

Title: Cultural Nationalism: The Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales

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[(essay date 1978) In the following essay, Snyder discusses the *Fairy Tales* in relation to German nationalism and the Romantic movement, focusing on how the tales present positive, praiseworthy traits common to the German people while at the same time promoting the idea of fear of the outsider, personified in the character of the Jew.]

All my works relate to the Fatherland, from whose soil they derive their strength.

Jakob Grimm

For generations the Grimm *Fairy Tales* have enjoyed international popularity. Children all over the world have been and are still fascinated by the stories of Cinderella, and Hansel and Gretel. Yet, paradoxically, the scholars who collected and refined these tales worked within the framework of that romanticism which became an important element of German nationalism. The Grimms regarded all their work, including the fairy tales, as deriving its strength from the soil of the Fatherland.

When this theme was presented originally, it turned out to be most controversial. It was denounced by defenders of childhood on the ground that no taint of nationalism could possibly exist in stories so popular among the world's children. Among the most vociferous critics were German scholars who had been obliged to leave Hitler's Germany as refugees: to them the idea was exaggerated and unfair. It is, perhaps, an indication of the tenacity of cultural nationalism that even refugee academicians, themselves victims of Nazi irrationalism, should regard this theme as an attack on their old homeland. Somehow, the presentation of nationalistic sentiment in the *Hausmärchen* was taken as a reflection upon "the superior cultural standards" of the old but not forgotten *Vaterland*.

It is, therefore, a matter of some satisfaction that distinguished folklorists have come to accept the conclusions presented in this study. Richard M. Dorson, Professor of History and Folklore and Director of the Folklore Institute at Indiana University and general editor of the University of Chicago series, *Folktales of the World*, wrote in the foreword of the eighteenth volume, *Folklore of Germany*, concerning the motivations of the Grimms. In selecting and refining their household stories, Dorson said, the Grimms placed stress on some attitudes as particularly Germanic. In this way they conveyed the impression that their tales reflected praiseworthy national traits of the German people. These included authoritarianism, militarism, violence toward the outsider, and the strict enforcement of discipline. The social classes were set apart: the king, the count, the leader, the hero are glorified, while the lower class, the servants and peasants dependent upon them and obediently executing their commands, is praised. In contrast stand the avaricious, mendacious middle class of merchants and quack doctors and scheming Jews--outsiders who intruded through the dark forest into the orderly system of manor and village. Hence the loathing for outsiders.

Professor Dorson recognized the nexus:

In the wake of the Grimms, late nineteenth century nationalists extolled the brothers and their *Märchen* for helping acquaint Germans with a sense of folk unity and add historical past. Under the Nazis the original edition of the tales with their bloodletting and violence was reintroduced.

Apart from the distortion by the Nazis, modern German folktale scholarship has largely disavowed the promises and methods of the Grimms. The powerful interest they generated in *Märchensammlung* and *Märchenforschung* has maintained its momentum up to the present time, but with altered directions and revised emphases. [*Folktales of Germany*, ed., Kurt Ranke, tr. Lotte Baumann (Chicago, 1966), pp. xvii-xix. Kurt Ranke is generally regarded as the outstanding folklore scholar in contemporary Germany.]

Nationalism and the Grimm Brothers

"Not a narrow nationalism but the philosophic romanticism of Schelling, Görres, Cruetzer and Kanne, the view that the mythos glimpsed more of truth than reason, impelled the brothers Grimm to make such great collections of folk poetry as the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*."¹ And again: "The brothers Grimm had no thought of breeding an overweening nationalism, but rather of paving the way for a profounder comprehension of German character, a national self-knowledge."² These two conclusions, reached in 1937 by Rudolf Stadelmann, then of the University of Freiburg i. Br., tend to relieve the famed German philologists, founders of scientific Germanistics, of the onus of "narrow" and "overweening" nationalism that has caused an enormous amount of trouble in recent years. Because nationalism, far from weakening, is growing even stronger as nations everywhere grow more national in thought and in deed, an examination of nationalistic aspects of the work of the two gifted brothers would seem to be in order.

Did nationalism, whether narrow or wide, play a vital rôle in the lives and works of the brothers Grimm? Did they venerate national, indigenous, anonymous folk poetry merely on esthetic grounds or in the belief that it contained primitive folk wisdom which became peculiarly German in character? Is there any evidence to show that the *Hausmärchen*, though beloved among many generations of children all over the world, were designed originally to stimulate German national sentiment and to glorify German national traditions?

Die Brüder Grimm, Jakob Ludwig Karl (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Karl (1786-1859), are inseparably linked in the history of German antiquarianism, philology, and folklore. The two were together all their lives. As children they slept in the same bed and worked at the same table, as students they had two beds and tables in the same room. Even after Wilhelm's marriage in 1825, Uncle Jakob shared the house, and they both lived "in such harmony and community that one might almost imagine the two children were common property."³ The two scholars eventually became leaders of that band of distinguished men who in the nineteenth century devoted themselves to the scientific study of German language and literature and who, at the same time, fashioned the early framework of philology which was used later by some of the linguistic paleontologists in their search for the elusive Aryan by "race."⁴ There is versatile genius here, for it is not usual for the same minds to evolve an authoritative grammar and a book of popular fairy tales.⁵ Most of the major works of the Grimm brothers stressed national indigenous literature, such as their great collections of folk poetry, as well as their standard works on the history of the Germanic languages, law, folklore, and comparative mythology. The Grimms were certain that every language has its own peculiar spirit standing in mysterious relationship to the national character. They preferred knowledge of native literature to all foreign lore, because "we can grasp nothing else as surely as our innate powers" and because "Nature herself

guides us towards the Fatherland."⁶ From the beginning they were attracted by all national poetry, either epics, ballads, or popular tales, and they received full satisfaction in the study of the language, traditions, mythology, and laws of their countrymen.

When Jakob in 1805 visited the libraries of Paris, he quickly became homesick and wrote to his brother that he always dreamed of the Fatherland: "At night I am always home in Germany."⁷ Four years later he informed Wilhelm that he would not go to a certain vacation resort "because there are too many Frenchmen there."⁸ After watching a festival bonfire in 1814, he wrote to Wilhelm: "I wished that a colossal Bonaparte, a *Puppe aus Heu*, be thrown ceremoniously into the fire and burned."⁹ When his friend Benecke received a call to Edinburgh in 1821 and asked for his advice, Jakob replied: "I cannot advise you but I can say that, if I were in your place, I would not emigrate. That would be a difficult thing."¹⁰ In his inaugural lecture at Göttingen, Jakob wrote: "The love for the Fatherland is so godlike and so deeply impressed a feeling in every human breast that it is not weakened but rather strengthened by the sorrows and misfortunes that happen to us in the land of our birth."¹¹ When Bettina in 1838 sought to get the Grimms positions in France after they had been dismissed at Göttingen, Wilhelm Grimm wrote to Dahmann: "What's the use of doing it? What can become of the matter? All our work would be paralyzed and extinguished in short order if we renounced our Fatherland."¹²

In 1817 the brothers went to Göttingen, where Jakob received an appointment as professor and librarian, Wilhelm as underlibrarian. In 1837 they were among the "*Göttinger Sieben*" who signed a protest against the king of Hanover's abrogation of the constitution. Both were dismissed from their positions and banished from the kingdom of Hanover.¹³ On the surface the protest of the Grimms seems to have been motivated by liberal sentiment, but actually they had no extreme faith in parliamentary government. To them constitutions had a negative value--as dikes against a devastating flood, while positive fertility was given by the benevolent grace of a monarch.¹⁴ Wilhelm IV had established a constitution and Ernst had by two successive decrees revoked it. In the sight of the Grimms, Ernst had perjured himself, and it was the duty of *Georgia Augusta*, the University of Göttingen, to protest.¹⁵

In 1840 Jakob wrote to Lachmann: "*Der Welt bin ich nicht feind und hänge heiss an allem Vaterländischen.*"¹⁶ In his dedication to his *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, Jakob Grimm confessed that his book was meant to be political, since the German people had been responsible for throwing off the Roman yoke, bringing "fresh freedom to the Romans in Gaul, Italy, Spain, and Britain," and with their own strength decided the victory of Christianity "by erecting an unbreakable wall against the constantly pressing Slavs in Europe's middle."¹⁷ "All my works" Jakob wrote later in one of his last essays, "relate to the Fatherland, from whose soil they derive their strength."¹⁸ The distinguished scholar of modern nationalism, Hans Kohn, concluded that "Jakob Grimm, one of the most violent Pan-Germans, expressed his confidence that the peace and salvation of the whole continent will rest upon Germany's strength and freedom."¹⁹

Romanticism and German Nationalism

From the outset the Grimm brothers took the Romantic position which was closely allied with the rising German nationalism. Following closely upon the lead of the early Romantics--the Schlegel brothers, Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, Herder, Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, the Grimms in their philological investigations sought to unlock the poetry and the experiences of the German people, which were encased in words and grammatical forms.²⁰ Many of the German Romantics saw their

organic-genetic conception of culture as the expression of the Germanic national soul,²¹ which had its beginning in the heroic Middle Ages.²² Like the Romantics the Grimms issued a plea for the claims of the imagination, of emotion and feeling, of individualism, and above all for a synthetic expression of the national genius in all its manifold aspects of literature, art, religion, and philosophy.²³ But where the Romantics enriched the imagination by presenting the many-colored life of other ages and countries, they remained mostly artists and poets, not scholars, philologists, and historians; the Grimms, on the other hand, functioned in the Romantic circle by giving to it the critical scholarship that hitherto had been lacking.²⁴ "I strove to penetrate into the wild forests of our ancestors," wrote Wilhelm Grimm, "listening to their whole language, and watching their pure customs."²⁵ As a group the Romantics profoundly venerated folk poetry and especially the fairy tale.²⁶ Novalis pronounced the folk tale the primary and highest creation of man.²⁷ Even the great Schiller had written in extravagant terms:

Tiefere Bedeutung

Liegt in dem Märchen meiner Kinderjahre,
Als in der Wahrheit, die das Leben lehrt.²⁸

It was this type of romanticism, stressing folk language, customs, personality, and the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*, or community of the people, which was an important factor in the historical evolution of modern nationalism.

Planning and Publication of the Fairy Tales

The idea for a collection of children's stories may be traced directly to Herder, who in 1773 aroused immediate attention to folk literature with an essay entitled *Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker*.²⁹ Such a collection, Herder once remarked, would be a Christmas present for the young people of the future.³⁰ In 1805 Jakob Grimm was taken to Paris by his teacher, Savigny. "I have been thinking," Wilhelm wrote to Jakob, "that you might look for old German poems among the manuscripts. Perhaps you might find something unknown and important."³¹ Soon after Jakob's return the brothers began their laborious collection of German sagas and fairy tales. The work proceeded under difficult conditions, for in 1806 the armies of Napoleon overran Kassel. "Those days," wrote Wilhelm, "of the collapse of all hitherto existing establishments will remain forever before my eyes. . . . The ardor with which the studies in Old German were pursued helped overcome the spiritual depression."³² Working thus in difficult times but nevertheless hearing "the horns of elfland faintly blowing,"³³ the Grimms completed their first volume, which appeared at Christmas, 1812, the winter of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. It was an immediate success, the masterpiece for which the whole Romantic movement had been waiting.³⁴

The name of the Grimms quickly became a household word throughout the Germanies,³⁵ and eventually it was carried throughout the civilized world in a series of translations. Even the natives of African and the South Seas have borrowed tales from the Grimms.³⁶

With the publication of the *Hausmärchen* the Grimms not only accomplished for the fairy tale what Arnim and Brentano had done for the *Volkslied*,³⁷ but they also established a universal standard for the telling of fairy tales.³⁸ The Grimms were ideal interpreters of this literary form. Fascinated by folk-poetry and themselves gifted with a persisting sense of childlike wonder, the dignified scholars at the

same time had a rare ability to pass on their own enthusiasm to children. They saw to it that any child could follow the tales. The youngster loves a beginning, a plot, and an ending, together with a clean-cut moral, and the Grimms gave them all of these. The Grimms recognized that the child loves to know how old people are, what they wear, what they say, and why they say it, details which attract the attention of young minds. That the Grimms knew their way around in the child's world is attested by the simple and subtle humor of the tales. Children love houses built of bread, roofed with cake, and finished with sugar windows. They are delighted to learn that witches have red eyes and cannot see far, that a kettle can be scoured to resemble gold, and that a dwarf fishing can get his beard entangled in his line. They love the little bean who laughed so much that she burst and had to be sewn up with black cotton by a friendly tailor, thus explaining why every bean since that day has a black seam in it.³⁹

The Grimms obtained their folk tales from the lips of peasant women, shepherds, waggoners, vagrants, old grannies, and children in Hesse, Hanau, and other areas.⁴⁰ Their first concern in collecting the stories was "faithfulness to the truth," and they sought to keep the tales "as clean as possible," adding nothing and changing nothing.⁴¹ Wilhelm Grimm stated explicitly that he and his brother were most careful to avoid embellishing the tales which in themselves were so rich and rewarding.⁴² Jakob Grimm, too, was certain that "stories of this kind are sought for with full recognition of their scientific value and with a dread of altering any part of their contents, whereas formerly they were only regarded as worthless fancy-pieces which might be manipulated at will."⁴³ In their thorough commentary on the stories the Grimms gave painstaking and accurate references to the exact source from which each tale was taken. For example, nineteen of their finest tales were taken from Frau Katerina Viehmann (1755-1815), the wife of a tailor, who lived at Niedierzwehn, a village near Kassel. "Anyone believing that traditional materials are easily falsified and carelessly preserved, and hence cannot survive over a long period, should hear how close she always keeps to her story and how zealous she is for its accuracy."⁴⁴

The fact that the brothers Grimm took down the tales with almost fanatical accuracy does not at all invalidate the thesis that the *Märchen* have played a role in the historical evolution of German nationalism. Quite the contrary--the many sentiments typical of German nationalism which are found in the tales, as will be demonstrated, existed among the old peasants, nurses, and workers from whom the Grimms obtained their material. What the anthologists did was to catch the varied strands of German national tradition and weave them into a pattern glorifying German folk stories. Themselves superbpatriots who always believed in sanctifying the ancient German tongue,⁴⁵ the Grimms, consciously or unconsciously, stressed those peculiar traits which have since come to be known as important elements of the German national character. Moreover, in the very cooperative action by which the tales were written a quality of national validity and individual unity appears.⁴⁶

Analysis of the Tales

The environment of the Grimms' tales was one which reflected similarities of family life in the same culture. The milieu consisted of farmland, villages, towns, and the forest, but the sea was alien. In the village lived the peasant, the tradesman, and the artisan, near the castle of the king and his court. The forest, a dark jewel containing evil spirits and lovely treasures, was a fascinating but frightening unknown, where witches lived in huts and princesses in enchanting castles. The family was a cohesive unit, with the good and able father, respected and obeyed, at its head; its cohesiveness was challenged by such unattractive elements as poverty, the stepmother, and inheritance trouble. There was no primogeniture, hence the Salic law with its cycle of unification, disruption, and unification prevailed.

Society consisted of royalty, the aristocracy, the military, the professionals, merchants, artisans, and peasants. Class distinctions were definite. The upper and lower classes are depicted favorably in the tales, but the middle class, consisting of merchants, innkeepers, doctors, clerics, and Jews, is condemned for its greed and quackery. Virtue is always rewarded and sin punished, though virtue was complicated somewhat by heroes lying, cheating, stealing, and slaying to gain an end.

There is plenty of evidence in the fairy tales to show the existence of what may be called universal factors of personality, qualities which are typical of many peoples from all parts of the world. But at the same time there is also evidence of the existence of such relatively uniform and striking attitudes as respect for order, obedience, discipline, authoritarianism, militarism, glorification of violence, and fear of and contempt for the stranger.

A strong respect for the desirability of order is indicated in the opening paragraph of *The Sole*:

The fishes had for a long time been discontented because no order prevailed in their kingdom. None of them turned aside for the others, but all swam to the right or left as they fancied, or darted between those who wanted to stay together, or got into their way; and a strong one gave a weak one a blow with its tail, and drove it away, or else swallowed it up without more ado. "How delightful it would be," said they, "if we had a king who enforced law and justice among us!" and they met together to choose for their ruler the one who would cleave through the water most quickly, and give help to the weak ones.⁴⁷

The concept of obedience is emphasized again and again. A little hare tells a musician: "I will obey you as a scholar obeys his master."⁴⁸ When the Devil orders a father to cut off the hands of his own child, the father asks his daughter to understand his predicament. She replies: "Dear father, do with me what you will, I am your child." Whereupon she lays down both her hands, and allows them to be cut off.⁴⁹ A king's son, seized with a desire to travel around the world "took no one with him but a faithful servant."⁵⁰ When Hans serves his master for seven years, the master gives him as reward "a piece of gold as big as his head."⁵¹ A diligent servant is the first out of bed every morning, the last to go to bed at night, and whenever there was a difficult job to be done, which nobody cared to undertake, he was always the first to set himself to it. Moreover, he never complained, but was contented with everything, and was always merry.⁵²

This concept of obedience, together with its corollary--discipline, amounted to something more than mere obedience of the child to its parents. It was closely akin to that type of authoritarianism manifested in attitudes toward the family, society, and the state. The father is head of the home and the ruler of the family; it is wrong and dangerous to challenge his authority. Society itself is static, with definite gradations from top to bottom. The state is supreme and the end of all striving. In the state the king is supreme. His word is law and his orders must be strictly obeyed, even if forfeiture of life be the result. He may on occasion order death or grant wealth at a mere whim.

The nature and personality of the king become dominant themes in the *Märchen*. The land of the tales is made up of many small kingdoms, in each of which the king emerges as the strong, all-powerful personality. When a king made a great feast and invited thereto, from far and near, all the young men likely to marry, he marshalled all of them in a row according to their rank and standing: first came the kings, then the grand-dukes, then the princes, the earls, the barons, and the gentry.⁵³ When Adam and Eve enter Heaven, the Lord saw their pretty children, blessed them, laid his hands on the first, and said, "Thou shalt be a powerful king."⁵⁴ When a bird sings well, it is identified as "the king of the

birds."⁵⁵ It was decided among the birds that he who flew highest should be king.⁵⁶ The king is mighty: "such a person arrives in the carriage in full splendor like a mighty king, not like a beggar."⁵⁷ The king is wise: "a long time ago there lived a king who was famed for his wisdom through all the land."⁵⁸ The verdict always comes before the king.⁵⁹ The king is generous: when he hears of a poor peasant's poverty, he presents him with a bit of land.⁶⁰ He is handsome: when peasants dress up in splendid garments, and wash, "no king could have looked so handsome."⁶¹ The king is kindly; he always looked kindly at frightened people,⁶² and, feeling compassion, raised a poor soldier from poverty.⁶³ He is a lover of all the better things, including all kinds of fine trees.⁶⁴ He is sentimental: "tears rose to the king's eyes."⁶⁵ He is omnipresent and omniscient: when a shepherd boy's fame spreads far and wide because of his wise answers, the king naturally hears of it and summons him,⁶⁶ when a horn sings by itself "the king understood it all, and caused the ground below the bridge to be dug up, and then the whole skeleton of the murdered man to come to life."⁶⁷ Similarly, the various members of the king's family take top rank in the social hierarchy.⁶⁸

The love and reverence for the king, emphasized so strongly in the fairy tales, are a part of a major theme of the stories: the life of the hero. How the hero makes his way through thick, weird forests, how he outwits ferocious animals, and how he wins a propitious marriage, these exert a tremendous appeal to the child's mind. The hero, be he prince, soldier, peasant's son, servant, or tradesman, falls into two categories: he is a cunning, clever fellow, destined from the very beginning to conquer fate by his strength, courage, and brains, or he is slightly stupid and guided in his victorious course by good fairies.⁶⁹ In both cases obviousness is the chief characteristic. The clever hero appears less often than the dullard, but his is a glorious life overshadowed by the wings of death. A simpleton son, by a trick of fate, gains his father's inheritance away from his two intelligent, older brothers.⁷⁰ In *The Golden Goose*, the youngest son, Dummling, attains success and happiness despite his stupidity.⁷¹

The greatest virtue of either the clever or dullard boy is courage. When Strong Hans beats some robbers, "his mother stood in a corner admiring his bravery and strength."⁷² When a young soldier is asked if he is fearless, he replies: "A soldier and fear--how can the two go together"?"⁷³ The cunning little tailor was not frightened by a bear that had never left anyone alive who had fallen into its embraces, but was on the contrary, quite delighted, saying: "Boldly ventured is half-won."⁷⁴ When the seven Swabians make up their minds to travel about the world and seek adventures and perform great deeds, they reserve the place of honor at the front for Master Schultz, "the boldest and the bravest."⁷⁵ One of the longest of the tales is concerned with a youth who went forth to learn what fear was.⁷⁶ Little Thumbling the tiny son of a diminutive tailor, was no bigger than a thumb, "but he had some courage in him."⁷⁷

The virtue of courage is closely associated with another dominant theme of modern nationalism: the veneration of the military spirit. Again and again the tales show that war is good, that fighting gives great moral vigor, that bearing arms is the highest of all possible honors, and that the military instinct is a blessing. There are many great deeds of valor, reminiscent of the *chansons de geste* of the Middle Ages. In *Iron John*, a country was overrun by war, whereupon the king gathered together all his people, and did not know whether or not he could offer resistance to the enemy, who was superior in strength. But the gardener's son came to the rescue. "When he got near the battlefield a great part of the king's men had already fallen, and little was wanting to make the rest give way. Then the youth galloped thither with his iron soldiers, broke like a hurricane over the enemy, and beat down all who opposed him. They began to fly, but the youth pursued, and never stopped, until there was not a single

man left."⁷⁸ A young fellow, who enlists as a soldier, conducts himself bravely, "and was always the foremost when it rained bullets."⁷⁹ When three soldiers desert the army, they receive due punishment for it, not by the authorities but by a dragon, who turns out to be the Devil.⁸⁰

The moral is clear: it is not wise nor desirable to desert the army. When the valiant little tailor announces that he is ready to enter the king's service as a soldier, "he was therefore honorably received and a special dwelling assigned to him."⁸¹ "When there is order to be maintained in the kingdom, the king angrily, as is expected, orders a captain to march out with his troops."⁸² Even the animals are infected with the war spirit: "when the time came for the war to begin, the willow-wren sent out spies to discover who was the enemy's commander-in-chief"⁸³ [the spies were gnats, who were the most crafty, and who flew into the forest where the enemy was assembled].⁸⁴ Force is accepted as normal and desirable: when a cat jumps upon her friend, the mouse, and swallows her, the story ends: "Verily, that is the way of the world."⁸⁵

Cruelty and violence and atrocity of every kind are characteristic of the fairy tales and myths of all peoples. On a certain level of civilization punishment is meted out without any seeming relation to guilt. Thus Achilles pitilessly drags the corpse of gallant Hector ten times around the walls of Troy, and Ulysses kills his wife's suitors for no greater sin than revelling. These things are common enough. "But typical of the German fairy tale is the juxtaposition of the commonplace and the intimate with the horrors of death and all the tortures of a calculated cruelty."⁸⁶ While the king's son is busy putting on his clothes, a giant surprises him, and puts both his eyes out.⁸⁷ A king orders a witch cast into the fire and miserably burnt, while her daughter is to be taken to the forest to be torn to death by wild beasts.⁸⁸ A wicked stepmother is placed in a barrel filled with boiling oil and venomous snakes.⁸⁹ An equally wicked mother-in-law is bound to the stake and burnt to ashes.⁹⁰ The two false sisters of Cinderella have their eyes pecked out by pigeons;⁹¹ the cook of a hunter decides to throw Fundevogel into boiling water and eat him;⁹² an old woman cuts off the head of her beautiful step-daughter, whereupon drops of blood from the girl's head carry on a conversation.⁹³

And so it goes, with Hansel and Gretel shoving the wicked witch into the oven for a merited cremation, bad step-mothers torn to death by wild beasts, others forced to dance in red-hot slippers, and tailors having their eyes gouged out one by one. To find a comparable obsession with vengeance and death it would be necessary to turn to ancient Egypt. But where the Egyptians linked death with elaborate ritual and a traditional piety, the characters in the *Märchen* challenge it in a mood of hysterical fear and revenge. Throughout the tales there is a bias toward elementary justice very much like the early Hebrew-Babylonian concept of an eye for an eye.

Much of this, of course, is typical of the primitive instincts of children, which are not very different, in the final analysis, from those of the savage. Dr. Frederic Wertham points out that the lack of respect for human life can begin in childhood in the comparative indifference to torture, mutilation, and death.⁹⁴ One of my students, Miss Bertha Pinsky, demonstrated the existence of this callousness to violence in a series of experiments with her own class of six-year-olds. Finding it difficult to maintain order among this group of pupils, she hit upon the expedient of reading the Grimms' fairy tales to them. "I was amazed to discover that I could obtain perfect silence by reading any one of the more violent tales. The children were simply fascinated. The entire class howled with delight when I read to them *The Jew Among Thorns*, in which an old Jew is forced to dance among thorns to the tune of a fiddle."

When these primitive sadistic and masochistic social attitudes carry over into the adult years, trouble can be expected. It is to the eternal discredit of the Nazi leaders of Germany that they elevated obscene glorifications of violence and crime into a place of authority. All the cruel pieces of the fairy tales, which had been eliminated under the Weimar Republic, were restored in Hitler's Germany, and the study of folklore was raised to a special place of honor.⁹⁵

Still another obvious theme of the *Märchen* was fear of and hatred for the outsider, characteristic of primitive tribalism and modern nationalism. The stepmother is invariably a disgusting old woman who performs evil deeds with inhuman zest and cruelty. She is diabolically cunning in seeking to do away with her stepchildren. If she has any children from her first marriage, she will seek to displace her stepchildren so that her own flesh and blood will acquire the family fortune. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the stepmother purposely loses her stepchildren in the forest so that they will no longer be in the family.⁹⁶ A king, fearing that the stepmother of his children might not treat them well, and even do them injury, takes them to a lonely castle in the midst of a forest.⁹⁷ A little boy takes his younger sister by the hand and proclaims: "Since our mother died we have had no happiness. Our stepmother beats us every day, and if we come near her she kicks us with her foot. God pity us, if our mother only knew."⁹⁸ But when a wicked stepmother is taken before a judge, she is placed in a barrel filled with boiling oil and venomous snakes, and dies an evil death.⁹⁹ The stepmother's real crime is disruption of the family, the alienation of the children and even the father. She is an alien in the home, an outsider, a foreigner in the state. She must be hated and eliminated because she will throw the accepted order into chaos with her new ideas and foreign attitudes and methods.

The virulent type of anti-Semitism which is a concomitant of German nationalism,¹⁰⁰ appears often in the *Märchen*. It was taken as a matter of course that poverty and discontent were directly attributable to the Jew, who was "the unproductive exploiter and employer of other people's labor." The peasant suffers most from the machinations of the Jew.¹⁰¹ Though the merchant is always a villain, the Jewish merchant is something more--a foreigner, the product of a strange and ancient civilization, who is universally disliked. He is a greedy moneylender who cheats his fellow man, and moreover he is a sycophant and a serio-comic villain. He is always dressed shabbily, has a yellow or gray beard, and it is plainly his fault when some honest person gets into trouble and goes to the gallows.

In *The Bright Sun Brings it to Life* a Jew appears as a prophet of death to a hapless tailor.¹⁰² *The Good Bargain* is concerned with the struggle between a shrewd peasant and a deceitful Jew, in which the peasant says: "Ah, what a Jew says is always false--no true word ever comes out of his mouth."¹⁰³ In *The Jew Among Thorns* an honest and clever servant, who played a fiddle, one day meets a Jew with a long goat's beard. When the Jew, who is watching a bird in the thorn bushes, crawls into the bushes to fetch the bird, the good servant's humor leads him to take up his fiddle and play.

In a moment the Jew's legs began to move, and to jump into the air, and the more the servant fiddled the better went the dance. But the thorns tore his shabby coat from him, combed his beard, and pricked and plucked him all over the body. "Oh, dear," cried the Jew, "what do I want with your fiddling? Leave the fiddle alone master; I do not want to dance."

But the servant did not listen to him, and thought: "You have fleeced people often enough, now the thorn-bushes shall do the same to you"; and he began to play over again, so that the Jew had to jump higher than ever, and scraps of his coat were left hanging on the thorns.

The story concludes with a courtroom scene, in which the judge "had the Jew taken to the gallows and hanged as a thief."¹⁰⁴

The effects of such tales upon generations of German youth may well be imagined. In Nazi Germany the unexpurgated fairy tales were read by children and a large part of Nazi literature designed for children was merely a modernized version of the Grimms' tales, with emphasis upon the idealization of fighting, glorification of power, reckless courage, theft, brigandage, and militarism reinforced with mysticism.¹⁰⁵

It is reasonable to conclude, then, that, with their fairy tales, as well as their dictionary and grammar, the brothers Grimm contributed as much to the German revival and to German nationalism as generals, diplomats, and political figures. The place of the Grimms in the development of German nationalism was recognized a half century ago by Carl Franke:

To the spirit of German schoolchildren the tales have become what mother's milk is for their bodies--the first nourishment for the spirit and the imagination. How German is Snow White, Little Briar Rose, Little Red Cap, the seven dwarfs! Through such genuine German diet must the language and spirit of the child gradually become more and more German. . . .

Indeed the brothers Grimm have earned our innermost love and highest admiration as citizens and as men. For they belong doubtlessly in the broadest sense among the founders of the new German Reich. . . . They exhibited all the German virtues: the inner love of family, true friendship, the kindly love for the Hessian homeland, the inspiring love for the Fatherland. . . . With full right they earn therefore a place among Germany's greatest men.¹⁰⁶

Summary and Conclusions

1. Nationalism played a vital role in the lives and works of the Grimm brothers, who were convinced that all their writings, including the fairy tales, derived their strength "from the soil of the German Fatherland."
2. From the beginning of their work the Grimm brothers took the Romantic position, closely allied with the rising German nationalism, in which they stressed the claims of the imagination, emotions, and feelings.
3. In planning and collecting the fairy tales the Grimms, consciously or unconsciously, were motivated by a desire to glorify German traditions and to stimulate German national sentiment.
4. An analysis of the *Märchen* gives ample evidence to show an emphasis upon such social characteristics as respect for order, belief in the desirability of obedience, subservience to authority, respect for the leader and the hero, veneration of courage and the military spirit, acceptance without protest of cruelty, violence, and atrocity, fear of and hatred for the outsider, and virulent anti-Semitism.
5. The fairy tales thus played a significant role, hitherto little recognized outside of Germany, in the development of modern integral German nationalism. "They have enabled us to understand that we, the German people, bear the power and conditions in ourselves to take up and carry on the civilization of old times, that we are a folk with a high historical mission."¹⁰⁷

A Question of Authenticity

The *Hausmärchen* continue to attract the attention of children everywhere as well as fascinated scholars. Some German folklore specialists are now reluctant to accept the judgment of Hermann Grimm, son of Wilhelm Grimm, that the collection of tales "spring from the soil of Germany." The most recent attempt to purge the tales of what is called romantic politicizing was made in 1976 by Heinz Rölleke, a Wuppertal Professor of German, who for many years was a lecturer at the University of Cologne. Rölleke discovered a manuscript copy of sixty-three of the original tales and compared them with the first edition of 1812.¹⁰⁸ His research led him to question the German origin of some of the tales as well as their very authenticity.

According to Rölleke, the *Fairy Tales* are not as German in spirit as has been generally accepted. The Grimm brothers had quoted "elderly peasant women from Hesse" as the main verbal source of their stories. Nineteen of the tales, they noted, came from Frau Katerina Viehmann, the wife of a tailor. "It was one of those pieces of good fortune," Wilhelm Grimm wrote in 1819, "that we got to know an old peasant woman who lived in a small village called Niederzwehn, near Kassel, and who told us the greatest and best parts of the second volume. She was still hale and hearty, and not much over 50 years old. Her face was firm, pleasant and somehow knowledgeable, and her eyes clear and sharp. She retained the old stories in her head."¹⁰⁹ Further, in 1895 Hermann Grimm told of how an aged woman called "Old Marie" had told his father and uncle most of the remaining stories of the first volume, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Rölleke's research revealed that Frau Viehmann¹¹⁰ came from a French Huguenot family, grew up speaking French, and took some of her stories straight from Charles Perrault, a 17th-century French writer. "Old Marie" was a woman named Marie Hassenpflug, also from a Huguenot family; she was brought up in the French tradition and--far from being a peasant woman steeped in German folklore--was the wife of a president of the government. Thus, Rölleke dismisses the traditional explanation that these were genuine "Hesse folk tales" as Wilhelm Grimm had contended but rather the product of comparatively well-educated people from good families in Switzerland or other French-speaking areas. As an example he quotes the story of *The Sleeping Beauty*, which hitherto had been held to be particularly German. The story, concerning a princess who was put to sleep for a century by an evil fairy until she was awakened by a kiss from a prince, was told to the Grimms by "Old Marie." Rölleke insists that it is a word-for-word repetition of Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, a collection of French fairy tales which appeared in 1697. He cites other tales as also not reflecting the German folklore language of old peasant women.

Rölleke does not assert that the Grimms were literary swindlers who were aware of the questionable authenticity of the tales. He agrees that they listened to the two old women and that the brothers simply acted within the spirit of the times. Nevertheless, he does conclude that it is an exaggeration to say that the tales were irreproachably German and genuine.

Rölleke deserves much credit for his discovery that Frau Viehmann and "Old Marie" were of French Huguenot background and that several of the tales were French in origin. Yet this does not invalidate the theory of the importance of the tales in the development of German nationalism. Far from it. The methods of the Grimms may well have been faulty, but they endowed their tales with nationalistic bias.

The fact that Frau Viehmann and "Old Marie" were of Huguenot origin does not lessen their role in German cultural life. Historically, many Huguenots or French Protestants who fled from France after

the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, settled in England, America (the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, and New York), and Germany (especially in Brandenburg and the Rhineland). Of Calvinist persuasion, the Huguenots were skilled as artisans and traders, and wherever they went they constituted one of the most advanced and industrious elements in society. Invariably, they became assimilated in their new homelands, while at the same time retaining many of their old cultural forms. Undoubtedly, they brought with them folklore tales of French origin. But this does not mean that the German folk tales therefore became exclusively French.

Secondly, the Huguenots were but one element among the many ethnic and cultural groups which formed the German nationality. Neither Germans nor any other people are born with a sense of national consciousness: the need for security may be biological but national consciousness is engrained environmentally through family, school, and public life. Because the old women interviewed were of Huguenot origin does not mean that the authenticity of the tales is thereby demolished.

Finally, it is not as much the tales themselves as the *usage* made of them by the Grimms that makes them vital in the development of German romantic-nationalism. As linguistic paleontologists, the Grimms believed that their tales "sprang from the soil of Germany." That was the way they were presented. Perhaps, indeed, some of the tales came not from peasant women but from bourgeois Huguenot families. It may also be true that, despite their denials, the Grimms idealized and stylized the stories. But the two brothers always emphasized the Germanness of their tales. They gave romantic pictures of German medieval life, with its special conglomeration of kings, princes, princesses, peasants, frogs, and pumpkins. Even if *Sleeping Beauty* were originally French, the Grimms converted her into a fair German maiden. The motivation may well have been unconscious, but it was certainly inspired by the sentiment of nationalism.

The brothers Grimm had no idea that one day their folk tales would become the best-known German book in existence with translations into many languages throughout the world. For them the stories were particularly German and a reflection of true German folkish culture. The elements of loyalty, greed, and cunning may have common international implications, but regarded *in toto*, a special combination of German characteristics, both stereotypes and national, remain in the German versions of the tales.

Notes

¹ R. Stadelmann, "Grimm, Jakob Karl and Wilhelm Karl," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1937), p. 173.

² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³ R. Cleasby, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1875), p. lxix.

⁴ See Louis L. Snyder, *Race: A History of Modern Ethnic Theories* (New York, 1939), pp. 65-66.

⁵ C. Spender, "Grimms' Fairy Tales," *Contemporary Review*, 102 (1912), pp. 673-679.

⁶ Stadelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁷ T. Matthias, *Der deutsche Gedanke bei Jakob Grimm* (Leipzig, 1915), p. 45.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹ Jakob Grimm, *De desiderio patriae*, in *Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen*, November 13, 1830.

¹² Matthias, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹³ See Veit Valentin, *The German People* (New York, 1945), pp. 407-408; S. H. Steinberg, *A Short History of Germany* (New York, 1946), p. 195; and Matthias, pp. 25-34.

¹⁴ W. P. Ker, *Jakob Grimm* (London, 1915), p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Matthias, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-57.

¹⁸ G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century* 4th ed. (London and New York, 1928), p. 61.

¹⁹ Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples, Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (New York, 1946), p. 194.

²⁰ S. Liptzin, *From Novalis to Nietzsche* (New York, 1929), p. 4.

²¹ Robert R. Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York, 1931), p. 4.

²² G. Salomon, *Das Mittelalter als Ideal in der Romantik* (Munich, 1922), pp. 46 ff.

²³ See F. Wertham, *The Show of Violence* (New York, 1929).

²⁴ Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁵ J. and W. Grimm, *Fairy Tales* (New York, 1944), p. 943. Hereafter cited as *Fairy Tales*.

²⁶ H. Hamann, *Die literarischen Vorlagen der Kinder- und Hausmärchen und ihre Bearbeitung durch die Brüder Grimm* (Berlin, 1906), p. 8.

²⁷ J. Campbell, "The Work of the Grimm Brothers," in *Fairy Tales*, p. 834.

²⁸ Friedrich von Schiller, *Die Piccolomini*, in *Schillers Werke, herausgegeben von J. J. Fischer* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, n.d.) [The excerpt is from Act III, Scene 4, p. 317.]

²⁹ E. Lichtenstein, *Die Idee der Naturpoesie bei den Brüdern Grimm und ihr Verhältnis zu Herder*, *Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. VI (1928), pp. 513-547; E.

Laas, *Herders Einwirkung auf die deutsche Lyrik von 1770 bis 1775*, *Grenzboten* vol. XXX (1871), pp. 581 ff.; W. A. Berendsohn, *Grundformen volkstümlicher Erzählerkunst in der Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Hamburg, 1921), p. 8; and Ergang, *op. cit.*, pp. 102, 106, 114, 139, 174, 208, 234, 236, 240.

³⁰ Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³² Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 835-836.

³³ Spender, *op. cit.*, p. 673.

³⁴ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 838.

³⁵ Stadelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁶ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 839.

³⁷ Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁸ G. M. Priest, *A Brief History of German Literature* (New York, 1909), p. 253.

³⁹ Spender, *op. cit.*, pp. 673 ff.

⁴⁰ W. School, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grimm'schen Märchen*, *Sonderabdruck aus den Hessischen Blättern für Volkskunde*, XIX (Frankfurt am Main, 1931), *passim*. See also R. Steig, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Märchen und Sagen der Brüder Grimm*, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, vol. 107 (1901).

⁴¹ Liptzin, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ H. B. Paull, *The Grimms' Fairy Tales and Household Stories*. Reviewed in *The Athenaeum*, 3148 (1888), pp. 237-239.

⁴⁴ J. Bolte and G. Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Leipzig, 1912-1932), vol. IV, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵ J. and W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1854), vol. I, preface.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 848.

⁴⁷ *Fairy Tales*, no. 172.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 83.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 110.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, no. 52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 180.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 102.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 171.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 94.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 146.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 91.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 94.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 152.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 19, 65, 94, 126, 128, 129, 166.

⁶⁹ V. Brun, "The German Fairy Tale," *Menorah Journal*, XXVII, pp. 147-155.

⁷⁰ *Fairy Tales*, no. 63.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, no. 64.

⁷² *Ibid.*, no. 166.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 101.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 114.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 119.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 45.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 136.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 101.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 125.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 54.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, no. 102.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

⁸⁶ Brun, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

⁸⁷ *Fairy Tales*, no. 121.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 49.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

⁹² *Ibid.*, no. 51.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, no. 56.

⁹⁴ Wertham, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁹⁵ Brun, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

⁹⁶ *Fairy Tales*, no. 15.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 49.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 9.

¹⁰⁰ See I. Cohen, *Anti-Semitism in Germany* (London, 1918), and F. von Hellwald, "Zur Charakteristik der jüdischen Volk," *Das Ausland*, XLV (1872), pp. 951-955.

¹⁰¹ S. Maccoby, "Modern Anti-Semitism," *Contemporary Review*, CXLVIII (1935), pp. 342-348.

¹⁰² *Fairy Tales*, no. 115.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 110.

¹⁰⁵ V. Petrova and A. Vibakh, "Nazi Literature for Children," *The Living Age*, CCCXLVII (1934), pp. 365-366.

¹⁰⁶ Carl Franke, *Die Brüder Grimm, Ihr Leben und Wirken* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1899), pp. 40, 52, 150-151, 153.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ This manuscript was originally owned by Clemens Brentano, who acquired it in 1810 because of his active assistance in preparing it. On his death it passed eventually to a Trappist monastery in Alsace, and from there to an auction in New York in 1953, at which time it was acquired by Martin Bodmer, a Swiss national. The Bodmer family passed it on to Rölleke, who used it for his systematic analysis of the tales.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Mathias Schreiber in *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, April 17, 1976. Schreiber's article, on which this section is based, gives an excellent résumé of the Rölleke thesis.

¹¹⁰ Rölleke calls her *Dorothea* instead of *Katerina Viehmann*.

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