

Fairy Tales by Grimm Brothers

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Introduction

- Jacob Ludwig Karl and Wilhelm Karl Grimm first published their collection as *Children's and Household Tales* in 1812, known as *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in German.
- The first edition of the second volume (1815) acknowledges Dorothea Viehmann, a woman from the countryside, who had retained in her memory, legends and stories, as one of their contributors.
- The first edition was not quite seen as suitable for family reading, therefore in 1819, in the second edition, the stories had to be revised according to the moral dispensation of the present time.

The Process of Collection

- Since 1806, the Grimms started collecting legends, songs, sagas, and stories.
- Their Professor Friedrich Karl von Savigny was a great influence on them. Jacob even accompanied him to Paris to do a research on the legal manuscripts of the Middle Ages.
- They had no intention to publish their collection at first, but were just contributing materials to Achim von Arnim's and Clemens Brentano's collection of popular songs.
- Achim von Arnim encouraged the brothers to publish the first two volumes of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in 1812 and 1815.
- They were not looking for literary materials but were looking for something very simple, which would reflect the tastes of ordinary folks.

Contemporary Period

- Germany was a conglomeration of different states, with no common history or national identity.
- Language was the only unifying theme; the wars led by Napoleon Bonaparte, caused much sufferings and also became one of the reasons for the restructuring of Germany.
- Call for National emancipation, and German cultural movement became need of the hour.
- Intuition and emotions favoured as opposed to French rationalism.
- Process to create national literature to emphasise on the nation's unity, based on German folk traditions garnered interest.

German Romanticism

- Compared to the other European countries, Romanticism in Germany developed later in the late 18th and early 19th century.
- Emphasis on developing national languages, folklore and encouragement of celebration of local customs.
- Focus on individual liberty, and the search for inspiration in nature.
- The Germans were also inspired by the call given by Johann Gottfried Herder, who believed that the revival of traditional songs and tales would help people to realise their national identity as well.

“You have no Shakespeare. Have you also no songs of your forbears of which you can boast? ... The voice of your fathers has faded and lies silent in the dust. Nation of heroic customs, of noble virtues and language, you have no impressions of your soul from the past? Without a doubt they once existed and perchance still do, but they lie under the mire ... Lend a hand then, my brothers, and show our nation what it is and is not.” (Teverson 62)

- Appealed to the childlike innocence of the human soul

German Romanticism and Brothers Grimm

- The Romantics' interest in mythology and folklore captured the brothers' attention.
- The idea, that the purest form of culture, or those that binds a community together, could be found in orally transmitted stories, may be the reason behind their collection.
- But they were not always like the Romantics; the brothers wanted no changes in the original texts or stories
“They felt that the language of the people should be in print as it is .” (Kamenetsky 379)
- The romantics emphasised on the contribution of poetry and history for the formation of national literature, whereas, the brothers gave more preference to history.
- The brother's collection of fairy tales is also considered as an initiative towards the formation of national identity

German Popular Stories

- It was in 1823, Grimms' fairy tales were translated for the first time into English as *German Popular Stories*
- A man named Edgar Taylor along with his collaborator David Jardine, carried out the translation.
- With its publication, they sought to improve the reception of the English fairy tales or draw the people's attention towards the sad plight of English fairy tales.
- Also defends fantasy as a genre, considers it appropriate for reading for young readers.
- George Cruikshank, a very famous British cartoonist illustrated *German Popular Stories*.

Fairy Tales

- Fairy tales do not necessarily need to have fairies.
- Even the Grimms' Fairy Tales do not literally have fairies in their stories, but contain legends, fables, animal tales and folk anecdotes(Zipes 54).
- In *Guardian of Education*(1803), Sarah Trimmer discouraged reading of fairy tales for / by children, because according to her, imagination in fairy tales created an imbalance in the young minds, and also did not teach them any morals.
- Unlike in other countries, fairy tales were very popular in France among the aristocrats, especially among women, who would gather in the salons, share their stories and ideas.

The Frog Prince

- Also was included in the Ölenberg manuscript of 1810, which the Grimms had sent to Clemens Brentano but was not published or used by him.
- The princess drops her golden ball into the spring, the frog promises to retrieve the ball, on certain conditions.
- The princess belittles the frog at first, but accepts all the conditions later.
- She quickly runs away after getting her ball, and forgets about the frog.
- The frog is persistent and reminds the princess about her promise.
- The frog later on, changes into a charming prince, who was actually cursed by a spirit.
- The morals of the story are that one should never be judged by his or her looks and also that one should not forget the promise kept. The king, princess' father is seen as a wise and honest man, because he always reminded his daughter about the promise, that she had given to the frog.

Rapunzel

- The woman sees a rampion (fruit, also known as rapunzel) growing in the garden and longs to eat it.
- The man goes to steal it for his wife, the owner of the garden, who is also an enchantress finds him.
- She allows the man to take the fruit provided that he and his wife give their first born to her.
- The enchantress named the child, Rapunzel, and locked her away when she was just twelve years old.
- Rapunzel falls in love with a prince, who would climb up to the castle, using Rapunzel's long hair.
- The story may also be read as a comment on the status of women in the contemporary society, how they were kept under restrictions or how they were always kept under the guidance of older women.
- The union of prince and Rapunzel also represent the victory of love over evil.

Hansel and Gretel

- In the first edition of Grimms' fairy tales, the mother is the biological mother and not the step mother.
- The biological mother is replaced by a step mother in the fifth edition to make it appear less gruesome.
- In the story, the step mother wants to send away the children to the forest, although the father is very sad about it.
- Hansel invents certain tricks to come back home, but one day, he is unsuccessful.
- The brother and sister lands up in a gingerbread house, which belongs to the witch and their lives are in danger.
- But they are clever and manages to escape after killing the witch.
- The story may have had its origin in the Baltic regions during the Great Famine of 1314, when the people had to even kill their own children to survive the famine.
- The theme of abandonment and survival stands out.

Hans in Luck

- Hans decides to visit his mother; his master rewards him with a lump of silver for his consistent hard work.
- He exchanges his reward for a horse which he thinks is a good bargain. Later, he exchanges the horse for a cow, and then the horse for a pig, pig for a white goose, and the white goose for the grinding stone.
- Hans is fooled by everyone, those with whom he exchanged his objects with, but we never see him unhappy.
- We may consider him a fool, but we also cannot ignore how happy he is, despite all the ill luck, he encountered.
- Hans story can be read as a very good example of how happiness is or may be considered as more important than material benefits are.
- The ultimate goals in life according to Buddhist philosophy are, to reduce sufferings and to achieve happiness. Hans we understand through the story, reduces his sufferings and also seeks happiness, whenever possible.
- A very good lesson is to be learnt from Hans' story, especially when the entire world is obsessed about materialistic benefits.

Conclusion

- The brothers never used the word German or Deutsche in their title, this imparts universal appeal to the tales.
- The Allies blamed the Grimms' fairy tales for the atrocities of the Nazis and had even put a ban on its publication at the end of World War II.
- In 1830, King Ernest Augustus demanded allegiance from the professors in Göttingen, the brothers were teaching in the city too. The brothers refused to take the pledge, along with the five other professors, because they were against the alteration of the constitution, which the new ruler demanded.
- They are famously known as the "Göttingen Seven", they were treated as political dissidents and even asked to leave the city. The students followed them to the end of the city.
- DEFA (Deutsche Film- Aktiengesellschaft) produced twenty-three live action fairy- tale films from 1956 to 1989 based on the Grimms' tales.

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