***Grimm’s Fairy Tales***

***Chapter 1***

***The Frog-King or King Henry***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Synopsis:***

A princess promises to befriend a frog to get her ball back. Once she has what she wants, the girl leaves the frog behind. The king finds out about the princess's broken promise and makes her be friends with the frog. The frog turns into a prince whom she marries. As the couple rides in a carriage to the prince's kingdom, they hear a cracking noise made by iron bands that surround the heart of the prince's coachman. The coachman had the bands put around his heart to keep it from bursting from grief when the prince was turned into a frog.

This story teaches that a person should be careful to keep the promises he makes. First, don't make a promise that can't be kept. Next, even if the results of a promise may seem unappetizing, there may be an unseen reward associated with keeping a promise.

***Summary:***

* There's this beautiful princess who loves to play with her golden ball so of course she freaks out when it rolls down a well.
* While she's crying, a frog asks her what's wrong. You know, how frogs do.
* She tells him about the ball and he offers to get it for her…for a price. She offers him her jewels, crown, clothes (what, is she gonna strip for him?), but all he wants is to be her companion and hang out, eat, drink, and sleep with her (again, getting kind of creepy).
* The princess agrees, but she knows she isn't going to keep her promise, so she grabs the ball as soon as the frog finds it and then runs home to her swanky palace.
* The next day, while she's eating from her little golden plate with her father the king and all the courtiers (see what we mean by swanky?) the frog knocks super-loudly at the door and reminds the princess of her promise.
* Frightened, she confesses to her dad and he tells her to keep her promise.
* She unhappily shares her meal with the frog and then has to carry him upstairs to her silken bed. The very thought of the slimy critter sharing her clean sheets grosses her out, but her father gets ticked at her for not helping someone who helped her, so she has to.
* She puts the frog in a corner of the bedroom but he insists on sharing the bed with her, which enrages her so much that she picks him up and throws him against the wall.
* But then he turns into a prince. Bonus.
* The two talk a bunch so he can reveal that he was cursed by a wicked witch, and then they (chastely?) share the bed.
* The next morning, some pimped-out carriages come to retrieve the new couple so the prince can go back to his kingdom.
* The prince's servant Iron Heinrich is there, and during the carriage ride there's this weird cracking noise that turns out to be each of the three iron bands Heinrich had secured around his heart to keep it from breaking of sorrow at his master's enchantment.
* So everyone lived happily ever after…but man, they don't make servants like they used to.

***Critical Study:***

A king lives with his daughters in a castle near a wood. All the girls are beautiful, but the youngest is so lovely that even the sun is awed at her beauty.

On hot days, the princess sometimes sits by a cool spring in the woods, tossing and catching her golden ball. One day the ball rolls into the water. The princess bursts into tears but is interrupted by a large frog, who offers to fetch the ball on one condition: the princess must let him become her companion.

Out loud, the princess agrees. To herself, she scoffs at the idea. When the frog dives in and finds the ball, the princess grabs it and rushes home, leaving the frog behind. The next day, she's at dinner with the rest of the court when the frog knocks at the door. The king reminds his disgusted daughter that a promise must be kept. The princess is forced to bring in the frog and set him next to her on the table so he can eat from her plate.

Dinner finished, the frog announces that he's tired and would like to join the princess in her bed. Again the princess refuses. When the frog threatens to tell the king how the princess is still resisting him, the angry girl grabs the creature and throws him against the wall. Instantly the frog transforms into a handsome prince. He explains that he's been under a spell from which only a princess could release him.

The prince and princess marry immediately. Next morning, a coach arrives, pulled by eight white horses with golden reins. The prince's servant, Iron Heinrich, stands at the back of the coach. (His name refers to his steadfast loyalty to the prince.)

When the prince turned into a frog, Heinrich was so affected that he had three metal hoops set around his chest to keep his heart from breaking. Now he's so happy that his heart no longer needs binding. As the coach drives along, the three hoops snap one by one.

This tale is less complex than many in the collection, and readers may feel that the princess is over-rewarded. She completely neglects her part of the bargain and is rude to the frog besides. On the other hand, it's a nice touch that her father is so resolute about making her keep the promise she has made to the frog. Fathers in the [Grimm](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Grimms-Fairy-Tales-Selected/author/) universe can be disturbingly remote; here's one who refuses to let his daughter wriggle out of her responsibilities.

In defense of the daughter, sleeping with a frog is more than most fairy-tale heroines are expected to do! Her hurling the frog against the wall makes more emotional sense if the reader takes this passage as expressing female ambivalence about sex. There's no doubting the princess's repulsion, which is shown even more strongly in other versions of the tale. A Polish version replaces the frog with a snake, which the princess tears in two; another retelling transforms the princess herself into a frog and joining the frog prince in the pond; in yet another, she eats the frog's legs.

The Iron Heinrich subplot seems a bit sketchy and tacked-on, especially since there's been no mention of this servant until the end of the story. In another version of the story, the prince marries a false bride, while the true princess rides behind the wedding coach disguised as a man. In that version, it's the princess's iron bands that snap, which seems better-integrated with the plot than a male servant who shows up out of nowhere.

***Significance of Characters:***

**Princess** - young girl that was a bit clumsy and lost her ball in the lake. A green frog helped her and she promised to grant him his wishes if he takes her ball out of the lake. When he told her his wish she thought he was kidding but he wasn't. He wanted to live with her in the castle. When she kissed him a miracle occurred.

**Frog (prince)** - a young man who was under an evil witch's spell. She turned him into a frog and when he saw the princess by the lake he finally got his chance to become a human again. He was wise and came with a plan to get his life back with the help of the princess. When she kissed him he wasn't a green, ugly, sticky frog anymore. He was finally a beautiful prince he was and he married the princess.

# Notes: The Frog-King, or Iron Henry

Tale of the Brothers Grimm translated by M. Hunt [1884]  
Interpretation by Undine & Jens in green [2018]

In old times when wishing still helped one, there lived a king whose daughters were all beautiful, but the youngest was so beautiful that the sun itself, which has seen so much, was astonished whenever it shone in her face. Close by the King’s castle lay a great dark forest, and under an old lime-tree in the forest was a well, and when the day was very warm, the King’s child went out into the forest and sat down by the side of the cool fountain, and when she was dull she took a golden ball, and threw it up on high and caught it, and this ball was her favourite plaything.

There is probably no fairy tale that has been interpreted as often as this one. This indicates that it has touched many generations. So we also want to try and especially examine the symbolic level a little closer. “In old days, when wishing still helped, there lived a king...” That’s already a good thing to ponder about in our times, because for our rational mind, the effect of spiritual wishing is still a great mystery. We believe in the effects of chemical substances, we wonder about placebo effects and homeopathy, but when it comes to Reiki or the like, that’s going beyond a joke. And now someone wants to say that a pure wish can help! Remember the usual “Bless you!” after sneezing. Well, that really only works, if the king lives, that is, if the spirit is alive. And the fact that the mind has the power to make you sick or healthy is indeed something that everyone in life can experience, but that nevertheless hardly fits into our scientific worldview, which is primarily about the material. But in our fairy tale we want to turn a blind eye and try to play with these symbols. The daughters of the king, the spirit, could then be our souls, of which the youngest, of course, is always the most beautiful. The castle or even the castle of the king could be our body, the great dark forest the wilderness of nature, the lime tree the tree of life and the well the accumulated karma from which our destiny flows. At this well, the soul plays with the golden ball, the very essence of our life, in the heat of desire, which of course is closely connected to boredom.

Now it so happened that on one occasion the princess’s golden ball did not fall into the little hand which she was holding up for it, but on to the ground beyond, and rolled straight into the water. The King’s daughter followed it with her eyes, but it vanished, and the well was deep, so deep that the bottom could not be seen. On this she began to cry, and cried louder and louder, and could not be comforted. And as she thus lamented, some one said to her, “What ails thee, King’s daughter? Thou weepest so that even a stone would show pity.” She looked round to the side from whence the voice came, and saw a frog stretching forth its thick, ugly head from the water. “Ah! Old water-splasher, is it thou?” said she; “I am weeping for my golden ball, which has fallen into the well.”

This true essence of life quickly slides out of the soul’s hand and disappears into the bottomless well from which her destiny flows. The whole thing is obviously associated with suffering and of course the soul is crying over the loss. A frog speaks to her, symbolizing the essence of the water. The water is again a symbol of life, because the water is closely linked to our lives. A person can only live a few days without water, our body consists mostly of water, we grow up in a amniotic sac full of water and the earthly life itself was created in the water.

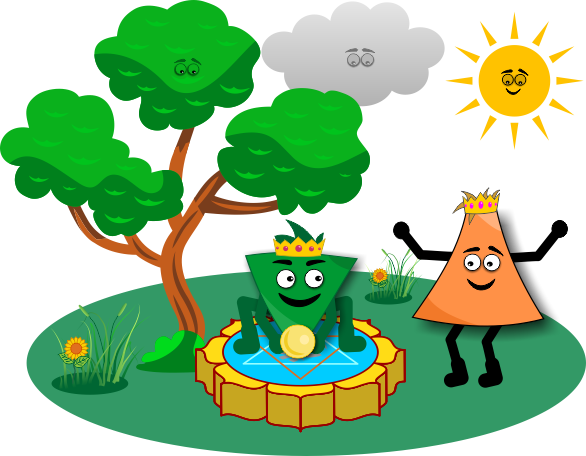
“Be quiet, and do not weep,” answered the frog, “I can help thee, but what wilt thou give me if I bring thy plaything up again?” - “Whatever thou wilt have, dear frog,” said she “my clothes, my pearls and jewels, and even the golden crown which I am wearing.” The frog answered, “I do not care for thy clothes, thy pearls and jewels, or thy golden crown, but if thou wilt love me and let me be thy companion and play-fellow, and sit by thee at thy little table, and eat off thy little golden plate, and drink out of thy little cup, and sleep in thy little bed if thou wilt promise me this I will go down below, and bring thee thy golden ball up again.” - “Oh, yes,” said she, “I promise thee all thou wishest, if thou wilt but bring me my ball back again.” She, however, thought, “How the silly frog does talk! He lives in the water with the other frogs and croaks, and can be no companion to any human being!”.

And this ‘life’ promises the soul some help to find the true essence, the golden ball, that has gone lost. But what does the frog claim for his help? No pearls or gemstones, but an intense connection of life and soul. And that is what the soul initially promises without actually knowing what it means. For she does not believe that she could associate herself with this simple form of life, though she is already addressed in a human way.

In another version of this tale, the basic problem was explained by the fact that the water of life in this well had clouded. This reminds us of the illusion that obscures our view. And the frog as a symbol of life promised there with a beautiful saying:

“When you want to be my sweetheart,  
I will give you bright, clear waters.”

But the frog when he had received this promise, put his head into the water and sank down, and in a short time came swimming up again with the ball in his mouth, and threw it on the grass. The King’s daughter was delighted to see her pretty plaything once more, and picked it up, and ran away with it. “Wait, wait!” said the frog, “Take me with thee. I can’t run as thou canst.” But what did it avail him to scream his croak, croak, after her, as loudly as he could? She did not listen to it, but ran home and soon forgot the poor frog, who was forced to go back into his well again.



The frog fulfilled his promise, but the king’s daughter is still in doubt. What kind of a strange couple is here looking for each other? The symbolism is brilliant. On the one hand you can see the frog as a spirit trapped in nature, and on the other hand the princess as nature, trapped in the mind. For the frog is trapped in its natural form, which appears ugly to the princess, and the princess is trapped in the spiritual form of her artificial home and court life, which in turn challenges the frog to act as a representative of natural life:

The next day when she had seated herself at table with the King and all the courtiers, and was eating from her little golden plate, something came creeping splish splash, splish splash, up the marble staircase, and when it had got to the top, it knocked at the door and cried, “Princess, youngest princess, open the door for me.” She ran to see who was outside, but when she opened the door, there sat the frog in front of it. Then she slammed the door to, in great haste, sat down to dinner again, and was quite frightened. The King saw plainly that her heart was beating violently, and said, “My child, what art thou so afraid of? Is there perchance a giant outside who wants to carry thee away?” - “Ah, no,” replied she, “it is no giant, but a disgusting frog.”

“What does the frog want with thee?” - “Ah, dear father, yesterday when I was in the forest sitting by the well, playing, my golden ball fell into the water. And because I cried so the frog brought it out again for me, and because he insisted so on it, I promised him he should be my companion, but I never thought he would be able to come out of his water! And now he is outside there, and wants to come in to me.”

In the meantime it knocked a second time, and cried,  
“Princess! youngest princess!  
Open the door for me!  
Dost thou not know what thou saidst to me  
Yesterday by the cool waters of the fountain?  
Princess, youngest princess!  
Open the door for me!”

Then said the King, “That which thou hast promised must thou perform. Go and let him in.” She went and opened the door, and the frog hopped in and followed her, step by step, to her chair. There he sat still and cried, “Lift me up beside thee.” She delayed, until at last the King commanded her to do it. When the frog was once on the chair he wanted to be on the table, and when he was on the table he said, “Now, push thy little golden plate nearer to me that we may eat together.” She did this, but it was easy to see that she did not do it willingly. The frog enjoyed what he ate, but almost every mouthful she took choked her. At length he said, “I have eaten and am satisfied; now I am tired, carry me into thy little room and make thy little silken bed ready, and we will both lie down and go to sleep.”

The King’s daughter began to cry, for she was afraid of the cold frog which she did not like to touch, and which was now to sleep in her pretty, clean little bed. But the King grew angry and said, “He who helped thee when thou wert in trouble ought not afterwards to be despised by thee.” So she took hold of the frog with two fingers, carried him upstairs, and put him in a corner.



It cannot be described more impressively how these two opposites meet. The exalted spirit in court in the form of the princess, who closes her mind to nature, and the ugly nature in the form of a slippery frog, which challenges all the ideals of the princess. He asks her several times: “Daughter of the King, open the door for me! - Open yourself to the spirit of life!” And the old king fulfils his duty perfectly. Truly, we want such a genuinely pure spirit to be our king even today! And the princess was certainly well educated by him, follows and trusts her father, at least to a certain point:

But when she was in bed he crept to her and said, “I am tired, I want to sleep as well as thou, lift me up or I will tell thy father.” Then she was terribly angry, and took him up and threw him with all her might against the wall. “Now, thou wilt be quiet, odious frog!” said she. But when he fell down he was no frog but a king’s son with beautiful kind eyes. He by her father’s will was now her dear companion and husband.

Here we probably reach the spectacular highlight of our fairy tale, which usually also means a change. The situation escalates, the frog threatens with the father, and the princess displays her natural powers and throws the ugly frog angrily against the wall, for finally peace to come. This may sound like animal abuse today, where we like to keep hamsters, mice and even frogs as petting animals at home. But this is certainly about the symbolism, namely to break the outer form in which life was trapped. Truly, a pure and free-moving mind without attachment would go unimpressed through every wall and not even leave a trace. An overly hardened mind clinging to its physical form would break and die painfully. Our frog was obviously somewhere in between, for he transformed his outer shape into a king’s son, with which at the same time the hate of the princess changed into love. And certainly not just because it was the will of her father. Of course, this story symbolizes a process of spiritual change, which takes place especially inside the princess. The princess becomes aware of how the outer form of the frog breaks and the royal spirit is seen which was hidden behind this form. This is a typical process of awakening, when in all forms of nature one can first see the great life and then even the purely spiritual and divine. We already notice here, how the spirit of princess and frog start to meld.

From another point of view, the princess as a female being could also symbolize nature itself. We are certainly aware of the fact that nature attacks our lives hard and likes to throw us against many walls. Here the walls are death, great losses or other obstacles that seem invincible to us. And only very rarely our mind is so free and mobile that we go through unimpressed. Usually a part of us breaks and changes. And the harder we are, the more threatening and hostile nature becomes for us, and in the end we even fear our utter downfall. Already Goethe had Mephisto say in the name of nature:

*In every way you are lost; -  
The elements are conspired with us,  
And destruction is out there.*

The chorus of the angels answers later:

*Whoever strives,  
We can redeem. [Faust II]*

And so here too the frog sought the favour of the princess, just like the spirit seeks the soul, so that in the end both can be united and redeemed from the curse.

Then he told her how he had been bewitched by a wicked witch, and how no one could have delivered him from the well but herself, and that to-morrow they would go together into his kingdom.

This sentence is very interesting and memorable, that only the soul can redeem the spirit from the well of karma. And that is certainly what life is all about, namely to restore the harmonious unity of mind, soul and nature and not to find any isolated solution that can only bring limited happiness. Whoever is the evil witch who curses our minds remains open in this fairy tale. In the Bible, it was the crafty snake that hissed the passionate “I” into Eve’s ear. In Germanic mythology it is Loki as the father of the Midgard Serpent, who causes chaos to the world. In the Indian Mahabharata we read of the demons Madhu and Kaithabha, who robbed the truth in the form of the Vedas and brought the world back into swing [e.g. [MHB 12.348](http://www.mahabharata.pushpak.de/buch12/mahabharata_b12k348.html)]. In practical life, it is above all the illusion that enchants and bewitches us, because we rarely wish for something truthful.

Then they went to sleep, and next morning when the sun awoke them, a carriage came driving up with eight white horses, which had white ostrich feathers on their heads, and were harnessed with golden chains, and behind stood the young King’s servant faithful Henry. Faithful Henry had been so unhappy when his master was changed into a frog, that he had caused three iron bands to be laid round his heart, lest it should burst with grief and sadness. The carriage was to conduct the young King into his kingdom. Faithful Henry helped them both in, and placed himself behind again, and was full of joy because of this deliverance. And when they had driven a part of the way, the King’s son heard a cracking behind him as if something had broken. So he turned round and cried, “Henry, the carriage is breaking.”

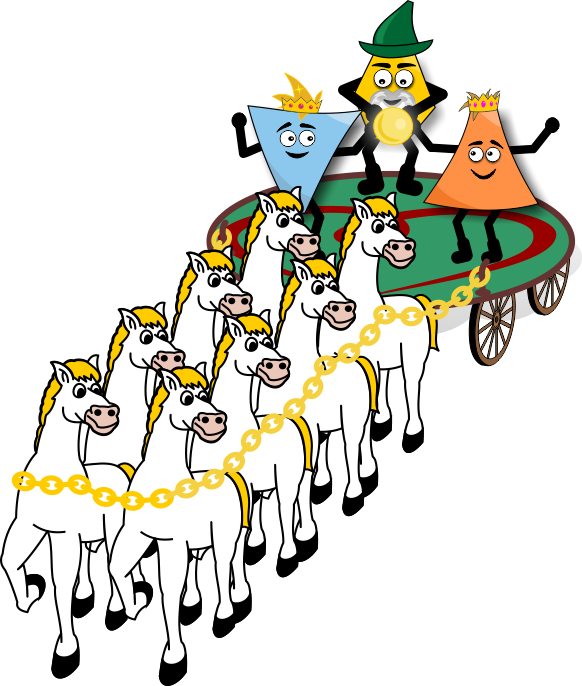
“No, master, it is not the carriage. It is a band from my heart, which was put there in my great pain when you were a frog and imprisoned in the well.” Again and once again while they were on their way something cracked, and each time the King’s son thought the carriage was breaking; but it was only the bands which were springing from the heart of faithful Henry because his master was set free and was happy.

The rising sun has always been a symbol of awakening from the sleep of illusion, into which soul and spirit had fallen. And onwards goes the wonderful symbolism of the carriage, which takes the soul through this earthly life and hopefully brings her back to her true realm at some point. Eight white horses with white feathers on their heads already indicate a pure spirit led by the golden chains of eternal truth. The Eight is often used as a figure of perfection, and in Christianity the eighth day is considered the day of resurrection. A yogi would perhaps here see the bodily carriage of the soul, drawn by the five senses, thought, consciousness, and destiny, who have reached a certain purity. And what does the faithful Henry mean as a true servant of the spirit? Well, similar to the fairy tale of the faithful John, we can here think of reason, which is always a faithful servant to the spirit and the soul. Of course, when the mind was banished to nature, reason was full of worries, which were expressed by iron bands that press the life. What are the three bands here, is left to our imagination. One might think of the worries of death, of separation or illusion, which broke away from reason with a loud crack on this wedding journey of mind and soul, because now his Lord was redeemed and happy.

Finally, perhaps a few thoughts on the title “The Frog King or Iron Henry”, which was probably chosen by the Brothers Grimm to underline the deeper message of this fairy tale. Accordingly, we have the choice of whether we want to live as a quacking frog like an animal, or use the iron Henry as a servant, to raise us with true reason to a dignified humanity. Well, it’s all about bringing mind, soul, and body together in harmony, overcoming the evil witch’s curse, untying the bonds that bind us to suffering, and returning to our true kingdom.

After all, it is reason that is supposed to distinguish man from animals. Otherwise, we end up having to endure the mockery of nature, as Goethe lets Mephisto speak to God in [Faust I]:

*“The little god of the world sticks to the same old way,  
And is as whimsical as on Creation’s day.  
Life somewhat better might content him,  
But for the gleam of heavenly light which Thou hast lent him  
He calls it Reason thence his power’s increased,  
To be far beastlier than any beast.”*

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