
SEX AND VIOLENCE

The Hard Core of Fairy Tales

These stories are suffused with the same purity that makes children appear so marvelous and blessed.

—WILHELM GRIMM,
preface to the *Nursery and Household Tales*

FOR MANY ADULTS, reading through an unexpurgated edition of the Grimms' collection of tales can be an eye-opening experience. Even those who know that Snow White's stepmother arranges the murder of her stepdaughter, that doves peck out the eyes of Cinderella's stepsisters, that Briar Rose's suitors bleed to death on the hedge surrounding her castle, or that a mad rage drives Rumpelstiltskin to tear himself in two will find themselves hardly prepared for the graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children.¹ In "The Juniper Tree," one of the most widely admired of the tales, a woman decapitates her stepson, chops his corpse into small pieces, and cooks him in a stew that her husband devours with obvious gusto. "Fledgling" recounts a cook's attempt to carry out a similar plan, though she is ultimately outwitted by the boy and his sister. Frau Trude, in the story of that title, turns a girl into a block of wood and throws her into a fire. "Darling Roland" features a witch who takes axe in hand to murder her stepdaughter but ends by butchering her own daughter. Another stepmother dresses her stepdaughter in a paper chemise, turns her out into the woods on a frigid winter day, and forbids her to return home until she has harvested a basket of strawberries.



FIGURE 2. A Moritz von Schwind illustration of one of the many gruesome episodes in "The Juniper Tree."

Lest this litany of atrocities leads to the mistaken view that women are the sole agents of evil in German fairy tales, let us look at examples of paternal and fraternal cruelty. Who can forget the miller who makes life miserable for his daughter by boasting that she can spin straw to gold? Or the king of the same tale who is prepared to execute the girl if her father's declarations prove false? In another tale a man becomes so irritated by his son's naiveté that he first disowns him, then orders him murdered by his servants. The singing bone, in the tale of that title, is whittled from the remains of a fratricide victim; when the bone reveals the secret of the scandalous murder to the world, the surviving brother is sewn up in a sack and drowned. The father of the fairy-tale heroine known as Thousandfurs is so bent on marrying his own daughter that she is obliged to

flee from her home into the woods. Another father is so firm a believer in female ultimogeniture that he prepares twelve coffins for his twelve sons in the event that his thirteenth child turns out to be a girl. One monarch after another punishes wicked females by forcing them to disrobe and to roll down hills in kegs studded with nails.

In fairy tales, nearly every character—from the most hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary—is capable of cruel behavior. In "The Robber Bridegroom," a young woman watches in horror as her betrothed and his accomplices drag a girl into their headquarters, tear off her clothes, place her on a table, hack her body to pieces, and sprinkle them with salt. Her horror deepens when one of the thieves, spotting a golden ring on the murdered girl's finger, takes an axe, chops off the finger, and sends it flying through the air into her lap. Such behavior may not be wholly out of character for brigands and highwaymen, but even the Virgin Mary appears to be more of an ogre than a saint in the Grimms' collection. When the girl known as Mary's Child disobeys an injunction against opening one of thirteen doors to the kingdom of heaven and tries to conceal her transgression, the Virgin sends her back to earth as punishment. There the girl marries a king and bears three children, each of whom is whisked off to heaven by the Virgin, who is annoyed by the young queen's persistent refusal to acknowledge her guilt. The mysterious disappearance of the children naturally arouses the suspicions of the king's councilors, who bring the queen to trial and condemn her to death for cannibalism. Only when the queen confesses her sin (just as flames leap up around the stake to which she is bound) does Mary liberate her and restore the three children to her. Compassion clearly does not number among the virtues of the Virgin Mary as she appears in fairy tales.

The Grimms only occasionally took advantage of opportunities to tone down descriptions of brutal punishments visited on villains or to eliminate pain and suffering from their tales.² When they did, it was often at the behest of a friend or colleague rather than of their own volition. More often, the Grimms made a point of adding or intensifying violent episodes. Cinderella's stepisters are spared their vision in the first version of the story. Only in the second edition of

the *Nursery and Household Tales* did Wilhelm Grimm embellish the story with a vivid account of the doves' revenge and with a somewhat fatuous justification for the bloody tableau at the tale's end: "So both sisters were punished with blindness to the end of their days for being so wicked and false." Rumpelstiltskin beats a hasty retreat on a flying spoon at the end of some versions of his tale, but the Grimms seem to have favored violence over whimsy. Their Rumpelstiltskin becomes ever more infuriated by the queen's discovery of his name; in the second edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, he is so beside himself with rage that he tears himself in two. Briar Rose sleeps for a hundred years while a hedge peacefully grows around the castle in the first recorded version of the story. In successive editions of the Grimms' collection, we not only read about the young prince who succeeds in penetrating the thorny barrier, but also learn the grisly particulars about Briar Rose's unsuccessful suitors. They fail because "the briar bushes clung together as though they had hands so that the young princes were caught in them and died a pitiful death."

The changes made from the first to the second edition in "The Magic Table, the Gold Donkey, and the Cudgel in the Sack" show just how keen the Grimms must have been to give added prominence to violent episodes. In the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, we read about the encounter between the story's hero and an innkeeper who confiscates the property of the hero's brothers.

The turner placed the sack under his pillow. When the innkeeper came and pulled at it, he said: "Cudgel, come out of the sack!" The cudgel jumped out of the sack and attacked the innkeeper, danced with him, and beat him so mercilessly that he was glad to promise to return the magic table and the gold donkey.³

The second edition not only fills in the details on the crime and its punishment, but also puts the innkeeper's humiliation on clearer display.

At bedtime [the turner] stretched out on the bench and used his sack as a pillow for his head. When the innkeeper thought his guest was fast asleep and that no one else was in the room, he went over and

began to tug and pull very carefully at the sack, hoping to get it away and to put another in its place. But the turner had been waiting for him to do exactly that. Just as the innkeeper was about to give a good hard tug, he cried out: "Cudgel, come out of the sack!" In a flash the little cudgel jumped out, went at the innkeeper, and gave him a good sound thrashing. The innkeeper began screaming pitifully, but the louder he screamed the harder the cudgel beat time on his back, until at last he fell down on the ground. Then the turner said: "Now give me the magic table and the gold donkey, or the dance will start all over again." "Oh no!" said the innkeeper. "I'll be glad to give you everything, if only you'll make that little devil crawl back into his sack." The journeyman answered: "This time I will, but watch out for further injuries." Then he said: "Cudgel, back in the sack" and left him in peace.

What the brothers found harder to tolerate than violence and what they did their best to eliminate from the collection through vigilant editing were references to what they coyly called "certain conditions and relationships." Foremost among those conditions seems to have been pregnancy. The story of Hans Dumm, who has the power (and uses it) of impregnating women simply by wishing them to be with child, was included in the first edition but failed to pass muster for the second edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. "The Master Hunter," as told by Dorothea Viehmann, the Grimms' favorite exhibit when it came to discouraging on the excellence of folk narrators, must have struck the Grimms as unsatisfactory. Viehmann's version, which was relegated to the notes on the tales, relates that the story's hero enters a tower, discovers a naked princess asleep on her bed, and lies down next to her. After his departure, the princess discovers to her deep distress and to her father's outrage that she is pregnant. The version that actually appeared in the *Nursery and Household Tales* made do instead with a fully clothed princess and a young man who stands as a model of restraint and decorum.⁴

Pregnancy, whether the result of a frivolous wish (as in "Hans Dumm") or of an illicit sexual relationship (as in "The Master Hunter"), was a subject that made the Grimms uncomfortable. In fact, any hints of premarital sexual activity must have made Wil-

helm Grimm in particular blush with embarrassment. A quick look at the "Frog King or Iron Heinrich" (the first tale in the collection and therefore the most visible) reveals the tactics he used to cover up the folkloric facts of the story. When the princess in that celebrated tale dashes the hapless frog against the wall, he "falls down into her bed and lies there as a handsome young prince, and the king's daughter lies down next to him." No printed edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* contains this wording. Only a copy of the original drafts for the collection, sent to the Grimms' friend Clemens Brentano in 1810 and recovered many years later in a Trappist monastery, is explicit about where the frog lands and about the princess's alacrity in joining him there. In the first edition, the frog still falls on the bed. After his transformation, he becomes the "dear companion" of the princess. "She cherished him as she had promised," we are told, and *immediately* thereafter the two fall "peacefully asleep." For the second edition, Wilhelm Grimm deprived the frog of his soft landing spot and simply observed that the transformation from frog to prince took place as soon as the frog hit the wall. In this version, the happy couple does not retire for the evening until wedding vows are exchanged, and these are exchanged only with the explicit approval of the princess's father. The Grimms' transformation of a tale replete with sexual innuendo into a prim and proper nursery story with a dutiful daughter is almost as striking as the folkloric metamorphosis of frog into prince.⁵

Another of the "conditions and relationships" that the Grimms seem to have found repugnant, or at least inappropriate as a theme in their collection, was incest and incestuous desire. In some cases, incest constituted so essential a part of a tale's logic that even Wilhelm Grimm thought twice before suppressing it; instead he resorted to weaving judgmental observations on the subject into the text. The father of Thousandfurs may persist in pressing marriage proposals on his daughter throughout all editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, but by the second edition he receives a stern reprimand from his court councilors. "A father cannot marry his daughter," they protest. "God forbids it. No good can come of such a sin." In later editions, we learn that the entire kingdom would be

"dragged down to perdition" with the sinful king. But in other cases, where there was no more than the hint of an incestuous tie between father and daughter, say in "Johannes-Wassersprung and Caspar-Wassersprung" (a tale that was ultimately eliminated from the collection), the Grimms were quick to add details pointing the finger of blame away from the father-king.

When a tale was available in several versions, the Grimms invariably preferred one that camouflaged incestuous desires and Oedipal entanglements. The textual history of the tale known as "The Girl without Hands" illustrates the Grimms' touchy anxiety when it came to stories about fathers with designs on their daughters. That story first came to the Grimms' attention in the following form: A miller falls on hard times and strikes a bargain with the devil, promising him whatever is standing behind his mill in exchange for untold wealth. To his dismay, he returns home to learn that his daughter happened to be behind the mill at the moment the pact was sealed. She must surrender herself to the devil in three years. But the miller's pious daughter succeeds in warding off the devil, if at the price of bodily mutilation: the devil forces the father, who has not kept his end of the bargain, to chop off his daughter's hands. For no apparent reason, the girl packs her severed hands on her back and decides to seek her fortune in the world, despite her father's protestations and his promises to secure her all possible creature comforts at home. The remainder of the story recounts her further trials and tribulations after she marries a king. This is the tale as it appeared in the first edition of the Grimms' collection.

The brothers subsequently came upon a number of versions of that story, one of which they declared far superior to all the others. So impressed were they by its integrity that they could not resist substituting it for the version printed in the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. Still, the opening paragraph of the new, "superior" version did not quite suit their taste, even though it provided a clear, logical motive for the daughter's departure from home. Instead of leaving home of her own accord and for no particular reason, the girl flees a father who first demands her hand in marriage, and then has her hands and breasts chopped off for refusing him.

There is no mention of devils in this version; the girl's father is the sole satanic figure. The Grimms found it easy, however, to reintroduce the devil by mutilating the folkloric text whose authenticity they so admired. The original introduction detailing the father's offenses was deleted from the tale and replaced by the less sensational account of a pact with the devil.⁶

Even without reading Freud on the devil as a substitute for the father, it is easy to see how the devil became mixed up in this tale. Just as God, Saint Peter, and Christ came to stand in for various benefactors in folktales, so Satan in his various guises was available for the role of villain and could incarnate forbidden desire. "The Poor Man and the Rich Man," "The Devil and His Grandmother," and "The Carnation" are among the many other texts in the *Nursery and Household Tales* that mobilize divinities and devils as agents of good and evil. The Grimms seemed, in general, to have favored tales with a Christian cast of characters over their "pagan" counterparts, although there was no compelling folkloristic reason for them to do so. For "The Girl without Hands," they chose to graft the introduction from what they considered an inferior version of the tale (but one that had the advantage of demonizing Satan instead of a father) onto a "superior (and complete)" variant. Clearly the Grimms were not particularly enamored with the idea of including plots concerned with incestuous desire in a collection of tales with the title *Nursery and Household Tales*. Incest was just not one of those perfectly natural matters extolled in their preface to the tales.

Sex and violence: these are the major thematic concerns of tales in the Grimms' collection, at least in their unedited form. But more important, sex and violence in that body of stories frequently take the perverse form of incest and child abuse, for the nuclear family furnishes the fairy tale's main cast of characters just as the family constitutes its most common subject. When it came to passages colored by sexual details or to plots based on Oedipal conflicts, Wilhelm Grimm exhibited extraordinary editorial zeal. Over the years, he systematically purged the collection of references to sexuality and masked depictions of incestuous desire. But lurid portrayals of child abuse, starvation, and exposure, like fastidious descriptions of

cruel punishments, on the whole escaped censorship. The facts of life seemed to have been more disturbing to the Grimms than the harsh realities of everyday life.

How is one to explain these odd editorial practices? The Grimms' enterprise, we must recall, began as a scholarly venture and a patriotic project. As early as 1811, the brothers proclaimed that their efforts as collectors were guided by scholarly principles, and they therefore implied that they were writing largely for academic colleagues. There was an idealistic effort to capture German folk traditions in print before they died out and to make a modest contribution to the history of German poetry. As Jacob Grimm pointed out during his search for a publisher, the main purpose of the proposed volume was not so much to earn royalties as to salvage what was left of the priceless national resources still in the hands of the German folk. The Grimms therefore were willing to forgo royalties for the benefit of appearing in print. Still, the brothers expressed the hope that the volume in the offing would find friends everywhere—and that it would entertain them as well.⁷

Weighed down by a ponderous introduction and by extensive annotations, the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* had the look of a scholarly tome, rather than of a book for a wide audience. Sales, however, were surprisingly brisk, perhaps in part because of the book's title. Several of the Grimms' contemporaries had already registered respectable commercial successes with collections of stories for children, and the appearance of the *Nursery and Household Tales* coincided to some extent with a developing market for collections of fairy tales. By 1815 nearly all 900 copies of the first volume had been sold, and Wilhelm Grimm began talking about a second edition in light of the "heavy demand" for the collection. The Grimms had every reason to be pleased, particularly when one calculates that thirty years later (when literacy was more widespread and the demand for children's literature greater) a book such as the popular *Struwwelpeter* had a first printing of only 1,500. With their reputation for "revering trivia" and their endless struggles to get things published, they must also have been growing hungry for a measure of commercial success or at least for some indication of

strong interest and support for their literary efforts. Before preparations were even set in motion for publication of the second edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Wilhelm Grimm had already calculated exactly what the appropriate royalties would be for the first and second editions.⁸

The projected royalties for the collection were by no means inconsequential. These were lean years for the Grimms, and their letters to each other are sprinkled with references to financial pressures and to indignities visited on them owing to their impecunious circumstances. From Vienna, Jacob grumbled that he was short of cash and that his clothes were shabby and his shoes worn out. In 1815, Wilhelm Grimm complained that there was not a chair in the house that could be used without imperiling the physical welfare of its occupant. Books were often borrowed and copied out by hand because they were too dear an item in a household where the number of daily meals was limited to two. Thus the 500 talers that Savigny and Wilhelm Grimm had established as appropriate royalties for the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* certainly must have been a welcome prospect. And the 400 talers that Wilhelm Grimm expected to receive for the second edition would have been a substantial addition to the household budget, particularly if we bear in mind that in 1816 Jacob Grimm drew an annual salary of 600 talers as librarian in Kassel, while Wilhelm received an annual salary of 300 talers. It is thus not surprising that the royalties for the *Nursery and Household Tales* would go a long way toward paying their many debts.⁹

That even Jacob, the less worldly of the fraternal team, was keen on strong sales is revealed by a letter of 1815 to his brother. It did not take long for him to begin thinking of the tales as a source of income as well as part of a noble scholarly and patriotic mission. "We will have to confer extensively about the new edition of the first part of the children's tales," he wrote to Wilhelm. "I do not think we can print it as it was; there is much to be improved and added—something that will also prove favorable for sales, since many who own the first edition will also purchase the second edition."¹⁰

Unfortunately for the Grimms, reasonably robust sales did not

translate into generous royalty payments. Delighted to have found a way to get their collection in print, they made only the most casual contractual arrangements with Georg Andreas Reimer, their publisher in Berlin. Neither of the brothers had the experience, confidence, or foresight to ask Reimer to spell out specific terms. Wilhelm simply assented to Reimer's proposal that royalties would be paid after a certain (unspecified) number of copies were sold. Reimer's assurances that he would never lose sight of the Grimms' interests as authors and of his own obligations as editor were enough to satisfy the brothers. They felt it unnecessary to draft a written contract. When it began to dawn on them that Reimer constantly had to be prodded for information, action, and payment, they tried to pin him down on a precise financial agreement. But in 1817, nearly five years after the first volume of the *Nursery and Household Tales* had appeared, Reimer was evidently less prepared than ever to clarify the terms of publication. Although he visited Kassel at the end of that year, he found himself too busy to drop in on the Grimms to settle accounts.

With time the Grimms began to lose patience with Reimer. Again and again it fell on them to put a burr under his saddle about the *Nursery and Household Tales*. Royalty payments, when they came, were nearly always late. Worse yet, Reimer did not appear ready to make good on his promise to publish a second edition, even though the first edition was not to be had in most bookstores. Convinced that further delays in bringing out a second edition would work to the advantage of inferior competitors (in 1808 a volume entitled *Kindermährchen* had been published by an A. L. Grimm), Wilhelm Grimm threatened to take the *Nursery and Household Tales* to a rival firm unless Reimer proved willing to meet his terms for a second edition. At that point, Reimer showed his claws. He reminded Wilhelm that no written contract existed between them and that he was therefore under no obligation to pay anything more than half the promised royalties. Furthermore, sales of the *Nursery and Household Tales* were "no longer particularly strong," and he was left holding 350 worthless copies of the second volume. Nonetheless, he declared his readiness to move ahead with the second edition, and this

time he set acceptable, though again not fully explicit, terms for royalties. Once again the Grimms made the mistake of working on the basis of a gentleman's agreement.

It was not until 1833 that the Grimms sat down, did some simple arithmetic, and began to realize the extent to which Reimer was taking advantage of their good will. The 50 louis d'ors that the brothers had received as royalties for the second edition were trivial compared with the 2,500 talers that Jacob Grimm calculated as Reimer's profit on the three volumes. The exchange between Reimer and the Grimms became more and more unpleasant in the following months, with much sarcasm let loose on each side. Reimer started by charging that the Grimms knew nothing about the realities of the book trade and ended by reminding them of the many "sacrifices" he had made for their brother Ferdinand, who had been working for Reimer since 1815 at the not exactly princely salary of 20 talers per month. Under the circumstances, the Grimms remained remarkably even-tempered in their responses. They reassured Reimer of their warm feelings for him but became ever more firm about demanding their due. In the end, the two parties failed to find a common ground—Wilhelm threw up his hands in despair and declared that there was no point in continuing to correspond with a man who was "impossible." The Grimms published the third edition of their fairy tales with Diederich in Göttingen, and Ferdinand Grimm lost his post after twenty years of service.¹¹

The Grimms may never have made or even hoped to make a financial killing on the *Nursery and Household Tales*, but the profit motive was certainly not wholly absent from their calculations and to some extent must have guided their revisions of the first edition. Still, the potential financial benefits to be reaped from strong sales of the collection counted merely as a secondary gain. What really mattered, particularly in the years immediately following publication of the first edition, were the views of the larger literary world. Both brothers monitored reviews with special interest, and here one disappointment followed another. Jacob, on the road much of the time from 1813 to 1815 in diplomatic service, repeatedly asked his brother for news about the collection's reception. But none of the

people who counted seemed to take much interest in reviewing the book, and those who actually did review it rarely had anything good to say. While the Grimms waited in vain for reviews from such luminaries as Goethe, minor talents like Johann Gustav Büsching—whose own collection of tales had been assailed by Jacob Grimm—and Friedrich Rühls—whose book on the *Edda* had been attacked by Wilhelm Grimm—seized the chance to get even. Büsching's anonymous review of 1813 in the *Wiener Literatur-Zeitung* compared the first volume of the *Nursery and Household Tales* unfavorably with another collection of tales, which happened to be Büsching's own *Folktales, Fairy Tales, and Legends (Volks-Sagen, Märchen und Legenden)*. "Once again," Büsching railed, "the Grimms see in themselves the sole source of salvation." Instead of acknowledging the efforts of their fellow toilers in the field of folkloric studies, wrote Büsching, the Grimms had taken the opportunity in their preface to the *Nursery and Household Tales* to belittle Musäus, Naubert, Otmar, and Büsching himself. Furthermore, the Grimms had remained blind to the fact that their collection was heavily tainted by Italian and French sources and therefore not really German. Wilhelm Grimm was so annoyed by this "silly" essay and by the lack of favorable reviews that, in desperation, he asked Achim von Arnim to publish a review, a move that was singularly inappropriate since the book was dedicated to Arnim's wife and son. Jacob Grimm described Büsching as the most miserable reviewer he had ever encountered.

Friedrich Rühls was somewhat more restrained than Büsching in his 1815 review of both volumes of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. That Rühls was no friend of the Grimms and of their collection was obvious from an 1812 essay in *Die Museen*, where he stated that the *Nursery and Household Tales* would deserve praise if the few good things that were in it had not been completely overshadowed by large quantities of "the most pathetic and tasteless material imaginable." But his review of 1815 recommended the collection with only a few minor reservations. This was not a book to put into the hands of children, Rühls emphasized. The stories in it may be short and simple, but some are likely to disturb children and lead to "uncomfortable feelings." Parents must therefore exercise good judg-

ment in selecting appropriate stories for their children. The Grimms had no reason to be particularly distressed by this review, but by then they were also hoping for some panegyrics to redress the balance.¹²

The brothers' bitter feelings about the bad press given to their fairy tales is evident as late as 1820 in a letter from Jacob Grimm to Karl Lachmann: "Reviewers, who have a habit of praising idiotic things, ought to stop making such foolish statements about our collection of legends and fairy tales. Instead of stifling what there is of the public's interest in them, they ought to keep completely quiet about them." That the book was ignored by literary worthies continued to irritate Jacob long after its publication. "Those who do not object to our purpose and substance are so refined that they hold their tongues," he complained.¹³

For many observers, the *Nursery and Household Tales* fell wide of the mark and missed its potential market because the brothers had let their scholarly ambitions undermine the production of a book for children. The Grimms' seemingly slavish fidelity to oral folk traditions—in particular to the crude language of the folk—came under especially heavy fire. August Wilhelm Schlegel and Clemens Brentano felt that a bit of artifice would have gone a long way toward improving the art of the folk and toward making the tales more appealing. "If you want to display children's clothing, you can do that quite well without bringing out an outfit that has buttons torn off it, dirt smeared on it, and the shirt hanging out of the pants," Brentano wrote to Arnim. Arnim candidly told the Grimms that they would be wise to add, in the form of a subtitle, a consumer warning to the collection. Future editions ought to state that the book was "for parents, who can select stories for retelling." Other readers were less tactful. Heinrich Voß described the collection (with the exception of a few tales) as "real junk."¹⁴

More serious were the remarks of Albert Ludwig Grimm, no relation to the brothers but also a collector of fairy tales. When that Grimm used the preface to his *Lima's Book of Fairy Tales* (1816) to get back at the Grimms for having criticized him in their preface, Wilhelm took the trouble of placing a handwritten copy of the charges

in his personal copy of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. Albert Ludwig Grimm found the style and tone of the Grimms' collection deplorable. Instead of searching high and low for an ideal folk narrator, the Grimms, he charged, had simply settled for the first nursemaid who happened to turn up. For him, nearly all the tales in the collection were flawed by the unrefined tenor of the narrative voice. Furthermore, in trying to serve two masters (scholars and children), the Grimms had failed to satisfy either. "It's impossible to think of that collection as a book that can be put in the hands of children," he grumbled. *Lima's Book of Fairy Tales*, by contrast, was conceived from the start as a book for children, and no one would find anything in it the least bit offensive.¹⁵

Albert Ludwig Grimm had indeed worked hard to avoid the "sketchy" style and the "distorted" plot lines of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. For "The Fairy Tale of Brunnenhold and Brunnenstark" (his version of "Thousandfurs"), he took fifteen pages to tell what the Grimms had summarized in one paragraph. In the Grimms' "Thousandfurs," the widowed father of the heroine (as noted earlier) tries to persuade his daughter to marry him. A. L. Grimm gave the episode a special twist that retained the motivation for the heroine's flight, but exonerated the father-monarch from blame, thus making the story in his eyes suitable reading matter for children. The father of his Armina never proposes marriage to his daughter; it is his court councilors who do everything in their power to arrange the marriage. The morally unimpeachable king refuses and uses the opportunity to pontificate on the rights of monarchs: "He explained to them that such a thing would be a sin in the eyes of man and God, for it had never before happened that a father wanted to take his daughter for a wife, and even as a king he could not allow himself what no man had ever done."¹⁶

Wilhelm Grimm lost little time in following the advice of his competitor, from whom he and his brother had so explicitly dissociated themselves in the preface to the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. In successive editions of the collection, he fleshed out the texts to the point where they were often double their original length, and he so polished the prose that no one could complain

of its rough-hewn qualities. He also worked hard to clean up the content of the stories. Both A. L. Grimm and Friedrich Rühls singled out "Rapunzel" as a tale particularly inappropriate to include in a collection of tales that children could get their hands on. "What proper mother or nanny could tell the fairy tale about Rapunzel to an innocent daughter without blushing?" Rühls gasped. Wilhelm Grimm saw to it that the story was rewritten along lines that would meet with both critics' approval. Jacob Grimm may have responded to criticism by asserting that the collection had never been intended for young audiences, but his brother was prepared to delete or revise tales deemed unsuitable for children. He was encouraged in such efforts by his brother Ferdinand, who was all for eliminating anything that might offend the sensibilities (*Féingefühl*) of the reading public.¹⁷

Wilhelm Grimm proved to be as adept a bowdlerizer as Albert Ludwig Grimm. Consider the following passage from the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* (Rapunzel's daily romps up in the tower with the prince, we learn, have weighty consequences).

At first Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young king so much that she agreed to let him visit every day and to pull him up. The two lived joyfully for a time, and the fairy did not catch on at all until Rapunzel told her one day: "Tell me, Godmother, why my clothes are so tight and why they don't fit me any longer." "Wicked child!" cried the fairy.¹⁸

In the second edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Wilhelm Grimm made the passage less "lewd"—and in the bargain a good deal less colorful. Here, Rapunzel's "wickedness" has a very different cause.

At first Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young king so much that she agreed to let him visit every day and to pull him up. The two lived joyfully for a time and loved each other dearly, like man and wife. The enchantress did not catch on at all until Rapunzel told her one day: "Tell me, Godmother, why is it that you are much harder to pull up than the young prince?" "Wicked child," cried the enchantress.

It is easy to leap to the conclusion that Teutonic prudishness or the Grimms' delicate sense of propriety motivated the kinds of changes

made in "Rapunzel." That may well be the case. But it is far more logical to assume that Wilhelm Grimm took to heart the criticisms leveled against his volume and, eager to find a wider audience, set to work making the appropriate changes. His nervous sensitivity about moral objections to the tales in the collection reflects a growing desire to write for children rather than to collect for scholars.

In the years that intervened between the first two editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Wilhelm Grimm charted a new course for the collection. His son was later to claim that children had taken possession of a book that was not theirs to begin with, but Wilhelm clearly helped that process along. He had evidently already done some editing behind Jacob's back but apparently not enough to satisfy his critics. The preface to the second edition emphasized the value of the tales for children, noting—almost as an afterthought—that adults could also enjoy them and even learn something from them. The brothers no longer insisted on literal fidelity to oral traditions but openly admitted that they had taken pains to delete "every phrase unsuitable for children." Furthermore, they expressed the hope that their collection could serve as a "manual of manners" (*Erziehungsbuch*). Although it is true that Wilhelm Grimm was responsible for the lion's share of the revisions in successive editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Jacob Grimm, who had once declared that the collection was not targeted for children, could not have offered vigorous opposition. After his brother's death, he made the curiously contradictory claim that he had invested as much time in the first editions of the collection as Wilhelm, yet he had also resisted the temptation to rewrite and embellish the source material. Had he done both, the *Nursery and Household Tales* would no doubt have developed in a very different direction.¹⁹

Sales of the second edition were not so brisk that the Grimms could afford to rest on their oars. It took another eighteen years for a third edition to appear in print. The collection did not meet with full-scale popular success until after 1825, the year that marked the publication of an abridged edition (the so-called *Kleine Ausgabe*). For this single, low-priced volume modeled on Edgar Taylor's financially successful British translation of selected tales from the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Wilhelm Grimm put together fifty of the best-

known stories—more or less what became the classic canon of texts. The first printing of 1,500 copies sold well, and the brothers witnessed nine additional printings of this edition in their lifetimes. To be sure, the market for children's literature was gradually opening in those years—the frontispieces to collections of fairy tales begin, at about this time, to show nursemaids and grandmothers reading to children from books instead of narrating freely. But Wilhelm Grimm also had the right instincts about how to strengthen sales. For the abridged edition, he even went beyond Achim von Arnim's advice on how to turn the *Nursery and Household Tales* into a book for children. The preface and the notes were eliminated; illustrations were added (by the Grimms' brother Ludwig Emil); and the texts were based on the revised version of 1819. As Wilhelm wrote his publisher, anything that smacked of scholarship had no place in the volume.²⁰

Eliminating references to unwanted pregnancies, introducing marriage before displaying the marriage bed, and explicitly condemning deviant behavior must have gone a long way toward silencing critics and appeasing parental objections to the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. It clearly made good commercial sense to move along those lines. But why intensify violence or take pains to portray the punishment of evildoers if one is aiming to reach an audience of children? For one thing, the Grimms were careful to eliminate violence whenever it appeared in too realistic a setting. "The Starving Children," for example, is less a fairy tale than a quasi-journalistic account; therefore it never appeared between the covers of the second edition. When it came to fairy tales, however, the Grimms adopted a different strategy. There they had no reservations about including detailed descriptions of children abused and of abusers punished; nor did they rush to excise passages that showed heads rolling or fingers flying through the air.

Professional raconteurs report that children are rarely squeamish when they hear about decapitation or other forms of mutilation. Grisly episodes often strike them as amusing rather than horrifying. Vilma Mönckeberg, a notable teller of fairy tales, recalls that her young audiences found episodes in "The Juniper Tree" to be "hi-

larious." The cannibalistic tableau in that tale did not elicit disgust and outrage as she had feared. Another storyteller reports that children "howled with delight" when hearing about the agony of the Jew in the brambles in the tale of that title.²¹ And this for reasons that probably had little to do with anti-Semitism. Obviously this kind of laughter is more a release for pent-up anxieties than an expression of delight, but it also indicates that the depiction of physical violence in fairy tales has a special appeal for children, and not only in connection with the punishment of villains. When it comes to descriptions of a hero's trials and tribulations, however, we are dealing with a somewhat different matter. There, children, who invariably count themselves among the downtrodden and underprivileged, identify and empathize with the protagonist. The more Hansel, Gretel, Cinderella, and Snow White are victimized by the powers of evil, the more sympathy they elicit and the more captivating they are for children. Wilhelm Grimm's editing procedures here again succeeded in making the *Nursery and Household Tales* more rather than less attractive to young audiences.

All this is not to say that the Grimms were rank opportunists. Rather they were part of a tendency that had become a trend by the early nineteenth century. The stories collected by the two young students of folklore and philology (Jacob was twenty-seven and Wilhelm twenty-six when the first volume of the *Nursery and Household Tales* was published) could still be considered a source of entertainment for all age groups. They appeared in print just when folktales were moving out of barns and spinning rooms and into the nursery. The process by which adult entertainment was translated into children's literature was a slow one with a long transitional period when the line between the two was by no means clear.

In many ways, the Grimms' collection (at least in its original form) straddled the line between adult entertainment and children's literature. By giving their collection the title *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the Grimms seemed from the start to imply that their tales were intended primarily for children and that their province was henceforth the domestic sphere. But as C. S. Lewis has said of fairy tales, "Many children don't like them and many adults do." No age group

has ever had an uncontested monopoly on fairy tales. The Grimms' own gloss of 1819 on the title for their collection reveals that their first edition might have been produced for scholars but that the actual audience for those stories comprised both adults and children: "Children's tales [*Kindermärchen*] are told so that the thoughts and feelings of the heart can awaken and develop in their pure, mild light; but because their simple poetry can delight everyone and impart to them their truth and because they stay in the home and are passed on from one generation to the next, they are also called household tales [*Hausmärchen*]." Jacob Grimm himself stressed that the distinction made in the title of the collection between children's tales and household tales was more apparent than real. In his view, children and adults had equal claims on the folkloristic legacy of their ancestors. Thus a recent translation of the brothers' *Kindermärchen* as *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old* probably best captures the full spirit of the original, German title.²²

Collections of fairy tales predating the Grimms' volume had already been designed to provide diversion for both young and old. A single tale could offer a sobering lesson for children even as it served as a source of light-hearted entertainment for adults. The double lesson appended to Perrault's "Bluebeard" reveals in telling fashion that there are two implied audiences for this grisly tale. The first moral (aimed at children—and most likely at women too) spells out the perils of curiosity: "In spite of its great charms, curiosity / Often brings with it serious regrets. . . / For once satisfied, curiosity / offers nothing, / And ever does it cost more dearly."²³ This is the lesson to be derived from the story of Bluebeard's last wife, a lesson that does not quite square with the tale's events, for the "curious" wife lives happily ever after with a "very worthy man" and forgets all about the evil days she passed with her brutish husband. A second moral emphasizes that "Bluebeard" is not to be taken all too seriously.

If you take a sensible point of view
And study this grim story,
You will recognize that this tale
Is one of days long past.

No longer are husbands so terrifying,
Demanding the impossible,
Being both dissatisfied and jealous;
In the presence of wives they're now gracious enough,
And no matter what color their beards may be
One does not have to guess who is master!²⁴

As J.R.R. Tolkien perceived it, fairy tales were retired to the nursery when they became unfashionable, just as "shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room."²⁵ Exactly when the function of folktales shifted from amusement for adults to the education and diversion of young children is not clear. From Noël du Fail's account of the *veillée*, where men and women listened to tales while discharging household chores, we know that folktales were still very much adult fare in sixteenth-century France. In certain parts of Germany, the art of composing and narrating folktales persisted as a widespread custom among adults up to the time of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. But as industrialization gradually curtailed the need for the kinds of collective household chores and harvesting activities that had created a forum for oral narration, folktales as a form of public entertainment for adults died out. There may still exist many pockets of culture—both rural and urban—in which oral performance of tales and songs thrives, but on the whole it is safe to say that the nineteenth century witnessed a steady decline in the once intense preoccupation of adults with folktales.²⁶

Since traditionally folktales were related at adult gatherings after the children had been put to bed for the night, peasant raconteurs could take certain liberties with their diction and give free play to their penchant for sexual innuendo or off-color allusions. In eighteenth-century French versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," the heroine unwittingly eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her grandmother, is called a slut by her grandmother's cat, and performs a slow striptease for the wolf. An Italian version has the wolf kill the mother, make a latch cord of her tendons, a meat pie of her flesh, and wine from her blood. The heroine pulls the latch, eats the meat pie, and drinks the blood.²⁷ Even this folktale, which in its latter-day version appears to be the most explicitly didactic of all, evi-

dently started out as a bawdy tale for adults hardly suitable for children. As much as some readers may be shocked by the cruelty and violence of the Grimms' tales, they would find many of the stories tame by comparison with their corresponding peasant versions.

Walt Disney was by no means the first to disguise or eliminate sex, violence, and family conflict from the surface of the tales.²⁸ Long before Disney transformed Snow White's stepmother into an evil queen, the Grimms had seen to it that Snow White's treacherous biological mother was replaced by a stepmother. Although the brothers insisted that they may have tinkered with the letter but had never tampered with the spirit of the tales, just as they repeatedly asserted that the essential contours of each folk tale plot remained intact, comparisons of successive editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales* suggest that the Grimms were either disingenuous, dishonest, or engaging in self-deception when they made such declarations.²⁹ Publicly and privately they observed that revisions had been made only in the interest of producing complete and authentic tales. In fact, Wilhelm Grimm rewrote the tales so extensively and went so far in the direction of eliminating off-color episodes that he can be credited with sanitizing folktales and thereby paving the way for the process that made them acceptable children's literature in all cultures.

As much and as often as the Grimms sought to advertise their tales as products of the "folk," recent scholarship has shown that they actually relied on sources at least at one remove from peasant culture. Since the Grimms began the process of compiling tales just when the stories were ceasing to play a vital role in the day-to-day activities of adult life, they received from their informants versions of the tales that already had been dramatically revised. The basic content may not have deviated sharply from what was told at harvesting time or in the spinning room, but off-color details along with crude language had no doubt been toned down or eliminated. The Grimms' informants were rarely unlettered peasants who spoke the inimitable language of the "folk," but literate men and women from various social classes.³⁰ They may have ranged greatly in age, but their educational and class backgrounds were not so different as to

make any one of the principal contributors stand out from the crowd. Also, the Grimms were by no means opposed to resorting to literary sources for their "folkloric" texts. For their first volume in particular they raided one printed collection after another for tales to include in their own. Not until preparations were under way for the second volume did they begin to rely extensively on oral narratives.

Even when the Grimms had the opportunity to witness an "authentic" folkloric performance, they still were not able to capture that performance in all its "purity," as they had claimed. Like any auditors of folkloric performances, they played a role in shaping the plots of the tales they heard. Every storyteller has a unique repertoire of tales, one developed in collaboration with an audience. Much as the tellers of the tales may appear to exercise unilateral control over their material, their powers of invention are to some extent held in check by their audiences. The successful retelling of a tale requires the narrator to take the measure of his listeners, anticipate their wishes, and veer away from what might offend their ears. Even in the heat of narration, the teller may allow his story to take new twists and turns as he trains his powers of observation on the audience, watches their reactions, and becomes attuned to their likes and dislikes. Thus the teller of tales works in concert with his audience to create popular tales. Or, to put matters differently, the folkloric community operates as a kind of censor, endlessly revising the content of a tale until it meets with full approval. Thus it is not surprising to find radically different versions of the same tale as one moves from one cultural context to another. Each community or culture participates in its own unique oral narrative traditions, imbibing them with their particular mores and values.³¹

For the Grimms, the process of recasting folktales unfolded in three stages. First, as audience or addressees, they influenced the telling of a tale simply by their physical presence. Their social standing, age, sexual identity, and body language worked in concert on their informants. Dorothea Viehmann, Jeanette Hassenpflug, and Dorothea Wild no doubt adopted a different manner and subtly changed the matter of their tales when reciting them for two young

bachelors. Much as the brothers claimed that Dorothea Viehmann had an infallible memory for detail and corrected herself if for a moment she deviated from the standard phrasing for a story, it is hard to believe that her narrative tone and style remained exactly the same whether she was rehearsing her repertory for the Grimms or telling a tale to her grandchildren. No matter how precisely the Grimms recorded the oral renditions of those tales, they were still the receivers of texts shaped by their presence. They were, furthermore, never able to capture anything other than the verbal dimension of a performance. Intonation, gesture, facial expression, along with all the other vital components of a live performance, escaped their recording efforts.³²

In a second, even more fundamental fashion, the Grimms altered the texture of the tales narrated to them. Like the early collectors of folktales, particularly those working before the age of the portable tape recorder, they could not resist the temptation to improve on what they heard, to render readable what might be pleasing to the ear alone. Take, for example, the Grimms' recasting of "Fledgling." A passage from the original, manuscript version reveals the extent to which the two brothers initially attempted to retain the flavor and tone of the oral account—at the expense of readability.

Early the next morning the forester goes hunting at two o'clock, once he is gone Lehnchen says to Karl if you don't leave me all alone I won't leave you, and Karl says never, then Lehnchen says I just want to tell you that our cook carried a lot of water into the house yesterday so I asked her why she was bringing so much water into the house and she told me if I wouldn't tell anyone else, then she would tell me and so I told her I wouldn't tell a soul, and she told me after my father had gone hunting early the next morning she planned to boil a cauldron of hot water and to throw you into it and cook you.³³

This passage makes it eminently clear that pedantic fidelity to a folkloric source is not necessarily a virtue. "Nursery tales told in the nurse's tone should spread through oral transmission," the German writer Wieland once warned, "but they should not be put into print." The oral version of a tale can easily fall flat when transferred to paper, just as the written version can fail to electrify an audience.

It is therefore not hard to understand what moved the Grimms to translate the verbal utterances of their informants into what purists have described as a stilted and artificial literary language.³⁴

Still, the Grimms outdid themselves on occasion. While they may not have gone quite as far as Madame de Villeneuve, who so puffed up the story "Beauty and the Beast" that her version took up more than three hundred pages, they occasionally succumbed to the temptation to embellish a tale by expanding it. Here are a few lines from their original draft of "Briar Rose":

[Briar Rose] pricked her finger with the spindle and immediately fell into a deep sleep. The king and his retinue had just returned and they too, along with the flies on the wall and everything else in the castle, fell asleep. All around the castle grew a hedge of thorns, concealing everything from sight.³⁵

As Max Lüthi and others have enjoyed pointing out, that passage grew and expanded almost as quickly as the hedge surrounding the castle.³⁶ By the time the final edition came out, it looked like this:

[Briar Rose] took hold of the spindle and tried to spin. But no sooner had she touched the spindle than the magic spell took effect, and she pricked her finger with it.

The very moment that she felt the prick she sank down into the bed that was right there and fell into a deep sleep. And that sleep spread throughout the entire palace. The king and the queen, who had just come home and entered the great hall, 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 that had been flaming on the hearth stopped and went to sleep, 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 him go and fell asleep. And the wind died down, and not a single little leaf stirred on the trees by the castle.

All around the castle a briar hedge began to grow. Each year it grew higher, and finally it surrounded the entire castle and grew so thickly beyond it that not a trace of the castle was to be seen, not even the flag on the roof.

The Grimms often went beyond mere stylistic expansion and embellishment. The opening passages of "Mother Holle" in the first

and seventh editions, for example, offer an interesting study in contrasts. The 1812 version is direct and vivid in its simplicity.

A widow had two daughters, one of whom was beautiful and hard-working, while the other was ugly and lazy. She preferred the ugly and lazy one, and so the other one had to do all the work and was the Cinderella of the household. Once the girl went off to fetch water and when she bent over to pull the bucket out of the well, she bent over too far and fell in.³⁷

The 1857 version not only adds exegesis to exposition, but also makes a point of dilating on the physical hardships and mental torment that the heroine must endure.

A widow had two daughters, one of whom was beautiful and hard-working, while the other was ugly and lazy. She preferred the ugly and lazy one, who was her own daughter, and so the other one had to do all the work and be the Cinderella of the household. The poor girl had to sit every day by a well on the main road and spin until her fingers began to bleed. Once it happened that the spindle was covered with blood and she bent over the well to wash it off. But the spindle dropped out of her hands and fell down into the well. She started crying, ran to her stepmother, and told her about her bad luck. The stepmother scolded her sharply and was so unsympathetic that she said: "If you let the spindle fall into the well, you'll just have to bring it back up again." The girl went back to the well and didn't know what she should do. Scared to death, she jumped into the well to get her spindle back.

Even if the Grimms are forgiven the sin of tampering with the language of the tales, there still remain countless other charges that can be leveled against the folkloristic authenticity of their collection. Critics have accused Wilhelm Grimm not only of creating a homogenous, stylized language for the tales, but also of introducing messages, motivations, judgments, morals, and other often pedantic touches. A prisoner of his passion for order, logic, and instrumentality, Wilhelm Grimm unfailingly smoothed the rough edges of the tales he heard and read, even as he imbued them with the values and pedagogical demands of his time. Just what these values were is not always easy to determine, but the following song chanted by

schoolchildren in Ravensburg in the Grimms' day and age has been considered representative.

Hard work and obedience:
Those are the qualities to which
All good citizens must aspire.
.....
Modesty and gentility,
Skill, hard work, and love of labor
Crown a girl and her achievements,
Building the foundations of a woman's dignity.³⁸
*Fleiß und Gehorsam sind die Pflichten,
Welche redlich zu entrichten
Gute Bürger sich bestreben.*
.....
*Sittsamkeit und sanfte Triebe,
Kenntnis, Fleiß und Arbeitsliebe
Sind der Mädchen schönste Zierde,
Gründen fest des Weibes Würde.*

This hymn to dutiful diligence does not, however, appear to harmonize perfectly with the ethical tone of fairy-tale worlds, where luck and chance often count for more than hard work and obedience. But this dissonance can easily be muted, in some cases eliminated altogether. Take the example of the editorial changes made in "Snow White." When Snow White meets the dwarves for the first time in the Grimms' earliest version of the tale, the dwarves ask nothing more of her than that she cook their meals in exchange for shelter. But by the first printed edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, the dwarves have already escalated their demands and propose different terms for the contract, terms that no doubt reflect the Grimms' notions on contractual relations between men and women: "If you will keep house for us, do the cooking, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and clean, you can stay with us and you won't want for anything."³⁹ We have already seen how "Mother Holle" was expanded in order to dwell on the details of the long-suffering heroine's painful, but ultimately rewarding, discharging of household duties. Although fairy-tale heroines the

world over are often required to labor for their salvation while their male counterparts rely on magic or helpers to carry out chores, in the *Nursery and Household Tales* they work harder than in most other collections of tales. The Grimms seized nearly every available opportunity to emphasize the virtue of hard work and made a point of correlating diligence with beauty and desirability wherever possible.

Where a tale's heroine was not required to labor for her salvation, she was given attributes that conformed to those celebrated in the song of the Ravensburg schoolchildren. Briar Rose becomes both beautiful and dutiful (*sittsam*) in the second edition of the tales; the heroine of "Twelve Brothers" acquires a "tender heart" by the seventh edition; and the "girl without hands" becomes progressively more God-fearing from one edition to the next. In a tale such as "King Thrushbeard," the heroine's arrogant behavior comes under increasingly heavy fire with each new edition, just as the heroine becomes ever more contrite in the end. The changes made in "The White Snake" are also characteristic of Wilhelm's editorial practices. He could rarely resist the temptation to attach attributes to each and every figure in a story. In the first version of that tale there is a king plain and simple, a servant, and a princess. By the time the third version of the *Nursery and Household Tales* appeared, the monarch had become "renowned throughout the land for his wisdom," the servant had become "compassionate," "merciful," and "good," and the princess had become "beautiful" but "arrogant" and had a "proud heart." Rather than allowing the various figures of the tale to reveal their traits through their actions (this is one of the hallmarks of a folktale), Wilhelm Grimm felt obliged to stamp the tale's actors with his own character judgments and thus shaped his readers' views of them. That we are forever coming across wise monarchs, compassionate heroes, toiling beauties, and proud princesses has something to do with folkloric plot patterns, but it also has a great deal to do with Wilhelm Grimm's preconceived notions about sex, class, and character.

The Grimms actively and deliberately altered the folkloric material they claimed to have tried so hard to preserve in its pristine state. At times, those changes seem oddly arbitrary, almost more accidental than intentional. Who can tell why the hero of "Hans My

Hedgehog" looks after pigs in the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* and finds himself tending both donkeys and swine in the second edition? At other times, the changes are cryptic and not easy to explain. A comparison of the opening passages of "Twelve Brothers" in the first and second editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales* raises some interesting questions about Wilhelm Grimm's intentions. The first edition shows us a king whose horror at the idea of having a daughter takes an extreme form.

There was once a king who had twelve children—all were boys. He did not want to have a daughter and told the queen: "If the thirteenth child that you bear is a girl, I'll have the twelve others killed. But if it's a boy, they can all stay alive and live together." The queen wanted to talk him out of it. But the king would hear nothing more of it: "If it is as I have said, then they must die. I would rather cut off all their heads than have a girl among them."⁴⁰

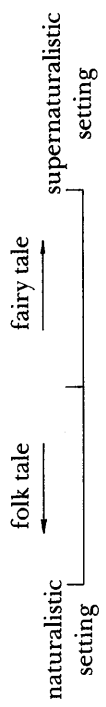
The second edition reverses this situation and gives us a king who is so set on the idea of a daughter that he is prepared to sacrifice his sons for her financial welfare.

There were once a king and queen who lived together in peace with their twelve children, who were all boys. One day the king said to his wife: "If the thirteenth child you are about to bear is a girl, the twelve boys must die, so that her wealth may be great and that she alone may inherit the kingdom." He had twelve coffins made and had them filled with wood shavings. In each of them there was a little pillow. He had them taken to a locked room, gave the queen a key to it, and told her not to tell anyone about the matter.

In this particular case, it would take some effort to understand exactly what motivated Wilhelm Grimm to make this radical change.

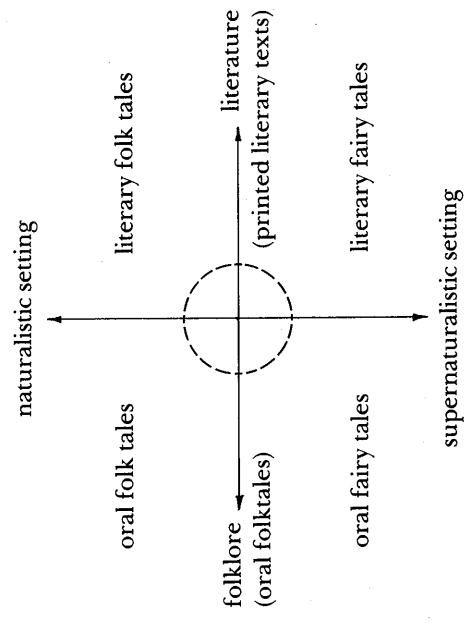
In most cases, however, it is easy to account for changes made from one edition to the next. In addition to wanting to produce a volume appropriate for children and attractive to parents, the Grimms wanted to give the public a document of German folk culture in its most admirable form. To make it appear all the more German, every fairy (*Fee*), prince (*Prinz*), and princess (*Prinzessin*) was transformed into a more Teutonic-sounding enchantress (*Zauberin*) or wise woman (*weise Frau*), king's son (*Königssohn*), and king's daughter (*Königstochter*). Proverbs were added to give the collection

that takes us from naturalistic settings to supernatural ones (in practice, often from the farm to the enchanted forest), folk tales occupy the left side, fairy tales the right.



Some of the stories in the *Nursery and Household Tales* are, to be sure, not easy to place on this spectrum. Fables and tall tales, for example, are by no means realistic, but they also have little in common with classic fairy tales. While most fables in the Grimms' collection fulfill the didactic purpose of that particular genre, the tall tales give us slapstick and comic exaggeration. The allegorical mode of the fable admits the possibility of the impossible, just as the absurd elements of the tall tale stretch the limits of plausibility. Still, since these tales lack the magical and marvelous elements found in fairy tales and tend to the naturalistic in their overt or covert concern with human behavior, they are in many ways more at home among the class of folk tales.

If we map out the contrasting pairs folklore / literature and folk tale / fairy tale in graphic terms, the following configuration emerges:



The circle formed by the broken line encompasses the types of texts found in the *Nursery and Household Tales*.

Identifying specific examples from the Grimms' collection of the four types of tales housed in the four quadrants is not difficult. "Snow White" stands as a classic example of an oral fairy tale—the Grimms give us a version of the plot that has enjoyed widespread circulation. "Snow White and Rose Red," on the other hand, gives us a literary fairy tale, one based on a story by Caroline Stahl and rewritten for the *Nursery and Household Tales*.⁴⁵ "The Peasant's Clever Daughter," with its village setting and down-to-earth characters, stands as a clear example of an oral folk tale—its narrative armature can be detected in stories told the world over. And finally, "Sharing Joys and Sorrows," borrowed from Jörg Wickram, appears to be a compact form of the literary folk tale.

The Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales* can be said to embrace both folk tales and fairy tales and to run the gamut from folklore to literature. Since the fairy tale, rather than the folk tale, constitutes the main concern of this study, I shall define that term with greater precision in chapter 3. For now, the rough division between folk tales and fairy tales will have to suffice as a terminological indicator.

From the time that the Grimms first began assembling folk tales and fairy tales until the final edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Wilhelm Grimm acted as a tireless and relentless editor, attempting again and again to improve on the original source material. Some scholars would argue that he made changes so fundamental to the spirit of the *Nursery and Household Tales* that the values and tastes embodied in individual tales represent nothing more than a reflection of his own personal ethos. In short, they tell us nothing at all about the German national character. And since they are not authentic creations of the folk, they also tell us little or nothing about the collective unconscious that ordinarily speaks through the voice of folkloric performances. Yet closer inspection of the changes introduced by the Grimms into the tales shows that the brothers did not distort beyond recognition the substance of the tales. And even if they did, we still are fortunate to have the original drafts of many of the tales along with variant forms from Germany

and the rest of Europe. The task of reconstructing a tale's basic form is by no means impossible.⁴⁶

The marked predictability in the Grimms' editing procedures also makes it possible to separate the essential and authentic from what is mere editorial embellishment or authorial affectation. Take the case of what is perhaps the best-known tale in the Grimms' collection: "Hansel and Gretel." The Grimms, one scholar has argued, turned what was originally a powerful tale of parental malice and family conflict into a relatively tame story utterly lacking the emotional intensity to touch upon or stir childhood anxieties. In successive editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, he claims, they exonerated the father from blame in abandoning his children, just as they wholly exculpated the biological mother by placing the stepmother in her role.⁴⁷ Thus a frightening story of child abuse and abandonment became a tale about a stepmother so wicked that no child would ever contemplate identifying her with his mother. A quick glance at the Grimms' manuscript version of "Hansel and Gretel" (the version that, in all likelihood, is most faithful to the authentic oral folk narrative) tells us that the father of the two children could hardly be accused of collaborating with his wife in a plot to desert his offspring. Only after a good deal of nagging does he finally cave in and agree to lead the two children into the forest.⁴⁸ The mother alone stands as villain—even in versions untouched by the Grimms. It is true that she becomes more explicitly bad-tempered in subsequent versions of the *Nursery and Household Tales* while her husband becomes more long suffering in his role as harassed husband. Still, there is no fundamental change of character in the two figures as they evolved in various versions recorded by the Grimms, only a deepening of their already established character traits.

Wilhelm Grimm's habit of intensifying maternal malice ultimately led him to make at least one significant substantive change in a number of tales. Again, it is easy to identify that change and inductive to study the motive for it. In "Hansel and Gretel," the biological mother of the children becomes, in the fourth edition of the collection, a stepmother. The mother of "Snow White" undergoes the same metamorphosis in the second edition of the tales, as does

the biological mother of the heroine in "Mother Holle." As successive editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales* rolled from the presses, Wilhelm Grimm must have become acutely aware of the collection's role as a repository of bedtime stories for children rather than as a source of entertainment for adults. What might have been perfectly acceptable as adult entertainment required considerable modification for children. Thus the heartless mother who leaves her children to starve so that she and her husband might live and thrive becomes a wicked stepmother, and the evil queen driven by sexual rivalry to do away with her daughter slips easily into the role of the jealous stepmother who plots the murder of her beautiful stepdaughter. In each case, Wilhelm Grimm recognized that most children (along with those who read to them) find the idea of wicked stepmothers easier to tolerate than that of cruel mothers.

Countless other examples of editing procedures can be noted, but the point should be obvious. The Grimms' censorship tended to operate in a uniform and consistent fashion that focused on precisely those facts of fairy-tale life that were the most difficult to tolerate. "Faced with monstrously cruel mothers and with fathers driven by incestuous desires, they sought their salvation in the editing of texts," one critic concludes.⁴⁹ Thanks to the existence of the original manuscripts and of the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, many of the Grimms' changes can be identified, and a survey of those changes can often be as telling as an encounter with the unvarnished truth of the original tales.⁵⁰ Those are precisely the changes that tell us something about the Grimms' mentality and about what they found unacceptable in the thinking of the folk so revered by them.

The stories collected by the Grimms passed through three separate phases before reaching the definitive, printed form of the final edition. The first phase did not involve active intervention by the brothers but resulted in substantial changes in the tales they heard. The Grimms' physical presence alone, with eyes alert and pens poised, could not but affect the utterances of the tales' tellers. The second involved vigorous editing, the translating of a spoken idiom into readable, literary language. Only the third phase witnessed the

kind of wholesale rewriting that altered the shape and substance of the tales' plots. As the stories moved from oral performance to written text, they became more readable but less transparent. What was stated directly in oral versions became veiled by the time the tale found its place between the covers of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. What appeared too crude or offensive for children's ears was eliminated. Coarse, inelegant phrasing was polished and refined. What seemed unmotivated was given a cause. If folk wisdom along with the preoccupations of peasants and workers remained very much on the surface of tales in their oral form, they became ever more deeply buried as the Grimms pursued their editorial activities.

To search for the hidden meaning of the Grimms' fairy tales is therefore not so fatuous an exercise as some would have us believe. That these tales have entered the realm of "children's literature" does not necessarily mean that they are "innocent" stories devoid of psychological depth. Ever since oral folk narratives were translated into stable written texts intended to entertain children, their original meaning has become masked, or at least obscured. Yet it is not impossible to recover that meaning and its implications. The folk may never have required the assistance of folklorists and psychologists to decode the tales told while spinning wool or husking ears of corn, for they prided themselves on boldness of language and baldness of narrative exposition. Censorship was as unwelcome as it was unnecessary in the company of adults, and the hard core of the plots could remain intact. The modern, written counterparts to these narratives can, by contrast, appear both cryptic and abstruse, in part because original text and context are forever lost to us. For that reason, they invite, indeed demand, interpretation.

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