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A BOOK AND A THERAPEUTIC METHOD THAT HAS CHANGED MANY LIVES

Ildikó Boldizsár:
Fairytale Therapy – non-fiction, 368 pages
 MAGVETŐ PUBLISHING, HUNGARY

Both of a book and a therapeutic method.
The book is a very big success in Hungary and the method has changed many many lives for the better.



Independently from nationality, the Metamorphoses Fairytale Therapy Method works everywhere in the

world: it is well known from the study of folklore that the spiritual processes which create fairy tales are similar all over the world, just like the structure and patterns of folk tales also show a great deal of similarity everywhere on the globe. And this is exactly why fairy tales in any corner of the world can be summoned for help, with the method described in the “Fairytale Therapy” book.

WHAT IS FAIRYTALE THERAPY?

Fairytale therapy is based on the concept that there is no life situation that does not have a fairytale equivalent. During the course of the therapy, the therapist and the patient find the fairy tale with the best fit for the given situation. The process of therapy then leads them to investigate the reasons for the patient failing to overcome the obstacles in his path.

- How can we overcome our own limitations and fears?**
- How can we find solutions in unbalanced situations?**
- How can we find our true partner?**
- How will we recognise our trusty magic steed and with what weapon can we slay the dragon?**
- Where can we find the water of life and how do we get there?**
- What lies beyond the Glass Mountain?**

Fairy tales ask all these questions and, of course, many more. These are all motifs and “life problems” that we meet in our everyday lives and not in a symbolic but in a very concrete form.

A book about how Fairy tales offer us the opportunity to change everything that fails to work properly in the real world.

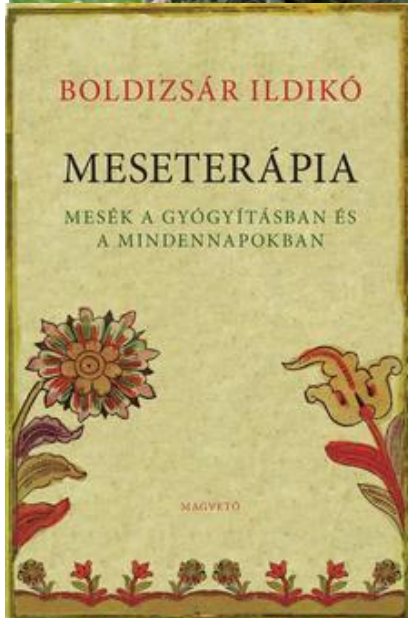
RECENTLY ALSO PUBLISHED: FAIRYTALE THERAPY IN PRACTICE, WITH MANY CASE STUDIES

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About the author

Ildikó Boldizsár was born in Dunaújváros, Hungary. Between 1987 and 1993 she was a researching fellow at the Hungarian Science Academy, doing research on fairy tales. She received her doctorate in folklore in 1999. She has worked for more than twenty years as an editor, including being editor-in-chief at Magvető Publishing House (2003-2008), where she published five fairy-tale anthologies of her own: *Fairy Tales About Men For Women* (2007), *Fairy Tales About Women For Men* (2007), *Fairy Tales About Mothers* (2008), *Fairy Tales About Fathers* (2008), *Fairy Tales About Life, Death And Rebirth* (2009). Further books by the author: *Tales about Siblings to Siblings*(2012), *A Fairy Tale Guide for Those on their Way – Stories for Life Turnings*(2013), *Fairy Tales about the Old and Happy*(2014), *Fairy tale Therapy in Practice*(2014).



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EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

WHAT IS FAIRYTALE THERAPY?

Fairy tale therapy is based on the concept that there is no life situation that does not have a fairy tale equivalent. During the course of the therapy, we find the fairy tale with the best fit for the given situation, in which the hero sets forth into the world for the same reasons and seeks to realise the same ambitions as my patient but is better able to overcome the obstacles in his path. The hero of the chosen fairy tale is not killed by the dragon or turned to stone but manages to take his journey to its conclusion. The process of therapy leads us to investigate the reasons for a patient failing to overcome the obstacles in his path. It often proves to be the case that the tools he employs are inappropriate to the task or his technique is not the right one but it may also turn out that his adversaries really are invincible. We then move to a stage where we seek out the helper that everyone has in their lives – even if it

proves tough to recognise at first – and then we examine the setting in which we find the adversaries, the helpers, the conflicts, the complications and the possible exits and where the individual is placed in relation to all of these elements. In doing this we are also able to better visualise the setting and work out where there is

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dense forest and where we might find a sunny glade. Our position within our own fairy tale symbolically represents where we are in our lives. But it is not sufficient to find our own fairy tale, we also have to understand it and use it to further our own personal development.

When I initially began to work with fairy tales, I spent years looking at the texts of individual stories. If we look deep into any fairy tale, we see that a bad situation can always be improved. Only the first few phrases of a story show a balanced situation although some may begin with a crisis of some sort. It is only in the fourth sentence that the initial equilibrium is somehow lost and the hero has to set out to re-establish this lost balance at the end of the fairy tale. The composition of a fairy tale not only recognises and illustrates conflicts, it also offers a method by which they may be overcome. As the hero moves forward through the fairy tale, he demonstrates powers that he didn't appear to possess at the beginning, leading us to realise that any individual has the ability to do much more than he or she or those around him may assume at any given moment in their life. This often requires an individual to take a step back and, just like the hero in the folk tale *The Reed Maiden*, say "everything I see here looks good but I cannot imagine that it can never be better". In other words: all that I see about me is beautiful, but I don't think that it can't be made even more beautiful.

How can we overcome our own limitations and fears? How can we find solutions in unbalanced situations? How can we find our true partner? How will we recognise our trusty magic steed and with what weapon can we slay the dragon? Where can we find the water of life and how do we get there? What lies beyond the Glass Mountain? The fairy tale asks all these questions and, of course, many more. These are all motifs and "life problems" that we meet in our everyday lives and not in a symbolic but in a very concrete form.

Fairy tales offer us the opportunity to change everything that fails to work properly in the real world. With reference to folk tales from Europe and the East, I would even venture to say that it isn't the "world" that works wrongly but the individual who fails to respond harmoniously to the possibilities offered by that world with a series of poor choices leading to increased problems. In the symbolic language of fairy tales, the "world" represents the universe, the place we live and our inner world. The moment I experienced that these three are interdependent and a fairy tale provides a structure that brings these three worlds together, I realised that the fairy tale is nothing less than a story that is capable of ordering chaos and restoring harmony. This is precisely one of the secrets of a fairy tale's healing power.

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Even if we don't regard them as "healing stories" we are still able to experience their reassuring and soothing effect, which largely depends on the persona of the storyteller. The art of storytelling is just as important as the stories themselves and that is why a therapist needs to pay particular attention to the way stories are told.

Simply listening to a story can initiate all kinds of processes within an individual that we might consider as spiritual refreshment. Everything seems that little easier after we have listened to a story and, just like the king who had a story read to him by Scheherazade for a thousand and one nights, anyone listening to a story feels more positive and less burdened by negative thoughts, painful emotions and general anxiety. The story of Ivan the Terrible tells of a man who was not able to go to his bed at night without first listening to three blind storytellers. A fairy tale is able to take the listener to a "place" they rarely visit: to the subconscious. This is a place of ancient symbols and accessing it in this manner gives a great sense of liberation and makes use of a part of the brain that sits largely dormant in everyday life: the right brain. Thinking in terms of stories is a very natural human function. All that we learn or experience through stories stays with us for much longer than random pieces of information we try to commit to memory or have forced upon us by others. One of the reasons for this is that stories always target our emotions and often with such power that we are left under their spell for hours and sometimes days. One theory of cognitive psychology says: "The functioning of the human brain is not programmed to understand logic but to understand stories. [...] Understanding stories follows a path which completely bypasses the left brain."*

Storytelling is an ancient and universal phenomenon, which has magical meaning and a ritual role in all cultures. The anthropologist Venetia Newall describes in one of her studies** the part played in various cultures by storytelling and listening to stories and how this has provided the only method of survival in certain extreme situations. Eskimo culture is a perfect example as listening to stories and the advice they contain followed by the integration of the information passed on in such tales often meant the difference between life and death as they had to abide by certain rules in order to survive in the unforgiving wilderness of the frozen north. Stories and fables were also present in the rituals of archaic cultures that symbolised the move from one stage of life to the next. The master of ceremonies at a traditional Jewish wedding always told stories to the young couple and the guests. The Jews also employ storytelling as a teaching tool as storytelling and religious education have always been very closely linked in Jewish tradition. Christian traditions use

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parables from the life of Christ and storytelling still plays an important role in many cultures where it helps to strengthen moral sensitivity within the community.

* Daniel H. Pink: *A Whole New Mind*, Riverhead Books, 2005.

** Venetia Newall: "Tell Us A Story", ed. : Jeremy Cherfas – Roger Lewin, *New Scientist*, vol. 83, no. 1162, 5 July 1979, page 18.

People living in peasant cultures did not restrict themselves to storytelling during work but it was also the custom to tell stories to the dead in Europe, South American and West Indies. When a respected man of public office died in Hungary, it was the custom to invite the best storytellers who brought their longest "vigil stories". Storytelling was also a favourite pastime of Muslim men who traditionally told stories during Ramadan after a long day of fasting. African families still mark a joyous event, such as recovery from illness, a welcome visitor or a plentiful crop, by sitting around and telling stories in a ritual known as an "ibota". These storytelling sessions are organised by the head of the family and everyone gathers close to the family altar so that those no longer living may also enjoy the songs and stories performed in their honour.

Newall tells of how an African storyteller also plays an instrument as he tells his story and the members of the tribe believe that this has the power to heal the mind and bring happiness. Members of the Limba tribe have a great love for their traditional stories because they believe that they were left for them by their ancestors and so form an integral part of their cultural heritage. They believe that the storyteller is directed by the dead and teaches with his own heart.

Apart from providing spiritual refreshment and involving right-brain function, a fairytale also offers solutions and teaches us how to manage conflicting emotions and how to escape being smashed to a pulp between rocks grinding each other and judge the exact moment to jump between them. Other stories teach us how to part company with something or someone when the moment comes or how to create enduring relationships.

But stories provide us with more than the answers to practical, everyday questions, they also point us to some of life's deeper truths and help us to confront conflicts within ourselves. Used in this way, fairy tales demonstrate to us that there are other ways and other solutions beyond the ones we have adopted out of routine, practicality, laziness and comfort. The greatest power that fairy tales possess is to fundamentally alter the way we look at the world, which at first provides us with

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greater insight and then empowers us to make change. And all of this happens in the most direct way, that is through the heroes of the story.

What can we learn from the heroes of our stories? We can generally say that fairytale heroes have no past and live in a constant present. They don't think, they act; they don't imagine their lives, they live them. They do what they have to do and in so doing they encourage us to do the same. Heroes don't leave things to "sort themselves out". That is why their stories encourage us to take responsibility for our lives and the lives of those close to us. Heroes are forever on the move because they know that they can't find all the answers in one place. They make their way through their fairytale and gain experience, which they then use for their own benefit. The "wedding" (the final goal) can only be reached by overcoming at least seven or eight obstacles.

Every situation has a key in a fairy tale but we need to be able to recognise the key, the lock and the method of opening, then we have to see how and when this knowledge is best employed. Fairy tales allow us to gain further understanding of what a tree, a flower, a stick or a cape may represent. They help us to understand why we often need to choose the wrong object or take the wrong turn. They help us to decide how to fight our foes and, in freeing others, how we might free ourselves. *Fairytale therapy is not based on the interpretation of fairy tales (as no one interpretation exists for any given situation) but it is based on the knowledge held by its heroes: a thought only gains meaning if it is put into action. Fairytale heroes teach us how to take action.*

Translated by Ralph Berkin

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