



Fairy Tales as Literature of Literature

The "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" by
the Brothers Grimm

Lothar Bluhm

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Preface

The first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* concludes with the short story *Der goldene Schlüssel*, which was always supposed to be the final story in the following revised and improved editions of the collection: A poor boy finds a golden key while chopping wood in winter and, when he starts digging, soon finds an iron chest as well. The story remains quite unfinished, because when the boy finally puts the key in the lock and turns it, the story ends with the note that we have to wait “until it is fully open, then we will see what is inside.” The editors and publishers of the story collection clearly play with the expectation of a resolution and the hint of a secret that remains hidden. The Grimms have repeatedly made it clear that their own collection appeared to them as a “treasure chest,” which they understood as a “repository of a lost German myth,” which they saw as the central task of “fairy tale work.”

The present study also opens the box of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. It makes the collection accessible as a literary compendium, which is the product of literature and which more or less concealed its literary heritage. From a scattered mass of fragments and mosaic stones, which were collected over the years and decades of their own “fairy tale work,” the following will outline a general picture of the Grimm fairy tale as a literature made of literature, which explicitly opposes the explanatory pattern of wanting to recognize a collection of “folk tales” in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Instead, the stories are fixed as re-, new- and continuation of older literature and are trying to be categorized.

Those who are looking for “wonderful and delicious things” in the fairy tales of the Grimm collection, as the poor boy hopes to find them in the chest, can find them in the often forgotten and disregarded literary evidence, which finally became “fairy tales” as part of an often confusing transformation history. And certainly he will find them in the fairy tales themselves, which tell more than it seems at first glance.

Landau in der Pfalz
28.11.2021

Lothar Bluhm

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Introductory Remarks

1

As explained on the website of Unesco, the Grimm's collection of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is probably the “most well-known and widely distributed book in the German language” next to the Luther Bible.¹ Its status as a cultural document is undisputed. In educational discussions, it is often pointed out that the fairy tale collection may be the last testimony of a general literary education in Germany. The classifications of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* are always manifold. Depending on the point of view, they are the point of reference for a variety of attributions as folk tales and evidence of an oral storytelling tradition, as national literature, building blocks of a history of German poetry, as children's or entertainment literature, and much more.

The history of these attributions refers directly on the editors of the collection—not authors, as is sometimes narrowly—back to the Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, who have started around 1807 with the collection and later processing of the stories, to publish them in 1812 in new versions and to comment. This “fairy tale work” ran throughout under the sign of the “Brothers Grimm”, but was since the second edition actually the sole field of activity of the younger Grimm brother Wilhelm: “my brother could do other more important work because of the second volume of the first edition little”, wrote Wilhelm Grimm retrospectively to the friend Karl Simrock. “The second newly worked edition in 1819 and the whole third volume 1822 fell to me alone, and so it has remained [...]”² The project should accompany him until his death in 1859. We connect the “Brothers Grimm” with the fairy tale work the reminiscence of a Grimm's program—just that of the “brotherhood”—and an early practice of fairy tale edition, not the claim

¹ <https://www.unesco.de/kultur-und-natur/weltdokumentenerbe/weltdokumentenerbe-deutschland/maerchen-brueder-grimm>; accessed on 29.09.2021.

² Ottendorff-Simrock (1966, p. 61). Letter from February 1851.

of a permanent actual employment relationship. In this sense, it is also justified to continue to use the term as a working formula.

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* are characterized in a special way by their own attribution history. Their peculiarities include, in all their multifaceted nature, a strong traditionality. It has its roots not least in the fact that the collectors and editors of the fairy tales were at the same time the first scientific commentators and analysts of the narrative material and that they thereby determined the foundations of the subsequent fairy tale research to a large extent. As innovative as they were, the Grimms did not act without presuppositions, but rather moved within the horizon of their time and within the framework of the prevailing discourses. The attributions that can still be observed today with changing emphasis are, in central respects, quite obviously still based on the contemporary conceptual ideas of this publication project from the early 19th century and its conditions.

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* enjoy an enduring popularity as a cultural project of the early 19th century and as a research subject, as hardly any other. The story collection has already been viewed, described and analyzed from various perspectives on numerous occasions. All editions of the two-volume set published during the Grimms' lifetime are available in digital form. There are highly valued editions, wide-ranging documentation, introductions and an almost unmanageable wealth of different studies on a variety of topics from various disciplines that have been produced over the years and decades. Folktale research has developed into a field with many facets, on which, based on sometimes highly divergent and sometimes even fundamentally conflicting premises, literary, folkloristic, mythological and religious historical, pedagogical and didactic, psychological and many other types of knowledge interests are directed towards the subject matter. However, there are rarely any contacts and hardly any cooperation between the different approaches. With their respective disciplinary premises, each approach ultimately produces its own subject matter. In this way, the fairy tales are often only what the respective observer, guided by his or her own (disciplinary) interest, tries to recognize or wants to recognize in them. This is not a problem in itself, but could even contribute to a complex overall picture of the subject matter, the parts of which would then complement and enlighten each other. Moreover, the problem is that the attention to the subject matter, in its fixation on one's own knowledge interest, all too often loses sight of, or even completely ignores, the basic facts and structural circumstances of the subject matter, which makes mutual reference impossible. In the corresponding narrowing of vision, the basic literary-historical and, in a narrower sense, the story-historical constitutive factors of the Grimm fairy tales are too often neglected or even completely ignored as objects of attribution.

If fairy tale research wants to gain a reliable terrain, it must subject its object—the fairy tales—to an appropriate perspective, which includes that it takes its factual givenness seriously and makes it the starting point of any consideration. In the following study, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* should therefore not be considered from the point of view of what the stories are supposed to be *as fairy tales*, but what they—viewed soberly—actually *are* in their facticity. The focus should not be on the *collection* as a coherent corpus, which is well researched in its history

of origin and printing;³ rather, the focus should be on the plurality of the assembled stories, which actually make up the diversity of the collection. In this way, the individual stories themselves serve as a reference. They confront us as text constructs with fictional content and are thus simply stories as such, even narrower: literary evidence. They are already literature in the sense that, as individual texts and in the compilation as a collection, they represent the product of a design will and are part of a cultural program. In a narrower sense, the stories also prove to be 'literature on the second level', to use a model of modern narrative theory. They are 'palimpsests', which are texts that look back on other texts and refer back to them directly or indirectly. This structure element, which constitutes them as literature, should be the focus of the investigation.

The fairy tales compiled in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* are, beyond all attribution and interpretation, the result of material history that, in the course of literary historical development, underwent diverse processes of change with many genre and function changes. In the course of this history of origin, which, with regard to the over 200 fairy tales, actually represents a broad bundle of many different histories of origin, the texts later famous as Grimm fairy tales were not, contrary to some popular opinion, characterized by an atemporal constancy. Rather, the fairy tales are the product of a transformation process and represent literature of literature, often even literature of literature of literature. The complexity of this transformation process is due in part to the fact that, at the hinge positions of the genesis, a change of media in the form of an oral (re)mediation took place in many cases, palpable above all in those texts in the collection phase through the Brothers Grimm or their contributors as a written version of oral narratives. The change of media in the material history leading up to the fairy tale is of particular interest from a media history perspective, but is probably also not to be excluded in the pre-history of an intangible written tradition. The backbone of the material history leading to the fairy tale is, however, throughout the literary tradition. If one wants to describe the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and adequately grasp their specificity, not least their specific literariness, one must take these structural givennesses as the starting point of the observation.

The following study wants to take the fairy tales in these given circumstances seriously and develops them fundamentally as 'palimpsests', that is as literary witnesses which would not be thinkable without previous literary texts which are superimposed and only appear covered up or in a veiled form. Forms of material genesis and transformation of genre and function are to be shown using paradigmatic examples. The aim of this investigation is to make the origin of the Grimm fairy tale transparent as a transformation process to a new genre. Focusing on the process of formation of this literature form, which is still significant today, a

³Heinz Rölleke's 1985 introduction *The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, which has since been published in a number of editions and editions, can still be considered as fundamental. A concise summary can be found in Chap. 1: "On the History of the Collection" (*Älteste Märchensammlung/Rölleke 1975*, pp. 341–347).

practice of ‘palimpsestuous reading’ of fairy tales is to be initiated, which understands the fairy tales as part of a transformation history, which is considered relevant, if not even essential, for the understanding of each individual fairy tale—for interpretation and interpretation. Without the knowledge of the genesis and without understanding it, every view of the individual fairy tale remains empty, the access itself speculative and arbitrary, scientifically certainly insufficient. Then it is not the structural conditions of the fairy tale in the horizon of its literary history that determine its analysis, but the exchangeable premises of the respective scientific or other approach and the associated—arbitrary—attributions.

Since the publication of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as the subject of ‘fairy tales’ itself has already been overshadowed by various interpretations and preconceptions in the conceptual phase of the edition, a study of the collection and its fairy tales can hardly avoid sketching this history of attribution at least in its most important developments in order to make the own approach and the landmarks of the description of the subject matter clear. Therefore, the opening of this small study is a problem-oriented introduction to the genre of ‘fairy tales’ and the history of research. The basics and the problems of each fairy tale research are to be shown essentially. The concept of the genre of ‘fairy tales’, the history of the concept, the question of the delimitation from other narrative forms and the genre-specificity of the Grimm’s fairy tales are discussed accordingly. Since the focus of the study is on the ‘palimpsestuous’ structure of the Grimm’s fairy tales, the explanation of the basics of the own approach follows the problem-oriented introduction to the ‘genre of fairy tales’ and its research. The talk of the fairy tales as ‘palimpsests’ already points to the modern theory of narration, whose description of ‘literature on the second level’ offers the model for the investigation of selected fairy tales as literature from literature. However, the basics of this model should only be briefly outlined, only to the extent that this model is used for the investigation. It is neither about its confirmation nor its differentiation; the model serves in its now scientific-theoretical classicism merely as a heuristic tool. The approach committed to modern structuralism is supplemented in the present study by the literary-historical and comparative, in the narrower sense genre-historical deepening. The study is thus fundamentally oriented towards literary studies in this foundation. The history of the subject matter of the individual fairy tales, which is to be exemplified in the main part of the investigation, asks, to put it simply, not only for the what and the how of changes in the course of the history of the subject matter, but also for the why and focuses on the problem of which shifts in meaning have arisen in the course of the genesis or geneses. The individual ‘text stories’ on the selected fairy tales open up a spectrum of different transformations in sum, but these are only for the overall of the fairy tales collection of the Brothers Grimm of central importance. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and the origin of the stories at least cum grano salis claim validity. So the following study wants to make the structure of the Grimm’s fairy tales and in some respects the modern fairy tale transparent at all. It is understood as a corrective for an oscillating fairy tale research and as a basis for a yet to be written literary history of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.



The Genre ‘Fairy Tale’ and its Research

2

2.1 Misconceptions and Misjudgments—An Introduction

A scientific, even a merely factual engagement with the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* of the Brothers Grimm takes place in a space full of preconceptions and outdated certainties, which are not always, but often problematic and sometimes even wrong. Many of them have a long history, some date back to the early days of fairy tale research by the Brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. They are tenacious and sometimes surprisingly resistant to revision. They are not only encountered on the wide field of popular interest in fairy tales, but are also alive in science, even in highly valued standard literature of recent and very recent times. To represent and question the misconceptions and misjudgments in their entirety must be left to a research and interpretation history of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* that still has to be written. In the following, only a few key words will be taken up as a kind of introduction to this little history of the Grimm’s fairy tales as literature of literature in order to illustrate the generality of these misconceptions and misjudgments by way of example and to help justify the literary historical perspective of this study.

Some of the misconceptions and misjudgments can be easily corrected by simply documenting the facts. This includes the common talk of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as a successful project of its time, which, with the seven two-volume and ten one-volume fairy tale editions that came onto the market during the lifetime of the Brothers Grimm, would have helped the genre to breakthrough. However, one should not be misled by the number of editions—the success of the edition was rather modest during the lifetime of the Grimms. A more recent fairy tale research has compiled the facts in a desirable clarity and determined the edition sizes. The seven editions of the two-volume “Great Edition” brought to market by the Brothers Grimm between 1812 and 1857, which are commonly

regarded as the carriers of the print tradition, have consistently only been published in small edition sizes:

Edition	¹ 1812/ ¹ 1815	² 1819	³ 1837	⁴ 1840	⁵ 1843	⁶ 1850	⁷ 1857
Specimens	1000	1500	1000	1000	6000	3000	3550

(after Winzer 2021, p. 281)

Even the ten one-volume “Small Editions” published between 1825 and 1858, which brought a selection for a children’s audience and were decorated with copperplates, did not exceed these low circulation figures. The competing fairy tale businesses at this time were often much more successful. Ludwig Bechstein’s *Deutsches Märchenbuch* alone had sales of around 70,000 copies (according to Winzer 2021, p. 283) between 1845 and 1853, i.e. in this short period of time it sold about four times as many books as the Brothers Grimm with their collection in 45 years. Compared to other, often more presentable and better equipped fairy tale books, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were extremely expensive. For example, the *Lina’s Märchenbuch* by the educator and publicist Albert Ludwig Grimm, who was not related to the Brothers Grimm but in competition with them, was published in two volumes in 1816

on vellum paper and with 8 copperplates in the text 2 talers, without copperplates 1 taler, 8 groschen. For the second edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* published three years later, [the publisher of the Dieterichsche Buchhandlung] Reimer demanded 4 talers with four copperplates. In 1820 the first two volumes of A.L. Grimm’s *Märchen-Bibliothek für Kinder* with retellings from *Tausendundeiner Nacht* in the version on better paper with one copperplate each were published at a price of 3 talers together, in the pictureless version on simple paper at 2 talers. (Winzer 2021, p. 287)

Of course, the poorer equipment and the much higher selling price meant a clear competitive disadvantage for the Grimm publication compared to the fairy tale book of the name relative who had long been established as a children’s book author. The price level of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* edition used for comparison becomes even more tangible when measured against the purchasing power equivalence. Based on this, the 4 talers of 1819 would correspond to a price of more than 140,- euros in today’s purchasing power. Just this price level, which is without doubt far too high, makes it clear why the two volumes of 1819, like the other (mostly also overpriced) KHM editions, could never develop into bestsellers during the Grimms’ lifetime.¹

In addition, the Grimm fairy tale editions were published by publishers with a scientific profile, were meager in their equipment, were comparatively less present in public perception and were reviewed more critically, which may

¹A conversion table is offered by the Scientific Service of the German Bundestag, Kaufkraftvergleich historischer Geldbeträge—2016: WD4-3000-096/16.

have contributed to the fact that the contemporary success of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* must be seen as relatively low. The first edition of the two-volume “Great Edition” of 1812/15 was published by the Realschulbuchhandlung in Berlin, where, for example, around the same time, Amalie von Helwigs’ and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s *Taschenbuch der Sagen und Legenden* and, a little later, the *Kinder-Mährchen* by C.W. Contessa, Fouqué and E.T.A. Hoffmann as well as Ernst Moritz Arndt’s *Mährchen und Jugenderinnerungen* were published,² but above all a schoolbook and science program was implemented. So in 1815 the Grimms also published the *Lieder der alten Edda* and Hartmanns von Aue *Der arme Heinrich* here. The second edition of 1819, the commentary volume of 1822 and the one-volume ‘Kleinen Ausgaben’ of 1825 and 1833 were published by G. Reimer in Berlin, who took over the Realschulbuchhandlung and expanded the schoolbook program with a wide range of humanities, then also natural sciences and mathematics, which secured the publisher a high scientific reputation. The following editions of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* up to the 7th edition of 1857 and the commentary volume of 1856 were published by Dieterichsche Buchhandlung in Göttingen. In this specialist publisher, Jacob Grimm’s treatise *Ueber den alt-deutschen Meistergesang* had already been published in 1811 and later his *Deutsche Grammatik*, the *Deutsche Mythologie*, *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* and other scientific publications as well as Wilhelm Grimm’s 1821 *Ueber deutsche Runen*, his *Grave Ruodolf*—and the *Freidank* -editions, *Die deutsche Heldensage* and a multitude of mostly editorial publications on Middle High German literature were published. The ‘Kleinen Ausgaben’ up to 1858 were published by Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Duncker in Berlin, whose programmatic focus was also on the sciences, above all philosophy (as in the first Hegel Gesamtausgabe)^{3,4} and the history of science (for example, Rankes Werke).⁵

The publisher, price, book design and print run suggest that the Grimm brothers’ fairy tale editions were seen less in the spectrum of entertainment and children’s literature of their time than in the horizon of scientific specialist literature and are therefore to be classified accordingly. This is in line with Jacob Grimm’s remark: “The fairy tale book is not written for children at all, but they are quite right, and that pleases me very much [...]” (Steig 1904, p. 271) The tireless

²Taschenbuch der Sagen und Legenden. Ed. by Amalie v. Helwig und Fr. Baron de la Motte Fouqué. 2 volumes, Berlin 1812 and 1817; Kinder-Mährchen. Von C.W. Contessa, Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué und E.T.A. Hoffmann. Berlin 1816; Ernst Moritz Arndt: Mährchen und Jugenderinnerungen. Erster Theil. Berlin 1818. Sales of Arndt’s collection were so slow that the publisher rejected a second volume projected in 1820. The second volume did not appear until 1843, when it was published by Reimer Verlag.

³Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Des Epimenides Erwachen. Ein Festspiel. Berlin 1815.

⁴Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe durch einen Verein von Freunden des Verewigten. Berlin 1832–1845.

⁵So Leopold Rankes three volumes *Die römischen Päpste in den letzten vier Jahrhunderten* (1834–1836) and the six volumes *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (1839–1847).

efforts to produce new editions, which led to the relay of the seven “Great” and ten “Small Editions”, testify more to the efforts of the editors—and that means in the narrower sense of Wilhelm Grimm—to suggest success on the book market through the new editions than to an actual success story. In fact, the “success story” of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is a much later phenomenon, which is closely linked to the imperial nationalism of the late 19th century and stands in the horizon of a corresponding interpretation history of the fairy tales, which were highly valued as “German narrative heritage”. The national-cultural tradition claimed by the Grimms was thus raised to a certainty that was not least of all politically founded.⁶

It is also not surprising that the classification of the Grimm’s fairy tales as specifically “German narrative” is one of the enduring misconceptions and wrong judgments, although as early as the first half of the 20th century, studies by Albert Wesselski completely different findings were brought forward, and also in modern fairy tale research—for example in the studies of Manfred Grätz, the investigations of Heinz Rölleke on the contribution or the commentaries of Hans-Jörg Uther—clear oppositions were formulated. The fundamental proof that the stories are actually to be situated in a European context of material and in a narrower sense often look back on a French provenance, has long been established. The claim of the Grimm’s fairy tales as specifically “German narrative” corresponds to the myth of a contribution, which would have consisted mainly of old women from the rural world and the lower classes and told the Brothers Grimm their fairy tales. With the discovery that the so-called “Old Marie”, a contributor who was often used as an ideal type of such mediation, was actually not an elderly housekeeper, but a “young Marie” from the upper Kassel bourgeoisie, Heinz Rölleke was able to correct this sociocultural misattribution.⁷

A central component in the structure of misconceptions and misinterpretations is the legend of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as ‘folk tales’, which has been kept alive despite some counter-arguments in recent standard literature on Grimm research. The Grimms had already placed this idea in the public arena in the paratexts of their first edition; for example, in the “Preface” to the second volume they explicitly spoke of “folk tales” (KHM 1815 II, p. VII). This assessment can be found explicitly or implicitly in the work of scholars such as Lüthi (2004), Rölleke (1985a, 2000b) or Pöge-Alder (2007), but even Neuhaus (2017) remains committed to this model. It is not surprising that this problematic assignment is then also used in the further recent and latest research on fairy tale reception—for example

⁶The corresponding paradigm shift is probably nowhere better tangible than in a call by the young Kaiser Wilhelm II. at the Berlin School Conference in 1890. The programme of a national politicisation of the (higher) school advocated by him leads to the order to make the German the central point of reference and “to educate national young Germans and not young Greeks and Romans”. (Cf. Verhandlungen über Fragen des höheren Unterrichts 1891, p. 71–72).

⁷Of undeniably fundamental importance for the recent research history of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is Rölleke 1975. For an attempt at a new “remythification” see Bluhm 1989b.

in the collection of essays on the history and present of the fairy tale film edited by Dettmar, Pecher and Schlesinger (2017). The term is only rarely seriously problematic, as Dingelmaier (2019, p. 86) tries to do, who rightly demands that “the still widely used term ‘Volksmärchen’ and, related to this, the distinction in fairy tales research between ‘folk tales’ and ‘literary tales’ should be reconsidered”. Dingelmaier then specifies the fairy tale as a ‘narrative of *nation building*’.

The use of the term ‘Volksmärchen’ for the Grimm’s fairy tales already reflects a revaluation on the basis of an invalid assumption: Around and before 1800, the term was firmly classified as a general term for romantically told—‘romantic’—entertainment literature, which appeared in an antiquated outfit and presented itself as a continuation of folk tales, including the anonymity of the author. The term became its own ‘brand’ through the titles of successful collections such as the five volumes of *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782–1786) by Johann Karl August Musäus, Benedikte Nauberts’ subsequent four volumes of *Neue Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1789–1792), or Ludwig Tieck’s three volumes of *Volksmärchen* (1797), which contained literary versions of stories such as the ‘boots cat’ or ‘knight Blaubart’ as well as the novella *Der blonde Eckbert*. The program to assert an oral tradition was probably nowhere as explicit as in the *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* by J.K.A. Musäus. In the “foreword” it says:

Uebrigens ist keins dieser Märchen von eigener oder ausländischer Erfindung, sondern, soviel ich weis, sind sie ingesamt einheimische Produkte, die sich seit mancher Generation, bereits von Urvätern auf Enkel und Nachkommen durch mündliche Tradition fortgepflanzt haben. (Musäus 1782 I, S. [XXVII])

Clausen-Stolzenburg speaks with all decisiveness of a “Schwindeletikett” (Clausen-Stolzenburg 1995, p. 404). That the narratives are actually literarizations, in the words of Musäus the “processing” of “raw masses”, is conceded a little later by the author himself: “However, the author has allowed himself to localize the vagueness of these narratives and to set them in times and places that seemed appropriate to their content.” (Musäus 1782 I, p. [XXVIII]) The insinuation associated with the genre term “Volksmä(h)rchen” that orally transmitted folk tales have been (re-)written is reversed in later—and still today’s—use into a fact.

The staging of high-quality oral storytelling and the fiction of an appropriate tradition that was associated with the literary “fairy tales” collections of the late 18th century undoubtedly also meant a new openness to the phenomenon of actual popular storytelling and thus a certain departure from the enlightened verdict of the contemptible “fairy tale”. So August von Kotzebue, a nephew of Musäus and in later years one of the most popular theatre authors in Germany, traced his uncle’s narrative talent back to his efforts to connect with the popular storytelling of his time:

Wenigen aber ist vielleicht bekannt, daß, als er den Gedanken faßte Volksmärchen der Deutschen zu schreiben, er wirklich eine Menge alter Weiber mit ihren Spinnrädern um sich her versammelte, sich in ihre Mitte setzte, und von ihnen in eckelhafter Geschwätzigkeit vorplaudern ließ, was er hernach so reizend nachplauderte. Auch

Kinder rief er oft von der Straße hinauf, wurde mit ihnen zum Kinde, ließ sich Märchen erzählen, und bezahlte jedes Märchen mit einem Dreyer.—Eines Abends kam seine Frau von einem Besuche zurück. Als sie die Thür des Zimmer öffnete, dampfte ihr eine Wolke von schlechtem Tabak entgegen, und sie erblickte durch diesen Nebel ihren Mann am Ofen sitzend, neben einem alten Soldaten, der sein kurzes Pfeifgen zwischen den Zähnen hielt, tapfer drauf los schmauchte, und ihm Märchen erzählte. (Kotzebue 1791, S. 14–15)⁸

The always topical description of a popular narrative setting—"old women with their spinning wheels"; stories of an "old soldier" "by the stove" or by "children"—already betrays how much Kotzebue moved in the horizon of an idealizing representation with this memory. Kotzebue's reservations against such popular storytelling are already tangible in the late Enlightenment thinker's choice of words (,alte Weiber', ,ekelhafte Geschwätzigkeit', ,Wolke von schlechtem Tabak'). What Kotzebue introduced as a humorous anecdote appears in the form of scientific documentation with the Brothers Grimm.

Since the question of an oral narrative tradition is regularly taken up anew in the most recent publications of fairy tale research and therefore necessarily also negotiated in this study in various ways, at this point let us at least briefly discuss a central argument for the actual implementation of such a tradition. The claim of a popular oral narrative culture and a corresponding narrative tradition is often based on confessions and memories from the time around 1800, comparable to Kotzebue's. Especially in the late 18th century, such statements occur more frequently. For example, the "patriotic antiquarian" Friedrich David Gräter, a Nordicist and main editor of the "literary magazine" *Bragur*, referred on one occasion to "*Ammenmärchen*" and "orally transmitted *Volksmärchen*" (Gräter 1794, p. 239) and emphasized that "listening" to popular "songs and fairy tales" had "pleased him on many occasions":

Zuweilen fiel es mir ein, solche Verse und Märchen aufzuschreiben, und so bin ich unvermerkt zu einer ganzen Sammlung gekommen. Wie viele würde ich hier mitzuthemen haben, wenn ich mich und die Leser von Geschmack nicht schonen müßte [...]. (Gräter 1794, p. 240)

Despite his concern about the "spirit of the times", Gräter finally offers an "example":

In dem Ammenmärchen von den drey Königstöchtern und dem in einen Frosch verzauberten Prinzen ist die ganze Erzählung in Prosa, die Gespräche mit dem Frosche und seine Forderung aber in Versen. So spricht er z. B. da er vor die verschlossene Thüre der jüngsten Prinzessin kömmt:

Königstochter jüngste
Mach mir auf!
Weißt du nicht, was gestern

⁸ Kotzebue was—like Vulpius—a pupil of Musäus at the Wilhelminum-Ernestinum Gymnasium in Weimar. Johann Gottfried Herder was director of this educational institution from 1776 to 1791.

Du zu mir besagt,
 Bey dem kühlen Brunnenwasser?
 Königstochter jüngste,
 Mach mir auf!

Diese simplen Verse, die ich mich noch aus meiner Kindheit auch singen gehört zu haben erinnere, haben doch viel Lebhaftigkeit und Drang, und kommen dem Ton und Sylbenmaaße nach einigen Nordischen Stücken sehr nahe.

(Gräter 1794, p. 241–242)

The variant sketched by Gräter to the fairy tale introduction preceding the Grimm's collection *Der Froschkönig oder der eiserne Heinrich* probably corresponds to the "other [narrative]" (KHM 1856, p. [III]), which the Grimms summarized in the commentary section as another version. Because the story seemed to be documented as early as the 16th century by Georg Rollenhagen and subsequently by Johann Michael Moscherosch, the Grimms rated it as one of the "oldest in Germany" (KHM 1856, p. 5), which probably justified its special position as an introductory story. Similar to Gräter, Johann F.A. Kinderling also remembered oral tradition in one of the following volumes of the magazine: "in den Spinnstuben verkürzt man sich oft die Zeit durch Märchen und Gesang" (Kinderling 1797, p. 35), and picks up a popular topos that spoke of a fairy tale tradition as a narrative from 'spinning rooms' or other domestic work or social spaces. By the way, Gräter's hint at his collections also moved the Romantics—Achim von Arnim, the Grimms and others—to get in touch with him, whereby the exchange with the Brothers Grimm developed very unpleasant for both sides—but especially for Gräter.⁹

Gräter, Kinderling and many others, not least the Brothers Grimm themselves, therefore emphasize the existence of a known oral tradition. With a view to the later and still virulent discussion, the *existence* of an oral tradition is actually uncontentious in principle. However, its *extent*, in particular the durability of the evidence as a culture-generating and supporting force, and also its *origins* as a supposedly old oral tradition based on anonymous creation or as a reproduction of heard (re-)oralized cultural artefacts, are disputed.¹⁰ The actual genre character of these often referred to as 'fairy tales' or 'folk tales' oral tradition is disputed. One must actually imagine them as genre-neutral, that is, that such stories were not fairy tales in the modern or Grimm sense. Reflections of such actual popular

⁹Cf. Bluhm 1997, p. 251–275, especially p. 272.—The Grimms tried in 1812/3 without success to get a variant of their 'Hansel and Gretel' fairy tale from Gräter, which Achim von Arnim had read in his collections.

¹⁰See also Clausen-Stolzenburg in retrospect on her analysis of Grimm's conception of fairy tales in terms of oral tradition, age and origin of the stories: "It is not the functioning of oral tradition in general that should be doubted [...] But it should have become clear that in none of the cases mentioned [...] an existing written culture would have remained without influence on oral tradition." (Clausen-Stolzenburg 1995, p. 92).