



# GRIMM LEGACIES

*The MAGIC SPELL of the  
GRIMMS' FOLK and FAIRY TALES*

JACK ZIPES



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The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy Tales

**Jack Zipes**

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*For Heinz Rölleke  
With great admiration and respect*



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## PREFACE

# Legacies and Cultural Heritage

In 2012, the bicentenary year of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's first edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*), published 1812 and 1815 in two volumes, numerous conferences and individual lectures in Europe and North America were held that commemorated and celebrated the achievement of the Brothers Grimm. Moreover, their tales continued to be honored in 2013 and 2014. Almost all the conferences that I attended produced new insights into the significance of the Grimms' tales from different critical perspectives. Yet, from my own standpoint, it was clear to me that many scholars and critics were not fully aware of the cultural heritage of the Grimms' folk and fairy tales and their impact throughout the world. Therefore, in the talks that I delivered, I concentrated on the different legacies of the Grimms' tales. In my opinion, there are many legacies to consider, not just one. My goal was to test my ideas at the conferences, learn from the critical reception, and then revise my talks after a year to address the question of the legacies of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in greater depth.

Central to my efforts was the question: Did the Grimms consciously begin collecting folk and fairy tales with the intention of bequeathing a legacy that would be cultivated in German-speaking principalities? Related to this question are others such as: What exactly is a legacy? How have the Grimms' tales as legacy been received and honored in Germany up to the present? How have the tales been received as legacies in other countries and regions of the world? As I have stated, it is quite clear that there is more than one legacy. Moreover, it is also clear that the Grimms' intentions were different from the reception and impact that the tales have had, not only in Germany, but also in other parts of the world. And this difference is indeed great.

To give one example: It is impossible in the twenty-first century to think of all the Walt Disney adaptations of fairy tales and their worldwide popularity without the legacy of the Brothers Grimm. In fact, it is, in part thanks to the Disney corporation, impossible to think about the dissemination of fairy tales throughout the world without taking into account the Grimms' collection of tales, even though most of the Grimms' stories were not strictly speaking fairy tales, nor were they intended for children. Through Disney, the Grimms' name has become a household name, a trademark, and a designator in general for fairy

tales that are allegedly “appropriate” for children. More than any author or collector of fairy tales, including Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen, the Grimms are totally associated with the fairy-tale genre, and their tales, which have been translated into 150 languages, have seeped into the conscious and subconscious popular memory of people throughout the world.

Some of the ramifications of the Grimms’ worldwide influence have been carefully analyzed in a recent book, *Grimms’ Tales around the Globe: The Dynamics of Their International Reception* (2014) edited by Vanessa Joosen and Gillian Lathey. However, it is, of course, impossible to study the impact of the Grimms’ tales in the cultural heritage of all the countries in which they have had an important reception. Therefore, my present study focuses primarily on the role that the Grimms’ tales have played in German-speaking and English-speaking countries. My hope is that my work might pave the way for similar studies about the reception of the Grimms’ tales as a legacy in other countries.

Most of the essays in my book were first composed as talks that I held at various conferences and universities in 2012 and 2013. The introduction, “The Vibrant Body of the Grimms’ Folk and Fairy Tales, Which Do Not Belong to the Grimms,” discusses how the Grimms began developing the corpus of their tales at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the purpose of preserving an ancient tradition of storytelling. The Brothers were among the first scholars to recall and establish the historical tradition of “authentic” folk tales that stemmed from oral storytelling. In the course of their research from 1806 until their deaths, Wilhelm in 1859, and Jacob in 1863, they published seven large editions and ten small editions of folk and fairy tales along with separate volumes of notes that were constantly changed and edited. These are the books that form the body of their work on folk and fairy tales, but it is a live and vibrant body that consists of other books of legends and tales that they collected, edited, and published. In addition, one must take into consideration the 150 or more translations and the Grimms’ manuscripts such as the Ölenberg manuscript of 1810 and their posthumous papers. What then, I ask, is the corpus that they left behind them? How are we to appraise the neverending and seemingly eternal reproduction of their tales?

In chapter one, “*German Popular Stories* as Revolutionary Book,” I propose that the Grimms’ legacy was already undergoing a change during their lifetime, and this change was brought about directly by the influence of a young British lawyer. One of the fascinating aspects of their legacy in English-speaking countries is that the first so-called translation, *German Popular Stories*, by Edgar Taylor, published in 1823 and 1826 in two volumes, generated three major “myths”: (1) that the tales were primarily intended for children (which they weren’t); (2) that the Grimms themselves collected the tales from peasants, represented by the image of an ideal peasant woman, whom Taylor called Gammer Grethel;

(3) that the tales were German (which they aren't). The great success of Taylor's books with illustrations by the famous caricaturist, George Cruikshank, stimulated the Brothers, especially Wilhelm, to change the format of their tales so that they might find a greater resonance among young readers primarily from middle-class families in German-speaking principalities.

Chapter two, "Hyping the Grimms' Fairy Tales," explores Taylor's influence in greater depth to examine how, without realizing it, the Brothers began embellishing and marketing their tales to seek a greater reading public. There was an overt change in policy that was initiated in 1825, when they decided to publish their Small Edition of fifty tales with illustrations by their brother Ludwig Grimm. It was not a question of money and profit, but the Grimms created more hyperbolic paratexts to their editions with the hope that German folk culture would gain the respect that it deserved. At the same time, they also maintained their scholarly philological approach. However, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries this marketing strategy also led to a trivialization if not banalization of the tales. So in this chapter, I discuss the ramifications of hyping the Grimms' tales in today's hyperglobalized cultures.

One of the results of the hyping is explored in chapter three, "Americanization of the Grimms' Fairy Tales: Twists and Turns of History," in which I demonstrate that the Grimms' tales have been so thoroughly Americanized that Americans (and people in other countries) are more liable to think that Disney created the Grimms' tales. There is very little information in the United States about the Grimms' lives and their scholarly project of salvaging relics from the past. Their image and their tales have been distorted in the popular memory of Americans, and yet there have been some interesting Americanized innovations and appropriations of their tales that lend them new meanings in the twenty-first century.

Although Germans respond to the Grimms' tales much differently from Americans, there is still a noticeable similarity in the manner in which they have received the tales since 1945. Chapter four, "Two Hundred Years after Once Upon a Time: The Legacy of the Brothers Grimm and Their Tales in Germany," reveals that, even in Germany, there is a tendency either to transform the Grimms' tales into kitsch or to lionize them. While there was a stronger sense of nationalism among the readers of and listeners to the Grimms' tales in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, a sense that the Grimms had contributed to a German national identity, World War II, and the Nazi appropriation of German culture have led to a more nuanced appreciation of the Grimms' tales. German scholars have carefully analyzed this reception history, and therefore, I focus primarily on literary and filmic adaptations of the tales in the twenty-first century and also discuss a few recent scholarly studies that shed new light on the Grimms' legacy.

In chapter five, “How Superheroes Made Their Way into the World of Fairy Tales: The Appeal of Cooperation and Collective Action from the Greek Myths to the Grimms’ Tales and Beyond,” I deal with an aspect of the tales that has made them memetically relevant in countries throughout the world from the Greco-Roman period to the present. I trace different variants of a particular tale type, “The Extraordinary Companions” (ATU 513), to understand how and why collective action forms the basis of hundreds if not thousands of stories. Greek gods, Japanese samurai, folk heroes, and superheroes share a basic purpose that connects them in remarkable international relationships and networks. I argue that if a particular international tale type such as the Grimms’ “How Six Made Their Way in the World” sticks in people’s memories throughout the world, there should be an evolutionary explanation for this relevance, and here I endeavor to connect the tale to our innate human disposition for cooperation.

Chapter six, “The Grimmness of Contemporary Fairy Tales: Exploring the Legacy of the Brothers Grimm in the Twenty-First Century,” is a critique of the manner in which numerous contemporary English-speaking writers and artists have adapted the Grimms’ tales. There is, of course, no right way to rewrite the Grimm’s tales, but I maintain that one can discern whether the Grimms’ legacy is abused by writers, artists, and filmmakers. Basically I ask the questions: What is an authentic adaptation? Who does and who doesn’t take the Grimms’ tales seriously? Have the Grimms’ tales become merchandise? Is it possible to cultivate a genuine legacy when the Grimms made their legacy somewhat ambivalent?

The epilogue, “A Curious Legacy: Ernst Bloch’s Enlightened View of the Fairy Tale and Utopian Longing,” concludes this book with a philosophical discussion about the utopian quality of the Grimms’ tales and what role utopian longing plays in the legacy and tradition of the Grimms’ tales, and is an essential element in the magic appeal of fairy tales in general. Here I recount an interview about fairy tales that Bloch, the great German philosopher of hope, had with Theodor Adorno, the most astute member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Both were familiar with the Grimms’ tales, and ironically, though they were often at odds with one another in their writing about aesthetics and politics, they come to more or less the same conclusion in this conversation and reinforce some of the underlying notions that the Grimms had as they began to collect their tales some two hundred years ago.

As I have stated earlier, the essays in this book were first delivered in different versions as talks at Harvard University, Lisbon University, the University of Ghent, Kingston University, the University of Chichester, the Folklore Society (London), the Goethe Institute (Chicago), Miami University (Ohio), Göttingen University, the University of Winnipeg, and Homerton College (Cambridge University). Thanks to the invitations by colleagues from these institutions, I was

able to share and discuss my ideas with different audiences of students, professors, and people interested in the Grimms, and thanks to their suggestions and critical responses, I altered and modified the talks as I began to transform them later into essays. At times I have been compelled to repeat information that I present in one chapter in another. I have endeavored to keep this repetition to a minimum, but sometimes it is unavoidable because the theses of the original talks depended on some of the same basic material.

Numerous friends and scholars have made suggestions that have helped me reevaluate my ideas, and they have also provided me with important information and materials. I should therefore like to express my gratitude to Maria Tatar, Francisco Vaz da Silva, Vanessa Joosen, Stijn Praet, Caroline Oates, Bill Gray, Andrew Teverson, Marina Warner, Irmi Maunu-Kocian, Wolfgang Mieder, Todd Cesaratto, Ulrich Marzolph, Pauline Greenhill, Karin Kukkonen, Morag Styles, and Maria Nikolajeva. In addition, I have benefited greatly from conversations and correspondence with Cristina Bacchilega, Sadhana Naithani, Don Haase, Pat Ryan, Mike Wilson, Mick Gowar, and David Hopkin. At the beginning of this project I was given wise counsel and encouragement by Alison MacKeen, and when Alison left Princeton, Anne Savarese graciously and seamlessly stepped in to become my editor and has been an enormous help to me. Sara Lerner has waved her magic wand as usual to make sure the production of the book went as smoothly as possible, while Jennifer Harris has provided careful and insightful copy-editing. Last but not least, I want to thank my wife, Carol Dines, who has been a great inspiration throughout the past thirty years.





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# GRIMM LEGACIES



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## INTRODUCTION

# The Vibrant Body of the Grimms’ Folk and Fairy Tales, Which Do Not Belong to the Grimms

*The example of the Brothers Grimm had its imitators even in Russia, including the person of the first editor of Russian Folk Tales, A. N. Afanasyev. From the viewpoint of contemporary folkloristics, even a cautious reworking and stylization of the texts, written down from their performers, is considered absolutely inadmissible in scientific editions. But in the era of the Brothers Grimm, in the world of romantic ideas and principles, this was altogether permissible. To the credit of the Brothers Grimm, it must be added that they were almost the first to establish the principle of publication of the authentic, popular oral poetic productions.*

—Y. M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore* (1966)<sup>1</sup>

*It is the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who illustrate the connection between folklore and textual criticism most powerfully, just as they demonstrate the continuing influence of Herder on thought. Nationalist politics and folkloric endeavours intertwine throughout all the Grimm brothers’ projects, but the Europe-wide significance of the Kinder- und Hausmärchen (first edition 1812) was the inspiration it provided to proto-folklorists to go out and collect “vom Volksmund,” that is from the mouth of the people (whether or not this was the Grimms’ own practice).*

—Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin, *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century* (2012)<sup>2</sup>

Just what is a legacy, and what was the corpus of folk and fairy tales that the Brothers Grimm passed on to the German people—a corpus that grew, expanded, and eventually spread itself throughout the world? What do we mean when we talk about cultural legacy and memory? Why have the Grimms’ so-called German

tales spread throughout the world and become so universally international? Have the Grimms' original intentions been betrayed? Did they betray them? If we fail to address these questions, the cultural legacy of the Grimms' tales and their relevance cannot be grasped. This does not mean that there are right and wrong answers. Rather, the questions set a framework for inquiry that will lead to greater insight into the Grimms' legacies, for there is more than just one that they bequeathed to the German people.

There are several definitions of legacy in the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, and the most pertinent one for my purposes concerns legacy as a bequest: "what one bequeaths . . . anything handed down by an ancestor or a predecessor."<sup>3</sup> But legacy also carries with it a notion of binding or connecting something to someone as in the Italian verb *legare*—to bind, to connect, to attach. And I want to suggest that the Grimms bound themselves to a German popular tradition of storytelling through the collecting of tales that belonged to the German people. Whether these tales actually belonged to the German people is irrelevant here because the Grimms assumed that these tales, largely gathered on Hessian and Westphalian soil, emanated from the lips of German people, primarily from the lower classes but also from the upper classes. What counts is their assumption, and what counts is their firm belief in the ancient origins of storytelling. What counts is that they wanted to discover and forge a German heritage that had greater cultural value than they realized. The Grimms wanted to save the folk and fairy tales from extinction and to bequeath this *Naturpoesie* as a gift to the German people of all social classes. Here is what they state in the first volume of the first edition of 1812:

We have tried to grasp and interpret these tales as purely as possible. In many of them one will find that the narrative is interrupted by rhymes and verses that even possess clear alliteration at times but are never sung during the telling of a tale, and these are precisely the oldest and best tales. No incident has been added or embellished and changed, for we would have shied away from expanding tales already so rich in and of themselves with their own analogies and similarities. They cannot be invented. In this regard no collection like this one has yet to appear in Germany. The tales have almost always been used as stuff to create longer stories which have been arbitrarily expanded and changed depending on their value. They have always been ripped from the hands of children even though they belonged to them, and nothing was given back to them in return. Even those people who thought about the children could not restrain themselves from mixing in mannerisms

of contemporary writing. Diligence in collecting has almost always been lacking. Just a few, noted by chance, were immediately published. Had we been so fortunate to be able to tell the tales in a very particular dialect they would have undoubtedly gained a great deal. Here we have a case where all the accomplishments of education, refinement, and artistic command of language ruin everything, and where one feels that a purified literary language as elegant as it may be for everything else, brighter and more transparent, has here, however, become more tasteless and cannot get to the heart of the matter.

We offer this book to well-meaning hands and thereby think chiefly of the blessed power that lies in these hands. We wish they will not allow these tiny morsels of poetry to be kept entirely hidden from poor and modest readers.<sup>4</sup>

And in the preface to the second volume of the first edition published in 1815, they state:

Our collection was not merely intended to serve the history of poetry but also to bring out the poetry itself that lives in it and make it effective: enabling it to bring pleasure wherever it can and also therefore, enabling it to become an actual educational primer. Objections have been raised against this last point because this or that might be embarrassing and would be unsuitable for children or offensive (when the tales might touch on certain situations and relations—even the mentioning of the bad things that the devil does) and that parents might not want to put the book into the hands of children. That concern might be legitimate in certain cases, and then one can easily make selections. On the whole it is certainly not necessary. Nature itself provides our best evidence, for it has allowed these and those flowers and leaves to grow in their own colors and shapes. If they are not beneficial for any person or personal needs, something that the flowers and leaves are unaware of, then that person can walk right by them, but the individual cannot demand that they be colored and cut according to his or her needs. Or, in other words, rain and dew provide a benefit for everything on earth. Whoever is afraid to put plants outside because they might be too delicate and could be harmed and would rather water them inside cannot demand to put an end to the rain and the dew. Everything that is natural can also become

beneficial. And that is what our aim should be. Incidentally, we are not aware of a single salutary and powerful book that has edified the people, in which such dubious matters don't appear to a great extent, even if we place the Bible at the top of the list. Making the right use of a book doesn't result in finding evil, rather, as an appealing saying puts it: evidence of our hearts. Children read the stars without fear, while others, according to folk belief, insult angels by doing this.<sup>5</sup>

I have quoted extensively from the two prefaces of the first edition because they significantly embody the early intentions of the Grimms' legacy of tales that they bequeathed to the German people. What is striking, I believe, about their language is their inclination to use metaphors of nature, religion, and education. This is also the language of German romanticism—idealistic and somewhat mystical. For the Grimms the folk and fairy tales were divinely inspired and pure. They evolved organically, encapsulating human experience and behavior, and it was through the common people if not people of all social classes that their “essential” messages were remembered and articulated. These messages contained information and truths about human experience, but they were not didactic commandments or lessons. As I have stated in the introduction to my translation of the first edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*):<sup>6</sup> Though mindful of the educational value of their collection, the Grimms shied away from making the tales in their collection moralistic or overly didactic. They viewed the morality in the tales as naïve and organic, and readers, young and old, could intuit lessons from them spontaneously because of their “pure” poetry.

In his book, *Einfache Formen* (*Simple Forms*, 1930) André Jolles claims that the Grimms saw a paradoxical morality in the miraculous events of folk and fairy tales alike. Jolles writes that the basic foundation of these tales derives from the paradox that the miraculous is not miraculous in the fairy tale; rather it is natural, self-evident, a matter of course. “The miraculous is here the only possible guarantee that the immorality of reality has stopped.”<sup>7</sup> The readers' interpretations of folk and fairy tales are natural because of the profound if not divine nature of the tales, and in this sense, the Grimms envisioned themselves as moral cultivators of a particular cultural heritage and their collection as an educational primer of ethics, values, and customs that would grow on readers who would grow by reading these living relics of the past and also by retelling them. In collecting and publishing the tales and all their other philological works, the Grimms were actually returning “gifts” of the people through writing and print that would safeguard folk culture. In addition, their work on the German language and medieval literature contributed to nation building, not

through politics but through a profound interdisciplinary and cultural approach to words that tied different Germanic peoples together. Not only did the tales become a great source of cultural memory, but their unusual romantic approach to philology and literature played a great role in forging a new discipline at German universities. As Jeffrey Peck has remarked:

Any critical history of *Germanistik* that wants to unearth its origins, especially in struggles for national identity, seems always to begin with the Grimm Brothers. The Grimms represent in their work what [Hans Ulrich] Gumbrecht typifies for Romanticism: “National identity—as a representation of collective identity—seems to depend—at least for the early 19th century—on the existence of socially distant folktales and historically distant medieval cultural forms, which can be identified as the objectifications of one’s own people.” Merely the titles of the Grimms’ publications reflect their preoccupation with “the German” and the German past: *German Legends* (2 vols., 1816–18) and their periodical *Old German Woods* (1813–16); Jacob’s own projects, *Old German Song* (1811), *German Grammar* (1819–37), *German Monuments of Law* (1828), *German Mythology* (1835), *History of the German language* (2 vols., 1848); and, of course, their well-known *Fairy Tales* and the *German Dictionary*.<sup>8</sup>

## The Corpus of the Tales

Here it should be pointed out that the Grimms’ tales are not strictly speaking “fairy tales,” and they never used that term, which, in German, would be *Feenmärchen*. Their collection is much more diverse and includes animal tales, legends, tall tales, nonsense stories, fables, anecdotes, religious legends, and, of course, magic tales (*Zaubermärchen*), which are clearly related to the great European tradition of fairy tales that can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome and beyond. It is because their collection had such deep roots and a broad European heritage that the Grimms asserted that reading these tales would serve as an education for young and old alike. In some ways their collection was intended to be part of the European civilizing process, not just a national legacy. It was never intended for children even if it became children’s reading matter, something I shall address in chapter one.

In this regard, the corpus of their collected tales was formed to change constantly and to remain alive forever as vital talking points in oral and literary traditions. Collecting was an act of resuscitation. Editing and translating were



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