

The Theme of Child Abuse In Selected Fairy Tales By Brothers Grimm

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Abstract

Brothers Grimm produced over two hundred fairytales that survived history to reach us in the twenty – first century. These tales, although condemned by most critics of Children’s literature, are still widely read and are competing with modern fairytales. For many years these tales have been subject to scrutiny due to the vast amount of violence, cruelty, cannibalism and other horrific elements in them. It was not until recently that very few critics, namely Maria Tatar and Jack Zipes, discovered a new horrific theme, the theme of Child Abuse, in many of The Brothers Tales.

Maria Tatar has translated thirty – six of Brothers Grimm’s tales from German into English. In this research, the researcher studied all tales to trace Child Abuse theme. At the beginning the term Child abuse is defined as well as a brief clarification of the four types of child abuse are stated. There are four types of child abuse; neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse and in this collection of tales twenty – one out of thirty – six tales have one or more types of abuse.

Many tales are about children who suffer from neglect like *Hansel and Gretel*. Their parents abandon them in the woods because they couldn’t afford to feed them anymore. Emotional abuse is another type of child abuse that prevails in the Brothers Grimm Tales. *Cinderella*, for instance, goes through emotional abuse the moment her mother dies and a stepmother and stepsisters enslaved her. She was abused for many years as long as it takes a branch to turn into a tree.

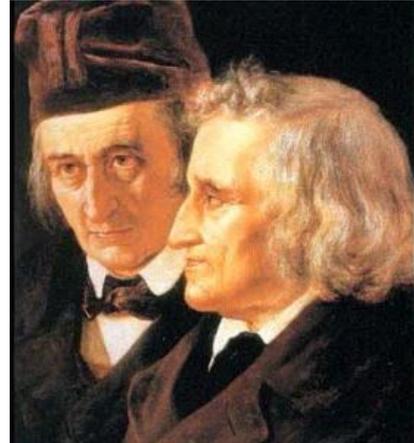
Most of the tales have a physical abuse theme like *Snow White* in which her stepmother attempts to kill her stepdaughter out of jealousy, in *Rumpelstilskin* a father threatens his daughter’s life by telling the king that she can spin strew into gold. Some tales have one hero/heroine that is abused by more than one person for example the same girl in this tale is physically abused by the king who locks her up in a room filled with strew and she is condemned to death if she doesn’t spin it into gold. Some tales, like *The Juniper Tree*, physical abuse develop to the murder of the child, in which a stepmother chopped her stepson up and cooked him into a stew. To make things even more horrific, the mother fed the stew to the boy’s father. Although Brothers Grimm removed all sexual elements from the tales; yet some tales like *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Furreypelt* tackle the theme of child’s sexual abuse. In *Furreypelt* a father lusts for his own daughter and decides to marry her.

The researcher concluded that the theme of child abuse prevailed in the tales simply because they prevailed in the time the Brothers Grimm collected the tales. The tales portrayed the reality of children’s abuse during that period of time thus they managed to live through many historical times and still capture the attention of the twenty first century reader for their realistic themes.

1. Introduction:

It is almost impossible to read children's literature whether classic or modern without encountering a fairytale by Brothers Grimm. Brothers Grimm namely Jacob (1785 – 1863) and Wilhelm (1786 – 1859) were German authors and scholars who collected folklore.

¹ They started studying law in Marburg and through their study of the German history of law, they fell in love with Medieval Literature.² Their love for



German Medieval literature resulted in over two hundred fairy tales that are well known in our days. The Brothers' goal was to collect traditional German stories in a treatise on folk tales³ that reflects "German Cultural Identity."⁴ Their work granted them a scholarship and then resulted in "nation – wide recognition, with honorary doctorates from Marburg (1819), Berlin (1828), and Breslua (1829)."⁵ Through collecting the tales they were able to produce massive collective projects including the historical grammar of German Language, German Laws and Costumes and a dictionary of German language, they also made archives of ancient folklore, mythology, religion, linguistics and law.⁶

Brothers Grimm's contribution to Germany and to the whole world crystallized in *Children's Stories and Household Tales (1812)*⁷. This volume consisted of German folk tales known in our present time as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*.⁸ Although Brothers Grimm's tales are read world wide by children, they were not intended for young audience.⁹ Instead the Brothers were surprised that children received them so they refined the tales several time so as to "de – emphasize sexuality and increase their violence, adapting the stories to their ideas of what was best suited to the education of children."¹⁰ The first edition of this volume included eighty –six tales that were refined, added, removed and changed in many editions to follow making the final edition that included two hundred tales.¹¹ Many versions of the same fairytale were published to ensure its proper content yet "forty heroines out of more than two hundred tales are abused and tortured."¹² In the other tales the audience, children, are the object of cruelty and abuse. Since there are many editions and translations of *Children's Stories and Household Tales*, the researcher took Maria Tatar¹³'s *The Annotated Brothers*

Grimm as the main source for this research's fairytales. This text included thirty – seven tales for children that twenty of them share the theme of child abuse.

Child Abuse :

Child abuse is defined as "the physical, sexual, emotional mistreatment or neglect of a child or children."¹⁴ The abuser can be one or both parents, a caregiver, a relative, a friend or a stranger who intends to harm or threatens to harm a child. Child abuse can be "any act or failure to act on the part of a parent, caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation."¹⁵

Child abuse is classified into four major types:¹⁶

1. Physical Abuse:

This type of abuse involves "physical aggression directed at a child by an adult."¹⁷ This type of abuse is distinguished from discipline when the parents fail to control their anger, control their children through fear and unpredictability of parents' behavior.¹⁸

2. Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse is defined as "an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation."¹⁹ Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve touching it can be done by exposing the child to a sexual situation or material that is abusive to a child.²⁰

3. Psychological or emotional Abuse:

This type of abuse refers to any psychological and social problems that a child suffers from as a result of the parents or caregiver's behavior. Abusive parents or caregiver's behavior include yelling at a child, rude remarks or attitudes, name – calling, severe criticism , belittling the child's personality, exposing the child to the abuse of others, limited physical contact with the child, seeing a loved one being abused, etc.²¹

4. Neglect :

It is the failure of a parent or a caregiver to provide the child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, medical care, hygiene, or supervision that might threaten or harm the child's health and safety.²²

The Office on Child Abuse and neglect²³ classifies child abuse into six types; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, educational neglect and emotional neglect.²⁴

2. Brothers Grimm Fairytales With Child Abuse Themes:

Since most fairytales tackled in this research has all types of child abuse, the researcher will discuss fairytales with less severe types of abuse first, that is to say neglect, moving to more serious ones namely emotional abuse followed by physical abuse ending with sexual abuse.

2.1. Fairytales with the Theme of Child Neglect :

The first type of child abuse that can be traced in the tales is Neglect. In *The Golden Key* a boy is sent out in middle of the cold winter night to bring his family wood for fire. The child after collecting the wood was half freezing to death a matter that forced him to light up the wood and feel the warmth of the fire. But after the wood has finished he didn't dare to go back home empty handed so he stayed in his place shoving ice from one place to another till he found a golden key that belonged to a casket that he found later on. Although the story ends in a promise of good fortune for the child if he managed to open the casket, the beginning was dim just like *The Star Taler*. In this fairytale a girl is neglected by all her relatives because her parents have passed away and therefore she was forced to search for a shelter and a caregiver. She leaves with nothing to call her own save her clothes and a piece of bread. On her journey she encounters an old man who asks her for her bread and she kindly gives it to him, then she is met by many children all freezing from the cold winter weather and suffer from lack of clothes. Compassionate by nature, the girl gave every child she met a piece of her cloth till she had nothing on her. The sky started to drop silver stars that the girl collected and since that day she became very rich. All children whether the boy in the first tale and the girl and all the children she pitted in the second suffered from emotional, physical and educational neglect. They have no families to care for their basic needs like food, clothing and shelter, and even if they have one, like the boy, they are emotionally neglected a point that is clearly displayed when the boy refuses to go back home and prefers sitting in the dark cold night.

Neglect can take another form that is when a child is left unsupervised or is exposed to the abuse of others like in *The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats*. The fairytale is about seven little kids and their protective, loving mother goat. One day, the mother is forced to leave her kids unattended to bring food. The mother gathers her kids and warns them saying "you'll have to watch out for the wolf. If he

manages to get into the house, he'll gobble you up, skin, hair, bones and all."²⁵ She ended her warning by stating two vital things; the first is that the wolf will try to trick them into opening the door for him and the second is he can be discovered through his "gruff voice" and "black feet."²⁶ The kids promised to take care of themselves so the mother left home feeling secure. Shortly after the mother's departure the wolf came knocking on the door asking them to let him in saying he is their mother. The kids did not open the door recognizing his harsh voice so he swallowed some chalk to soften it. The kids did not fall this trick too because they saw his black paw from the window. The wolf covered his paw with dough and sprinkled some white flour on it and went for the third time speaking in his soft voice showing his white paw from the window. The kids were fooled so they opened the door for their mother thinking she was carrying food to discover they opened the door to a wolf that they are his food. The little goats ran in terror trying to hide in their safest places at home yet in vain, the wolf found them one after the other and "he sent one after another down his gullet, gobbling them all up."²⁷ Only one little goat was able to escape the horrific abusive act. When the mother came to her house she was in terror finding that every thing in the house was up side down and broken into pieces and, of course, there were no kids. In panic she cried their names one after the other till she reached the youngest who responded in a faint voice from the clock case. He told his mother everything and the mother vowed revenge. She took her kid with her to seek the wolf. The wolf, having no regrets at all was under tree sleeping so deeply that he did not feel the mother goat cutting his belly open and freeing her goats and placing heavy stones instead of them and sewing him up. The wolf, not knowing what happened to him, went to the well to drink water fell into it and drowned. The mother goat and her kids danced around the well with joy.

The mother neglected her kids when she knew very well that a wolf will eat them up. This negligence gives plenty of opportunities to a child predator, the wolf, to plan and execute three tricks to get to his victims. Yet another type of abuse can be detected in this fairytale incarnated by the wolf that is the physical abuse. The wolf is the main abusive figure that eats the little goats one in front of the other for no apparent reason other than hunger. He did not take his time to eat them properly; he swallowed them without chewing, a matter that kept them alive in his belly. Again a third type of child abuse is apparent which is the emotional abuse where the youngest goat had to witness

his brothers eaten one after the other and the fear of being the next to be eaten.

3. Fairytales with The Theme of Child Emotional Abuse

Emotional child abuse can be as simple as belittling a youngest son or a brother such as in *The Golden Bird*, *The Three Feathers*, *A Fairytale About a Boy Who Left Home To Learn About Fear* and *The Golden Goose*. These fairytales share many elements, a father who has three sons, the youngest son is called the Dummy and he is emotionally abused by his family. The father has no faith in his youngest son in all these tales while the mother in *The Golden Goose* discriminates among her sons in the type of food she gives to her youngest child; the elder boys get tasty pancakes and wine while the youngest gets pancake baked with ashes and water. Siblings play an important role in emotionally abusing their youngest brother by belittling and insulting him. At the end of all four tales the youngest wins at the end.

Emotional child abuse can be more serious when a parent gives up his offspring for his own financial security like, the Miller in *Rumplestiltskin* who wanted to be rich so he claimed that his daughter can spin strew into gold. His claim endangered his daughter's life for the king locked her up in a room filled with strew and she had to spin it into gold otherwise she will be killed. In *Rapunzel*, the parents also give their child away but they were forced to by a witch who locked the girl in a tower with no doors.

Cinderella is famous for being emotionally abused as a child by her evil stepmother and stepsisters. When her biological mother died her father married a woman with two daughters. Her stepmother enslaved her in her own house and all her belongings were taken

"The two sisters did everything imaginable to make her life miserable. They made fun of her and threw peas and lentils into the ashes so that she would have to bend down over the ashes and pick them out. In the evening, when she was completely exhausted from work, she didn't have a bed to lie down in but had to sleep at the hearth in the ashes. She began looking so dusty and dirty that everyone called her Cinderella."²⁸

Her father plays a very negative role in this story for he is not absent he was there all the time witnessing the abuse that his daughter was going through. The girl spent all of her spare time weeping her heart out over her mother's grave while her father made no reaction. He appears in her life just to give her a wicked stepmother and stepsisters then again to bring her a hazel branch that she planted and she watered with her tears every day "she wept so hard that her tears fell to the ground and watered it. It grew to become a beautiful tree."²⁹ It seems that she suffered from abuse for along period of time as long as it takes to grow a branch into a tree.³⁰ The tree is her fairy godmother who granted her wishes and the dresses that she wore for the three night – ball. Her father didn't recognize her all cleaned up and well dressed that he kept saying "Could it be Cinderella?"³¹



Her stepmother was also as cruel as her daughters to Cinderella, but she was physically abusive to her daughters as well. On the last night, the prince covered the staircase with pitch that one of Cinderella's golden slippers stuck in the tar. Left with one slipper, the prince started searching for its owner and announced any woman that would fit the slipper will be his wife. The stepmother wanted to live in wealth on the expense of her daughters so when the eldest stepsister didn't fit in the golden shoe because of her big toe her mother forced her to cut it off with a knife. When the prince discovered that she was not the bride that he was looking for the second stepsister tried on the shoe but this time her heel was too big. "Her mother handed her a knife too and said "cut off a part of your heel. Once you're a queen, you won't need to go on foot anymore."³² As the case with all Grimm's Tales the wicked are punished severely; the stepsisters were punished by having their eyes picked by Cinderella's doves to live blind for the rest of their lives.

4. Fairytales with the Theme of Child Physical Abuse:

Physical Abuse is the most dominate type of child abuse in the Grimm's Tales. Abuse rank from simple physical abuse that is cursing a child with a spell that changes his physical appearance to sever physical abuse that is murder. In the *Seven Ravens* a father curses his seven sons and wishes that they will turn into ravens. The seven

children suffered greatly because of their father's curse but at the end they were all saved by their sister. The stepmother in *The Six Swans* changes her stepsons into swans because their father spends a lot of time with them. Like all abusers in Brothers Grimm fairytales, she turns back home "filled with glee, thinking that she had gotten rid of the stepchildren."³³ Again their younger sister saves them. Both sisters suffered from physical abuse to save their brothers, the sister of the seven ravens had to run away from the child eating sun and the human eating moon and ended cutting her finger to use it as a key to open the ravens' castle door. The six swans' sister, to break the spell had to work hard for six years making six shirts without speaking or laughing, endured the false accusations of her evil mother in law and the burning on the stake. The father in *The Twelve Brothers* vowed to kill all his twelve sons if the thirteenth child his wife is bearing was a girl "If the thirteenth child you are about to bear turns out to be a girl, the twelve boys will have to be put to death, so that her wealth can be great and so that she alone inherits the kingdom."³⁴

Accordingly twelve coffins were set for the children. The father was shaved the wood of the coffins and placed little pillows inside each so as the boys can rest their heads on. He locked the coffins room and gave the mother the key and asked her not to tell their sons of his plan. The mother was eaten up with sorrow that her children noticed and when the youngest asked for the reason she was sad he was surprised to hear of his father's plan. He calmed his mother and promised her that he and his brothers will run away from home. The mother advised her sons to take refuge in the woods and wait in the trees for her signal from the tower. She prays for them to feel warm at winter and cold at summer. The boys ran to the wood waiting for the mother's signal and there it was a "red flag as blood"³⁵ which meant that their mother gave birth to a girl. The brothers were angry and vowed to revenge themselves from their sister "if we run into a girl, her red blood will flow."³⁶ Again the sister seeks her long lost brothers and lives with them for some time and by an accident she enchanted them turning them into ravens. As the sister of the *Six Swans*, their sister had to go seven years without speaking or laughing to redeem her brothers and so she did.

In *Little Brother and Little Sister* child abuse is well pronounced that the starting sentence is a clear portrayal of physical abuse:

Little Brother took Little Sister by the hand and said:
"Since the day our mother died, we haven't had a moment

of peace. Our stepmother beats us everyday, and when we try to talk to her, she just gives us a swift kick and drives us off. All we get to eat are crusts of hard bread. Even the dog under the table is better off than we are. At least he gets an occasional tidbit. Our mother would be turning over in her grave if she knew what was happening. It's time for us to leave home and seek our fortune out in the world."³⁷

Again the siblings find refuge in the forest but the stepmother did not leave them at peace. She was ill with envy and jealousy when she knew that they were both living in peace and happy for she was "constantly trying to figure out how to turn the tide on the two, bringing misfortune on them."³⁸ At first she enchanted the little brother into a fawn then when the little sister grew up and got married to a king she managed to get to her, killed her and took her child. The tale ends a happy ending by the king realizing the ghost of his dead wife who tells him everything. The king revenges for his wife and once the stepmother is out of the picture the little sister, now the queen, comes back to life and her brother turns back to his human form.

The same is true for *The Magic Table*, *Golden Donkey* and *The Club In The Sack* in which a father physically abuses his three sons till they run away from him one after the other. The father owns a goat and he asks his sons one by one to feed her, although the sons do feed the goat, the goat denies it when the father asks her. The father's lack of trust and his faith in the goat drives him to chase his sons out of the house with a stick. The youngest son took all the beating because the father was "beside himself with rage, he raced up the stairs and gave the boy such a tanning with his stick that he fled the house."³⁹ The boys find refuge and each learned a different craft in a different place. They come back one after the other bringing magical gifts that they earned at the end of their career.

In *The Devil and His Three Golden Hairs* and *Snow White* physical abuse evolves into attempted murder. In the first tale a child is born with a coal in his head that predicts he will be a man of good fortune and marries the king's daughter. One day the king, who was disguised saw the boy and heard the prophecy, felt unsecured and decided to kill the child. The king offered his parents money in exchange for their child and promised to raise him in wealth. The parents gave up their child to the king who immediately threw him into a box in the river. The box floated and it settled in the king's city.

After some time the king found the child again in his kingdom, who now is a boy, and once again aimed at killing him. He gave the boy a letter to deliver to his wife, the queen. The letter states that the carrier of the letter should be killed and buried at once. The boy escapes the murderous attempts of the king by a pure chance and marries the princess.

Physical abuse in *Snow White* is well known. Snow White's stepmother attempts to kill her because she was jealous of her beauty. When the mirror on the wall told the queen that Snow White is the prettiest of all, the queen "began to tremble, and her face turned green with envy. From that moment on, she hated Snow White, and whenever she set eyes on her, her heart turned cold like stone."⁴⁰ She attempted to harm her physically by asking the huntsman to kill Snow White who was only seven years old. The huntsman pitted her and released her in the woods. The huntsman came back to the queen carrying a heart and a liver of a boar and gave it to the queen. The queen asked her cook to "boil them [Snow White's heart and liver] in brine, and the wicked woman ate them up, thinking that she had consumed Snow White's lungs and liver."⁴¹ Snow White was left alone in the woods and she was frightened by many wild beasts that didn't harm her. Again the abused child seeks shelter in a seemingly scary wood instead of a seemingly cozy home. Finally she takes refuge in the seven dwarfs' house where she lived for sometime as their housekeeper. The queen discovered that Snow was alive and she was still the fairest female in the kingdom. She "thought long and hard about how she could get rid of Snow White. Unless she herself was the fairest in the land, she would never be able to feel anything but envy."⁴² Disguised as an old woman, the queen tried to suffocate Snow White with a lace and when she failed "the blood froze in her veins."⁴³ So, on her third attempt she used up all her witchcraft to make a poisonous comb which the girl was saved from again by the dwarfs. This time when the queen realized that her plan failed she "began trembling with rage. "Snow White must die!" she cried out. "Even if it costs me my life."⁴⁴ She made a poisonous apple with white and red cheeks. Snow White was tempted so she took one bite that was enough to kill her. Snow White did not die and was saved by the prince's kiss. The queen, when she heard that Snow White is still alive and is going to be the queen, she "let out a curse, and she was paralyzed with fear that she didn't know what to do."⁴⁵ She attended the wedding just to see how Snow White became but Snow White recognized her and punished her for her abuse :

Iron slippers had already been heated up for her over a fire of coals. They were brought in with tongs and set up right in front of her. She had to put on the red – hot iron shoes and dance in them until she dropped to the ground dead.⁴⁶

In most fairytales the mother is the abuser and she is the stepmother but in *The Juniper Tree* there are two types of abuse as there are two types of mothers. When the biological mother of the boy dies the father marries a woman who soon gave birth to a daughter. The stepmother hated her stepson:



"When the woman looked at her daughter, she felt nothing but love for her, but whenever she looked at the little boy, she felt sick at heart. It seemed that no matter what he did he was in the way, and the woman kept wondering how she could make sure that her daughter eventually inherited everything. The devil got hold of her so that she began to hate the little boy, and she slapped him around and pinched him here and cuffed him there. The poor child lived in terror, and when he came home from school he had no peace at all."⁴⁷

By time her hatred grew stronger and more intense till one day she planed to kill him. She called and offered him an apple from a chest that had a very heavy lid and an iron lock. The child felt that his stepmother is going to harm him but he couldn't disobey so once he bent over to take an apple "she slammed the lid down so hard that the boy's head flew off and fell into the chest with the apples."⁴⁸ Unlike other stepmothers, this stepmother felt fear and thought of a way to cover her crime so after finishing her physical abuse with her stepson she started emotionally abusing her own daughter. When her daughter, Marlene, came back from school the mother had already cleaned the blood, seated the boy on a chair, tied his head back on his body with a handkerchief and placed an apple in his hands. The little girl wanted an apple just like her brother but her mother told her to go and ask her brother for his apple and if he did not give her the apple she should slap him very hard. The girl did exactly what her mother told her and to her horror her brother's head flew off. She ran to her mother to tell her what she has done but the mother responded "little Marlene, what

dreadful thing you've done! But don't breathe a word to a soul, for there's nothing we can do. We'll cook him up in stew."⁴⁹ Then the tale portrays how the mother chopped the boy's body into pieces and placed him in pot and started to cook him and she didn't have to put any salt because Marlene was standing by the pot crying her heart out and her tears fell right into the pot. When the father came home and asked for his son the mother told him that he went to visit their relative and served him his son chopped up and cooked in a hug dish of stew. The father loved the taste of the stew very much that he ate it all. The entire time the father was eating the little girl was weeping and when he finished she collected the bones from under the table and buried them under the Juniper Tree. The bones disappeared and a beautiful bird raised from them and started singing

"My Mother, she slew me,
My father, he ate me,
My sister, Marlene,
Gathered my bones,
Tied them in silk,
For the juniper tree.
Tweet, tweet, what a fine bird am I!"⁵⁰

The boy returned to his formal state after revenging from his stepmother and he celebrated by dining with his father and sister. The emotional abuse that the biological mother exposes her daughter to is unexplained. Why did she let her child go through the fear, regret and sadness when she could simply use the same lie she used with the father?! This is one of the rare tales in which a biological mother abuses her daughter in this harsh way.

In one of their most famous tales, *Hansel and Gretel*, Brothers Grimm portrayed three types of abuse; neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse. The story starts with parents abandoning their children in a dark scary wood because they cannot provide for them any more. The parents worked up a plan to get rid of their children

At night, he [the father] lay in bed worrying, tossing and turning in despair. With deep sigh, he turned to his wife and said: "what is going to become of us? How can we possibly take care of our poor little children when the two of us don't have enough to eat?"

"Listen to me," his wife replied. "Tomorrow, at the crack of dawn, let's take the children down into the deepest part of the forest. We'll make a fire for them out there and give them each a crust of bread. Then we'll go about our work, leaving them all by themselves. They'll never find their way back home, and we'll be rid of them."

"Oh, no," her husband said. "How could I ever do that! I don't have the heart to leave the children all alone in the woods. Wild beasts are sure to find them and tear them to pieces."

"You fool," his wife replied. "Then all four of us can starve to death. You might as well start sanding the boards for our coffins."⁵¹

The children heard every word their parents were saying and out of despair Hansel took some stones so in the morning when the parents were carrying out their plan, Hansel spread the stone along their path away from home so they can find their way back again. Left alone in the woods the children walked all night till they came back home at dawn. Yet when food got scarce again the parents executed the same plan but this time the children got lost in the woods for days with no food or drink.

After some time they came up a house. The house built of bread and covered with cake; the windows were of pure



sugar. Driven by hunger they started eating the house up. The owner of the house was a human – eating witch, who was as famished as they were, she asked them to join her for more food and drink. After a while the witch took hold of Hansel and locked him up in a cage so as to fatten him for a big feast. Gretel, to save her brother and herself, shoved the witch into the stove where she burnt to death. The children took up all the witch's jewels and gold and went back home where their father cried of happiness seeing his both children alive and carrying bags of gold that would last them for a life time.

Brothers Grimm published many editions of this fairytale and in the earlier versions the parents were the biological parents of the children who planed to get rid of these two extra mouths to feed. By the fourth version of the tale, the Brothers made the mother the only villain and changed her, of course, into a stepmother. One critic of Brothers Grimm, P. L. Traves stated that "the true mother, by her very nature, is bound to preserve, protect and comfort."⁵² Whether

biological or step the parents abused their children on two levels, emotional (psychological) abuse, the children knew they are a burden and that their parents wanted to get rid of them in a most fearful way; leaving them alone in a dark wood filled with human eating beasts. The second level of abuse is neglect incarnated in their failure to provide for their children. Many historians say this story was a product of war times were people suffered from famine, war and poverty during the eighteenth century. At that period peasants were suffering from the feudal system that forced people to do their best to survive and one of those means for surviving was "the abandonment of children."⁵³ The children were fully aware of the situation that they did not blame their parents for dumping the in the woods. The children came back loaded with gold and jewels to please their parents.⁵⁴

5. Fairytales with the Theme of Child Sexual Abuse:

Although many tales have sexual abuse themes⁵⁵, yet sexual abuse towards children is encoded in *The Little Red Riding Hood* and *Furypelts*. In *The Little Red Riding Hood* the reputation of the wolf as a child predator is well established. Little red riding hood was sent by her mother with a basket of cake and wine to visit her ill grandmother who lives in the woods. Her mother warns not to leave the clear path and stray in the wood. The little girl walked in the path till the wolf spots her. He asked her where she was going and when she answered him he knew that she was so innocent to know what a wolf was and what he is capable of doing. He planned to eat her and her grandmother together so he distracted the little girl by letting her wander in the woods looking for flowers. He ran to the grandmother's house and swallowed her whole and wore her clothes waiting for the girl. The girl came and suspected the presence of a predator but by the time she was sure it was too late, the wolf ate her too. A huntsman walking by decided to check on the old woman and was surprised to find the wolf. He cut him open and freed the grandmother and the girl. The girl filled the wolf's belly with stones and sewed him up. When he awoke he could not walk so he fell down and died.⁵⁶

The original tale had many erotic scenes that Brothers Grimm erased to suit their audience. Nevertheless, the tale has been and is still read as an introduction to sexuality and adulthood where the innocent girl is faced with the wolf which is a symbol for a man sexual predator. In 17th century the fear of wolves and werewolves was in its highest. After thirty years of war,⁵⁷ the Germans suffered from child abuse in all its types and sexual abuse was on the top of the list. The wolf is

frequently portrayed as "a metaphor for sexually seductive men."⁵⁸ The image of the wolf gobbling the grandmother and the girl together has been seen by critics as "symbolic double rape."⁵⁹ The huntsman called the wolf "the old sinner"⁶⁰ to refer to his kinship with the devil.⁶¹

In *Furrypelts*⁶² a father desires to marry his own daughter because his wife on her death – bed made him vow to marry a woman as beautiful as she was. His daughter met this criteria for she looked



like her mother. Thus she was as beautiful as her mother. The father, the king, called his councilors and told them of his decision. The councilors said "God has forbidden a man to marry his daughter. Nothing good can come from sin, and the kingdom will be dragged down to perdition with you."⁶³ The councilors couldn't stop the king from committing sexual abuse towards his daughter. The daughter was "horrified when she heard about her father's plan, but she was sure that she could change his mind."⁶⁴ She tried to prevent the marriage by asking for impossible things:

"Before I fulfill your wish, I will have to have three dresses: one as golden as the sun, a second as silver as the moon, and the third as bright as the stars. In addition, I will need a cloak made of thousands of kinds of pelts and fur, with a snippet taken from every animal in your kingdom."⁶⁵

By asking for these dresses she believed that "he can't possibly get all those things," she thought "and trying will distract him from his wicked intentions."⁶⁶ The king was so eager that he enslaved all his people to make these dresses and recruited hunters to hunt all the animals in his kingdom. The three dresses were finished and so was the cloak which the king spread in front of his daughter and pronounced "tomorrow our wedding will be celebrated."⁶⁷ As the case with all the children who were threatened by abuse, the princess ran away from home to seek shelter in the dark forest. She took with her the three dresses, a golden ring, a miniature golden spinning wheel and a golden bobbin. She wore her cloak that was made of all kinds of fur and covered her face and hands with soot and slept in a hollow tree. When it was morning another king, the one who owns the forest

found and took her in after she pleaded to him saying that she was a poor girl abandoned by her parents. She was made kitchen servant and she had to do hard and dirty work to keep her new shelter. Like Cinderella, she tries to seduce the king by bedazzling him with her beauty and secret identity when she attends three balls wearing her three dresses and after each ball she cooks bread soup for the king living one of her precious belonging in it. In the third ball her identity was found and the king marries her.

The little girl was sexually threatened by her father's incestuous desire to marry that she tried several times to escape this destiny first by asking for impossible dresses and second by running away from home and third by disguising herself in soot. She only reveals herself when she finds a man who can protect her, the king. Compared to Cinderella, she is much stronger and resourceful for she managed to escape the harm of her father and get the king that she wants.⁶⁸

3. Conclusion

To come up with an accurate conclusion some issues must be addressed first. The researcher will go through the conclusion by stating the repeated theme of child abuse in Brothers Grimm's fairytales and the reasons behind this repetition whether the Brothers intended to present this theme or was it a portrayal of social life during their time. In addition to that, the researcher will state the active actions taken to prevent and cure child abuse in modern society namely by spreading awareness through modern children's literature.

After going through the tales one will notice repetitive patterns, elements and themes. Patterns like numbers two, three and twelve that occur in many tales and characters with no names but their ranks in the family for example the elder son and the youngest. In addition to that, there are no family relations other than the parents, that is to say, no cousins, nephews or uncles and aunts.⁶⁹ Elements like the death of the biological mother, the cruel stepmother, strong sibling relationships, the domestication of women, trickery, transformations, wicked witches, running away from home to seek shelter in the forest or woods, etc are repeated throughout most of the tales.⁷⁰ Yet the most common theme in *Children's Stories and Household Tales* is Child Abuse.

In table (1) the researcher summed up the research's information. In the table the tales are presented in the order in which

they are in the research. The title of each tale is given followed by the abuser, the child/ children who suffer(s) from abuse, the type of abuse and the punishment the abuser received because of his abusive behavior.

After taking a closer look at the tale as listed in table (1) one can notice that ten tales out of twenty – one the father is the abuser; yet none of these abusive fathers were punished. Little Red Riding Hood was sexually abused by a wolf while Furreypelt was abused by her father. The wolf was killed for his act but the father is dropped out of the tale. Five tales out of twenty one have the mother as the sole abuser and in three of them she is punished by death. In nine tales both parents share abuse with no apparent punishment. In six tales out of twenty one tales strangers are the abusers and in four of them they are punished severely. Although many heroes and heroines in the tales marry at the end; yet they start up the tale as abused children. Only four out of twenty – one tales the abused child does not get married at the end as if marriage is their reward for tolerating abuse. In earlier centuries, as Maria Tatar states in her Book the *Annotated Brothers Grimm*, “childhood was of a much shorter duration, with the child integrated into the adult world of work even before the onset of puberty.”⁷¹ Thus we have heroines like Snow White, Cinderella, Furrypelt and heroes like the Dummies in *The Three Feathers* and *The Golden Goose* who start the tales as abused children and end up getting married.

Table (1)
The Theme of Child Abuse in Twenty One Tales Tackled in this research

N	Tale	Abuser	Abused	Type of Abuse	Punishment
1	The Golden Key	Both parents	The boy	Neglect	No Punishment
2	The Star Taler	Parents	The girl	Neglect	=
			children in the wood		=
3	The Wolf and The Seven Little Goats	Mother	The goats	Neglect	=
		Wolf		physical	Killed
4	The Golden	Elder	youngest	Emotiona	Executed

	Bird	Brothers	brother	l	
5	The Three Feathers	Elder Brothers	youngest brother	Emotional	No punishment
6	The Golden Goose	Elder Brothers	youngest brother	Emotional	=
		Mother		Neglect	=
7	A Fairytale about a boy who left home to learn about fear	Father	youngest son	Emotional	=
8	Rumpelstiltskin	Father	The girl	Physical	=
		King		Physical	=
9	Rapunzel	Both parents	Rapunzel	Physical	=
		Witch	=	Physical Emotional	=
10	Cinderella	Parents	Cinderella	Neglect	
		Stepsisters	=	Emotional	Doves picked their eyes and blinded them
11	Seven Ravens	Father	Seven sons	Physical	No punishment
12	The Six Swans	Stepmother	6 boys & their sister	Physical	=
13	Twelve Brothers	Father	12 sons	Physical	=
14	Little Brother & Little Sister	Stepmother	Both	Physical	Killed
15	The Magic table, the Golden Donkey and the Club in the Sack	Father	Three sons	Physical	No punishment

16	The Devil and His three Golden Hairs	Parents	Boy	Neglect	
		King	Boy	Physical	Row till death
17	Snow White	Stepmother	Snow White	Physical	Danced till death
18	The Juniper Tree	Father	The boy	Physical	No punishment
		Mother	The boy and girl	Physical Emotional	Killed
19	Hansel and Gretel	Parents	Both	Neglect Emotional	No punishment
		Witch	Both	Physical Emotional	Burned alive
20	Little Red Riding Hood	Wolf	Little Red Riding Hood	Sexual Physical	Killed
21	Furrypelts	Father	Furrypelts	Sexual	No punishment

One might wonder if Brothers Grimm intended to present the theme of child abuse in their tales or was it a product of their own society. To answer this question one should keep in mind that the Brothers Grimm were not pure authors of the tales nor merely collectors. Although the Brothers' Grimm collected their fairytales from male and female sources that either came from the Middle Class or Aristocratic Class⁷² or from folk tales that represent the culture and history of Germany, they spent a lot of time studying the tales and changing them, as we mentioned earlier, to suit their young readers. Critics of the twentieth century have criticized the tales for their violence and cruelty. In her book, *The Hard Facts of The Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar states that if a parent wants to read these tales to their children they should be "prepared for the graphic description of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children."⁷³ Jack Zipes⁷⁴, in many of his publications, condemned Brothers Grimm's Tales for rationalizing and justifying child abuse stating that 40% of the tales have child abuse themes.⁷⁵ Critics have argued that although the Brothers Grimm changed the tales by omitting, changing and refining

the tales to remove unsuitable material for children, they increased violence scenes and are still horror tales for children.⁷⁶

It is not easy to dismiss the tales for the reasons mentioned above for there must be a strong reason that kept these very ancient tales alive till our modern time competing with great numbers of modern children's books and more considerate authors.

If child abuse filled the pages of the tales, it must be because child abuse filled Germany during that time in history when the Brothers collected the tales. Critics, instead of condemning the brothers for reporting it they should realize that during the middle ages, the period in which the Grimm's collected the tales, children did suffer greatly from child abuse and abandonment. Society, circumstances and culture allowed it. Germany, like the rest of the world, was at war thus all classes of society suffered from one type or another of abuse. Men were plagued by poverty and they were either sent to war as soldiers abandoning their families or had to earn their living working very hard for long hours.⁷⁷ Women were abused for the same reasons. Pregnant women gave birth to dead babies due to malnutrition and if the baby was born healthy, lack of health care and nutrition sicken him.⁷⁸ Infanticide increased during this era of history along with it child abuse.⁷⁹ Abuse was seen as a common family discipline and it was not until the nineteenth century that infanticide and abuse that led to death was condemned.⁸⁰ With the rise of the twentieth century Child Rights were issued and child abuse is punished by law. In 10 December 1959 the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1386 (XIV) issued The Declaration Of The Rights Of The Child and in 1974 child abuse law was drafted.⁸¹

Since then many publications tackled this subject starting with the definition of child abuse, its types, criteria for identifying each type of abuse and methods for preventing it and curing it. Numerous organizations emerged to protect Child Rights and spread awareness and precaution against Child Abuse. As a result, modern twenty – first Century children's books also tackle the theme of Child Abuse but in a manner that suits our twenty first century child reader. Some of the famous children's books about child abuse is *It's My Body* by Lory Britain. It is a story for children aged seven years old and up that teaches the child within a simple clear storyline how to reject inappropriate touches to raise his awareness of sexual abuse. This book is one of many series entitled Children's Safety and Abuse Prevention. Other books by Elizabeth Verdick like *Feet are not for Kicking* and *Teeth are not for Biting* teaches children the effects of physical abuse to

name few examples. The characterizations, style, plot and illustrations are completely different for example the illustration of *Little Red Riding Hood* on the left is very different and scary compare with the illustration of *It's My Body*. Although both stories tackle the theme of child sexual abuse yet the first attempts to horrify the child a manner that was suitable for Middle Ages Children while the second attempts to comfort a twenty first century child through abuse awareness and methods to protect himself from it.



In conclusion Brothers Grimm tales have one common theme among all of them which is the theme of Child Abuse. This theme was an innovation in itself because no other authors dared to tackle it so clearly and openly. Their innovation in portraying the historical and the social context of their folklore and society is impressive and rewarding at the same time. They paved the way for modern generation of child books authors to tackle the same theme from another angle benefiting from the reception of their former counterparts. No matter how hard critics reject Brothers Grimm fairytales as being violent, they lived on to reach us today while many other fairytales were eaten up with dust because they chose to tackle unrealistic fantastical elements.

Endnotes

¹ Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairytales, stories, tall tales, and costumes that are traditions of a culture, subculture, or a group. "Folklore," Wikipedia the free online Encyclopedia. Retrieved at 23/11/2012.

² Jack Zipes. Editor in Chief. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

³ "Brothers Grimm," Wikipedia the free online encyclopedia. Retrieved at 20/11/2012.

⁴ Folktales "are all forms of narrative, written or oral, which have been handed down through the years." Charlottle S.Huck. and Barbara Z. Kiefer. *Children's Literature In The Elementary School*. 8th Edition. (New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2004, p241.

⁵ Jack Zipes, Editor. *The Oxford Companion to Fairytales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p238

⁶ Ibid, pp218 – 219.

⁷ The German title of the Volume is *Kinder – Und Huäsmarchen*.

⁸ "Children's Stories and Household Tales," Wikipedia the free online Encyclopedia. Retrieved at 24/11/2012.

⁹ Linda Degh. "Grimm's "Household Tales" and its place in the household: The Social relevance of a Controversial Classic." *Western Folklore*, Vol. 38, No.2, Apr., 1979, p 88.

¹⁰ J.D.Stahl, Tina L. Hanlan and Elizabeth Lennox Keyser. *Crosscurrents of Children's Literature: An Anthology of Tex and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p146.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Kay Stone "Thing Walt Disney Never Told Us." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 88, no 347, Women and Folklore, Jan 1975, p43

¹³ Maria Tatar is the dean of Humanities and a professor of Germanic Languages and literature at Harvard University. She has personally translated these fairytales and provided a full literary criticism on each. (the book Jacket)

¹⁴ "Child Abuse," Wikipedia the free online Encyclopedia. Retrieved at 24/11/2012.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid also in Sydney Newton and Julie Gerrits, *Straight Talk About Child Abuse*. (USA: Crabtree Publishing Company, 2010, p8 and Robin E. Clark, Judith Freeman Clark and Christines Adamec. *Encyclopedia of Child Abuse*, 3rd edition. New York: 2007, p xii

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ The office on child abuse and neglect (OCAN) within the Children's Bureau was created under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1996 to provide leadership in the field of child maltreatment. (18th

National Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect ; April 16 – 20, 2012/ Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington DC (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb)

²⁴ Clark, p xiii

²⁵ Tatar, p30

²⁶ Ibid, 31

²⁷ Ibid, p 32

²⁸ Tatar, p116

²⁹ Ibid, 119

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid, p124

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid, 226

³⁴ Ibid, p 37

³⁵ Ibid, p38

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, p45

³⁸ Ibid, pp50 – 51

³⁹ Ibid, p 170

⁴⁰ Ibid, p245

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid, p249

⁴³ Ibid, p250

⁴⁴ Ibid, p251

⁴⁵ Ibid, p255

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid ,p 211 - 212

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid , p213

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Tatar, pp 73 – 74

⁵² Quoted in Tatar, p 73.

⁵³ David Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), p. 38.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Some examples of women's sexual abuse are heroines forced to marry for the welfare of a father or family like *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Briar Rose*, in *Robbers Bridegroom* the girl was kidnapped from home and the robber forced her to marry him.

⁵⁶ Tatar, pp142 – 148

⁵⁷ "Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) was a series of wars principally fought in Central Europe, involving most countries of Europe. It was one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history, and one of the longest continuous wars in modern history." "Thirty Years' War," Wikipedia the free online encyclopedia. Retrieved at 5/3/2013.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p 144 -145.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 146

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Also called *All – Kinds – of Fur, All Kinds of Pelts, Thousandfurs* and *Allfurs*

⁶³ Tatar, p294

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tatar, p292

⁶⁹ Matteo Starri, *An Analysis of Collection Of Fairytales By The Brothers Grimm*. PPT Lecture given in 2008.

⁷⁰ Charlotte S. Huck and Barbara Z. Kiefer. *Children's Literature In The Elementary School*. 8th Edition. (New York: McGraw Himm Higher Education, 2004, p241, pp246 – 247.

⁷¹ Tatar, p244

⁷² Jack Zipes. *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests To The Modern Word*. 2nd edition. Palgrave MacMillian, p159)

⁷³ Maria Tatar. *The Hard Facts of The Grimm's Fairy Tales*. 2nd edition. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987. p3.

⁷⁴ Jack Zipes is American professor of German at the University of Minnesota. He is widely know for his publications on fairytales, children's literature, comparative literature. Some of his famous books are *The translation of The Complete fairytales of the Brothers Grimm* (1987), *The Oxford Companion to Fairytales* (2000) *The Brothers Grimm : from the Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (2003), *the Oxford encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (4 volume set, 2006).

⁷⁵ Jack Zipes, "Fairytales, Child Abuse, and "Childism."" Lecture given in Nolte Center for continuing education. 15/11/2012 from 1:30pm – 3:30 pm. (ias.umn.edu/2012/11/15/zipes-jack/) the audio and video presentations can be downloaded.

⁷⁶ "Brothers Grimm," Wikipedia the free online Encyclopedia retrieved at 20/11/2012.

⁷⁷ Sharon Thompson Hirschy and Elaine Wilkinson. *Protecting Our Children: Understanding and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Early Childhood*. USA: Wadsworth cengage Learning, 2010. P4

⁷⁸ Ibid,

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid, P6

⁸¹ "Declaration of The Rights Of The Child,"

(www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/resources/child.asp) retrieved in 24/11/2012.

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موضع العنف ضد الاطفال في حكايات خرافية مختارة للاخوان غريم

أ.م. أنسام يعرب خيون

مستخلص

ان الاخوة غرم قدموا اكثر من 200 حكاية خرافية عاشت منذ الماضي البعيد لتصلنا في القرن الواحد والعشرين. هذه الحكايات ادانها العديد من النقاد ولكن على الرغم من هذا لازالت تقرا وتتألف مثيلاتها من الحكايات الحديثة. هذه الحكايات قد اديننت بسبب كثرة العنف والقسوة والعديد من العناصر المخيفة الاخرى. قبل بضع سنوات فقط اكتشف عدد قليل من النقاد خاصة ماريا تاتار وجاك زيبس موضوع جديد في حكايات الاخوين وهو موضوع العنف ضد الاطفال.

لقد قامت ماريا تاتار بترجمة ثلاثة وستون حكاية للاخوان غرم من اللغة الالمانية الى الانكليزية. في هذا البحث تم دراسة جميع هذه الحكايات لايجاد موضوع العنف ضد الاطفال. في البداية تم تعريف العنف ضد الاطفال وبيان انواعه الاربعة: الاهمال و العنف النفسي والعنف الجسدي والعنف الجنسي. لقد وجد الباحث ان واحد وعشرون حكاية من اصل ثلاثة وستون يوجد فيها عنف ضد الاطفال.

هناك العديد من الحكايات عن اطفال يعانون من الاهمال مثل *هانسل وغريتل*. حيث في هذه الحكاية يترك الوالدان اطفالهم في الغابة لانهم لا يستطيعون اطعامهم. العنف النفسي هو احد انواع العنف السائدة في حكايات الاخوين وخاصة *سندريلا*. تبدأ معاناة سندريلا منذ اللحظة التي تموت فيها امها ويتخذ والدها زوجة ومعها ابنتيها. ان اختي سندريلا يعذبانها اشد العذاب ولفترة طويلة.

معظم الحكايات تصف العنف الجسدي وترتكز عليه مثل *بياض الثلج* حيث تحاول زوجة ابوها قتلها لغيرتها من جمالها. في *رمبلستسكن* يعرض اب ابنته للموت بتباهيه امام الملك ان ابنته تستطيع تحويل القش الى ذهب. وفي العديد من الحكايات تجد ان البطل قد يتعرض لنوعين او اكثر من العنف على يد عدة اشخاص كما هو الحال مع ابنة الطحان في *رمبلستسكن*. عندما سمع الملك ان الفتاة تستطيع تحويل القش الى ذهب سجنها في غرفة مليئة بالقش وامر باعدامها اذا لم تحوله الى ذهب. في *شجرة جونبير* يتحول العنف الجسدي ضد الطفل الى جريمة قتل. حيث تقوم زوجة الاب بقتل ابن زوجها وتقطيعه وطبخه وتقديمه الى والده كي يأكله على العشاء. على الرغم من الاخوين غرم حذفوا جميع العناصر الجنسية في الحكايات الا ان العنف الجنسي واضح في *ذات الرداء الاحمر* و*الذئب وجلد الحيوانات*. في *جلد الحيوانات* يتوق اب لابنته لدرجة تجعله يود الزواج بها.

استنتج الباحث بان موضوع العنف ضد الاطفال انتشر في حكايات الاخوين غريم لان العنف ضد الاطفال كان منتشر في المانيا في العصر الذي جمع فيه الاخوين الحكايات واستطاعت ان تبرز هذه الحكايات معاناة الطفل في تلك الحقبة وتصلنا عبر التاريخ وتاسر اهتمام قارئ القرن الواحد والعشرين بسبب واقعية موضوعاتها.