

ABSTRACT

Fairy Tales Revisited

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Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are known as the gatherers and editors of tales collected in *Nursery Tales for Children*, or *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. These tales were originally collected by the brothers as part of a mission to reassert German nationalism, not solely as a collection of bedtime stories for children, but also as a way for the adults reading them to understand their identity as Germans. What they created was a blueprint for how fairy tales would be retold and passed down, and made familiar to us even today through television and film. As is characteristic of fairy tales, today's versions reflect problems relevant to our culture like incorporating feminism, the disparity of wealth, and so on, while maintaining widely recognized aspects of the Grimm's "original" tales. Though we have tried to repackage fairy tales for children, by emphasizing the morals within the stories, the fairy tale genre today still contains material designated for adults rather than children: violent retribution and sexual connotations, complex societal overhaul, and a longing for the past and the beauty and freedom of youth.

Fairy Tales Revisited

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By

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Introduction

Fairy tales are an interesting window into what a society values and fears, and how we seek to instruct future generations. The brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm collected and revised fairy tales to create one of the most printed books of all time, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which remains the blueprint for fairy tale storylines to this day. Because fairy tales so clearly reflect the society that imbibes them, it is interesting to reflect on what has changed in the perception of fairy tales and their role in society since even before the brothers Grimm collected the tales. I have found that though many in the literary field would argue that fairy tales were only tailored for adults in the older, oral versions, the moralization and editing of recorded tales has shown what the adult society deems fit and worth reinforcing in their children: an emphasis on parental and governmental authority, obedience, purity, and beauty. These themes have been perpetuated since the Grimms first undertook their revising process, but adult themes of sexuality and sexual awakening, violent retribution, and the rationalization of abandonment have remained. The trend in revising and reinterpreting fairy tales is just beginning to come full circle, as one can see in the types of films Disney and others are producing with strong female leads, and an update on the morals and themes hidden within the tales. In another direction, television shows like *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm*, in conjunction with films in the PG-13 category, are catering once more to the adult audience these fairy tales originally addressed and pushing the genre to new creative heights.

In the first chapter I will explain who the Grimms are and why they recorded and revised the tales as they did. The brothers collected fairy tales with the intent of establishing the stories as German in heritage such that their projected audience, adults and alike, would align themselves with the unified identity under this heritage in a post-Napoleonic Germany. The second chapter focuses on the edits the Grimms made to the tales and what this shows about their evolving intentions and the demands of their society. The different stages of revision they went through as the years progressed, as well as the pattern it established for generations of storytellers and filmmakers onward, shows us the various ways fairy tales are used to convey morals and ideas about contemporary society. Chapter three focuses on modern retellings of Grimm tales and what is being done with them currently, reflecting some of the Grimm's initial edits. In particular, Disney tales with an emphasis on balanced gender roles and power structures within their tales update storylines to fit today's demand for stories that are uplifting and supportive of current structures, rather than the condemning and authoritative tone of the original Grimm tales. The fourth chapter and conclusion focus more on what this can show us about the future of fairy tales. Parallel to the success of Disney's newer version of tales is a more adult-centered movement in entertainment combining the familiar tales we share with children as well as what the tales are actually saying about the desires within us and our society.

CHAPTER ONE

The Brothers

The brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are known around the world for their collection of fairy tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which has been adapted for plays, films, and the television screen countless times since the first edition of the tales in 1812. The profound effect of this collection is such that its printing “ranks with the Bible and Shakespeare” and shows no signs of slowing as the tales pop up in media, reimagined in television shows like “Grimm” or “Once Upon a Time,” to say nothing of their use in Disney films.¹ Jacob and Wilhelm wrote the tales at a time of crucial need for unification for the German people after Napoleon had invaded and occupied Germany. The Napoleonic wars and the dismantling of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation left the population crying out for a sense of commonality and tranquility in the wake of the French invasions.² The brothers filled a void in the German metanarrative by claiming the tales were from an oral heritage and took tales from all over the world, revise them to claim a literary lineage bolstering German *Nationalstolz*, or pride. The appeal to a German tradition of story-telling and the hearkening back to “simpler times”

¹ Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts about Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Expanded 2nd Edition Vol. 2 1987. Print.

² “German Literature,” Ehrhard Bahr, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified December 7, 2012, accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/230881/German-literature>.

of a medieval atmosphere is a major component of what separates German Romanticism from its other Western European counterparts, especially with the touches of humor within the tales and the beauty of nature within the accompanying illustrations.³

Jacob and Wilhelm were the oldest of six surviving children, five boys and one girl, born to jurist Philipp Wilhelm Grimm and his wife Dorothea.⁴ The family moved to Steinau where Philipp was the *Amtmann*, or district magistrate, until his sudden death from pneumonia in 1796. The family was placed under severe and unexpected financial stress, forcing them to move out of their large home and leave behind their comfortable lifestyle, forcing the two older brothers to provide for the family. The two brothers felt the effects of their father's death in many ways, both emotional and social, because it pushed them to the outer edges of acceptable society and made obtaining schooling and a career much more difficult. In many ways the foundation of the brothers' lives is similar to the heroes in their stories, capped off by the enormous and unforeseen success of their collection of tales. Without a male provider and head of household, Jacob and Wilhelm tried to fill the void. This meant the two developed a very close-knit and interdependent relationship, beyond that of normal siblings, and would remain this way for the rest of their lives, even living together after Wilhelm married.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, Ehrhard Bahr, "German Literature," accessed July 28, 201.

⁴ Jack Zipes, *Enchanted Screen: A History of Fairy Tales on Film*. Florence, KY, USA. Routedledge, 2010. p.12. <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/baylor/Doc?id=10446805&ppg=12>.

Dorothea Grimm was forced to give up their home and rely on aid from her father and sister, who prodded the boys to be industrious and independent, as well as provided connections to the court of Prince Frederick Charles of Hesse.⁵ With the help of their aunt and her connections in Kassel the brothers attended the well-known *Friedrichsgymnasium*, where they were constantly reminded of their lower status and had to work much harder than other students to get the attention of their professors.⁶ Their labors paid off, however, and both brothers graduated at the top of their class.

Against all odds, the brothers received a dispensation to study law at the University of Marburg where again their position at the fringe of school society forced them to put in the extra hours to succeed. Wilhelm even wrote in his autobiography “the ardor with which we studied Old German helped us overcome the spiritual depression of those days.”⁷ Their drive attracted the attention of law professor Friedrich von Savigny, who would become a huge influence on the Grimms by pushing them to study history and more particularly, medieval Germanic literature. The brothers’ interest was likely driven by the German search for strong nationalistic roots in the face of French pressure and invasion from Napoleon, as well as the need Germans felt to unite the approximately two hundred principalities in Germany into a single state. In pursuit of this interest, the brothers sought to develop a strong sense of nationalism in

⁵ Zipes, Jack (2002). *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (1st ed.). Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-90081-2.

⁶ Zipes, *Enchanted Screen*, 1, 5.

⁷ Zipes, “*The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*,” p.7.

language, leading to “the largest and most comprehensive collection of the German language in existence,” the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*.⁸ For the brothers, language was the purest expression of culture, and thus they began to turn to the oral versions of tales in an attempt to capture the most “original” expressions of the people in recording their versions of the stories.⁹

Jack Zipes acknowledges the interdependence between Romanticism and such types of revolutionary thought in Germany, and how fairy tales played a significant intellectual role. Zipes refers to the tales as “revolutionary in form, revolutionary in state” and says that fairy tales in general “no matter the individual political or aesthetic bias of a romantic writer” sought to “contain, comprehend and comment on the essence of changing times.”¹⁰ Indeed, the Grimm brothers used the aesthetics of the fairy tales to help Germans connect to the reading middleclass and to inspire a dream of a united Germany. Fairy tales, being outside the realm of physical reality, I would argue, may have been seen as better vehicles for Romanticism than folk tales. A folk tale is more centered on natural occurrence and the interpretation of these occurrences in a more oral tradition, whereas fairy tales came to be seen as a reflection of the times centered on imagining a better future attainable through a shift in social paradigms.

⁸ Clifford Wunderlich, “*Deutsches Wörterbuch* von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm,” Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University Divinity School, April 2012.

⁹ Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, 28.

¹⁰ Jack Zipes, “Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales.” (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979), 42.

Their professor Friedrich von Savigny also provided the connection to other German Romantics, such as Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim. These contemporaries of the brothers were among the first readers and editors of the tales. They understood the significance of what the brothers were doing, yet had words of caution about the tales being directed towards children due to the traditionally adult nature of their content¹¹. Fairy tales “were never really meant for children’s ears alone . . . originally told at fireside gatherings or in spinning circles by adults to adult audiences” and have only become part of “the canon of children’s literature” within the last two to three centuries. ¹²Even after generations of stylization and revision, most tales have underlying messages for adult audiences--if nothing else reaffirming the power and authority of the parent in absolute control over the will and choices of their child. What this shows is a dichotomy between the distinctly adult undertones of fairy tales and the moralization that has taken over the essence of the story. The messages of the stories simultaneously contain adult content as well as magic and morals for the children. Some of the more persistent themes still prevalent in the tales even after decades of editing are the supreme authority of parents, the clear distinction between right and wrong with extreme castigation for wrongdoers, and the underlying tones of the demonization of women. Fairy tales that comment on any type of male-female exchange or the role of women as seductress are slipped into the minds of children

¹¹ Maria Tatar, preface to *The Hard Facts about Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Expanded 2nd Edition Vol. , 1987. Print.

¹² Tatar, Preface, xxvi.

without a second thought, naturally prejudicing them to think only of the evil stepmother or helpless damsel when considering the role of female characters.

However, Jacob and Wilhelm did not initially set out to write the tales for children, but rather as an academic collection of the oral tradition or “people’s poetry” as part of a movement to reassert German nationalism in a time of political turbulence, “to record faithfully, to the letter, including the so-called speech dialect, mannerisms, turns of events, even if they seem incorrect,” in the words of Jacob Grimm himself.¹³

Although fairy tales in that day and age had long been passed down as entertainment for adults or as forms of poetry, the Grimm brothers, in recording the tales, redirected this entertainment towards a younger audience than was typically intended, trying to incorporate their own messages on behavior and morality, which made fundamental changes to the “oral tradition” tales essential.¹⁴ It was a new brand of fairy tale, and, as Maria Tatar writes, “neither brother could have foreseen the stunning success” that the tales would achieve. The brothers claimed the tales in the name of their fatherland and made them accessible and organized in one book, certainly very appealing for their audience. The Grimms claimed that the stories were collected from Hessen peasants and the likes of “Old Marie,” but they were in fact from “relatives and childhood friends; first sister Lotte; then the daughters of their next-door neighbor,

¹³Linda Degh, “Grimm’s Household Tales and its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic,” in *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing: Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature*, (Berne: Peter Lang Publishers, 1981), 34.

¹⁴ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 2.

pharmacist Wild (one who would later be Wilhelm's wife); and finally the children of the Hassenpflug family." Even Katharina Dorothea Viehmann, who was presented "as the ideal Märchenfrau" was French Huguenot, meaning many of her tales were rooted in the stories of Perrault and d'Aulnoy.¹⁵

Even though the Grimms intended the tales for a younger audience, they had to be cautioned by friends and associates to clean up the tales so that they were more appropriate for the children they were targeting. However, the brothers insisted that "cruelties should not be omitted because they were inherent in folk tradition" and the tales were meant to be as authentic as possible.¹⁶ The first edition of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in 1812 was an exploration into fairytales with which the brothers were not entirely comfortable, since their expertise was in the study of the Germanic language and philosophy.¹⁷ In the story "The Wedding of Mrs. Fox," for example, a fox decides to test his wife's loyalty and devotion by feigning his own death and observing whom his wife woos. Different fox suitors come and go, but Mrs. Fox rejects them because they do not possess the "nine tails" of her husband. Eventually she does find a suitable fox with the appropriate tail and Mr. Fox comes back to life and confronts his wife with her lust and greed, driving off the suitor. The word for tail, *Schwanz*, would have been recognized as an obscenity by the audience as a slang term for a penis, but not by the brothers Grimm. In many tales, the sexual innuendos were clear and central

¹⁵ Degh, Grimm's Household Tales, 34.

¹⁶ Degh, Grimm's Household Tales, 33.

¹⁷ Tatar, Hard facts preface, xxvi.

to the tale; however the Grimms did their very best, in the words of Wilhelm, to eliminate “certain conditions and relationships.”¹⁸ The most bothersome condition was apparently pregnancy, as in the case of *Hans Dumm*. According to the tale, Hans wields the power to impregnate women by simply wishing that they were with child. This tale made only the first edition of the tales. One more obvious example in the tales of the discomfort of sexuality for the brothers is the editing of the “Frog King,” the first tale in the collection and one of the more popular tales today. According to Maria Tatar, “only a copy of the original drafts for the collection, sent to Clemens Brentano in 1810 . . . is explicit about where the frog lands and the princess’s alacrity in joining him there.”¹⁹ In this unprinted version the frog is thrown against the wall by the princess then “falls down into her bed and lies there as a handsome young prince, and the king’s daughter lies down next to him.”²⁰

Even as the brothers tried to eliminate sexuality from the tales, they did not do the same for the violence in the tales, even “increasing the level of violence and brutality when, for example, those in the tales who suffered it deserved it according to their moral outlook.”²¹ In *The Hard Facts of the Grimm Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar argues that sex and violence particularly appeared in the tales “taking the perverse form of incest and child abuse, for the nuclear family furnishes the fairy tale’s main cast of

¹⁸ Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts about Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Expanded 2nd Edition Vol. 2, 1987. Print. , p.7.

¹⁹ Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 8.

²⁰ Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 8.

²¹ *One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 79.

characters just as the family constitutes its most common subject.”²² Although the brothers began the collection as a “scholarly venture and patriotic project,” the brothers allowed to remain, and even enhanced “lurid portrayals of child abuse, starvation, and exposure” and deemed them more appropriate as a bedtime story than what Tatar calls “the facts of life,” i.e. any sort of sexuality.²³

Despite this, what actually made the tales so popular was the context of the society they were written within rather than the artistry of their words or the sensationalism of their subject matter. The German upper-middle-class family in the nineteenth century found that the tales “fitted scientific and subjective tastes” and supported the “ideology from German nationalism and folk romanticism.”²⁴ Although the Grimm brothers were not the first to initiate a renewed interest in German folklore (Johann Gottfried Herder was among the leaders of the “*Sturm and Drang*” movement in late 18th century Germany that would look to fairy tales as a form of prophetic history bolstering German pride²⁵), they were seen as belonging to the group of more “avant garde” writers that developed the use of fairy tales as a “form of protest against the vulgar utilitarian ideals of the Enlightenment.”²⁶ Their revised stories were part of what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s study, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, would label the “instrumentalization of reason,” boosting the rise of

²² Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 10.

²³ Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 10.

²⁴ Degh, *Grimm’s Household Tales*, 34.

²⁵ Jack Zipes, “Instrumentalization of Fantasy,” in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979).

²⁶ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 13.

innovative story telling for the Romantics.²⁷ These tales were used as a vehicle for showing the people that they could be as it once was at the “beginning” of their heritage. As Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, under the pseudonym “Novalis,” wrote, “History was a reappropriation of nature and resources through love and the imagination of individuals jointly striving to help one another reach full potential.”²⁸ Fairy tales fit into this formula because they pit characters against seemingly insurmountable problems and systems of authoritarianism and the characters dance out of the way with cleverness and somehow beat the odds to gain the money, status, or power the reader now feels they are entitled to. Fairy tales echo “the most profound articulation of the human struggle,” that is maintaining a civilizing process.²⁹ The tales worked in Romanticism to unite the German nation-states, and later the Western world, into believing that the Grimm version of these tales was an authentic portrayal of the oral tradition, thus allowing them to be taken at face value for the morality and authoritarian issues within.

Although the Victorian era saw the tales watered down and trivialized, the “emancipatory potency of fairy tales” could not be diminished, Jack Zipes argues.³⁰ Even “mass-mediated tales that reaffirm the goodness of the culture industry” contain many elements promoting individual autonomy over that of the state, ingenuity and creativity in the place of oppression, and freethinking and imagination in the conception

²⁷ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 13.

²⁸ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 15.

²⁹ Zipes, *Enchanted Screen*, prologue.

³⁰ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 18.

and processing of the story itself. ³¹Zipes and I agree here once again, because no matter what is done to the fairy tales, the classic themes of societal upheaval, love against all odds, and the rise of the underdog remain to inspire the audience. Storytelling is so deeply ingrained in human culture, as part of an act of building community and passing down lessons, that even though the tradition has been altered, the sense of “emancipatory potency” that Zipes described remains. Zipes also argues that Novalis, the pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, who ranks highly among German fairy tale writers in the Romantic period, would also agree, since he wrote that “to become a human being is an art” and “the fantastic and artistic designs of folk and fairy tales reflect the social configurations which lead to conflict, solidarity or change in the name of humanity.” ³² The conflict in tales continues to show us how to face our own problems, despite the evolution of the tales. Zipes also co-opts Albert Einstein to his cause, a man who also had great regard for the imaginative power of tales and their application. Fairy tales “like his theory of relativity . . . transform time into relative elements and offer us the hope and possibility to take history into our hands.”³³ Much in the same way that tales can make time feel relative, looking into the history of the story-telling tradition and seeing that the most essential elements have remained steadfast against the tides of time gives hope for the future of creativity and ingenuity in the future.

³¹ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 18.

³² Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 18.

³³ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 19.

In addition to his support of fairy tales as a consistently relevant art form in society, Zipes argues that technology and advancement are not enemies of fairy tales, but rather among the strongest allies; they help to “liberate and fulfill the imaginative projections” in tales. This is even truer today than when *Breaking the Magic Spell* was written by Zipes in 1979. Technology today makes these “imaginative projections” infinitely more accessible in a variety of forms: television and film, book series with princess heroines, like the *Damsels* comic series, computer and video games, and electronic readers.

CHAPTER TWO

The Darker Side of Happily Ever After

Bruno Bettelheim's work "The Use and Abuse of Folk and Fairy Tales with Children" argues that the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child around which he or she can structure daydreams and thus give better direction to life, and that they can also be a "therapeutic educational tool." However, Bettelheim acknowledges that for the tales to be used for children's education there would be a need for "careful delineation of the progressive and regressive ideological and psychological meanings of the tales."³⁴ With this, we are reminded that the tales in the earlier versions or the oral tradition were *not* intended for children as the Grimm brothers' peers pointed out to them. For there to even be the need for "careful delineation" and explanation to the child indicates that the tales underwent a transformation in order to convey the Grimms' moral message to the audience. Their emphasis on violence stresses the significance of the family and children's role in submission and obedience to the will of the parent, and subsequent authority structures in society.

"The Juniper Tree" is one example of the Grimms' juxtaposition of violence and rough justice.³⁵ The greedy stepmother serves her stepson to his father as a stew and is crushed by a millstone in accordance with the biblical punishment for those who sin against children. Within even this brief summation it becomes clear

³⁴ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 192.

³⁵ Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 8.

that the stepmother is demonized, the father is absolved of guilt through his negligence, and, with the meting out of extreme punishment to wrongdoers, the moral message that the Grimms wished to include is clearly present.³⁶

The nature of the villain in this tales as in others says a lot about who the Grimms blamed for problems in society, since, as Zipes explains, at their very core fairy tales are the truest expression of faults and desires of humanity.³⁷ The examples of “The Juniper Tree,” or other more classic tales like “Snow White,” include the stereotyped role of the evil stepmother. We take this notion of an “evil stepmother” for granted nowadays, precisely because of the most well-known fairy tales, but originally, in tales such as “Snow White,” the villain was the biological mother. The substitution of the stepmother was an editing choice by the Grimms that has dramatically changed the reception of the tales. In the first version of “Snow White” (1812), the queen takes her own daughter into the woods and hides her amongst the flowers, abandoning her to die. The huntsman is later sent out to return with Snow White’s lung and liver as proof of her death. There are three attempts at her life before the success of the poison apple. In a version sent to Clemens Brentano

³⁶ This is now normal in how we perceive fairy tales, though it remains unclear to me why we allow it to be perpetuated to the next generation while we condemn video game violence and allow bullying to continue and go unpunished beneath our noses, contrary to the justice for wrongdoers in fairy tales.

“Bullying Infographic,” Stop Bullying Now, accessed July 22, 2014, <http://www.stopbullyingnowfoundation.org/main/images/stories/bullying-infographic.png>.

³⁷ Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 137.

in 1810, but never published, the father of Snow White “is the one who finds and removes the coffin, ordering revival by tying her body to ropes connected to the four corners of a room.”³⁸ But at the close of the tale retribution is still achieved: the queen attends the wedding of the new queen, whom she soon recognizes as her daughter and “her heart fills with the deepest of dread when she realizes the truth” about her survival. The villain queen is made to dance in a pair of “glowing hot iron shoes” and dances until she drops dead, all of which takes place at the wedding for the entertainment of the guests. In “Happily Ever After,” Jack Zipes explains that the stepmother is a vehicle for undertones of the demonization of women and accusations of witchcraft.³⁹ The distance between a stepmother and stepdaughter was apparently more comfortable for the audience than that between a biological mother and her child, and allowed them to accept the violence and cruelty that transpires, as well as to absolve the male parent, who is often neglectful of and even a danger to the children.

In the chapter titled “Rationalization of Abandonment and Abuse in Fairy Tales” in the same work mentioned above, Zipes tackles the question of why we have grown accustomed to accepting the return of the abandoned children to the father that deserted them in the first place, such as the neglectful father in “Hansel

³⁸ Kay Stone, “The Three Transformations of Snow White,” in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*, ed. James M. McGlathery (Illinois: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1988), 56.

³⁹ Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 47.

and Gretel.” In the most popular version of the tale, it is the stepmother who suggests he turn the children out so their other children might live. This may have been a common situation in the time of the oral circulation of tales and the Grimm’s initial gathering, when husbands were much older than their wives and so stepmothers and stepchildren were a common addition to families. However, the father of Hansel and Gretel readily agrees to the suggestion of his wife and abandons the children, even if he does not bear the brunt of the blame as the tale stands. He even casts them out twice, after Hansel’s pebbles guide the children back the first time. Hansel and Gretel go through the ordeal with the witch and then return to the same father who abandoned them. But even this widely accepted version had an original in which *both* parents were biological and shared the blame equally. The substitution of an abusive and cruel stepmother allows the father to pass off the blame, especially since the stepmother has conveniently died by the time the children return home. It might be argued that the mother/stepmother is synonymous with the character of the witch. Both are driven by hunger and a wish to get rid of the children, and the fact that both characters have died by the time of the reunification is significant. The message that remains after this careful editing by Wilhelm Grimm in particular is a message common for the time- that women possess a sort of innate evil.

We cannot blame the Grimms for having this opinion of women. Germany had a blemished history when it came to accusations against women: indeed with the Würzburg witch trial was one of the largest trials and mass executions of the

Early Modern period.⁴⁰ Though the last executions for crimes of witchcraft took place in the 18th century, sorcery was illegal in Germany late into the 18th century-- showing the extent to which fear of magic and the unknown permeated German culture.⁴¹ In much the same way that witch hunts preyed upon outsiders and unmarried, older women in the lower stratus of society, it was inevitable that tales would be edited in such a way that women became evil in every instance that they were not the beautiful virgin heroine with potential to rule; such as evil and aging queens envious of their younger princess counterparts, or the witch living alone in the forest intent on luring in and devouring children rather than aiming to nurture and protect them as women are responsible for in everyday society.

The witch's greed and stepmother's envy are clearly the evil that Hansel and Gretel are up against, but they have done nothing wrong themselves to fall into the trap besides eating from an edible house when they are starving. Perhaps the eating of the witch's house points to appetites they are not supposed to have as good children, and, again as good children, they have to return to the father. Zipes argues that the addition of a swan, a "God-like figure" that helps the children across the river, seems to help legitimize the fact that the children are right to return to their father.⁴² The father is even rewarded with newly found wealth in the form of the greedy witch's horde of jewels, which the children happily produce upon their

⁴⁰ Lois Martin, *A Brief History of Witchcraft*, (Running Press, 2010), 5.

⁴¹ Erich Goode; Nachman Ben-Yehuda *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. (Wiley, 2010), 195.

⁴² Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 42.

reunion. In contrast to the subtle demonization of women in the tales is the bolstering of paternal and male authority. In the examples of both “The Juniper Tree” and “Hansel and Gretel,” the father is forgiven for his compliance in wrongdoing. Another layer of complexity with the relationship to the father is the death of Jacob and Wilhelm’s own father, Phillip. Phillip Grimm’s death profoundly affected the way relations between father and child were handled in the stories the brothers wrote. The extreme love of the father at the end of the tale is used to gloss over the fact that the children were abandoned in the first place.

The same pattern of paternal exception from blame bleeds over into other fairy tale collections, and later the world of Disney. It is a common criticism of Disney storylines that the main hero/heroine is without one or both parents. The Grimm brothers transformed tales from having equally accountable biological parents, to replacing with stepparents, as in “Snow White,” “Cinderella,” and other classic tales. Though this certainly mirrors the evolution of the Grimm fairy tales, there is also a layer of complexity to Walt Disney’s brand of storytelling. After the unprecedented success of “Disney’s folly,” *Snow White*, Walt and his brother Roy bought their parents a new home in North Hollywood. Within a month of being in the new home, tragedy struck and Flora Disney died in the night as a result of asphyxiation due to carbon monoxide poisoning.⁴³ While it is understandable that there would need to be distance from parental influence in the Disney movies, so

⁴³ Geoff Shearer, *Disney Keeps Killing Movie Mothers*, (The [Queensland] Courier-Mail), accessed 7 March 2008.

that the protagonist could grow and face obstacles alone, it is interesting to consider the effect this tragedy could have, albeit it subtly, on Disney's creative process in developing films. Furthermore, his wife Lillian Disney had pregnancy complications, including a miscarriage, which pushed the couple into adopting their second daughter Sharon. This could have further complicated the perspective on maternal influence in his brand of storytelling.⁴⁴ Whatever the root of Disney's own reason for paternal issues in his movies, it is doubtless originally a result of the storytelling pattern made widely known by the editing of tales done by the brothers Grimm.

The cautionary messages that remained after the Grimm's editing warned against disobedience, straying from the path, and an overeager appetite on the part of children. While children were not always directly blamed for these impulses, the violent and gratuitous punishment emphasized in the tales served as a warning. Parents became the ones to share these tales with their children and to explain the meaning of the tales, further bolstering paternal authority. This allowed adults to add their own morals and to censor any traces of sexuality the Grimms might have missed. This has perpetuated tales with an over-inflated sense of moral correctness that they arguably did not contain in their older oral forms. Today, television and film are attempting to access the themes and nature of original versions of tales, going to Grimm versions and further back, to tap into the adult nature of tales and to cater to mature audiences once more. The trend of recent creative efforts, the shows

⁴⁴ "Lillian Disney", D23, Accessed July 19, <https://d23.com/disney-legends/?key=Lillian+Disney>.

Grimm and *Once Upon A Time*, and even Disney film projects like *Brave*, *Tangled*, and *Malificent*, is to make the tales feel more authentic and yet reinvisioned, acknowledging them as entertainment while taking the next step by including feminist ideals and more adult motifs.

CHAPTER THREE

Modern Retellings

Our culture has imbibed Grimms' tales in the form of Disney movies. Just as in 19th-century Germany, 20th-century America felt the need for a utopian construct in our imaginations where the ordinary could rise up against extraordinary odds.⁴⁵ Disney used the Grimm tales because they were already familiar to the audience and fit easily into our society's expectations of how certain characters should succeed as well as bolstering the moral values we were attempting to live by.

Disney was successful at transforming the fairy tales into screenplays because the company was able to rely on our preformed imaginations "to suggest the Disney-like utopias are the ones we should all strive to construct in reality."⁴⁶ The brothers Grimm did much the same thing, both in their choice of the tales they gathered as well as their revision of the tales to fit a more unitary German consciousness, yearning for the nostalgic medieval utopian fabrication of life. They wrote as if the tales took place in a much simpler time, yet still with the sense that it could or did happen in what would become Germany, because of the complications faced as a result of the Napoleonic wars, rising industry, and the looming questions of the Enlightenment. As with the Grimms' readership, albeit to a lesser extent, Disney's audience is receiving a watered-down version of the adult entertainment of the original oral tales along with the insertion of more modern moral lessons intended to help foster growth in the youth. But do most tales-turned-movies

⁴⁵ Zipes BTMS 105

⁴⁶ Zipes 105

actually help children grapple with contemporary social problems? After all, solutions in a Disney fairy tale have no connection to the world most of us face on a daily basis. Perhaps in the tales' original forms in the oral tradition there was a re-assertion of parent over child, the threat of defying authority, and the danger of disobeying and straying into the woods; but Disney movies guided children into constructs of unattainable utopias rather than ways of living their lives and facing their problems without magical aid or extraordinarily useful cleverness.

The transformation from the Grimm storybook to Disney films actually began with a rendition of *Three Little Pigs* in 1933, arguably rooted in the Grimm tale *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* from the 1812 edition of the collection of tales. However, the first major success and new direction of film-making to incorporate Grimm was, of course, the 1937 film, *Snow White*. The film was Walt Disney's brainchild: it was his idea to take a well-known storybook tale and transform it into a feature-length animated film with revolutionary ideas in animation and the rendering of special effects, such as the queen's transformation into a hag and the forest sequences. *Snow White* used many of the formulaic characteristics of the later editions of Grimm tales—the beautiful, virginal heroine pitted against an aging and evil stepmother—while also putting Disney's own stamp on the film with dancing and singing forest creature companions and an infantilizing of the story further by lessening the retribution on the evil queen, and pushing her from a cliff as opposed to her dancing to death in iron shoes.

The next Grimm transformation came in 1950 with *Cinderella*. Although the story of Cinderella is also attributed to the French Charles Perrault, there was a

version of the story in the Grimms' collection of tales, "Aschenputtel." The Disney version continued the Grimms' *leitmotif* of the evil stepmother, as well as stepsisters, and the wealth and status that came with her marriage to the handsome prince. Disney also continued the trope of helpful animal friends in *Cinderella*, with the talkative mice and birds that sing and help her get dressed. But what the Disney version does not include are the gory details about how the stepsisters' eyes are pecked out by the same bird friends, or that the sisters cut off their heels and toes to try and fit into the glass slipper, as in the original tale. The violent retribution that was so crucial to the Grimm's and the audience they wrote for had become outdated and unnecessary for a Disney version attempting to please an audience in 1950.

The next installment of the fairy tale films was *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959 that built on the legacy of the first two films, even pulling scrapped scenes from the previous projects such as the capture and mocking of the prince and the dance sequence with Aurora and the bucket-manufactured prince.⁴⁷ These scenes were originally supposed to be in *Snow White* and *Cinderella* respectively. The film writers pulled from the Grimms' as well as Perrault's version of the tale, while adding their own elements like the evil, yet glamorously styled, Queen Malificent, and the three instead of seven fairies, each with their personality to provide more interest. The naming of the princess (Aurora) acknowledged the forefathers of the tale, pulling the name from Perrault's name for one of the twins born to the princess in his tale, and the three fairies in the film using the name "Briar Rose" for the princess in disguise, which is the name of the Grimm version of the tale. The Disney

⁴⁷ <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/sleepingbeauty/notes.html#FORTY4>.

team used live-action to record the story on film and give the animators a basis for their drawings. Queen Malificent was played by actress Eleanor Audley who voiced the Queen as well as the evil stepmother in *Cinderella*.⁴⁸ *Sleeping Beauty* is notable for its advancement of animated design, using xerography and custom background designs by the artist Eyvind Earle.⁴⁹

After *Sleeping Beauty*'s somewhat disappointing revenue, Disney studios refrained from the fairy tale genre until *The Little Mermaid* in 1989. *The Little Mermaid* is based on Danish Hans Christian Andersen's tale of the same name. The success of this boosted the genre of storytelling film, and work for *Beauty and the Beast* picked up with fervor. Ideas for *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* had been on the shelf since *Snow White* went into production, but could never be finalized because of problems creating strong storylines amidst work on other projects.⁵⁰ *Beauty and the Beast* was the first of the Disney films to gain accredited acclaim, "famously nominated as the first animated film for the Academy Award for Best Picture."⁵¹ But after "Sleeping Beauty," Disney would not return to the Grimms' tales until the very recent movies *Tangled* and *Malificent*.

The next wave of fairy tale success is more recent. Disney studios have been reviving fairy tales and branching out from their typical princess tropes in projects like *Tangled*, *Brave*, and *Malificent*. All three of these films give greater depth to the

⁴⁸ Andreas Deja (2011-08-31). "Deja View: Miss Audley". Andreasdeja.blogspot.ru. Retrieved 2014-04-13.

⁴⁹http://www.monstersandcritics.com/dvd/features/article_1435078.php/Disney_animator_Burny_Mattinson_talks_Sleeping_Beauty.

⁵⁰ Tale as Old as Time: The Making of *Beauty and the Beast* (VCD). Walt Disney Home Entertainment. 2002.

⁵¹ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=beautyandthebeast.htm>.

princesses, as well as the figures surrounding them, to provide a more modern basis for the lessons in the film, while still pushing the boundaries of visualization and animation as is typical for the brand. *Tangled* and *Malificent* in particular are significant to my research for their claims of fairy tale authenticity and revival. Initially, *Tangled* was supposed to be a “Shrek-like version of the fairy tale,” developed to have a more comedic and whimsical feel and retaining few elements of the original tale (“Rapunzel”).⁵² However, Glen Keane the animator and author behind *Beauty and the Beast*, as well as other beloved films like *Tarzan* and *Aladdin* felt differently: “in my heart of hearts I believed there was something much more sincere and genuine to get out of the story, so we set it aside and went back to the roots of the original fairy tale.”⁵³ What Keane and the other creators did was update the fairy tale “Rapunzel” and cut out the more overtly sexual overtones without losing the sincerity and connection that comes with a tale of girl growing up isolated from the world and discovering what it has to offer. *Tangled* is a good example of how fairy tales are being guided in a new direction for 21st-century audiences, where the lead is still a princess who finds true love, but who also has character and an identity that is more than skin-deep. Rapunzel’s opposite in the film, Flynn Rider, is not a prince but the “bad guy” Rapunzel’s keeper has in mind in cautioning her against the outside world. The role of Flynn is expanded in the film to make him more than just the charming prince stereotype, and the movie is about him coming of age as much as it is about Rapunzel. Indeed, when the name of the film was

⁵² <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/moviemom/2010/11/interview-glen-keane-of-tangle.html>.

⁵³ Glen Keane interview.

changed to *Tangled* and Flynn was given such a major role, many critics were upset, claiming that Disney was being true to old sexist patterns in not allowing Rapunzel to stand on her own.⁵⁴ However, Rapunzel is shown to be emotionally complex and extremely independent and daring: she does not need rescuing from Flynn but rather helps him on his journey to self-discovery. For the 21st-century, the balancing of gender roles is a more important step than trying to rectify years of getting it wrong by only putting female leads on display.

Many of the big names in fairy tale research and historiography (Jack Zipes, Kay Stone, and Ruth Bettelheim) use “Snow White” as a tool for understanding and following the progression of fairy tales in modern society for no tale has undergone as many transformations as “Snow White.”

The last version of Snow White printed in the 1857 edition of “Kinder and Hausmärchen Tales” is widely accepted as the “authoritative original story,” and offered the basis for the Disney film. The two major changes in the tale were motivated mostly by a wish to visualize impressive special effects: the queen’s transformation into a hag to deliver the poison apple, and her subsequent death falling off the cliff rather than dancing to death in red-hot shoes.⁵⁵ The film was originally dubbed “Disney’s folly,” even within the company, because no one predicted audiences would pay for a full-length cartoon version of a children’s fairy tale. The choice was unprecedented, yet it commanded the attention of audiences with the new style of cinematography and cartoon work. Snow White was modeled

⁵⁴ <http://blog.sfgate.com/mmagowan/2010/11/22/disneys-male-execs-stop-movies-starring-girls/>.

⁵⁵Dundes p.58.

after a popular movie star of the day, Janet Gaynor, while the Queen was a mixture of “Lady Macbeth and the Big Bad Wolf.”⁵⁶ The prince’s role was allegedly bigger at one point in production, but was diminished so that he could appear in *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959 in expanded form. The film pushed industry standards for production to a whole new level, proving that audiences would definitely pay to watch fairy tales. It also provided the formula for how Disney would transform the tales into morally sound and aesthetically pleasing tales appropriate for families and children of all ages. The success of the Disney film made *Snow White* not just a household name in fairy tales, but also a widely popular cultural reference point. Allusions to Snow White can pop up in anything from household cleaning product advertisements, to comedy parodies like *Sydney White and the Seven Dorks*, a film with Amanda Bynes updating the fairy tale, and billed as a “modern retelling of Snow White set against students in their freshman year of college in the Greek system.”⁵⁷ Since even 2007, Snow White has reappeared. Released within 2012 alone were two different live-action films updating the Disney classic; *Snow White and the Huntsman*, a darker and more artistic reimaging of the tale starring Kristen Stewart, and *Mirror Mirror*, a comedy fantasy starring Julia Roberts. In *Snow White and the Huntsman* many references to the Grimm version are made: for example, the “three drops of blood on the snow” after which the queen wishes for a child with “lips as red as a rose and skin as white as snow” are taken almost verbatim from the Grimms’ version. Kristen Stewart is identified early on as Snow White, with

⁵⁶Dundes p.58.

⁵⁷ “Sydney White and the Seven Dorks,” IMDb, Last updated September 21, 2007. Accessed July 28, 2014.

costuming directly mimicking the Disney princess. Stewart is also friendly with fairy tale creatures but has a more sinister trip through the woods than the Disney version, although it is illustrated with similar tree outlines and tunnels as in the original animation. The evil queen in this version is played by the stunning Charlize Theron, who uses the easily recognized lines “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” so that we once again identify with the Disney, and earlier, versions. *Mirror Mirror* is clearly designated for a younger audience with less gloom and doom than *Snow White and the Huntsman*, as well as more whimsical and imaginative costume designs and character traits. Where *Snow White and the Huntsman* goes back to the darker roots of the tale in Grimm and makes additions to the story line to create a new drama within the tale, *Mirror Mirror* remains on the surface and takes the tale we recognize with minor changes, for instance new names like Queen Clementianna and Prince Alcott as well as the names of the dwarves, that connect it to the Disney version without mimicking it.

The versatility of fairy tales has also allowed them to expand into new roles in the commercial and marketing industry, adult film, theater, and complete reworking in childrens’ books like “The Stinky Cheeseman and other Fairly Stupid Fairy Tales” with “Little Red Running Shorts” in place of the hooded Grimm character.⁵⁸ The same familiarity with tales that allows for transformations is what helps perpetuate these new forms into an ever-evolving lifespan for the material. Thus, fairy tales and their messages are a significant cultural theme, and tracking their evolution can reveal a lot about the values and hopes of the societies they have

⁵⁸<http://my.fit.edu/~lperdiga/HUM%202085--Film%20Adaptation--Tatar%20Fairy%20Tales.pdf>.

evolved within, including our own. What initially caught my interest in exploring the origin and evolution of fairy tales was the resurgence of the Grimms' stories in media- a show labeled "Grimm," very directly tying itself to the brothers' tales, or related material like "Once Upon a Time," remakes of Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, the story of Rapunzel, and new envisioning for princesses for today's little girl like the stars of *Brave* and *Frozen*. While these explorations into new versions of fairy tales may not be authentic to the Grimm's source material, it is certainly significant that these productions of the fairy tale genre use the Grimm's versions as the original starting point from which they develop characters and plots. After all, we are all familiar with the tales so for something fresh and exciting to be done with them, only minor details and character traits need to remain consistent in order for the foundation of the tale to be recognized.

The ongoing television series "Once Upon a Time" still has to rely on Disney interpretations and visualizations of tales to connect the dots for the audience, and show them what story they are seeing. This is played out in Storybrook, the modern-day town where fairy tale characters live in a suspended state of reality under the spell of Regina, the evil queen/stepmother from Snow White. Mary Margaret Blanchard is the name assigned to the Snow White counterpart in Storybrook: although she has a shorter hairstyle, she still shows the same connection animals, volunteering at the animal shelter, cueing the audience in to her "real" identity. The Seven Dwarves of the television series take on the names of the Disney version, "Sleepy, Grumpy, Doc" etc., even though that is not an element of the "original" Grimm tale. Their job as miners (solely from the Disney movie) is also comical for a

show that is seemingly trying to get back to the original versions of these tales, including their brutality and adult nature. It seems that the Disney versions have taken over in our imagination and have become the new “originals,” to which we have to add back the sexuality and brutality that were there in the first place.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Children Will Listen”

The play, and soon to be film, *Into the Woods*, takes the fairy tale genre in a new and note-worthy direction. In consideration of the ways in which our society is striving toward equality of the sexes, and now has an awareness of the psychological effect that stories told to children can have, the play introduces characters and dialogue reflecting the concept that our culture ought to reconsider what we are passing down. Disney is taking on production of the film, set to be in theaters this winter, showing that even the industry behind the films that have led us astray is keen on making changes to adapt with society, as fairy tales have always done.

Into the Woods is a musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by James Lapine that premiered on Broadway November 5, 1987. *Into the Woods* won several Tony Awards, including Best Score, Best Book, and Best Actress in a Musical (Joanna Gleason as the Baker’s Wife), in a season dominated by the instant classic *The Phantom of the Opera*. The collaboration between Sondheim and Lapine “brings to musical life” Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Ridinghood and other easily recognized fairy-tale characters in such a way that credits the tales of origin but creates an interconnected web and fresh perspective on the morals these tales teach.

Even the title clues the audience in to the looming mysteries and trials awaiting the characters. Just as fairy tale characters and plot points are ingrained through repetition and revision, going into the woods is associated with a character foraying into the dark and dangerous unknown, where anything can happen. The

original oral tales and earlier editions of Grimm seem to emphasize the many dangers that can befall children who disobey their parents and explore where they are not supposed to—creating a sort of trope for the meaning of the forest in tales and human understanding at large. The woods represent a return to nature and animalistic instincts, a place where danger abounds and where there is no oversight. Snow White, Little Red, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, and a great many other characters have found danger, isolation, refuge, and a whole new world when they have crossed over into the woods. And this trope carries over into the modern interpretations I've connected to earlier—for example, the surreal fairy tale existence that both mimics and predates the goings-on of Storybrook in *Once Upon a Time* takes place in a parallel world known as “The Enchanted Forest.” Characters have repeatedly revealed more about their own or others’ “true identities” in forays to the woods, and it is also the stage for kidnappings, seductions, and many plot twists in the show, further underscoring the notion of the woods as the place where true identities and intentions are revealed.

Each of the characters at the beginning of *Into the Woods* has a specific desire that it turns out can only be remedied by a venture into the woods. Central to the stories of the witch, Cinderella and her stepsisters, Simple Jack and his mother, and Little Red Ridinghood, are the Baker and his wife. They wish to have a child, and have been trying desperately to no avail. The witch has appeared to them providing a solution in the form of a spell requiring “the cow white as milk, the cape red as blood, the hair as yellow as corn, the slipper pure as gold.” Consequently, the audience realizes that each of these components will come from the other stories

they know and see playing out before them onstage. The insertion of the Baker and his barren wife feels like a familiar fairy tale, the woman desiring to bear a child and in need of magical interference, but is a construct of Sondheim and Lapine's making. The wants of the different characters mimic the desires a fairy tale protagonist would introduce at the onset of a typical fairy tale, but the upheaval that ensues in the play not only undermines the interconnected society in the forest, but our own society's use and manipulation of the tales to allegedly teach children about how to navigate the world around them and how to censor their own desires.

The Baker and his wife cannot seem to work together in the new plan for getting a child, which seems to be indicative of their marriage at large. The wife follows her husband into the woods against his wishes, in order to help, and shows strength and purpose because she is the only one able to remember what they are after and actually obtain the objects. Though the husband and wife do end up attempting to work together, the storyline of these two points to the problem of female exclusion in fairytales. *Into the Woods* manipulates these stereotypical roles giving the witch, Cinderella, and even the Baker's wife other agendas besides beauty and the wife or mother roles they originally sought. Little Red in particular is transformed from an innocent, albeit selfish, little girl who is typically seen as an object of the Wolf's- perhaps sexual- desires, into a more observant and cautious person by the Wolf. When saved by the Baker, she gives him her red cape and takes on a new identity and dons the Wolf's pelt instead, summing up her metamorphosis with the song "I Know Things Now." This song shows the audience that Red has awakened from a naïve child to a woman, and more fully realized human being.

Little Red's role reversal is interesting because of the many transformations of that tale through feminist literature, *Once Upon a Time*, or even the (poorly done) Amanda Seyfried film. The original tale has been manipulated to incorporate more overtly sexual symbols (in a pre-Grimm version, for example, Little Red urinates and removes her clothes, enticing the wolf who demands she join him in grandmother's bed) and for this musical to bring back her sense of identity and take the character in a new direction is refreshing.⁵⁹

Contrastingly, the men in this story portray more vulnerability and transparency with their aims than is typical for fairy tales. The Baker cannot follow the specific directions of the Witch or accept the assistance his own wife offers, and struggles to navigate his way through the woods in stark contrast to his wife who is ruthless in getting what she needs to provide for the Witch's spell. Even the Mysterious Man who attempts to steer the characters on the "right" and moral path is revealed to be responsible for the Witch's curse rendering the couple barren in the first place. Of course, no men are more caricatured than the two princes who admittedly are characters "raised to be charming, not sincere."⁶⁰ They go after initially Cinderella because she presents a challenge, and by the second act have become dissatisfied with their choice of wives and pursue the next difficult woman they come across- Sleeping Beauty and Snow White trapped in a sleep like death. The infidelity of the princes upsets the "happily ever after" mood the first act presents, and shows how Rapunzel and Cinderella would realistically be after years

⁵⁹ "Little Red Riding Hood," Little Red Riding Hood and other tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 333, University of Pittsburgh, Last updated October 15, 2013, accessed July 29, 2014.

⁶⁰*Into the Woods* pg.127.

of mistreatment and social isolation- not always the happy and willing wife. The audience has always known in a small part in the back of their mind that “happily ever after” does not come easy, especially when you are an abused or neglected teenage girl married off to a stranger, but it is not usually highlighted. Rapunzel’s storyline contains a lot more of the unedited version of the tale, with Rapunzel’s visitor being found out as a result of her pregnancy. She is cast out by her surrogate mother, the Witch, who also tosses her prince out of the castle tower into the brambles, blinding him. Rapunzel wanders lost in the desert with her twin infants until reunited with her Prince with the aid of her lovely singing voice, guiding her blind lover back to her. Her happy tears of course heal his blindness and the happy little family is reunited. Naturally, Rapunzel would have very complicated trust issues after this falling-out with the Witch, the only other human interaction she has known since birth, and does not become the best mother and wife as a result. Rapunzel falls short of the assumed expectation to stay at home and dutifully raise the children and live in a way that serves and pleases her Prince, always being receptive to his demands. But from the dialogue between the princes, the audience finds out that neither Rapunzel nor Cinderella, are compliant and willing to meet the demands of their husbands and “cry too much.”

Thus, while we sympathize with the Princes for the issues their complicated wives bring to the table, it is still abhorrent that they take to the woods and find themselves a new challenge and a new set of problems with Sleeping Beauty and Snow White who are also going to be traumatized women. It is also interesting to note that James Lapine incorporates the big names in fairy-tale princesses and the

reality of what their lives would be like as a jab to the Disney versions of these characters and the notion of “happily ever after” and “love at first sight.” The Baker’s wife is a great example of this unhappily ever after playing out. She also is unfaithful to her husband, with one of the princes as a matter of fact. They meet and have their moment of indiscretion, which shows us both the shallow nature of the prince and the Baker’s wife’s deep dissatisfaction in her marriage and longing for a life outside of her own. This instance further clarifies just how we as an audience might need to second-guess the happy endings and love stories we so readily consume.

The interplay between the Mysterious Man and the Witch is the most telling part of the musical; they are the most honest in their direction towards other characters and can see clearly into their true natures. The Mysterious Man in particular guides his son, the Baker, towards a more moral and honest path. For example, when the Giantess comes down in the second act seeking vengeance for the death of her husband (killed by Jack), the Baker is convinced by his father in the song “No More” to face responsibility and own up to his actions. The Baker helps bring down the Giantess instead of fleeing, and also convinces Jack that revenge on the royal steward for the death of his mother does not contribute towards any greater good, only perpetuates the violence and greed that placed them in the current situation. The assignment of guilt in the Jack and the Beanstalk tale is another example of Lapine and Sondheim turning fairy tales upside down. In truth, the wrath of the giantess is Jack’s fault for stealing from the giants, then murdering them, especially when the hospitality of the large couple is specifically enumerated in this version of the tale. The humans of the play unite against the Giantess and kill

her to protect Jack, though he has set this all in motion with his greed and the murder of the Giantess's husband. The Giantess should be seen as justified for wanting Jack to pay for his crime, and her death and the death of Jack's mother cancel each other out in a way that seems that justice has truly been served. The characters of the story instinctively protected Jack and would not turn him over, but he is duly punished anyway. This echoes the often-violent retribution of older versions of fairy tales. Each character seems to be given what he or she wished for at the closure of the first act, befitting the typical fairy tale mold, but the retribution in the second act is very telling about how Sondheim and Lapine see the classic fairy tales. By drawing on the greed and vanity inherent in the tales, yet typically ignored, the real motives are laid out in plain sight and the true morals of the stories revealed. The audience may even come to the conclusion that fairy tales do not have intrinsic moral value but merely instruct children on the way we think the world ought to work, or how to best pretend that happily ever after is a reality.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps we should instead consider that fairy tales should more realistically combine the world of the fantastical with the world children must actually face, and be more cautious about the ideals of character we present to our youth. Tales should include more Mystery Man and less Prince Charming, more of the realized Little Red in place of willing princess brides. *Into the Woods* is the transformation, or rather clarification, of fairy tales to which our generation should pay heed. Fairy tales have endured because of their ability to capitalize on the fantasies and hopes for success, beauty and love that we all have, but they ought to reflect the improvements society has made in terms of social and gender equality and to provide a new version of hope for the future beyond a happy marriage and union for kingdoms. Fairy tales have the opportunity to be a relevant tool for fostering a positive outlook in the next generation far beyond being a pretty princess or charming and heroic prince. The heroes and moral victories are expanded to encompass these developments in *Into the Woods* and even more recent films like *Tangled*, *Brave* and *Malificent*—the other side of the villain queen in *Sleeping Beauty*. In fact, Disney is working on an *Into the Woods* film that seems to go against even their own tradition of sanitized tales with empty-headed princesses and happy endings. While shows like *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* work on making fairy tales adult once more, *Into the Woods* seems to combine the power of fairy tales to carry new ideas of social transformation for all ages. The musical directly mocks the meek princess and charming prince motifs that Disney has expertly perpetuated throughout the years, turning the idea of

moral children's tales on their head with complicated motives within its characters and plotlines. While Disney certainly has branched out from fairy tale film in the past, making more adult ventures like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Prince of Persia*, and *Tron: The Legacy*, these have remained within story-telling and child-centered dramas, *Pirates* being based on a theme-park ride and *Tron* on a video game. For Disney to take on a musical like *Into the Woods* that was so successful on Broadway is not necessarily unprecedented. But for it to be a musical with commentary on how fairy tales have been misused or misinterpreted in the past, notably by the film *Superman*, seems a bold step in the right direction. While it will accommodate the children in the audience who will recognize the familiar fairy tale characters, it will also give parents something to reflect on with respect to the lessons they are ingraining in children with bedtime stories or films.

On that note, the conclusion of the musical is a piece entitled "Children Will Listen," explaining: "Careful the things you say, children will listen. Careful the things you do, children will see. And learn . . . Careful the tale you tell. *That* is the spell. Children will listen . . ." ⁶¹ The song is a poignant and pointed diatribe against the outdated morals nested in fairy tales we pass on to children as well as a warning that everything a child sees and experiences contributes to how they will carry themselves. Pretending things are as they appear in fairy tales with everything tied up wonderfully by the conclusion is a lie we cannot afford to pass on to the next generation. "Children will Listen" encapsulates warnings that parents and storytellers should consider before sharing what goes on in the woods, or in the

⁶¹ *Into the Woods*, p.136.

psyches of different characters, and that paradigms of moral behavior should be chosen carefully. In order to foster fully-formed adults with the capacity to care and contribute to the world around them, society should focus on stories that elaborate how differences in characters' heroism, love interests, and agency in society can be acceptable. It is my opinion that children need not be shielded from mild violence or disappointment in the stories they hear, and should even be exposed to the types of violent and sexual themes in the tales as early as the parents feel they are ready, - because such themes do reflect human nature and desire. What can be used more effectively is the dialogue between parent and child, or filmmaker, writer, etc. creating and sharing the story to help provide context for understanding why certain characters are punished or rewarded, and why stories might not always end happily in marriage. There certainly is merit in allowing children the privacy to interpret and imagine the tales for themselves, as Bruno Bettelheim would certainly argue, but today's children face a much more direct form of media penetration in movies, TV shows, audiobooks, and so on than having the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* tales being read aloud to them in the comfort of their parent's presence. Because the world only increases in its interconnectedness and awareness of diversity, fairy tales should accommodate shifting social paradigms as they always have, and *Into the Woods* has made itself a part of that change.

The Grimms did indeed seriously alter the way people perceived and relayed tales by standardizing the versions. Indeed, Alan Dundes sees in the cutting off of the audience from the original "oral" storyteller an instance of what he calls "fakelore," a judgment with which critic Kay Stone, agrees:

“[It] seems sacrilegious to label the Grimms as ‘fakelore’, but the extent that oral materials are rewritten, embellished, and elaborated, and then presented as if they were pure, authentic oral tradition, we do indeed have a prime facia case of fakelore.”⁶²

But I would argue that she and Dundes are missing the point: oral tales in the “genuine folk tradition” were embellished and elaborated for each audience they were presented to, and the evolution of the tales throughout their revisions and transformations into the modern era seems in fact to be exactly in the spirit of the original tales. The Grimms, as well as others like Charles Perrault and the Italian Giambattista, altered the oral versions, Christianizing and moralizing the tales they started with. But they also encapsulated the societal demands of the times they wrote in. As discussed earlier, the Grimms work focused on establishing a sense of German nationalism and Christianity in their tales. They lied about their sources to lend an air of authenticity to the German cultural claim, while Perrault, with the morals at the ends of his tales, had a similar goal in “institutionalizing storytelling in the home for the French upper classes” and glorifying civility.⁶³

Each new “standardization” breathes life to the next generation of reworked tales and gives a new “original” for others to work from and be influenced by. It will be interesting to see how these tales are reimagined as the 21st century continues.

⁶² Kay Stone, *The Three Transformations of Snow White*, (Illinois: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois), 18.

⁶³Lange, Ariane. "BuzzFeed." BuzzFeed. BuzzFeed.com, 24 Mar. 2014. Web. 31 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.buzzfeed.com/arianelange/maleficent-sleeping-beauty>>.

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