

Into the Woods: Fairytales and Transformation

Creating fairytales using your dreams

If you are a dreamer, come in. If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar, A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer... If you're a pretender, come sit by the fire For we have some flax-golden tales to spin. Come in! Come in! - Shel Silverstein

One day you will be old enough to read fairytales again. – C.S. Lewis

The dream image belongs to the dreamer but here are some common symbols in fairytales and some possible interpretations.

1. Forest: The Unconscious, the unknown, a place of challenge.
2. Mirror: Self-reflection, vanity, hidden truths, realities, distorted self image.
3. Key: Opens things up, can be a word or object
4. Tower: Not connected to reality, ascending to something higher, a place of isolation/imprisonment.
5. Apple/fruit: Something that changes the direction of things.
6. Bridges: Before/after, under is where you meet darker energies, here to there.
7. Moon: Powerful symbol of the feminine.
8. Shoes: Standpoint, attitude to reality, “step into my father’s shoes”, transition (think Cinderella), walking barefoot shedding identities and walking into something new, freedom.
9. Ring: Connection or fetter.

Symbols are a portal into the mystery.

Common fairytale tropes:

1. The “rule of 3” or “power of 3”: We see this again and again in fairytales. Three is an archetypal number of change and transformation. A miller or king or queen has 3 sons/daughters. There are 3 tasks to be accomplished. 3 trials to be endured.

2. The Hero/Heroines's journey: A journey must be undertaken, trials endured, the return home.
3. Magical Helpers: Sometimes nature/animals, sometimes fairy godmothers, crones, etc.
4. Transformation: Someone is changed through a curse or an action. Can be changed into an animal or stone, etc.
5. The power of names: Someone is given a new name or a characters name must be guessed/discovered.
6. The forbidden action: An action results in something bad happening (opening the door to the room in the fairytale Bluebeard comes to mind).
7. The underdog triumphs: Often it is the youngest, the weakest, the dummling that triumphs in the end. They are the one who is willing to trust the help available and often humble and kind.
8. The longing for a child: The king and queen or the miller and his wife, etc., desire the child they have never had.
9. They lived happily ever after: There is some kind of redemptive ending that brings healing or uniting of the opposites. James Hollis refers to it as a paradigm of the healing or therapeutic process. What is lost is returned, ie. feminine/masculine energy.

Setting the stage/stating the problem.

Fairytales often start with ideas that set the stage for us, or reveal the problem and the attitude toward the problem.

1. There once was a wicked step-mother...
2. A King had 3 daughters. The Queen, their mother, had died...
3. In a time when the misty mountains were ripe with magic...
4. Once upon a time there was a poor miller and his wife...
5. A Queen had 3 sons who needed a good wife...

Sometimes it is a challenge to translate the modern images that our unconscious uses in our dreams to fit the fairytale form. That is where imagination comes in! We still hold that imagination and magic that we had as children. Those children we were still live in us and if we give ourselves permission we can tap in to that to help us explore the images in our dreams and the resulting story.

Fairytale work is projective work in the same way dreamwork is. Quoting James Hollis again, fairytales “hold part of the individual human psyche in a collectively represented way.” They are a collective experience that speaks to us individually because we recognize ourselves in the often nameless characters and their fear, frustrations, anger, courage, etc.