

FAIRY TALES OR BRUTAL TALES: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE FAMOUS GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES.

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Abstract: Generally, people think or remember of fairy tales from their childhood, they can count on one thing — a “happily ever after.” But fairy tales weren’t always feel-good, happy ending stories. Many of them were utterly depressing and had a horridness about them. These fairy tales of old — like those passed down by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm — were more often cautionary tales meant to teach children hard lessons in a pleasant way. The Brothers Grimm became famous for their retellings of these old German folk tales, in all their gory glory. But thanks to brands like Disney, the fairy tales children grow up with today scarcely resemble their darker origins. The purpose of this article is to showcase the brutality these tales contained in aplomb.

Key Words:- Violence, Murder, Mutilation, Cannibalism, Incest, Infanticide etc.

Kinder and Hausmarchen, Known in English as Children’s and Household Tales or the Grimm’s Collection is a classic among the children’s literature. As children, we have all been enthralled by characters such as Cinderella, Snow White and so on, and we have all dreamt of becoming one of them. But the more apparent vicious side of the same innocent tales glares at us in a lesser terrifying way. *On the covers* are the most innocent titles which depict nice tales for nice children. But behind the safe titles lie dark stories of sex and violence, tales of murder, maiming, cannibalism, infanticide and incest and what not.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were writing in a different world. They lived in the town of Kassel in Germany and studied law and language as well writing more than 150 stories which they published in two volumes between 1812 and 1814. Initially their so called fairy tales were gory and violent to the core. Gradually, the brothers subdued the violent scenes and the newer versions of the stories tended to be a little bit suited to the young readers. Here are some of the darkest elements to be found in early translations of Grimms’ fairy tales, including some specific examples from some popular and lesser-known stories.

Perhaps one of the most basic dark elements common to Grimms’ fairy tales is murder. The particularly disturbing part is that murder in fairy tales very often happens within families. In *The Juniper Tree*, a woman decides to eliminate her stepson so her daughter can inherit all of her father’s riches. She chops off the boy’s head by slamming a chest shut on it as he reaches in for an apple. To make matters worse, she props his head back onto his body and ties the head on with a scarf (so apparently no one will realize he’s been murdered). She then prompts her own daughter to “box his ears” if he doesn’t respond to her,

thereby making her daughter think she murdered her brother. In another story, *The Singing Bone*, Two brothers are tasked with killing a wild boar, with the successful one promised the king's daughter's hand in marriage. One brother goes out and kills the boar. When his drunk brother sees this he murders the successful brother and takes the boar to the king himself to claim the princess.

Cannibalism is another theme found within several of their collected stories. In *The Robber Bridegroom*, a young woman is promised to a man by her father. She never gets a good feeling about the guy, and she's warned by a bird that she is in a murderer's house when she visits her bridegroom's home for the first time. As it turns out, her bridegroom has no intention to marry her and live happily ever after. He and his fellow robbers instead capture girls, kill them, and eat them. She sees them do this to another young woman before escaping. In *The Juniper Tree*, after murdering her stepson, the woman in this tale chops up his body and feeds him to his own father in the form of stew. Parents in some of Grimms' tales seem to have no problem ordering the mutilation of their children's bodies. These two tales are perfect examples. In older versions of *Cinderella*, the two stepsisters mutilate their feet in an attempt to fit into the glass slipper. One cuts off her big toe and the other cuts off part of her heel — all at their mother's instruction. After all, notes their mother, "when you are queen you will no longer have to go on foot." In the story, *The girl without hands*, a father is instructed by the devil to chop off his daughter's hands. And he does.

One of the darker themes found in Grimms' tales that sometimes survives into the sanitized versions is that of child abuse and neglect. For example, you probably know the story of Snow White's stepmother sending a huntsman after her to kill her in the forest. Planning to murder your children seems to be an unfortunate, but common, theme in these early folk tales. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the children are deserted in the forest after their stepmother convinces their father that they'd be better off without an extra two mouths to feed. When the children find their way home following a trail of pebbles, that doesn't stop the loving parents from trying again to leave them for dead. In *The Twelve Brothers*, a king decides that he wants his pregnant wife to bear him a daughter, and when that daughter is born he wants her to be his sole heir.

Therefore he has 12 coffins made for his 12 sons, whom he plans to have killed if the baby is indeed a girl. It is. Fortunately the queen warned one of her sons on time and he was able to get his brothers to safety. Even more shockingly, much of the violence in "Grimm's Fairy Tales" is directed at children. *Snow White* is only seven years old when the huntsman takes her into the forest with orders to bring back her liver and lungs. In *The Juniper Tree* a woman kills her stepson as he bends down to get an apple. She then chops up his body, puts him in a stew and serves it to her husband, who enjoys the meal so much that ends up asking for second spoonfuls. *Snow White* eventually wins the day, as does the boy protagonist in *The Juniper Tree*, who is brought back to life. But not every child in the Grimms' tales end up so lucky. The title character in *Frau Trude* turns a disobedient girl into a block of wood and tosses her into a fire. And in *The Stubborn Child* a youngster dies after God lets him become sick.

Revenge is the most common dark theme of all of Grimm's collected tales. Unlike the Disney series of Cinderella tales where the stepsisters see redemption, in early stories they have their eyes pecked out by birds and are forced to be in this world the rest of their lives as lame blind beggar women (after having already mutilated their own feet). In *Little Red Riding Hood*, The story ends with a wolf's stomach being cut open. In this case it is a huntsman who finds the wolf and cuts his stomach open to rescue the girl and her grandmother (who were also swallowed whole). And again, they fill the stomach of the wolf with rocks, which kills him. In the popular story of *Snow White*, The evil queen is forced to wear a pair of iron shoes heated on burning coals, in which she is made to dance until she dies off. In *The Singing Bone*, after it becomes known that the husband of the princess actually killed his brother and stole the wild boar he was tasked to find and kill, he's put to death himself.

Just to make this story a touch darker, his acts became known after his dead brother's bone surfaced, was turned into a flute, and tattled on him through song. In *The Robber Bridegroom*, after she discovers that her bridegroom is killing and eating women, the young woman has him come to her family's house for their wedding. She then tells the tale of what she witnessed and even has a victim's chopped-off finger as proof. Her family then seizes the man and his fellow robbers and they are all executed for their crimes. Sometimes the violence in fairy tales is less about violence done unto others, and instead violence done unto oneself — generally in some sort of fit. In *Rumpelstiltskin*, People read into the ending differently — whether his actions constitute suicide-by-rage or an accident. But in the end of the story when the young man doesn't get his way, he tears himself right in half. In another tale named *Bearskin*, There are three sisters and one man who made a deal with the devil. Basically he has to spend 7 years unwashed and wearing a bear skin as a cloak (and using it as his only bed) to see a lifetime of wealth. He shows kindness to a stranger who then promises Bearskin one of his three daughters.

When he meets the sisters, the elder two are repulsed by him. But the youngest agrees to marry him when he returns in three years (the end of his seven year deal). When he returns, the two elder sisters are so infuriated that this now-handsome and wealthy man is going to marry their sister instead of them that they both kill themselves. One drowns herself in a well and the other hangs herself from a tree.

In the original version of "Rapunzel," published in 1812, a prince impregnates the title character after the two spend many days together living in "joy and pleasure." "Hans Dumm," meanwhile, is about a man who impregnates a princess simply by wishing it, and in "The Frog King" a princess spends the night with her suitor once he turns into a handsome bachelor. The Grimms stripped the sex scenes from later versions of "Rapunzel" and "The Frog King" and eliminated "Hans Dumm" entirely. Although the brothers Grimm played down the sex in later editions of their work, they knowingly or unknowingly ramped up the violence. A particularly horrific incident occurs in "The Robber Bridegroom," when some bandits drag a maiden into their underground hideout, force her to drink wine until her heart bursts, rip off her clothes and then hack her body into pieces. Other tales have similarly gory episodes. In "Cinderella" the evil stepsisters sever off their toes and heels trying to make the slipper fit and later have their eyes pecked out by doves; in "The Six Swans" an evil mother-

in-law is burned at the stake; in “The Goose Maid” a false bride is stripped naked, thrown into a barrel filled with nails and dragged through the streets; and in “Snow White” the wicked queen dies after being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes. Even the love stories contain violence. The princess in “The Frog King” turns her amphibian escort into a person not by kissing it, but instead by hurling it against a wall in frustration.

The Grimms gathered over 200 tales for their collection, three of which contained Jewish characters. In “The Jew in the Brambles” the protagonist happily torments a Jew by forcing him to hop in a copse of thorns. He also insults the Jew, calling him a “dirty dog,” among other things. Later on, a judge doubts that a Jew would ever voluntarily divulge the money. The Jew in the story turns out to be a thief and is hanged. In “The Good Bargain” a Jewish man is likewise portrayed as a penny-pinching swindler. During the Third Reich, the Nazis adopted the Grimms’ tales for propaganda purposes. They claimed, for example, that Little Red Riding Hood symbolized the German people suffering at the hands of the Jewish wolf, and that Cinderella’s Aryan purity distinguished her from her mongrel stepsisters.

Evil stepparents are a dime a dozen in fairy tales, but the Grimms originally included some evil biological mothers also. In the 1812 version of “Hansel and Gretel,” a wife persuades her husband to abandon their children in the adjoining woods because they don’t have enough food to feed them. Snow White also has an evil mother, who initially wishes for her downfall and then become infuriated by her daughter’s beauty. The Grimms turned both of these appalling characters into stepmothers in subsequent editions, and mothers have essentially remained off the hook ever since in the retelling of these stories.

Children and women weren’t the only common victims of violence in Grimm’s fairy tales. Animals saw their fair share too. In *The Frog Prince*, Older translations don’t have a princess kissing a frog to turn him back into a prince. Instead the young princess, repulsed by the frog, throws him against a wall. Somehow that fit of violence breaks the spell he was under. In *The Bremen Town Musicians*, where a donkey, a dog, a cat, and a rooster feature together. They venture to Bremen to become musicians. But the reason they do this is because their owners or masters all wanted to kill them because they were becoming old and of less use to them. Fortunately for the animals in this story, they lived. They even managed to outsmart some robbers, steal their house, and live out their days there more comfortably. Not all Grimms’ tales are appropriate for the younger audience because of violence, cruelty, abuse, killings, cannibalism, and torture depicted in them. Parents have to use good judgment when choosing a tale from original Nursery and Household Tales for their children.

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