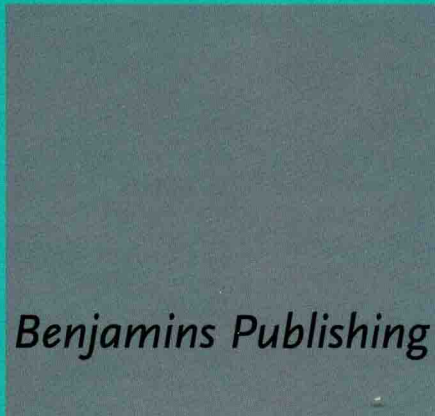


Grimm Language

Grammar, Gender and Genuineness in the Fairy Tales

Orrin W. Robinson



John Benjamins Publishing Company

Linguistic Approaches to Literature

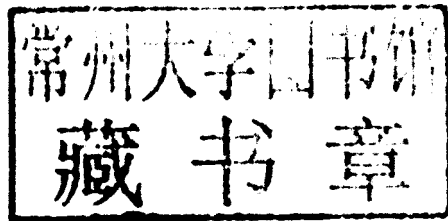


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Grimm Language

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Linguistic Approaches to Literature (LAL) provides an international forum for researchers who believe that the application of linguistic methods leads to a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of many aspects of literature. The emphasis will be on pragmatic approaches intersecting with areas such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, rhetoric, philosophy, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics and stylistics.

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Volume 10

Grimm Language. Grammar, Gender and Genuineness in the Fairy Tales
by Orrin W. Robinson

*This book is dedicated to the memory
of my father, Orrin W. Robinson Jr.
(I being the third of that name).
I miss you, Dad.*

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CHAPTER 1

A linguistic look at the *Children's and Household Tales*

In this introduction to the book, I want to give a brief overview of its orientation, its objectives, and its limitations. As an obvious first observation, one should note that the Grimms' fairy tales, as set down in their monumental *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*), henceforth *KHM*, are not only important representatives of German literature on the world scene, they are recognized as being among the most influential works in all of world literature. That being the case, they also, separately or together, number among the most studied and written-about works of literature in the scholarly world, not to mention their echoes in every corner of popular culture, from printed retellings to Disney films to YouTube.

I could, in this chapter, summarize in some detail all the ways in which the Grimm tales have been studied. This would not only make the book too long, it would also be redundant. Many fine overall discussions of the scholarly literature have been written; in English I can mention especially McGlathery (1993), who explicitly makes it his task to summarize and classify the research done to that date, but also Tatar (2003) and Zipes (2002), who, while arguing their own points of view, survey many of the other approaches to the tales (also adding additional bibliography).

Usefully, in his study McGlathery discusses separately approaches taken to fairy tales in general and the Grimm tales in particular. The distinction is clearly not absolute. Many of the theories propounded concerning fairy tales in general have strong roots in the Grimm collection, and many of the questions one might pose about the nature of fairy tales in general must necessarily also be asked of the *KHM*. Thus one may note that any attempt to approach fairy tales from, say, a psychoanalytic perspective (e.g. famously Bettelheim 1976) is likely to have as prime objects of investigation tales like "Hänsel und Gretel" or "Snow White." And any literary attempts to pin down the fairy tale as a genre inevitably must deal with the myriad types of tales to be found in the Grimm collection (or not). Questions as to the oral or literary origin of fairy tales in general, or concerning their historicity or ahistoricity, must also deal with the Grimm tales in particular.

But the reason that McGlathery's general/Grimm split proves useful is that so many of the questions that one might have of fairy tales in general have their own special twist when it comes to the Grimms. For example, the question of the oral versus literary provenience of fairy tales seems especially relevant for the Grimm stories, given the oral sources the Grimms claim or imply for many of them. And while in general scholars may have debated the monogenesis or polygenesis of various tale-types in different cultures of Europe or the world, the question of origins becomes especially crucial for a collection whose Germanness is such a central point.

McGlathery's chapter dealing with analyses of the Grimm tales in particular (pp. 29–58) indeed makes it clear that a lot of that research revolves around the Grimms' own ideas and claims concerning their tales. Thus the following questions can be and have been asked concerning the *KHM*: How German are they? How old are they? How faithful to the original sources? How literary (versus oral) are they? How simple are they, really? Who was their intended audience, and did it change? How significantly did the Grimms alter the tales?

In order to answer many of these kinds of questions, reliable sources of data have of course had to be made available. One name stands out as the prime enabler here, namely that of Heinz Rölleke. In addition to editing and/or reissuing many of the editions of the *KHM*, he has also published the full text of the 1810 manuscript version of some 49 of the tales, captured by the Grimms for their friend Clemens Brentano and presumably representing their earliest (Grimm) version (Rölleke 1975). These are usefully juxtaposed for closer comparison with the form of the same tales to be found in the 1st edition of the *KHM*. Rölleke has also published a book introducing the original literary sources for those Grimm tales demonstrably derived from such (Rölleke 1998), and in addition has published a wealth of studies, based on these and other data, attempting to answer many of the questions posed above (cf. Rölleke 1985, Bluhm und Rölleke 1997, and more).

For the purposes of this book, I am taking many of the questions posed above as being already somewhat answered. At least many of the most famous fairy tales in this collection are not really ancient German tales, but are suspiciously similar to earlier French ones; a lot of them have demonstrably literary sources; the original audience may have been adults, but increasingly it was children; the original stories may or may not be old, but they have been ruthlessly changed and edited by (especially) Wilhelm Grimm over the course of almost 50 years, leading to what many consider to be a distinctive "Grimm genre."¹

As McGlathery notes (p. 50), if these are the right answers to these questions, then the *KHM* must be seen primarily as a literary work rather than some kind

1. In German "Gattung Grimm," see e.g. Bluhm 1995: 27.

of anthropological collection. This in turn lessens the likelihood of some kinds of interpretations that would see the tales as reflections of a collective human or national subconscious, and increases the focus on them as products of specific individuals under specific social circumstances. Here, then, all kinds of perspectives can be brought on the Brothers Grimm themselves, and on the issues and mores of their times. For more recent studies in English, McGlathery emphasizes Tatar's primarily psychological (though not narrowly psychoanalytic) approach to sex, violence, victimization and retaliation in the *KHM* (in the References section represented recently by Tatar 2003), Zipes' psycho-social studies on the origins, reception and appropriation of the tales (Zipes 2002), and Bottigheimer's more narrowly-focused and textually-driven work on the values, stereotypes and aims reflected by the Grimms' (especially Wilhelm's) ceaseless editorial activity (Bottigheimer 1987).

So what does this new study have to contribute to what is now a really long tradition? As it turns out, I think, quite a bit. One of the funny things about becoming relatively quickly a landmark of world literature is that a work such as the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is rapidly translated, retold or bowdlerized, and ensuing scholarly treatments often end up dealing, not with the **language** of the original work (in this case some form of German), but more with the plots, themes, and ideas of the work in some kind of a-linguistic environment.² Even scholars speaking and writing in the original language of the work may sometimes overlook significant aspects of the linguistic form of the work, if grammar is not their forte.

I believe that it is in this area that my contribution to the research on the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* lies. I don't normally do literary analysis, I'm a linguist who cares about things like the history of the Germanic languages, word-order in Old High German, and the proper analysis of the Standard German sound system. Yet as a linguistics Professor who assigned himself the task of teaching a class which might actually get some students, I couldn't help but notice that the Grimm brothers (and one should know that Jacob counts among the founders of the field of Germanic linguistics) employed, whether consciously or unconsciously, an amazingly sophisticated linguistic strategy to convey their attitude toward the action of the tales, the nature of the characters in them, and the appropriateness of certain gender stereotypes. Such an observation was only supported by the fact that the tales have a (long!) longitudinal aspect to them – first published in 1812 (though, as noted above, drafts exist earlier than that), the

2. An interesting variant on this is Levorato (2003), whose explicitly linguistic comparisons of twelve versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" are to my mind more than a little limited by the fact that she is working only in English, thus with translations of the non-English tales. Many of the issues I deal with in this book simply could not come up for her.

last edition came out in 1857. In between, the number and the selection of tales shifted, but at least as importantly, even the tales that survived experienced great changes: They got longer, and a number of grammatical (or lexical) decisions got made that had clearly been up in the air at first blush.

This is the kind of thing studied in this work. But even with this basic orientation, there are a lot of different perspectives from which one could approach the *KHM*. One especially interesting one involves exploring linguistic reflections of gender stereotypes that the Grimms may have supported or pushed in their tales. Their employment of gender stereotypes by itself comes as no surprise – one can cite the observations made in Bottigheimer (1987), Haase (2004), Tatar (2003), Levorato (2003), Warner (1994) and Zipes (2002), among others – but I think that my own more relentlessly German-language-oriented approach in the latter part of the book (Chapters 7 through 11 on the favored nouns, adjectives and 3rd person pronouns used when referring to Grimm heroines and heroes) can cast a new light on this topic. But one may also profitably ask what it was that the Grimms did and favored linguistically that made their tales (1) appear to be genuinely German, even if in some cases the evidence for this provenience was weak (here, too, I have some resonance with the earlier work by Bluhm and Röllecke 1997 on the insertions of German folk sayings into the *KHM*); and (2) serve as exemplars of proper Standard German, a criterion frequently at odds with the first. These are roughly the topics of my Chapters 3 through 6. It should be noted that I do not treat every possible linguistic phenomenon to be remarked on in the Grimm fairy tales. I concentrate on those which struck me most forcefully on reading the tales, and which are easiest to document.

This brings me to the data-sources for all of my arguments in the rest of this book. In the first place, this is the searchable version of all 211 tales and legends found in the 1857 (final) edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, issued by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH in the *Digitale Bibliothek*. The search engine is not perfect, but the numbers I have given in my discussions on individual phenomena are at least relatively correct. Of course, those relative numbers refer only to that 1857 edition. In order to document actual **changes** the Grimms made to their tales, or to those originally published by others, I have had to refer to **print** editions of those earlier versions. These are unfortunately not normally in searchable electronic form (bless the *Digitale Bibliothek*, Bechstein's tales are!),³ so my statements regarding changes may not always be as precise as I would like. Nonetheless, in most of my discussions of individual phenomena to be found in later

3. A digital searchable version of each of the 1st edition tales **separately** can be found at Zeno.org, with the URL <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Grimm,+Jacob+und+Wilhelm/M%C3%A4rchen/Kinder-+und+Hausm%C3%A4rchen+%281812-15%29>.

chapters I have striven to consult not just the final edition of the *KHM*, nor, except in Chapter 2 (where I am simply demonstrating the kinds of changes the tales underwent), the 1st and the final edition. Evidence is also drawn from the preceding manuscript versions of the tales, the editions published between the 1st and the 7th, and the outside literary sources for many of the tales. I also frequently look at fairy tales (whether treating the same stories or not) written by contemporaries of the Grimms, to determine whether certain phenomena can be considered as uniquely Grimm.

Besides Chapters 3 through 11, there are three more chapters, including this one. The conclusion is a short summing up of the linguistic characteristics I believe I have documented for the Grimms' fairy tales, and their implications. Chapter 2, on the other hand, as I indicated in the last paragraph, and in line with its early position, is a comparison of two versions of a single tale, "Die sechs Schwäne," from the first and last editions of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. In this chapter I illustrate at some length the types of phenomena that will be discussed in detail in later chapters, as well as a few that will not.

CHAPTER 2

The Six Swans

I would like to begin my linguistic observations in this book with a detailed comparison of two versions, the first and the last, of Tale #49 “The Six Swans” (“Die sechs Schwäne”).¹ This tale was apparently recited to the brothers on Jan. 1, 1812 by their friend Dortchen Wild “aus Hessen” (‘from Hessian’ – Grimm 1857, v. 3:463). My twofold printing of the story is meant to accomplish several things. In the first place, it documents the fact that the Grimms did not simply “collect” a story and leave it as is. If this tale was truly originally collected orally, even the first version, from the first (1812, v. 1: 220–25) edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, shows us linguistic features extremely unlikely to have appeared in that oral rendition. The second version, from the 1857 final (7th) edition of the *KHM* (Grimm 1857, v. 1: 251–256), shows us even more clearly how the Grimms expanded and modified older versions of a story to achieve their storytelling ends.

Perhaps a more important function of juxtaposing these two versions of the same story is to lay a foundation for the rest of this book, in which I discuss precisely what kinds of editorial changes the Grimms carried out on their tales to achieve the relatively uniform generic shape we now know as a “Grimm fairy tale.” The changes were of many types, and served a number of different functions, as I see it. Surely it was important for the Grimms to make their tales as entertaining as possible; it was also, given their original objectives for collecting the tales, important to bring out their intrinsic Germanness, even if they had to add material to achieve that. Furthermore, it seems clear that the Grimms wanted to have reflected in their tales values which they, and often the bourgeois society of their time generally, felt to be important (including, importantly for my book, proper sex roles). Finally, as linguists/philologists the Grimms, especially Jacob, were necessarily participants in the evolving nature of the standard language in the 19th century, and their own perceptions about what was, or should be, “proper” German inevitably were reflected in the linguistic form of the tales (sometimes leading to a conflict with other motivations such as entertainment value and Germanic authenticity).

1. The Grimm tales all have a fixed number. I will not normally list these in the body of the book, nor will I give the German version of the titles. These will all be found in an appendix.