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Grimm's *Household Tales* and Its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic

LINDA DÉGH

The unacquainted reader, looking at the German title of Grimm's *Household Tales*—*Kinder-und Hausmärchen*—will probably take for granted that it contains what it promises: tales for the nursery and the household. Relying on traditional knowledge passed on for over a century from generation to generation of parents, grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and grade school teachers, the reader will not be surprised to see several complete and abridged editions of this book, year after year, as best sellers on the children's Christmas gift market. At closer scrutiny, however, he might be disappointed by the realization that the collection as a whole is not for children and not for the household. Neither is it a homogeneous body of tales.

What is it then? A bunch of various stories "written" by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm? A historic marker to this effect was posted on a house in Kassel where the brothers lived during the creation of their collection. But the statement of the marker is not altogether true because the stories were more adapted than written, and some were adapted (or written) by the brothers, some by others. How is this possible? Were the stories not supposed to be folktales taken from the lips of oral tellers? Most of them were, but some were not. Were the transmitters of these stories peasants from the rural countryside? Not really, but if so, only indirectly. Are the Grimm tales,

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then, not original folk narratives? Some are, but most are not.

Is it true that, as the Grimms have contended, the tales are the late remains of an ancient Germanic mythology and heroic epic and thus belong to the treasure house of the national poetry of the German people? No, many of them were known earlier in many countries, as is evidenced by such famous collections as the *Arabian Nights*, Basile's *Pentamerone*, and Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez*. But then, are they at least prototypes of genuine oral narratives, since they seem to resemble tales known around the world from later sources? This is not quite so, or perhaps it is. More probably, the *Household Tales*, as a stylistically and ideologically standardized storybook, reinforced earlier narratives and influenced the formulation and the maintenance of tales in both oral and literary circulation over the one hundred and sixty-seven years since the release of the first volume.

Attitudes toward the collection have been as ambiguous as the answers to the questions concerning the Grimms' work, and they have changed through time. Be that as it may, the appeal of the stories has never faded.¹ While millions have enjoyed their enchanting spell, the Grimms' masterpiece has remained controversial. The spirit of controversy still lingers on.

Jacob was twenty-one and Wilhelm twenty when in 1806 they began to collect tales.² Like fellow romanticists of the post-Herder era, they recognized the superiority of *Naturpoesie* [nature poetry], "made by itself" through divine inspiration and uttered by the ignorant folk, over the *Kunstpoesie* [art poetry] constructed by poets.³ Their interest turned specifically toward the national poetry of the folk. Tales, songs, and beliefs of German peasants were, for the Grimms, splintered remnants of the mythology of pagan ances-

1. For listing of editions, translations and adaptations, and evaluative discussion of the impact of the tales on national narrative repertoires, see Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1963), 4:473-87; "Dem Gedenken der Brüder Grimm am 100. Todestag von Jacob Grimm 20 September 1963," *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde* 54 (1963); "Jacob Grimm zur 100. Wiederkehr seines Todestages," *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 9(1963); "Brüder Grimm Gedenken," *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde* 64/65 (1975), Band 2.

2. Ruth Michaelis-Jena, *The Brothers Grimm* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 47-48.

3. Guiseppe Cocchiara, *Storia del folklore in Europa* (Torino: Einaudi, 1954), chapter 13, 3-5; Wolfgang Emmerich, *Zur Kritik der Volkstumsideologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 29-50.

tors suppressed by the medieval church. Their aim was to reconstruct this mythology by piecing together the splinters for the education of the people. According to the brothers, language, religion, and poetry, as well as heroic virtues manifested in the ancestral epic, would make the Germans conscious of their national values and effective in the struggle for national survival and independence in their age of political turbulence. The gathering of tale materials, according to Jacob, would lead to a history of German poetry.

Encouraged by their fellow folk enthusiasts, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, collectors and publishers of folksongs, the two Grimms set to work. In the words of Jacob, they were determined to record authentic oral folktales "faithfully, true to the letter, including the so-called nonsensical speech dialect, mannerisms, turns of events, even if they seem grammatically incorrect."⁴ Folk narratives, seen by the Grimms as centuries-old national poems, included "stories from the entire German Fatherland: all traditions of common man, be they sad or merry, didactic or funny, especially the Märchen of nurses and children, evening recounts and spinnery stories."⁵

With this original aim in mind, the brothers started to collect in their Hessen homeland, actively seeking the genuine arch-German peasant tradition as represented by the Hessen folk. In search of storytellers, they enlisted the help of relatives and childhood friends: first sister Lotte; then the daughters of their next-door neighbor, pharmacist Wild (one of whom, Dortchen, later became the wife of Wilhelm); and finally the children of the Hasenpflug family. Others were added to this small collecting team later, when the brothers made new acquaintances outside of their home. Among their many intellectual friends, the best contributors were the young members of the Haxthausen family and the Droste-Hülshoff sisters. These well-educated collectors from the affluent urban elite in many cases acted as retellers of stories remembered from childhood rather than as exacting recorders of what the Grimms were looking for among household servants, nursemaids, and simple peasants.

Until recently, it was generally accepted that the earliest among

4. Bolte and Polívka, 4:424.

5. *Ibid.*

the authentic folk raconteurs was Old Marie, nanny of the Wild children, and that "Little Brother and Little Sister," "Red Riding Hood," "Godfather Death," "Briar Rose," "Robber Bridegroom," and "Snow White" were her contributions to the first edition of *Household Tales* in 1812.⁶ Close scrutiny of informants and their repertoires, however, has revealed recently that the housekeeper of the Wild family was probably no storyteller and that in mentioning Marie, the Grimms meant rather their friend, the young Marie Hassenpflug.⁷ Katharina Dorothea Viehmann was presented as the ideal "Märchenfrau" by the Grimms: old, peasant, and Hessian. This slight woman, whose admirable recital Wilhelm described in his introduction to the second volume of the *Household Tales*,⁸ was introduced to the brothers probably around 1812 by the daughters of a clergyman. The young ladies often treated her to a bowl of soup or coffee in exchange for stories when she came by twice a week to sell them eggs and butter. At their urging, the story lady also visited the Grimms at their Kassel home and was treated generously by them. During their brief acquaintance (she died in 1815), Mrs. Viehmann told the brothers twenty-one new tales and several variants of already known pieces. Among the stories of the "Viehmännin" were the "Lazy Spinning Girl," "The Girl Without Hands," "Dr. Know-It-All," "Hans My Hedgehog," "The Clever Peasant Girl," "The Poor Miller's Servant and the Cat," and "The Devil and his Grandmother." While she spoke, brother Ludwig Grimm made a portrait of her. The etching shows her kindly face, so characteristic of storytellers, and her worn hands. But she was by no means a peasant woman. As the widow of a tailor, she belonged to the urban middle class. Like the Grimms' hometown friends, she had no roots in Hessian either. As Rölleke has pointed out, she came "directly from a French Huguenot family and was raised in the French language so that her tale repertoire stemmed much more

6. Bolte and Polivka, 4:432-33; Wilhelm Schoof, *Zur Entstehung der Grimmschen Märchen bearbeitet unter Benutzung des Nachlasses der Brüder Grimm* (Hamburg: Hauswedell & Co., 1959), 59-61.

7. Heinz Rölleke, "Die 'stockhessischen' Märchen der 'alten Marie'. Das Ende eines Mythos um die frühesten KHM-Aufzeichnungen der Brüder Grimm," *Germanisch-romanische Monatschrift* 25(1975): 74-86; Rölleke, *Die älteste Marchensammlung der Brüder Grimm. Synopse der handschriftlichen Urfassung von 1810 und der Erstdrucke von 1812* (Cologne-Genève: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1975), 395-96.

8. In Kassel, July 3, 1819.

specifically from the stories of Perrault and d'Aulnoy than from the Hessen traditions."⁹

The names of two more "folk" raconteurs can be discerned from the notes of the Grimm brothers. Marie Lenhardt was a wet-nurse with a modest repertoire, and Johann Friedrich Krause was an old soldier who furnished a few jests and some good tales: "The Snake's Three Leaves," "The Old Sultan," "The Trained Huntsman," and "The Knapsack, the Cap and the Horn." The name of the "Marburger Story Lady," who was unsuccessfully visited by Lotte Grimm, remained unknown.¹⁰

Evidently, the Grimms' recorded tales seldom, if ever, came originally "from the lips of the German folk." Narrators retold stories from the fashionable literary collections of Musaeus, d'Aulnoy, Perrault, and others. Even tales from early German sources were selected for inclusion: the exemplum books and jestbooks of Montanus (one of the most popular Märchen, "The Brave Little Tailor," came from him), Johannes Pauli, Prätorius, Hans Sachs, and Froschmäuseler, among others.

The first seventy tales, largely from Hessen (but only few from Hessen ancestry), were published in the first volume of 1812. The rest (from different parts of the German-speaking territory, including Austria, Moravia, and Switzerland, and passed on to the Grimms by further fellow folk romantics)¹¹ appeared in 1819 for the first time. A third volume in 1822 included scholarly comments and annotations.

The Grimm brothers were primarily scholars—linguists, historians of religion and literature, and students of customary law. Although their nationalistic vocation was obvious, the comparative method they initiated opened a new chapter in philology. They established a new discipline: the science of folklore. Their example of collecting oral literature launched general fieldwork in most European countries and resulted in the cooperative scholarly study of their prime focus of interest: the Märchen.

The *Household Tales* had set the model which was followed in similar basic collections by patriots of many European nations.

9. Rölleke, *Die älteste Märchensammlung*, 390.

10. H. Rölleke, "Die marburger Märchenfrau'. Zur Herkunft der KHM 21 and 57," *Fabula* 15(1974): 87-94.

11. Schoof, 77-130.

Among others, Afanasiev collected in Russia, Asbjørnsen in Norway, Erben in Bohemia, Kolberg in Poland, Gaál in Hungary, Hahn in Greece and Albania. Scholars in different countries, driven by similar goals, produced evidence which disproved the claim of the Grimms that the tales were invented by the Germans and only borrowed by other races. The *Household Tales* soon became the standard work for international tale study, basic for comparative analysis. After a century and a half, they are still the target of research and remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration for tale scholarship.

Evidently, *Household Tales* was originally intended for the scholarly reader. Only under the pressures of success and popular demand did the Grimms turn more and more to the audience of children. As early as 1823, they published a selection of fifty illustrated tales which sold at a reasonable price and became the source of thousands of children's storybooks at home and abroad.¹²

For fifty years, the brothers kept improving their texts. However, since Jacob's scholarly intentions had been carried out at the time of the first recordings,¹³ the published versions increasingly showed the stylistic editing of Wilhelm. The brothers were in agreement over the interpretation of the meaning of "authenticity": "truth and faithfulness to the folktext." Both Jacob, the scholar, and Wilhelm, the sensitive poet, felt that folktales were not so much the original creations of individuals whom they consulted but rather those of the "communal folk genius." Therefore, the *contents* must not be changed, but the awkward *wording* of the informants had to be modified.¹⁴ The editing amounted to an inspired rewriting of the heterogeneous body of narratives according to a standardized style. Although Jacob also reworked texts—it was he, for example,

12. The first English translation of the selection appeared in 2 volumes, in 1823 and 1826, and its lasting influence was discussed in "Dem Gedenken . . .": Katharine Briggs, "The influence of the Brothers Grimm in England," 511-24; and Wayland D. Hand, "Die Märchen der Brüder Grimm in den Vereinigten Staaten," 525-44.

13. There were seventeen editions. Apparently, the first manuscript of 108 handwritten pages comprising twenty-five tales by Jacob, fourteen by Wilhelm, and seven by various contributors collected until 1810 ("Urfassung") was not meant to be preserved. The Brothers sent it to Clemens Brentano, who did not destroy the unedited fragmentary notations which after his death were held in the trappist monastery of Ölenberg in Alsace until it was discovered and first published by Joseph Lefftz: *Marchen der Brüder Grimm. Urfassung nach der Originalhandschrift der Abtei Ölenberg im Elsass* (Heidelberg, 1927).

14. Schoof, 171.

who converted Basile's tale "lo Serpe" into "the style of the German folktale"¹⁵—it was Wilhelm's work to create a literary Märchen style which influenced both the oral and the written tale language in Germany and elsewhere. He did not work entirely on his own. The story of the "Juniper Tree" and "The Fisher and his Wife," collected from Pomeranian fishermen by painter Phillip Runge, served as models.

While the contents of the Grimm stories were scrupulously maintained, stylistic editing produced radical changes. It consisted of the embellishment and elaboration of details to a great extent, the polishing of rough edges, the correction of obvious errors, the replacement of indirect with direct speech, the addition of originally nonexistent dialogues, the addition of opening and closing as well as episode-connecting formulas and repetitions, the omission of subordinate clauses, transposition, and the equal distribution of dialect words and folk sayings. In many cases, the Grimms composed one perfect tale out of several less complete variants told by informants from different parts of Germany.¹⁶ The technique of editing and the improvement of the texts in the Grimm workshop can easily be followed by comparing the versions in the different editions. The following sample phrase from the "Briar Rose" shows the nature of the elaboration:

The original *Urfassung* as written down by Jacob before 1810:

. . . at the moment the king and his court returned, so began everything, everything in the castle to fall asleep, down to the flies on the wall. . . .

The 1812 version of the same phrase by Wilhelm:

The king and queen had just come home, and when they entered the great hall they fell asleep and the whole court with them. The horses fell asleep in the stables, the dogs in the courtyard, the pigeons on the roof, and the flies on the wall, even the fire in the hearth stopped flaming and fell asleep, and the roast stopped crackling and the cook, who was about to pull the kitchen boy's hair because he had done something wrong, let go and fell asleep. And

15. Gunhild Ginschel, "Der Märchenstil Jacob Grimms," *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 9(1963): 131–168.

16. For the editing method of Jacob and Wilhelm see Bolte-Polívka, 4:467–73; Schoof, 170–96; and Rölleke, *passim*.

the kitchen maid let the cock which she plucked drop and went to sleep. . . .

The last sentence further extended in the 1819 edition:

. . . and the wind died down, and not a leaf stirred on the tree outside the castle.

Another example of two versions of a phrase from "Tom Thumb's Wanderings":

. . . the black (cow) swallowed him with all. Now was the Thumbling locked in the cow and heard in the evening that she will be slaughtered.

. . . now among these was a big black cow, who swallowed him—without hurting him. Nevertheless, he didn't like it down there, for it was quite dark and no candle was burning either. When the cow was being milked, he shouted:

"Strip, strap, strull!

Will the pail soon be full?"

but because of the noise of the milking no one understood him. Then the master came into the stable and said, "Tomorrow the cow over there is to be slaughtered."¹⁷

Thus standardized, the *Household Tales* reflects a unity in narrative tone. This unity, however, does not change the fact that the collection itself is not composed of tales only. It is greatly diversified in terms of the origin, form, genre, function, and meaning of the stories. Many do not end happily at all and do not satisfy the expectations of the Märchen reader.

On the basis of a comparative inventory of the Grimm collection by Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka,¹⁸ one can easily distinguish the following kinds of narratives: magic tales, about the miraculous

17. The most recent two translations—Francis P. Magoun, Jr. and Alexander H. Krappe, *The Grimm's German Folk Tales* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960) and Ralph Manheim, *Grimm's Tales for Young and Old* (New York: Doubleday, 1977)—show slight differences. The former used the final edition illustrated by Ludwig Grimm and published by Reinhold Steig in 1912, the latter was based on the 1819 edition.

18. Bolte-Polívka, 4:467–73. In another classification, Walter A. Berendsohn asserts that "the three large basic forms of narrative folk art: the Märchen, the Schwank and the legend originally were not and because of their essential meaning are not for children" (*Grundformen volkstümlicher Erzählerkunst in den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 2nd ed. [Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig, 1968], 11).

career of lowly heroes and heroines; romantic love and adventure stories (novellas); Christian legends and miracle stories; didactic exempla; explanatory and origin legends; ghost stories; legends about evil spirits, witches, and the malevolent dead; fables; chain and catch tales; lying tales; and humorous anecdotes about numbskulls, tricksters, and adulterers.

This diversity has prompted folklorists to avoid the use of the term "Märchen" as an umbrella reference to the collection; some prefer to speak about the "Gattung Grimm" [the Grimm type]. At any rate, the romanticists who liked to consider this representative corpus of international folk narratives as comparable to the fashionable, reworked, pseudo-naive literary "fairy tale" collections of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were clearly mistaken. In terms of content, all of the tales were known in traditional peasant communities and were enjoyed by different age, sex, and occupational groups. Magic tales and novellas were told at adult get-togethers with the strict exclusion of children, as were most of the scary legends, exempla, and the spicy, realistic anecdotes. Women at late evening communal works exchanged ghost and horror stories along with funny anecdotes. Many female heroine-stories were popular with the girls busy with spinning; they enjoyed didactic and entertaining stories about lazy and ignorant girls as well as about lucky girls who marry a prince. Narratives for other occupational groups—craftsmen, farmhands, soldiers—were also represented in the Grimm repertoire. So were the narratives for young children.

But it is quite remarkable how little there is in this rich treasury for mothers and nurses actually to select for the bedtime entertainment of youngsters. Of course, there are the animal tales with sound imitation, the rhythmic catch tales, and the long, winding chain tales so popular with little children. Some of the simple religious legends are also appropriate. The story ladies must have had a difficult time following the advice of the Grimms and deciding what would be best for the children. All in all, the Bolte-Polívka catalog lists eighteen titles as children's stories. This makes a total of less than ten percent of the collection.

In addition, folklore scholars have recognized that one special set of stories, so-called scare and warning tales, are meant for children. Tales such as "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids," "Hansel and Gretel," and "Red Riding Hood" are considered to be educa-

tional. In these, children are exposed to hostile powers without the protection of adults. Young listeners can learn how dangerous it is to open the door for strangers or to go along with them.¹⁹

This is exactly why, even before the publication of the *Tales*, the controversy mentioned earlier focused on this question: are Märchen actually "educational" for children or not? Are they beneficial or harmful to the young? Prior to the Grimms, oral tales in their natural state were regarded by the urban upper class intellectuals as silly lies, spreading superstitions and sheer irrationality, fit for drunken soldiers, spinning girls, old wives, and children. To elevate their status, to capture the attention of the educated audience, the tales required creative rewriting. According to the poet Wieland, "Nursery tales in the nurse's tone may spread through oral transmission but must not be printed." Only Gottfried Herder felt that children should be taught the "natural language" of the Märchen early, along with the mother tongue. The suggestion of Wilhelm Grimm, that "These stories are pervaded by the same purity that makes children appear so marvelous and blessed to us," is convincingly interpreted by Alfred and Mary Elizabeth David: "It is not that the stories are primarily *for* children . . . , but the stories are *like* children, have lived *among* children, and have been treasured and preserved within the family. This childlike sense of wonder and the moral simplicity [are what] . . . the Grimms saw in fairy tales. . . ."²⁰

Friends and associates of the Grimm brothers expressed their concern over the exposure of children to the *Household Tales*. Achim von Arnim, among others, suggested that a subtitle should warn parents to exercise sound judgment in selecting stories for retelling. (In today's wording, we might say that he gave a "P.G." rating to the book.) The brothers took the advice to heart, but instead of adding a subtitle, included in the Introduction their suggestion of "parental guidance." They expressed the view that the tales represent pure poetry of great national value. Tales give pleasure and delight; therefore the collection would be a useful text-

19. Marianne Rumpf, *Ursprung und Entstehung von Warn- und Schreckmärchen*, FCC, 160 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia, 1955); Lutz Röhrich, *Märchen und Wirklichkeit*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974), 126-27.

20. Alfred and Mary Elizabeth David, "A Literary Approach to the Brothers Grimm," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1(1963): 181.

book for the education of children, if administered wisely and appropriately to the different age categories.

The pedagogical principles of the Grimms and their contemporaries, as shown in the use of tales, were rather limited. Their prime concern was the protection of children from vulgarities, rough language, and blasphemous expressions. They eliminated archaisms difficult to understand, as Arnim suggested, but felt that cruelties—for example, children play-butchered each other and parents eating their children—should not be omitted because such incidents were inherent in folk tradition. In an age when fright was regarded as the most effective disciplinary measure, it was necessary to keep children well-behaved, quiet, at home, and out of trouble. Child-devouring witches and ogres that lurked in the forest came in handy and were at the same time pedagogically acceptable, especially if conveyed through the poetic language of the tale.

Having thus eliminated possible worries, those who judged the tales viewed them in a positive light for a long time—not only because of their educational value, but also because of their gratifying conclusion that permits all good people to “live happily ever after.” The just outcome of the struggle between recognized good and evil powers was what mattered, regardless of the frightening, cruel, gory details or other potentially harmful elements.

The tremendous success of the Grimm storybook, writes Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, cannot be explained only by its artistry.²¹ Socio-historic conditions—the aspirations of the German urban upper middle class family in the nineteenth century—were responsible for making the *Household Tales* an educational textbook to be read by mothers, grandmothers, and children alike. The harmonious whole, created from scraps of accidentally found traditional materials, fitted scientific and subjective tastes and gave an ideology for German nationalism and folk romanticism.

In a short time, the *Household Tales* became one of the greatest best sellers in the history of publishing—“next to the Bible,” as one author stated. The tales were recognized as “fairy tales” having a sense of wonder, ideal for the entertainment of children; they were translated into more than seventy languages. They reached

21. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, “Rölleke, Heinz, ed.: Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm,” *Fabula* 17(1976): 138–140; see also: *Die deutsche Familie. Versuch einer Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975), 32–37.

children all over the world through innumerable selections for school samplers and storybooks, and joined these children together into a big international family. The Grimm versions of "Cinderella," "The Frog Prince," "Hansel and Gretel," "Snow White," and some others became the favorites of nurseries and elementary schools almost everywhere through story-telling mothers, coloring books, cartoons, toys, school pageants, and puppet shows.²² Selections for children contained the "educationally acceptable" stories. But the bulk of the collection was considered too gruesome.

As a matter of fact, it is easy to assemble a list of Märchen horrors from the *Household Tales*. Leafing through the pages, the reader will find no end to child abuse: torture, mutilation, abandonment, expulsion, and killing of children by parents. Children are sacrificed for the well-being of a friend; older brothers are condemned to death at the birth of a daughter; a child is fed to the father by the mother; a daughter's hands are cut off by the father. Human sacrifice, cannibalism, and mass murder of unsuccessful suitors and innocent girls abound, to say nothing of the detailed, naturalistic description of cruel executions.²³ How incongruous is Wilhelm Grimm's characterization of the tales as reflexive of the purity which makes children so wonderful to us, with their brilliant and immaculate eyes of innocence.²⁴

It seems that the unrelenting and stubborn purposefulness and the ruthless goal-orientation of heroes and villains so typical in the Märchen caused the Grimm collection to gain unexpected popularity in Nazi Germany.²⁵ Ideologists of the Third Reich consciously

22. Röhrich, "Vorrede zur dritten Auflage"; Hand, 532-37; Hermann Bausinger, "Kinder und Jugendliche im Spannungsfeld der Massenmedien. Die Widerkehr des Märchens," *AJS Informationen* 5(1976): 1-4; Kay F. Stone, "Romantic Heroines in Anglo-American Folk and Popular Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975).

23. Röhrich gives a detailed list of gruesome tale incidents in a separate chapter on "Die Grausamkeit im Märchen"; see *Märchen und Wirklichkeit*, 123-58. Atrocities against tale heroes functioning as transitional incidents in the Grimm tales were recently analyzed by Katalin Horn, "Motivationen und Funktionen der tödlichen Bedrohung in den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 74(1978): 20-40.

24. From the *Introduction*.

25. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Zur Kritik der Volkstumsideologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 146-61; Quirin Gerstl, *Die Brüder Grimm als Erzieher. Pädagogische Analyse des Märchens* (München: Ehrenwirth, 1964), 40-42; Richard M. Dorson quotes Louis L. Snyder's article "Nationalistic Aspects of the Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales" (*Journal of Social Psychology* 23[1959]: 219-21) in *Folktales of Germany*, ed. Kurt Ranke (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), xix. About the reap-

exploited Jacob Grimm's idea that tales are direct descendants of German mythology. They saw tale heroes as pioneers of the racist causes and models for the desirable "fundamental German" prototype. They demanded that every German household own a copy of the Grimm collection, "this most important work among our sacred books,"²⁶ and that every school use it as a textbook. But why? What did they expect to achieve by having everybody read the *Household Tales*? Nothing less than a rebirth of a German folk religion, based on the imagery of tales. Quite contrary to the advice of the Grimms, Nazi educators did not recommend selection according to parental judgment but instead wanted to introduce the Märchen as educational material. "Besides communicating the Nordic-German mythology, they were also to serve as a mirror of pagan virtues and naturally offer examples fit for children to comprehend political measures of the party," writes Gerstl.²⁷ As Nazi authors stated: there is no better intellectual food for the German schoolchild than the Märchen, "because they increase German self-consciousness and stimulate the fighting spirit, the will of victory, which, luckily, is reborn with every German youth and every German girl again and again."²⁸ Convenient symbols fitting their paranoid thinking were always at hand. They saw, for example, Red Riding Hood as the symbol of the poor German folk, plagued by the wolf: the Jews. The Huntsman who rescued Red Riding Hood could not be anyone else, of course, but Adolf Hitler.²⁹ Likewise, who else but the Nazis could interpret the symbolic meaning of the Grimm tale "The Jew in the Hawthorn Hedge" as a healthy expression of the righteous German spirit defiant against intruding inferior aliens?³⁰

It is easy to understand why following the defeat of the Third Reich, people both in Germany and elsewhere reacted strongly against folk tradition and intellectual creations exploited in support of racist ideology. For a while, the Grimm tales shared the fate

praisal of the *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* as the "new Bible" see also Christa Kamenetzky, "Folktale and Ideology in the Third Reich," *Journal of American Folklore* 90(1977): 1968-78.

26. Gerstl, 40.

27. *Ibid.*, 41.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. Emmerich, 150-151.

of National Socialist literature. In accordance with what the Nazis had suggested, the opinion spread that German tales, particularly those of the Grimms, were responsible for Auschwitz, Buchenwald, the horrors of the war, and extreme racial intolerance. "Never again shall we enter with our children the environs of the gruesome, the scary and the crazy in the Märchenland," proclaimed a German child psychologist after the war. "In an age that saw so many horrors come true, and experienced so many terrible things like ours, the child is more imperiled by bad influences than in an epoch of secure peace and respected laws of humanity."³¹ So the tide turned.

If all Grimm tales without exception were deemed fit for children by the Nazis, post-war pedagogy demanded that all tales without exception be taken away from children. The arguments against them were sanguine and so convincing that the occupying powers in some cities ordered that the tales be eliminated from school textbooks and also that Grimm storybooks be withdrawn from circulation.³² This action was taken in the hope of removing all traces of hate and arrogance and of bringing up post-war German children in a new atmosphere of love and care. One can only agree with this respectable goal. The measure to achieve it seemed at that time reasonable enough.

Unfortunately, in the case of the Grimm tales, the authorities overreacted. They failed to consider that the collection of the brothers is anything but pure German, even if the Nazis had claimed it was. As we have already noted, the brothers and their collaborators did not hesitate to "Germanize" good stories from foreign sources. One glance at the Bolte-Polívka catalog or the Aarne-Thompson international tale typology shows that even the tales recorded from German informants are international. If "Little Red Riding Hood" was to be considered as the symbol of the German people liberated by Hitler, how could it be that this tale was a direct adaptation from Perrault's "La Petit Chaperon Rouge?" Before Nazi ideologists interpreted its meaning, scholars of the nineteenth century had seen the heroine as the symbol of sunset according to a sun-centered mythology or as the symbol of spring according to a myth-ritual theory of tale origins. Depth psychologists of different orienta-

31. Julia Meinerzhagen, "Sollen wir bei der Erziehung der Kinder Märchen verwenden?" *Pädagogische Rundschau* 2(1948): 4/171.

32. Röhrich, 125.

tions also have had their own interpretations for Red Riding Hood (as much as they have of other popular tale characters). So have Marxist theorists.³³

No matter how unlikely it always seemed that Nazi violence could be blamed on the Grimm tales, time had to elapse before the public could forget the accusations. Anyone really wanting to know could have found out that the tales of any people can be considered gruesome and that the Grimm versions are not among the worst. It could also have been ascertained that nations have always been interested in their roots and in past greatness, and that, like the Grimms in Germany, other scholars of the nineteenth century also saw the vestiges of their lost myth in folktales and legends. Hence, the Nazis had no right to monopolize the Grimm tales, nor was there a reason to attribute racist ideology to the Brothers Grimm.

The controversy, however, has still not been settled. Some authors fear that tales keep children in a haze of unreality. Others believe tales contribute to the development of a passive, day-dreaming, miracle-awaiting personality. But the most commonly voiced concern still remains the fearsome, gruesome nature of the Grimm tales. In our age, there is more reason than ever to consider the question: are not children's tales, the Grimm tales, the pseudo-Grimm tales, the horror world of the Grimm-epigons, as some believe, the propaedeutics of all that is subsumed under the title of violence?³⁴

33. The ongoing eagerness of hunting for and decoding of tale symbols had been discussed by Emmerich, 157–161; Jan de Vries, *Betrachtungen zum Märchen*, FFC, 150 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1967), 22–28; Hermann Bausinger, "Zum Problem der Aschenputtel," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 52(1955): 144–55. A random sample of the currently booming interest in tale interpretation should include Eric Berne, *What Do You Say after You Say Hello? The Psychology of Human Destiny* (New York: Grove Press, A Bantam Book, 1972), chaps. 12 and 13; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, tr. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), 126, 163, 171 ff.; Iring Fetscher, *Wer hat Dornröschen wachgeküsst? Das Märchen Verwirrbuch* (Hamburg: Classen, 1972); Christa Hunscha, *Struwwelpeter und Krümmelmonster. Die Darstellung der Wirklichkeit in Kinderbüchern und Kinderfernsehen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fisher Taschenbuchverlag, 1974), 151–55; P. L. Travers, *About the Sleeping Beauty*. A growing interest in the relevance and influence of the Märchen on society is shown also by the articles in the "Literatur und Kunst" section of the 1977 Christmas edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: Barbara Frischmut, "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot"; Gerold Späth, "Kein Märchen von einem, der auszog und das Fürchten nicht lernte"; Martin Walser, "Auskunft über Dornröschen" (No. 302, 24/25 December 1977, 37).

34. Wolfram Ellwanger and Arnold Grömminger, *Märchen—Erziehungshilfe oder Gefahr?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) discuss the usefulness and the dangers of using tales in child education.

The question is not so intricate as it seems, since modern child psychology and folkloristics have clarified it, to a certain extent. Above all, what is the tale? From the point of view of our discussion, it is a magic story which cannot be true; that is, a story which both the story-listening audience and the story-reading child know is *not true* and *cannot be true*. "Are there man-eating ogres in the forest?" asks the child. "No, dear, there are not," answers the adult, aware of his responsibility to humanism. If, however, for any reason his answer would be: "Yes, there are," or "Who knows? Maybe," he would turn the tale into a *legend*.³⁵ Nevertheless, such a legend—a magic story which is *true* or *might be true*—definitely would not belong to a genre intended for children. Not even if, as is the case today, legend characters—ghosts, witches, monsters, and other supernatural beings—irresistibly begin to populate the nights and the days of children³⁶ (and of many adults).

But here we are concerned with the tale, not the legend. Tales also can be violent and fearsome, whether they appear in the *Household Tales* or a French, Irish, Russian, Romanian, or Hungarian collection. Common sense would dictate, as the Grimms suggested, that parents, teachers, and publishers make selections for the different age groups. But common sense does not always dominate. Even horror has its defenders. There are advocates of freedom to use drugs, to bear arms, to smoke, and to liberate pornography; and they always find convincing arguments for their causes. What can they say in defense of horror? Many things. For example: "Life is full of terrifying experiences, and tale horrors will provide protection from them." "Children enjoy fear and adults should not deprive them of it." "Confrontation with horror engenders some kind of catharsis. The reader, so to say, abreacts his fears." Most of these statements have been disproved. For example, the results of an experiment on the mental health of the child, reported in a publication of the National Institute of Mental Health, ran "directly counter to the prediction of the usual catharsis hypothesis."³⁷

35. For an analytical distinction and definition of the legend see Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "The Dialectics of the Legend" *Folklore Preprint Series* 1, no. 6 (1973).

36. Christa Meves, *Wunschtraum und Wirklichkeit. Lernen an Irrwegen und Illusionen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1972), esp. section "Kinder träumen Angst," 43–54.

37. "The Impact of Visual Media on Personality" (Investigator: Albert Bandura, prepared by Clarissa Wittenberg), in *The Mental Health of the Child, Program Re-*

Horror has no cathartic effect. Neither has the milder, more tolerable anxiety, but anxiety which has been overcome does have one. "The original displeasure of anxiety [provoked by the tale] then turns into the great pleasure of anxiety successfully faced and mastered," writes Bruno Bettelheim.³⁸ By definition, one can master only those things which are conquerable. The tale symbolizes elementary reality with its dangers and struggles, and it demonstrates that cleverness, skill, courage, and perseverance lead to victory. The legend, on the other hand, is concerned with forces and figures which, in their often supernatural existence, cannot be defeated. The tale takes place in the "once upon a time" "never-never land," on a different level of existence, whereas the legend brings its fearsome mysteries down to earth. It happens here and now, in our home, perhaps even in the nursery. The tale gives relief from anxiety; the legend arouses it and leaves man alone with his anguish. The tale—the real one—is very useful. The legend—the real one—is very dangerous.

Anxiety, however, no matter how significant, is not the key to the tale. The tale speaks the language of childhood fantasy. Its world view corresponds with the world view of the child. We have known since Piaget³⁹ that the thinking of the child is animistic: objects feel and think, animals understand what people say and can answer if they want, just as they can in the tale. The child is intentionalistic; causality operates according to the rules of fantasy. The sun shines because it wants to, the wind blows because it wants to, the edge of the table hits the child who accidentally bumped into it because it wants to. The small child's world view is magic, not yet filled with rationality. The state of things can be changed to the

ports of the National Institute of Mental Health, ed. Julius Segal (Rockville, Md.: National Institute of Mental Health, June 1971), 253; one might remember the observation of G. Legman: "The admission so cheerfully made, that children need these aggressive outlets in fantasy against their parents, teachers, policemen and total social environment is an admission that this social environment does not have a place for the child" (*Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* [New York: Breaking Point, 1949], 33).

38. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 122.

39. Jean Piaget, *The Child's Concept of the World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929); Bettelheim, 45–53; Ellwanger and Gromminger, 29–42; Charlotte Bühler and Josephine Bilz, *Das Märchen und die Phantasie des Kindes*, 2nd ed. (München: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1961); Hedwig von Beit, *Das Märchen. Sein Ort in der geistigen Entwicklung* (Bern: Francke, 1965), 31–43.

advantage of the hero in the magic tale by magic means: by whistle, spell, sword, wand, or horse, or by magic transformation and travel. Unconsciously, the child identifies with the strong, valiant hero; he does not get tired of hearing or reading the same tale a hundred times and lives through the rare joy of relief from anxiety and dismay.

The tale is a need, especially for children between four and ten, but in many cases this need lives on beyond the tale-age, late into adulthood. Children who are deprived of the tale by force will sooner or later suffer from the consequences. It might be that mystic cults and irrational sects, mushrooming in our days, take their victims from among those who substituted childhood vision with the rationalism of adult society much too early.

All we have said about magic tales fits the characteristics of the Grimm tales. As we have noted earlier, this is not so much because the world's most widespread tales resemble the Grimm tales but also because they actually stem from the Grimm collection. If someone were to poll Americans for their familiarity with tales, most people would mention heroes, heroines, adventures, wonders, castles, landscapes, dragons, witches, fairies, and stepmothers, with features strikingly resembling those in the Grimm tales—indeed featured in standard forms through traditional storybook illustrations. Nevertheless, these tale elements made a long detour before they eventually reached the American public, especially the young readers of today. At the beginning of this century numerous Grimm selections of variable quality were published for American children. It is no surprise that the book *Märchen* easily penetrated folk tradition. Folklorists doing fieldwork among the mountain folk of Appalachia, for example, recorded a typical selection of Grimm tales from sometimes illiterate tellers, who only insignificantly deviated from the printed versions.⁴⁰ Following World War I, Mary Huse Eastman's repeatedly reprinted and extended *Index of Fairy Tales* for elementary school teachers and playground directors effectively popularized the Grimm *Märchen*. Storytelling guilds were founded, and children's libraries provided story hours for their young clientele. Meanwhile, courses in children's literature at American uni-

40. See for example Marie Campbell, *Tales from the Cloud Walking Country* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958); Leonard Roberts, *South of Hell-fer-Sartin: Kentucky Mountain Folktales* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

versities also contributed to the general notion that the Grimm collection was the most useful storehouse of nursery tales. Children's storybooks bearing the names of the Brothers Grimm reached ninety printings in 1928, the peak year of their popularity.⁴¹ Soon, however, the number of editions began to decline. The demand for stories was filled by comic strips and picture books containing horror stories about spooks, haunted houses, madmen, and monsters. Over the years, the situation did not improve: it worsened. The Grimm tales, however, survived. They still appear in new editions, new selections. Some are good, some not; some are close to the original, while others are drastically changed. All in all, the many editions have kept a part of the Grimm Märchen alive and made them known to the general public. The comic strip series bearing the title "Grimm's Ghost Stories" probably takes advantage of the easy confusion of the name "Grimm" with the similar sounding word "grim," to make the step from the "unreal" tale, to the "real" world of horror.

Some of the Grimm tales achieved great popularity through animated film and later television productions.⁴² Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," in particular, made film history in 1938 with an overnight world success. It also marked the beginning of a new era for tale communication through media. But not everybody applauded the Disney-type Grimm. The prestigious Child Study Association of America protested against the movie presentation of scary tales. Others disagreed. How about the horror movies and gangster pictures? asked an author in defense of the Grimms. How about toy guns as Christmas presents? Aren't they more damaging than Märchen witches?

From that time on, many animated Grimm Märchen themes have appeared on the screen, modified according to the potential of their genre and by the conception of the film makers. Some have adapted lengthy plots, others only particular motifs. Other mass media, mostly television from the early 1940s, suddenly expanded the limits of common audience awareness still further. Through a relatively limited number of popular characters and through paraphernalia,

41. Hand, 532-34; Kay Stone lists the favorite Märchen of Americans: "Sleeping Beauty," "Snow White," "Cinderella," "Rumpelstiltskin," "Hansel and Gretel," and the "Frog Prince," 242.

42. Hand, 525; Kay F. Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us," *Journal of American Folklore* 88(1975): 42-50; Kay F. Stone, "Fairy Tales for Adults" (MS.1978).

tone, and style, the Grimm tales became generally known, reaching even those who otherwise never would have encountered them.

If it is true that, through educators, professional storytellers, phonograph records, cassette tapes and other means of conveying the book-tales of the Grimms, the tale plots have been pedagogically normalized for the audience of youngsters in the western world,⁴³ it seems also true that tale elements divorced from their anachronistic contexts have begun a new life in society, satisfying new needs. The Grimm tales, as Max Lüthi has observed, despite attempts at parody and travesty, have amazingly resisted destruction.⁴⁴ The common knowledge of the tales is so profound, so deeply ingrained, that, even without the story being told in full, a reference or casual hint is enough to communicate the meaning of the essential message of a tale. For example, Märchen figures appear from time to time for a second on TV commercials:⁴⁵ Cinderella waxes the floor with a new product; Snow White's wicked stepmother watches the effect of Palm Olive soap on her face through the magic mirror; Briar Rose enjoys a sweeter slumber in brand name percale bedding; and the Frog-Prince prefers staying a frog if the pool is treated with the advertised purifier. Cartoons also make tale references. The giant with club in hand enters the kitchen where the cooks are at work: "Fe fi fo fum! Something sure smells yummy yum-yum"⁴⁶; and the MC announces the winners of the contest: "Nominees for the hand of Prince Charming are Cinderella in 'Cinderella,' Rosamond in 'Sleeping Beauty,' Goldilocks in 'The Three Bears,' Beauty in 'Beauty and the Beast,' Rapunzel in 'Rapunzel.' The envelope, please."⁴⁷ "I feel like Cinderella," said a woman in the crowd interviewed for the evening news by a reporter at the eve of the Orange Bowl game in New Orleans, January, 1978. She had driven with her husband all the way from Kansas. Cinderella, the Wicked Stepmother, witches, the Frog Prince, the Seven Dwarfs, and Prince Charming are popular fancy ball costumes available for everyone at the nearest store.

43. Hermann Bausinger, *Volkskunde* (Darmstadt: Carl Habel, 1971), 145.

44. Max Lüthi, "Zum Schultz von Dornröschen, Antwort an Martin Walser," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 307, Saturday/Sunday, 31 December 1977/1 January 1978, 31.

45. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Magic for Sale: Märchen and Legend in TV Advertising," *Fabula* 20 (1979).

46. *New Yorker*, 28 March 1977, 45.

47. *New Yorker*, 1 April 1974, 41.

It seems evident that the tale world for modern society is the same one the Grimm tales projected, screening out other tales from both oral and literary tradition. Society's need for magic tales seems to be fulfilled by the remarkably modest but active and persistent repertoire selected from the Grimm tales. To answer the question of why these and not other tales constitute this repertoire might also reveal something of the nature of the Märchen as a folklore genre.

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