

## Stylistic Characteristics of Fairy Tales

Paganism:  
*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*

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## Outline

- Collectors of Fairy Tales
  - Charles Perrault
  - Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm
  - Aleksandr Afanas'ev
- Paganism: *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*
- Stylistic Characteristics of Fairy Tales
  - One-dimensionality
  - Depthlessness
  - Abstract Style

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## Collectors of Folk Tales

- Charles Perrault (1628–1703)
- The Brothers Grimm
  - Jakob Ludwig Grimm (1785–1863)
  - Wilhelm Karl Grimm (1786–1859)
- Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanas'ev (1826–71)

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### Charles Perrault (1628–1703)

- *Contes de ma mère l'oye* (*Tales of Mother Goose*)
- 1697



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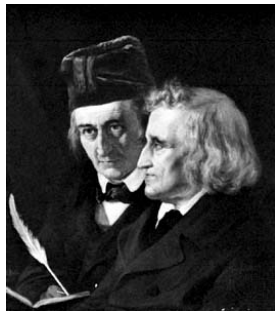
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### The Brothers Grimm

- Jakob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785–1863)
- Wilhelm Karl Grimm (1786–1859)
- *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*). 1812–22



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### Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanas'ev (1826–71)

- *Narodnye russkie skazki* (*Russian Folk Tales*)
- 1855–64



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Antti Aarne (1867–1925)  
and  
Stith Thompson (1885–1976)

*Motif-Index of Folk Literature; a Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends (1932–36)*

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*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*

- *Wild Horses of Fire*
- Sergei Paradjanov (1924–1990; script and director)
- 1964
- Mikhaylo Kotsiubinsky (1864–1913; novel, 1911)
- Hutsul (Carpathian Mountains)
- Second half of 19th century



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### Viewing Guide

- Ivanko's true love dies, later wife (Palagna) is infertile, and is unfaithful with Yura, the sorcerer
- First scene: Palagna goes out to field to pray to God (*dvoeverie*) that she might have a child with Ivan, meets Yura
- Second scene: Yura drives away storm, seduces Palagna

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### Max Lüthi

- 1909–91
- Professor of Folk Literature, University of Zürich
- *Das europäische Volksmärchen: Form und Wesen* (1947)
- *The European Folktale: Form and Function* (1981)

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### Fundamentals

- Questions
  - What makes a folk tale a folk tale?
  - What do all folk tales have in common?
  - How can folk tales vary?
  - Are there essential *laws* governing folk tales?
- How to classify folk tales
  - Stylistic regularities (Lüthi)
  - Structural regularities (Propp; "functions")
  - Motifs (Aarne-Thompson)

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**Repetition and Originality**

“If repetition, rather than originality and uniqueness, is dominant in traditional literature, then the discovery of the laws that govern this literature is both possible and essential.” (viii)

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**Lüthi in a Nutshell**

- One-Dimensionality
  - The natural and the supernatural are part of the same world
- Depthlessness
  - No deep spatial, temporal, spiritual, or psychological relationships
- Abstract Style
  - Simple statement in lieu of description or detail

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**One-Dimensionality:  
The Supernatural**

- In most texts (other than fairy tales), the supernatural (other world) is perceived as bewildering, fearsome, disorienting, etc.
- In folk tales, the supernatural is unremarkable
  - Talking animals and inanimate objects
  - Witches, dragons, swan maidens, etc.
  - Magic helpers
  - Magic objects
- In folk tales, “otherness” is conveyed by geography (forests, kingdoms, etc.), not the supernatural

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### One-Dimensionality

“Ivan the Peasant’s Son and the Thumb-Sized Man”

- Dreams are no different from reality
- Dragons are as matter-of-fact as horses
- Rivers of fire are as unremarkable as rivers of water
- Ivan doesn’t change his clothes, but he changes himself effortlessly into a cat
- That a man can be “as big as a thumb” is not surprising
- “Otherness” is the forest, not the dragons in it

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### Depthlessness

- People: No psychological depth
  - No stable relationships
  - Little real process of aging
  - No emotional growth of characters
    - Marriage, but no erotic attraction (is there love?)
  - No vacillation or difficult decisions
  - Alienation from injury and violence
- Objects: No stable presence
  - Magic objects are used once for one purpose and then forgotten

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### Depthlessness

“Ivan the Peasant’s Son and the Thumb-Sized Man”

- Ivan has no meaningful family relationships
- Ivan ages three years in one sentence with no visible change
- Magic helpers (old man at the beginning; amputee; three assistants) have little biography, appear when needed and then vanish forever
- Amputation is not psychologically traumatic
- Ivan marries the princess, but is never described as being in love with her

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### Abstract Style

- Means of achieving depthlessness
  - Only the essential is mentioned
  - Naming, rather than description
  - Usually only one adjective at a time
  - People and objects are described as simple substances
  - Simple sequences of events
  - Simple tasks
  - Magic objects are perfectly suited to specific tasks
  - Everything happens at just the right time
  - Formulaic numbering

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### Abstract Style

“Ivan the Peasant’s Son and the Thumb-Sized Man”

- Gold, silver, and copper pillars
- Small cast of characters, each of whom performs only one function
- Plot-driven: obtain means to achieve goal, achieve goal with minimal fuss, then move on to next goal

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