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“We Are What We Are Supposed to Be”

The Brothers Grimm as Fictional Representations

In 1985, in a catalog of contemporary art inspired by the Brothers Grimm and their tales, W. P. Fahrenberg presented the unpublished manuscript of a deceased Grimm scholar identified only by the initial L. In that rare piece of research, L. makes an astounding claim:

You know the Brothers Grimm as men who brightened your childhood, as pioneers of dream, as men of political integrity, as outstanding Germanists, as highly celebrated “great German intellectuals.” All this is true. And yet I would like to add to these celebratory assessments one more theory that, while affirming these declarations, at the same time also makes them pale in comparison. Brace yourself:

The Brothers Grimm were extraterrestrials whose explicit goal and mission were to subjugate humanity and thus to prepare it for that day in the future when the world as we know it will be turned topsy-turvy.¹

It should be clear to readers of that catalog, *Der Grimm auf Märchen*²—as it should be to readers of this article—that L. was not an actual person but a fictional scholar invented by Fahrenberg himself. That this catalog and Fahrenberg’s fictional L.

should appear in 1985 is significant, for 1985 and 1986 witnessed the bicentennial celebration of the births of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Depicting Jacob and Wilhelm as agents of an alien power involved in a great conspiracy to subjugate Earth's inhabitants might seem like an odd way to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversaries of the brothers' births, but this satirical take on the influential brothers was perfectly in sync with the changing reception of the Grimms and their work, particularly the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Whatever laudations the Grimms might have received during the bicentenary years were accompanied by a critical, skeptical, and cautious approach to the brothers, who had been revered since the nineteenth century both inside and outside Germany. Whether as icons of German nationalism and cultural identity or appropriated as icons of the universal spirit of humanity, the Grimms and their work—especially their collection of folktales—had enjoyed worldwide celebrity.³ That is not to say that their broad acclaim and fame were unadulterated and uninterrupted. Subversive responses to Grimms' tales certainly predate the flood of radical adaptations that have occurred over the last forty to fifty years. And the shameful exploitation of the Grimms' identities and work during the era of National Socialism certainly sullied their image and provoked debate about the ideological implications of their significant cultural and nationalistic work.⁴ So the reception history of the Grimms' work, especially the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, is closely linked to the way the brothers themselves have been understood over time. As the assessment of their tales' cultural value shifted, so did representations of their life and iconic status. To examine this phenomenon is to recognize the diverse ways in which Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm themselves have been repeatedly adapted and repurposed.

In what follows, I will survey the largely undocumented history of the Grimms' story—or rather, their *stories*—focusing on their roles as imaginative representations and fictional characters. I draw on selected examples from diverse media in German and Anglo-American contexts from the nineteenth century to the present to sketch how the Brothers Grimm evolved from romantics to rogues, from icons to con men, and how—much like their tales—they have been reimagined and reinvested with multiple identities to reflect their problematic legacy; to contest, complicate, and subvert the reception of their tales; and to recreate the Grimm brand for a new era.

The dominant narrative about the Grimms and their work has always affirmed their iconic status—typically by invoking their international if not universal value. The postwar years provide a good example. Despite concerns about the Grimms'

role in cultural propaganda of National Socialism, the Grimms' advocates were quick to reassert their universality. Already in 1944, W. H. Auden wrote "In Praise of the Brothers Grimm" and reaffirmed the value of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as one of the foundational books of Western culture; and in 1948, the German exile writer Carl Zuckmayer published his tribute *Die Brüder Grimm: Ein deutscher Beitrag zur Humanität* (The Brothers Grimm: A German Contribution to Humanity).

The postwar popularity of the Grimms, however, may be nowhere more evident than in the American film *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm*. Released in the United States in 1962, the 150th anniversary of the tales and the year before the hundredth anniversary of Jacob Grimms' death, the film—a musical—was actually a vehicle to promote the new moviemaking technology of Cinerama. In that sense the Grimms' lives and tales were secondary to the promotion of Cinerama.⁵ Still, it is remarkable that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Cinerama would put their money on a biopic of the Brothers Grimm to sell the public on the new technology and to produce a roadshow picture with the potential to earn big profits (Hall 164). Supporting the film's American release in August 1962 and its subsequent distribution, the producers undertook a multifaceted marketing campaign that featured not only the film and the hardcover souvenir program but also an LP of the musical soundtrack and a comic-book version of *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm*. The film made its mark, receiving an Academy Award for costume design and three other Oscar nominations.⁶ The West German release of the film occurred in 1963, the very year of the Jacob Grimm centenary.

The point I want to make here is that the producers of this film staked their success not just on the appeal of Grimms' stories but also on the story of the Grimms—as fanciful and wrongheaded as that story might have been. As the souvenir program tells us, "This is the story of Wilhelm and Jacob, of their fantastic lives, their adventures, their romances and the fabulous tales they told. It is a story for everyone" (*Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*). True to this silly description and the effort to universalize the Grimms, the film completely dehistoricizes their life and contains every imaginable cliché. Conflict is achieved by portraying Wilhelm and Jacob as opposites: Jacob is the levelheaded scholar who tries to keep his dreamy brother's feet on the ground. Typical of this portrayal is a scene in which Wilhelm is sent to buy bread but spends the family's scarce money on a story from an old woman in the marketplace. Similarly, impractical Wilhelm endangers the family's security and his health when he neglects his responsibilities and devotes his attention to a peasant storyteller he has discovered while on an official errand. Caught in a storm,

he falls deathly ill and dreams of fairy-tale characters who help him back to health and come to populate his tales. The film concludes with the obligatory happy end as the Grimms arrive to take up their new posts in Berlin and are cheered by crowds of children, who have come to love the brothers for their stories. Completely dehistoricized at every turn, the film lays a bogus claim to authority and authenticity by alleging, in the credits, to be based on the biographical work of Hermann Gerstner, an actual German Grimm scholar of some renown.⁷

Despite the film's success and despite an Emmy-winning musical made for prime time American television in 1977 called *Once upon a Brothers Grimm*,⁸ the romantic fiction of the Grimms' lives was under assault. By the 1970s, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were the object of scrutiny by Marxist scholars, feminists, progressive pedagogues, sociohistorical critics, and philologists interested in the textual development of the Grimms' collection.⁹ By raising questions and offering new information about the Grimms' collecting and editing, their treatment of gender, the role of their stories in the socializing process, and the ideological implications and abuse of their tales, such scholarship created not only an atmosphere in which their tales would be newly understood, adapted, and subverted by creative writers and artists—as Vanessa Joosen has demonstrated so convincingly—but also provoked a dismantling of the conventional narrative about Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm themselves. While the dominant narrative of the Brothers Grimm correctly depicted them as men of great erudition, loyalty, political courage, and integrity, in popular consciousness it was also in other respects a fiction. In light of the new critique and demythologizing of Grimms' tales, a less reverential image emerged, one that made the Grimms and their life story more vulnerable as targets of parody, criticism, repurposing, and reinvention. To those who had grown up with the romanticized story, the “new Grimms”—implicated in the cultural propaganda of the Third Reich, creators and purveyors of misogynist tales and a repressive morality—would have indeed appeared strange, even like extraterrestrials, aliens with a troubling agenda.

The Brothers Grimm: A Fairy Tale

The romanticized story of the Brothers Grimm has involved their being closely identified with their tales. The common use of the “Brothers Grimm” as *label* to identify the fairy tales suggests not only how the two Grimms came to be branded

but also hints at just how dehistoricized they have become. Heinz Rölleke quotes the English author Russell Hoban, who sees a complete identification of the name Grimm with fairy tales: “When I was a child,” Hoban writes, “it never occurred to me to wonder where these tales came from. . . . Their first name was ‘Grimm’s,’ their middle name was ‘Fairy,’ their last name was ‘Tales,’ and that was that.”¹⁰ So closely is the name identified with the tales that even in nonfictional contexts the brothers are treated as fictional fairy-tale characters and their life as a fairy tale. The editor of a 1966 reprint of Lucy Crane’s translation of *Grimms’ Household Stories* claims that “the life of the brothers is in itself the stuff of which folktales are made” (G. H.). This romantic view is nonsense,¹¹ but editors, translators, and journalists do their best to prove it true. George Kent’s 1965 article about the Grimms in the popular magazine *Reader’s Digest*—published three years after the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer biopic in Cinerama—is representative. Entitled “Happily Ever after with the Brothers Grimm,” it not only begins with the predictable “Once upon a time,” it also closes with “happily ever after.” While it purports to be a factual account of the Grimms’ lives and works, the fairy-tale frame and characteristic discourse mark it as fiction. The piece was even reprinted in Germany in *Das Beste aus Reader’s Digest*, and the German title—“Märchenwelt der Brüder Grimm” (Fairy Tale World of the Brothers Grimm)—identifies even more explicitly the Grimms’ own experience with the fairy tale.

There are many examples of this. Consider Kathleen Burke’s essay on the Brothers Grimm published during the bicentennial of 1985–86 in the *Smithsonian*, a magazine of science, history, and culture. Burke not only begins with the predictable formula but also engages in full-fledged fictional description: “Once upon a time in the far-off principality of Hesse there lived two brothers: Jacob, who was slight and stern-faced, crotchety and reclusive; and Wilhelm, who was lanky and lively, high spirited and witty” (109). She follows this depiction of the contrast between two brothers—which occurs repeatedly in fictional characterizations of the Grimms—with an imaginary elaboration: “During the fairy-story years, Jacob preferred to stay at his desk, scrawling away with a quill pen. Wilhelm was more likely to be spied under a linden tree hard by the village market in Kassel, where they lived, scribbling furiously as a seamstress or shepherd or woodcutter spun a tale.” These descriptions are based not on biographical facts but on imaginative fictions in popular imagination. Apparently, the biographical fairy tale has to be told as we like it and have heard it before. As with any tale type, some variation is allowed, but it must remain recognizable.

The tendency to idealize and mythologize the Grimms was a convention that had originated in the Grimms' own lifetime. Rudolf Schenda has commented on the phenomenon of "Grimm-Verherrlichung"—Grimm-glorification—and on the "sacrosanct nature of the monument of fairy tales-legends-myths that disciples of the brothers from Kassel had erected already in their lifetime."¹² And Grimm biographer Murray B. Peppard, confirming that "even during their lifetimes the brothers had become legendary figures," observes that "like figures from one of their own tales they had become folk heroes."¹³

Of course, wherever there is a monument, there is monument desecration; so already in the nineteenth century the Grimms were appropriated to appear not only in their legendary roles but also as characters in a counternarrative. In 1853 Jacob and Wilhelm were the basis of a satirical play titled *Einer muß heirathen* (One of Them Must Get Married) by Alexander Victor Zechmeister (published under the pseudonym Alexander Wilhelmi). Zechmeister's play pokes fun at the Grimms, and especially Jacob's bachelorhood, by presenting the scholarly brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Zorn (*Zorn* meaning *anger*, and thus a play on "Grimm"). The Brothers Zorn face the prospect of losing the housekeeping services of their aunt if one of them does not get married. After drawing lots to determine which of the two will marry, Jacob proves inept at courtship, and Wilhelm, as in reality, woos the wife who assures domestic stability while the brothers continue their scholarly pursuits.¹⁴ Although unflattering to the Grimms, the satire works because they were well-known figures whose idealized public status and celebrity provoked Zechmeister's humanizing satire about their private lives.

The contrast between the brothers is nearly obligatory. Based in part on reality—Jacob as confirmed bachelor, Wilhelm as husband and father; Jacob as the advocate of the natural folk voice and Wilhelm as the creative, literary editor—it also creates a structure on which to build plots and characterizations (even if those traits are reversed, as they are, for example, in Terry Gilliam's film *The Brothers Grimm*). In Zechmeister's play contrast is used to deflate the Grimms' revered public image by poking fun at the pragmatic nature of their private lives, household, and especially their differing relationships with women—a theme, as we'll see below, that still occupies writers in the twenty-first century.

The more benevolent narratives about the Brothers Grimm typically cast the duo as protective guides on a quest or journey through or into a new realm. This was the case when their Swiss contemporary August Corrodi paid homage to the Grimms by having them appear in his own fairy tale of 1862, "Wie Märchen das

Kind wandern ging" (How the Child Fairy Tale Went Traveling). In Corrodi's tale, not only the Grimms but also the fairy-tale genre is fictionalized as a character, whom the brothers befriend and defend on its journey through the land of real people. Later, in a short play by Walter Grothe published in 1936, a family receives a copy of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which the Grimms have sent to the head of the household. In the spirit of National Socialism, the father intones at the end of the piece: "We want to thank the Brothers Grimm, who opened for us the fairy-tale gates to the land of our fathers."¹⁵ The representation of the Grimms as guides for the German family and their tales as the point of entry into the fatherland reflects *in nuce* how the Grimms were appropriated in the service of ideology during the Third Reich.

Thirteen years later, in 1949, the Grimms are still accompanying Germans on journeys to new realms, but they are now conscripted into the dehistoricized service of *Märchenland*—the land of fairy tales—instead of the fatherland. The text here is Hugo Hagn's *Die wunderbare Himmelfahrt der Brüder Grimm: Ein Märchenroman für Kinder und Eltern* (The Wondrous Ascension to Heaven of the Brothers Grimm: A Fairy-Tale Novel for Children and Parents). In this postwar fiction, the Grimms find themselves, along with illustrator Ludwig Richter, on an afterlife journey through the land of fairy tales to the last judgment before Saint Peter at the gates of heaven. They are led on their journey by a venerable Dorothea Viehmann (one of their folktale informants) and a cast of characters from their tales, and a German family joins them. The members of the family had been separated and killed in the war—the father as a soldier, the stepmother and children in a bombing. However, they are reunited in *Märchenland* with the help of fairy-tale characters because of their deep love for the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Profoundly revered by this family and all the children of *Märchenland*, the Grimms—along with Ludwig Richter, the children, and the parents—are pronounced saved by Saint Peter at the end of their journey, and instead of entering heaven *per se*, they are sent to spend eternity with the inhabitants of *Märchenland*, where the children send up cheers of approval.

Hagn's sentimental fiction is a clear attempt to rehabilitate Jacob and Wilhelm, whose works had been tarnished because of their abuse by National Socialism, and who actually came under attack by the occupation forces in postwar Germany. Whereas Grothe's Grimms of 1936 had directed a family to the gates of the fatherland, Hagn's Grimms guide a victimized family to the gates of fairyland. Hagn seeks to reclaim the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and transform catastrophe into a fairy

tale by thoroughly dehistoricizing the Grimms and portraying them as the saviors of a war-torn people. The effort to rehabilitate the Grimms was simultaneously an effort to rehabilitate German identity.¹⁶

However, the Grimms' unjust association with the atrocities of the war and the Holocaust were too great a burden to be completely overcome. As Jack Zipes has written, "Unfortunately, their utopian vision for Germany in the nineteenth century turned into a nightmare" (*Enchanted Forests* xi). The burden of that past, coupled with the critical scholarship of the 1970s and '80s, caused a radical shift in the perception of the Grimms and provoked much more critical—or at least ambivalent—representations of the brothers.

Subverting the Tale of the Brothers Grimm

Fahrenberg's mock-scholarly revelation of the Grimms as aliens participating in a nefarious plot to dominate the world is an example of that shift, as is the subversive Grimm-inspired art collected in the catalog edited by Fahrenberg and Klein in 1985. Among the pieces based on fairy tales are several caricatures and paintings of the Brothers Grimm. One of these is a watercolor/sepia painting by Michael Mathias Precht titled *Hänsel und Gretel verbrennen die Lebkuchenbäckerin* (Hansel and Gretel Burn the Gingerbread Baker, 34). In it, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm look on as a boy and girl from the Hitler-Jugend and the Bund Deutscher Mädel burn, pummel, stab, and spear a bound and gagged woman wearing the Star of David. The Grimms' gestures might be viewed as ambiguous. Is Wilhelm, hand over his mouth, gasping or contemplating? Is Jacob's wide-eyed stare an expression of shock or keen interest? Are the brothers' extended arms supposed to signal a protest or embrace of the children? However one might read the painting, the very presence of the Grimms acknowledges their role—whether condemnable or tragically ironic—in the Holocaust and in the cultural education of German youth. In light of such a representation, the catalog's final image, a caricature by Thomas Kapielski, makes Jacob and Wilhelm seem all the more perverse and sinister (165).¹⁷ A sparse drawing made with a black felt-tip pen on graph paper depicts two simply sketched yet threatening faces. They have a demonic look, with solid black eyes, arched eyebrows, distinct frowns, and, in one case, two sharp vampiric fangs. Overlapping in the manner of a Venn diagram, the faces seem merged into one dual visage. Below them is the handwritten line "Gebrüder Grimm" (Brothers

Grimm). For all its simplicity, Kapielski's drawing provides at a glance a thorough subversion of more than a century of romantic mythmaking about the Brothers Grimm and their tales.

Günter Grass had taken up the Grimms' conflicted role in Germany's past and present in two remarkable novels that include Jacob and Wilhelm as characters. In *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*)—published in 1977, when fairy tales were being critically challenged by feminism¹⁸—Jacob and Wilhelm appear in a section called “Die andere Wahrheit” (“The Other Truth”). Here, Grass brings together the Grimms and their contemporaries Achim and Bettina von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, and Philipp Otto Runge and offers a fictional account of how the tale of “The Fisherman and His Wife” came to be published in the Grimms' collection. According to Grass's imaginative account, the painter Runge brings two authentic versions of the tale to the Grimms. Whereas one version depicts *women* as quarrelsome and insatiable, the other indicts *men*, who are driven by a lust for power that wreaks havoc on the world (*Butt* 442–46/*Flounder* 348–51). Faced with *two* truths, the group discuss their options, but Jacob and Runge agree that only the first, misogynistic version could be published: “die andere Version . . . müsse man wohl zurückhalten, ihrer Weltuntergangsstimmung wegen” (448; “the other version . . . would have to be withheld, because of its apocalyptic tone” [353]). Accordingly, the second version is burned, an act that may allude to the Nazis' book burning.¹⁹ Clearly informed by Grass's awareness of the Grimms' editorial practices and their problematic ideology, this fictional account contributes to the demythologizing of the Grimms and their collection by exposing their ambiguous and conflicted role in German cultural, social, and political history.

That ambiguity and Grass's ambivalence toward the Grimms are also evident in *Die Rättin* (*The Rat*) published in the bicentennial year 1986. In a Germany where the forests are dying—and along with them the fairy tales—the Brothers Grimm are cast in the roles of government officials: Jacob as the minister for forests, rivers, lakes, and air; Wilhelm as his undersecretary. In that capacity, they assume responsibility for the preservation of the German forests, just as they had for the preservation of the folktales that helped to make the forest such a profound cultural symbol for Germans. The characters of Grimms' fairy tales, who also populate the pages of this novel, revolt against government policies and against the well-intentioned but ineffectual Grimms, who had “been controlling [the fairy tales] to prevent them from challenging too overtly the status quo” (Anderson 109). While crediting the Grimms with preserving tales that had played such an important role in German

culture and the cult of nature, Grass simultaneously faults the brothers for having imposed a too rigid ideology that limits the tales' utopian and revolutionary potential. Under the auspices of the Grimms, neither the German forests nor the fairy tales—in which German identity was so heavily invested—will survive. Such is the irony in the political, cultural, and environmental legacy of the ambiguous Brothers Grimm.²⁰

The Grimms' ambiguous legacy in modern German history is also at the heart of British author Haydn Middleton's novel of 2001, *Grimm's Last Fairy Tale*, which recounts a fictional journey taken by Jacob Grimm and his niece Auguste, Wilhelm's daughter, in 1863, the year of his death. The narrative of the journey is filled with flashbacks to Grimm's past and alternates with an increasingly dark Sleeping-Beauty-type tale that evokes both Jacob's own journey and German history, including the Holocaust. Pervading the novel is a sense of "that 'other Germany' . . . the land of dark forests and sometimes even darker fairy tales" (23), which foreshadows the evil that was to come from the dark fairy-tale forests and from Jacob's hope for German unity and identity. Tragically implicated in this history, Jacob seems haunted throughout by a sense of foreboding about Germany, "a fatherland in fragments, which he had loved above all else" (203)—and a "land that had finally failed him" (239). Middleton paints a portrait of Jacob Grimm that is compassionate, but it leaves no doubt about the tragic ambiguity of his cultural legacy. Indeed, the unambiguous truth about Jacob is difficult to know. Throughout the novel, Jacob's niece, Auguste, harbors the suspicion that Jacob—and not Wilhelm—is her true father, and she hopes to learn her true identity from him. But she never does, and Jacob dies, leaving her to recognize that "She still could not be sure who he was" (238). Implicit in this, too, is the knowledge that she could not establish who she was through Jacob, revealing the novel as a cautionary tale that those who look to the Grimms and their work for their own identity—whether cultural or personal—will be disappointed or deceived.

Just as Grass and Middleton expose cracks in the monument built to the Grimms as icons of German identity, others subvert their once traditional identity as benevolent guides and protectors. This is especially true of Americans who appropriate the image of the Brothers Grimm. Among these is author Peter Straub, who casts Jacob ("Jakob" for Straub) and Wilhelm as demonic mentors in the dangerously immoral realm of Shadowland, the title of his horror novel of 1980. We encounter the Brothers Grimm when fifteen-year-old Tom Flanagan, the novel's main character, spends the summer in Vermont with a schoolmate's uncle, an

insanely evil magician who hopes to find a successor in Tom. The Grimms first appear to Tom when he enters a forbidden room on the uncle's estate. At first Jakob and Wilhelm appear friendly and scholarly: "Look, Jakob,' a man said, looking up from a desk. He smiled at Tom, and the man who sat at another desk facing him lifted his head from the papers before him and gave a similar quizzical, inviting smile. 'Do you see? A visitor. A *young* visitor.' His accent was German. . . . 'I know who you are. Who you're supposed to be,' [Tom] said. . . . 'We are what we are supposed to be,' said the one called Wilhelm. 'That is one of the great joys of our life. How many can claim such a thing? We discovered what we were supposed to be young, and have pursued it ever since.' 'We shared the same joy in collecting things,' said Jakob" (223–24).

Soon, however, this friendliness becomes ambiguous. The Grimms give only cryptic answers to Tom's questions; they express a delight in terror; and collecting—we discover—is a euphemism for killing. Indeed, in Tom's second encounter with the Grimms, these two famous collectors carry out their work in a World War I bunker, suggesting that they have been busy "collecting" as war rages in Europe. Their conversation with Tom quickly takes a sinister turn, and their speech and behavior turn violent: "The lights suddenly died. . . . A pair of rough hands shoved at [Tom's] chest. . . . He smelled sausage, smoke, sour breath beneath brandy. . . . The hands pressed him back. Rattling and banging; things were falling off the walls. . . . The hands, Jakob's or Wilhelm's, continued to push him back. The man's face must have been only inches from Tom's. 'Way way way down in the dump I found a little boy . . . and nobody ever saw either one of us again'" (264).

Here the brothers are fully demonized, threatening, and violent. They inhabit a world in which childhood and youth have lost their innocence and where horror and abuse lurk behind every door. Shadowland, the horrific land of the Grimms, those ultimate collectors, is a far cry from Hagn's heavenly *Märchenland* in 1949; and Straub's portrayal of the brothers and their horrific, homicidal "collecting" reflects the increasingly popular association of the Grimms as the source of troubling tales about the abuse and violence of childhood.²¹

This representation of the Brothers Grimm as perverse collectors has its farcical counterpart on the Internet site called *Uncyclopedia: The Content-Free Encyclopedia*. The entry on "Brothers Grimm" offers this riff on their biography:

Jakken and Koffen Grimm were born in 1785 and 1786, respectively, in Hanau near Frankfurter. They were educated at the Friedrichs Gymnasium in Kassel,

due to their father's lifelong desire to be a naked acrobat. Much to the dismay of their father, however, the brothers displayed more interest in the ancient human tradition of scaring children into behaving themselves than a life of free-flying acrobatic grace. Their father died a broken man, saddened by his sons' inability to perform a triple-inverted hoover backtuck, and complete inability to distinguish tales of moral lessons from gay porn.

The Brothers Grimm live in Malibu, California, in a large house with their two cats and one wife. They enjoy walks on the beach, pina colatas, and making up stories involving blood and gore.

In the companion article about their tales, since removed from the site, their collection is called "Grimm's Guide to Torturing Children" and credited with being "the main reason why English, French, and German children are so well behaved."

For Alfred Gingold, another subversive biographer of the Brothers Grimm, their collecting was not about homicidal fantasy or child abuse, but about money and celebrity. *Fire in the John: The Manly Man in the Age of Sissification*, Gingold's 1991 parody of two books from the men's movement—Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990) and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* (1991)—contains an appendix that portrays the Grimms as commercial opportunists who are eager to make money on their collection: "Myths," he writes,

have always been valuable commodities to those who owned them. Though today regarded merely as quaint children's-book authors, in nineteenth-century Vienna, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were folklorists with muscle. Roaming the European countryside with paper and pen ("mythopoetry in motion," their publicist claimed), their collected stories were published to acclaim. The books were best-sellers, topping the lists from Silesia to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The cherry on top was the publication of *Nursery and Household Tales*. . . . Offers streamed in. "Truly," Jacob wrote Wilhelm after the initial reviews broke the book big, "we seem to have fallen into a bucket of *schlag* with this baby." (153)

Jealous of their profit, even their folk informants show up "demanding royalties." "What's more," Gingold writes, "many of these anonymous 'folk' were in fact professional entertainers on the provincial Austrian 'hovel' circuit, playing tiny huts and outbuildings." Even Grimm informant Dorothea—here Katherina—Viehmann is deromanticized by Gingold, who quotes her as saying,

I've been doing *Snow White* since those Grimm bastards were wearing three-cornered pants. . . . It's my bread and butter, my big finish. They promised me a chance to play Vienna. Christ, I'd play a dromedary just to perform under a roof that wasn't thatched, but it's always been my dream to play the Big Schnitzel. Now anyone can buy the book and learn *Snow White*. Everyone knows the ending. My best routine, ruined. Those two Nazis put me out of business. (153–54)

Finally, Gingold portrays the Grimms as subjects of scandal, not for faking folklore but for hiding it until it could be better commercialized on magic lantern slides. Blacklisted and dropped by their agent, the Grimms “made their way to America, where they found work as commercial models” (154). The text shows us an illustration of the two Smith Brothers on a box of the eponymous cough drops. Gingold's travesty of the Grimms as self-centered commercial opportunists has clearly picked up on the scholarly controversies surrounding the Grimms and the critique of the commercial exploitation of fairy tales.

The image of the Grimms as exploitative collectors of fairy tales occurs also in Anthony Schmitz's fiction of 1998, *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale*. As narrated by a wolf named Wolf, the story tells of his desire to be cured of his own nature, which compels him to crave the soft flesh of children. In an encounter with Jacob (“the bird-beaked brother” [10]) and Wilhelm (“the wide-bottomed scholar” [7]), Wolf confesses his struggle to deny his natural identity and instincts, whereupon the Grimms offer him a course of therapy to cure him. The Devil warns Wolf that the Grimms “care nothing for you. Their prey is knowledge” (80), and that they are interested only in fame (81), but still Wolf pursues the cure. We soon find that Devil is right, for the Grimms' purported therapy involves leading Wolf into temptation so that they can observe how he acts in a real fairy-tale scenario they have staged involving children left alone without their mother. By watching and recording this gory scene as it plays out, the Grimms would have another tale for their collection. So Wolf is exploited and deceived by the brothers for the sake of their fairy-tale research (128), and they offer him no cure, no realization of his wishes, no path to a *new* identity. As the Devil declares, the Grimms are “devils in their own manner. . . . They limit our possibilities. They confine our imaginations. They are narrow and moralistic” (89). Schmitz's fictional portrayal of the Grimms as frauds who only *appear* to hold out the hope for cure and liberation echoes the modern critique of Grimms' tales as repressive instruments of socialization.

Rebranding the Grimms in the Twenty-First Century

For roughly four decades now, the idealized image of the Grimms has been dismantled. Their fictional avatars, stripped of their role as guides and protectors, carried a burdensome historical legacy and were exposed as deceitful, dishonest, and demonic. Terry Gilliam's feature film of 2005, *The Brothers Grimm*, which casts Jacob and Wilhelm as con men earning a living as fraudulent ghostbusters, is something of a capstone to that tradition. We have seen deceitful, fraudulent Grimms before, just not on the scale or with the publicity of a major motion picture from such a popular filmmaker. There is much to be said about Gilliam's *Brothers Grimm*, and Kendra Magnus-Johnston has said much of it in her exquisite reading of the film. Here I want only to identify the film's conclusion as a transition to what seems to be a turning point in the reception and fictional biography of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, especially in the United States.

At the end of Gilliam's movie, after the brothers have liberated a village from a curse by solving in fact a *real* supernatural mystery that was not one of their cons, Jake and Will walk together through a field of jubilant folk, across a bridge, through a gate, and into the village, marking a transition. Suggesting they may have reached "a turning point," Will proposes that they might pursue a "new career path" that puts their new skills to use. "Will," Jake says, "this is the real world. We're men without a country, we're enemies of the state, and worst of all we haven't a single bean to our name." "But it's a good name, though, isn't it?" asks Jake, to which Will replies: "It's a damned good name."

This exchange at the film's conclusion suggests something of the rebranding that Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm have experienced over the course of more than two centuries. Despite the intense historicizing of the Grimms and their tales that has occurred over the last four to five decades, the name *Grimm* has a life separate from the historical brothers. As "men without a country," the Grimms have lost, at least in American consciousness, their national and cultural identity. They constitute a name, a universal template onto which a host of identities, associations, and expectations can be projected. When, in 2005, the online magazine *tastes like chicken* assigned its artists the topic "The Brothers Grimm," some of them responded with diverse portraits of the Brothers Grimm that—despite some allusions to Gilliam's film—resist generalization and a single identity ("Sketchbook").

"Grimm" is indeed a "damned good name," one that remains marketable and continues to sell, even without the explicit presence of Jacob and Wilhelm. That is

evident in the success of the recent American prime-time television series bearing the simple title *Grimm*. The series is based on the idea that a twenty-first-century police detective, Nick Burkhardt—who discovers his identity as a descendant from the Grimm line—is destined to solve crimes involving fairy-tale characters and paranormal creatures, all generically called *Wesen*. The television series seems to imply that the Brothers Grimm had indeed taken a new career path, and the name “Grimm” in the series signifies those individuals who have descended from Jacob and Wilhelm and who possess special powers to detect, see, and fight *Wesen*. In the context of the trajectory of Grimm reception I have been tracing here, the point I want to make about this series is that the Brothers Grimm—in the guise of their namesakes—have been resurrected as guardians and protectors. The Grimms who were once projected as the guardians of German families in the pre- or post-World-War-II era are reimagined here as guardians engaged in a worldwide struggle with evil and located in twenty-first-century Portland, Oregon, USA.

While television’s *Grimm* may seem entirely original, it is not. Fictional descendants and heirs of the Grimms have been surfacing in their resurrected careers as guardians, guides, and protectors in the United States for at least the past seven years, well before the premier of *Grimm*. In 2007, Michael Buckley published the first book in his series for children, *The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy-Tale Detectives*. In it, the orphans Sabrina and Daphne are sent to live in the town of Ferryport Landing with their grandmother Relda Grimm, who tells them that they are descendants of the Brothers Grimm. Ferryport Landing is inhabited by Everafters, fairy-tale characters whose stories Jacob and Wilhelm had been documenting. To escape growing persecution by humans, the Everafters immigrated to America, where the conflict surfaced again. In exchange for a spell cast by Baba Yaga to contain the Everafters, Wilhelm Grimm had to agree that “[a] Grimm must stay in Ferryport Landing, just like the Everafters, as long as the spell is intact” (chap. 3). Like television’s Nick Burkhardt, the orphaned sisters discover their Grimm ancestry and their destiny as protectors and fairy-tale detectives. As Granny Relda explains, “We watch the town, investigate anything strange or criminal, and document what we see, so that when we are gone our children will know what we went through. Think of us as detectives. Someday I will pass all of this on to you. . . . It is your destiny. We are Grimms and this is what we do” (chap. 3).

Heirs of the Grimms do something very similar in Stephen Carpenter’s juvenile book series, *The Grimm Curse*. The first volume of that brief series, *Once upon a Time Is Now*, was published in 2010, three years after Buckley’s *Sisters Grimm* and

one year *before* the premier of TV's *Grimm*, which Carpenter co-created. In this coming-of-age novel, fifteen-year-old Jake Grimm flees his foster home near Los Angeles and returns to his birthplace, Woodland, in search of his identity. There he learns he is "the last living descendant of the Grimm family" (chap. 16) and destined "to be the new Huntsman" (chap. 14), a Grimm who protects the human residents of Woodland from angry creatures from the Otherworld. This is the obligation each last living Grimm inherits due to a spell put on the family when the Otherworld was exposed by the publication of Grimms' tales. In a letter from the previous Huntsman, Jake learns that being a Grimm is both an obligation and a journey toward self-realization: "we Grimms bear the terrible, lonely responsibility of protecting the innocents around us. . . . [N]ow that you know your destiny, you know the truth about your family, and you will learn more as you take up the sword your fathers carried. Trust what you feel, and your greatest fears will become your greatest strengths" (chap. 25).

Guardian Grimms in novels for children and juveniles have also made an appearance in literature for adults. *Candy Houses*, book one in Shiloh Walker's paranormal romance series *Grimm's Circle*, was published in 2009. In this romance novella, a Grimm is a guardian angel who acts as a personal guide, mentor, and protector. The Grimm in *Candy Houses* is Greta, a survivor from the tale of "Hansel and Gretel," who was mentored by another Grimm named Mary. In addition to having sex with an attractive Grimm named Rip, formerly Rip Van Winkle (who knows his way around a bed), Greta's mission is to convince a young woman of her own strength and self-worth (chap. 7) and to protect her from soul-eating demons from the Netherworld that only Grimms can see.

Finally, while the Grimms' role as guides and protectors has been assumed in these recent examples by the brothers' American descendants, one of the most recent fictionalizations of Jacob Grimm brings him back from the dead to take on that role himself. I'm referring to *another* novel titled *Grimm's Last Fairy Tale* by the self-published author Becky Lyn Rickman. Published in 2012, Rickman's book recounts the story of Margaret Naomi Austen—Maggie—a lonely, twice divorced fifty-three-year-old, who had wasted her life and love on men who had abused or abandoned her. Shortly before discovering she has cancer, Maggie is visited by the visible spirit of Jacob Grimm. Like a supernatural voyeur, Jacob had come to love Maggie as he observed her reading his and Wilhelm's fairy tales during his unseen visits from the afterlife: "I came to you when you were a child, and I must tell you that your love of our stories was the most fulfilling thing in my afterlife. . . . I became

your devoted servant from those initial moments on” (chap. 6). Maggie falls for Jacob, and he becomes her guardian angel and guide into death, where she becomes Mrs. Grimm. If previous accounts of Jacob’s bachelorhood and relationship with women raised any questions about his sexuality and sexual orientation—from Zechmeister’s onward—his postmortem courtship and marriage to Maggie are a testimony to his heterosexuality. Take this snippet of dialogue between Jacob and Maggie:

“Well, it’s time to turn off the thinker for the night and get some shut eye,” says Jacob, “Want a kiss on the forehead?”

“Oh, yes, please—and make it as magic as the others. Potent stuff, your kisses. I can only imagine what a real one on the lips would do to me.”

“When the time is right, you shall know.”

“Goodnight, Jacob.”

“Goodnight, my love.” (chap. 33)

This appears to be an entirely new, if also idiosyncratic fictional resurrection of Jacob Grimm, but it reveals just how dehistoricized, malleable, and accommodating the Grimms have become—how easily their “career paths” can change in the service of diverse genres and media and in the service of national, cultural, commercial, or even individual wishes, needs, and agendas.

Conclusion

One is hard pressed to think of another pair of literary-cultural figures who have attained the iconic status of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who are known around the globe and among both children and adults as the Brothers Grimm. Despite their many other significant works of scholarship and their intellectual and cultural legacy, I wonder whether they would have retained that iconic status and collective appellation without their equally famous collection of fairy tales. Identified so closely with their profoundly influential and contested fairy-tale collection, the Brothers Grimm have become synonymous with it and have provoked strong responses, both laudatory and critical. It is no wonder that they have become attractive narrative material, characters in a controversial story that has the aura and status of a fairy tale. Like their tales—which have been adapted and used in

the service of diverse political, sociocultural, and commercial agendas—the story of the Brothers Grimm has been revised, reinvented, repurposed, and rehabilitated in the service of those same ideological and commercial interests.

After roughly two hundred years, their tale continues to be told by their defenders and critics, as well as by those who know little about Jacob and Wilhelm beyond the brand name. Although Grimm-glorification waned in the postwar era and was supplanted by ambivalence and subversion following the creative and critical work during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, the Grimms continue to be dehistoricized, Americanized, and repurposed in a broad range of representations.²² Yet whether the Grimms are guides to a Germanic past, pilgrims to a heavenly *Märchenland*, killer/collectors in a demonic Shadowland, opportunists in the commercialization of folklore, con men, crime fighters, guardian angels, supernatural suitors, or even extraterrestrials, they remain—both in popular media and in scholarship—characters in a cultural fiction that is repeatedly retold and reimagined. And just when the Grimms seemed like they might be losing their hold on us—thanks to developments in fairy-tale studies since the last Grimm celebration—their descendants and heirs surfaced in American books and prime-time television, inviting readers and viewers to discover their inner Grimm, and to investigate the relationship between fairy tales and reality, not unlike fairy-tale scholars. The two brothers—men with or without a country—are recurring figures in our search for cultural narratives, meaning, and identity, and they prove themselves, along with their descendants, ready to take on whatever roles we ask them to play.

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■ NOTES

1. Fahrenberg, “Die Aufzeichnungen des Forschers L.” 11.

Sie kennen die Gebrüder Grimm als Verschönerer Ihrer Kindheit, als Traumvordenker, als politisch integre Persönlichkeiten, als hervorragende Germanisten, als vielgefeierte “große deutsche Geister.” All dies ist wahr. Und doch möchte ich derlei

jubilierenden Einschätzungen noch eine Theorie hinzufügen, die alle bisherigen Aussagen zwar bestätigt, aber sie gleichzeitig auch zu einer Farce werden läßt. Halten Sie sich fest:

Die Gebrüder Grimm waren extraterrestrische Intelligenzen, dessen erklärtes Ziel und befohlene Aufgabe es war, die Menschheit zu unterjochen, und sie damit auf einen Tag X vorzubereiten, an dem sich die Welt, wie wir sie kennen, auf den Kopf stellen wird.

2. Edited by Fahrenberg and Armin Klein, the catalog's complete title is *Der Grimm auf Märchen: Motive Grimmscher Volksmärchen und Märchenhaftes in den aktuellen Künsten*. In addition to visual artworks, the catalog includes essays and original fiction. See also the similarly titled book edited by Fahrenberg, *Der Grimm auf Märchen: Die beliebtesten deutschen Volksmärchen in der Karikatur*, which contains works of visual art that satirize and caricature the Grimms' tales and the brothers themselves.
3. See Joosen and Lathey for a recent collection of essays devoted to the reception of Grimms' tales around the world.
4. See, for example, Bausinger; Kamenetsky; and Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 134–69.
5. See Magnus-Johnston's superb analysis of this and other Grimm biopics.
6. For art direction, cinematography (color), and music ("35th Academy Awards").
7. See also the souvenir program, where, among the technical credits, it states: "Based on 'Die Brüder Grimm' by Dr. Hermann Gerstner (*Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, inside back cover). The book by Gerstner was apparently *Die Brüder Grimm: Ihr Leben und Werk in Selbstzeugnissen, Briefen und Aufzeichnungen*, a biographical work published in 1952 that featured excerpts from the brothers' writings and letters, other contemporary documents, portraits, sketches, and photographs. Later, in 1970, Gerstner published a biography titled *Die Brüder Grimm: Biographie*.
8. *Once upon a Brothers Grimm* is one of the films discussed by Magnus-Johnston.
9. See, for example, Haase, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" and introduction; and Joosen.
10. Quoted by Heinz Rölleke in his afterword in Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen: Ausgabe letzter Hand* 3: 592.
11. This is not to say that the Grimms did not project themselves into their tales. See, for example, Jack Zipes, *Brothers Grimm* 28–42. I refer here specifically to chapter 2 as it appeared in the first edition of Zipes's book.
12. "Unantastbarkeit des Märchen-Sagen-Mythen-Monuments, das die Epigonen der Kasseler Brüder schon zu Lebzeiten errichtet hatten" (Schenda 36).

13. Of course, Peppard entices readers into his biography of the Brothers Grimm with the title *Paths through the Forest*, which does not distance his work from conventional fictionalizations but instead identifies the multifaceted Grimms with their primary brand—the fairy tale—and creates expectations of a biography resembling a fairy-tale plot. The persistent and absolute identification of the Grimms' biography with the fairy tale—that is, the confusion of biography and narrative fiction—is perfectly embodied in Robert Quackenbush's biography of the Grimms for juveniles, published in time for the Grimm bicentennial. Bearing the by now predictable title *Once upon a Time*, the book has the provocative subtitle: *A Story of the Brothers Grimm*. In fact, the work is written in the discourse of a fictional story—especially that of a fairy tale. Not content to have a clichéd title, Quackenbush begins his narrative with “Once upon a time . . .” (9). However, having invoked the fairy-tale formula, Quackenbush inserts a parenthetical remark that seeks to obliterate the tension between Märchen and biography: “Once upon a time (this is a true story), there were two brothers named Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm . . .” What Quackenbush actually succeeds in doing is making the difference between fiction and history transparent, and framing his “story” of the brothers Grimm as a fairy tale, and thus he makes the story only more fictional through its insistence on its truthfulness. Despite the fact that this book was written when more than enough revisionist scholarship was available about the Grimms, Quackenbush conforms to the fairy-tale image and has the Grimms collecting tales among peasants. The story—the formula—requires it, for the truth no longer exists in the facts of the Grimms' lives but in the traditional *story* of their lives, which is now a well-known fairy tale.
14. See the discussions of the Grimms' domestic concerns, occasioned especially by the marriage of their sister Lotte, and their relationship to women in Hildebrandt 92–102; and Weishaupt 102–03.
15. “Wir wollen den Brüdern Grimm danken, die uns die Märchentore zum Land der Väter geöffnet haben” (Grothe 6).
16. On postwar efforts to come to grips with the Grimms' and their place in both East and West Germany, see Zipes, “Struggle.”
17. Kapielski's drawing is also in Fahrenberg, *Der Grimm auf Märchen*.
18. See Haase, “Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship.”
19. See Thesz 108; and Mews 172.
20. Later, and more recently, Jacob and Wilhelm appear in another book by Grass, the autobiographical *Grimms Wörter: Eine Liebeserklärung* (2010). Here they act as

Grass's interlocutors, as he relates their life and reflects on personal and political parallels in his own. See Shafi for an excellent discussion of Grass's relationship to the Grimms and their status as cultural icons.

21. Straub's depiction of the Grimm brothers is consistent with his use of Grimms' tales elsewhere—particularly in his adaptation of the “Juniper Tree” in the collection of stories, *Houses without Doors*, where fairy tales are abhorrent to memory because of the terror and violence their child characters experience. For the relation of child abuse to fairy tales, see Zipes, “Rationalization” and “Recent Psychological Approaches”; and Tatar.
22. While the final section of my survey draws conclusions about the recent American resurrections of the Grimms, the Grimms also appear as investigators of sorts in Germany in the novels of Kai Meyer: *Die Winterprinzessin* and *Der Geisterseher*. Grimms' unrelated namesakes also appear in German writer Cornelia Funke's *Reckless* series. A police report on the disappearance of the Grimms is the subject of “Afternoon with the Bros. Grimm,” a collaboration between the American author of speculative fiction Harlan Ellison and the Polish artist Jacek Yerka. Further research is certainly warranted.

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