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THE SIN-COMPLEX:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF ENGLISH VERSIONS
OF THE GRIMMS' KINDER- UND HAUSMÄRCHEN
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
IN COMPARISON WITH THE GERMAN ORIGINALS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the English versions of the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (= *KHM*) published between the years 1823 and 1884, i.e. from the first translation by Edgar Taylor and David Jardine, *German Popular Stories* (1823 and 1826), to the first complete edition of the Grimms’ collection of stories and notes by Margaret Hunt, *Grimm’s Household Tales* (1884).

Each of the first eleven chapters deals with a specific English edition and gives an analysis of one or more stories from that edition together with the texts of the German original. The two versions, German and English, are placed alongside each other in parallel columns to facilitate comparison. The twelfth chapter takes the final paragraph of one story, ‘Sneewittchen’ (*KHM* 53), and examines the seven different English versions of it in the editions discussed in the previous chapters. The final chapter compares the quality of English translations of the *KHM* in the nineteenth century with that of the Grimms’ sole venture in translating tales in the English language into German, viz. Wilhelm Grimm’s *Irische Elfenmärchen* (1826). Included as an appendix is a tabulated concordance of the contents of the twelve major editions discussed in this thesis.

The investigation shows that the areas deemed to be sensitive ones by English translators were those which had to do with what Darton (*Children’s Books in England*, 1982, p.99) has singled out as ‘a deep-rooted sin-complex’ in England. Any story that touched on the issues of religious belief and superstition, the human body and its physical nature, violence and evil, and the intense emotions felt by human beings which prompt them to commit violent and destructive acts, was inevitably viewed with concern and mistrust, especially by purveyors of children’s literature in the nineteenth century. All these issues, as well as the element of fantasy which so readily admits and entertains them, were prone to considerable revision by successive translators of the *KHM*. 
Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Eve Sutton (1906-1992),
who, when I was a child, filled me with a love of folk- and
fairy-tales which, since then, has not died.
Acknowledgements and thanks are due:

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ONCE UPON A TIME

Every teller
Of fairy tales
Knows why children
Bite their nails

Fee fi
Fo fum
Chew our blanket
Suck our thumb

Nibble nibble
Like a mouse
The king’s caught the queen
In the counting-house

Mirror mirror
On the wall
What gives the greatest
Satisfaction of all?

Love, money
Food or bloodshed?
Give us this day
Our daily spread

A successful story
Is guaranteed
To tell us of sex
Violence and greed

For these are the ever-
Recurring themes
Of our fearful, tearful
Childish dreams
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INTRODUCTION

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (= *KHM*) edited by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (first edition 1812/1815; seventh edition 1857, the last during the lifetime of the Grimm brothers) constitute the most important collection of German traditional stories. They are also central to the whole canon of German literature, having long been a subject of intensive study and debate. The last twenty years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the work of the Grimm brothers. Since the publication in the 1980s of the first, second, third, and seventh editions of the *KHM* by Heinz Rölleke (see List of References: *KHM* 1812/1815, *KHM* 1819, *KHM* 1837, and *KHM* 1857), research into the Grimms' collection of tales has had a firm foundation in close textual analysis and criticism. It has been possible to follow the changing history of the *KHM* as well as the approach taken by the Grimm brothers to the task of preparing, editing, and revising the different editions of their work. Of special interest have been the alterations introduced into the texts of the stories, particularly by Wilhelm Grimm, who took over sole charge of the *KHM* from the second edition of 1819 onwards. One of the results of recent research has been the realization that these stories are not unalterably fixed but have undergone changes, several of them quite drastic ones, in the course of the history of the seven different editions of the 'Große Ausgabe' to appear in the Grimms' lifetime.

The *KHM* have of course not been confined to their central position in German history and culture. They have crossed national boundaries and established themselves as that work of German literature which is most widely known throughout the world. The 'internationalization' of the Grimms' tales is an ongoing process, and scholarly investigation of the transmission of the *KHM* has been fostered and encouraged above all by Ludwig Denecke, especially in the various issues of his *Brüder Grimm Gedenken* (1963ff.). Many of the Grimms' stories, which began as narratives recorded from the oral tradition and then underwent changes as they appeared in print in the various German editions of the *KHM*, were translated into other languages and have appeared in book form or in other media, such as comics, film, and television, even, in some instances, passing back into the oral tradition of cultures outside Germany and Europe (see e.g. Karlinger 1963, and Sutton 1988, pp.358ff.). This process of 'cross-cultural' transmission is an enduring one with a long history.

The subject investigated in this thesis is the manner in which the Grimms' tales were transmitted in printed form in nineteenth-century Britain: specifically, how the English translators of the time coped with the unique character of the *KHM*, their novelty, strangeness, and directness, as
well as their elusiveness. Other questions will also be raised. For instance, which of the various editions of the *KHM* served as the sources for the early English translations? How faithful and accurate are these English translations? If the translators depart markedly from the original German texts, what are the likely reasons for their doing so? And what are the results and implications of such departures for the possible meanings of the new, specifically English stories that have been created? Are the new versions an improvement on the originals or are they an impairment of them? What comparisons can be be drawn between Wilhelm Grimm's editorial procedures and the textual changes made by their English translators? Such questions can best be answered by a close comparison of the texts of the English versions with the original stories from which they were taken. This is the basis for the present investigation, which can be seen both as an exercise in comparative textology and as a foray into the broader field of intercultural studies.

The thirteen English editions of the *KHM* chosen span a period of just over sixty years, from the first volume of Edgar Taylor's *German Popular Stories* published in 1823 to the first complete translation of the Grimms' collection of stories and notes by Margaret Hunt in 1884. They comprise the major English versions of the *KHM* of this time, and they are important for one or more of the following reasons: a) the substantial number of stories they contain, b) the claims that they make for their fidelity to the source texts, c) the historical significance of their time of publication (especially the earlier editions), d) their durability, which, paradoxically, is often in inverse proportion to e) their quality as accurate translations. Other minor works, such as versified adaptations and individual stories published separately, will also be mentioned where relevant to the main argument.

It is perhaps worthwhile observing at this juncture that several of the major translations that appeared in the first sixty or so years of the nineteenth century were published as anonymous editions. This anonymity probably reflects the modest literary status that writers for children endured in the first half of the 19th century, a situation commented on by the Opies (1980, p.1030): 'At the beginning of the nineteenth century moralists and educators customarily had their names on the title pages of their work; but those who sought to entertain the public remained discreet about it. They were not held to be advancing man's spiritual and intellectual welfare like their calf-bound contemporaries, and could not therefore expect to be admired.' This status was considerably raised during the second half of the century and one observes that all the translators who are clearly named on the title pages of the editions published from 1855 on were women. This can be seen as a reflection of the growing educational and professional independence of women at the time (see Trevelyan 1952, pp.88 and 91, and Rowbotham 1989, Chapter 6).
One of the problems raised by an investigation such as this one is the difficulty of obtaining information about the translators and editors of these nineteenth-century English editions of the Grimms' tales, especially about their working methods. Biographical details can be found in various sources on the identifiable early translators Edgar Taylor, John Edward Taylor, and William Thoms, as well as on the women authors of the editions published later in the nineteenth century. However, even in these cases there is the same lack of information on certain crucial issues that one encounters with the editions published anonymously. This particular difficulty, engendered by the very nature of the material under investigation, has been articulately expressed by George Steiner (1975, pp.273-4):

But even if we take the modest view, even if we regard the study of translation as descriptive--taxonomic rather than properly theoretic ('theoretic' meaning susceptible of inductive generalization, prediction, and falsifiability by counter-example), a severe difficulty arises. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the material for study is a finished product. We have in front of us an original text and one or more putative translations. Our analysis and judgement work from outside, they come after the fact. We know next to nothing of the genetic process which has gone into the translator's practice, of the prescriptive or purely empirical principles, devices, routines which have controlled his choice of this equivalent rather than that, of one stylistic level in preference to another, of word 'x' before 'y'. We cannot dissect, or only rarely. If only because it was deemed to be hack-work, the great mass of translation has left no records.

Because of this inherent difficulty the approach followed in this study is essentially one of textual analysis. Assumptions about the 'genetic process' and the principles and practices followed by the translators are based on close textual reading of the stories they produced and on comparison of these with their German sources. To a large extent, this approach is one that other commentators of the English versions of Grimm have also been forced to follow, though previous investigations are far less intensive and extensive than the present one.

There has in fact been remarkably little literature published on either 19th or 20th century English translations of the Kinder- und Haussmärchen of the brothers Grimm. The first translation of a selection of the tales, German Popular Stories (vol.1 in 1823, vol.2 in 1826), has attracted the most attention from commentators, not only because of its historical importance but also on account of its enduring longevity--it is still available, at the time of writing, as a Puffin paperback edition (Grimms' Fairy Tales 1948). Michaelis-Jena (1975 and 1978) has unearthed some useful biographical and bibliographical facts about Edgar Taylor, the editor and chief translator of this work; Di Benedetto (1986-7) in an unpublished thesis has investigated some--but by no means all--of the cultural and textual differences to be found between the KHM and Taylor's translation. However, a number of her
conclusions must be questioned (see esp. below, Chapter II, p.99). Blamires (1989) sets the early translations of the KHM, such as Taylor’s, in the context of the English reception of fairytales in the first half of the 19th century, and, like Sutton (1990), draws attention to the textual changes Taylor introduces to such tales as ‘Der Froschkönig’ (KHM 1); while Alderson (1978, 1985, 1993) has passed comment on the quality of Taylor’s translation as well as pointing to the success or failure of a number of subsequent English translations of the KHM. The comments of these authors will be quoted and discussed when the editions to which they refer are being investigated in the relevant chapters below.

B. Q. Morgan in his useful Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation 1481-1927 (1965) gives his own personal evaluation of the translations he has listed in this comprehensive work, among which are many English versions of the Grimms’ tales (Morgan 1965, pp.180-193). Morgan provides a system of diacritical marks, to which reference will also be made in the course of the following study (ibid., pp.2-3):

The asterisk (*) indicates excellence; it does not mean perfection, which is no more often attained in translation than in other fields of human endeavor, but implies that a reader may safely take a version so marked as a reasonably satisfactory rendering of the original. In many cases a word of comment appended to the bibliographical entry gives a sign a more specific meaning. Occasionally the double asterisk (**) is used to indicate unusually high quality. The section mark ($) is somewhat more negative in character; it says in effect: I have examined the translation and find it neither wholly good nor wholly bad. Expressed in terms of examination grades, it represents the rank between B and C. In a collection of lyrics, such a mark means that you may find a very good or even excellent version here and there but you cannot be sure of doing so consistently, for the bulk of them are in some way or other defective.

The dagger (†) is comparable to the inverted thumb in the ancient Coliseum, . . .

Morgan also raises an issue that is pertinent to the assessment of the quality of English versions of the KHM. In Morgan’s opinion (ibid., p.2) ‘If a translator plays fast and loose with his original in the first paragraph, he is likely to do so in the last one; and, conversely, if he has the ability to render a single complex sentence into correct and idiomatic English, he is not likely to lapse into slovenly procedure at any time.’

The quality of the English translations of the KHM varies considerably, not only from one edition to another but also within any one edition—and indeed within any one particular story in any one edition. This of course makes evaluation of the quality of a translation a very difficult business
and one which is necessarily subjective and selective. Morgan himself freely admits that his own system is 'liable to error' (ibid., p.2) and this must be especially true with regard to the English versions of the Grimms' tales where the translators themselves are not always singular or identifiable (several editions would appear to have been put together by two or more anonymous translators) and where, in the case of a long and disparate work such as a collection of folk- and fairy-tales, the quality of the translating may vary considerably. This might explain why previous studies of the English translations of the *KHM* have remained fragmentary: commentators have noted selected passages where the translator has altered or departed from the original, and they may also explain these alterations and departures in the light of the cultural mores or taboos of the time, but such a fragmented approach which considers isolated passages or other isolated features (such as style or diction) of a particular text runs the danger of overlooking the story as a whole and its overall impact.

The study, like the work of previous commentators, is an empirical one and does not start from within the bounds of any one particular theoretical framework. It aims to avoid the danger of the earlier fragmented approaches by giving a close comparison of the complete text of selected English versions of the Grimms' tales with their original German source. Wherever possible the two texts will be aligned in parallel columns to facilitate comparison. For the purpose of easy reference, line numbers will be given on the left of the columns. References both to the German originals in the left-hand column and to the English translations in the right-hand one will be made using these numbers, ignoring the inevitable discrepancies that result from the differing lengths of the two parallel texts. (In some instances the comparison will involve more than just two texts, and where this is the case, the font size will be reduced to accommodate the increased amount of text.) The texts of the Grimms' *KHM* and of the English translations are given in exactly the same form as they appear in the editions from which they are taken. Only in one matter of punctuation is there a departure from this pattern: following the conventions of the Oxford University Press, single quotation marks have been used in all instances, except where these occur within a quotation; then double marks are used. The occasional placing of quotation marks immediately before rather than after another punctuation mark, such as a point or a comma, is intentional and follows the typesetting of some of the Grimms' originals.

It is hoped that through this comparison of parallel texts a process of mutual illumination will take place. Each text will shed light on the other, and the translator's choices will be clearly highlighted. This is in fact the focal point of this study, viz. the choices that translators make, the possible reasons for these choices, and the consequences that ensue from these choices for a reading
and interpretation of the resulting text.

Ideally, in order to be comprehensive, this study should examine all the stories in each of the collections chosen and compare them with their sources. However, such an enterprise would be unmanageable in its vastness. Instead, a selection of stories has been made and the reasons for this selection are given in the individual chapters. At this early stage it can be noted that the majority of the stories are regarded as being among the 'classic' stories from the Grimms' collection.

In three chapters, viz. Chapters II, IX, and XII, there is a departure from the normal procedure of comparing the text of a whole story with that of its English translation. This is done not only for the sake of variety but for other reasons as well. In Chapter II, sandwiched between two longish chapters, a comparison is made between just sections of stories—albeit significant ones—from the first English translation by Edgar Taylor and his immediate successors, George Cunningham and William Thoms. Both these translators were acquainted with Taylor's work and they responded to it in different ways. One appears to have drawn on the earlier English versions while at the same time translating from the Grimms' original texts; the other consciously adopted an approach quite dissimilar to Taylor's. Chapter IX covers a collection of brief passages from the KHM which have proved to be awkward ones for English translators to translate literally. All of them are concerned with one of the central themes of this thesis: the human body and its natural processes and functions. Finally, in Chapter XII, the last paragraph of one story, 'Sneewittchen' (KHM 53), is followed through its versions in the different editions of the KHM and these are then compared to the same paragraph as it is rendered in the various nineteenth-century English editions in which it appears. The paragraph is important in that it contains a number of features that have activated what Harvey Darton (1982, p.99) has called—and his appositely chosen phrase provides the title for this thesis—the English 'sin-complex' (see below, Chapter I, p.8).

Included at the end of this study is a Tabulated Concordance of the contents of twelve of the thirteen English editions discussed. It omits Cunningham's Foreign Tales and Traditions (1828) as this contains only five of the Grimms' stories (for a list of these, see below, Chapter II, p.57).

A comparative study such as this one necessarily involves much cross-referencing. The Harvard system of references has been used so that all references and cross-references are given in brackets within the main text of the thesis. The List of References at the very end of this study gives more comprehensive bibliographical details of the works referred to in the text. It is hoped that the use of this system, whereby the number of footnotes is kept to a minimum, will make for greater ease of reading.