

Fairy tales, folktales and legends

[Philosophy](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

People across the globe have always told stories, and tales are the major symbol of the human struggle for eternity and immortality. Even though many take for granted that fairy tales have always been for children, in the 19th century tales were told and written principally for adults. The desire and the attraction to the past allowed oral tradition to survive and, thus, the tales continue to be told. In fact, a difference should be outlined about the history of storytelling and the distinction among tales.

Fairy tales and folktales have frequently been compared and differentiated by scholars in order to shed light on their relations and dissimilarities. Even though it is arduous to clearly distinguish between the two genres, considering tales have changed significantly throughout the centuries, it must be stressed that in fairy tales, author and origin can be identified. Some fairy tales have roots in the oral tradition, but others, called literary fairy tales, were made up and written down. On the contrary, in folktales the story was passed down orally by storytellers and it was pivotal to keep it close to the original as much as possible, although it may be complicated since many peculiar cultures are mixed in a way that fortifies the variations. As a result, authentic composers and specific sources are unknown.

Furthermore, collectors of folktales as the brothers Grimm and Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, rewrote and passed down those tales in a more literary form and the consequence is that they were no longer a popular creative material. Grimm's Fairy Tales generated a model that, in the course of time, has been stuck and adapted to the European tale. In the 19th century Wilhelm Grimm believed that several of the fairy tales they made popular were ingrained in a shared cultural history native of the Indo-European language family. Hence,

<https://assignbuster.com/fairy-tales-folktales-and-legends/>

the origin of folktales was one of the biggest mysteries in folktale studies, since in oral tradition they are transmitted through spoken language, and from generation to generation. Some of these stories goes much back than classical mythology and some variants appear in Latin and Greek texts too.

Fairy tales

It is almost impossible to describe the fairy tale as a mere literary genre because, over the years, it became a cultural institution as well.

Nevertheless, fairy tales follow a representative pattern and a code that differentiate them from other genres, for instance fantasy stories. They are adventure story which embrace the whole universe, the form of which is characterized by the concentration and sublimation: clarity and mystery pervade them at the same time. Their aim is not to embellish or transfigure the real world since the world transfigure itself spontaneously: they see the world in the same way they create it. Bloody or cruel incidents are not deleted from their own context, but they are collocated in a specific place. As a result, everything seems to be in order and the intimate human desire of the ideal world is eventually satisfied.

Also known as Märchen, fairy tales involve magical and fantastic characters, events and symbols, they are not believed to be true and are always set in timeless, generic and unspecified places. They often feature one-dimensional characters which undergo a physical or mental transformation and hardly ever contain actual fairies, even though several supernatural creatures are present (such as giants, witches or ogres). Academicians utilize the German term Märchen in order to express this concept:

“ The Märchen or Magic Tale is the diminutive form of the old German mär meaning a short story, is the technical term for what was earlier and is still called, in the English-speaking world, the magic tale, the fairy tale, or sometimes the hero tale.”

The origin of the word ‘ fairy’ is the Latin *fatum*, which means ‘ to enchant’. The English word derives from the French form of the root *fee* (or *feerie*), that stands for ‘ illusion’ or ‘ enchantment’ and, in old French romance, a ‘ woman skilled in magic’. Moreover, this term can be associated with the Italian word ‘ *fata*’.

Other three connotations of the term ‘ fairy’ can be outlined: it represented the country of the Fays (Abode of the Faes); the people of Fairyland (its inhabitants); and eventually, the individual in Fairyland (the Fairy Knight or Elf) . After the publication of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* , fairies were identified with nymphs and elves, and distinctions became confused. A clear and famous example of this misunderstanding is given by Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* , in which he incorporated most of the legendary traditions known in England.

According to Laura F. Kready , four main origins of fairy tales can be identified:

1. Firstly, fairy tales are myth sediments and surviving echoes of gods and heroes: the narration is basically unchanged. The plot and the incidents are the same of the heroic epics, focusing on the monstrous and miraculous which reflected the condition of rude people.

2. Secondly, fairy tales are myths of Sun, Dawn, Thunder, Rain, etc. Since there were the beliefs in human descent from animals and in animated nature, fairy tales represented the primitive man's experience with the natural world. In such world there was no supernatural because there was no distinction between nature and human personality. As soon as the first meaning of the original name was lost, everything became a new story. All scholars agree that some tales are plainly myths of Sun and Dawn: in the natural history of savages there are summer and winter feasts, rituals of sorrow, interest in the motion of the heavenly bodies and the custom of naming men and women from the phenomena of nature.

3. Thirdly, fairy tales all arose in India. India is the probable source because of the vitality of its animism and transformation, its marvelous incidents and fairy-like characters.

4. Lastly, fairy tales owe their origin to the identity of early fancy. Primitive people in remote parts of the world, in similar situations, would express experience in tales with similar characteristics and motifs.

It is likely that all these theories are at least partially correct, and that fairy tales owe their origin to all four sources.

Tales have been transmitted in many ways, both orally and literally.

Sometimes tales taken from the oral tradition are written and redrafted to make the plot and the language more acceptable to their audience, and sometimes an author writes a tale maintaining traditional plot and style: both of these types are called literary tales, and it often happens that such

stories are absorbed into the oral culture again and become part of the traditional literature.

Literary fairy tales can include individualized characters with a developed personality and detailed descriptions of individuals and settings. Even though fairy tales, myths and legends may seem to mean the same thing, they provide a diverse and unique reading experience. In the fairy tale men poetically gain a dominion over the world: what is difficult and unfathomable in the real world becomes simple and transparent in the fiction.

All the tales in the world have similar characteristics that have been defined by the influential scholar Max Lüthi in his book *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. According to him, it should be possible to identify the function of the tale by its aspect: the form of such extraordinary artistic creation which was so widely read is determined by two main factors. It depends on the characteristics of its creators but, at the same time, on the needs of its audience. The form of the tale should be adapted to its function. Hence, it is possible to comprehend, at least approximately, its function starting with its form. Lüthi identifies five points:

1. The tale must be unidimensional. The fairy tale contains many supernatural symbols and characters (witches, fairies, soothsayers, trolls, giants, dwarves, dragons and fantastic animals), and outwardly common animals can speak and show transcendental capabilities. In fairy tales there are no feelings of fear, concern and curiosity in front of the supernatural, the hero is not baffled or scared. Everything seems to belong to the same dimension, what Lüthi calls 'unidimensional'.

2. The tale lacks a perspective. It is not possible to perceive the fracture that dissociates the unholy world from the holy one. The characters are bodiless, without an inner world and they lack connections with past, future and time in general. The characters of the tale do not have an inner world, but not even a surrounding one: they live and act in their hometown and they do not leave it. Every experience and relationship are developed in that specific place.

3. The tale is abstract. The eradication of any perspective provides distance from reality. Fairy tale does not aim to shape the real world and its multiple dimensions, but it turns them into a different form in order to build another universe. Every creature, otherworldly or not, is mentioned but not described, and that is far to be a loss because this approach gives substance to every element.

4. The tale implies isolation and universal connections. It has already been observed that in fairy tales there is no fear, amazement and snoopiness. This lack of concern shows how characters are isolated or alienated, and there is a complete absence of a permanent relationship. Fairy tales favor what is rare, precious, extreme, what is isolated, precisely. Only what is not ingrained in an actual place, what is not detained by constraints and external relationship, can both make and dissolve bonds. The isolation acquires a real meaning only if it is able to create universal boundaries: without this capacity the externally isolated elements would necessarily disperse in every direction.

5. The tale implies sublimation and universal contents. Fairy tales have an abstract and figurative style. Objects and characters lose their individual characteristics and become ethereal and transparent figures. The motives found in fairy tales did not develop in the tale itself, most of them are just ‘social motives’ (wedding, poverty, loss of parents, discord among brothers and sisters, loyalty etc.) and they reflect the relationships between men and men, men and animals or, otherwise, between men and the surrounding world. However, these profane motives are combined with magic, and the tale sublimates them into specific ones. Even mythical, sexual and erotic motives are sublimated and transformed since fairy tales are compositions made of universal contents.

The modern fairy tale probably begins with Andersen’s Fairy Tales and Stories , and it differs from its antecedent due to its length and its multiplicity of images. It emphasizes the satirical and critical element and its humor is often heavy, while the old tale used concrete artistry since if the symbol expressed less, it implied more.

According to Bengt Holbek,

“ the marvelous elements in fairy tales are symbolic, meaning they convey feelings rather than thoughts. Moreover, such vivid emotional impressions are deemed to refer to beings, events and phenomena of the real world.”

In conclusion, a traditional fairy tale besides characters, plot, setting, and dialogue, must present truth and have emotion and imagination mixed with the formal beauty of language. Any examination of the modern fairy tale very frequently shows a failure to meet these requirements.

<https://assignbuster.com/fairy-tales-folktales-and-legends/>

Folktales

Folktales are imaginative stories which have passed from storyteller to storyteller. In comparison with the fairy tale, the folktale is an older form, it is oral and communal because it represents the relationship between people expressed in fantastic and symbolic terms. It is based on real life even though it often features supernatural and extraordinary elements and it speaks to humans' basic emotions, beliefs, and cultural norms. It is embedded in cultures, so it is difficult for audiences to immediately understand the meaning of another culture's folk literature. Folktales have a particular and proper style with a standard opening formula ('once upon a time', 'once there was a king and a queen'), and also a standardized ending: sometimes the formula tells what happened after the main story was over. According to Stith Thompson,

“the teller of stories has everywhere and always found eager listeners. Whether his tale is the mere report of a recent happening, a legend of long ago, or an elaborately contrived fiction, men and women have hung upon his words and satisfied their yearnings for information or amusement, for incitement to heroic deeds, for religious edification, or for release from the overpowering monotony of their lives.”

Hence, folktales developed through repeated oral retellings within a society or community and every storyteller gave his own contribution. Simplification and schematization are common, the stories have a restricted list of characters (usually there are only two people) and the plot is often systemized. The folktale uses short characterizations and repetitions to

emphasize important features, it starts and ends with poetic justice: the good characters are rewarded, and the evil ones are punished. Eventually, folktales generally lack descriptive passages and depend on plot.