

BOOK REVIEWS

One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales. By John M. Ellis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. 204, bibliography, index. Cloth \$17.50.

Reviewed by Eric Montenyohl.

Newcomers to the field of folkloristics are commonly greeted with information like this: [The Grimms] "established a new discipline: the science of folklore. Their example of collecting oral literature launched general fieldwork in most European countries and resulted in the cooperative scholarly study of their prime focus of interest: The Märchen."⁽¹⁾ Thus, one's first impression is that the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812, 1815) is the origin of modern folklore studies. The Grimms collected their tales from German peasants, recorded them faithfully, and annotated them methodically.⁽²⁾

Professor Ellis challenges folklorists to defend this view. He reviews sources, all of which have been available for at least fifteen years, in order to take an opposing position. First, the tales were not collected from German (Hessian) peasants, but a relatively small circle consisting of family and friends of the brothers. Second, the tales are not wholly German, since several of the informants for the tales--notably the Hassenpflug family and Dorothea Viehmann--were of French Huguenot extraction; in fact, they still spoke French in the home. Third, despite the Grimms' assertion to the contrary, the tales were largely rewritten from what was collected and recorded in manuscript to the printed edition. Further, the tales were constantly revised and rewritten in the course of the seven editions published during the brothers' lifetimes.

Professor Ellis reviews these facts clearly and aggressively. He concludes that the Grimms essentially perpetrated a fraud by claiming fieldwork among German peasants and "sacred" versions of the tales. He chides German scholars and folklorists for failing to face up to these deceptions of the Grimms: (1) not naming their sources, despite their "valuing the original narrator" (Johannes Bolte discovered the notations indicating the likely sources of the tales in the margins of the brothers' own published copies of the tales, more than thirty years after their deaths); (2) not preserving their original notes and manuscripts (the Grimms burned them); and (3) constantly revising and editing the tales for publication (while denying that the tales were anything but the authentic expression of German peasants).

Ellis's work should not be read in isolation, for it is not an exhaustive or definitive work, nor is it intended to be. It is a work of interpretation, one which should be read by folklorists. The Grimms may not be as guilty of outright fraud as the author suggests, but the case should be examined carefully. Ellis claims that folklorists have responded to the facts about the Grimms with statements to the effect that "standards have changed since then" or perhaps that standards of text revision have changed also. He assaults these defenses as well, pointing out that the standards claimed by the Grimms are still acceptable; the problem is not in a change of standards but in the Grimms' own failure to adhere to them. Ultimately, it is the folklorists' retention of the Grimms as the founding fathers of a scientific field that irks Ellis the most: this is the "one fairy story too many" of the title, for it is one totally created by the Grimms and perpetuated by scholars.

For folklorists, this book is likely to be somewhat frustrating. First, it should be pointed out in fairness to all, that Linda Degh,

Max Luthi, and others cite some of the same evidence and virtually all of the same shortcomings as Ellis does. The difference is that Degh and other folklorists do not defend the Grimms, nor do they attack them only on the basis of their first published collection; they merely persist in identifying the origins of modern folklore study with the work of the Grimms. Ellis refuses to accept the fact that the modern study of folklore was largely inspired by the Grimms, however imperfect or fraudulent their work may have been.

Perhaps an area that Professor Ellis prods, without intending to, is the study of the narrative, and specifically these folk narratives. For if most analyses of folktale style are based on the Grimms' published versions, how can they be said to deal with folktale style at all? Are they not studies of the Grimm style instead? And how pervasive has the Grimm style become? Has it changed or suppressed an oral narrative style? And since the Grimms changed not only the style but the content of the tales, how valuable have the psychological interpretations of the Grimm Märchen (von Franz, Bettelheim, Jung et al) been? Are these then reduced to psychological studies of the Grimms themselves rather than national or universal studies?

Professor Ellis's work, if accepted at face value, creates a troubling scenario for folklorists and ethnologists. That the book is provocative is no reason to ignore or deny it, for folklorists can only progress by responding to such new interpretations.

NOTES

1. Linda Degh, "Grimm's Household Tales and Its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic," *Western Folklore* 38:2 (1979): 83-103.

2. This is certainly not what Dr. Degh argues in the article cited above. This assumption, the leap from inspiring others to

demonstrating exemplary technique, may be common to newcomers in folkloristics. Nevertheless, this sentence is a stance which no contemporary folklorist would choose to defend.

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend. Proceedings of the Conference on Contemporary Legend, Sheffield, July 1982. Edited by Paul Smith. Sheffield, England: The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1984. CECTAL Conference Papers Series No. 4. Pp.xi + 233, introduction, appendices.

Reviewed by Barbara Truesdell

At the Conference on Contemporary Legend held in Sheffield, England, in 1982, folklorists shared insights, reevaluated established ideas, and explored new facets of legend study. The book **Perspectives on Contemporary Legend**, a collection of the conference's papers, allows readers to participate in the intellectual concerns shared at Sheffield. Three major foci emerge in this collection: the connection of a specific contemporary legend to earlier themes and motifs, the uses and meanings of legends to the group perpetuating them, and the problems and applications of analysis in legend study.

Bringing the contemporary legend out of its artificial isolation as a wholly modern phenomenon gives the researcher insights into legend adaptation and meaning. Three papers in this volume focused on placing modern legend in its historical and generic context. Gillian Bennett's paper, "The Phantom Hitchhiker: Neither Modern, Urban Nor Legend?," places this legend into a continuum with older ghostlore of similar theme, relating its features to changes in beliefs about ghostly behavior and attendant changes in the story's internal logic to shape its present form. Jan Harold Brunvand's article,