

Stylistic Characteristics of Fairy Tales

Paganism:
Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors

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

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)

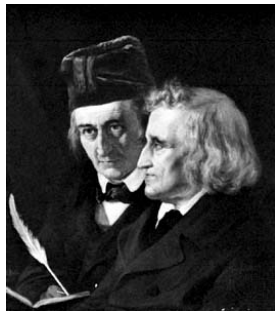
Charles Perrault (1628–1703)

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



The Brothers Grimm

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



Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanas'ev (1826–71)

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



**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)*

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





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

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)

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)

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)

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

**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

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

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

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

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

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
