Images of Femininity in World Fairy Tales

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Abstract From the point of view of depth psychology, which focuses on the personal and collective aspects of the human psyche and is nourished by the theory of psychoanalysis, seeing dreams and fairy tales as the masked realization of unconsciously repressed desires, fairy tales are archaic legacies that emerge from the collective part of the unconscious to the surface of consciousness and are therefore the projection of collective experiences,. Althouth the manifestations of these legacies on the surface of consciousness and in fairy tales vary, the hidden meaning they contain is constant. The intricate relationship between archetypes, dreams, and fairy tales is predicated on their capacity to convey the fundamental dilemmas surrounding human existence and development through a symbolic lexicon. Central to the collective unconscious are archetypes that embody the inner images of the psyche. Among these, the self represents the core of consciousness, encircled by the unconscious; the persona encapsulates the individual's outward spiritual demeanor; the shadow signifies the repressed aspects of the self; the anima serves as the integral feminine component within the male unconscious; the animus reflects the masculine essence within the female; the trickster embodies the consciousness unbridled by instinctual drives; the wise old man symbolizes the spirit of nature; and the grandmother archetype oscillates between nurturing

and destructive forces, representing both growth and fear. These archetypal motifs in fairy tales have garnered considerable attention across various disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, folklore, and literary studies. Notably, research in archetypal fairy tale analysis often remains confined to specific national philologies or lacks a focused examination of femininity. This study seeks to bridge this gap by comparing representations of femininity across Turkish, German, French, Italian, and Arabic literary traditions. Employing a Jungian framework through archetypal criticism, this research aims to elucidate the foundational types of feminine images present in the collective unconscious, analyzing how these representations manifest in the narratives of world fairy tales. Furthermore, it endeavors to delineate the psychological building blocks these feminine archetypes embody, exploring their correspondence with the fictional worlds depicted in the aforementioned literary traditions. By examining the intersections of these archetypal feminine images, this study aspires to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how cultural narratives shape and reflect the complexities of gender identity and the collective psyche across diverse societies. In doing so, it aims to enrich the discourse on femininity in fairy tales, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and cross-cultural approach to the analysis of these enduring narratives.

Keywords world literature; fairy tale, psychoanalysis; Jung, archetypal symbolism[1]

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Introduction

Fairy tales, emerging from the shaping of the collective unconscious, resonate deeply with the cultural and psychological fabric of a nation. They serve as a powerful reflection of national identity, embodying folklore, cultural beliefs, and material realities (Sakaoğlu 3). As mirrors of collective identity, these narratives unveil societal values and the enduring archetypes that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries. Jung's concept of the archetype, viewed as a primordial image manifested in diverse forms, highlights how these narratives are influenced by shared human experiences and emotional landscapes (Jung, *Analitik Psikoloji* 9). A key aspect of understanding fairy tales lies in their symbolic language, which Jung posits is vital for the individuation process, where the self reconciles conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche. In contrast to Freud's emphasis on sexual drives, Jung recognizes a broader range of libidinal energy expressed through various human endeavors, accentuating the significance of archetypal images (Schultz and Schultz 644). The archetypes present in fairy tales—such as the hero, shadow, and anima/animus—function as universal symbols, conveying profound truths about the human experience.

The human psyche is not a blank slate; it is shaped by an inherited collective unconscious that encompasses both personal and shared experiences. Jung's model delineates a triadic structure: the conscious mind, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious, each of which contributes to our understanding of fairy tales (Hall and Nordby 52). The self archetype, frequently represented by mandalas within these narratives, symbolizes the holistic integration of personality, reflecting

the inner journey of individuation that the fairy tale hero undergoes (Jacobi 64). Fairy tales illustrate the circular nature of this individuation process through the protagonist's journey, which is marked by various trials and encounters with archetypal figures. The ego, embodied by characters who courageously confront darkness and chaos, serves as the center of consciousness, mediating between the inner and outer worlds. This dynamic interplay exposes the inherent contradictions of the human experience, where courage coexists with vulnerability and the pursuit of self-discovery is often fraught with peril (Chetwynd 285). The persona, or the social mask that individuals adopt, is commonly depicted in fairy tales through idealized characters that embody societal expectations. However, the journey toward self-actualization necessitates confronting the shadow—the repressed and darker aspects of the self—often represented as antagonistic forces in these narratives. Integrating the shadow, while challenging, is essential for achieving wholeness and authenticity (Jung, *Dört Arketip* 55, 128, 135). In this context, the archetypal pairs of anima and animus illustrate the duality of human nature. The anima embodies feminine qualities, while the animus represents masculine traits, highlighting the yin-yang principle of interconnectedness. Their presence in fairy tales—manifesting through characters ranging from benevolent guides to formidable foes—underscores the complexities of gender dynamics and the quest for balance within the psyche (Izutsu 163).

Ultimately, fairy tales transcend mere escapism; they encapsulate the depth of human existence and creativity. Each tale, with its unique blend of archetypal themes and symbolic language, holds the potential to awaken the latent powers of the psyche, revealing insights that resonate across cultures and generations (Campbell 13). As such, fairy tales remain vital cultural artifacts that not only entertain but also educate and transform, inviting individuals to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery.

Femininity Images in World Fairy Tales

In Turkish mythology, femininity is expressed through various forms such as goddesses, animals (like snakes and wolves), and archetypal figures, including the innocent maiden, the mother, and the witch. These representations reflect societal beliefs about fertility and fear, encapsulated within the narrative structures of Turkish fairy tales. As noted, introductory and concluding phrases such as "once upon a time" and "three apples fell from the sky" frame these tales, integrating topographical elements like remote villages and enchanted forests, thereby shaping the context in which femininity is explored (Boratav 136; Sarıyüce 196).

The fairy tale *Keloğlan Seven Floors Under the Ground* provides a rich text for analysis through the lens of archetypal symbolism and the individuation process of the feminine psyche. Keloğlan's quest to confront a giant consuming the apples in the royal garden symbolizes the struggle to integrate various layers of the psyche—consciousness, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious—as represented by the apple tree, which serves as a metaphor for the self (Jung, *Dört Arketip* 62, 71). The apple represents not only the ultimate goal of the psyche but also acts as a catalyst for Keloğlan's heroic journey. His battle against the giant, an embodiment of the shadow, illustrates the necessity of confronting darker aspects of the psyche to achieve wholeness. The giant's descent into a well signifies the repression of the shadow, while the well itself represents a womb—a fertile space for transformation (Jung, *Dört Arketip* 22). Keloğlan's descent into the well and subsequent journey symbolize the necessary exploration of the unconscious to access the core of the feminine psyche, represented by the sultan's daughter. As Keloğlan interacts with the feminine figures in the narrative, his journey emphasizes the integration of anima and animus, showcasing the dynamic interplay between the masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche. The act of throwing an apple, symbolizing the sultan's daughter's search for her animus—the masculine counterpart essential for her spiritual maturation—connects to the broader archetypal narrative of fertility and rebirth, reinforcing the significance of harmonious integration in the individuation process. The conclusion of the tale, where the marriage between Keloğlan and the sultan's daughter unfolds over a symbolic forty-day period, embodies a cyclical process of transformation and renewal (Schimmel 31). This celebration encapsulates the harmonious balance of yin and yang, a vital theme for understanding femininity within fairy tales.

In fairy tales, which balance opposites, everything that is not feminine is masculine, and vice versa, suggesting a complementary relationship akin to yin and yang. Focusing on the function of transmitting implicit social codes and cultural elements, we can view fairy tale characters, whether good or bad, as important archetypal elements in the individuation process. For instance, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by the Brothers Grimm, the imagery of femininity can be examined through the lens of Jung's archetypal symbolism. In this tale, during the coldest season, a queen who sews by the window pricks her finger, spilling three drops of blood and wishing for a daughter. Snow White is born—white as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony—but her mother dies, and the king remarries. The new queen, obsessed with beauty, consults her magic mirror daily. As Snow White grows and surpasses her stepmother in beauty, jealousy leads the queen to attempt to kill

her. A hunter spares Snow White, who then finds refuge with seven dwarfs in the forest. The stepmother's disguises and attempts to poison Snow White illustrate her jealousy. When the dwarfs find Snow White asleep in a glass coffin after she bites the poisoned apple, it symbolizes her death and subsequent rebirth. The prince's arrival represents the awakening of Snow White and her ultimate union with her animus. The stepmother's punishment—forced to wear red-hot iron shoes—highlights the destructive consequences of jealousy. Examining the tale, the queen's desire for a child embodies the ideal self that the Great Mother represents. The color symbolism associated with Snow White reveals the dynamics of the feminine psyche: the white mask persona, the shadow, and the menstruating psyche ready to integrate with her animus. The stepmother serves as a catalyst for Snow White's individuation process, representing the negative aspect of the Great Mother, pushing the feminine psyche toward integration.

In *Le Nain Jaune* by d'Aulnoy, Princess Toute-Belle's journey to find her soulmate mirrors the stages of the feminine psyche reaching her animus. Her mother seeks help from a desert fairy, leading to a series of trials. Toute-Belle's encounters reflect her inner pilgrimage toward her spiritual center, characterized by obstacles and labyrinths. The desert fairy embodies the ambivalent Great Mother archetype, illustrating the complex relationship between the feminine psyche and its inner dynamics. Ultimately, both tales reveal how archetypal narratives reflect the psychological development of femininity, emphasizing the significance of balancing opposites in the individuation process.

Through these stories, we gain insights into the universal experiences of self-discovery and transformation. Indeed, the concrete symbol of this in the fairy tale is that when the princess wakes up, she finds herself in her bed, in clean clothes, and with a ring made of a red hair thread that she cannot remove from her finger. The ring, which is traditionally worn as a symbol of love, sometimes also of power and authority, and which also represents protection from destructive forces (Wilkinson 284), is a magical circle that serves as objects in the shape of a ring and symbolizes divine existence (Aras 164), it signifies the bond of the feminine psyche with its animus on the way to divine wholeness, and here the fact that the ring is made of a red hair thread also emphasizes the passionate "expression of its power and might" (Spahn 92) of the bond of the feminine psyche with its animus and soon the heroine process of the feminine psyche evolves into the seclusion process in the belly of the whale with the princess being kidnapped by the Yellow Dwarf and imprisoned in a steel castle protected by sunlight. The seclusion that the princess spends in this high and inaccessible castle, which implies the belly of the

whale, when turned upside down topographically, implies the development process in the womb of the Great Mother, which extends underground and will ferment a new existence of the feminine psyche. During this development phase, where the feminine psyche completes the fetus process in the womb, its animus also orbits it. This situation, symbolized by the king walking by the sea in the fairy tale, ends with the king escaping with the mermaid from the desert fairy and reaching the castle. The mermaid, who can enter and exit in all layers of the ocean-like human consciousness, represents feelings, sexuality, and power, here in the form of the embodied form of the divine femininity of the Great Mother and is in the role of a sacred guide that will take her animus (king) to her anima (princess).

Indeed, it happens in a space of unconsciousness (castle) where the king and princess, to put it in archetypal expression, animus, and feminine psyche, come together; they come together in a bed adorned with golden sheets and pearls the size of a walnut. The meaning of the image of the bed adorned with golden sheets and pearls here is the belly of the whale that the feminine psyche needs to enter with its animus (king) to reach the lofty personality ideal she has been eagerly waiting for and to end her heroine journey. But unlike most fairy tales, the fairy tale seems to end not with a happy ending; the king drops the diamond sword in his hand when he reaches the princess and is killed by the Yellow Dwarf and two giants. The princess, who cannot stand the death of the king, also dies and the mermaid turns the bodies of the two lovers into palm trees and the fairy tale ends in this way. From an archetypal perspective, the death of the two lovers, which implies the selflessness of the feminine psyche and animus to form a new union, is the only means of transforming into the ideal self. Therefore, in the fairy tale, the scene where the king drops his diamond sword in front of the princess is a part of the night of union where the animus surrenders to the feminine psyche. In conclusion, the scene ending with the death of the king and princess captured by the Yellow Dwarf and two giants is not a scene to be feared, but a moment of union where the animus in the form of the king surrenders to the shadow self of the Janus-faced Great Mother and the animus, emphasized with the name Yellow Dwarf, hunger for growth, and reaches eternal resurrection with his feminine psyche (princess), and the transformation of the king and princess into palm trees, which were depicted as the tree of life in the old Christian periods and accepted as the symbol of ancient victories, resurrection and eternal life (Hepper 117), at the end of the fairy tale also corroborates this interpretation.

In the Italian fairy tale Imbrani's *La Prezzemolina* (Firenze), a pregnant woman is caught by fairies while eating parsley in their garden and is persuaded to promise

to give them the child she will bear. Time passes, the woman gives birth to a girl and they name her Prezzemolina. When Prezzemolina grows up, the fairies come and take her to their home and tell her to make a pitch-black room as clean as milk and paint it, otherwise, they will eat her. While cleaning the room, Memè, the male cousin of the fairies, makes the room spotlessly clean and pure white with his magic wand. Then they send Prezzemolina to the castle of Fairy Morgana to get Bel-Giullare's box. On her journey, Prezzemolina encounters four women in turn, who give her two pieces of pig fat to rub on two doors, two pieces of bread to give to two dogs, a string and a hook to deliver to a shoemaker, and rags and brooms to give to a baker woman. Prezzemolina does exactly as all four women tell her and finally reaches the castle of Fairy Morgana, enters, goes up to the second floor, takes the box, and leaves immediately. When the fairy notices the situation, she tells the baker woman, the shoemaker, the two dogs, and the doors to hold the girl, but they allow the girl to escape and survive because of the good deeds she has done. The escaped girl is curious about what is inside the box and opens it. A lot of people escape from inside and the girl can't catch any of them. At the moment of despair, Fairy Memè comes and puts the escapees back into the box with magic. When the girl shows the box to the fairies at their home, the fairies are astonished and make another plan to eat the girl. They make Prezzemolina light the boiler under the pretext of washing laundry. But Memè tells Prezzemolina about the fairies' plan and Prezzemolina and Memè throw the fairies into the boiling boiler. Then they go down to the basement. In the basement where many lights are burning, Prezzemolina and Memè, who extinguish the largest light belonging to the soul of the oldest fairy, thus destroying all the fairies, go to the castle of Fairy Morgana and get married. In the fairy tale, which is open to reading from the perspective of archetypal symbolism, the mother eating the parsley in the fairies' garden while pregnant triggers the heroine adventure of Prezzemolina, who appears in the form of the feminine psyche. In this respect, the mother figure, who determines the fate of Prezzemolina from the beginning by eating the parsley, which we can associate with renewal and rebirth because it grows rapidly again even after being picked or cut, shows that there is an a priori factor in all human actions and that every animal, like humans, has a preformed psyche suitable for its species (Jung, *Dört Arketip* 19-20).

Indeed, everything psychic is preformed, and the ultimate goal of the human psyche is the collapse of the subjective apocalypse where the individual consciousness is buried in the waters of darkness and then the transformation into a high personality, which is an expression of the Self. Therefore, the existential fate of Prezzemolina in the fairy tale is predetermined, even while she is still in

the womb. Her day will come, she will leave her home, the protected space on the surface of consciousness, she will be surrendered to the fairies, and she will live under their hegemony until she finds her prince. The individuation process, which begins with Prezzemolina leaving her home, continues through trials and ends at the castle of Fairy Morgana. Prezzemolina, who enters the castle of Fairy Morgana and takes a magical box from a room on the second floor of the castle, represents the feminine psyche confronting a multitude of people/collective unconscious elements in the belly of the whale/the womb of the Great Mother, symbolized by the number two, the symbol of "polarity and division" (Schimmel 57). The one who enables Prezzemolina to put the people who escape from the box back into the box is the male fairy Memè, which in the archetypal world corresponds to the need for the feminine psyche to integrate the elements of the collective unconscious with its animus, the origin of the opposite sex. Indeed, Prezzemolina/the feminine psyche, who escapes from the castle of Fairy Morgana/the belly of the whale thanks to Fairy Memè/animus, is also saved from being eaten by the fairies/her shadow by Fairy Memè/animus.

Also, thanks to Fairy Memè/animus, Prezzemolina throws the fairies who want to eat her into a boiling cauldron and goes down to the basement where many lights are burning and extinguishes the light belonging to the soul of the oldest fairy. By destroying all the fairies in this way and achieving salvation, Prezzemolina marries Fairy Memè in the castle of Fairy Morgana. From an archetypal perspective, what is at stake here is the victory of the feminine psyche, who wants to seize self-consciousness and put her shadow into the fertile womb of the mother. Indeed, in the fairy tale, Prezzemolina cutting off the light of the largest fairy in the basement, which implies the collective unconscious, signifies the end of the dominant position of her shadow, which emerges from the darkness of the unconscious to the brightness of the conscious surface, and as a result, the feminine psyche performs a sacred integration with the opposite spirit image.

Compiled and translated into Arabic by Muhammed el-Gahşigar around the 9th century, taken from India, Baghdad, and Cairo and containing 264 tales, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Özpalabıyıklar) is, in a word, the world's largest collection of fairy tales. In the first frame tale of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which tells the story of King Shahriyar and his brother King Shahzaman, who spent a thousand and one nights with the daughter of the vizier, Shahrazad, the king becomes cruel in the face of his wife's infidelity, who cheats on him with black slaves and orders his vizier to bring him a virgin maiden every night, and every night he takes a young girl into his bed and deflowers her; and in the morning he has

her killed. Shahrazad, who begins to tell stories to the king every night, brings her stories to such an exciting point at the end of the night that the king has to postpone her execution to hear the continuation. Shahrazad continues to tell the story the next night and again leaves the story at its most exciting point in the morning, and this continues. After a thousand and one nights, Shahriyar, who learns lessons from the stories he listens to, admires Shahrazad, thanks God for sending him Shahrazad, and marries her. From the perspective of archetypal symbolism, it is noteworthy that the feminine psyche is embodied in Shahrazad. The feminine psyche, which receives the inner call necessary to solve an existing problem (Shahriyar's virgin massacres) for the individuation adventure, takes on the responsibility of becoming a hero, leaves where she is (her father's house), and starts the process of spiritual change/transformation. Shahrazad, who leaves where she is and dares to enter the dangerous king's bed, represents the feminine psyche descending into the realm of the shadows in the collective unconscious from the surface of consciousness to reach her lacking masculine origin:

> The passage of the mythological hero may be overground, fundamentally it is inward-into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revivified, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world. This deed accomplished, life no longer suffers hopelessly under the terrible mutilations of ubiquitous disaster, battered by time, hideous throughout space; but with its horror visible still, its cries of anguish still tumultuous, it becomes penetrated by an all-suffusing, all-sustaining love, and a knowledge of its own unconquered power. (Campbell 41)

The feminine psyche, which frees itself from the dominance of the logos in its journey from the known to the unknown and tends to meet with unconscious elements, makes a transition from a world where everyone has their own logos to a world where there is a common logos (Frye, *Mitik Aşama* 174) and the room in the king's palace, which is her new home, is the sacred center of her absolute reality. In this sacred center where the feminine psyche needs to enter for her rebirth, Shahrazad, who spends a thousand and one nights with Shahriyar, her masculine origin (animus), and survives by telling Shahriyar a story after each night, depicts the individuation effort of the feminine psyche trying to integrate with the masculine opposite in the belly of the whale:

> The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the

> dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, virtue, beauty, and life and bow or submit to the intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh. (Campbell 107)

Indeed, with the fairy tales, which are the earthly dreams of young humanity (Freud 133), the feminine psyche, which lets the Father hear her voice in the collective unconscious, has transformed into a new form of existence like a hero who needs to overcome a vagina dentata by initiation or descend dangerously down a crevice or into a cave equated with the mouth and womb of Mother Earth (Eliade, *Mitlerin Özellikleri* 109). In this respect, the room where Scheherazade has sexual intercourse for a thousand and one nights represents the dark cave of the collective unconscious where the feminine psyche integrates with her animus, which is first and natural and ultimately holistic, that is, it forms a world in itself (Eliade, *Zalmoksis'ten* 49). The path of trials in Scheherazade's individuation adventure, symbolizing the feminine psyche, is to stay alive by telling stories that will pique the curiosity of the king. Scheherazade/feminine psyche completes this initiation process lasting a thousand and one nights and earns the trust of the king/animus who listens to her stories and marries/integrates with him. In the fairy tale, symbolized by the motif of the night, the feminine psyche, who finds the secret of her existence (her animus) in the darkness of the unconscious, reaches the image of being able to carry her own existence as a whole, which is the ultimate reward of maturation.

Conclusion

Tales, timeless narratives passed down through generations, offer a captivating blend of magic and meaning. These extraordinary stories, often rooted in folklore, continue to resonate with readers of all ages. While they present fantastical worlds filled with enchanted creatures and mythical quests, they also delve into profound psychological themes. Through the lens of Jungian psychology, fairy tales reveal a rich tapestry of archetypal symbols. These symbols, deeply embedded in the collective unconscious, represent universal human experiences and emotions. From the enchanted forests and mythical creatures to the recurring themes of good versus evil and the hero's journey, fairy tales offer a timeless exploration of the human psyche. Many classic fairy tales feature characters who embark on transformative journeys. Snow White, Scheherazade, and Keloğlan, among others, confront challenges and overcome obstacles, often guided by intuition and courage. These

quests often symbolize the hero's journey, a common archetype that represents the individual's search for self-discovery and spiritual growth. Fairy tales also explore the concept of the anima or animus, the feminine or masculine aspects of the psyche. Characters like Prezzemolina and Princess Toute-Belle often encounter challenges that require them to balance their masculine and feminine energies. These journeys can be seen as metaphors for the individual's quest for wholeness and integration. In conclusion, fairy tales offer a valuable exploration of the human psyche. Their timeless appeal lies in their ability to connect with universal experiences and emotions. By examining the archetypal symbols and themes within these stories, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

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