



The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales

Maria Tatar

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Murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest: the darker side of classic fairy tales figures as the subject matter for this intriguing study of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's Nursery and Household Tales. This updated and expanded second edition includes a new preface and an appendix containing new translations of six tales, along with commentary by Maria Tatar. Throughout the book, Tatar skillfully employs the tools not only of a psychoanalyst but also of a folklorist, literary critic, and historian to examine the harsher aspects of these stories. She presents new interpretations of the powerful stories in this worldwide best-selling book. Few studies have been written in English on these tales, and none has probed their allegedly happy endings so thoroughly.

The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales Details

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From Reader Review The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales for online ebook

Becky Graham says

an interesting look at the history of the editorial changes made by the Grimm Brothers, especially in terms of sex and violence towards women and in gender roles

Nathan Dehoff says

The scholar who did the annotations for *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* here does a general overview of the brothers' collection of stories, noting how it developed and what changes they made to it. While it was first billed as a collection of folklore for fellow academics, it became popular with children, so the Grimms altered the tales accordingly. Interestingly, while they tended to edit out references to sex, they increased the violence in many cases. They also often changed evil mothers into stepmothers, both to make less cases of biological parents being abusive and to reflect realities in a time of scarce resources. Something like the Hansel and Gretel situation of the stepmother convincing her husband to abandon the kids out in the woods didn't happen often, but it wasn't totally outside the realm of possibility.

Jo says

A great look at the importance of fairy tales and their nature. This book looks in depth at the violence and didactic means of communicating with child. Specifically looking at Grimm's fairy tales, Maria Tatar explains how and what the Brothers Grimm did to local stories and how they compare to their French and Italian predecessors. It also looks at patterns in fairy tales such as hero and villain characteristics. This is an excellent resource when researching fairy tales.

Ana Mardoll says

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Like many of us, I am deeply interested in fairy tales and I eagerly anticipated this book, looking forward to an engaging, informative handling of the content and textual analysis of the Grimms' tales, with a focus on the un-"child-friendly" elements so common in the stories, due to their original intent to entertain mature audiences.

Unfortunately, I was profoundly disappointed in this book. Clarity and organization are severely lacking and the whole book feels very much like a hastily expanded dissertation that was haphazardly padded to 'book size'. The writing runs in various different directions, often seemingly at random, with no clear view of why a certain topic was discussed, nor how it led into the next topic.

For example, in the first chapter ("SEX AND VIOLENCE: The Hard Core of Fairy Tales"), Tatar deals very

briefly and very superficially on the existence of sex and violence in fairy tales before moving hurriedly on to devote the bulk of the chapter on the Grimms' financial difficulties, publishing woes, irritation over harsh critics, and such varied and dissimilar themes as the differences in vernacular between various editions, the misfortunes of modern compilers who have not had the older, less heavily edited versions available, and authors who failed to realize that the "Grimms" author were two people, not one. Most of these topics, as the shrewd reader will note, have little or nothing to do with sex or violence in Grimms' fairy tales or any others, so it is deeply unclear why this comprised the bulk of a chapter titled "SEX AND VIOLENCE".

Another flaw in this book pointing to a dissertation source is Tatar's baffling obsession with diagrams. Multiple diagrams are devoted to detailing the difference between "fairy" tales and "folk" tales. This was not a topic that interested me whatsoever, and the multitude of pages devoted to it was deeply annoying. What does the difference between a fairy/folk tale have to do with the "hard facts" of the Grimms' tales? Nothing, as we later find out. It's just something Tatar is interested in, and she hopes we will be, too. Slightly more pertinent is the number of diagrams devoted to detailing the relationships between various story archetypes, but once again, I did not buy this book to learn about the archetypes of fairy tales, but rather to deal with the "hard facts" of the Grimms' tales - specifically the existence of, explanation for, and critical analysis of the sex, violence, and abandonment in the Grimms' tales, along with the fact that a number of endings were very much "happily ever after". The lack of serious treatment of these grim topics makes me feel that this book was misnamed in an attempt to drum up sales.

I do not think it is appropriate to market a book to an audience expecting analysis and explanation of the content of the Grimms' tales, when the book should more accurately be billed as a "history of the publication of the Grimms' tales" or "an analysis of relationships between archetypal characters in classic fairy/folk tales" or something similarly close to the actual content of this book. If you want a book on deconstructing fairy tales in general, this is a decent resource, if somewhat dry. If you want a book on the grim realities of the Grimms' tales, look elsewhere.

~ Ana Mardoll

Nikki says

Wonderful and fascinating exploration of fairytales!! Sets up the historical development of the Grimm's collection and examines the prolific themes of heroes, heroines, ogres, and beasts. Excited to see Maria Tatar speak this summer!

Mike says

Good scholarly examination of the Grimm tales - where they came from, why/how they were changed, what themes and characters to look for. I'm doing some short stories with some Grimm characters in them, so this was/is good research.

Library book - ordered my own copy today.

Huijia Li says

Very interesting exploration of the themes of violence, sexuality, obedience and victimization in the Grimms' tales. She also discusses the evolution of the tales from first edition to the last, and how the editorial process of the Grimms affected each edition.

StephTKO says

This is a great book for any one interested in the psychology of fairy tales. Putting aside the subject matter, this book was just absurdly well written. Maria Tatar, evil genius.

Edward Batres says

The chapter on Sex and Violence was the best...

Nikki says

The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales is a pretty good discussion of, not the origins of the tales in the Grimms' collection, but in how the Grimms treated them and why. It looks at some of the publication history and the issues surrounding different editions, the changes in audience, and it deals with some pretty common interpretations of some of the tales (e.g. why Bluebeard is considered a cautionary tale about the evils of curiosity instead of, you know, the evils of killing your wives and butchering their dead bodies and then marrying again) and how they came about.

I guess it's probably a bit dry if you're not particularly interested in the topic, but I found it perfectly readable. It does help that I recently reread selections from the Grimms' work, and looked at some of them in my SF/F class -- I notice myself falling into some of the traps of thinking about these stories which Tatar discusses and evades -- so that the whole topic is fresh in my mind and relevant to what I'm thinking about lately.

If you're looking for salacious details of the "real" Bluebeard, or the real Hansel and Gretel, seek elsewhere. Tatar doesn't really go in for that kind of interpretation of fairytale/folklore origins.

Paula Soper says

This book is really interesting. I have learned a lot about fairy tales (or folk tales or folktales). If you like fairy and folk, this is the book for you.

Margaux says

Maria Tatar did a wonderful job of explaining the history of the Grimms' Fairy Tales in this book. The first section on the sexualization and desexualization of the stories we now associate with young children was a totally new concept for me. I never would have thought to look at Jacob Grimm & Wilhelm Grimm's educational background to deduce how they would have come up with their stories, nor would I have thought to question the long-believed notion that the Grimms got their stories from "folk resources." However, Tatar debunks and explains some of these scenarios in a way that is totally believable.

For any teacher or librarian planning on using these stories with any age level of children, I would say this book is worth checking out at the library. For parents, the ones who should be the most vigilant about knowing what kinds of goblins and witches await their children in the forests of their dreams, you should definitely look at this or a similar title. Just to know what you're up against.

Sapote3 says

I very much enjoyed the excerpts from the original Grimms' that were appended at the end; I skipped over a great deal of the intermediary analysis. What I really loved about this book was the way it redeemed stories that have been treated as the birth of "children's literature" and pointed out that these were originally part of a community storytelling tradition that included adults and children both. I loved that glimpse into a very eloquent - if gorey - oral tradition - I'm afraid I've really absorbed the idea that "illiterate German peasant" meant that this was a group of people who didn't *have* a literature, which of course they did, even if it took the Grimm brothers to record it in writing and pretty it up.

What I really skimmed in boredom, though it might have just been personal laziness, were all the careful explanations that a lot of these stories evinced, you know, discomfort with forests and stepmothers.

Aaron says

Fairy Tales without the Victorian cleaning white-wash.

Hazel says

Very interesting subject, but this approach is a bit too scholarly for me right now. I may try it again later on.

Jennifer Orr says

My youngest is obsessed with fairy tales right now and after many evenings of glossing over some of Grimms' finest for appropriate bedtime reading, I started wondering about the history of these stories. This book didn't go as deep as I wanted into how and where these stories actually originated; that probably is an

impossible task. But it is an interesting look at how the Grimms modified these tales for their collection (Rapunzel pregnant!) and analyzes the messages behind some of these tales.

Penny says

I can't say I read this from start to finish. I read this as a companion book while reading The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales and honestly it made all the difference! I didn't particularly care for the Tales, they seemed rather abrupt, strange and often left me with a slightly bad feeling, but this book made up for all of that.

The most interesting part of the Grimm's Tales is the history of the lore and how the stories have changed over time. I learned through this book that the commonly read and translated version on the Grimm's Tales is the 4th edition put together by the brothers themselves. I tried to get my hands on a first edition but couldn't. However many of the most interesting differences were chronicled in here.

For example, between the first and second edition, the brothers changed the mothers in the fairy tales into step mothers. I found that very interesting! I think most of us find it easier to believe that a step mother with no blood relation to a child would find it easier to be cruel to said child than we would a mother who gave birth to the child. I think the stories take on a very different tone when you leave out the word "step" and leave the mothers as mothers. I understand why they might have made the change, but I was very interested to learn what it had been originally.

The Frog King was one of my favourite stories to discuss because it was so weird. I found a lot of information about the original here and how the princess had thrown him against the wall and he fell onto her bed where she lay down with him and they passed the night together. By the 4th edition that had been edited to them being companions and leaving to go marry at his castle. The original and the subsequent kiss the frog and he turns into a prince makes far more sense than the 4th edition "original".

If you've ever planning to read The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales, I'd highly recommend that you read this at the same time. Simply brilliant!

Bob says

A look at the classic Grimm Brothers fairy tales in their uncensored form tracing their transformation from adult reading material to the watered-down tales that many of us first heard as children.

Anna Rose says

This book looked at the beginnings of Grimm's fairy tails and their prominent themes and motifs. It also addresses other folk tales and fairy tales. From the beginning to the end, I found this book engaging and thought-provoking. If you are a fan of fairy tales, this is a great read.

Sarah Smith says

Skipped around a lot through this book because it was just waaaayyyy too much useless information. She spent more time telling the fairy tales than actually talking about the history behind them; at least, that's how it felt to me.
