



The Feminine in Fairy Tales

Marie-Louise von Franz

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In this engaging commentary, the distinguished analyst and author Marie-Louise von Franz shows how the Feminine reveals itself in fairy tales of German, Russian, Scandinavian, and Eskimo origin, including familiar stories such as "Sleeping Beauty," "Snow White and Rose Red," and "Rumpelstiltskin." Some tales, she points out, offer insights into the psychology of women, while others reflect the problems and characteristics of the anima, the inner femininity of men. Dr. von Franz discusses the archetypes and symbolic themes that appear in fairy tales as well as dreams and fantasies, draws practical advice from the tales, and demonstrates its application in case studies from her analytical practice.

The Feminine in Fairy Tales Details

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Mariana says

I wonder how the author would interpret modern myths and fairy tales and how the feminine shows up in graphic novels and modern novels. Would it be different? Has the feminine changed in the 50 years since the author wrote this book? This is a good starting place for exploring the feminine.

Dawn says

"A woman who always gives advice irritates a man".....well I didn't need to read this book to be told that lol!!.....yet "Most women, since they depend so much on relationship and long for it, have great difficulty in admitting to themselves how lonely they are and in accepting that as a given situation.....According to my experience it is very painful, but very important, for women to realise and accept their loneliness".....

This was the saddest sentence in the book, but must be true for many women for the author to have written it. The book examines feminine reaction to male dominated and patriarchal religious and civil systems, and aspects of feminine psychology, and concludes that the positive functioning of the feminine principle is not to become outwardly dominant, but to give the ruling principle the necessary subtlety - to attain that subtle rightness resulting in an inner subtlety in understanding life.

I found this a difficult book to read in parts for several reasons (such as unfamiliarity with Jungian terms, references to pagan practices and beliefs such as shamanism, references to unfamiliar concepts about myths and gods and goddesses - which are often archetypes of instincts - etc etc), but overall it was an interesting read and certainly an education into feminine psychology - and how fairy tales are often an expression of the "collective unconscious" to counteract male-dominated societies and patriarchal systems.

The book also looks at the "dark side of nature" and I found this helpful in some ways: "Resist not evil" - there is a dark side which brings about good in a cruel yet paradoxical manner.

The author often refers to some of her cases to use as examples to illustrate motifs which constantly appear in fairy tales (eg: sleep - as in "Sleeping Beauty"; or the spindle; or amputation - as in "The Girl with no Hands" etc etc)

The author also examines how women can become entrapped if they do not proceed to "individuation" - eg:

"There is a crucial time in a woman's individuation when she must liberate herself from inappropriate pity".

The author also examines the "negative father complex" where daughters need nourishing by a father's "eros function" ("eros" in Jungian terminology means "the function of relationship") - otherwise she will become cold. Negative paternal reactions can have a devastating effect on the inner mentality of a daughter.

The author shows from fairy tales how women can find healing from negative forces in their lives by going into introversion: "a healing regression", also just waiting can be healing (reminded me of the Scripture that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made"). She points out that collective standards in society do not help women develop at times, and can be harmful.

The author refers often to the "animus" (the masculine part of the woman). The existence of this "animus" could be much debated, but assuming that it does exist, the author - from her vast experience in analysis - writes some interesting things about this mysterious part of a woman - eg:

"The animus is generally always right - but at the wrong time"

"A woman who always gives advice irritates a man. It needs veiling of the inner face of her animus"

"Drifting out of life is part of feminine psychology (of animus - dark and light, ideas and concepts). The anima does not affect men this way" (men have an anima, but are driven by the Logos principle)

"The animus contains the element of being a mystery, something inexplicable which is the secret of both its beauty and its awkwardness"

"The spirit (animus) imprisons if one does not live enough, but redeems if it is emotionally involved"

"It is very difficult to stand loneliness without getting overwhelmed by the unconscious - and in a woman's case, the animus" (ie resulting in animus "possession" where the animus can take over a woman's personality)

The book ends with a positive fairytale about Vasilisa who "bestows subtlety" on her animus with positive results. "To give the animus subtlety....would mean finding the attitude which suits the situation, knowing instinctively what is right....knowing how to act in each individual case, and for that much subtlety and individual feeling into the situation are required. On such things the woman's animus goes off at the deep end, for there is, of course, the famous partnership between shadow and animus".

The book ends by stating that women who have a superior way of judging situations rightly have wholeness, and this is a model of femininity which is to be attained.

Diana Michele says

I read this quite some time ago and plan to pick it up again to see if I still find it so fascinating. Some books are necessary during a particular phase of development and then no more...

Jazmin says

Essential read. I read and reread this book of wisdom.

Simona Friuli says

Trovo alcune interpretazioni più che forzate; malgrado sia sempre stata attratta dal mondo contorto della psiche, avrei preferito più contenuti strettamente attinenti alla fiaba, rispetto alla sovrabbondanza di casi clinici. Più che al femminile nella fiaba, il saggio mi è sembrato dedicato all'applicazione psicoanalitica o

psichiatrica della fiaba.

Amy Leigh says

holy shit. this book just blew my entire mind away. it is so smart and awesome that i can't figure out anything smart or awesome to say about it.

damn.

Clara Mazzi says

Junghiano. Micidiale. Stomachevole. Non ne posso più di leggere analisi di testi fatti dalla prospettiva junghiana. Non mi ci ritrovo. Partono per la tangente per un nonnulla; tutto è sempre il contrario di tutto e poi viceversa; elaborano teorie intricatissime per delle ovvietà. Quello che mi ha fatto detestare ancora di più questo libro però è il "sessismo" della psicologa stessa (una donna!!!!) che fa dichiarazioni sulla condizione nonché pensiero femminile per le quali avrebbe ricevuto premi su premi da Mussolini, il tutto condito poi da una "bella" morale cristiana, il peggio che la religione possa offrire per la libertà mentale.

Mariana Wilson says

It touches on some of the most important (and troublesome) issues in a woman's life. I don't think any woman can go through this book without finding the answer or solution to at least one of her problems. Marie-Louise is brutally honest, she gets straight to the point, sometimes in such a cutting manner that it can hurt oversensitive natures but, once you get over that, the book reveals its wealth of wisdom and insight.

Caroline Mays says

Another great one for you Jungian-heads. Von Franz is one of the feistiest, no-nonsense, quit-crying-in-your-soup, authors I've ever read.

Arielle says

2015 Reading Challenge: A book your mom loves/recommended.

Luíse Bello says

Eu tive muuuuita preguiça e li tipo até a página 80, depois abandonei o livro por meses. Mas num projeto de retomada do meu hábito de leitura, dei uma nova chance ao livro e aí eu realmente gostei dele.

É diferente do que eu esperava, mas levanta questões interessantíssimas sobre os aspectos psicológicos que podem ser analisados a partir da narrativa dos contos de fada. A partir de um certo momento, a gente começa até a entrar no jogo da autora e a tentar extrair das histórias propostas por ela alguma reflexão.

Sou totalmente leiga em termos da psicanálise, mas o livro é um bom começo para quem não entende do riscado até achar que está sabendo de alguma coisa. Enfim, indico para quem se interessa por psicologia e contos de fada... ou para quem acha que pode se interessar por isso e ainda nem sabe!

Jay says

I tried to enjoy this book, but unfortunately I just couldn't get into it. This book is completely different to what I thought it would be. I thought it would be a breakdown for female character archetypes present in classical fairy tales and a feminist few on them. Instead, von Franz presents a Carl Jung analysis and compares fairy tales to Greek and Roman mythological stories.

While I'm sure this is interesting to many people, I am not one of them. This book simply isn't what I expected to be, so I found it difficult to finish. Oop.

Sara Salem says

Amazing amazing amazing book. Feminist psychoanalysis explains so much about the way women are socialized to act that you will never understand through feminism that focuses on the political or economic.
