

The Grimm Brothers

The Oral Tradition

Once upon a time in a land far away, the people of a small town sat down around a fire to hear stories about fantasy and magic, not knowing that this very action would continue to be passed on for years and years to come.

There is no real way of estimating when the art of storytelling began. Due to its origin as an oral tradition, there is no written record – no history. There is a high likelihood that the act of storytelling began as soon as we developed the ability to speak.

Fairy tales in particular emerged as European folktales that were passed on from generation to generation. They were often made to portray parables with a moral twist, and featured issues such as sadistic parents, brutal punishments and children being devoured by beasts.



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Through time, there have been multiple people that tried to transform this oral tradition into a literary one, but the ones that succeeded the most were the two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In 1812 they published the first edition of their collection of tales with the name *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. In English that translates to *Children's and Household Tales*, implying that these stories were for everyone, children, and adults alike.

However, the two brothers never intended the fairy tales in their book to be for children, but rather a way to preserve the folklore of the regions that were being overrun by France during the Napoleonic war. The stories were tragic and filled with murder and chaos, not at all suited for children.

The collection contained 200 fairy tales and became widely appreciated all over the world, subsequently becoming the model for turning the fairy tale writing. One of the stories included in this first edition is 'Hansel and Gretel,' a brutal story of abandonment, survival, and cannibalism.

The original version is about two medieval German siblings, whose family was struggling during the famine. The siblings, abandoned in the forest by their mother, starving, stumbled upon a house made of sweets, not knowing it was a trap set up by a child-eating witch. The witch captures the children and imprisons them. After a while, Gretel tricks the witch and shoves her into her oven, closing the hatch, and burning her alive. Freeing Hansel, they steal the witch's treasures and return

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home, where their cruel mother, has mysteriously died.

Through time, the dark and gory fairy tales portrayed in the Grimm brothers' collection grew lighter, adapting to time, becoming more suitable for children.

The Grimm Brothers' story of Hansel and Gretel was one of the many fairy tales that evolved over time and became more and more sanitized through each publication of it.

They published the last edition of their collection in 1857 where the cruel mother had been swapped out by a wicked stepmother to make it less personal, as well as showing the father as more empathetic, showing more regret for his actions so that the father is not antagonized.

Today there are versions that are solely meant for children where Hansel and Gretel run away into the woods and get



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The Century of Film

lost instead of being abandoned by their parents.



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About a hundred years after the brothers Grimm finished their collection, during the mid 1900s, film became hugely popular, and it did not take long until fairy tales were adapted into film. The first adaptation of Hansel and Gretel was made in 1954 and followed the same plot as the original fairy tale.

Presently, there are around 22 films based on the story of Hansel and Gretel. These films are either made to be meant for children or into horror films aimed towards adults. One of the more well-known adaptations is the 2013 film *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* with Jeremy Renner and Gemma Arterton as Hansel and Gretel.

The film is set fifteen years after the original fairy tale and the siblings are now fully grown skilled and successful witch-hunters. The two dedicated their lives to save others from evil witches, but they soon stumble upon a new challenge that is connected to a dark secret of their past.

Even though fairy tales are still heard and read by many, film is at present taking over, and as for the future, there is no possible way of predicting how fairy tales will evolve.

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