

Characteristics of Grimm's Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are stories either created or strongly influenced by oral traditions. Their plots feature stark conflicts between good and evil, with magic and luck determining the usually happy endings. While each culture and geographic region of the world has its own body of folk tales and fairy tales that it considers "its own," certain themes and motifs tend to be repeated across many cultures and time periods. Universal human emotions such as love, hate, courage, kindness, and cruelty appear in bold, broad strokes on the canvas of fairy tales.

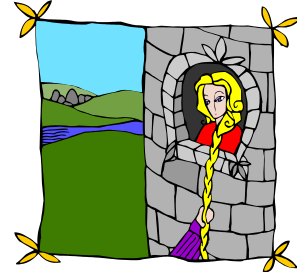
Some of the common characteristics of fairy tales are as follows:

Setting:

- unspecified place
- unspecified time—often set in the past—usually significantly long ago. May be presented as historical fact from the past.

Characters:

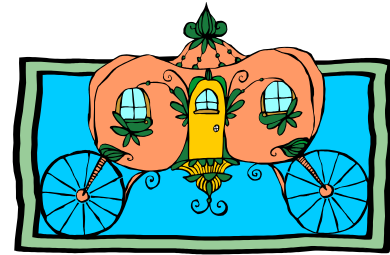
- archetypal characters (no specific names)
- often a girl as protagonist
- does NOT need to include fairies
- "flat" characters that never develop, more often types than anything else (even when given names - e.g., "Cinderella" means nothing more than "girl of the cinders")
- typically incorporate clearly defined good characters and evil characters



Plot:

- simple plot--the plot focuses on a problem or conflict that needs to be solved.
- protagonist leaves home
- extreme conditions (beauty, riches, poverty etc.)

- involves magic elements, which may be magical people, animals, objects, or magic spells Magic may be positive or negative.
- may include objects, people, or events in threes (three battles, three tasks)
- hero (or heroine) heroine has bad luck
- hero (or heroine) must perform impossible tasks
- hero (or heroine) must fight a villain
- hero (or heroine) meets magical helpers
- hero (or heroine) is treated badly
- hero (or heroine) is in danger
- villain is punished
- hero (or heroine) is rewarded with wealth
- hero (or heroine) is rewarded with a happy marriage
- social mobility (poor characters can marry royalty)
- a transformation, either a physical transformation (e.g., the beast turns into a handsome prince) or a character transformation (e.g., the ugly duckling turns out to have been a swan all along)
- happy ending (order is restored in the end based on the resolution of the conflict or problem)



Theme:

- morality (good vs. bad, good is rewarded and evil is punished)
- encouragement of middle-class social values
- usually teach a lesson or demonstrate values important to the culture

