



The Interpretation of Fairy Tales

Marie-Louise von Franz

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Of the various types of mythological literature, fairy tales are the simplest and purest expressions of the collective unconscious and thus offer the clearest understanding of the basic patterns of the human psyche. Every people or nation has its own way of experiencing this psychic reality, and so a study of the world's fairy tales yields a wealth of insights into the archetypal experiences of humankind.

Perhaps the foremost authority on the psychological interpretation of fairy tales is Marie-Louise von Franz. In this book—originally published as *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales*—she describes the steps involved in analyzing and illustrates them with a variety of European tales, from "Beauty and the Beast" to "The Robber Bridegroom."

Dr. von Franz begins with a history of the study of fairy tales and the various theories of interpretation. By way of illustration she presents a detailed examination of a simple Grimm's tale, "The Three Feathers," followed by a comprehensive discussion of motifs related to Jung's concept of the shadow, the anima, and the animus. This revised edition has been corrected and updated by the author.

The Interpretation of Fairy Tales Details

Date : Published July 9th 1996 by Shambhala (first published January 1st 1970)

ISBN : 9780877735267

Author : Marie-Louise von Franz

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Psychology, Nonfiction, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Mythology, Reference, Research, Philosophy

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John Kulm says

Marie Louise von Franz is my favorite Jungian author, and I'm finding she's particularly popular with writers and artists. Here are some quotes from the book:

"All fairy tales endeavor to describe one and the same psychic fact, but a fact so complex and far-reaching and so difficult for us to realize in all its different aspects that hundreds of tales and thousands of repetitions with a musician's variations are needed until this unknown fact is delivered into consciousness; and even then the theme is not exhausted. This unknown fact is what Jung calls the Self, which is the psychic totality of an individual and also, paradoxically, the regulating center of the collective unconscious."

"We constantly build our lives by our ego decisions, and it is only in old age when one looks back that one sees that the whole thing had a pattern. Some people who are more introspective know it a bit before the end of their lives and are secretly convinced that things have a pattern, that they are led, and that there is a kind of secret design behind the ephemeral actions and decisions of a human being. Actually, we turn toward dreams and the unconscious because we want to find out more about our life pattern in order to make fewer mistakes and not to cut our knives into our inner carpet, but to fulfill our destiny instead of resisting it. This purposeiveness of an individual life pattern, which gives one a feeling of meaningfulness, is very often symbolized in the carpet. Generally carpets, especially Oriental ones, have those complicated meandering patterns such as you follow up when in a dreamy mood, when you feel that life goes up and down and along and changes around. Only if you look from afar, from a certain objective distance, do you realize that there is a pattern of wholeness in it."

"A man who represses his anima generally represses his creative imagination."

"Fantasy is not just whimsical ego-nonsense but comes really from the depths; it constellates symbolic situations which give life a deeper meaning and a deeper realization."

"Without the fire of emotion no development takes place and no higher consciousness can be reached."

"If someone in analysis is dispassionate about it and does not suffer – if there is neither the fire of despair nor hatred nor conflict nor fury nor annoyance nor anything of that kind – one can be pretty sure that not much will be constellated and it will be a 'blah-blah' analysis forever. So the fire, even if it is a destructive sort of fire – conflicts, hatred, jealousy, or any other affect – speeds up the maturing process and really is a 'judge' and clarifies things."

"When we are able to see our own greed, jealousy, spite, hatred, and so on, then these can be turned to positive account because in such destructive emotions is stored much life, and when we have this energy at our disposal, it can be turned to positive ends."

The last 84 pages of the book describe the relationship of a man to his anima and a woman to her animus (feminine and masculine sides). It was directed at the interpretation of fairy tales, but full of interesting advice the individual's relationship with the anima or animus, and also about how to understand each other

better in relationships by understanding the dynamics of each other's anima and animus. I found it really intriguing.

James says

As I read, I am considering the implicate order and the explicate order from the work of the a theoretical physicist David Bohm. What I have in mind is the Appendix 'The enfolding-unfolding universe and consciousness' in Wholeness and the Implicate Order, by David Bohm. Perhaps the collective unconscious (archetypes, symbols) and collective conscious (stories, individuation) are constituents of the implicate and explicate order.

I gather from Marie-Louise von Franze that the grizzly bear in my dreams is a symbol (implicate order) that lead me end disguising my experience, disguising my potential, disguising the large measure of my influence (explicate order). Fear of my inadequacy generated this disguise and powered down my raw power.

An abundant and penetrating description of how boundaries and repression suppress instincts emerges through the hero figure, Dummling.

Perhaps you too can find value in this credible little book.

Richard says

Found this a bit of a 'tuff read'...although, von Franz makes an excellent case that 'fairy tales/myths' seem 'foolish to the intellect'...but, if 'engaged' at the 'emotional' level...it's a 'another story'. Have shelved for another time...

"To the intellect, all my mythologizing is futile speculation. To the emotions, however, it is a healing and valid activity; it gives existence a glamour which we would not like to do without. Nor is there any good reason why we should." ~ CG Jung

Damien Brunetto says

Honestly, I was not tremendously impressed with this book. I am very interested in the interpretation of fairy tales and mythologies and I think that there is something valuable to learn in doing so. But I am not convinced that this book will really help anyone. All the evidence that von Franz provides is very

circumstantial and not particularly well backed up. She often says that such and such part of the fairy tale obviously means this or that and expects you to just accept that it is clear and obvious without any evidence to back this up. The best impression I get of her method is that if we sit around and think about something hard enough, then the truth will just come to us and everything will be clear. I believe that we need some evidence to back that up, as opposed to just saying that something is so because it seems obvious to me.

However, she is clear that interpretations can vary from person to person. I just wish she actually was able to provide evidence for things other than just "this obviously means that". I found this a very frustrating read because of this.

Tamara Agha-Jaffar says

I've been a big fan of the works of Marie-Louise Von Franz ever since I read *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*. In *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Von Franz does what she does best: she performs a Jungian interpretation of fairy tales. Von Franz deconstructs the tales by delving deeper and deeper into the significance of each character, object, and event. She compares and contrasts different versions of the same tale to offer a more expansive interpretation. Her discussion provides insights into human behavior and relationships. However, the last chapter on Shadow, Anima, and Animus can be a challenge to those without even a rudimentary familiarity with the works of Jung.

Katherine Sas says

An interesting and useful introduction to the Jungian analysis of fairy tales.

Ed says

I have collected fairy tales for many years. If I had to rate the #1 person who has provided the most insight into these tales it is Marie-Louise Von Franz. These books, and there are a number of them, are fabulously insightful. Each one is hard to put down. I am sad that she has passed on and there will be no more.

Felicity says

Von Franz was apparently Jung's chief disciple, and her work on fairy tales and folklore was central to her continuation of his work. This volume is, mostly, more centered on the act of interpreting than on the big Jungian worldview, and thus is interesting even if you don't entirely buy into Jungianism. It discusses the importance of tale-telling and fairy tales and demonstrates Jungian folklore analysis by dissecting individual tales in depth.

I enjoyed the way von Franz uses multiple versions of a story to triangulate a strong interpretation. The stories she uses are often evocative and little known. Many of the symbols she discusses, and the diagramming of fairy tales by number and gender of characters are very useful and fruitful. The last sections of the book were less intriguing, especially the section where she talks about the female fairy tale heroine,

which dripped gender essentialism and was more full than usual of Jungian metaphysical certainties. Most of the book, however, was thought-provoking and even inspiring. Recommended for fabulists and other fairy tale enthusiasts.

Shiz says

Oh my god. I have no words. This book is hard, perhaps on par with Freud's writing when it comes to how difficult it is to follow. But, oh my god, I have learnt so much and I will revisit it s many times.

Maan Kawas says

Excellent book by Marie-Louise von Franz about the interpretation of the fairy tales using the Jungian approach. She applies the Principles of the Jungian approach to some fairy tales, demonstrating how to spot and understand the implicit key archetypes, such as the shadow, anima, animus, even the symbolism of numbers. The language is readable and clear! I highly recommend it!!

Giovana Catarinacho says

Depois de um certo ponto, a leitura se torna mecânica, e parece que somos forçados a aprender o conteúdo dos capítulos por repetição. Vencido esse obstáculo, porém, vê-se que Franz apresenta contos e observações relevantes tanto para o âmbito acadêmico quanto pessoal, até a última página.

Els (Tragic Romantic) says

Von Franz is proving to be a lot more useful than Bettelheim, probably because Bettelheim's theories are built on Freud while von Franz is of the Jungian school.

Bridgett says

A great book applying Jungian psychology and the ideas of the Self/ego/anima/animus/shadow to fairy tales.

Daniel Lieberman says

Marie-Louise von Franz was a Jungian scholar, and this book seems like it was written for her peers who had the same in-depth knowledge of Jung's writings. It's fascinating material, and worth the read if your willing to spend a significant amount of time on Wikipedia reading about things like Anima and Shadow. Probably a

great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

This book is the indirect inspiration for a number of films. Among the best examples are Star Wars and the Lion King. The Hero's Journey is a pattern of narrative identified by Joseph Campbell that is seen in important stories in many different cultures. It's based on Jungian interpretation of story as is seen in this book. It's the prototypical plot. The Lion King, Star Wars, and countless other movies incorporated the elements of the Hero's Journey into their plots, and the most famous script-writing book ever, "Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need" operationalized it. "Save the Cat" is such a good book that it's been blamed for the homogenization of American cinema. Thanks a lot von Franz.

Qing Wang says

This book clearly shows me that my prejudices were a result of my own ignorance.

On the other hand, while this book certainly helps a lot when it comes to European fairy tales, it invites the question of to what extent the same principle could apply to other culture. There are some common symbols, maybe from the collective unconscious, more from the pagan side. In China we do not have the problem brought by Enlightenment, though certainly there are some other issues. maybe need to explore more about the folklore and contemporary research.

Got inspired to read this one while with The Hero with a Thousand Faces, will go back to Jung's writing about archetype and maybe also alchemy later on.
