

# FAIRY TALE MOTIFS

MOTIF: A theme, character, or verbal pattern which recurs in literature or folklore. (William Freedman)

## CHARACTER MOTIFS

1. Royalty
  - Royal bloodline / lineage
  - Succession
  - Castle
2. Hero (Male or Female)
  - Person who has the most to gain in the story
  - Social mobility (rags to riches - Cinderella, or riches to rags - Beast)
3. True Love (Male or Female)
  - Object of hero's affections
  - Hero often does battle for his/her True Love
4. Villain (sometimes the villain and monster are the same, sometimes they are not)
  - Opposes hero
  - Force of evil
5. Monster (sometimes the villain and monster are the same, sometimes they are not)
  - Opposes hero
  - Dragons, ogres, etc.
6. Trickster
  - Clever
  - Possibly villainous, but not always
  - Word games
7. Guardian
  - Often a powerful, magical person
  - Elder
  - Gives advice or a valuable gift to the hero (e.g. fairy godmother)
  - Often tests the hero
8. Friend
  - Companion of the hero, often of lower social class or a servant (Snow' White's dwarves)
  - Talking animals
9. Messenger
  - Brings news

## PLACE MOTIFS

1. Home
  - An ordinary place, not magical
  - Often the starting or ending place of the story
2. Paradise
  - Where the hero gets his/her heart's desire
3. Bad Place
  - Villain's lair
  - There is often a monster here to overcome
  - May coincide with *prison, curse, sleep, etc.*)
4. Prison (literal or symbolic)
  - Escape desired (e.g. Rapunzel's tower)

## OBJECT MOTIFS

1. Objects with magical powers:
  - Transportation (e.g. Cinderella's carriage)
  - Weapons (e.g. enchanted sword, poison apple)
  - Supplies / Medicine
  - Token of Recognition - by which the hero/true love recognize each other

## THEMATIC MOTIFS

1. Triumph of the poor
2. Human weakness explored (curiosity, gluttony, pride, laziness, etc.)
3. Human strength glorified (kindness, generosity, patience, courage, etc.)
4. Young vs. old (succession, sibling rivalry, parents v. children, etc.)
5. Struggle between good and evil (light and dark imagery)
6. Impossible tasks (quests, feats of bravery, slay the dragon, rescue the princess, etc.)

## OTHER MOTIFS

1. Curse
2. Magical spell
3. Sleep (extended sleep, death-like trances)
4. Numbers (magical patterns or other numbers that are symbolically significant to a story)
  - Tasks, wishes, experiences occurring in 3s, 7 dwarves, etc.
5. Cannibalism