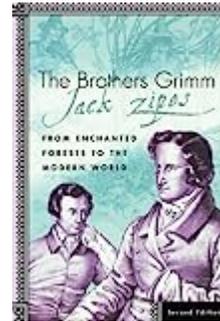




Jack Zipes. *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forest to the Modern World.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. x + 331 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-6065-8; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-29380-2.



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Once upon a time there was a book about fairy tales so important that fourteen years after its initial publication, a second edition was put forth. Although *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forest to the Modern World* has continued to serve as the seminal study on the genesis of fairy tales in the modern world, scholar Jack Zipes nevertheless has impressively re-examined, revised and reworked his original essays. Zipes was in part influenced by the numerous studies, ranging from historical to psychological, that have appeared since his book, some celebrating, others deriding, the publication of the Grimms' fairy tales. For this reason, he has updated and expanded his original work substantially, adding biographical data, condensing material and providing new chapters. Pointing to the brothers' lasting contribution to the fairy tale tradition, he uses this new edition to provide for more critical and up-to-date analyses thereby situating his earlier study anew within these more recent academic debates.

Jacob and Wilhelm were, of course, philological scholars who were passionate supporters of a unified, democratic Germany. Like many of their intellectual peers, they envisioned German popular traditions as one of the major tools for achieving such a state. In this regard, the brothers were interested in tracing the development of German language and culture and used the me-

dieval past as a utopian representation of the ideal Germany. The Grimms, along with numerous German scholars and poets of the time, believed folk songs, tales and rhymes to be replete with content designed to educate young and old alike about society and morality. Until the early-nineteenth century, fairy tales were typically spread during rituals, such as communal celebrations, weddings and dances, and the Grimms altered these oral stories and published them to impart specific values and mores.

Zipes, however, debunks the sentimental legend that the Grimms collected their fairy tales from German peasants. Rather, they relied largely on wealthy, educated bourgeois and aristocratic female friends, who gathered the tales in their behalf. The brothers then reworked and revised the tales to transmit the lessons they deemed important for German parents and their children. In so doing, the brothers shaped the tales so that they defined what they believed it meant to be German: simple yet clever, modest and industrious. *Ordnung*, *Fleiss* and *Sparsamkeit* were all character traits that would lead to a morally strong and healthy *Bildungsbuergertum*. In this regard, Zipes provides an explicative dissection of the tales, emphasizing the Grimms' own intent to use them as pedagogical tools for educating German children. In some of the more fascinating sections of the book, Zipes

provides readers with various adaptations of such well-known tales as “Snow White,” “Rapunzel” and “Little Red Riding Hood” as well as of more obscure ones, including “A Tale about the Boy Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was.” Comparing and contrasting earlier versions with what the Grimms crafted reveals a great deal about just how pivotal the brothers were in determining which renderings would ultimately reach German audiences.

Indeed, these reconstructions prompt the reader to wonder why the Grimms chose to emphasize certain themes over others. For this reason, Zipes carefully examines the brothers’ biographies to explain why the tales so clearly championed male domination as well as the heroic role repeatedly designated for the underdog. Influenced by their bourgeois roots and the class prejudices they endured, particularly while at university, Jacob and Wilhelm shaped the stories to identify with the hard-working “little folk.” Their background accordingly accounts for the plethora of characters such as millers, tailors, soldiers, Thumbings and simpletons, all of whom suffer from the inequalities of a class-based society. Names such as Hans, Heinz, Gretel and Lise represent the German *Jedermann*, the “little guy,” who successfully engages in cunning one-upmanship to get the better of his social superiors. Not surprisingly, revenge, especially in the case of those cruelly mistreated and impoverished, plays a key role.

In this regard, Zipes underscores the redemptive lesson inherent in so many of the narratives: the trod upon socially inferior outsider gains his rightful place in society, because he is more clever and wiser than monarchs and aristocrats. While riches often fall to such heroes, wealth and treasure are always secondary, even tertiary, prizes. The primary reward is to become a good, upstanding, contributing member of society. Along with this social mobility come acceptance and a comfortable standard of living. Zipes expands upon this observation by exploring the similarities between Odysseus and Tom Thumb, the former serving as the prototype of the ultimate bourgeois hero. Trials and tribulations befall the Grimms’ male protagonists, but it is self-abnegation and self-discipline, traits not widely associated with the aristocracy, that ultimately result in reward. Through self-denial, the fairy tale heroes outwit their betters, thereby gaining self-determination over their own lives. While today such a narrative seems formulaic—indeed most Hollywood films follow this cliché—the Grimms originally established the standard for this preference and made a lasting contribution to how stories continue to be framed in the present day.

In addition to recounting the origins of the tales, Zipes also explores their reception, both at the time of their initial publication and throughout subsequent periods. Indeed, it is how the tales are continuously received and perceived that explains their enduring attraction for supporters and detractors. While the general public may continue to view “timeless” stories such as “Cinderella,” particularly in its Disney incarnation, as harmless, other groups, including scholars, psychologists and feminists, have dissected the stories to reveal less than flattering interpretations. Critics in recent decades have pointed to the inherent racism and sexism in the tales, while others have implicated them in the rise of fascism. In his exploration of “Sleeping Beauty,” the passive female who needs a man’s kiss to wake her from eternal sleep before she can live her life, Zipes reaffirms the sexist message many critics have suspected behind the myth. Yet he also refuses to stop at such simplistic interpretations, exploring the deeper complexity at work. Noting that earlier versions of “Sleeping Beauty” hinted at rape, Zipes also argues that this tale deals with the universal fear of death and the hope of rebirth. He also points to some of the darker elements in the Grimms storytelling, such as the subtly implied incest behind “The Maiden without Hands.”

These dark observations aside, Zipes also devotes considerable space to discussing the sustaining German “obsession” with fairy tales, both in terms of the former East Germany and the Federal Republic. While the tales may not be peculiarly German (indeed many tales had French Huguenot origins), in the Grimms’ hands, they have been transformed into a German *Kulturgut*. Zipes sees in the diligent, lower-class hero, such as Hans My Hedgehog,⁴ the prototype for the German bourgeois ideal: hardworking, diligent and upwardly mobile, much as the brothers themselves were. How these tales continue to be framed and reframed in the German public sphere reveals what Zipes perceives as a very typical German attitude of hope.

Interest and devotion to the Grimms’ fairy tales extend, of course, far beyond Germany’s borders. Miramax studios, for example, is releasing a film in 2005 entitled *The Brothers Grimm* that casts Jacob and Wilhelm as German con artists duped into investigating a haunted castle. Such outrageously fictitious approaches indicate that the Grimms and their tales continue to be widely loved while simultaneously misunderstood and misrepresented. For this reason, this updated edition on the Brothers Grimm is not only welcome but needed. How we interpret and adapt the tales in the twenty-first century will continue to reveal much about how we perceive

our universal struggles and choose to signify our lives. the cultural heritage of the Grimms' fairy tales and their
Jack Zipes' revised work does a great deal to expand upon lasting legacy.

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