

Elements of European Fairy Tales



European Fairy Tale Characteristics

In most examples of this genre of writing, common patterns emerge which enable quick identification.

- due to their popularity as sources of entertainment for children, the stories are readily available
- children themselves can quickly determine a fairy tale from other types of writing
- the public likewise has an instant expectation from the writing, primarily that the works show a magical representation of the world
- protagonists and antagonists are easily identified
- happy-endings are expected
- rewards for good behavior are also expected; harsh punishment for the wicked

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Below is a typical gruesome situation from the Grimm brothers' version of "Little Snow-White" where the story closes with the death of the evil step-mother.

Then the wicked woman uttered a curse, and was so wretched, so utterly wretched, that she knew not what to do. At first she would not go to the wedding at all, but she had no peace, and must go to see the young Queen. And when she went in she knew Snow-white; and she stood still with rage and fear, and could not stir. But iron slippers had already been put upon the fire, and they were brought in with tongs, and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "Little Snow-White." *Household Tales*. Margaret Hunt, trans. *Surlalunefairytales.com*. October 11, 2007. Web. 01/26/11.

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- pattern number of threes: three tasks, three wishes, three journeys