

THE PROBLEM OF THE  
FAIRY TALE

Sometimes the simplest forms are the most difficult to explain. Perhaps the reason for this is that one estimates the problems involved as being too simple, too obvious, and does not seek, therefore, to penetrate to their core. Besides, there is an aura of the primitive and underivative about a literary form we are used to considering as popular; we hardly dare profane it by dry, objective analysis. As the tradition of a community, it shares the anonymity of the latter. Seeking the traces of creative and tradition-conscious personages, we find only an amorphous mass of the unknown. No wonder that the riddle has been relegated back to prehistoric times, permitting us to conceal its problems behind a veil of mystery.

Almost a century and a half has passed since the Brothers Grimm first turned with scholarly interest to the fairy tale. When we try to take a comprehensive view of the results which have by now been reached, we get the impression that the investigations have constantly gone around in a circle and have now returned to their point of departure. Have we asked the wrong questions? Have we tried to solve only parts of problems? At any event, we can now talk about a "crisis" in fairy-tale scholarship,

Translated by Edith Cooper.

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whereas less than fifty years ago scholars thought, with the greatest confidence, that they were nearing the “solution” to the main problems. This crisis is not limited to a single main problem; all facets are more or less touched by it. I shall treat here the following questions: How are we to understand the form of the fairy tale? What is its origin? From what places did it come to us? How did it spread?

But, first, we must agree on the meaning of the word “*Märchen*,” which (like the Dutch *sprookje*) means simply “tale,” thus corresponding to the French *conte populaire*. In Scandinavian it is called “adventure” (e.g., Danish *eventyr*) or, very colorlessly, “myth” (as in Swedish). These fuzzy designations (compare also the Russian *skazka* and the Finnish *tarina*) are in agreement with the contents of the famous book with which the Brothers Grimm stimulated fairy-tale research, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (“Children’s and Household Tales”), containing fables and pranks, even some legends, along with the fairy tales proper. Obviously, completely different products of the art of storytelling were here thrown into one pot. In the catalogue of types created by Antti Aarne and expanded by Stith Thompson, too, these forms exist peacefully side by side; but we are bound to make a distinction. Fable and prank are easily eliminated; the legend, too, does not belong here. What is left are the real fairy tales, separated by Aarne again into “magical tales” and “*novella*-like tales.” The latter group shows many ties with the international literature of *novelle* which flowered in the late Middle Ages and drew mainly on the Orient for its subjects. This leaves as proper for our study the “magical fairy tales”—tales in which supernatural themes appear, such as personified beings (giants, dwarfs, fairies, Frau Holle), helpful animals (a horse gifted with human speech), transformations of enchanted humans into animals, and magical objects or actions. The English name “fairy tale” comes closest to this kind of folk tale, even though it designates too precisely a single genre. I shall treat only the magical fairy tale in these observations.

The form of the fairy tale is not so easy to determine. It is simple, as we expect from folk art. The lower classes, peasants and artisans, among whom in modern times the fairy tales were written down, naturally had only the simplest language at their command. This explains the paratactical sentence structure and the choice of plain words. Threefold repetition, verbatim, of parallel actions is the trade mark of folk style, as is the use of fixed formulas at beginning and end. The description of characters is schematic: king, princess, artisan, garden boy. All are drawn only as types and sometimes very naïvely: the king himself opens the gate to his castle;

the princess does housework. The style is also stereotyped in the sense that for years and years a good storyteller does not change in the smallest detail the formula he has invented.

We can understand why André Jolles counted the fairy tale among the “simple forms” to which he devoted a beautiful and instructive book. The style is indeed simple, but is it therefore primitive as well? It is worth noting that the style of fairy tales has often been imitated, with failure as the result. The names of Perrault and Musäus demonstrate how much they were governed by the taste of the times. Only the unique Hans Christian Andersen was able to imitate the genuine fairy-tale style to perfection, even though the results were art tales rather than true folk tales. Modern collections of fairy tales for children are either sentimental or too educational, and this must give us pause. The manner of speaking of the lower classes has been brilliantly conveyed in countless peasant novels; often the author had himself come from the “people” and spoke his native dialect. Why, then, this failure in the case of the fairy tale, so that the imitation led to a stiff and unnatural absurdity? Obviously, this style was not so simple as it appeared; perhaps its individuality was coined in such a way that the imitator could not capture its spirit. Has the tradition of more than a thousand years here led to a result which in its simplicity and balance can be called even classical? It is easy to consider the Grimm collection as an example of this classical style; but that is a deception. An exact comparison of the editions made by Wilhelm himself has taught us that he took constant pains to mold his style to ever greater perfection, according to his own taste, with the result that what we admire is more Wilhelm’s personal style than the art of storytelling as it really lives among the people. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the language of the genuine popular writings, which, by the way, is no less “classical” in its natural simplicity.

The Swiss folklorist, Max Lüthi, in an exhaustive investigation, tried to determine the true fairy-tale style; through an analysis of its peculiarities he came to the conclusion that we must by no means think of a primitive formulation here but rather of a high art form which aimed at eliminating the chance single occurrence and reaching a more or less obligatory standard form. The everyday speech of the common folk is concrete; in fairy tales, however, we find a high degree of abstraction. At first this seems strange. Here not “every bird sings as it is beaked”; pains have been taken to achieve a special style.

Max Lüthi therefore rejects the description “simple form” and speaks, on the contrary, of a “final form,” one which was evolved only at the end

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of a long development. Now this final form is by no means to be thought of as the result of grooming in popular circles, which would have led to the juicy and humorous speech of everyday rather than to this extreme schematicism. The final form stood at the beginning. When the fairy tale appeared it already had its pronounced form. May we conclude from this that it originated in circles used to realizing an art form with conscious intent?

We have arrived now at the problem of the origin. In the spirit of romanticism, Jakob Grimm had perceived ancient myths in the fairy tales. The appearance of supernatural creatures, wonderful metamorphoses, and concepts of the waters of life and of the restorative powers of fire were held in common by myth and fairy tale; the relation could be explained only by saying that from the myth, once it had shed its religious content, the fairy tale had come into being, innocent and serving only to please. The author of the definitive book, *Deutsche Mythologie*, who was also a zealous collector of German folklore, understandably thought that German fairy tales came from German, that is, Germanic, myths. Later, when he came to know other European, particularly Slavic, collections, he had to widen his hypothesis and assume an Indo-Germanic myth as basis for the fairy tale.

Meanwhile, the spirit of the times changed. In place of romanticism, conceiving of large-scale syntheses, reigned the critical positivism of the nineteenth century. Now no one wanted to hear any more of an origin in prehistoric times; but, in agreement with the prevalent evolutionism, the spread and transmission in historical times from one place, or perhaps several places, of origin was conceived. After a closer acquaintance with Indian literature had been established and the rich collections of fables, *novelle*, and jests had been found (like the *Panchatantra* and *Kathāsaritāgāra*), the place of origin could be looked for only in India, especially since in those days there was a tendency to overestimate greatly the age of the Indian literature. The similarity of motif in European fairy tales and Indian stories was quite obvious; there was really only the one question left: how these Indian preforms, contained only in a literary body of writing, could have reached the European folk tradition. Theodor Benfey (a Sanscrit scholar), the originator of the "Indianistic theory," hardly occupied himself with the folkloristic question. Far greater effort in this direction was made by the French folklorist Cosquin, who did not try to trace the European fairy-tale tradition back to its Indian roots but rather to determine more exactly the ways of its spreading. He ascribed a considerable role to the Mongols as mediators between the strongly ethical and moralizing Indian literature

and the European folk tradition. It is doubtless true that the expansion of the Mongol tribes from Asia to Europe opened the way westward for numerous cultural goods, but it is seriously to be questioned that these same Mongols, whose impulses caused the European nations to tremble, had the gifts necessary for transmitting a harmless treasure of light literature.

Still, there were other possibilities. The Iranians linguistically and culturally belonged with the Indians and thus could have been regarded as a western outpost of India; then, also, the way through Greece and Byzantium could easily be found. After the Islamization of the Near East, a new gap had been spanned; from the Near East to Spain the Mohammedan world was in immediate contact with Europe—a contact which was, if anything, intensified by the Crusades.

But research had already taken other paths. So far, the method it used had been primarily philological; now it was to become purely folkloristic. This meant, of course, that eventually a separate and new method was to be evolved for fairy-tale research, using as point of departure the plentiful folkloristic material which had already been collected. The European tradition was not to be arrived at purely deductively from an original source assumed somewhat arbitrarily. Rather, its early history was to be reconstructed inductively. But how was it possible to handle the gigantic number of fairy-tale variants, growing larger year by year, with a philological method which did and could only work with a limited number of manuscripts? Out of this need grew the purely folkloristic method which has been called “historic-geographical” or the “Finnish” method. An indispensable preliminary condition was to arrange the material according to nations and tribes, in order to be able to observe the individual life of the tradition in various parts of Europe. However, in the face of the overwhelming majority of modern texts, the sporadically recorded variants of earlier centuries have had to be treated with particular attention, in order, perhaps, to find a gradual change—in other words, a development.

It must be stressed emphatically that the Finnish method was only a means of research, new and suitable to the material. It was not connected with a specific theory which it tried to prove. Scholars looked forward to the results with suspense and hoped at last to reach a definite decision about the origin of the fairy tale. They did not want even to think in terms of a limitation to the Indo-Germanic group of nations; they ransacked the ethnological literature in order to collect variants from all parts of the earth. Now they also had the insight to conclude that India, although a rich

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source of these tales, was not the only one. In northern and western Europe, too, a fairy tale could have come into being and spread far into Asia.

Through the Finnish Academy of Sciences, the publication of a series, the "Folklore Fellows Communications," was made possible, and scholars of the most diverse nationalities were allowed to publish here the results of their investigations. They began with the greatest industry in the belief that a valid opinion about the origin of the fairy tale could not be pronounced until most, if not all, of the fairy tales had been examined to that end. But gradually their industry subsided, and today such studies have become a rarity. This is to be blamed not entirely on the fact that the working-over of material swelling to a thousand or more variants is a very time-consuming and almost purely mechanical-technical affair but rather on a sense of discomfort concerning the value of the method. How was one to find the origin through an exact identification of the series of motifs in the variants examined? First of all, one should reconstruct an original form; however, the human intellect functioning as it does only by rational laws, the original form was to be a complex of motifs complete in itself. But how can one be sure that in the beginning there was a tale calculated to fit our present-day habits of thinking? Without agreeing with Lévy-Bruhl on a prelogical mentality, it seems safe to assume that a mythical consistency need not be logical. Often it was thought that one had to assume the place of origin where the best preserved or the most variants were found. But the number of variants is often conditioned only by the organization and devotion of the collectors, and why should not a corrupt tradition dominate today where once a fairy tale originated? The method was not foolproof, and the results obtained not positive, often even wrong. Thus hundreds of books could be written without ever coming to a conclusive result.

The problem of the fairy tale could in this way be solved only in the far-distant future, if at all. The uncomfortable atmosphere created by this fact was strengthened by the acquisition of material growing to monstrous proportions and by a revolution in the intellectual life of Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century, men's minds were no longer ruled by positivism; neoromantic currents prevailed instead.

As for the newly acquired material, while the European variants in the folklore archives increased to infinity, they finally yielded only variants of variants. But added to this was the material from outside Europe which ethnography unearthed in astonishing quantities. Among primitive peoples, an unimagined wealth of myths was found which exhibited impor-

tant parallels to those of the European nations. Side by side with these were found fairy-tale-like stories which often contained mythical themes but served only to entertain. These stories were called "*Mythen-Märchen*" (myth-fairy-tales), a name which indicates a certain hybrid character. However, in the tradition of the natives a sharp line is drawn between the two: the myth is serious and holy, the spoken word which accompanies the ritual act; the fairy tale is only a story serving to entertain, making no demands on belief. Among the North American Indians the coyote is, on the one hand, a bearer of culture who is reverently reported to have brought certain benefits to his tribe in primitive times; on the other hand, he is also a knave who plays all kinds of pranks and whom no one takes seriously.

The border line between the two groups can be drawn by a native with unflinching instinct, but this is impossible for the outsider. There may be myth-fairy-tales in the sense in which in Scandinavian mythology we find tales about Thor which may well be either in earnest or in jest and which are often denied to have any religious value, perhaps unjustly so. The myth-fairy-tale with which the newer research has been working is one using mythical themes. It impresses us as strange to read purely farcical stories about mythical personages; possibly the continuity of the background against which they flourish has given them an especial charm which we cannot share. At any rate, the narratives of primitive tribes cannot without more ado be put on the same plane as those of the European nations.

For after the ethnological material had shown that a number of fairy-tale themes were known all over the world, the conclusion was nevertheless reached that our fairy tale is a typical Indo-European phenomenon. The Swedish scholar C. W. von Sydow compared the Indo-European and Semitic folk tales and underlined their radically different character. The miracle-fairy-tale belongs to the Indo-Germanic peoples, while the Semites developed particularly the *novella*, the joke, and especially the *Kasus* (anecdote). The *Arabian Nights* cannot be used as counterargument, because a large part of its contents can be traced to Persian, that is, Indo-European, sources. Von Sydow also regards as originally Indo-Germanic the Egyptian "two-brother-tale," which, because of its great antiquity, played an important part in later fairy-tale research.

Here we must also make a sharp division between our fairy tale and the primitive myth-fairy tale. The great difference is this: the tales of primitive tribes almost always give the impression of fairy tales which are not fully developed. Even though they usually employ much the same themes

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as the European tales, they work them into sketchy forms which often appear to be only fragmentary, preliminary steps to the actual fairy tale. Through just such a comparison we realize how tightly knit and spiritually formed are the fairy tales of the Indo-European nations.

It must be abundantly clear that these tales are full of primitive concepts. The numerous magic potions and magic actions, the view of animals as creatures equal with men and able to exchange shapes with them, are direct signs of a primitive mentality. In the European cultural sphere we would ascribe them to about the Neolithic age; the German scholar W. Peuckert drew from this the reckless conclusion that fairy tales originated in the early Stone Age. I do not think that the arguments advanced for this hypothesis make it a plausible one. Some of these "Neolithic" beliefs and customs still live among the peasants of today or have at least been preserved as themes for stories. A fairy tale using such themes need not therefore have originated in times as early as that but could incorporate the themes at any time. New cultural forms always carry with them a large heritage from earlier periods; how many heathen concepts and even customs have been preserved after the conversion to this day! Great caution should be used in the judging of such survivals; they themselves are again the building blocks out of which in later times something new can be created.

When one reads an investigation by the "Finnish" school, he finds that a fairy tale is dissected into its motifs, which are examined carefully for form, age, and origin, and, finally, from the motifs assumed to be "original," a tale, complete in itself, is assembled, which has to pass for the original form of the story. Now the comparison of a number of fairy-tale variants shows that the separate motifs are easily interchangeable without injury to the main plot. It could be argued that it is not the motifs which make a plot but that the plot, according to requirements and caprice, chooses the motifs with which it makes the skeleton of an outline into a living body.

Looking at it from the point of view of the motifs, the fairy tale seems to combine these pretty arbitrarily. But, then, how are we to understand the fact that the fairy tales, despite numerous exchanges of themes and contamination, only rarely give up their fundamental structure and even find their way back to the clear basic outlines from an apparently wild disorder. It is not the themes that are significant but the scheme of action—the "pattern," as it is now likely to be called.

Von Sydow had already demanded emphatically that not the single



tale but a group of related types was to be examined. This respected and original scholar was indeed familiar with the idea that the whole is worth more than its parts. Within the protean figure of the fairy tales, then, a definite scheme of action can be shown. In a book which appeared in 1954 as No. 150 of the "Folklore Fellows Communications," I outlined the main scheme as follows: The miraculous birth of the hero, often connected with his exposure; sometimes he is the youngest of three brothers and therefore disdained. This is followed by the cause for the real adventure: he must rescue a woman or carry out other difficult tasks, in which he gets supernatural help, either from animals or from magic objects. But the journey does not lead straight to success; he comes into the power of a demoniacal creature, finally saving himself from the danger. Then the fairy tale often takes a surprising turn: a swindler comes on the scene who tries to cheat the hero out of his reward. All ends well, however; the crook is unmasked, the hero rescues the lady he sought, or he is delivered from his enchantment.

I have traced this scheme *mutatis mutandis* in the heroic saga as well as in the myth. This cannot be ascribed to chance. There has to be an inner relationship between the three forms of art which one might consider as the unfolding of a basic idea into three separate forms. Mythology can, of course, be thought of as the primal cell; and, if we wish to "explain" the scheme of action, we must do so from a religious point of view. The character of this scheme corresponds to the normal course of an initiation. The ritual act, so important for the life of the tribe as well as for the individual, builds up according to a fixed scheme: the young man comes under the power of a primeval being (is swallowed by it as Jonah by the whale) and, after enduring much torture and pain, returns to life. Through a simulated death, the initiated is reborn to a new life in which he is henceforth a valid member of the tribe. The acquisition of a bride in the fairy tale is homologous to the accession to manhood and potency of the newly consecrated male.

The conclusion is obvious: mythology provided a number of actions which, however, were carried over from the divine into the human world. The heroic saga has also taken over the majority of its life-histories from mythology; it has even transformed gods into heroes. But the hero who takes a divine action upon himself steps outside the bounds of the world of humans and has to pay for his presumption with his doom. The fairy-tale hero, on the other hand, solves his difficulties with ease; an optimistic sense of life predominates here—does not the hero at the end win the

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princess and half the kingdom? In this respect one could believe that the fairy tale continues along the lines set down by mythology. But how are we to understand the relationship between the two?

The French folklorist Saintyves already suspected this sacral origin of the fairy tale. Unfortunately, he choose as point of departure for his observations the fairy tales by Perrault, which are anything but folklike, and tried to demonstrate an immediate connection with primeval cult rites (rites of spring or initiation). This was misguided. The fairy tales are only literature and not cult texts accompanying ritual acts. But we nevertheless owe to him the return to a view which re-establishes the connection with mythology in a period of sober rationalism.

I should like to choose another path toward an explanation. The difference between myth and fairy tale is obviously that the myth is believed, while the fairy tale serves only to entertain. But, as soon as the myth begins to forfeit its ritual meaning, its content is free to be used as well-known and popular themes for literary treatment. That which was once inviolably earnest now becomes amusing adventure which, in contrast to the heroic saga, is pure play.

There are times and peoples who are willing to listen to the heroic tales of the *Iliad* and the *Nibelungenlied*; but there are others who cast off all their cares in the lighthearted fantasy world of the fairy tale. It seems safe to assume that the fairy tale separated itself from the myth as an independent genre in an atmosphere which allowed devotion to illusions in a life without problems—a life lived in the optimism of the delusion that there are no insoluble problems. This seems to me to be an aristocratic attitude toward life which can manifest itself only for a few happy months in the history of man.

Did the same aristocratic circles foster both the heroic epic and the fairy tale? This does not seem to me impossible. We find an example for it in medieval France. The austere *Chansons de Geste*, maintained in good heroic style, gradually change to novels of adventure; but beside them the *Matière de Bretagne* comes to the foreground with typical fairy-tale content—love for women and service to them—and which, moreover, display a definitely ethical attitude. Behind apparent optimism, however, a feeling of inescapable doom can easily lie hidden.

The fairy tale, then, seems to be connected with a definite cultural epoch. The myth must have lost its validity, and heroic attitudes weakened, before the proper appreciation for lighthearted invention of fairy tales could exist. When this time arrived will have to be determined more

exactly for each nation. In so doing, the possibility must not be overlooked that these forms could have existed side by side. That is proved by the myth-fairy-tale of primitive tribes, which still lives on against the background of the valid myth, acting, in a manner of speaking, as foil for it. The European fairy tale finally detached itself from its mythical foundation and only then began its triumphal march through the centuries.

It was precisely through this absorption of mythical material that the fairy tale gained a share in an immortal treasure of motifs which is part of the spiritual life of Europe. The motifs function, as the psychologist Jung once put it, as archetypes, anchored indestructibly in the consciousness of mankind. In dreams and hallucinations they keep rising up out of the darkness of the unconscious inner life. This explains their role in the psychiatry of neurotic diseases; it also explains the continuing attraction the motifs have for the childish mind, and their suitability, despite pedagogical protests in periods of enlightenment, for giving young people a view of the world which Max Lüthi has very aptly called an "aspect of real life."

"Poor man's poetry" is the way in which fairy tales are sometimes described, and this is what they have gradually become. In classical sources they are called "old wives' tales"; in Scandinavian, "shepherds' sagas." The optimistic view, originally proof that the world was recognized and depicted in its essence, soon led to the feeling that the fairy tale was only the image of a dream world. Life was too harsh to give credibility to this world picture. The superior view of life offered by the fairy tale has been experienced as reality only in rare moments and in privileged circles, as Max Lüthi so convincingly demonstrated.

The conclusion, then, might well be that the fairy tale is not the prerogative of a single Indo-Germanic nation. When the time is ripe, it can originate anywhere and does so in accordance with the prevailing cultural stage. Thus, fairy tales can have appeared in various parts of Eurasia, since everywhere the necessary conditions for it were present at some historical moment. But there were nations which progressed sooner and more decisively than others; they were, then, the first to detach the fairy tale from the myth and were therefore able to stand as examples for more backward nations.

This brings us once again to the question of the diffusion of the fairy tale, although the inquiry has now taken on a new aspect. The investigations by the Finnish school showed that different tribal units developed their own form, distinguished by a certain choice of motifs and style. Von

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Sydow called them "ecotypes" (*Oekotypen*), that is, types which adapted to a certain national environment. This can be observed with greatest clarity in border-line areas: in Finland, Swedish and Russian variants exist side by side; in Flanders, Germanic and Romantic types cross, indicating a migration of the fairy tale.

In examining the whole variant material of a single fairy tale, one has the impression of an almost homogeneous mass. How did this uniformity, even if only relative, come about? How did it spread over the whole continent, from one fixed point, if such can be assumed? How were these tales able to cross language boundaries so easily? At first it was thought to envisage a passage along a wide front—a whole nation communicating tales to its neighbor. But, after the collective views on folk art which originated in the romantic movement had been proved wrong, the role of the individual had to be considered in the answering of such questions. This individual, however, was not just any member of a nation but an especially gifted one, singular in the community, or at any rate one of a very few. These were the carriers of tradition; they also must have been its disseminators. Of course there are cases in which a tale was carried over a long distance, suggesting travelers, sailors, and merchants; but these were, in general, not real fairy tales but rather pranks, anecdotes, or *novelle*.

The crux of the question is: How can the form of a fairy tale be preserved in a transmission? How is it possible that the peculiar unity of folk tradition was not disturbed? For, indeed, in a single transfer the potential number of errors is great. The German-Czechoslovakian scholar Wesselski, who was most skeptical about the popular character of the fairy tale and derived it rather from a literary genre, was of the opinion that a long-continued tradition can only destroy an inherited form. He attempted to strengthen this argument by an experiment. A fairy tale was told to a class of school children, and the children were asked to repeat its contents. Of course the result was very disappointing. Many adults similarly prove in court that they can remember only sketchily even things they have witnessed themselves. But the same man who made a miserable impression as witness can tell in faultless style a joke he enjoys. Walter Anderson, a folklorist with much experience in questions of folk tradition, was easily able to carry Wesselski's argument to absurdity and pointed out that fairy tales can spread only through repeated recital. The odd faithfulness of folk tradition which, on the whole, remains unbroken through centuries, even though one will find incomplete or spoiled variants during one's collect-

ing, can be explained by continuous self-correction of the variants told over and over by good raconteurs.

We must keep in mind that the carriers of tradition are especially gifted people. Each has his fixed repertoire. Each has refined the form suited to his individuality, and this concerns not only the spoken expression but pitch, mimicry, and gestures as well. Such performers never let a good opportunity pass to increase their repertoire; they take up a new fairy tale attentively and pass it on. This is the way in which fairy tales can wander far and still preserve their form.

Near a language border one always finds people who command both languages and live in constant exchange with each other. Even the severe splitting-up of Europe has not been able to stop the triumphal march of the fairy tale. One fact, however, must be reckoned with; the newly received tales have adapted themselves to the special local tradition and thus are transformed into a special ecotype.

How do we explain the power of those ecotypes which force every tale into their magic circle? It is easy enough to understand that in Russia and in France different themes are preferred, but this does not explain why each nation has perfected its form of fairy tale. We cannot, obviously, proceed by ascribing to each nation a special taste or sense of style, since this would lead to the area of national psychology, the nature of which has barely begun to be investigated.

But, if the fairy tale branched off from the myth, we might find an answer to this question. The myth, as the latest theories lead us to believe, was a heritage from a common origin for all Indo-Germanic nations. A heritage, however, must be continually repossessed by each nation, which necessitates a continued change in the course of its cultural development. One nation, like the Greeks, might advance quickly along this course; another might lag far behind, like the Slavs. Moreover, each Indo-Germanic nation came in contact with an aboriginal population from which important elements of culture could be borrowed, thus considerably transforming the old inheritance. The Indians lived in the midst of an Austro-Asiatic prime layer; the Greeks settled above the Pelasgians; and so forth. The influences were in every case, therefore, of a completely different kind. In the area of religion, too, it can be assumed that the myths showed differences in vital points.

Each nation then formed its own treasury of fairy tales. This probably happened in that period in which the myths lost their validity, and their

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content was available as material for entertainment. Since this moment was not the same for the various Indo-European nations, the myths themselves could have had a diverging development before the tales were formed from them, since the ecotypes indicated that each province fully developed its own individuality.

The fairy tale is a final form, Max Lüthi says. When it came into being, mythology had reached its richest flowering. It had been cultivated among the priests, and poets had given it its consummate form. All this the fairy tale had as its inheritance. In time, a cultural satiation set in; appreciation was lacking for the harsh heroic-epic poetry in which the old beliefs had been largely given up or rationalized, and a new art form was successfully created which reflected a new aspect of life. I am thinking of a period of euphoria in which the great problems of the world and of men were considered as solved—or one simply did not want to acknowledge their validity. That was when one could enjoy the lighthearted fairy tale, which was already familiar with the problems, having been born from the myth which in its own way had offered a solution to the questions of life. And here, in the fairy tale, the problems were solved. The young man walked through the tortures of initiation leading him close to death but purifying him for a new and richer humanity. This was connected with ancient custom. But separated from that tradition, what would the account of such adventures mean today? Simply a story with a “happy ending”? Hardly that. The myth had authority enough to impress its view of life on the fairy tale; the latter, too, showed a true picture of how the world was constituted, and it was supported by a sincere belief in the indestructibility of human strength and the success of strife for a definite aim. Superhuman powers were certainly needed, but their help did not have to be obtained through sacrifice. They gave salvation to the good man when he had properly passed his tests. He who helps the little dwarf or the animals obtains the help of the spirits as naturally as if it were a law of the world. Thus the fairy tale, too, is in its own way an expression of a highly ethical attitude toward life.

We can assume that a nation can remain at the peak of so optimistic a view of the world for only a short time. Soon melancholia and *Wolfzeit* (the time of the wolf) set in, showing that even the best will in the world is dashed to pieces by fate. And then the fairy tale is regarded as unrealistic and senseless. But, when it then sinks down to the lower classes, the fairy tale is conceived as a message of how-it-ought-to-be: the world as mirrored in the fairy tale cannot very well be the real one which is full of

want and oppression; but one does not want, nonetheless, to be denied the eternal dream of a true, more just world. The fairy tale tells the poor, beaten, and harried people how the pitiful world of men is meant to be and thus, in its true character, really is. Is it, then, merely entertainment; or does it not serve to light in many hearts a small flame of hope?

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