

THE GOLDFISH AND LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD: CHARACTERS AND THEIR COMBINATIONS IN FAIRY TALE JOKES AND PARODIES*

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ABSTRACT

There are two types of joke that can be described as fairy tale jokes: those with punchlines that include fairy tale characters, and fairy tale parodies. The paper discusses fairy tale jokes that were sent to the jokes page of the major Estonian internet Web Portal *Delfi* by Internet users between 2000 and 2011, and jokes added by the editors of the portal between 2011 and 2018 (CFTJ). The joke corpus has had different addresses at different times, and was a live ‘folklore field’ for the first few years after creation.

Of all the characters, the Goldfish appeared in the largest number of jokes (76 out of a total of 286 jokes), followed by Little Red Riding Hood (72). Other fairy tale characters feature in a 14 or fewer fairy tale jokes each.

Several fairy tale jokes circulating on the Internet varied over the period observed. Fairy tale jokes generally get their impetus from the characters and from plots with unexpected outcomes. A seemingly innocent fairy tale character is often linked to a sexual theme: sexuality holds first place as the source of humour in fairy tale jokes, although this may be caused by the so-called genre code of jokes.

KEYWORDS: fairy tale joke • fairy tale • joke • interpretation • parody

Fairy tale characters are often iconic and need no explanation; they are likely to evoke associations with the full content of the tale and its web of relations in most people in the Western cultural sphere. This is why fairy tale characters can be efficiently used in, for example, advertising because adverts convey new information through what is already known (cf. Dégh and Vazsonyi 1979; Järv 2013). According to a similar princi-

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ple, fairy tales are employed in newspaper cartoons (see Röhrich 1990), slogans (Mieder 1993) and various films based on fairy tales (Greenhill and Matrix 2010).

Fairy tales act as memes (cf. Zipes 2006). Cathy Lynn Preston (2004: 210) has suggested that the “stuff” of fairy tales exists as fragments in the postmodern era because fairy tales have particular details that makes them easily quotable. For example, Little Red Riding Hood in an Estonian fairy tale joke from 2000: the red headgear is employed as a self-evident identifying attribute that serves as the source of parody – the red item chosen is ‘opposed’ to the hood and the character is thus called Little Red Sock (Estonian *Punasokike*; however, Little Red Riding Hood is used unchanged twice in the joke).

Once upon a time there was a girl. Everyone called her Little Red Sock because she wore a red sock on her head. One day she went to visit her grandmother. On her way she met a drunken wolf who asked her, “Where are you going?”

Little Red Riding Hood replied, “I’m on my way to see my grandma who has an alcohol problem. I am taking her some cake and vodka.”

“Little Red Riding Hood, instead of picking flowers, why don’t you drink the vodka yourself.”

Little Red Sock did so. The wolf, in the meantime, went to grandmother’s house. When he arrived the wolf saw that grandmother was drunk as a skunk and gobbled her up. Little Red Sock fell asleep by the side of the road and, if she’s still alive, she will sleep there happily ever after.¹

Contemporary readers indeed often tend to know fairy tales through their modern reworkings, among which film versions are certainly the most widespread, although the source could also be a book of abbreviated and simplified fairy tales. Fairy tale films have shown an increasing tendency to rely on the modifying of plots and employ humour and parody (Bacchilega and Rieder 2010: 28). It is a strategy of humour, or of parody in particular, that is deemed a suitable way to sell fairy tales to the people (cf. *ibid.*: 32). Scholars often draw attention to feminist points made in the remakes, for example Preston (2004: 198), in her essay “Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale”, included a joke from 1999 titled “Once upon a time ... (offensive to frogs)”, in which the princess, after hearing the frog prince’s chauvinist proposal, eats the frog instead of kissing it.

The male versions still exist:

A Russian fairy tale. Once upon a time, Ivan Tsarevich went to a French restaurant. The waiter brought him a frog on a plate. The frog jumped off the plate and turned into Vasilisa the Beautiful. Poor Ivanushka tried as hard as he could to turn the girl back into a frog by hitting her against the floor, but in vain... Eventually he was forced to eat her as she was.²

Narrative plots with fairy tale characters changed in this manner can be regarded a transformed genre, i.e. the **fairy tale joke**. The fairy tale joke (in a broad sense) can be defined either as a joke with a punchline or a fairy tale parody, in both cases fairy tale characters are involved.

It can be argued that fairy tales and jokes are opposite to each other, conflicting in several aspects – length, didacticism, present or past tense, etc. (see Oring 1992 [1989]: 81–82). Nevertheless, some fairy tales, especially the most popular ones, have displayed

the tendency to transform into jokes. During the systematisation and classification of Estonian folk tales (on the basis of more than 13,000 tale variants stored at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum) and compilation of a two-volume anthology of Estonian fairy tales (tales of magic) (Järv et al. 2009; 2014), our research team often met quite different variants of the most popular fairy tale types in the form of short versions of tales written in a humorous tone. If we consider the text variants of the well-known type *Little Red Riding Hood* (*Punamütsike*, ATU 333/KHM 6), stored at the archives, it turns out that several of these display a similar tendency to transform from a traditional fairy tale text into a joke. In a text recorded in 1897 in Järva-Jaani Parish, the main character, Little Red Head (*Punapea*), engages in the following dialogue with her ‘grandmother’:

[...] “Why are you so ugly?” Little Red Head asked. He replied, “I have a terrible toothache! Give me bread and a bottle of vodka, perhaps that will help!” Little Red Head handed these over to the Wolf. The Wolf ate the bread and the bottle of vodka (probably drank the vodka from the bottle). When he had finished, the Wolf also ate Little Red Head.³

The text could be mistaken for as storyteller’s individual elaboration on the tale, but the analysis of early translations of the Grimm fairy tales into Estonian indicated that the variant is based on an early, rather loose translator’s rendition of the Grimms’ tale (see Toomeos-Orglaan 2003: 189–190).

A similar modification can be found in another well-known plot, the tale of the Goldfish (ATU 555/KHM 19, *The Fisherman and His Wife*) in a more modern (1980) version recorded in Setomaa. A young man wishes increasingly bigger wishes from a box given to him by the Goldfish – something to eat, a house, and a car with a crate of vodka – which brings about his death as a closure, an unfortunate ending that is traditionally characteristic of this tale type.⁴

The similarities and differences in the two genres, on the one hand, and the author’s diachronic study of fairy tales and their ‘offshoots’ on the other, have led to the subject of how popular fairy tale lore has been modernised in contemporary society. This article focuses on structural analysis of fairy tale jokes by observing which structural strategies have been applied in adapting fixed and commonly known fairy tales.

SOURCE MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

As a source material for the analysis I used jokes found at the online humour site of web portal *Delfi – Delfi Naljaleht*. The humour section was created shortly before April 1, 2000 and the main content was intended to be “folklore i.e. jokes” (*rahvalooming ehk anekdoodid*) (Tähismaa 2000). The *Delfi* jokes page became more popular than the similar, earlier, jokes environment *Jokebook*, and, according to researchers, folkloristic communication continued on this new site – although to a lesser extent (Krikmann 2005: 75). As a reflection of a live tradition it was originally very popular, and people have regularly posted jokes there since the beginning (for more on *Delfi Naljaleht*, see Laineste 2008: 51–55).

I created a corpus of fairy tale jokes (CFTJ) by conducting a search in the *Delfi* portal in 2007. At that time, a preliminary Estonian-language analysis of the fairy tale jokes from the period 2000–2007 was prepared (Järv 2008). The fairy tales which are chosen for adaptation can be expected to be the most popular ones, and so the search query was limited to a specific number of fairy tale characters. Linda Dégh (1989: 54) has presented a list of a dozen regularly recurring fairy tale plots which can be found in most 20th-century fairy tale anthologies, most of which are based on the Grimms' tales. I started my search with these popular tales. Of course, the number of fairy tale characters is huge and such a 'needle-in-a-haystack' search cannot possibly result in all of them being found.

The search yielded jokes about the following fairy tales/fairy tale characters from Dégh's list: Cinderella (*Tuhkatriinu*), Snow White, dwarf (*Lumivalgeke/Lumivalguke*; *pöialpoiss*), Sleeping Beauty (*Okasroosike*), Little Red Riding Hood/Little Red Cap (*Punamütsike*), Frog (Prince) (*konn (kuningapoeg)*). I also added the Bun (*Kakuke*), Three Little Pigs (*kolm pörsakest*), (Seven) young kids (*[seitse] kitsetalle*), Goldfish (*kuldkala*), Ali-Baba, Baba Yaga (*Baba-Jagaa*), Vasilisa (The Beautiful) (*[imekaunis] Vassilissa*), Dragon (*lohe/draakon*) and a few others. In addition, I extended the search to characters who typically occur in fairy tales: the king, the king's son/prince, the king's daughter/princess. Finally, I carried out a search among the portal's joke texts that contained the word 'fairy tale' (*muinasjutt*) and thus I also included texts in which the joke was labelled as a fairy tale. In fairy tale jokes both folkloric fairy tale characters and literary heroes appear together. For the common reader, both the literary fairy tale character Pinocchio and Ali Baba come from a 'fairy tale'. Today these characters have probably become folkloric to the same degree, and here it is worth remembering that even *Little Red Riding Hood* was first published as a fairy tale in the form written by Charles Perrault in 1697 (Perrault 2000 [1697]). Those jokes in which fairy tale characters do not appear as active characters, but are alluded to as objects of comparison, were excluded.⁵

In cyberspace, which is highly dynamic, the website has been renamed on several occasions; in 2007 the site was reconstructed and, starting from 2008 the joke section was available as a subsection of the entertainment section. There were several additional changes in subsequent years, the material was restructured and relocated, and the contributors changed from 'ordinary people' to portal editors. Fairy tale jokes are now available as a sub-section in the news section of the celebrity magazine (see *Kroonika/Delfi. Igav.*).

I carried out several new searches on this new site prior to 2018 to analyse further changes. Unfortunately, the relocation resulted in losses of meta-data. The aliases of the posters, the dates of posting and, initially, also the time of posting were added to the jokes when creating the corpus. After one particular site relocation the times of posting were lost. This only concerns the posts that were transferred from the earlier site, while newer posts show the time again. This change has rendered one research aspect completely impossible: my analysis of the material of the earliest period (Järv 2008: 120) revealed that in addition to the peak in the posting activity of fairy tale jokes at around noon, nearly half of the jokes were posted in *Delfi* between 5 PM and 9 AM; there was another increase late in the evening. Thus it can be concluded that lunch breaks and the hours after work were the main posting times, i.e. fairy tale jokes are generally posted during people's free time.

Since the joke corpus was relocated, even the username of the person who posted the joke is no longer shown, so it is not possible to see who has posted noticeably more fairy tale jokes than others. From the first search we know that users with the aliases PAX, Dr Huibolit, Desertfox and kosja have made more than three posts each, although it is possible that the same person used different aliases.

It must be noted that disappearing data is not unusual in news portals. When analysing the use of proverbs in Estonian newspapers it was discovered that texts from a whole section had been lost when a new web environment was created (compare especially Järv 2009: 266).

What is new is the introduction of titles, a move that is justified in the context of the news portal, for news must have headlines. We can see a similarity with the fairy tale tradition: usually if folk tales do not have titles, it is common practice to give them titles (if the stories have authors, or, as here, editors). The first four words form the titles, in the case of the earlier postings. These tales are presented with titles, and also pictures, typical of clickable news items.

THE MOST POPULAR TALE TYPES

The search yielded in total 286 fairy tale jokes – 259 jokes with punchlines and 48 parodies (some texts fell into both categories). Of all the characters, the Goldfish appeared in the largest number of jokes (76), followed by Little Red Riding Hood (72). Other fairy tale characters feature in 19 or fewer fairy tale jokes each.

Jokes about the Goldfish, which make up the largest number of jokes, seem to be somewhat exceptional in the sample. In most of them the Goldfish appears as the agent and grants wishes, although its character is usually secondary and it is perceived as a supporting character. Indeed, many goldfish jokes resemble *The Fisherman and His Wife* (ATU 555) tale type in which the wishes grow bigger and bigger until everything is lost (which is a kind of punch line itself!), or, alternatively, *The Three Wishes* (ATU 750A/KHM 87) tale type, in which the third wish has to be used to correct a previous, thoughtlessly uttered wish.

A wave throws a goldfish onto the shore and he cannot get back to the water. He sees a family of three – father, mother, son – sitting nearby and shouts to them:

“Listen, tell me your wishes and cast me back into the water!”

Son: “A hamster for me!”

Father: “Stuff it up your arse!”

Mother: “Get it from his arse!”⁶

It may be said that in most goldfish jokes the joke is not built upon the script of the goldfish as a fairy tale character, but the script should rather be called ‘three miraculous wishes’, in which the goldfish, caught from the sea, acts as a mediator. Alternatively, it could be called ‘a stupid drunk’ script, in which a drunk only wishes for vodka – first the whole sea full of it, then the river full of it, and finally, when nothing better comes to his mind, a bottle in his hand.

Among the goldfish jokes the proportion of jokes connected with sexuality and genitals is considerably smaller, whereas the share of ethnic jokes is larger. There is a gold-

fish joke, for example, that makes fun of a Jew's profit-seeking and trading skills:

An old Jew caught a goldfish and, as usual, was granted three wishes. He thought for a while and said: "I'd like to have a house in the Mediterranean, five million in my bank account, and a woman with large tits. Now, this was my first wish..."⁷

The goldfish jokes also tend to be more in tune with current affairs than other fairy tale jokes, discussing, for example, the Chechen war of the early 2000s, problems with the Windows operating system, a character called Edgar (referring obviously to the well-known Estonian politician Edgar Savisaar), racial problems, etc.

Little Red Riding Hood appears second among the most-used fairy tale characters in jokes (73). The proportion of Little Red Riding Hood jokes increased recently after the jokes were mainly derived from the editors, and these jokes are currently predominant.

Although it has been claimed that the portal editors aim to delete repeated jokes, there are still plots worded in relatively similar ways, with a joke about a sexually aware Little Red Riding Hood appearing eight times.

Little Red Riding Hood is walking in the woods late at night and meets the wolf.

"Aren't you scared of going through the dark woods alone?"

"No, I'm not. I have no money and I like sex."⁸

On the basis of variability one can conclude that, as regards fairy tale jokes with punch lines, the *Delfi* joke collection functioned (before the editors) as a kind of continuation to oral culture, with jokes heard by users being recorded. Most fairy tale jokes are short and easily memorable, rather than the lengthy 'lists' that have reached online tradition recently (cf. Krikmann 2005: 77).

Fairy tale jokes are also characterised by use of characters from different fairy tales appearing together. For example, Little Red Riding Hood and her deflowering is connected with Timur and his squad (from Arkadi Gaidar's children's book, see Gaidar 1943 [1940]) helping her to restore her virginity, or the naiveté of Little Red Riding Hood is revealed after her meeting the seven (violent, as they appear in the joke) Bogatyrs. One such joke with combined characters is given in the form of a riddle:

What does Little Red Riding Hood shout when she goes to wake the seven dwarfs?

"7up!"⁸

Jokes may combine characters from fairy tales and other spheres of children's culture (animated films and children's literature).

A drunken Cheburashka meets the old woman Shapoklyak in the street and says:

"Why, Little Red Riding Hood, you don't look old one bit!"¹⁰

The simplicity of (re)producing texts on the computer has made the development of jokes easier as well, a task that is not as simple in jokes transmitted in oral folklore. For example, the little round Bun (cf. ATU 2025) rolls around in the desert and says hello and then goodbye first to the three Bogatyrs, and then to their horses, while all the "hellos" and "goodbyes" are carefully spelled out. In the punch line the Bun meets Ali Baba and his 40 thieves.

Several jokes that combine characters from different sources sound more like humorous tales than jokes per se. Such, for example, is the joke in which 'Alice in Wonderland'

stands in front of the looking glass (Alice journeys through the looking glass in the sequel; see Carroll 1993) and is confronted by Snow White's evil stepmother:

[...] "Don't mimic me, you stupid girl!"

Things really heat up. Little Red Riding Hood and Three Little Pigs arrive. When all are present, Shifty-Eyed Wolf gobbles them all up.¹¹

In fairy tale jokes characters from different tales may appear side by side, offering an endless source of comic content, such as in the popular *Shrek* movies which employ an array of different fairy tale characters. Other popular characters from children's books or films can appear in the jokes as well without Internet users having much of a problem with it. As a result, modern fairy tale jokes is a land of dreams, a postmodern soiree, a fairy tale setting where all characters coexist in harmony.

Fairy tale jokes in the *Delfi* web portal enjoyed the highest popularity from 2000 to 2002; from then on, their overall number decreased (cf. Järv 2008: 121). The Estonian folklorist Liisi Laineste (2008: 52–55) has also drawn attention to the diminishing popularity of jokes in *Delfi Naljaleht*, using the example of animal jokes. However, a gradual drop in popularity after an initial surge was also typical of earlier collections of folklore, for instance there was a similar rise and fall in people sending fairy tales to the Estonian Folklore Archives following folklorist Jakob Hurt's appeal to collect folklore (for example, see Järv 2005: 47–48).

Two phases can be clearly differentiated in the *Delfi* content: one of posts by ordinary users between 2000 and 2011, and the editor period, 2011–2018. Editors still post fairy tale jokes, but they are considerably less numerous – there are only a couple of posts per year in the 2012–2018 period. Most of these posts repeat fairy tale plots that have already been published in the *Delfi* joke corpus. The structure of the posts has changed as titles and pictures are added. In more recent times visual and graphically designed fairy tale jokes have also been published.¹²

The few new jokes that have been added without exception create a contrast between the happy life lived in fairy tales and reality.

The shortest fairy tale in the world.

A man asked for the hand of a woman. She refused and he lived happily till the end of his life.¹³

There are fairy tale jokes that have been posted on several occasions and have been developed further, for instance a tale of different intoxications that first appeared before the New Year in the year when the joke environment was created (2000):

Some terms suitable for the coming Christmas holidays and New Year:

Cinderella's intoxication – you arrive home with one shoe

Snow White's hangover – you wake up in bed with seven men

Little Red Riding Hood's hangover – you wake up in bed with your grandmother

Sleeping Beauty's intoxication – your 'blackout' lasts for 100 years. [...] ¹⁴

In the new version of the fairy tale joke that appeared in *Delfi* in 2018, which was apparently inspired by the state's more rigorous alcohol policy, the list was longer as several new units were added, such as the Ice Queen's intoxication (with ice cubes), a descrip-

tion of the intoxication of the Estonian folk tale character Cunning Ants (*Kaval-Ants*), who has no hangover due to his drinking alcohol-free beer, and, as a non-fairy-tale addition, an intoxication named after the then Minister of Social Affairs, Jevgeni Ossinviski, the advocator of the alcohol policy, given the explanation “it suffices to see beer and the drunkenness is there”, etc.¹⁵

I have observed fairy tale jokes in *Delfi* starting from its zenith and monitoring the platform up to today’s rare examples. This does not mean, however, that fairy tale jokes have disappeared – they are present in Facebook thematic groups, etc. We can assume that the main reason for the decrease in the number of fairy tale jokes, and perhaps even the disappearance of the whole corpus from usage is, on the one hand, a general decrease in posts, yet on the other hand also the portal’s changed profile as an entertainment supplement to a small news section within a larger environment.

FAIRY TALE JOKES WITH A PUNCH LINE

A considerable number of fairy tale jokes start with a calmly evolving plot, characteristic of fairy tales (and traditional jokes), which is cut through by an unexpected punch line. Well-known fairy tale characters are introduced in a framework of activities typical of fairy tales, which, however, are followed by a turn subverting the logical development that was valid up to that point. When studying comic books inspired by fairy tales, Lutz Röhrich (1990: 11) found that comic features in these books are almost always based on the use of traditional elements of miracle tales in an unexpected contrast with rational thinking. This is valid for the *Delfi* corpus as well: the fairy tale is questioned, and the miraculous world set in doubt.

Once upon a time there were an old man and his wife. They had a hen. The hen laid an egg, however it was not a normal egg but a golden one.

The woman took the egg and knocked on it. It didn’t break. The man knocked – it didn’t break.

A little mouse came from somewhere, and lashed at it with his tail. The egg fell down and broke.

The woman wept, the man wept and the hen consoled them: “Don’t weep, woman! Don’t weep, man! I’ll lay you a new egg, not a golden egg but a normal one.”

Old man: “I’ll be damned – A TALKING HEN?!”¹⁶

The opening of the narrative is similar to the cumulative tale *The Broken Egg* (ATU 2022B). It has fairy tale characters and a plot that is eventually disrupted by the punch line. In an analogous example, a reference is made to a well-known tale motif, in which the frog turns into a princess (cf. *The Animal Bride* tale type, ATU 402/KHM 63). A captured frog begs a man to kiss her, to no avail, and cries through tears:

[...] “If you kiss me and turn me into a beautiful princess, I will stay with you for a whole year and do ANYTHING you wish.”

The man took the frog from his pocket, smiled at her and slipped her back into his pocket. Finally the frog asked: “What’s the matter with you? I told you that I was a beautiful princess, that I would stay with you for a whole year and that I’m willing to do whatever you wish, why don’t you kiss me?”

The man replies, "You know, I work in IT, I've got no time for a chick, but a talking frog is cool!"¹⁶

Fairy tale characters and plots are commonly thought of as being simple and childish, chaste and virginal. In a survey of the jokes sent to the archives in response to the 1992 collection of school lore in Estonia, Mare Kalda discussed fairy tale jokes. Kalda (1995: 96) mentions the "emphatically perfect", pure and uncorrupted image of fairy tale characters and argues that the jokes exploit the 'hidden potential' of the characters. It is typical that fairy tale jokes question the problems suggested by the fairy tale world, for example it is not marriage that is the final aim in fairy tales but the problems following marriage, the corruption of seemingly innocent fairy tale characters, etc.

Quite a number of jokes in the corpus reveal that popular fairy tale characters hide a much darker nature and fairy tales are a lot less innocent than originally thought.

Little Red Riding Hood: "Oh, Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

Grandmother: "All the better to see with, my child."

Little Red Riding Hood: "Oh, Grandmother, what big hands you have!"

Grandmother: "All the better to stroke your head, my child."

Little Red Riding Hood: "Oh, Grandmother, what a big mouth you have!"

Grandmother: "Fuck, you don't know how big your grandpa's [...] was!"¹⁸

In addition to the traditional fairy tale characters and plot the joke also employs fairy tale formulas and, again, a punch line that disrupts the traditional development, in which the first word introduces an altogether different horizon of expectations – again, something is subverted. Fairy tale jokes with sexual innuendos form a majority of the jokes discussed here. In addition to sexual themes, fairy tale jokes with punch lines often concern genitals or excrement, i.e. 'below-the-belt' jokes. For example, a hero who sets out to fight a dragon arrives "at a large mountain", rides "into the cave" and finds himself in the dragon's rectum; meeting Little Red Riding Hood who is having her first period, the wolf (a masculine character) thinks that Little Red Riding Hood has lost her *membrum virile*; Cinderella has problems with her tampon, which in the joke is made of pumpkin and resumes its former size after midnight, etc.

In humour theory, the most common explanation for how a joke comes into being is by joining two domains that have nothing in common (Knuuttila 1992: 131). Victor Raskin (1985) developed the semantic script theory of humour, applying the term 'script' to a large chunk of the semantic information associated with concepts. In jokes, humour is generated when the semantic domains of two opposite scripts collide (Preston 1997: 472–473; the terms 'frame' and 'schema' have been variously used to refer to the notion; see, for example, Krikmann 2004: 33–35; Laineste 2005: 12–13).

Steven Swann Jones (1985: 99–100) explains why the imagery in fairy tale jokes is so clearly inclined towards psychological and sexual topics, claiming that fairy tale jokes focus on the same theme as fairy tales, i.e. physical maturation alongside sexual discovery. According to Jones, jokes bring to the fore what remains hidden in fairy tales, which are understood by analysing fairy tale jokes. Thus using the script of sexuality is usual for fairy tale jokes.

The occurrence of sexual tendencies in fairy tale jokes could have a simple explanation insofar as jokes on sexual topics rank first in popularity in the world (Preston 1997), hence their frequency among fairy tale jokes is not particularly surprising.

As a result, themes of sexuality also emerge in jokes in which there is no apparent reason for them.

A Russian fairy tale.

Ivan the Fool was once lost in the woods. He went round and round until he arrived at a house that stood on chicken's feet. He knocked on the door and Baba Yaga opened it.

"Baba Yaga", Ivan said, "can I spend the night at your place?"

"You really are a fool, Ivan!" Baba Yaga replied. "I'm far too old for such things. Too old!"¹⁹

Preston (1994: 28) has discussed dirty Cinderella jokes, claiming in her article that a joke is a folk commentary on the dominant culture's representation of gender, class or sexuality. Fairy tales are characterised by mechanisms that tend to hide the obvious, while jokes directly target the problem and focus on indelicate content (Jones 1985: 101). If a fairy tale essentially promises a peaceful life with no worries about the future, a joke urges one to deconstruct things showing all the characteristic features of fairy tales in a comic key.

True, according to Bengt Holbek (1987) the tradition of wonder tales is associated with the human subconscious and with sexuality, as a fairy tale represents maturation to the marital age and much of the imagery in fairy tales can be interpreted in sexual terms. Here, Holbek relies, among other things, on earlier psychoanalytical approaches; in terms of fairy tales, for example, on Bruno Bettelheim's (1976) work *The Uses of Enchantment*. Considering that one of the popular interpretations of *Little Red Riding Hood* is to caution girls against sexual abuse (see Bettelheim 1989 [1976]: 166–183), it is no wonder that in a fairy tale joke a kind cow, who wishes to nourish Little Red Riding Hood with milk and sticks its teats into her mouth, is rejected as follows: "Guys, guys, one at a time, please!"²⁰

A fairy tale joke successfully applies traditional material by shaping it in this particular direction. The plot of the popular *The Animal Bride* tale type (ATU 402/KHM 6), in which the king encourages his sons to find wives where their arrows land, inspired the following episode:

An old fairy tale.

Once upon a time there were three brothers: the eldest, the middle, and the youngest. Time came for them to find wives. As it is commonly done in such a case, the brothers took out bows and arrows and started shooting.

Wherever an arrow landed, the shooter had to find his wife there. To make a long story short, the middle brother shot the eldest in the arse and the youngest shot his own hand...²¹

Although folklorists have found that ethnic jokes rank second after sexually themed jokes overall (cf. Davies 1998; Laineste 2005: 10), their proportion is considerably lower in fairy tale jokes, as it is more difficult (although not impossible) to use fairy tale characters in them. In his article on ethnic jokes, American folklorist Alan Dundes (1971: 195) gives as an example a joke involving a Jewish Little Red Riding Hood, in which the comic effect is created by the replacement of cultural details (the character's name

is Little Red Rosenthal and the joke involves giving a detailed list of Jewish dishes in her basket). The joke version does not contain any specific ethnic details, although the characters' dialogue ends with a similar punch line.

[...] "Grandmother, what big ears you have."

"All the better to hear you."

"Grandmother, what big eyes you have."

"All the better to see you."

"Grandmother, what a big nose you have."

"Because I'm Jewish," the wolf replies and starts to cry.²²

In the introduction to his anthology of fairy tale poetry, Wolfgang Mieder (1985: xiv) notes that sex is "only one of the themes of these poems", and lists about ten additional themes. It is possible that the dominance of sex in fairy tale jokes with a punch line is determined by the code of the joke genre, i.e. the genre specifics, rather than the main way of interpreting the in-depth content of the fairy tale. Shock and obscenity are often preconditions of a joke, as Jones (1985: 99) argues. In some cases, people need jokes, unabashed candour and hyperbole to overcome the pressure of daily life, and one way to create jokes is by employing the hidden potential of fairy tales. However, in a third of the texts in the sample, something else seems to be primary, for instance, questioning the truthfulness of the fairy tale world.

For three nights and three days the prince incessantly kissed the sleeping princess. Then it occurred to him: "But what if the princess is actually already dead?"²³

As in all jokes, one of the main principles of jokes – unexpectedness – is also prevalent in fairy tale jokes:

Little Red Riding Hood is walking along a forest path and sees the wolf's big eyes staring at her from a bush.

The wolf asks from the bush: "Are you Little Red Riding Hood?"

"Yes!"

"Are you going to visit your grandmother?"

"Yes, my grandmother!"

"You will have pies in your basket, of course?"

"Yes!"

"And the pies are nicely wrapped in paper?"

"Yes!"

"Then what are you still waiting for, you fool – give me the paper, quick!"²⁴

The subversive punchline is often connected with sexuality due to the tendency of fairy tale jokes to emphasize the sexual. While most plots included in the text corpus are based on subverting the essence of the fairy tale hero, in several fairy tale jokes yet another subversion takes place – the listener is led to expect something implying a sexual topic, but then the events are brought back to follow their proper path. As contemporary audiences are probably already used to perceiving heroes in fairy tale jokes as sexually highly charged characters, any script that undermines this development will strike them as surprising.

The grey wolf stops Little Red Riding Hood in the dark woods and tells her in a gruff voice: "Take it off!"

The girl flirtatiously asks: "What, my knickers?"

The wolf grunts, displeased: "What, am I a gynaecologist? Take your watch off!"²⁵

The listener's horizon of expectations plays a central role in these jokes (cf. Axel Olrik's [1992: 47–48] law of the epic and the ideal unity of plot among his laws of epic narrative). People are culturally disposed to expect narratives that conform to the understanding of the general course of events.

Little Red Riding Hood is laying naked under a tree. The Wolf approaches: "You aren't scared? You know what can happen to you in this forest!"

Little Red Riding Hood winks: "That's what I am waiting for!"

Then the Wolf comes closer and breaks the girl's leg.²⁶

The recipient prepares to receive the narrative in the key of a sexual script, but the expectation is not fulfilled; while in the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood is expected to be innocent and pure, in a fairy tale joke we already expect her to be a sullied and corrupt character. This expectation, in turn, is undermined by the punchline.

PARODIES

There are three main types of folk tale parody: the joke is based on either an unlikely development in the tale, the style, or piling formulas characteristic of fairy tales on top of each other (Wehse 2002: 580). At first it seems that the most effective element in this subgroup to trigger comic effect is the fairy-tale-like implausibility. Such parodies are not 'classic' jokes ending with a punch line, but a form of preserving the fairy tale plot and of rendering it into contemporary language.

The structure of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, is repeated in a tale rendered in 'legalese' and parodying the bureaucratic language that is becoming increasingly common in daily life. The fairy tale joke features the same fairy tale characters and the same plot, although rewritten in another style.

Here's a refined tale of Little Red Riding Hood told from a lawyer's viewpoint: We hereby forward detailed information relating to an incident involving a pre-school minor, who according to common report goes by the name of Little Red Riding Hood due to atypical headgear worn by the individual. The mother of the aforementioned Little Red Riding Hood was delivered a standard letter from her mother in which the latter informed of her of having been taken ill and being in need of home-based care, upon which the mother of Little Red Riding Hood decided to forward grandmother a package containing foodstuff and medicaments. [...] ²⁷

If we compare jokes mentioning fairy tale characters and fairy tale parodies, the parodies are outnumbered by almost six to one in the sample. The distinction between the two categories, however, is somewhat complicated because in many instances fairy tale elements are presented as parodies in jokes with punch lines as well. It could be argued that in this case, the fairy tale is subverted:

Once there was a girl whose name was Little Red Cap. She was called Little Cap because of the cap she always wore. But the cap was actually grey, because it was made of a wolf. And it was called red because it was worn with the fleshy side out.²⁸

A parody can also target writers or music styles. One fairy tale joke mentions the names of a dozen or so writers and has a 'sample text' to demonstrate how these writers would have written *Little Red Riding Hood*. The following example here is a parody of Erich Maria Remarque's style.

[...] "Come to me," said Wolf.

Little Red Riding Hood poured two glasses of calvados and sat beside him on the bed. They inhaled the familiar scent of calvados. In this scent was the quintessence of longing and fatigue. Calvados was life itself.

"Of course," said Little Red Riding Hood. "There is no hope, no future for any of us." Wolf was silent. He agreed with her.²⁹

The other group of fairy tale parodies imitates the fairy tale itself, conforming to Vladimir Propp's (2009 [1976]: 60) definition of parody according to which it "consists in the imitation of external characteristics of any phenomenon in our life [...] that completely overshadows or negates the inner meaning of what is being parodied".

Joking about fairy tales is by no means a completely new phenomenon. Even more so, folk tales themselves also include folk tale parodies. Heda Jason (1977) distinguishes between four main types of folk tale: in addition to masculine and feminine fairy tales, differentiated on the basis of the protagonist's gender, she also identifies gender-neutral reward-and-punishment fairy tales, and, as the fourth type, the so-called carnivalesque tales. The latter are stories in which the antagonist is defeated in a humorous way. As an example of folk tale parodies, Jason presents the tall tale *The Brave Tailor* (ATU 1640/KHM 20), in which fighting against flies parodies the miracle tale of the hero fighting a dragon.

Similarly, the tale type *The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is* (ATU 326/KHM 4) follows a parody-like structure. In this miracle fairy tale, the hero, who can never feel fear, finds himself overtaken by a series of comic events (Jason 1977: 39–40). Folk-tales that have characteristics of both wondertales and jokes are called anecdotal tales (*Scwankmärchen*; Uther 2005: 335). Lutz Röhrich (2006 [1967]: 152–155) argues that the plots of parodied wondertales correspondingly first sound like traditional fairy tales, with the unexpected, rather non-fairy-tale-like, twist or punch line only occurring at the very end. Parodies attempt to copy aspects of the structure of the parodied material, which is why familiarity with the original text is required.

The lifespan of the fairy tale jokes is remarkable. Several fairy tale joke plots were traditional at least 40 years ago (cf. Röhrich 1977: 99). Some jokes, for example the 2001 joke about the IT specialist and the frog (cf. Note 17) can be found in an English-language version in 1997. In 2018, the joke was reproduced in an unchanged form with only the punctuation slightly amended and a picture of a frog with a traffic sign was added.³⁰

The German author Hans Ritz has gathered different versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* in the anthology *Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen*. Between 1981 and 2013, 15 editions of the anthology were published, each further edited by the author. The most

recent edition includes more than 300 variants of the fairy tale. Ritz (2000: 192–193) argues that fairy tales and jokes share similar features, as in both the events start with an impossible situation and bring together things that have no connection with each other in real life. Ritz proposes the rather radical conclusion that fairy tale parodies are not modifications or ‘aberrations’ but are fairy tales *sui generis*.

In addition to the above-referenced Little Red Head sample from 1897, there are other tales from the ATU 333 type in the Estonian Folklore Archives that are categorised as fairy tales but have a large component of parody in them. In a version dating from 1938, a girl called Miili sees the wolf under the bed covers, escapes and calls for her father to help.

[...] Miili was hidden, her mother guarded the door from the wolf with a poker, and her father went inside to give the wolf a good beating. After the father had beaten the wolf enough, the wolf rammed the door, the door opened, and the wolf jumped out. But before he got out, Miili’s mother hit him on the head with the sooty poker; he ran into the woods and didn’t dare to come near the houses ever again, even in the coldest of weather. Other wolves called him a coward, because they didn’t know that he had almost lost his hide for a bellyful of cakes.³¹

It is also worth mentioning that the Estonian Folklore Archives contains only approximately a dozen recorded variants of the highly popular ATU 333 (Järv et al. 2009: 549), which, compared to most fairy tale types, is a remarkably small number, and thus the proportion of humorous tales among the type variants is considerable. So it seems that the plot is so well known that the need to parody it is as if encoded in the tale type, and what appears in the archives categorised as the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* largely appears in the form of humour.

Parody also appears in other folk tale genres; for example, in horror tale parodies (also known as pseudo horror tales, horror tales with a punch line or anti-legends) the audience, who are tuned into hearing horror tales, are presented with an unexpected punch line, for example, the traditional horror tale plot about “a black black” country, city, house, etc., ends with the nonsensical interjection “Sandwich!” (Kõiva 1995: 315–316). Studies on parody often draw attention to the fact that this phenomenon emerges when the parodied genre itself is showing signs of disappearance. Eda Kalmre (2005: 178) notes that the spread of parodies or anti-tales often peaks “when the true horror tale is beginning to fade”. Mall Hiimäe (Hiimäe and Krikmann 1992: 130) also argues that the audience is “no longer a small child and expects [the joke] to change” especially during the genre’s decadence.

One must take into account the fact that parodying texts ‘in their prime’, the stage when they are popularly known, can also be widespread. Arvo Krikmann (1985: 474) notes that creating parodies of proverbs is a natural, “if not the only conceivable”, reaction to widespread publication of proverbs.

Fairy tales started to spread in the form known to us in the Early Modern Age, the 16th–17th centuries, while motifs only are known to us from previous periods (Lüthi 1996 [1962]: 47). A large number of fairy tale parodies are known from 17th-century French literature: this was the time when fairy tales enjoyed particular popularity among the cultural elite, followed by a wave of parody (see Ennis 1997).

In narrative research such paraphrased fairy tales are sometimes referred to as 'fractured fairy tales' in which traditional tale plots have been restructured "as if to modernise" their social or moral function (for more on this see for example Ennis 1997; Deszcz 2002: 87). Sometimes, this restructuring conveys a completely opposing idea to the original, and so the term 'anti-fairy tales' has been used (see Mieder 1987: 8).

In his seminal work *Märchen*, Max Lüthi (1996 [1962]) concludes that, in addition to featuring as an individual tale genre, the tall tale offers a chance to understand any narrative form: there are also legend jokes, myth jokes and fairy tale jokes. In the latter the fairy tale world is taken apart and the marvels replaced by the hero's attempts at deception or technical miracles (ibid.: 13). Similarly, Jones (1985: 98), who has analysed fairy tale jokes, argues that these texts are of great value to folklorists because they are essentially 'metafolklore' – folklore about folklore, commentary on lore material.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of fairy tale jokes in the first three years of the first period (2000–2011) was probably because of the enthusiasm that accompanied the opening of the *Delfi* portal joke pages. During the second period (2011–2018), jokes that had appeared earlier were repeated (by the editors) and there is a general tendency towards a decrease in the number of fairy tale jokes from the portal.

In the majority of cases, fairy tale jokes provide fairy tale characters and plots with unexpected solutions – 'interpretations', as it were (generally the interpretation is related to sexual topics). Sexuality is the most widespread source of humour in fairy tale jokes, yet this may be caused by the so-called 'genre code', i.e. the established way of joking. In some cases, the recipient prepares to receive the narrative in the key of a sexual script, but the expectation is not fulfilled: in the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood is expected to be innocent and pure, in fairy tale jokes we expect her to be a sullied and corrupt character. There are a remarkable number of tales with gradually culminating plots among fairy tale jokes with punch lines. This brings them closer to the old tradition of folk jokes.

The most popular character in the corpus is the Goldfish. This set includes fewer jokes relating to sexuality than the remaining corpus, and are more related to topical issues. The character ranking second in popularity is Little Red Riding Hood. Fairy tale jokes can also be based on what is common and generally known, creating an alternative world familiar to everybody that can easily be employed as a script. Fairy tales with their simple rules are well suited to scripts that can be used in jokes.

NOTES

1 CFTJ: Kriss (11.04.2000, 09:48) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/elas-kord-punasokiketa-sai?id=67824917> (accessed May 22, 2019).

2 CFTJ: PAX (17.03.2003, 20:50) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/vene-muinasjutt-lainud-kord?id=67851939> (accessed May 22, 2019).

- 3 ERA II 120, 427/8 (37) < Järva-Jaani parish – Julius Aleksander Rehberg (Reepärg) (1897).
- 4 RKM II 348, 192/4 (5) < Põlva County, Radama village < Seto region, Saatse commune, Rääpt-suva village – Erna Tampere < Aleksanda Padumäe. Published in *Ussi naine* 2014: 51.
- 5 An example is, for instance, a joke in which two officers have a conversation in which one is describing his life: “[...] wife is a witch, mother-in-law – Baba-Yaga, father-in-law – Kashchei the Immortal, children – 3 little pigs. Luckily, my neighbour happens to be Vasilisa the Beautiful, who is married to Ivan the Fool!” CFTJ: Dr Huibolit (08.04.2005, 00:08) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/venemaal-kohtuvad-2-ohvitseri?id=67864985> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 6 CFTJ: Dr Huibolit (18.10.2006, 23:06) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/laine-viskab-kaldale-kuldkala?id=67871721> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 7 CFTJ: Caramba (28.04.2005, 16:00) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/vana-juut-puudiskinni?id=67865323> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 8 CFTJ: Jack (27.01.2004, 12:54) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/punamutsike-hilja-ohtul-konnib?id=67856243> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 9 CFTJ: driini (24.04.2004, 15:33) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/mida-huuab-punamutsike-seitset?id=67858165> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 10 CFTJ: Priidik (07.06.2000, 16:57) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/purjus-potsataja-kohtab-tanaval?id=67827591> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 11 CFTJ: Lizzi (15.12.2003, 01:25) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/alice-imedemaal-laheb-peegli?id=67855573> (accessed May 22, 2019). Shifty-Eyed Wolf is a popular children’s TV character in Estonia.
- 12 For example CFTJ: [Delfi] (06.08.2015, 09:43) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/anekdoot?id=72079969> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 13 CFTJ: [Delfi] (15.12.2003, 01:25) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/maailma-luhimuinasjutt?id=68000099> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 14 CFTJ: Kukimuki (19.12.2000, 10:23) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/muinasjutulised-pohmelli-versioonid?id=68000187> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 15 CFTJ: [Delfi] (19.04.2018, 01:14) <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/muinasjutuline-joobemaaraja?id=81814587> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 16 CFTJ: PAX (9.03.2003, 02:07) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/muinasjutt?id=67869353> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 17 CFTJ: sakust (22.10.2001, 22:31) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/kord-jalutas-meesjoe?id=67840307> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 18 CFTJ: ralf (28.05.2004, 21:37) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/punamutsike-oo-vanaema-miks?id=67873843> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 19 CFTJ: PAX (05.04.2001, 07:44) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/vene-muinasjutt-eksinud-kord?id=67835389> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 20 CFTJ: Mann (2.05.2001, 09:25) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/punamutsike-on-teel-vanaema?id=67836047> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 21 CFTJ: Kelu-Pilluke (26.04.2004, 22:28) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/vana-muinasjutt?id=67858203> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 22 CFTJ: ursula (17.11.2004, 17:59) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/hunt-soob-vanaemara?id=67862113> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 23 CFTJ: aHaa (13.06.2003, 08:55) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/kolm-ood-ja-kolm?id=67853035> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 24 CFTJ: Anti (10.02.2006, 07:25) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/punamutsike-astub-mooda-metsarada?id=67869027> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 25 CFTJ: aTa (12.02.2002, 14:22) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/hall-hunt-peatab-pimedas?id=67843873> (accessed May 22, 2019).

- 26 CFTJ: Dr Huibolit (21.09.2007, 01:01) – <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/lebab-punamut-sike-alasti-metsas?id=67874837> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 27 CFTJ: odamees (16.12.2005, 10:23) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/kuidas-jurist-omalapsele?id=68000875> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 28 CFTJ: matu (13.10.2003, 15:59) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/elas-kord-tudruk-kelle?id=67854701> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 29 CFTJ: Bundy (08.08.2005, 19:45) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/punamutsike?id=67866605> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 30 CFTJ: [Delfi] (30.04.2018, 13:24) – <https://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/anekdoot-raakiv-konn?id=81944325> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 31 ERA II 202, 261/7 (8) < Suure-Jaani parish – Jakob Muns (1938), published in Järv et al. 2009, No. 76.

SOURCES

CFTJ = Corpus of Fairy Tales Jokes, collected from www.delfi.ee/jokes, publik.delfi.ee/jokes, <http://vimka.delfi.ee> and <http://kroonika.delfi.ee/news/igav/> (accessed May 22, 2019).
The following metadata was gained from the original posts: CFTJ (fairy tale joke corpus) – the name that the user had chosen to identify him- or herself, the date and the time of the posted material (there were available in an earlier version of the joke corpus up to 2011 (included)). Omissions from texts are marked as follows [...].
Manuscript collections at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum:
ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives' folklore collection (1927–1944)
RKM – State Literary Museum's folklore collection (1945–1996)

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