

FAIRY-TALE STUDIES

"Fairy Tale" is the popular, or "lay," term for what folklorists refer to as "International Wonder Tales." While these tales are often conceived of as children's stories, this belief is a nineteenth-century construct; fairy tales are and have always been for everyone.

Fairy tales are classified using the ATU Index, a tale-type classification system that helps folklorists organize the stories they research. Each tale is a member of a tale-type group with a number - for example, "Little Red Riding Hood" stories are all classified as ATU 333 tales.

"Fairy Tale" is a term that provokes strong but bewilderingly diverse responses, a label laden with multiple and often contradictory associations [... a] name that can mean so many diverse things to so many different people needs unpacking."

- Carl Lindahl



Image by Walter Crane

Image by Arthur Rackham

The structure of the fairy tale generally follows the functions identified by Vladimir Propp - there are 31 functions or, basically, 'things that can happen in a fairy tale.' While a tale does NOT have to have every function, the functions it does have must happen in the order that Propp identified.

According to the fairy-tale journal *Marvels and Tales*, the term "fairy-tale studies" now refers to "scholarly work dealing with the fairy tale in any of its diverse manifestations and contexts." Scholars of psychology, gender studies, folklore, literature, social and cultural history, anthropology, film studies, ethnic studies, art and music history, and others are involved in fairy-tale studies.

Contemporary fairy-tale scholarship really began in earnest with the rise of feminist theory. It has expanded more recently to include queer and post-colonial thinking as well.

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