

## 5. Discussion

*Märchen*, and especially the 'ideally' constituted, popularly received type of *Märchen* presented in Grimms' collection, seem to invite interpretation. Their manifest fictionality, produced by abstract narrative style, hermetic construction and supernatural reference combines with the convention of reading for meaning to encourage transcendental, timeless, symbolic interpretation of the tales. In much recent popular discussion of the *KHM*, the historical circumstances which surround the production of the *KHM* appear to have been forgotten, leading to a situation where the influence of the text is used to make claims for its authority as a provider of transcendental truth. Interpretations which claim the *KHM* to be a bastion of timeless psychological truths about child development such as those of Bruno Bettelheim and Karl-Heinz Mallet have been mirrored in recent authorial production, in the writing of *veränderte Märchen* which reflect this recent popular preoccupation with psychological interpretation of the *KHM*.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the influence of the *KHM* is undeniable, and is therefore of paradigmatic value in consideration of the factors which have contributed to a gradual blurring of the distinctions between *Kunstmärchen* and *Volksmärchen*, terms whose definition bears, as noted previously, a striking resemblance to the Grimms' understanding and use of the terms *Kunstpoesie* and *Naturpoesie*. Historical shifts such as the Industrial Revolution created a large *Bildungsbürgertum*, accelerating the transformation from an oral to a print based

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<sup>1</sup> Filz: *Es war einmal?*, pp. 222-226.

culture. The general rate of literacy in Germany has risen continuously since publication of the *KHM*, bringing about a wide acceptance of the print medium as the basis for the preservation and transmission of culture. The widespread distribution and popularity of the *KHM*, aided by these transformations, has canonised Grimms' versions of tales such as 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26), 'Hänsel und Gretel' (*KHM* 15), 'Aschenputtel' (*KHM* 21) and 'Dornröschen' (*KHM* 50), so that the tales are transmitted through increasingly interactive oral and literary traditions. These factors combine with an increasing blurring of concepts such as high and low art to reveal terms such as *Volksmärchen* and *Kunstmärchen* to be largely artificial categories. For the same reasons, the traditional distinctions between oral and literary traditions have become increasingly questionable since the late nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, an important current in the literary criticism of the past thirty years has posited the 'death of the author'.<sup>2</sup> Texts, and the discourses they consist of, have been 'decentred', and the attempt to construct meaning from a text is presumed to be self-defeating; it is claimed that texts are empty of meaning, or equivalently, so full of meaning that all interpretations are possible and equally valid. The problem with making such strong claims about the ahistoricity of text is that such claims tend to lead to the production of interpretations which blatantly conflict with historical and philological evidence, evidence which even appears in the form of other texts. The

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Author" in: *Image-Music-Text*. Stephen Heath (ed.) New York: Hill and Wang 1977, pp. 142-148. See also: Michael Foucault: "What Is an Author?" in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1977, pp. 113-138.

interpretative history of the *KHM* offers a salutary warning of the dangers involved in positing such an absence of authors and meaning, in discounting the necessity of historical consciousness in the consideration of social phenomena. For example, the assumption that Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were in fact collectors of unadulterated tradition from an idealised common folk encouraged just such a proliferation of unfounded mythological and psychoanalytic interpretation of the *KHM*, to the detriment of the reputation of the fields of folklore, mythology and psychoanalysis. This sort of interpretative practice is undermined by the practice of parody:

Through interaction with satire, through the pragmatic need for encoder and decoder to share codes, and through the paradox of authorized transgression, the parodic appropriation of the past reaches out beyond textual introversion and aesthetic narcissism to address the 'text's situation in the world'.<sup>3</sup>

Parody foregrounds many of the possibilities of intertextuality, and, as has been shown in previous sections, it operates within a field of reference which can encompass many aspects of the social existence of a text: its origins, influences, production, reception and interpretation. In the case of the *KHM*'s 'situation in the world', the effect of recent interpretation and parody has been to "demystify the 'sacrosanct name of the author'"<sup>4</sup>, but not in a way in which neostructuralist critics might imagine such demystifying as functioning. It has rather

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<sup>3</sup> Hutcheon: *A Theory of Parody*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon: *A Theory of Parody*, p. 5, quoting Raymond Federman.

encouraged a reappraisal of the literary status of the *KHM*, and a rehabilitation and recognition of the fact of its multiple authorship.

Recent research into the origins and production of the *KHM* has conclusively shown the collection to be a product of multiple authorship. That is, the authorship of the *KHM* is the result of a collaborative effort which proceeded in several distinct stages. Tales which were found to be in accordance with certain philosophical guiding precepts and literary models were collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm from a variety of oral informants and printed sources, and were reworked, combined and stylised prior to publication. The collected texts were published in a series of editions, and the tales they contained were themselves progressively reworked, combined and stylised by Wilhelm Grimm, with the deletion of some tales and the addition of others, primarily taken from printed sources after the Third Edition of 1837. A further edition of fifty tales selected by Wilhelm Grimm on the basis of popularity and suitability for children was published in the form of the *Kleine Ausgabe*. This convoluted history of multiple authorship creates seemingly insurmountable problems in discussion of author intentionality, especially when the potential for conflicting intentions is considered, while the fact that the Grimms destroyed most of their notes and manuscripts makes it impossible to subject the contributions of individual sources and informants, of individual authors to empirical verification.<sup>5</sup> This must sound a further note of caution with respect to future interpretation of the *KHM*, since the collaborative nature of the *KHM* in itself requires a balancing of the roles

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<sup>5</sup> See: Jack Stillinger: "Implications for Theory" in: *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 1991, pp. 182-203.

of the Grimms and their informants, and of social and literary concerns in any discussion of intentionality. The suggestion that literature may be uninterpretable in terms of immanent author, intention does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of understanding author intention altogether though. In the case of the *KHM*, examination of Wilhelm Grimm's intentions seems to be possible through the comparative study of successive versions of the *KHM*. Knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding the production of the *KHM*, and knowledge of its authorship thereby enlarges the scope for understanding and appreciation of the text.

On the other hand, the possibilities apparent even in parody of a single, short text also suggest that it is impossible to read the author's intentions from a text mimetically. The double-coded nature of parody foregrounds the multiple authorship of the text, highlighting the fact that the author may be employing any number of literary devices or narrative techniques to obscure, conceal or contradict his/her actual intentions. In this respect, another aspect of neostructuralist theory may prove useful; namely, the claim that the author constructs a coherent text by suppressing moments of discontinuity, of heterogeneity. A parallel claim can be made with respect to the practice of parody, in that parody, through the foregrounding of its double-coded nature and through metafictional comment, tends to highlight the heterogeneity of the text and encourage the reader to recognise moments of discontinuity between the appropriated code of the parodied text and the code of the parody. In this way, parody of the *KHM* can also function as an antidote to Wilhelm Grimm's 'concealment' of the heterogeneous sources of the *KHM* through his editorial revisions and production of stylistic unity. Parody also crea-

tively refunctions text in a manner which invites comparison with the Grimms' creative refunctioning of *Märchen* material, in a manner both critical of and sympathetic towards the source material.

It has been argued in Chapter 4 that some discussion of this phenomenon has taken place, but mostly in terms of the *Märchen* genre, as *veränderte Märchen*, and mostly in terms of the use of the genre as an ideological vehicle. Using the terms proposed in this study, it can thus be argued that much of the critical emphasis in discussion of modern *Märchen* has been placed on strategies properly described as contrafact and travesty. It would seem that scant attention has been paid in criticism to the critical possibilities which emerge from reading parodic texts as interpretative responses to the *KHM*. Correspondingly, critics have indicted contemporary fantastic literature for displaying a "tendency towards regressive thinking and *Innerlichkeit*",<sup>6</sup> without paying similar attention to the success with which some authors have established a critical and creative dialogue with the *KHM*.

In other words, criticism of the *veränderte Märchen* phenomenon has generally used the rubric of *Märchen* as an aesthetic standard in the examination of responses to the *KHM*, a term which is no less problematic than the terms *Volksmärchen* and *Kunstmärchen*. The problematic nature of the use of the term *Märchen* in consideration of parodic texts becomes apparent when the stylistic, structural and semantic elements which signal the presence of parody are compared with the stylistic and structural features which describe the *KHM*. The reader expectations evoked through application of

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<sup>6</sup> Zipes: *The Brothers Grimm*, p. 173. See also: Filz: *Es war einmal?*, p. 265.

the textual strategy of parody and the conventions of the *Märchen* genre could not be more different. Parody, as a device, operates in ways which stress the double-coded nature of the text, its heterogeneity, and hence moments of discontinuity between the appropriated material and its new context. In contrast, the conventions of the *Märchen* genre, as exemplified in the *KHM*, stress abstract style, unity of plot, figures and motifs and the completeness of the narrative, without reference to the reader or to anything else 'outside of the text'. It is therefore unsurprising that a text which relies on reader reception of *Märchenelemente* to encourage recognition of the presence of parody would be judged inferior through the application of the conflicting conventions of the *Märchen* genre, conventions which have moreover solidified as a result of the huge influence of successive editions of the *KHM*. However, the stylistic consistency of the *Märchen* provides an opportunity for parody and travesty, since this 'ideal' style produces a very specific set of reader expectations. Furthermore, the very contrast between foregrounded parodic effects in a parodic text and the stylistic coherence characteristic of the *Märchen* genre can be said to problematise the question of genre more generally, by bringing into question distinctions between high and low, form and content, and even, in the case of the *KHM*, oral and literary traditions.

The interaction of these two divergent 'codes' creatively re-functions *KHM* material, creating a dialogue with the *KHM*. By recontextualising preformed material from the *KHM*, parodic texts can lead the reader to question assumptions involved in the reception and use of the *KHM*. This questioning can proceed in a number of directions, and is to some extent determined by the reader's knowledge of the preformed

material. As examination of texts by Janosch, Joachim Ringelnatz, Peter Rühmkorf and Heinrich Kühleborn has shown however, the aesthetic complexity which parody permits encourages multiple readings of the parodic text. Furthermore, since the parodic texts examined foreground issues of intentionality and receptivity by variously highlighting the convention of reading a text for meaning, the social setting of tale telling, the question of what constitutes an authoritative text and the need to correlate interpretation with empirically knowable facts, the recontextualisation and creative refunctioning of preformed material appropriated from 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) can be understood as directing the reader's attention towards the social, historical and literary details which constitute knowledge of the preformed material.

Recognising the cultural existence of literature as both a modern productive ideal and a social institution with its origins in eighteenth century Europe, conceived of as occupying an independent aesthetic realm by men such as Kant, Herder and Arnold, therefore allows a definition of parody and a resulting methodology which bases itself on the aesthetic nature and social existence of the text or texts examined, and the use of philological and historical methods in conjunction with textual methods. Through study of responses to the *KHM* under the rubric of parody it seems possible to reconcile synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of literature, since parody as defined in this study is concerned with both the text being parodied and the history of the text, with the uses it has been put to and the ways in which it has been interpreted. This methodology is also well suited to the examination of multiply authored, heterogeneously sourced and repeatedly reconstructed texts such as the *KHM*:

What is needed here is a broader notion of the conventions of reading, and such an expanded notion of reading must be based to some extent on the kinds of texts read. [...] Parody today cannot be explained *totally* in structuralist terms of form, in the hermeneutic context of response, in a semiotic-ideological framework, or in a post-structuralist absorption of everything into textuality. Yet the complex determinants of parody in some way involve all of these current critical perspectives - and many more. It is in this way that parody can, inadvertently perhaps, serve another useful function today: it can call into question the temptation towards the monolithic in critical theory. If many perspectives help us understand this pervasive modern phenomenon, but none is sufficient in itself, then how can we claim that a structuralist, semiotic, hermeneutic or deconstructive approach was in itself totally adequate to the task. This is not so much an argument for critical pluralism as it is a plea for theory that is a response to aesthetic realities.<sup>7</sup>

Defining the term 'parody' in this manner is intended to produce terminology which has some explanatory force in a particular situation, that is, in consideration of literary uses of Grimms' *KHM*. The intention has been to subdivide or relativise the generic term *Kunstmärchen*, the term most usually used in discussion of literary fairy tales, to show that there are limits to the explanatory force of the term, and to demonstrate that the conventions of the *Märchen* genre are being used for

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<sup>7</sup> Hutcheon: *A Theory of Parody*, p. 116.

a variety of divergent and not necessarily reconcilable purposes.<sup>8</sup> There are certainly utopian elements in *Märchen*, as the Grimms were no doubt well aware, but this is but one possible outcome of authorial application of the conventions of the genre. Hence, debate about *die Möglichkeit des Märchens*, in the sense of whether it is still possible to write *Märchen* is somewhat futile, while claims that writing which makes use of these conventions is inherently regressive are highly questionable. The genre consists of a set of formal, structural, stylistic conventions which activate certain reader expectations, and can be used for a variety of purposes. The best *Märchen* are testimony to this, whether they are written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde, James Thurber, Ödön von Horváth, Janosch or Peter Rühmkorf. An appreciation of the wide range of possible uses of its elements, even whilst still adhering to some of the historical, formal restrictions imposed by genre and even whilst constrained by a single, bounded textual strategy such as parody demonstrates this.

This study has not considered a wide range of other possible uses of preformed *Märchen* material, some of which may involve parody. The use of *Märchen* material in advertising and politics may not necessarily produce contrafact, whilst many other possibilities of textual appropriation involving less strict adherence to generic convention remain to be examined, such as Günter Grass' use of *Märchenelemente* in his recent novel *Die Rättin*.<sup>9</sup> However, both the general method which

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<sup>8</sup> On the need to relativise the term *Märchen* in discussion of issues of intention and reception see: Klaus Doderer: "Märchen für Kinder: Kontroverse Ansichten", in: *Germanic Review* 63 (Winter 1988), pp. 13-18, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Günter Grass: *Die Rättin*. Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1986. See

has been employed in this study and the resulting concept of parody would seem to be applicable to other texts. There are, of course, many other conceivable uses of parody 'in response to' the *KHM*. Lastly, since the intention has been to construct a theoretical framework suitable for a differentiated study of parody, contrafact and travesty of 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26), and to demonstrate the potential utility of such an approach, it should be noted that this study has considered but a tiny sample of the shorter texts which have appropriated preformed material from 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) to produce parody, contrafact and travesty.

Parody, a textual strategy often dismissed as 'parasitic', 'trivial' or 'merely comic', is in fact a richly communicative medium which can contribute to the continuing survival of the *Märchen* genre by encouraging a critical dialogue with the past. Parody of tales from Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* can be said to fulfil a useful and enlightening function, in that it can function to restore in them a heterogeneity of voice and identity, and a plurality of balanced interpretation which has been denied them by their canonisation.

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especially Chapters 5-7, pp. 160-292.