

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, please [click here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#) »

March 23, 1998

Marie-Louise von Franz, 83, A Jungian Legend, Is Dead

By ROBERT McG. THOMAS Jr.

Once upon a time in a faraway land, where princes once vied and heroes died, where questers set out and there were trolls and the stories seemed to come straight from the stone, a child of the aristocracy was born.

Her father was an Austrian baron. And if there were no sounds of trumpets when she was born in Munich on Jan. 14, 1915, when Marie-Louise von Franz died at 83 on Feb. 17 in her home in Kusnacht, Switzerland, there were those who hailed her as the queen of Jungian psychology. She was an expert on fairy tales who had been both Carl Gustav Jung's most brilliant and inspired disciple and the one who had done the most to illuminate the flame since his death in 1961.

In Jungian terms, if Dr. von Franz was not an actual archetype, it must have been because she was such an original that when they made her they threw away the mold.

Certainly she began making her legend early. As a brilliant and independent-minded schoolgirl, for example, she proved so resistant to religious education that a priest was assigned as her personal tutor. The arrangement ended when the priest became so dazzled by his pupil that he lost his faith and abandoned his calling.

In time Dr. von Franz came to regret the episode. For it was Freud, after all, who regarded religion as poppycock while Jung embraced religion as every bit as authentic as fairy tales themselves.

In Jungian theory, those primordial stories provide compelling evidence of his central notion that all humanity shares a collective unconscious of genetically replicated archetypal forms reflecting and embodying the entire spectrum of human aspirations, feelings, fears and frustrations.

For those who doubted, Dr. von Franz conducted a worldwide study of fairy tales and turned out a stream of rigorously researched and influential books on this subject. Among them were "An Introduction to the Psychology of Fairy Tales," "Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales," "Creation Myths," "Redemption Motifs," "Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales," and "Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales."

As Jung had sensed, along the way she found too many common themes and symbols in too many

isolated cultures for the similarities to be dismissed as mere coincidence.

Not that coincidence was something for Jung to sneeze at. Indeed, in one of those epochal synchronicities -- Jung's term for coincidences that are not -- when Marie-Louise was 3, her family moved from Germany to Switzerland, Jung's homeland. That paved the way for the meeting in 1933 between the 58-year-old Jung and the 18-year-old Miss von Franz.

Invited by a friend to meet the great man, she was so disconcerted when Jung mentioned a patient who lived on the moon that the brash young woman piped up and said surely he meant the woman acted "as if" she lived on the moon. When Jung replied that no, the woman really did live on the moon, Miss Franz, she later recalled, "went away thinking that either he was crazy or I was."

That was before she came to appreciate that to Jung dreams, like myths, fantasies and fairy tales are as real as the world itself -- and that a problem exists when somebody has trouble telling the two levels of reality apart.

The encounter was enough to draw Miss von Franz into the Jungian orbit, first as student, patient and research assistant, later as colleague and collaborator and eventually as successor at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich.

Miss von Franz was hardly the only young woman drawn to Jung. Unlike some of his adoring acolytes, though, she seems not to have had an affair with Jung -- who broke with Freud over Freud's obsession with sex as the overriding motive force of every facet of life, then shocked Freud by becoming a womanizer.

Perhaps in tribute to Miss von Franz's intelligence, Jung made different use of her. In one much-recounted episode, when she was having trouble deciding what field of study to pursue for her doctorate at the University of Zurich, Jung -- to whom dreams were the windows to the psyche -- told her that one of her dreams pointed to the study of classical languages. That interpretation, perhaps not coincidentally, gave her the qualifications to translate the ancient texts Jung needed for his work.

After obtaining the doctorate in 1940, Dr. von Franz threw herself into Jung's work, which became increasingly her own. During his lifetime, she made important contributions to Jung's major studies, particularly his inquiries into the psychology of medieval alchemy.

After his death she extended his work, turning out a torrent of books, including her fairy tale series and a 1980 study linking psychology and modern physics, "Number and Time."

Known as a compassionate and effective analyst who interpreted more than 65,000 dreams, she lectured widely in the United States and elsewhere, all the while insisting that the goal of the Jungian thought was not to become a Jungian but one's own unique self.

For Dr. von Franz, the process of individuation, Jung's term for finding and embracing oneself, was a lifelong pursuit.

To the end, dreams remained an important part of her quest. A few weeks before her death, Dr. von Franz, who suffered from Parkinson's disease, told a friend of a dream in which her disease had vanished, leaving her completely healed. She said the dream had brought her great joy.

Photo: Marie-Louise von Franz. (Desert Spring Media)