
Kinder- und Hausmärchen: To what extent have the folk and fairy tales fallen victim to censorship and consumerism?

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Abstract

The first volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Children's and Household Tales] was published in 1812, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published the second volume in 1815. Since this time, the tales have succumbed to a great deal of censorship and consumerism, as contemporary adaptations, translations and revisions of the tales have raised questions about authenticity, and target audience. Within the age of globalization, American culture has thus led to the Americanization of the tales at the hands of those readily disposed to reinforcing dominant ideologies. Therefore, the following article aims to analyse the extent to which the folk and fairy tales have fallen victim to censorship and consumerism, through calling upon Gerard Genette's paratextual thesis, Pierre Bourdieu's explanation of the field of cultural production, Wolfgang Iser's interpretation of the text-reader relationship, as well as Michel Foucault's examination of authorship.

Key Words

Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, censorship, consumerism, Americanization, globalization

Within modern society, few individuals are familiar with the majority of the original Brothers Grimm folk and fairy tales, as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm extensively revised the archetypal 156 stories from the 1812, and 1815 volumes of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Children's and Household Tales] in content and in style over the course of four decades. With the rise of literacy and the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, the oral tradition of storytelling had undergone an immense revolution, as the press served as an agent of change. The history of the book, and of communication, had experienced several shifts, from oral to literacy, and written to print, culminating in the most recent transference from print to computer-generated.

As Elizabeth Eisenstein demonstrates in *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, the shift from oral to literacy, resulting in written to print, provided a means for the preservation of knowledge, and culture, as other fields of reference cannot be wholly understood without taking into account how the advent of more uniformed texts affected mental constructs, and human behaviour (Eisenstein 2012, p. 120). One such example of this is the tales that were recorded by the Brothers Grimm.

Due to the communications shift of the time, oral tales were consequently taken over by a more prominent social class, and the themes, production, and reception of them were transformed, as the institutionalization of the tales "assumed different ideological and aesthetic positions" (Zipes 2002, pp. 10-12). As a result, six subsequent editions of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were created, culminating in the final seventh edition of 1857, containing 210 stories, which did not include the blunt and unpretentious sentiments of the first (Grimm and Grimm 2014, p. xlii). Instead, the Grimm's "censored the tales with sentimental Christianity and puritanical ideology" (p. xx), as writers put their own individual spin on the tales of the time, in order to assume an adequate expression of national culture, based on a bourgeois establishment of "control over desire and imagination within the symbolic order of western culture" (Zipes 2002, pp. 12-13).

From 1812 to 1857 numerous tales were deleted and replaced with new or different versions, more tales were added, the footnotes were withdrawn and published in a separate

volume, the prefaces and introductions were revised, and illustrations were added in a separate edition directed at children and families. History was altered.

Robert Darnton, in *What is the history of books?* explains that the purpose of examining the history of books, or rather the “social and cultural history of communication by print” is to understand how ideas are transmitted through print, and how exposure to the printed word affects the thoughts and behavior of civilization (Darnton 2002, p. 9). Darnton notes that the discipline of book history is capable of taking on a distinct scholarly identity of its own, by converging several disciplines on a common set of problems, all of them having to do with the process of communication (p. 9).

In correspondence, within their letters, essays, and books, written between 1806 and 1812, the Brothers Grimm can be seen to consider themselves as literary historians, concerned with the preservation of pure sources of German literature, in order to reveal the “debt or connection of literate culture to the oral tradition, by capturing the national culture” (Grimm and Grimm 2014, p. xxv). Underlying their work was a “pronounced romantic urge to excavate and preserve German cultural contributions”, in order to reserve essential truths about the German cultural heritage, through communication via print (p. xxv). Such sentiments can be seen within the preface to the second volume of the first edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, published in 1815 where the Grimms explain: “Our collection was not merely intended to serve the history of poetry but also to bring out the poetry itself that lives in it and make it effective: enabling it to bring pleasure wherever it can and also therefore, enabling it to become an actual educational primer” (p. 271).

Here, a readers’ interpretation of a tale is natural because of the profound nature of the tales, and in this sense, the Grimms’ envisioned themselves as moral cultivators; they viewed their collection as an educational primer of ethics, values, and customs that would grow on readers, who would themselves grow by indulging in them, in turn establishing the ideological and aesthetic positions of the time within a symbolic order.

Within *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gerard Genette offers a study of “the liminal devices that mediate the relations between the text and reader,” and identifies these devices as being paratexts that exist to steer an individual’s reading of a literary work

(Genette 1997, p. xi). If Genette's paratexts exist, Donald Haase notes in *Framing the Brothers Grimm* that the paratexts that occur surrounding the Grimm's stories "seek to direct and capture the reader's allegiance in a struggle over the tales' authority, control, ownership, and - most fundamentally - in a struggle over the stories that we tell each other about them" (Haase 2003, p. 66).

The Brothers Grimm thought that the stories they collected were innocent expressions and representation of the divine nature of the world. For them, the simplicity of pristine spoken tales was culturally and historically profound, and the Grimm's viewed themselves as cultivators of lost artifacts whose essence had to be conserved and disseminated before the tales vanished. It is only the larger cultural project that gave the stories legitimacy as primary cultural documents from oral translation via paratextual devices.

As, Haase also reports that "as authors – or at least authorial agents – the Grimm's carefully framed their collection with a variety of significant paratexts that sought to contextualize their fairy tales and explain to the reader a multitude of relevant and often complex issues. The title, designation of the compilers, dedication, preface, and annotations were all intended to help the recipient understand the place, nature, and function of the tales in historical, political, cultural, ethnic, mythological, scholarly, and pedagogical terms" (pp. 56-57). Concluding, Haase adds that the "one measure of how translators of Grimm's stories deal with cultural issues important to the Grimm's is the extent to which their translations make use (or no use) of the Grimm's paratexts" (p. 57).

With this in mind, one must consider how the Brothers Grimm folk and fairy tales have succumbed to censorship and consumerism during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as contemporary adaptations of the tales have raised questions about authenticity, and target audience – as predicted by Haase, due to a loss of paratextual devices.

In equivalence, the fundamental sociological element to Pierre Bourdieu's argument in *The Field of Cultural Production*, is that we cannot understand a work of literature purely in reference to itself, as an object of study. The work must be situated through other points of reference within the field of knowledge and institutions, in meaning and in practise (Bourdieu 1993, pp. 30-32). The field of cultural production is therefore a zone of social

activity in which there are *creators* who are intent on forming a certain kind of cultural product, which is defined in part by the expectations and values of the audience (pp. 31-32). Therefore, an audience cannot wholly understand the cultural significance of the Grimm's tales, unless they are in fact kept situated within their relevant institutions. If we place the institution in terms of nationalism, and thus German cultural heritage, T.S. Eliot in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, identifies that an individual outside of a culture may not approach a complete understanding of it, as "one cannot be outside and inside at the same time" (Eliot 1948, p. 41). The Brothers Grimm were inside the culture that they were trying to record, the creators of subsequent adaptations, translations and revisions are outsiders. Consequently, the true meaning of the tales as an educational primer of ethics, values, and customs of the time, is also lost due to the fact that contemporary adaptations are bent to suit dominant ideologies and cultural issues of the present, rather than of the past.

In *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes remarks that it is impossible to grasp the history of the fairy tale and the relationship of the fairy tale to myth without taking into consideration "the manner in which tales have been revised, duplicated, adapted, and manipulated to reinforce dominant ideologies and often to subvert them" (Zipes 2002, p. 10). He continues to illustrate that the evolution of the fairy tale as a cultural genre is marked by a process of dialectical appropriations involving imitation, memorization, and revision that set "the cultural conditions for its mythicization, institutionalization, and expansion as a mass-mediated genre through radio, film, television, and the Internet" (p. 10). Comparably, Wolfgang Iser in the *Interaction Between Text and Reader* views the text as offering "schematized aspects through which the aesthetic object of the work can be produced" (Ingarden 1979, p. 264). This is associated to the vital link with dyadic interaction, which Zipes refers to as dialectical appropriations – the ability to regulate context via face-to-face communication, which is then transformed into the restructuring of the text. Such restructuring is attributed to the gaps arising from the dialogue, which are filled in by the reader's imagination and projections (Iser 1993, p. 392). This is a point that Bourdieu also acknowledges when signifying that the audience's expectations are swayed by the creators of meaning, alongside the institution as a creator of

meaning. The Americanization of the Grimm's folk and fairy tales, through mass media, is an abundant example of tales being adapted to reinforce dominant ideologies through the work being created, in part, by the modern institution to which it is offered.

With the rise of Hollywood fairy-tale films, comes a disregarding of the binding responsibility that the legacy of traditional storytelling needs to develop the cultural value of the Grimm's tales. These films thrive parasitically by draining meaning and from distorting stories. The distortion of the source stories to such a degree, results in the narratives celebrating the massive technological power of Hollywood corporations through spectacle. The story is trivialized while the altered paratexts assume the centre of attention, shifting the focus to special effects, actors, and discussion of the film (Zipes 2015, p. 73).

Guy Debord, in *The Society of Spectacle* notes that "by means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise", while it invades society, there is nothing neutral about it, "it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics" (Debord 1995, p. 19). Due to the rapid technological development of paratexts by the end of the twentieth century, society has witnessed an unprecedented transformation of the way in which meaning becomes established in the public spheres of the West, due to the recent communications shift from print to digital. The shift has facilitated the destruction of the source text, artwork, or event within the field of cultural production, and sacrificed the preservation of paratext (Zipes 2015, p. 76).

Though the Grimm's stories are still widely disseminated and revered in Germany as part of the Germans' profound cultural heritage, the so-called German narratives have been greatly appropriated by the powerful American culture industry, and have been Americanized through the advent of globalization. As Simon Bronner explains in *The Americanization of the Brothers Grimm*, the tales became a "sign of Eurocentrism and commercial Americanization. The tales in their various consumed forms were part and parcel of mass culture, and drew attention to the Hollywood recontextualization from America to a global audience" (Bronner 1998, p. 236).

The process of the Americanization of the Grimm's tales, which Jack Zipes refers to as "globalized Disneyfication" in *Grimm Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy*

Tales, has a long history to it, which began in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Zipes 2015, p. 79). Such a process contained two key features, the English and American translations and adaptations of the Grimm's tales from 1823 to the present, as well as the filmic adaptation of the Grimm's tales in the age of globalization (p. 80). Here, the Americanized globalization of the tales, led to the "trivialization and commercial homogenization of them by current cultural forces that respect market conditions more than they respect diversity, particularism, sovereignty, history, and art" (p. 83).

Firstly, in terms of the English and American translations and adaptations of the Grimm's tales from 1823 to the present, Zipes details three important factors contributing to the Americanization of the tales. The first factor was that the tales were often confused with the fairy tales of Charles Perrault, a French author who laid the foundations of the fairy tale genre, by deriving stories from pre-existing folk tales. The consequence of this was that ten of Perrault's tales had already circulated in France, England and many other different European countries between their first publication in 1697, and their English translation by Robert Samber in 1729, before the publication of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812/1815 (p. 86). The confusion between these French fairy tales, and the tales of the Brothers Grimm have lasted up until the present day, as Perrault's tales can be found in the Grimm's editions, and visa versa. The difference being that Perrault's tales were dedicated to the amusement of children and young adults, with adaptations and illustrations.

If we look towards these adaptations, this leads us to the second important factor that contributed to the Americanization of the tales, which was the English translation by Edgar Taylor. A revolutionary and extraordinary intervention occurred at the hands of Taylor, as he published *German Popular Stories* in 1823/1826, due to a desire "to transform unusual folk tales from Germany and make them accessible to the scholarly interests of antiquarians and to provide amusement for middle-class families and the children" (p. 47).

The results of this was that the new translation avoided all extreme and cruel punishments, and should be referred to as adaptations, rather than translations, as Taylor appropriated the Grimm's tales and made them his own, by shaping them primarily for English bourgeois families and their children, and anglicising them through linguistic references that took into

consideration a British sensibility when it came to religion, sex, violence, and ideology (p. 87). This adaptation also contained twenty-two humorous illustrations by the caricaturist George Cruikshank, which is the third important factor that contributed to the Americanization of the tales. As, the drawings heightened the comic and sentimental changes made by Taylor and helped transform the tales into classical fairy tales for children. According to Robert Patten in *Imagination on a Long Rein: English Literature Illustrated*, “the resulting publication was one of the most influential of the nineteenth century. It established precedents in the literature and visualization of fairy tales that profoundly affected Hans Christian Andersen, John Ruskin, and legions of artists from Richard Doyle to Walt Disney” (Patten 1988, p. 14).

Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, there has been a tendency to protect the innocence of American children by purifying the Grimm’s tales, as they are shaped to reflect sociocultural concerns of the contemporary American period. However, the most powerful factor in the process of Americanization appeared in the age of globalization, and the “globalized Disneyfication” of the tales. Therefore, in terms of the filmic adaptation of the Grimm’s tales in the age of globalization, adaptations began as soon as the cinema industry developed in the 1890s, but are most notable via the work of Walt Disney.

The dominant conservative trend at the time was towards morals and values in accordance with the Protestant ethic, the man to uphold these American norms, alongside patriarchy and capitalism, was Walt Disney (Zipes 2015, p. 99). After World War II, the cinematic Americanization of the Grimm’s and other classical fairy tales became more stable and were dominated by the Disney model of production and ideology. Disney followed a “certain prescription based on Broadway and Hollywood musicals: beautiful young Barbie-doll virgin is persecuted and needs to be rescued by a prince-like Ken doll,” a model that celebrated stereotypical gender and power relations to foster a world view of harmony consecrated by the wedding of elite celebrity figures (p. 102).

In *Network Power*, David Grewal describes the experience of globalization as “the creation of an international in-group that welcomes the entire globe on settled terms: a new world order in which we clamour for connection to one another using standards that are offered

up for universal use” (Grewal 2008, p. 3). The convergence within globalization of institutions is part of a network of power that hinders free choice and sovereignty, coercing us to accept standardized ways of thinking and behaving. Therefore, through the global Americanization of the Grimm’s tales, via Edgar Taylor and Walt Disney, the essence of the tales are being wiped from memory, and adapted to serve power relations, and dominant ideologies, rather than original cultural significance.

Michael Foucault in *What Is An Author?* stipulates that “as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint” (Foucault 1984, p. 119). The “heterotopias” culture that Foucault then goes on to establish functions as a critique of established spatial forms. The heterotopias “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect” (p. 24).

In response to Foucault’s hypothesis, as well as the cultural history of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, one could argue that the Brothers Grimm have been displaced from both the text, and the reader, as they have been neutralised as authors, and their tales mirrored and reflected in translations, adaptations and revisions. Even at their insemination, the tales fell victim to the self-censorship of its authors via sentimental Christianity and puritanical ideology. Additionally, today in the age of globalization, and consumerism, the tales have further bore the brunt of censorship via the globalized Disneyfication of the tales, as they reinforce ideological and aesthetic positions of the present, within a symbolic order. In tern, loosing their original paratextual elements, and purpose as an educational primer.

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