The Interpretation of Fairy Tales Study Guide

The Interpretation of Fairy Tales by Marie-Louise von Franz

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Interpretation of Fairy Tales by Marie-Louise Von Franz examines several classic fairy tales, particularly the Grimm fairy tale "The Three Feathers." Von Franz uses terminology and theories inherited from her mentor, Carl Jung, to interpret the larger psychological significance of the tales.

All fairy tales can be said to involve some aspect of the Self, Jung's term for the unified consciousness and unconsciousness of a person. The beginning premise of a tale might demonstrate some problem with the Self; for example, an instance in which the unconscious is not in harmony with the ego, or consciousness. The hero of the fairy tale then steps in as the archetypal symbol of positive transformation of the Self. By the end of the tale, the hero will achieve a unified, matured Self.

Fairy tales are distinct from mythology, in that mythology is burdened by cultural-specific values and iconography, whereas fairy tales are free from cultural specificity and are thus more universal. Fairy tales themselves start as "local sagas," the product of an individual whose unconscious temporarily bubbles up to the surface in the form of a dream of hallucination. The local saga becomes embellished, generalized, and merge with similar tales in a process called "amplification," to the point it attains the universal status of the fairy tale.

"The Three Feathers" is about a king who is unsure of which of his three sons to give his kingdom to. He casts three feathers in the air and asks his three sons to follow each feather and locate the most beautiful carpet where the feather lands. The youngest son, Dummling, regarded as slow-witted, follows his feather to a trap door, where a talking toad gives him the carpet as well as other items the king requests. Finally, the toad turns into a beautiful woman whom Dummling marries, and the king proclaims Dummling as the heir.

In this tale, the king is the Self, and he is in a crisis of inertia. He is in danger of becoming stagnant and enervated. By casting the three feathers, he trusts his instincts and the spiritual world, the first step in transformation of the Self. Dummling is the agent who brings about full transformation. He summons up the Self's hidden female essence, the anima, from the cellar in the form of the toad who transforms into a princess. The anima is the playful, irrational, fantasy-oriented feminine aspect of men.

Females have an equivalent essence, the animus, though the danger with the animus is excess rather than lack. Females with excess animus behave with "manly" aggression, or often with paralyzing inertia. Several other tales are examined that feature heroines and the animus. Another Jungian concept looked at is the shadow, the double self which represents a distinct aspect of the Self. In "Prince Ring," the hero has both a positive double (a dog) and a negative double, and he must assimilate these two shadows into a unified Self by the end of the tale.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Fairy tales "are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes" (p. 1). In contrast to mythologies and legends, which have a lot of cultural overlays, fairy tales have little in the way of cultural material, and thus are closer manifestations of human universal psychic processes.

The author borrows very heavily from Carl Jung and his hypothesis of the "collective unconscious" and the presence of "archetypes." The fairy tales is a "closed system"; that is, its meaning is contained in the tale itself, and not elsewhere. The fairy tale contains one essential psychological meaning" (p. 2), which it expresses with symbolic images and events. All fairy tales, furthermore, are just different versions of the same expression, the expression of the Self (with a capital S), another concept borrowed from Jung, which "is the psychic totality of the individual" (p. 2).

Author Von Franz goes into the history of fairy tales and their interpretations. Plato wrote of stories that old women told their children, called mythoi. Apuleius, another writer of antiquity, had a "Beauty and the Beast"-type story, "Amor and Psyche," contained in his novel The Golden Ass. Fairy tales have also been found on ancient Egyptian papyri, and there is a famous Egyptian fairy tale of two brothers, Anup and Bata. Several basic fairy tales have remain basically unchanged for thousands of years.

Scientific interest in the fairy tale began in the eighteenth century with men like J. G. Herder, who hypothesized that fairy tales contain an expression of religious faith. Fairy tales were seen as a vital and more earthy alternative to Christianity. Famously, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (the Brothers Grimm) collected Germanic folklores for their volume of fairy tales. Their book was quite a success, and prompted a revival in fairy tale interest. Theorists then tried to trace the origin of fairy tales. Theodor Benfey, for one example, traced all fairy tales to India, while E. Stuck contended that fairy tales were of Babylonian origin. The Finnish school emerged, headed by Kaarle Krohn and Antti Aarne, who collected and cataloged the fairy tales of the world, and tried to find original versions by judging which tales were the best and most complete.

Later, Ludwig Laistner tried to interestingly link dreams with fairy tales, though he had none of the psychoanalytic or Jungian vocabulary to assist him. Adolf Bastian linked fairy tales to "elementary thoughts" and even "national thoughts," notions that might be precursors to Jung. Many other individuals and various "schools" are mentioned.

Where Von Franz sees these various theorists go astray is that they deny any emotional component to fairy tales. Jungian archetypes (which Von Franz links to fairy tales) are not just philosophical thoughts or intellectual exercises; they incorporate the emotional and fantasy life of the individual. Intellectually, analysts can get into the problem of "everything meaning everything." For example, one can intellectually make a case that

all fairy tales can be traced to the sun. By contrast, the Jungian approach also takes into account emotionality of the individual, making for a more sophisticated analysis.

As Jung would have it, there are four "functions of consciousness," and the best kind of interpretation takes into account all four. There is thinking (structure), feeling (values), sensation (symbols), and intuition (the tale as a whole).

Von Franz next asks, How does a fairy tale originate? She believes fairy tales start as "local sagas," strange anecdotes, related nightmares, or unexplained occurrences bound to a specific location. This saga will be "amplified" and generalized. A specific person in the saga will be generalized to "the miller," for example, and the human protagonist of a local saga will be made more heroic (and less human) for a fairy tale. The saga will also be infused with archetypes. For example, a local saga of a man's encounter with a talking fox will be expanded to include the fox being revealed to be a witch.

Chapter 2, and Chapter 3

Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2: Archetypal stories originate from individuals who have episodes in which their unconscious bubbles to the surface. This could be in the form of a dream, or a waking hallucination. This incident then gets amplified into myth or fairy tale. Individuals with these episodes may shape the telling of their incident to match an existing archetype, thus enriching and prolonging the archetype.

There is a kind of "chicken and egg" debate as to what came first, myth or fairy tale. One man, E. Schywzer, broke the Greek Hercules mythology down and discovered that the myth was made up of a succession of fairy tales, supporting the position that myth arises from fairy tale. On the opposite side, there are those that believe in the theory of the "decayed myth," that is, larger myths "decay" and break down over time, fragmenting into episodes that get retained as folklore. Regardless, Von Franz believes the fairy tale is the foundation. She makes an analogy both to a skeleton and to water. The fairy tale is the skeleton, where as local sagas or myth might be the flesh; alternately, the fairy tale is the water, whereas local sagas and myths are the waves upon the water.

While the myth bears a specifically national character, the fairy tale is free from such constraints. It is about humanity, simply. It ignores racial or cultural differences. It is the one language all the world shares.

It is suggested that Christianity itself, and its mythology of the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ, began as a local saga that then acquired mythological status. Christianity adopted many existing mythological symbols and concepts, as revealed in the Bible, and Jesus himself can be said to be the spiritual successor to the Greek god Dionysus or the Egyptian god Osiris. Defenders of Christianity would maintain that Jesus Christ was a new concept and had a new message for humanity. Likely both perspectives are correct. Christianity borrowed from existing mythologies, and yet added something that would appeal to the culture it was developed in.

Von Franz examines how religious ritual might originate. She offers a theory and two examples to support that theory. One involves an Indian named Black Elk who, deathly ill, had a vision of a great many horses and a dance of the tribe with those horses. He eventually confides this vision to a medicine man, who interprets it as something that should be recreated in reality for the spiritual benefit of the tribe. So in this case, ritual comes from an individual having a psychological experience that is interpreted in a certain way.

Von Franz last comments on the specific case of fairy tales involving animals. These animals are anthropomorphized aspects of the human conditions, and there may be

nothing more basic than relating a story in this way. For example, very young children seem to respond most eagerly to stories involving animals.

Chapter 3: This brief chapter deals with how one should go about interpreting/analyzing a fairy tale. The first step is to identify the setting. More often than not, this is a variation of the famous "once upon a time," which Von Franz equates to the timelessness/spacelessness of the unconscious. Next is to identify characters, and to analyze groupings. For example, if the beginning of the tale involves a king and his three sons, there seems to be a missing female element, and perhaps the story will go about "correcting" this missing female through marriage, rescuing a princess, etc. Symbolism must also be analyzed, and this requires somewhat of a background of classical symbols and their meanings for comparative analysis. There are then the peripeteia (the "ups and downs" of a story), and the lysis, or resolution. At the end of the telling, there is also often a "bringing back to reality," along the lines of, "and they lived happily ever after; meanwhile, here we are in the real world shivering and hungry."

The last step in the process is the actual interpretation, which must be expressed in purely psychological terms, and not in terms of the characters in the story. Von Franz stresses that one should not be arrogant about one's interpretation and consider it the only possible interpretation. A good interpretation should be individually satisfying.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Von Franz has chosen the Grimm fairy tale "The Three Feathers" to analyze. The tale is about an old king and three sons. The king must choose who is to inherit the kingdom. Two sons are intelligent and scheming, while the third is slow and dim-witted. This one is called Dummling. The king casts three feathers in the air and tells his sons they must follow the feather in order to find the most beautiful carpet in the land. Dummling's feather falls straight to the ground. The other brothers follow their feathers, which go east and west. Thinking they have Dummling beat—as his feather apparently didn't land anywhere significant—the brothers buy a shabby carpet from a peasant. However, Dummling's feather fell on top of a secret door in the floor. Dummling goes into the secret door to find talking toad. The toad produces a beautiful carpet, which he gives to the king.

The king is ready to name Dummling as the new king, but the other brothers object and demand another test. The king announces they must find a ring. The same thing happens with the feathers, and the toad gives Dummling a beautiful ring. Still not satisfied, the brothers object, and the king says they must now find a beautiful woman. Dummling gets a baby toad from the talking toad, and it magically turns into a beautiful woman. Dummling is triumphant, and the king names him his heir. There are several variations on the story, as Von Franz explains, but this version is quite typical.

Von Franz goes about deconstructing the story. The king represents a kind of God-man, a divine presence on earth. He is magical, and the welfare of the entire kingdom depends upon him. Von Franz then equates the king to the Jungian Self. As the king is a central regulating principle on which the nation depends, Self is a central regulating principle on which the individual depends. In this view, the king is in danger of becoming old and dying much like the Self is in danger of becoming stale and mechanical, of losing a fresh contact with the world.

Then who is Dummling? Von Franz goes into a discussion of the Self versus the ego. Similar to Freudian thought, the Self builds up an ego slowly over time as a kind of filter or defense shield to deal with the world. The ego is a more rational and conscious manifestation of the Self, which is by contrast mostly unconscious and emotional. A problem arises when the ego is not in proper accord with the self. When the ego takes over, to the denial of the Self, this leads to neurotic behaviors and mental anguish. Von Franz believes, given this framework, the hero figure in a tale (in this case, Dummling) is a figure that represents a restoration of the accord between ego and self. The hero restores the ego so that it is properly attuned with the Self.

Dummling, upon closer examination, is not stupid. He is simply naïve, innocent, and receptive to the world's possibilities (such as the trap door below them). He also is the access point to a femininity (what's called Eros, as opposed to Logos, a masculine

identity), that is sorely lacking in the story of these four men and no women. Dummling, with his refreshing simplicity, is thus a solution to a stuffy, overthinking, scheming, overworked society that has forgotten its more primitive roots. White society, and especially European society, is said to be an example of this kind of society.

Lastly examined is the symbolism of the feathers. Feathers are related to birds, which are related to the air, and thus to the spirit world. By using feathers to decide the kingdom's fate, the king is leaving matters to God, to fate. The throwing of the feathers also relates to inspiration and intuition. Dummling turns out to be the smartest of the bunch because he takes inspiration from where the feather lands; the older brothers ignore the feathers and try to scheme their way through the test. The lesson is that we should learn to trust our instincts and our intuition.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Going further with the "The Three Feathers" analysis, Von Franz next analyzes Dummling's descent through the trap door into the castle cellar to find the toad. This is a descent into a person's "unconscious virginal" nature, an irrational and feminine essence called the anima. Earth has long represented the feminine, such as "Mother Earth" or Gaea. Consequently, Dummling's descent is also a move to reaffirm pagan ideals that were rejected with rigid, male-dominated Christianity.

The toad is also long a symbol of the feminine. For example, witches often were said to brew potions with toad parts. Because the toad excretes a substance from its skin that causes irritation of the skin (and death in small animals), the toad is also thought of as poisonous and dangerous. It is also green, the color of nature. Summing this up, the toad is precisely the symbol of the feminine element that is missing at the beginning of the tale of a king and his three sons.

The carpet is inherited from Arab culture. The carpet, with its intricate designs (most symbolic of objects of religious importance), is a stand-in for life itself, for the complex patterns of life and its "secret design." Life has patterns, but often (and especially in the moment), they are hard to discern (as they are woven by a superior being, God). By the king lacking and asking for a carpet, he is asking for religious meaning in his life. The king (and therefore the community) has lost a sense of fantasy and spirituality.

The next item is the ring. It represents the ability of the Self to act on its own, to find movement/energy from within. Primitive people were fascinated with the circle (especially the sphere), as when rolled it seemed to keep going and going. Many fairy tales involve the hero following a ball or apple to a secret and fantastic place. Again, the message is to "look within" (into the unconscious mind) for meaning. Additionally, the ring is of course related to marriage. It can symbolize connection between two people, spiritual connection. But, it can simultaneously represent being enslaved, being burdened. In some fairy tales, a hero might inscribe a circle on the ground and call forth a demon who thus enslaves him.

The ring is gold, and gold has long symbolized eternity and longevity, as it is one of the few ancient metals that would not rust or corrode over time.

Why is the beautiful princess trapped in the cellar? She is the feminine essence, the anima, repressed in the psyche, psychically buried. When she comes up from the cellar, everyone initially sees her as a toad. This means that the conscious mind initially is repulsed at the buried anima; it sees it as something disgusting. But Dummling, as the hero, accepts her, and she turns into a beautiful woman, indicating that we must deliberately embrace our repressed anima for it to properly surface.

Lastly, the question is asked, Why is the "three" configuration so prevalent in fairy tales? In "The Three Feathers," we not only have three feathers and three sons, but three "tests" (carpet, ring, beautiful woman). In number symbolism, odd numbers are masculine, and the number three is the first odd number (discounting one, because there's no counting happening with one; it just is). As the primary masculine number, through some Jungian reasoning Von Franz doesn't fully explain, three is associated with movement, action, and events happening over time. This is represented in the past, the present, and the future, the Holy Trinity, and stories that have beginnings, middles, and ends.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

In the final act of "The Three Feathers," the older brothers are still not convinced about Dummling's right to the throne. They challenge Dummling's princess, along with the two homely peasant women they brought when they "shortcutted" the task of finding a beautiful woman, to jump through a ring. This act—jumping through a ring—is basically a spiritual act. The woman hangs in the air (air being a spiritual place) with great skill, finding the absolute center of the ring (much as we, as individuals, must find the "inner center" of our unconsciousness). Meanwhile, the peasant women are clumsy and break their legs trying to jump. Von Franz maintains that this final act is a challenge to live "the symbolic life," in which symbols—such as the ones that well up from our unconscious as dreams—are paid close attention to.

Von Franz next describes a Russian variation of "The Three Feathers." In this story, the king (czar) has a wife (czarina), and is not alone. The "Dummling" character (Ivan) is forced to marry what he thinks is a frog, who is in fact a beautiful woman dressed in a frog-skin. Ivan and his frog-princess are invited to a dinner party, and Ivan fears embarrassment, but the princess sheds the skin and arrives as a human princess. With a bit of food, this princess literally creates elements of paradise in the castle, such as a park and a lake, and a tomcat singing folk songs. Ivan, returning to his room, sees the princess' frog skin and burns it. This is apparently a disastrous act, and it forces the princess to go into exile. She turns into a bird and flies away. Ivan then goes on a quest across the world to find her, and he succeeds. The princess is relieved to see him, and explains her own father had put a curse on her, which is now broken.

For Von Franz, the princess' creation of a "fata morgana", or fantasy world, with a bit of food at the dinner party, is a more obvious manifestation of the "symbolic life" promised by the rediscovery of one's anima. And what to make of the mistake of burning the skin? Burning with fire has long been a symbol of transformation, of literally a "trial by fire," of a test that leaves only what was worthy and burns up the unworthy. Fire is the great destructor, and in burning the skin, Ivan has acted with too much "fiery" passion. He has overreached, and he lacks the subtlety required to harness one's anima. The frog-princess (as symbolizing the anima or the feminine/irrational/fantasy nature) must be treated with subtlety, it must be nurtured in the half-dark.

Lastly, Von Franz asks about the significance in the Russian variation of the angry father who cursed the princess. For Von Franz, this is a nod to the cycle of history, an acknowledgment of what came before, and especially to Christianity's displacement of paganism. The father is a symbol of an older god, a god that came before and which now creates conflict in the unconscious.

Chapter 7, pages 114 through 163

Chapter 7, pages 114 through 163 Summary and Analysis

This chapter takes a look at several other fairy tales and examines how the Jungian concepts of the "shadow," the "anima" and the "animus" might help illuminate them. In a tale called "Prince Ring," a prince named Ring chases a golden hind into the woods, and becomes trapped in a barrel by a witch. The barrel is tossed to sea, and he washes up in a strange land where two giants take him in. They are very kind, but they forbid him to go into the kitchen. He does anyway, finding a friendly dog named Snati-Snati there. The giants begrudgingly allow Ring to keep this dog. Ring and Snati-Snati travel to a kingdom where an advisor to the king named Rauder, jealous of Ring, compels the king to ask Ring to do a seemingly impossible task: take golden trinkets from a band of giants. With the help of Snati-Snati, Ring is able to trick the giants to their doom by pouring salt in their cooking pot, which makes them thirsty, upon which they fling themselves in the ocean to drown. Rauder is incensed that Ring was successful, and he tries to kill Ring in his sleep, but instead Snati-Snati bites Rauder's arm off. The king marries Ring to his daughter. Snati-Snati turns into a human, also called Ring, and confesses that he was cursed with a dog shape by his evil stepmother.

Von Franz painstakingly parses this story to find its hidden meaning. The golden hind is a symbol of transformative change. Its famous for shedding and regrowing its antlers, and it's also a frequent tool which leads the hero of the tale into the unknown/adventure. The hind has a golden ring on its antler, a symbol of the true Self which the hero seeks. The evil stepmother (as the witch with the barrel) traps the hero in the barrel, which is unfortunate, but also fortunate in that, by enduring this voyage in the barrel, the hero is able to find Snati-Snati the dog. The barrel is a stand-in for the womb. Ring is trapped in the barrel just as he is figuratively trapped in the womb, in a state of immaturity and in need of growth.

Snati-Snati the dog, as well as Rauder the evil advisor, are manifestations of what Jung labeled the shadow. These are doubles of the hero, other aspects of himself, and usually the hero must assimilate these different aspects into a unified whole in order to succeed. While Rauder does evil things to Ring, he also provides the opportunity for Ring to prove his worth and grow. In this way, this tale—like many other fairy tales—evil is a complex thing, capable of destruction but also of transformation and positive change, much like the evil stepmother. Rauder is Ring's emotional, destructive side (his animus, the male essence), and Snati-Snati is his more playful, instinctive side (the anima, the female essence). Both are necessary, in a balanced way, to realize the true Self. Too much of either side of the unconscious mind is dangerous. Rauder's rage leads to his attempted murder of Ring, and it's clear Snati-Snati cannot always exist in his simple form, because he has yearned to turn back into a human.

Another tale is called "The Bewitched Princess." In this tale, a young man named Peter leaves home with only twenty shillings to his name, but when Peter hears of an unknown peasant dying, he gives the twenty shillings toward giving the name a proper funeral. Grateful for this, the peasant's ghost appears and helps Peter to win a fair maiden by answering three riddles posed by a mountain spirit that has the woman in his thrall. There are many more symbols in the story, but essentially this peasant's ghost is another shadow figure. Peter pays money to "summon" the ghost; in psychological terms, the Self is expending energy to access the shadow part of his unconsciousness because the Self realizes it has not reached his full potential. And as for having to conquer a mountain spirit, the mountain has long been a symbol of enlightenment and knowledge. It takes much effort to climb a mountain, much like it takes a lot of personal struggle to achieve enlightenment. And in the end, one is closer to the heavens, one has achieved a fuller understanding of the universe.

In another tale called "The Secret Church," a schoolmaster journeys into the mountains and finds a strange church service conducted by a pastor who does not mention Jesus Christ (this is meant to show it is connected with pre-Christian paganism). The pastor's daughter has the schoolmaster over for tea, and asks if he would like to take the place of the pastor at the church. The schoolmaster asks for a year to think about it; when the year is up, the daughter visits him, and the schoolmaster says no. At that point, while doing work with his axe on his home's roof, the schoolmaster drops the axe and cuts his leg, causing him to be a cripple. In this tale, the daughter (and by association, the pagan church in the mountains) is the unrealized anima aspect of the Self. By rejecting this anima, the man has committed "psychic self-mutilation" and he no longer has contact with reality (literally, his leg—our connection to solid ground—is severed).

Chapter 7, pages 163 through 197

Chapter 7, pages 163 through 197 Summary and Analysis

This half of the chapter discusses "the female shadow." While heroines are much less common in fairy tales than heroes, there are a handful that are helpful in acquiring knowledge about the female psyche.

In a tale called "Shaggy Top," a king and queen unable to have children adopt a daughter. One day, while playing with her golden ball, the daughter attracts a beggar-girl and her mother. The beggar mother insists she knows how to make the king and queen fertile in order to have a child. The queen bathes in two different baths and then throws the bathwater under the bed. In the morning, a pretty flower as well as an ugly flower will grow in the water. The queen is to eat the pretty flower only. However, the queen finds the pretty flower so delicious she eats the ugly flower as well. Subsequently, she gives birth to a beautiful daughter but also a hideously ugly daughter, who is named Shaggy Top because of her shaggy tufts of hair. The daughters grow, and one day troll women arrive and play a cruel trick on the beautiful daughter by replacing her head with a cow head. Shaggy Top bravely ventures to the troll women's hut and steals back the princess' real head. When the two daughters are young women, a king wishes to marry the pretty one, but Shaggy Top insists that the king's son marry her, and a double wedding is arranged. The prince is very unhappy at having to marry such an ugly woman, but magically Shaggy Top turns into a beautiful woman, and everyone is happy.

Infertility is a common theme in fairy tales—it indicates a disconnect between the Self and the dark, fertile plane of some aspects of the unconscious. Much like Ring and Snati-Snati, the fair princess and Shaggy Top are mirrors of themselves. Shaggy Top is the shadow self. She represents a closer connection to nature and instinct. It's also telling that Shaggy Top does much of the hard work in the tale, including stealing the head back from the troll women and setting up the double marriage. She is a dynamic, energetic part of the unconscious that is lacking at the beginning of the tale. The tale ends with king married to fair princess and prince married to Shaggy Top, a "quarternity" (grouping of four) that is exceedingly common in the fairy tale.

Another tale is called "King Thrushbeard." In this tale, a woman of marriageable age mocks her suitors and doesn't accept a husband. One of her suitors is mocked as "Thrushbeard" because of his pointy chin. Exasperated, the king marries her off to the first beggar who comes near. The woman goes to live with the beggar, but she fails miserably at housework and wifely duties. Moreover, she is given the task of selling pottery at the market, and the pottery is shattered by a "wild hussar" on horseback. The beggar dismisses her as a good-for-nothing, and she is sent to the king's kitchen as a maid. From the kitchen, the woman watches a stately ballroom dance, and a prince invites her to dance. She is ashamed at her appearance. But the man reveals himself to

be Thrushbeard, and it turns out that he was disguised as the beggar to teach her a lesson and force her to lose her haughty pride.

In the case of this tale, a woman is suffering from excessive animus, excessive masculine influence. Living alone with her father the king, she is too manly, too aggressive, as evidenced by her mocking of suitors. In addition, excess animus is also characterized by listlessness and inertia. Therefore, she cannot do womanly household duties, paralyzed as she is with excess animus. Animus in this story is symbolized in three men who are all the same—Thrushbeard, the beggar husband, and the wild hussar who broke the pottery. The woman must be humiliated, she must be forced to do menial kitchen work well below her station in life, in order to break her out-of-control animus and masculine pride. "King Thrushbeard" is essentially a cautionary tale about the dangers of animus in the female psyche. In addition to what's been discussed, animus also leads one to thinking in extremes. In this case, no man was good enough for the woman, and so animus forced her to the other extreme of a destitute beggar.

Characters

Dummling

Dummling is the protagonist of the Grimm fairy tale "The Three Feathers." He is one of three sons of an aging king who needs to choose an heir. He is characterized initially as dim-witted and slow, and he is ridiculed and dismissed as an oaf by his older brothers. The king decides that whoever will bring him the most beautiful carpet will inherit the kingdom. He casts three feathers in the ai, and instructs his sons to follow each feather and find a carpet wherever it lands. As if to reinforce Dummling's dim-witted aspect, Dummling's feather falls directly down onto the castle floor. He appears to have no hope of finding a carpet, and the brothers think they have easily won.

However, Dummling finds a hidden trap door in the floor, and he follows it to a cellar where a toad (later revealed to be a beautiful woman) provides him with everything he needs to pass his father's trials. In this way, Dummling is showed to be instinctive and curious about the world, rather than plain dumb. The king, as Self, requires transformative change, and Dummling represents the psychological qualities (curiosity, instinctiveness, playfulness) that are necessary to bring about this transformation. Dummling takes the toad up with him to the castle, and because he believes the toad will bring about a solution to the problem of finding a beautiful woman, the toad becomes the beautiful woman. This also shows that a certain faith, a certain spirituality, is needed to positively transform the Self, and Dummling also possesses these qualities.

Ring

Ring is the protagonist of the tale "Prince Ring." He is drawn into the foggy woods (psychologically, the mysterious unconscious) by a hind with a gold ring on its antler. The hind represents transformation (it was thought a deer sheds its antlers and grows more), and the circular ring represents the unified Self. So Ring is the hero seeking the unified and realized Self.

In this task, Ring is aided by two shadow aspects of the Self. There is first the dog Snati-Snati, which he finds in a giant's kitchen. This dog will aid Ring greatly through several ordeals, and it is a positive aspect of the Self. The negative shadow is Rauder, the advisor to the king who sends Ring on dangerous journeys due to jealousy. Rauder is raw emotion, violence, and aggression. It is noteworthy that both Snati-Snati and Rauder are necessary to Ring in his journey. The apparent evilness of Rauder is actually beneficial, in that it forces Ring to challenge himself and grow. In this way, the Self must similarly be challenged by some seemingly negative emotions as it continues to grow and mature.

Rauder attacks Ring after he has completed his tasks, showing the danger posed by high emotion and aggression. But the softer side, Snati-Snati, intervenes, snapping Rauder's arm off, stripping him of his power. Snati-Snati then becomes another prince named Ring, transforming into a human and revealing he was cursed by his stepmother. Ring has attained enlightenment by the end, achieving the unified Self, and therefore Snati-Snati and Rauder, as shadow personages, cannot exist separately. Rauder is hanged and Snati-Snati essentially becomes Ring through magical transformation.

Carl Jung

The theories of psychologist Carl Jung are crucial to Von Franz's analysis of fairy tales. Jung theorized that all humanity shares a single "collective unconscious" populated by universal archetypes.

The Toad

This creature aids Dummling in "The Three Feathers" by providing him with items requested by the king. In the final trial, the toad travels to the surface and becomes a beautiful woman for Dummling to marry.

The Brothers Grimm

These German brothers are very important in the history of the fairy tale, as they collected, standardized, and then popularized European folk tales.

Ivan

Ivan is the equivalent of Dummling in the Russian variation of "The Three Feathers." He makes the mistake of burning the frog-skin of the beautiful princess. He thus represents the danger of being too emotional and too aggressive. He has neglected his anima.

Peter

Peter is the hero of "The Bewitched Princess." He gives all his shillings for a peasant's funeral, and the peasant's ghost repays him by helping him rescue a princess from a mountain spirit.

The Schoolmaster

The schoolmaster is the protagonist of "The Secret Church." He rejects his anima (in the form of a pagan church in the mountains, and the daughter of the church's pastor), and he is punished by dropping his axe on his leg and becoming a cripple.

Psychologically, the schoolmaster has committed "psychic self-mutilation" by rejecting his anima.

Shaggy Top

Shaggy Top is the shadow self of the beautiful princess in the tale "Shaggy Top." Shaggy Top represents energy and decisiveness. Ugly Shaggy Top rescues the princess' head from a group of troll-women, and she also arranges a double marriage.

Thrushbeard

Thrushbeard is a personification of the heroine's excess animus in "King Thrushbeard." The haughty heroine rejects Thrushbeard for his pointy chin. He disguises as a beggar and marries her in order to humiliate her, such that she loses her pride (her excess animus).

Objects/Places

The Self

The Self is Carl Jung's central psychological archetype, the unified consciousness and unconsciousness. According to Von Franz, all fairy tales involve some aspect of the Self.

Anima

Anima is the feminine essence buried in the unconscious of every man. This anima is playful, irrational, fantasy-oriented, creative, and instinctive. If a man does not have proper contact with his anima, he is neurotic.

Animus

Animus is the male essence buried in the unconscious of every female. It is destructive and aggressive. Several tales involving heroines warn about the danger of excess animus.

Shadow

The shadow is a double self, a mirror-image of the Self that contains a separate but related aspect of the Self that has splintered off. The Self must acknowledge the shadow, learn from the shadow, and finally re-incorporate the shadow in order to create a unified Self.

Once Upon a Time

Setting is an important aspect of a fairy tale to identify. Often, a fairy tale exists in a timeless realm, a realm of "once upon a time." This stresses the universality of the fairy tale.

Feathers

In "The Three Feathers," the king casts feathers in the air to decide who will rule his kingdom. Feathers are associated with birds and thus with the air, which is the realm of the spirits. The king has thus placed his faith in the spirit world by choosing in this manner.

Carpet

The king first asks his sons to fetch a beautiful carpet in "The Three Feathers." The carpet, with its intricate weaves and patterns, represents the complex patterns of life itself. It is an affirmation that there is indeed a pattern, a destiny, for everyone's life.

Infertility

As in "Shaggy Top," many fairy tales begin with a couple who cannot have children. Infertility represents a rift between the consciousness and unconsciousness.

Kitchen

In "Prince Ring," Ring finds his positive shadow in the form of the dog, Snati-Snati, standing in the forbidden kitchen of the giants' home. The kitchen, because it is associated with the chemical transformation of food, is a symbol for powerful transformation.

Barrel

In "Prince Ring," Ring is trapped by a witch in a barrel and dumped into the sea. The barrel is the symbol for the womb. It is protective in that it successfully carries Ring on his sea journey, but at the same time it represents arrested development and a lack of growth. Ring must break free of the barrel to continue his journey.

Themes

Mythology, Local Saga, and Fairy Tale

Much of Chapters One and Two is dedicated to explaining what the fairy tale is, and how it is different from mythology as well as something Von Franz calls the local saga. In Von Franz's view, the fairy tale is a more valuable genre to deconstruct for the purpose of locating psychological truths than mythology. This is because the fairy tale is universal, and is not encumbered with cultural-specific iconography, values, etc. Mythology helps to define a nation or culture, such as Greek or Roman mythology, and as such it reflects specific cultural values. The fairy tale is sufficiently divorced from cultural "baggage", such that its relation to universal human truths is more clear and more direct. There is an interesting "chicken and egg" question as to what came first, the myth or the fairy tale. Scholars are undecided, with some believing myths are made up of a succession of fairy tales, and others believing fairy tales are "decayed myths" which have lost their cultural specificity.

The local saga, as opposed to the fairy tale, is region-specific, and it springs from an actual individual. A local saga might involve a local miller, for example. The local saga then goes through a process of amplification, in which it becomes generalized, embellished, and combined with other elements of basic stories to the point that it evolves into a fairy tale.

Von Franz calls all three of these types of stories archetypal stories. It one could trace these stories all back to their source, one would find they were the product of an individual whose unconscious temporarily bubbled to the surface, either as a dream or a hallucination. The individual was thus able to tap into the collective unconscious common to all humanity, and that's why these stories bear universal psychological truths.

The Three Feathers

Von Franz spends a significant portion of the book taking apart the Grimm fairy tale "The Three Feathers." This story is about a king who decides to cast three feathers in the air in order to decide which of his three sons will inherit the kingdom. Each son is to follow their feather wherever it may land, and find in that area a beautiful carpet. The youngest son, Dummling, is regarded as stupid by the other two, and his feather lands directly on the floor. But Dummling discovers a trap door below the feather, which leads to a cellar and a talking toad which helps him through three successive trials (carpet, ring, and woman). In the last trial, the toad becomes the woman, and after this woman jumps through a ring, Dummling is declared king.

Von Franz chose this tale because it is representative of many other tales. It is about the Self, and a schism that has developed between the ego (the consciousness) and

the unconsciousness. The old king is the Self, and he is in danger of becoming enervated and rigid. The hero, as Dummling, is representative of the internal force necessary to bring the consciousness and unconsciousness into harmony once again. By casting feathers into the air to help decide—feathers being associated with birds, and thus with the air, and thus with spirituality—the king is trusting in God, he is relying on his instincts, which is the first step to transformation.

Dummling is related to this idea about the power of instinct. Upon closer examination, Dummling is not "slow" but merely curious, deliberate, and observant. He represents the traits that are needed to discover what has been lost.

The Shadow, the Anima, and the Animus

Drawing heavily upon Jung's archetypes of the collective unconscious, Von Franz finds three archetypes of particular note: the shadow, the anima, and the animus.

In reference to "The Three Feathers," by finding the toad/beautiful woman below, Dummling has rediscovered the anima, the feminine essence buried within all men. This essence provides playfulness, irrationality, a sense of fantasy, and natural instincts. If a man loses touch with his anima, he is rigid, overthinking, and too rational. He is "neurotic." In many stories, the hero rescuing the princess is, in psychological terms, the Self rediscovering the anima.

The animus is the female equivalent. The animus is the male essence within all women. Interestingly, most fairy tales warn against an excess of animus, rather than a lack as with anima in men. The animus provides a hunter/warrior instinct. It can be destructive and aggressive. It can also lead to paralysis of actions, and mental inertia. In the tale "King Thrushbeard," the haughty young heroine treats her potential suitors with disdain. She is acting inappropriately "manly" and aggressive. This excess of animus is personified in the person of Thrushbeard, who shows her how miserable it is to live a life with too much animus. The woman is pawned off to a beggar far below her station, and only when the heroine is brought to her lowest point by animus—as a kitchen-maid watching princes and princesses dance in the ballroom—does she realize the errors of her ways. At that point she is magically redeemed by Thrushbeard, who reveals himself as the beggar.

The shadow is a kind of dual self, a double which contains other aspects of the same Self. In this case of the tale "Prince Ring," the hero Ring has both a positive, playful, feminine-inspired double - the dog, Snati-Snati, who helps him through various ordeals —and a negative, aggressive, violent double—the advisor Rauder, who tries to send him to his doom by having him accomplish seemingly impossible acts. Both of these aspects of the Self must be assimilated back into the Self, so by the end, Ring has incorporated both qualities of Snati-Snati and Rauder into a unified, harmonic Self.

Style

Perspective

Author Marie-Louise Von Franz was heavily influenced by psychologist/theorist Carl Jung. She adopted all of his theories about the collective unconscious and adapted them (in this volume) to the interpretation of fairy tales. In doing so, she is carrying on Jung's research and extending his legacy. Naturally, she is heavily invested in Jungian theories, and she uses these sets of theories in her work at the exclusion of other theories.

Von Franz was also a practicing psychologist, a woman who believed in the power of dreams and who conducted extensive dream interpretation sessions with her patients. Von Franz strongly believes the unconscious mind is an extremely fruitful avenue of exploration, and that our unconscious mind can reveal truths about ourselves that are often lost on the conscious mind.

Von Franz displays a very impressive depth and breadth of understanding about mythology, story structure, world cultures, fairy tales, numerology, pre-Christian paganism and Christianity, and even more esoteric subjects like alchemy, which Von Franz admires as a sort of early attempt at psychology. She uses this encyclopedic knowledge to analyze select tales and to relate them ultimately to the Jungian concept of the Self and other Jungian concepts like the shadow, the anima, and the animus.

Tone

Because of Von Franz's encyclopedic knowledge on fairy tales and related information, as well as her status as a well-respected psychologist and scholar, the tone of the volume is authoritative. However, as even Von Franz mentions at one point, she does not believe her interpretations represent the "correct answers"; Von Franz feels that interpretation is an individual thing, and that rather than trying to arrive at an objectively exact interpretation, scholars (and students) should arrive at conclusions that "feel right" to them. If instinctively the interpretation feels right, the analyzer can be satisfied. Thus, Von Franz's tone is also somewhat inviting, asking the reader to partake in the kind of analysis being done.

In addition to authoritative, the tone could also be described as scholarly, yet accessible. Von Franz is writing for a liberal arts college student. The book does not have the rigor of a purely academic text written for other scholars. Von Franz's intent is to introduce the educated reader to the process of analyzing fairy tales so they might be inspired and try some on their own. In that sense, the book would be ideal for a college course in fairy tales, mythology, ancient cultures, or similar.

Although the book is intended for college students, Von Franz starts with the assumption that the reader is familiar with Jung and Jungian concepts like the Self, the

anima, the animus, and the shadow self. She does not formally introduce these concepts, and the reader uninitiated to Jung would be left somewhat confused.

Structure

The book is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter One, Von Franz introduces her purpose for writing, and her belief that fairy tales are variations on a single theme—that of the Jungian Self, the sum of human consciousness and unconsciousness that governs us. Fairy tales are essentially tales for how we should live our lives on a psychological level. The initial chapter also provides a scholarly history of the fairy tale, and what work has been done on the genre up until the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter Two compares the fairy tale to related genres, including mythology (which Von Franz maintains is more culture-specific than the fairy tale) and local saga (which are regional tales started from some specific kernel of truth). Over time and with a process called amplification, local sagas become fairy tales. Chapter Three provides some strategies for analyzing the fairy tale, including identifying the setting, the dramatis personae (cast of characters), the components of the story, and more. Chapter Three then expands on Chapter Two by providing strategies for how to analyze the deeper meaning of the fairy tale.

Chapters Four through Six are devoted to a painstaking analysis of a Grimm fairy tale called "The Three Feathers." Von Franz provides the story, as well as many regional variations on the story, and then goes about analyzing the many symbols and characters in the story by relating them to Jungian concepts. Chapter Seven is organized around specific concepts—the shadow, the anima, and the animus—rather than one fairy tale. Several fairy tales are revealed and analyzed in Chapter Seven.

Quotes

"Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. [...] They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form."
Chap. 1, p. 1

"[P]sychology, in contrast to all the other sciences, cannot afford to overlook feeling. It has to take into consideration the feeling tone and emotional value of outer and inner factors, including the observer's feeling reaction as well."
Chap. 1, p. 11

"[T]he most frequent way in which archetypal stories originate is through individual experiences of an invasion by some unconscious content, either in a dream or in a waking hallucination—some event or some mass hallucination whereby an archetypal content breaks into an individual life."
Chap. 2, p. 24

"[A]t the time of Christ the idea of the God-Man—which had existed for ages—had become the eminently important message, the one that had now to be realized at all costs. That is why it became the new message, the new light. And its emotional impact has created all that we now call the Christian civilization [...]"
Chap. 2, pp. 30-31

"In fairy tales time and place are always evident because they begin with 'once upon a time' or something similar, which means in timelessness and spacelessness—the realm of the collective unconscious."
Chap. 3, p. 39

"It can therefore be said that the hero is an archetypal figure which presents a model of an ego functioning in accord with the self."
Chap. 4, p. 62

"The anima—which means for a man the realm of fantasy and the way he relates to the unconscious—was once integrated into the field of consciousness and had reached a human level, but now, under unfavorable cultural circumstances, has been shut off and repressed into the unconscious."
Chap. 5, p. 84

"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."
Chap. 6, p. 103

"The figure of the shadow in itself belongs partly to the personal unconscious and partly to the collective unconscious. In fairy tales only the collective aspect can occur—the

shadow of the hero, for instance. This figure appears as a shadow-hero, more primitive and more instinctive than the hero but not necessarily morally inferior."
Chap. 7, p. 114

"When symbolic factors are repressed, they glut the instincts, and therefore they must be separated out so that the genuine instincts can function without being overloaded."
Chap. 7, p. 134

"Man in his primitive capacity as hunter and warrior is accustomed to kill, and it is as if the animus, being masculine, shares this propensity. Woman, on the other hand, serves life, and the anima entangles a man in life."
Chap. 7, p. 170

"The fact that the threads [motifs] running through the tales all follow the same direction [...] suggests that the order they refer to is a fundamental one. It is my feeling that when fairy tales are brought together in clusters and interpreted in relation to one another, they represent at bottom one transcendental archetypal arrangement."
Chap. 7, p. 196

Topics for Discussion

Why are fairy tales more useful to look at than mythologies as far as exploring universal truths?

Which came first, the mythology or the fairy tale? Discuss the theories Von Franz discusses in the book.

What kind of hero is Dummling? What are his attributes? What psychological truth is the fairy tale trying to reveal in the character of Dummling?

What is the significance of the number three in fairy tales?

Describe the story of "King Thrushbeard." How is a woman's struggle with animus dramatized in the story?

What is significant about Peter providing twenty shillings—his entire fortune—toward the peasant's funeral, a peasant who would later aid Peter in ghost form?

Why is it significant that Dummling in "The Three Feathers" finds his future wife in a castle cellar? What is Von Franz's psychological interpretation of this geography?