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6. Silenced Women in the Grimms' Tales: The "Fit" Between Fairy Tales and Society in Their Historical Context

RUTH B. BOTTIGHEIMER

Mid-nineteenth-century Germany shared to a very large extent in European culture as a whole but differed from it in significant ways. A vigorously championed German ethic at that time was that of the silent woman.¹ Yet the years 1770–1830 in non-German Europe provide a very different pattern. Furnishing a pattern admired and imitated in the numerous courts and large cities of the Germanies, France of the ancien régime was a place where the privileged and educated could expect to be surrounded by articulate and eloquent women of letters. In Germany, a few women — Germaine Necker de Stäel, Bettina Brentano von Arnim, and Charlotte von Stein — struggled to carry on this tradition, which culminated in the 1820s and 1830s in Berlin, where, briefly and uncharacteristically, several women led literary salons. Rahel Varnhagen, Dorothea Veit, and Henriette Herz provided forums for, and examples of, female wit and erudition. Far from typical, each lived a good part of her life in capital cities and was the daughter of Jewish parents, socially and sometimes even legally outside "society," unless converted to Christianity.

A very different ethic guided bourgeois families scattered in small towns throughout the Germanies. Their daughters, as described by

Theodore von Hippel in his long essay *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (1772), spent their youth simpering and primping their way to the altar. Exposure to good literature, von Hippel pleaded, would improve their minds and redirect their energy toward calm rationality. Von Hippel was not heeded by the authors of child-rearing books in the following decades, who incorporated and affirmed anti-feminist leanings extracted from Rousseau, as quintessentially feminine the very traits deplored by von Hippel.²

Evidence from diaries and letters suggests that by the 1830s, silence as a positive feminine attribute had gained wide acceptance in all social classes in the dukedoms, principalities, and free cities that made up the Germanies, and that the 1860s and 1870s marked the extreme point for “the silent woman” in Germany. Gone were the animated literary salons led by women. When Fanny Lewald tried to follow the example set by Rahel Varnhagen in the 1850s, it was too late. Even if a woman were a genius, she complained, she would be told to sit quietly and knit.³ A verse narrative in a children’s annual of 1855 reformulates the punishment of being burned at the stake, one of the principal threats against silenced women found in numerous German tales of Grimms’ *Fairy Tales* (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*) by declaring that too much chatter could be punished, and severely:

The Huckster Chatterbox

“Finally, Miz Greta, be sensible!”
Nante says, laughing maliciously.
I well know that in olden times
Many witches were burned,
But you are burning yourself, by George!
This punishment seems really new
For chattering.

Now, before you burn up completely
Do me one favor,
A little glowing ember for my pipe
Save me from your gown.”
Miz Greta was almost petrified by shock
But she still doesn’t leave off
Her chattering.

Die Schwatzhafte Hökerin

“Zulezt! Frau Grete, seid gescheid!”
Spricht boshaft lachend Nante
“Ich weiß wohl daß in alter Zeit
Man viele Hexen verbrannte,

Ihr aber verbrennt euch selber gar!
 Die Strafe scheint mir neu fürwahr
 Für's Schwatzen.

Nun, eh' ihr ganz verbrennen thut
 Mach mir noch eine Freude,
 Für meine Pfeif' ein Fünkchen Glute
 Schont mir von eurem Kleide." —
 Die Grete ward vor Schreck fast Stein,
 — Doch läßt sie es auch jetzt nicht sein,
 Das Schwatzen!⁴

Here too much talk is associated with witches and the grim punishment they met at the stake, although a very different situation occasions this verse: Frau Grete's footwarmer ignites her hem, which goes unnoticed as she continues to chatter volubly.

One aspect of Grimms' *Fairy Tales* is arguably related to this larger social phenomenon as well as to the history of German literature. Despite the ancient and international lineage of many of the tales, the process of editing, codifying, and translating them produced a distinctly nineteenth-century text, incorporating the gender-related assumptions of Grimms' informants and of Wilhelm Grimm himself. The question of language and speech taps into the very origin and existence of oral and written literature. When J. H. Campe and other child-rearing pundits of the turn of the nineteenth century were advocating the propriety of girlish and womanly silent repose, they effectively reanimated a hoary German folk and literary tradition, a misogynistic strain epitomized by the anonymous *Spiegel der regier-sichtigen bösen Weibern*, which emphasized the hatefulness of nagging, the only category of female speech it recognized.⁵ The image of silent women and of silent repose as the most praiseworthy female character trait emerges consistently in disparate areas of German life. One is the subscript for one of the twelve scenes of human life printed on a cotton kerchief of approximately 1880:

The boy's imagination soars abroad,
 The girl walks at his side quietly.
 Des Knaben Sinn schweift in die Weite,
 Still geht das Mädchen ihm zur Seite.⁶

Another is Cosima Wagner's advice to her daughter, Daniela von Bülow, before her marriage in 1885:

"You are [my] repose" is probably the highest accolade that can be addressed to a woman. It is that above all which men seek as a foil to the clamor of the world.

Let it blossom beautifully in you, my dear child; let us women not join the crazy dance and let us instead represent quiescence, at which the poor persecuted men refresh themselves.

“Du bist die Ruhe” ist wohl das höchste Lob, welches einer Frau gesungen werden kann, das was der Mann vor Allem sucht, gegenüber der Unruhe der Welt; laß sie schön in Dir aufblühen, mein gutes Kind; machen wir Frauen den tollen Tanz nicht mit, und den Hast gegenüber stellen wir die Rast vor, an welcher die armen Gehetzten sich laben.⁷

Similarly the adumbration of silence moves through German literature like a leitmotiv. Whether removed from the turmoil of political affairs or relieved of care after questing after the Grail, fictional and epic figures, mostly male, have seemed ready to retire from the world to the reward of a silent solitude, whereas women *were* silent, as part of their basic identity, for example, as epitomized by the name of a prominent female character in Thomas Mann’s *Dr. Faustus*, Schweigstill, an appellation which incorporates the imperative mode to be silent.

To be sure, silence can perform a narrative function. By retarding resolution a silent character can provide an opening for narrative elaboration by the authorial voice. This is as true of folk and fairy tales as it is of novels and dramas. What has always differentiated male from female repose and silence in the German oral and literary tradition, however, was the generally accepted understanding that it rewarded men for a life of striving but was enjoined upon women as comely and decent behavior. Men could be silent, but women were silenced.

This gender distinction is congruent with the distribution of power in most ages, a point Jean Bethke Elshtain makes in “Feminist Discourse and Its Discontent: Language, Power, and Meaning.”⁸ There she explores the relationship of language to power, seeing discourse as domination. In German-speaking countries even the vocabulary of legal personhood has long been grounded in the concept of language use. Knowing that *mündig* means “of age” and that *mundtot* means “dead in law” as well as “silenced” sharpens the reader’s awareness of the possible extended meaning of “for she could not open her mouth” (*denn es konnte seinen Mund nicht auf tun*) in “The Virgin’s Child” (#3: “Marienkind”).

We can infer that Wilhelm Grimm himself also understood discourse as domination by turning for a moment from silence to a consideration of speech at its most powerful: its use in casting spells. How and in what association these powers are distributed is a litmus test for otherwise invisible assumptions in the *Fairy Tales*. Of the

many verses in the text, only a few represent true conjuring, and of these, the overwhelming majority are spoken by female figures. Casting spells, or conjuring, is here understood as an imperative addressed to natural powers (to appear, to intervene, or to assist) in contradistinction to rhymes which perform mere narrative functions. Certain powers realizable through speech were ascribed to women in the *Fairy Tales*, a belief Tacitus attributed to German tribes in the first century A.D. These powers appear in Grimms' *Fairy Tales* in the figures of Cinderella (*Aschenputtel*), Gretel, the goosegirl (*die Gänsemagd*), and the girl in "Tales of the Paddock" ("Märchen von der Unke") among others. Each of these female characters successfully invokes natural forces exemplifying what Elshtain calls "discourse as domination." All of this, taken together, offers a glimpse backward to the ancient Germanic folk belief in women's inherent power over nature expressed through words. It exists in certain of these tales as an integral part of the plot and cannot be removed without gross distortion of the tale itself.

But powerful verbalizing women represented something Germans in general and Wilhelm Grimm in particular were not at all comfortable with in the nineteenth century. In a society which prized silent retiring women one would expect female speech — which in conjuring potently bears woman's will or intention — to be curtailed or even condemned in that society's literary productions, whether "folk" or canonical, and that is precisely what happened in Germany. Completely absent from the German fairy tale tradition, which otherwise borrowed so heavily from France, is any version of Perrault's tale of "Riquet à la Houppe," whose ravishing but inarticulate princess is perfected by the conferral of eloquence.

Commonplaces of culture such as the desire for silence in women determine the events of fairy tales, which as a stripped-down genre must negotiate with social realities in order to make sense to their readers or hearers. Without subplots and a large cast of characters who can explore gradations of meaning and nuances of social practices, fairy tales and their plots achieve validity in their own cultures by alluding to generally held beliefs, even if these beliefs themselves are an illusion, an illusion which provides for its own survival by functioning as a paradigm for subsequent generations.

Silence in Grimms' Fairy Tales

Silence appears at several levels in Grimms' *Fairy Tales*.⁹ Most conspicuous is the muteness which grows out of the narrative itself, when

a character is cursed with or condemned to silence for a period of time. Next are the silences within the text resulting from the author or editor's distribution of direct and indirect speech. And finally—and least noticeable at first reading—is the manner in which the lexical context colors what is said. In Grimms' *Fairy Tales* the verbs "speak" (*sprechen*), "say" (*sagen*), "ask" (*fragen*), "answer" (*antworten*), and "cry out" (*rufen*) provide a hierarchical gradation for characters by marking their speech as licit or illicit. Gender considerations play a large part in these three categories, each of which is confirmed in numerous tales in the collection.

The salient example of language use or its prohibition as a narrative element occurs in "The Virgin's Child" (#3: "Marienkind"). Although never achieving the prominence of "Little Snow-White" (#53: "Sneewittchen") or "Little Red-Cap" (#26: "Rotkäppchen") in Germany and generally omitted from American and English editions of the *Fairy Tales*, it was nearly always included in children's editions of ten or more selections in Germany in the nineteenth century. The tale begins where most others end, with the sudden elevation from rags to riches, from grinding hunger to sweet plenty, from a woodcutter's hut to a divinely ordained palace, from earthbound companions to angelic playmates. But when the child stubbornly denies having opened a forbidden door, the Virgin Mary deprives her of speech and casts her out of heaven. After many miserable solitary years in the wilderness, a passing king discovers and marries her, but the girl/queen's muteness leaves her defenseless against accusations of cannibalism which arise when the Virgin Mary removes her infants one by one as a continuing punishment for her refractory denials. Condemned to the stake as a witch, she saves herself at the last moment by her sudden desire—fanned by the flames—to acknowledge her transgression.

In "The Twelve Brothers" (#9: "Die zwölf Brüder") the youngest sibling, a sister, must endure seven years' silence, neither speaking nor laughing. A single word will cause her brothers' instant death:

You must be dumb for seven years, and may not speak or laugh, and if you speak one single word, and only an hour of the seven years is wanting, all is in vain, and your brothers will be killed by the one word.

Du mußt sieben Jahre stumm sein, darfst nicht sprechen und nicht lachen, und sprichst du ein einziges Wort, und es fehlt nur eine Stunde an den sieben Jahren, so ist alles umsonst, und deine Brüder werden von dem einen Wort getötet.

She, too, stands bound to the stake on the verge of immolation when the last moment of the seven years passes, her fraternal deliverers

appear, and she is rescued. In "The Six Swans" (#49: "Die sechs Schwäne") the sister accepts the condition of six years' silence to redeem her brothers — again neither laughter nor speech is allowed.¹⁰ She too is powerless against the world, exposed first to clamorous pursuit by the king's huntsmen, then after marrying their king, to the lurking wickedness of her mother-in-law, who like the Virgin Mary spirits her children away one by one in order to bring her to the stake. There, bound and ready for grisly execution, she is released by her brothers as the last moment of the sixth year passes, and her mother-in-law is executed instead.

Silence is again enjoined in "The Iron Oven" (#127: "Der Eisenofen"). An enchanted prince imprisoned in an iron oven can be released only if the princess who discovers him maintains a complete silence during the journey back to her own realm. This injunction continues, until on her last visit home the princess is sternly warned that she must speak no more than three words with her family or else her prince will disappear. However, her joy at seeing her father is so great that she unintentionally violates the condition:

Then she related all that had befallen her, and how because she had transgressed the order which had been given her not to say more than three words, the stove, and the King's son also, had disappeared.

Da erzählte sie alles, wie es ihr gegangen wäre, und weil sie das Gebot übertreten hätte, nicht mehr als drei Worte zu sprechen, wäre der Ofen weg samt dem Königssohn.

And finally there is "The Glass Coffin" (#163: "Der gläserne Sarg"). Rather longer than the others, it more closely resembles a literary fairy tale, a *Kunstmärchen*. Psychological motivations are accounted for within the narrative; symbolic actions, self-consciously employed magic, the sophistication of a frame tale, and the particularity absent from most fairy tales all make their appearance. As in "The Virgin's Child," the girl is struck dumb in conjunction with her willful refusal to comply. In "The Virgin's Child" the punishment is justified by the nature of the transgression: Marienkind has opened a door forbidden her by no less a personage than the Virgin Mary herself, while in "The Glass Coffin," the female protagonist loses her voice at the appearance of the man who wishes to claim her hand in marriage. Although this tale is more a caricature than a genuine folktale, or even a literary fairy tale, its retention of the theme of silence in conjunction with marriage links it with a persistent folktale tradition that has surfaced in virtually every European country. The association of silence with marriage extends backward in two tales to

the verge of womanhood and marriageability. Both Cinderella and Allerleirauh (#65) observe a strict silence in the ballroom to which they resort to establish their identity. Allerleirauh, in particular, exhibits ambivalent behavior; she coyly invites her own disclosure but denies her identity and womanly availability by her responses. Both flee the ballroom, never speaking, though their reasons differ.

Male silence exists, too, but it differs greatly from female silence, both in extent and in quality. For instance, in "The King of the Golden Mountain" (#92: "Der König vom goldenen Berge"), the merchant's son can break the magic spell binding the captive princess, if he silently endures the torments inflicted by twelve men for three nights running. Similarly the poor fisher's son in "The Three Black Princesses" (#137: "De Drei Schwatten Prinzessinnen") may not speak for the space of a year to the three princesses he has undertaken to redeem, but during that entire time no other proscription against speech binds him to silence.

They told him he must for a whole year not speak to them and also not look at them, and what he wanted to have he was just to ask for, and if they dared give him an answer they would do so.

He söll en gans Johr nig met en kühren un söll se auck nig ansehen; wat he gerne hebben wull, dat söll he men seggen, wann se Antwort giewen dröften, wullen se et dohn.

And finally in one of the ten legends appended to Grimms' *Fairy Tales*, "Poverty and Humility Lead to Heaven" (KL4: "Armut und Demut führen zum Himmel") the reader encounters a prince who, after renouncing speech as well as his position at court, spends seven years praying to God.

He took nothing but a little food, said nothing, but prayed to the Lord to take him into his heaven.

[Der Königssohn] nahm nichts als ein wenig Essen, sprach nichts, sondern betete zu dem Herrn, daß er ihn einmal in seinem Himmel aufnehmen wollte.

These examples clearly indicate gender-based differences in the imposition of speech loss by the teller of the tales. Male silence undertaken to redeem another person ("The Three Black Princesses") is neither total nor of long duration, while a male who wishes to redeem himself ("Poverty and Humility Lead to Heaven") takes on silence voluntarily. In clear contrast, the putative self-redemptive silence in "The Virgin's Child" is prescribed as a punishment, which generates

the threat of graver punishment in secular society, that is, being burned at the stake. We further see that the two males on whom silence is imposed as a redemptive precondition both emerge from lower social orders, while females may be deprived of speech whether urchins or queens.

Finally it becomes clear through an examination of the editorial history of "The Virgin's Child" that the deprivation of speech provides an effective means of breaking the girl-queen's will, which completes the equation of speech with power. It is precisely the deprivation and transformation of power that seems to motivate the plot shifts evident in individual folk and many fairy tales during the Early Modern period in Europe. Either positive female folk figures with power were deprived of this power, or their power was transformed in the tales into the wickedness of witchcraft.¹¹

The injunction to silence in these tales is paralleled in other tales by an actual silence. Many interpreters and critics of Grimms' *Fairy Tales* have discussed Wilhelm Grimm's preoccupation with substituting direct for indirect speech to enliven the tales stylistically, but none to date has posed the equally important questions: Who speaks? Whose voice is audible? In the enduringly popular "Frog-King; or, Iron Henry" (#1: "Der Froschkönig, oder der eiserne Heinrich"), the first tale in Grimm's collection, no one is struck dumb. Silence forms no part of the plot, and indeed we first meet the princess chatting up the frog, although he clearly occupies the rostrum. The same is true when the frog appears at the castle portal: both speak, but a good many of the princess's responses are described rather than uttered, while the frog freely articulates his thoughts.

She began to cry. . . . And as thus she lamented. . . .

Da fing sie an zu weinen. . . . Und wie sie so klagte. . . .

The frog's voice is clearly heard rebuking and silencing the princess:

"What ails you, King's daughter? You weep so that even a stone would show pity."

"Be quiet, and do not weep."

"Was hast du vor, Königstochter, du schreist ja, daß sich ein Stein erbarmen möchte."

"Sei still und weine nicht."

This pattern continues in "Rapunzel" (#12), where the sorceress occupies center stage, the prince is next in verbosity, and the titular

protagonist, Rapunzel, lags far behind. Again, typically, Rapunzel's reactions are described, while the prince bursts out in plucky verbalization. For example, when the prince sees the sorceress gain swift admittance to the tower by calling:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,"

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Lass dein Haar herunter,"

he says:

"If that is the ladder by which one mounts, I too will try my fortune."

"Ist das die Leiter, auf welcher man hinauf kommt, so will ich einmal mein Glück versuchen."

The reader learns that Rapunzel sings "a song . . . letting her sweet voice resound" ("ein Gesang . . . ihre süße Stimme"). The song's words remain a mystery.

When the prince climbs into the tower, we hear that "Rapunzel was terribly frightened" ("Rapunzel erschrak gewaltig"). Once again, Rapunzel appears through the editor's voice, not her own.

In "Hansel and Gretel" (#15: "Hänsel und Gretel") we see a consciously created silence descending on female characters. An analysis of the extent and content of direct discourse reveals a pattern of verbalization which undermines and contradicts Gretel's active role in implementing her own and Hansel's escape from the slaving witch. In the opening scene when Gretel tearfully says, "'Now all is over with us'" ("Nun ist's um uns geschehen"), Hansel adopts an appropriately consolatory attitude. His first words to Gretel, though, enjoin her silence: "'Be quiet Gretel, do not distress yourself, I will soon find a way to help us'" ("Still, Gretel . . . gräme dich nicht, ich will uns schon helfen"). Astonishingly, on the following two occasions on which Hansel calms Gretel, the text provides absolutely no occasion for his words; it is simply assumed that Gretel must be crying or deeply distressed. It is Hansel whom the stepmother addresses, and he who speaks in response, a situation which provides the pattern for discourse throughout the tale.

In "Cinderella" (#21: "Aschenputtel") we recognize the actual lineaments of female silence. After her piously expressed wish that her father bring her the first branch that brushes against his hat, Cinderella, aside from her formulaic incantations, says nothing further. Silent at the ball, speechless among the ashes, mute when trying on the tiny slipper, Cinderella endures the barbs and jibes of her lo-

quacious stepsisters. Their very loquacity identifies them as wicked. In the world of Wilhelm Grimm a talkative woman meant trouble.

Trouble could come in many forms, but particularly noxious was female sloth. The woman's volubility preserved precisely this loathsome trait in "The Lazy Spinner" (#128: "Die faule Spinnerin"), where slothfulness parallels her readiness to speak. "She was always ready with her tongue" ("so war sie mit ihrem Maul doch vornen") we hear Wilhelm, the editor, add. In case the reader missed the point, the tale ends: "But you yourself must own she was an odious woman!" ("Aber das mußt du selbst sagen; es war eine garstige Frau").

These implicit and explicit assumptions diverge sharply from the French tradition and from the English and American traditions derived from Perrault, who includes no mute women. Indeed, eloquence in women is prized, as in "Riquet à la Houppe" ("Ricky with the Tuft") where the reader meets two princesses. One is beautiful but "stupide," the other ugly but eloquent. At every party the guests first gather around the beauty but quickly drift to the brilliant conversation of her ugly sister. Riquet, himself ugly but eloquent, offers eloquence to the beautiful sister in return for loving him. In his eyes her "manque de parole" (inarticulateness) is her only fault. So too in "Cendrillon" ("Cinderella") the titular heroine speaks throughout the tale, suggests remedies, and thereby meets the approval of her fairy godmother, who characteristically affirms Cendrillon's suggestions by exclaiming at one point, "You are in the right!"

Can one then generalize about speech acts in Grimms' *Fairy Tales*? At one end of the speech scale are biological mothers—good but dead—and their marriageable daughters. Both are silent. The mothers of Snow White, Cinderella, and Marienkind exemplify this group. At the other end of the speech scale appear both evil witches and witchlike figures and authority figures—the Virgin Mary, kings, princes, and men in general—all free to speak. Here the power-bearers are clearly broken down along gender lines, with the curious exception of the Virgin Mary, a case to be discussed at another point.

The foregoing discussion leads to the conclusion that muteness clearly exists on two levels in Grimms' *Fairy Tales*: first, muteness which grows out of the narrative itself, when a character is cursed with or is condemned to silence for a period of time; and second, a silence within the text which results from the author's or editor's choice in distributing direct and indirect discourse.

A further manner in which the text itself can charge a character's speech with authority (or conversely can devalue it) grows out of the lexical context, the level least noticeable at first reading. In Grimms' *Fairy Tales* this set of distinctions is made with the verbs introducing

direct speech: “ask” (*fragen*), “answer” (*antworten*), “cry” (*rufen*), “say” (*sagen*), and “speak” (*sprechen*). The author or editor probably employs this set of distinctions least consistently. Despite this, a pattern emerges from Grimms’ *Fairy Tales*, a message on a subliminal level.

It is tempting to develop a theory about the distribution of the two verbs “speak” and “say,” which appear to offer an entry to the unconscious world in which Wilhelm ordered his folklore characters hierarchically according to gender, social class, and licit or illicit speech and power. In many of the tales, though by no means in all of them, “speak” appears far more often in conjunction with authority figures. A count of seven tales reveals the following numbers of instances of the verb “speak”:¹²

Mother	(3)
Girl	(7)
Witch	(19)
Father/King	(11)
Boy/Prince	(16)

This division of “speak” and “say” among the male or authority figures and female figures extends even to animal tales. The wolf in “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids” (#5: “Der Wolf und die sieben jungen Geißlein”) uses “spoke” four times, the nanny goat’s words are preceded by “said,” and the kids “cry” time after time.

Furthermore the verb “speak,” in two tales, “Faithful John” (#6: “Der treue Johannes”) and “The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was” (#4: “Märchen von einem der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen”) appears at the precise point at which the character’s authority and independence emerges, that is, when he leaves his father’s home:

When the day dawned, therefore, the boy put his fifty talers into his pocket, and went forth on the great highway, and continually said to himself. . . .

Als nun der Tag anbrach, steckte der Junge seine fünfzig Taler in die Tasche, ging hinaus auf die große Landstraße und sprach immer vor sich hin. . . .

In the same tale the youth’s eventual wife never speaks, but is only described: “And this at last angered her” (“Das verdroß sie endlich”), although her clever maid, the sexton’s wife, and the innkeeper’s wife are each allowed a few words, uncharacteristically introduced by the verbs so rare for women, “ask” and “speak.” It is possible that this tale points toward an implicitly held belief that the lower, serving

orders somehow lay outside the norms for correct bourgeois behavior, as expressed here by the incidence of the verbs "ask" and "speak." Is it significant, one wonders, that in the same tale the bold son cries out to a ghostly figure: "speak if you are an honest fellow" ("Sprich, wenn du ein ehrlicher Kerl bist")? May the reader conclude that male speech indicates a solid, honorable character (as indicated by the adjective "candid" [*redlich*]) applied in German society principally to males, whereas female speech implies the opposite? Jacob Grimm's successors addressed the question of the distinction between "speak" and "say" in the *German Dictionary* (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*) and concluded that their meanings were equivalent:

"Speak" is unusually frequent in older New High German. In contrast to that it has somewhat diminished in daily colloquial speech in favor of "say" and has taken on a somewhat ceremonial character. (2799)

With "say" the emphasis is placed on the content. For example, he spoke without saying much. (2801)

sprechen ist namentlich im älteren nhd. auszerordentlich häufig. jetzt ist es dagegen in der alltäglichen umgangssprache etwas zurückgetreten zu gunsten von sagen, und hat einen etwas feierlicheren charakter angenommen. (2799)

bei sagen [steht] die rücksicht auf den inhalt im vordergrunde. beispiel: er sprach ohne viel zu sagen. (2801)

The conclusions of this investigation, however, suggest that special considerations not addressed here, gender and social class, are conspicuously decisive in evaluating the act of speaking, regardless of content, which offers a radically new understanding of the patterns of speech distribution in Grimms' *Fairy Tales*.

In the *Fairy Tales* women answer with great frequency, they almost never pose a question, and their general helplessness leads them to cry out often. This represents much more than a random assignment of verbs introducing direct speech; it expresses the weight of an entire society enjoining compliant responses in good girls and, more important, forbidding inquiry, initiative, and, most heinous of all, impertinence. The consequences of such powerful paradigms for gender-differentiated behavior recorded or introduced into Grimms' *Fairy Tales* made themselves felt at every level of German society in the nineteenth century, from the apprentice carrying his printed kerchief, through Fanny Lewald, to Cosima Wagner herself.

Any doubt at this point about the relationship between language and power can be dispelled by a close examination of the images associated with muted females. *Marienkind* is banished from heaven, im-

prisoned by an impenetrable thornhedge, nourished on roots and berries, exposed naked to snow and ice, condemned as a cannibal, and tied to a stake with flames burning around her. The sister in "The Twelve Brothers" also ends up bound to the stake:

And when she was bound fast to the stake, and the fire was licking at her clothes with its red tongue. . . .

Und als sie schon an den Pfahl festgebunden war und das Feuer an ihren Kleidern mit roten Zungen leckte. . . .

The youngest sibling, the sister, in "The Six Swans" endures the same fate, though in her story, the fire has not yet been lit as she stands on the faggots. The nine days' hunger endured by the princess in "The Iron Oven" as a punishment for speaking more than the allotted three words to her father seems mild in comparison to these ghastly concluding scenes.

Sexual vulnerability also permeates tales of muteness. Before a king out hunting discovers Marienkind, her clothes rot and fall off her body in the several years she spends in the forest. Wielding a phallic sword, he hacks his way through the thicket and carries her off naked to his castle. The central fact of the girl's sexual vulnerability, her nakedness, is raised into high relief when this motif reappears in "The Six Swans," where against all logic the girl—having taken refuge in a tree—tries to drive off the king's hunters by throwing her clothes down at them, piece by piece, until she has only her shift left:

The huntsmen, however, did not let themselves be turned aside by that, but climbed the tree and fetched the maiden and led her before the king.

Die Jäger ließen sich aber damit nicht abweisen, stiegen auf den Baum, hoben das Mädchen herab und führten es vor den König.

The evident fact that no amount of security is protection enough for a woman emerges from my reading of "The Glass Coffin," where the onset of speechlessness coincides with the revelation of the protagonist's vulnerability, that is, her powerlessness against intrusion (and, of course, this forced entry may be understood in many ways):

I wanted to summon my waiting-maid who slept in the next room, but to my astonishment I found that speech was taken away from me by an unknown force. I felt as if a nightmare were weighing down my breast, and was unable to make the very slightest sound. In the meantime I saw the stranger enter through two doors which were fast bolted.

[Ich] wollte mein im Nebenzimmer schlafendes Kammermädchen rufen, allein zu meinem Erstaunen fand ich, daß mir, als lastete ein Alp auf meiner Brust, von einer unbekanntenen Gewalt die Sprache benommen und ich unvermögender war, den geringsten Laut von mir zu geben. Indem sah ich bei dem Schein der Nachtlampe den Fremden in mein durch zwei Türen fest verschlossenes Zimmer eintreten.

Speechlessness also occurs in conjunction with breaking a girl's will ("The Virgin's Child"), with reducing a girl's pride ("The Glass Coffin"), with spinning and sewing, the archetypal female occupations ("The Six Swans," "The Twelve Brothers," and "Allerleirauh"), and with practicing Christianity ("The Virgin's Child"). "The Twelve Brothers" exemplifies these tendencies: Here a Christian vocabulary (the sister wants "to redeem" [*erlösen*] her brothers) with repeated supplication to the Almighty frames the striking image of the sister sitting in a tree spinning, while the mother's silencing prefigures her daughter's later muted state: "'Dearest child,' she answered, 'I may not tell you'" ("'Liebstes Kind,' antworte sie, 'ich darf dir's nicht sagen'"). Female verbosity signals not only evil incarnate but also sloth. While the lazy spinner natters away, Wilhelm Grimm stands on the proscenium denigrating her in an editorial aside: "She was always ready with her tongue" ("so war sie mit ihrem Maul doch vornen").

Conclusion

In his own time Wilhelm Grimm codified a generally accepted behavioral code both as he found it in oral narrative and as he rewrote it in the collection. In the *Fairy Tales* he expressed the values of the German social structure out of which these tales grew, by holding up specific models of behavior as essential and necessary and exhibiting terrible punishments as the just fate of the wayward and dilatory. In this way, Grimm preserved and passed on these values in image and narrative.

One may well ponder the social function of these appalling representations of silenced girls and women. Kenneth Burke asserts that certain images may assist in tolerating the intolerable.¹³ Both men and women in the nineteenth century, though not all women, certainly not Fanny Lewald, accepted the rightness of the image of the quiet woman, whether silent or silenced. However, the extensive buttressing of this image by a purported or real folk tradition as expressed in Grimms' *Fairy Tales* suggests the intolerability of the image for many girls and women of the nineteenth century. In trying to understand

these images and to ponder the effect they may have had on their readers and listeners then and now, one must conclude that fairy tales offered an apparently innocent and peculiarly suitable medium for both transmitting and enforcing the norm of the silent woman. To the extent that these tales corroborated and codified the values of the society in which they appeared, they reinforced them powerfully, symbolizing and codifying the status quo and serving as paradigms for powerlessness.

Notes

1. The material in this chapter represents an extension into literary history of the lively discussion in linguistic circles about the relationship between gender, language, and social structure. For illuminating discussions and an extensive bibliography see Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae, and Nancy Henley, *Language, Gender and Society* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1983). An earlier study by Max Adler summarizes research in this area from 1879 to 1978. See *Sex Differences in Human Speech* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1978).
2. Dagmar Grenz, *Mädchenliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1981), p. 86 ff. Two recent and relevant studies should also be mentioned here. They are John C. Fout, ed., *German Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984) and Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, and Mary Jo Maynes, eds., *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social and Literary History* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986).
3. A valuable exposition of the real and psychological space accorded women in the home, in love, marriage, divorce, law, feminism, politics, and the academy in Germany, France, England, and Italy can be found in Priscilla Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).
4. From *Deutscher Jugend Kalender*, ed. H. Bürkner (Leipzig: Wigand, 1855), p. 59.
5. Originally published in Augsburg, 1733; repr. in the series *Frau in der Literatur*, ed. Ursula Schröder (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1982).
6. Musée de l'impression des étoffes 954.619.1 M.A., Mulhouse, France.
7. Letter of 10 October 1885, Bayreuth. Quoted in *Liebe Mutter, Liebe Tochter*, ed. Jutta Radel (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1982), p. 112.
8. *Signs*, Spring 1982, p. 605.
9. Unless otherwise noted, English tale titles, names, and translations are taken with permission from *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt and James Stern (New York: Pantheon, 1944, 1972). Quotations from the *Tales* in German come from the 1857 edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. A recent, and widely available, reliable German edition is that edited by Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980).
10. Although this tale is clearly a variant of "The Twelve Brothers," Wilhelm Grimm included both in the large edition.
11. This forms the conclusion of my article, "The Transformed Queen: A Search for the Origins of Negative Female Archetypes in Grimm's Fairy Tales," in *Amsterdamer Beiträge* 10 (1980): 1–12.
12. This graph is based on the incidence of the verb "sprechen" in seven tales: #13: "Die drei Männlein im Walde"; #12: "Rapunzel"; #15: "Hänsel und Gretel"; #21: "Aschenputtel"; #50: "Dornröschen"; #53: "Sneewittchen"; and #16: "Die drei Schlangenblätter."
13. Discussed in Marcia Landy, "The Silent Woman," in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 24.

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