Fairy-Tale Mother. Illustration from a collection of German fairy tales. Carl and Theodor Colshorn, *Märchen und Sagen* (Hannover: Verlag von Carl Rümpler, 1854), frontispiece.

Folk and Fairy Tales

A Handbook

D.L. Ashliman

Greenwood Folklore Handbooks

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or impossible to verify. Tales about ethnic minorities unable to cope with the accoutrements of an ostensibly superior culture are common (for example, the many tasteless Polish jokes currently circulating in America, or the Irish jokes of a generation or two earlier). Especially popular are tales, often told as true accounts, about "technically challenged" individuals who injure themselves while misusing or who are frightened by modern mechanical devices (A-T 1319A*).

Four
Scholarship and Approaches

PLATO AND SOCRATES

From the earliest times storytellers, their audiences, and interpreters have theorized about the nature, the extended meanings, and the impact of made-up tales. Plato, through the words of Socrates in *The Republic* (360 B.C.), criticizes adults for telling casual tales to children, tales that might instill beliefs that would prove untrue when the children mature. Even if such tales attempt to teach higher truths through symbols, a young person—says Plato's Socrates—cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; therefore fantasy tales should not be told to children.

This premise is possibly the oldest recorded example of folktale scholarship. A distinguished philosopher postulates a theory, cites examples, and draws a generalizing conclusion. Variations on Plato's position concerning the potential dangers of fantasy literature have surfaced repeatedly—even to the present time—with myths, fairy tales, comic books, and television successively and repeatedly coming under attack.

For the most part Plato's rejection of fantasy literature for children has not found favor among folktale interpreters, who more often have sought to show how the qualities of such stories can promote desirable behavior, both for children and adults. These qualities may be hidden behind a screen of symbolism, which gives scholars and interpreters a double function: to point out a tale's important and possibly hidden details, and then to explain the meaning of those details in literal language.

GESTA ROMANORUM

One example of an early European story collector who thus integrated a body of folklore and literature into an ideological system is the anonymous English cleric who in about 1330 compiled the *Gesta Romanorum* (Deeds of the Romans). Confirming his personal faith, he saw a Christian allegory in each tale of this collection. He neither asks who may have first told a given tale nor what may have been the original author's intentions. His only interest is how the tales will edify and enlighten his contemporaries within a Christian context.

Approximately 30 of the 283 entries in the *Gesta Romanorum* are folktales with an oral tradition apart from written literature. One story in particular, known generically as "An Ungrateful Beast Is Tricked Back into Captivity" (A-T 155), has a very wide dissemination as a folktale. Versions of this tale have been collected on virtually every continent. The example from the *Gesta Romanorum* differs from other international versions only in small details. Titled here "Of Nature and the Returns of Ingratitude," its summary follows:

An emperor who was hunting in a certain wood came upon a serpent that some shepherds had captured and bound to a tree. Moved by pity he released the serpent, which immediately began to bite him. "Why do you repay good with evil?" asked the emperor, to which the serpent replied, "I cannot act against my nature, and by my nature I am an enemy to man." They walked along arguing their case until they came upon a philosopher, whom they asked to judge between them. "I cannot judge the matter," said the philosopher, "until I see things as they stood before the man intervened." To demonstrate how the events had started, the serpent allowed himself to be bound to the tree once again. "Can you free yourself?" asked the philosopher. "I cannot," replied the serpent. "Then die," said the philosopher. "That is my sentence. You always were ungrateful to man, and you always will be." So saying, he sent the emperor on his way, admonishing him never again to repeat his folly. "Remember," said the philosopher in parting, "that the serpent is only influenced by his natural propensities."

The anonymous editor then appends to this story an "application," which tells his readers how they are to interpret this fantasy tale. He explains: "The emperor is any good ecclesiastic, the wood is the world, and the serpent is the devil. The shepherds are the prophets, patriarchs, Christian preachers, etc. The philosopher is a discreet confessor."

This is one of the most widespread folktales in the world. Versions have been collected throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The fourteenth-century churchman who built this story into the *Gesta Romanorum* did not find it difficult to turn it into an allegory, with each character and element symbolizing some larger aspect of Christianity. The text lends itself to such an interpretation, but essentially the same tale also has been told throughout the centuries by Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and secularists, all of whom have seen different meanings behind it—or no symbolic meaning at all, instead simply enjoying the story for the sake of its clever plot.

Long-lived and widely distributed tales of many types share this quality with "An Ungrateful Beast Is Tricked Back into Captivity," having the capacity to speak at many levels to audiences of different backgrounds. Such diversity of appeal goes far to explain the longevity and diffusion of most traditional folktales. A story that resonates with both genders, all ages, and different socioeconomic and educational levels—often for quite different reasons—has a greater chance of being remembered and retold than does a tale with a narrower audience appeal.

This rather self-evident observation leads to a bold conclusion: Even folktale interpreters who contradict one another can be justified in their conclusions, each one having selected a different aspect of the tale for examination. An old saw claims that everything can be proven through the Bible and Shakespeare. Folktales can readily be added to that list of authorities.

DEGRADED MYTHS

The first systematic scholars of folktales were Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Today their names are familiar around the world because of their collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), but the brothers (especially Jacob) were also insightful and prolific scholars in linguistics and medieval studies. Both held professorships at the University of Göttingen in Germany, but they were dismissed, along with five other colleagues—the so-called Göttingen Seven—for waging a formal protest against a constitutional violation of Ernst August, King of Hannover. The Grimm brothers received many offers for new positions, finally accepting professorships at the University of Berlin.

Although modern folklorists have criticized the Grimms for the liberties they took in formulating tales in their own words, rather than reporting them verbatim as they received them from informants, their folkloric methods were in many regards pioneering. Unlike their predecessors (or most of their immediate followers) they recorded the names of their informants, listed variants, and drew comparisons with analogues found in literature and in the folklore of other countries.

As folktale scholars their principal interest was less in the interpretation of tales and more in the investigation of origins. The Grimms' observation that

numerous elements of their tales were very ancient led them to the conclusion that many folktales, magic tales in particular, were surviving fragments of primeval myths. They also recognized that various motifs, sometimes entire plots, were told in widely separated places. Drawing on their (especially Jacob's) pioneering research in comparative philology, they concluded that these primeval myths had been common to a unified Indo-European people, the same folk that once spoke the original Indo-European language from which most languages spoken between India and northwestern Europe demonstrably evolved.

Anticipating and contradicting later theories, they postulated that these erstwhile myths had neither migrated from some distant land of origin (diffusion) nor been created independently and concurrently by imaginative storytellers speaking different languages and representing diverse cultures (polygenesis). Instead, they theorized, the myths from which fairy tales devolved were universal (at least throughout the Indo-European language area) and of such great antiquity as to be considered timeless. They recognized that fairy-tale creation was an ongoing process, with some elements of even traditional tales being relatively new. They also accepted the position that some tales migrate from one culture to another, although they thought that such instances were unusual.

Many European folktales contain motifs that support the Grimms' view that such tales are degraded myths. For example, a famous episode from Germanic mythology, recorded in the Old Norse *Saga of the Volsungs,* tells how Brynhild (apparently one of the Valkyries who were charged with deciding who would survive and who would perish on the field of battle) struck down a warrior whom Odin had promised victory. As punishment the Norse god stabbed her with a sleeping thorn. She remained in a trancelike sleep until awakened by the hero Sigurd (elsewhere called Siegfried). Fairy-tale lovers will immediately see in this myth elements of the familiar fairy tales "Sleeping Beauty" (A-T 410) and "Little Snow-White" (A-T 709).

Another important example is provided by the tale "Frau Holle" (Grimm 24), where an underground benefactress magically rewards a kind and industrious girl, then punishes her unkind and lazy stepsister. Well into the nineteenth century legends circulated throughout Germany depicting miracles performed by a supernatural being named Frau Holle (or a linguistic variation thereof). Apparently Frau Holle was an important goddess among the ancient Germans, but one who by the nineteenth century was remembered only through legends and fairy tales.

The vast subject of fairy lore provided the Grimms with further examples of degraded myths. Their interest in the hidden people is documented promi-

Cover illustration from a nineteenth-century textbook on Norse mythology, with the name Othinn (Odin, Wotan) spelled in runes. Rasmus B. Anderson, *Norse Mythology,* 7th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1907), cover illustration. First edition and copyright 1875.

nently in their 1826 translation (with a lengthy introductory essay) of *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* by Thomas Crofton Croker. Jacob also wrote extensively about the underground people in his *Deutsche Mythologie* (German Mythology, first edition 1835). There is ample evidence that active belief in fairies, elves, and other such hidden people was widespread and sincere throughout the British Isles, Scandinavia, and northern Europe, even into the twentieth century.

Many fairy tales, now using the term in its literal sense, reinforce the Grimms' view that magic tales told as household entertainment do indeed hearken back to rituals and myths that formerly were cornerstones of religious belief. Three of the Grimms' tales (grouped under the collective title "The Elves" as number 39) describe human encounters with elves, which can be (and have been) related either as true experiences or as fantasy tales. It is not illogical to conclude, as did the Grimms, that in some instances the former degraded into the latter.

The relationship between myth and folktale continues to be studied to the present day. A few of the many scholars who have made contributions in this comparative work are James G. Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Joseph Campbell, and Mircea Eliade.

SOLAR MYTHOLOGISTS

The Grimms' mythological views were well received in England, especially as interpreted by Max Müller, a German-born Sanskrit scholar who emigrated to England and became a distinguished Oxford professor. His essay "Comparative Mythology" (1856) advanced the theory that a process called "disease of language" gave rise to new myths when the original names of deities were forgotten, mispronounced, or mistranslated by succeeding generations. As a prime example he offered the Sanskrit and Greek deity names Dyâus and Zeus, each a sky god. The similarities between their names suggested to Müller that both were mutations from a primeval Indo-European sky deity.

Furthermore, folktale motifs dealing with sun, moon, stars, sky, clouds, winds, and the like were seen as distorted descendents from ancient sky-god myths. Müller's claims were immensely influential, dominating English folktale scholarship for the next quarter century. It was not difficult for solar or celestial mythologists (as they came to be known) to find evidence for their claims. For example, they saw in the predilection of fairy tales for the numbers 7 and 12 symbolic battles between light and dark (7 day-night cycles per week and 12 moon cycles per year).

Furthermore, they immediately jumped upon any fairy tale that used celestial names or concepts in its text—for example, Giambattista Basile's version of "Sleeping Beauty" (A-T 410), which he titles "Sun, Moon, and Thalia," the first two words being the names that Thalia, the sleeping beauty, gives to the twins that are born to her while she sleeps. Similarly, the heroine in Charles Perrault's version of the same tale, "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," names her first children Dawn and Day. If heroines name their children after the sun, the moon, the dawn, and the day, then surely their stories evolved from myths depicting the struggle between night and day, or so dictated the logic of the solar mythologists. Nor did they need names like Sun, Moon, Dawn, and Day to conclude that virtually every fairy tale, whatever the apparent plot, was actually about the primeval conflict between light and dark.

This chapter in folklore scholarship offers lessons to students in all fields. Stith Thompson, arguably the twentieth century's most eminent folktale scholar, looking back at the record of the solar mythologists, summarizes: "Proceeding from a few major premises, which they seem to have found entirely by introspection, they built up a structure so fantastic that the modern reader who ventures to examine it begins to doubt his own sanity" (*The Folktale,* p. 371).

The view that all Indo-European folklore derived from a primeval and unified belief system was immensely satisfying to nineteenth-century European intellectuals. However, as the century advanced two of the Grimm brothers' theories concerning the propagation of folktales came under increasing criticism. As previously mentioned, they held that neither polygenesis (the independent invention of essentially the same tale in different places) nor diffusion (the migration of a tale to outlying regions, following its creation at once specific place) accounted for the fact that similar tales were found at widely separated locations. Instead, they held that such tales had devolved from a common myth. The Grimms' collection and publication efforts prompted scholars and amateurs throughout Europe to compile similar works, typically focused on a single national or ethnic group. This collection activity amassed substantial evidence that folk and fairy tales do indeed migrate, and that diffusion, in one form or another, is the best explanation for their dispersal.

THE INDIAN SCHOOL

If folktales migrate, then the question naturally arises as to where the stories were first told and when and by what routes they came to their current homes. The German Sanskrit scholar Theodor Benfey, through his study of

comparative grammar and his translation and analysis of *The Panchatantra,* concluded that India was the principal source of Europe's folktales, with the exception of Aesopic fables, which demonstrably originated in Greece. He theorized that the migration of Indian tales to Europe began as a consequence of Alexander the Great's invasion of India (fourth century B.C.) and reached a high point during the Middle Ages by way of Arabic intermediaries.

However, folktale collections published subsequent to Benfey's pronouncements failed to establish the close relationship between Indian and European folktales that he postulated. Indeed, only about half of the tales in *The Panchatantra*—which according to Benfey should have been the mother lode of European folktales—are commonly found in Europe. And many of these are animal fables, which demonstrably migrated in antiquity from the Mediterranean area to India, not the other way around. Nonetheless, Benfey's scholarship brought him followers throughout Europe, including W.A. Clouston in Scotland, Emmanuel Cosquin in France, and Reinhold Köhler in Germany. Even if Benfey and his followers overstated their case, there is still evidence that many European fairy tales did indeed originate in India.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Folktale study in Great Britain, beginning in the late 1870s, was increasingly dominated by a group of scholars centered around the Folk-Lore Society, founded in 1878. Trained as historians, classicists, medievalists, and the like, they shared disdain for the solar mythologists and enthusiasm for the developing academic disciplines of cultural anthropology and folklore. Many were involved in the discovery, documentation, and interpretation of British, Celtic, Saxon, and Norse antiquities, ranging from stone monuments to holiday customs. Their findings were published in the society's quarterly journal *Folk-Lore* as well as by a number of publishing houses—for example, David Nutt—that came to specialize in folklore monographs.

The ever-expanding British Empire gave them access to cultures around the world, resulting in a large number of published folktale collections from remote areas, including Australia, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Africa, and many more. They were also active in their own islands, producing exemplary folktale collections from the Orkneys to Land's End and throughout Ireland.

Their interests were eclectic and their approaches nondogmatic. The common denominator of their work was cultural anthropology. Among the members of this group were Edward Clodd, Laurence Gomme, Edwin Sidney Hartland, Joseph Jacobs, Andrew Lang, Alfred Nutt, and E.B. Tylor.

Illustration by John D. Batten from an advertisement for fairy tales from the British Empire by Joseph Jacobs, published by David Nutt (1896). Advertising matter appended to Mrs. K. Langloh Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1896).

Working in the same academic climate as those researchers was James G. Frazer, a Cambridge cultural anthropologist. His reputation was established with the publication of *The Golden Bough* in 1890. This monumental work, which over a number of years expanded to 12 volumes, synthesized and compared religious and magic rituals of primitive cultures from around the world and from ancient times to the nineteenth century. Frazer concluded that fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and other kinds of folklore were remnants of ancient narratives that once accompanied and explained fertility rites, a view not far removed from the one held by the Grimms.

The influence of the nineteenth-century anthropological school continues through the work of such recent British folklorists as Katherine M. Briggs,

Iona and Peter Opie, and Ruth L. Tongue. Folktale scholars from other countries pursuing similar anthropology-based research include Richard M. Dorson (North America), Lutz Röhrich (Germany), and Linda Dégh (Hungary).

THE FINNISH SCHOOL

As the nineteenth century drew to a close a new method of folktale research began to establish itself in Europe, known variously as the geographic-historic method, the comparative method, the Finnish school (after the nationality of some of its most prestigious practitioners), or the Finnish-Scandinavian-American school (an effort to include all of its principal players). The main thrust of this movement was to accurately document as many appearances of a given folktale type as possible, faithfully recording the text exactly as received, and noting the date and location of its recital or publication. In the case of oral transmission, scholars collected details about the storytelling situation and relevant information about the storyteller, such as age, gender, position within the community, and the like.

The Finnish school received its impetus, appropriately, from investigations conducted by Julius Krohn into the sources and analogues of individual stories and songs imbedded within the great Finnish national epic *The Kalevala.* This epic was assembled by Elias Lönnrot from folklore collected in Finland's Kaleva district between 1828 and 1842 and published between 1835 and 1849. Lönnrot's final product, although based on authentic folk narratives and songs, was nonetheless his own poetic creation. Julius Krohn, by tracing the migration of individual songs and analyzing the differences between variants, attempted to recreate the original version of each piece.

Kaarle Krohn, the son of Julius, began in 1886 to apply these same comparative methods to more prosaic folktales then current in his native Finland: fables about the bear and the fox. In 1898 Kaarle Krohn was appointed professor of Finnish and comparative folklore at the University of Helsinki, thus becoming the world's first professor of folklore. Krohn's contemporary Antti Aarne was an even more prolific scholar. In a period of about 15 years he produced about one major monograph per year analyzing individual tale types.

The intellectual center of the Finnish school was the society Folklore Fellows. This group is known for its series of monographs, mostly on folktales, established in 1910 and still being published. Reflecting the changes in international scholarship standards (and not only in folklore studies), prior to the First World War most of the Folklore Fellows' publications were in German; the period between the two world wars saw a more-or-less even distribution between German and English; and since 1945 its publications have been predominantly in English.

Finnish school practitioners were greatly aided in their work by the publication of the monumental *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Commentary to the Children's and Household Tales of the Brothers Grimm, 5 vols., 1913–1932) assembled by the German medievalist Johannes Bolte and his partner Georg Polívka, a Slavicist from Prague. In this work they documented analogues and variants of the individual tales in the Grimms' collection, drawing on medieval and Renaissance sources as well as folklore from eastern and western Europe.

Because the Grimms' collection, with its more than 200 tales, encompassed all the major genres of folk narrative and a broad sampling of folktale types (as they would later come to be defined), Boltes and Polívka's study functioned as a descriptive catalog of European folktales, thus giving a valuable tool to researchers wishing to draw comparisons between different versions of a particular tale. Students of comparative folklore still find *Bolte-Polívka* (as the work is often abbreviated) an indispensable resource.

An important by-product of the Finnish school was a number of type and motif indexes, most prominently *The Types of the Folktale* started by Antti Aarne in 1910, with enlarged editions following in 1928 and 1960, authored by the American folklorist Stith Thompson. Thompson is also the creator of the massive *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (1955). These two works cover primarily folk literature between India and northwestern Europe. Type and motif indexes, patterned after such models, have since been compiled for many other regions of the world.

The Finnish school's legacy is very substantial. Their insistence on authentic texts, not arbitrarily rewritten by editors, and on the careful documentation of the place, year, and other details surrounding a tale's discovery has become the norm for folklore research. However, their attempts to definitively identify places of origin and to recreate original texts by mapping out the locations of all known variants of a given tale are not always convincing. There is no reliable way of knowing whether collected stories accurately represent the actual life history of a tale with all its migrations. In many instances too much of the storytelling record has been lost to allow one to project reliable patterns from the few surviving data points.

PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Some scholarship that emanated from the Finnish school might be compared to the research of a paleontologist who dedicated himself or herself to the discovery, mapping, cleaning, and sorting of ancient bones, and then the reconstruction of skeletons from those bones, but who afterward made little effort to interpret the meaning of the finished product. In a sense, the Finnish

school provided later scholars with the raw materials (authentic, annotated texts) and the tools (type and motif indexes) with which to carry out their work of interpretation.

Professional scholars and amateurs alike have been interpreting folktales for all of recorded history. Plato's censure of fantasy tales for children, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, is an act of interpretation. When medieval editors added aphorisms to Aesopic fables, restating "the moral of the story," they were practicing interpretation, as was the compiler of the *Gesta Romanorum* when he discovered a Christian allegory behind each of his tales.

Of all modern interpretive methods, none has been more prevalent than the psychological approach. Two distinct (but not mutually exclusive) directions are possible: The interpreter can analyze the psychology behind a storyteller's creative process, including the recollection of old tales, the invention of new ones, and the performance itself. Or the interpreter can analyze the psychological motivation of the fairy-tale characters.

Fairy Tales and Dreams

Observers of the human psyche and of creative processes have long noted similarities between dreams and fairy tales. Like poets and philosophers before him, Sigmund Freud theorized that the same psychic energy that generates dreams may play a role in the creation of fantasy tales. Thus both fairy tales and dreams are important windows into the unconscious.

For Freud the force behind dreams (the dream-work) derives from repressed fears and desires (often sexual) that are best able to express themselves once a sleeping person's inhibitions relax. Even then, the dream-work often disguises tabooed or particularly painful material through the use of symbolic images, thus making the dream somewhat more acceptable, even to a sleeping person. An important task of psychoanalysis, according to Freud, is to reveal the literal meaning of such symbols and to determine what event in the patient's past gave rise to the fears or fantasies that they represent.

Traditional storytellers, as is well documented, often slip into an altered state of consciousness as their tales unwind—almost as though the stories were driving them, not the other way about. If hypnotism and association exercises (two other methods used by Freud), like dreams, provide access into the inner mind, then storytelling, especially of fantasy tales, may also reflect mental activity that under other circumstances is unconscious. Freud himself recognized this, outlining in a well-known essay, "Märchenstoff in Träumen" (Fairy-Tale Subject Matter in Dreams, 1913), a number of specific cases

Children en route to dreamland or fairyland. Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, *Fairy Tales from the Far North,* translated by H.L. Brækstad (New York: A.L. Burt Company, 1897), frontispiece.

where elements in his patients' dreams resembled the images and motifs of familiar fairy tales.

Some traditional fairy tales reflect their relationship to dreams within their own texts. For example, the leading character in "Master Pfriem" (Grimm 178) dreams that he dies and goes to heaven. The entire tale is the contents of his dream. More recent authors and filmmakers have made frequent use of this technique. The magical plot of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* turns out to be a dream, which the reader discovers only in the book's final pages. Similarly, the miraculous, surrealistic events in the filmed version (although not in the book) of *The Wizard of Oz* are a dream, with some characters, grotesquely disguised, crossing over between the two worlds. Walt Disney, the most prolific and influential storyteller of the twentieth century, understood the relationship between dreams and fairy tales. His studio has often been called a "dream factory." Similarly, Steven Spielberg's studio is named DreamWorks.

Dreams are featured as sources of foreknowledge and motivation in countless folktales and myths. One famous example is the story of the man who became rich through a dream (A-T 1645) found in the *1,001 Nights* and also told as a local legend throughout Europe.

"The Peddler of Swaffham" from England is typical. After dreaming that good fortune would befall him at London Bridge, the peddler traveled to that place, and there related his dream to a shopkeeper. The Londoner ridiculed the stranger for having made such a long journey merely because of a dream, adding that he too recently had dreamed of buried treasure but was too sensible to pursue such a fantasy. He then described the treasure's location, as revealed in his dream. From the shopkeeper's description, the peddler recognized his own orchard. He hurried home and found the treasure.

This widespread tale is doubly ironic. First, two dreams had to be combined to find the buried treasure; and second, the protagonist discovered the treasure in his own garden, but he had to leave home before he could do so.

Oedipus and Electra Complexes

Another aspect of Freudian psychiatry that has been influential in fairy-tale research is his theory that between the ages of about three and five (when fairy tales are particularly appealing) every child is sexually attracted to his or her parent of the opposite gender, and hence jealous of the parent of the same gender. Freud gave the name Oedipus complex to a boy's infatuation with his mother and associated animosity toward his father. The female counterpart is called Electra complex. Most children, theorized Freud, outgrow these tendencies at a young age, but some do not, and for these individuals what was a natural condition grows into a mental illness that requires treatment through psychoanalysis.

Much ink has been spent pointing out supposed examples of Oedipus and Electra complexes in fairy tales (always hidden behind symbols, of course). To the skeptic some of these studies seem as belabored and improbable as the sun-myth claims of an earlier generation. However, not all such claims can be easily dismissed. Following is one example of a tale where a Freudian interpretation seems fully justified.

"Iron Hans" (Grimm 136) opens when a king incarcerates a wild man in a cage, prohibiting anyone from releasing him, under penalty of death. The king's eight-year-old son is playing near the cage when he loses control of his golden ball, and it falls into the cage. The wild man refuses to give the ball back to the boy, unless the latter will unlock his cage. The boy says that he does not know where the key is hidden. "It is under your mother's pillow," replies the wild man. The boy finds the key and opens the door, and the wild man escapes. Fearing his father, the boy begs the wild man to return. The wild man comes back and carries the boy into the woods. Many trials follow, but the hero is victorious, and in the end marries a princess. Among the guests at his wedding are his mother and father, and also a mysterious foreign king who introduces himself as the former wild man. "I had been transformed into a wild man," he explains, "but you redeemed me."

This complicated tale lends itself to different interpretations, certainly including one from a Freudian perspective. The wild man clearly symbolizes a force that the father wants to control, possibly his son's emerging sexuality. The boy releases the force, partially by accident and partially by intention, discovering its key under his own mother's pillow. After undergoing ordeals and trials the boy is ready for marriage, and the wild man, now tame and respectable, comes to his wedding. Also present are the hero's parents, suggesting a full reconciliation, although at one stage the boy was deathly afraid of his own father.

Surrealism

Freud's theories of the unconscious influenced artists and thinkers in many different fields. One such group, the so-called surrealists, had a strong connection to fairy tales. According to André Breton, their principal spokesman, surrealistic art connected the unconscious and the conscious realms, thus creating a reality that was beyond the actuality of either realm considered separately.

The distortions and seemingly unnatural juxtapositions that have come to be known as hallmarks of surrealistic painting and literature are common in traditional fairy tales, a fact that was noted more than a century before Freud by the German poet Novalis: "A fairy tale is actually like a dream image—without context—an ensemble of miraculous things and happenings—for example, a musical fantasy—the harmonic progressions of an Aeolian harp—nature herself" (*Schriften,* vol. 3, p. 454).

A prominent example of such surrealistic dreamlike imagery in a fairy tale is found in "Hans-My-Hedgehog" (Grimm 108). The title hero, a half-boy, half-hedgehog creature, rejected by his father, leaves home playing a set of bagpipes and riding upon a rooster that has been shod by a blacksmith. Thus mounted and armed he captures himself a bride. I omit many important details, but one dramatic and surrealistic image remains long after the story has been told: a half-human, half-hedgehog creature astride a rooster and playing the bagpipes. This image calls out for symbolic interpretation, even from younger readers and listeners.

Like many traditional tales, its very longevity and wide distribution indicate that there is more than one reason for the story's appeal, but certainly a Freudian explanation will make sense for at least some members of its audience.

Archetypes

Carl Jung was another pioneering psychiatrist who used fairy tales in his research. His essays and lectures—for example, "Zur Psychologie des Geistes" (On the Psychology of the Spirit, 1945)—frequently cite fairy tales and demonstrate the author's extensive knowledge of European folklore. Jung's concept of the archetype has found many followers among fairy-tale interpreters. Jung theorized that similar experiences of humans over countless generations have created a "collective unconscious," which has somehow become genetically imbedded in the psyches of all humans. This reveals itself through archetypes—patterns and images experienced in personal dreams and fantasies, and also found in icons, myths, rituals, and fairy tales inherited from the past.

Scholars who have used either Freudian or Jungian psychology as a basis for fairy-tale studies are too numerous to enumerate here. Some prominent names, especially those influential in the English-speaking world, in approximate chronological order, are Ernest Jones, Géza Róheim, Erich Fromm, Julius Heuscher, Bruno Bettelheim, Marie-Louise von Franz, and Alan Dundes.

Structuralism

The word *pattern* appears frequently in discussions of archetypes. Structuralism, a movement that examines the relationships between patterns in language, narratives, rituals, visual art, and the like, emerged from the disciplines of psychology and anthropology. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, a leading spokesman for this movement, the structures revealed by these investigations reflect the inherent structure of the human mind. Drawing examples from his own fieldwork among the indigenous peoples of Brazil and other preliterate cultures, Lévi-Strauss analyzed a wide range of human acts, including mythology, art, kinship rules, and eating customs.

In 1928 the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp published *Morphology of the Folktale,* an innovative theoretical study of 100 selected magic tales from the classic folktale collection of Aleksandr Afanasyev. Propp's work had little international impact until 1958, when it was first translated into English, but since then it has proven very influential. Propp's definition of morphology, a term borrowed from biology, is straightforward: "a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to the whole" (*Morphology of the Folktale,* p. 19). With the aid of charts and lists, Propp demonstrates that although at a first reading Afanasyev's magic tales (A-T 300–749) appear very diverse in their form, upon closer investigation they exhibit an amazing uniformity. The backbone of Propp's magic-tale skeleton is a list of 31 "functions," beginning with "One of the members of a family absents himself from home" and concluding with "The hero is married and ascends the throne" (ch. 3). According to Propp's analysis, Afanasyev's magic tales (and by implication, others as well) are virtually always constructed from a selection of these 31 elements. Furthermore, the relationships of the elements to each other demonstrate a marked similarity from tale to tale.

Another pioneering structuralist is the Dutch scholar André Jolles, whose book *Einfache Formen* (Simple Forms, 1929) identifies nine elemental literary forms and describes their structures. Jolles theorized that the basic structures of these genres, characterized by brevity and simplicity, are in a sense natural and irresistible, deriving as they do from structures within the human mind. Jolles's simple forms are saint's tale, legend, myth, riddle, proverb, exemplum, memorate, fairy tale, and joke.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Although the issues of sociology—relationships between organized groups of human beings—have been studied since Greek antiquity, it emerged as a separate academic discipline only in the late nineteenth century. Its early expansion coincided with the development of cultural anthropology as a field of study, which—as shown earlier in this chapter—prompted a substantial amount of folktale interest, especially in England.

As is the case with psychological folklore studies, sociologists have found at least two areas of interest in folktales. First, there is the sociology *of* storytelling, collection, and publication. Such studies investigate the mechanisms behind the gathering of an audience for the purpose of hearing stories, the processes used by collectors and editors in finding and preparing final texts for publication, and changes made from one edition to the next in response to public expectations. Second, there is sociology *in* folktales, that is, the use of folktale texts as case studies of social relationships.

Although folk and fairy tales nearly always feature individuals (not groups) in their search for fulfillment, many different social organizations serve as backdrops, providing substantial raw data for sociological analysis. The family is by far the most important social organization in fairy tales. Parent-child relationships, problems associated with large families, sibling cooperation and rivalry, arranged marriages, conflicts arising from the death or remarriage of a parent or spouse, care of aging parents: these are the issues of countless fairy tales and also prime study topics for sociologists of family life.

Also visible, but less central, are governing institutions represented by work overseers, landowners, rent collectors, constables, bailiffs, judges, and kings. As a rule the further removed such officials are from a commoner, the less specific are the depictions. For example, kings and queens feature prominently in most fairy tales, but they serve more as abstract ultimate goals than as functioning heads of state. The expected reward for a fairy-tale hero or heroine is to become king or queen, but rarely are any details given as to what that entails.

Religion permeates the folklore of most cultures. Words like *pious* or *virtuous* often describe the leading characters, with the understood definitions of such words dependent upon the local faith. Religious hypocrisy is targeted in legends, anecdotes, and jests in all cultures. Folktales around the world ridicule unworthy priests, rabbis, mullahs, and fakirs. Such tales provide sociologists of religion much material for analysis.

Sociological research in the aforementioned fields and others has proven very fruitful. Recent scholars in this area (without differentiation according to subspecialty) include Cristina Bacchilega, Ruth B. Bottigheimer, Linda Dégh, Richard M. Dorson, Donald Haase, Lutz Röhrich, Kay F. Stone, James M. Taggart, Maria Tatar, Marina Warner, and Jack Zipes.

Two subspecialties in particular have attracted many folktale interpreters: Marxism and feminism.

Marxism

In spite of its dramatic failure as a practical economic and political system, Marxism still provides a theoretical basis for some schools of literary interpretation, including those involved in folk and fairy-tale interpretation. On the surface, traditional fairy tales should provide fertile ground for Marxist literary critics. Fairy-tale protagonists typically come from the lowest social group, the proletariat, and as the tale progresses they nearly always engage in a conflict with the rich and the powerful, ultimately gaining victory through cunning and magic.

However, with rare exceptions, these struggles are not class conflicts, but rather individual battles. The final victory is virtually never that of an exploited class over a privileged class, but rather of one hero over one tyrant. In the end all social organizations remain intact: family, community, religion, and royalty. A swineherd becomes king, or a kitchen maid becomes queen—individual, not class victories—but all else in the society remains essentially the same.

Thus traditional fairy tales, taken as a whole, provide scant pickings for Marxist scholars, but that is not to say that individual episodes and tale types do not provide credible examples of class consciousness and the critique of bourgeois and upper-class values, as championed by Marxism.

One such example is the tale known generically as "The Rich Peasant and the Poor Peasant" (A-T 1535), told throughout Europe since the Middle Ages and represented in the Grimms' collection as "The Little Peasant" (61).

These tales typically begin when a rich peasant ruthlessly kills an animal belonging to a poor peasant. To cut his losses the poor peasant takes the animal's hide to market, hoping to sell it. Under way he convinces another wealthy peasant that the pelt is magic and sells it to him for an exorbitant price. Back at home his rich neighbor asks about the source of his new wealth. "That's the price I received for the pelt at the market," he answers, more-or-less honestly. Hoping for a great profit, the rich peasant then slaughters his entire herd of cattle, but he receives only scorn when he tries to sell their hides at the market.

Several other episodes follow, in which the poor peasant betters priests, public officials, and, of course, his principal adversary, the rich neighbor. In

the end he convinces the rich peasant and others of his ilk that reflections of clouds are actually sheep grazing in an underwater pasture. They jump into the lake to collect the sheep and are all drowned. The poor peasant takes possession of their goods.

This is a tale about rich versus poor, but class consciousness per se is not at its center. It is, rather, one man's conflict with his ruthless neighbors. In the end he is rich and they are dead, but social institutions that allowed or even promoted the initial inequities are still in place. There are no guarantees or indications that the once-poor and now-rich peasant will behave any better than did his adversary the once-rich and now-dead peasant. In fact, some versions of this tale depict the poor hero sacrificing other members of his class—even his own mother—to gain his personal ends (for example, "Big Peter and Little Peter" by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe).

Feminism

Folktales provide substantial raw material for gender-related studies. Unlike much traditional literature, household folktales typically were created and transmitted by women. A substantial body of evidence supports this claim. For example, most, if not all, European languages have expressions akin to *Mother Goose* associated with such tales, but masculine counterparts are scarce or nonexistent. As a matter of record, the majority of the Grimms' informants were female.

Whether created and performed by male or female storytellers, traditional folktales feature many unforgettable women. Granted, the modest and patient heroine who passively waits for a prince to awaken her or to rescue her from an ogre is a fairy-tale stereotype; and a large number of traditional folktales do ridicule women for talking too much, spending too freely, or attempting to dominate their husbands—all labels produced and promoted by patriarchal societies. However, folk and fairy tales also feature innumerable active, clever, and resourceful female characters. They outwit male opponents in setting and solving riddles (A-T 875), set traps for would-be sexual harassers (A-T 1730), steal food from stingy husbands or masters (A-T 1407, 1741), outmaneuver despotic husbands and lovers (A-T 311, 955), take revenge on jealous husbands (A-T 882), and establish sexual independence for themselves outside of marriage (A-T 1423).

In short, there is a vast pool of raw material for gender-oriented studies. The proverbial "battle of the sexes" is played out in countless traditional tales, sometimes with predictable, tradition-dictated results, but often with surprising, even revolutionary turns.

In many instances the same tale type is told with different conclusions, indicating that individual storytellers have dared to mold stories to their own needs and views instead of always conforming to a received standard. Possibly the best example of this is offered by the various versions of "The Frog King" (A-T 440). In most traditions the princess turns the frog into a prince by kissing him or by sleeping with him for three nights. In other words, she converts him by doing what *he* wants, by accepting him as he is. A minority position has also been recorded, the first tale in the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen.* Here (the complete text is reproduced in chapter 3) the princess refuses to allow the frog into her bed, but rather throws him against the wall, apparently intending to kill him. Precisely this self-assertive act, performed in direct violation of her father's will, converts the frog into a prince.

Thus the different versions of this tale present one problem but two solutions. The problem is a woman's arranged marriage with an unattractive man. One solution is to accept him as he is, and everything will be all right. The other solution is for the heroine to take matters into her own hands and assert herself, and everything will be all right. Fairy tales, in their rich diversity, offer feminists examples of dominated and manipulated women, but also of liberated and self-directing women.

AESTHETIC APPROACHES

A final method of interpreting folk and fairy tales is to apply to them the same standards that one would apply to any literary or artistic creation: Are they aesthetically pleasing? This approach combines many or even most of the previously discussed methods, because a fairy tale (like a poem, a novel, or a film) can be satisfying for different reasons: musicality of language, vividness of imagery, perceptive observation of human behavior, and many more.

Typically practitioners of this kind of fairy-tale interpretation are less interested in a given story's genealogy than in its impact on today's readers. Questions about our emotional involvement with the characters become more important than where the story came from and how it evolved into its present form. Scholars studying folktales for their aesthetic qualities often combine their folklore interests with traditional literary studies, including children's literature and literary fairy tales for adults. Representative scholars in this area include Steven Swann Jones, Max Lüthi, James M. McGlathery, Wolfgang Mieder, Roger Sale, and Jack Zipes.

It is appropriate to end this discussion of literature and fairy tales with a purposefully enigmatic and fragmentary statement by Novalis: "Fairy tales are

the canon of literature. Everything poetical must be like a fairy tale. Poets worship coincidence" (*Schriften,* vol. 3, p. 449).

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Five
Contexts

ONCE UPON A TIME

The charm of folk and fairy tales permeates our culture. Magical images from our favorite stories stay with us throughout our lives, providing shared experiences that cross national, ethnic, and social boundaries. A naïve little girl talking to a wolf in the forest; two children eating from a gingerbread house; a princess kissing a frog; a sleeping beauty—each of these images conjures up memories from childhood and releases a host of associations. This familiar ground is exploited by advertisers, used by joke makers, and manipulated by artists in many fields; and such has been the case for centuries. Our language itself is enriched with words and sayings from folk and fairy tales, as illustrated by the following list:

- Big bad wolf
- Bluebeard
- Cinderella team
- Crying wolf
- Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.
- Fairy godmother
- Fairy-tale ending
- Fairy-tale wedding
- Flying carpet
- Fool's paradise
- Goose that laid the golden eggs
- Happily ever after
- Kiss a frog
- Let the genie out of the bottle.
- Lion's share
- Magic lamp
- Magic word
- Midas touch
- Never-never land