

## METAMARCHEN: REEVALUATING AND DEFINING THE ROMANTIC KUNSTMARCHEN

Barry W. Rosen

The Romantic Kunstmärchen has always presented problems of classification for literary and folklore scholars. It is clearly a literary form, because unlike oral, anonymous folktales, it has been written by a famous author. However, attempts to define and distinguish it have often led to superficial historical accounts, as in Erich Bleich's, Helmut Lobeck's, and Jens Tismar's studies. Many of these problems in definition and classification have been due to the literary scholar's lack of background in folkloristics as well as their naive assumption that the Grimm's Märchen are Volksmärchen (folktales) and hence may be used for comparison.

For the purpose of classification, a third category would be useful: the Buchmärchen. Max Lüthi has already coined the term:

Wilhelm Grimm's stylistic recasting was largely responsible for the creation of the literary folktale (Buchmärchen), and elevated folktale, so to speak that we may clearly distinguish from freely inventive stories of deliberate artfulness. Literary folktales have an important function in that they fill the gap created by the disappearance of the oral tradition and have become the living possession of both children and adults. They cannot be considered fully representative of the true folktale, however (Lüthi 1982:110).

Thus Lüthi's "Buchmärchen" is an ideal term for discussing the Grimm's creation. Once the folktale has been edited and printed and purged of its paralingual and oral features, it is somewhere between two worlds. They are not Volksmärchen, as they have been lifted out of their oral medium, and are not Kunstmärchen, despite their new

ideology. Like the *Kunstmärchen*, however, the *Buchmärchen* exists in a written medium and depending on the degree of editing may retain more of its oral features such as a lack of secondary details, a less cohesive and unified plot, or stylistic imperfections.

Max Lüthi (1982) discussed the tale's one-dimensionality, lack of depth, abstract style, and plot complexity. Can Lüthi's formalist approach help define the elusive *Kunstmärchen*? Or must we go beyond formalism and understand the *Kunstmärchen* in terms of postmodern methodologies and realize that ultimately the *Kunstmärchen* engages the *Volksmärchen* in an active discourse which creates a *metamärchen*? To explore these questions, we will use three major *Kunstmärchen* by E.T.A. Hoffmann and Clemens Brentano and see if formalism and "metafictional theory" can help our classificatory and definitional problems.

Let us begin by comparing the two genres on a formal level. Jack Zipes, using formal categories, saw the major differences in terms of expansion: "Each one of the romantic fairy tales is distinctly different in composition, but they are the same in that they explode the bounds of the folktale." (Zipes 1979:90). In terms of formal levels such as plot, characterization, themes, coherence and unity, description, point of view, irony, style, and beginning and ending formulae, the *Kunstmärchen* transcends many of the traditional generic features of the *Volksmärchen*.

The first major aspect worth exploring is plot complexity. Max Lüthi claims that the single-stranded plot (of the *Volksmärchen*) refuses to directly portray anything that is many-layered or interpenetrating. The *Kunstmärchen* of E.T.A. Hoffmann defy and

explode this boundary and involve many interpenetrating levels. For example, in his **Nutcracker and the Mouseking** (see Appendix), Hoffmann creates a structure involving a tale within a tale within a tale. The story of Dame Mouserink is embedded within the Pirlipapp Märchen ("The Story of the Hard Nut") which is a part of the outer fairy tale. But more strikingly, the worlds of bourgeois rationalism and childlike imagination are often interconnected, creating a deliberate ambiguity regarding truth. For example, when Godpapa Drosselmeir tells a tale in which he is a major character, the tale operates on two interconnecting levels. Or when Marie falls off her chair and is knocked unconscious, the nutcracker comes in the form of Godpapa Drosselmeir's nephew to marry Marie. We are not clear which world we are in. This technique of deliberate ambiguity infuses the magical into the real world. Unlike the Volksmärchen which often has two clearly distinct worlds, Hoffmann's interpenetrating worlds create a degree of complexity which goes beyond the single-stranded plot of the Volksmärchen.

In terms of characterization, the Kunstmärchen also goes beyond the simple, stereotyped, transparent characters of the Volksmärchen. As Scholes notes, in contrast to the Volksmärchen, literary characters have more psychological depth and inner complexity. This is most apparent in the fourth vigil of Hoffmann's **The Golden Pot** (see Appendix) where the narrator and simple bumbling Anselmus exclaim:

But the Student Anselmus now felt as if he knew what it was that so moved and worked within him, nay, that so tore his bosom in the pain of an infinite longing. "What else is it," said he, "but that I love you with my whole heart and soul and even to the death, glorious

golden snake; nay that without you I cannot live and must perish in hopeless woe, unless I find you again, unless I have you as the beloved of my heart. But I know it, you shall be mine; and then all that glorious dreams have promised me of an other higher world shall be fulfilled" (Hoffmann 1967:19).

The inner psychological depth is quite apparent in contrast to the *Volksmärchen*. While Anselmus has many of the characteristics of the bumbling and unloved third son, he is not a member of the aristocracy or feudal society, but a member of the bourgeoisie. As Jack Zipes notes, this is another major change in the *Kunstmärchen*:

The new hero (of the romantic tale) is no longer a prince or peasant, but a bourgeois protagonist, generally speaking an artist, the creative individual, who has numerous adventures and encounters with the supernatural in pursuit of a "new world," where he will be able to develop and enjoy his talents. The quest is no longer for wealth and social status...but for a change in social relations. (Zipes 1979:34).

In short, characterization in the *Kunstmärchen* moves towards the portrayal of psychological depth as well as sociological changes. The Romantic *Kunstmärchen* address a new audience and mirror the concerns of a new age.

Coherence and unity are additional features worth considering. While one can find a purpose behind every detail and digression in Hoffmann's *Golden Pot* and *Nutcracker*, one might be hard-pressed to make the same claim for any oral tale. As parts of tales are fused, as secondary details are added, and as two different tales come together, coherence and unity are often lost. One major example which comes to mind is a Portuguese version of Cinderella, "Hearth-Cat" (Thompson 1968:173-6). The Cinderella

motifs are combined with the ones from the "Frau Holle" story, creating a natural blend of two types--but also destroying the story's coherence. The combination of motifs, (though sometimes deliberate) is often quite random. (Folklore audiences may, however, react positively to long and colorful digressions.) In contrast, the inner tale in **Nutcracker** is intimately tied to Hoffman's message concerning the magical qualities present in the imagination of the child living in the ordinary world. Thus the more natural incoherence of oral transmission contrasts with the more deliberate coherence of the purposefully shaped *Kunstmärchen*.

Description and detail further differentiate folktales from literary tales. The oral version may fail to elaborate on secondary details due to diffusion, while the written version will be polished and vivid. The Portuguese version of Cinderella provides another clear example. In "Hearth-Cat," the evil stepmother first sends out Hearth-Cat "...one day...to grass a cow, and gave her a load which she desired her to bring back whole, and an earthen pot with water, out of which she expected her to drink, and yet was to bring back full" (Thompson 1968: 174). The teller, however, fails to complete the description. While occasional loose ends may be found in literary tales, the editing process will usually not allow them. In fact, the Grimm brothers were especially famous for filling in secondary detail and elaborating descriptions (David 1964:180-96).

Some critics consider the ending of *Kunstmärchen* particularly unique. Bruno Bettelheim notes that, "at the end, the fairy tale dismisses us with a positive outlook on life, based on the conviction that evil will be punished, and the good will be rewarded.

The invented fairy tale, the *Kunstmärchen* by contrast, often ends with the undoing of the child hero, as can be typically seen in Hans Christian Andersen's "The Matchgirl" (Bettleheim 1981:19). Marianne Thalmann seems to agree, noting that "the traditional happy ending of the folk fairy tale--the reward of virtue and punishment of evil--was missing" from the *Kunstmärchen* (1963: vi-vii). However, both critics must be thinking of Tieck's *Kunstmärchen*. Both Brentano and Hoffmann retain the traditional happy ending although at times it may appear ambiguous. In *The Golden Pot*, for example, Anselmus will elope with Serpentina to the magical garden of Atlantis, but the narrator is left behind contemplating their bliss. In *Nutcracker*, Marie may elope with Drosselmeir's nephew, but we are unsure if this is her delusion from falling off a chair or her wish-fulfillment.

In most of Brentano's tales, the endings are happy. For example, in *Gockel and Hinkel* (see Appendix), all the characters change themselves into children in order to tell Märchen. The ending varies with author, making it difficult to define the *Kunstmärchen* in terms of its formal characteristics. The *Volksmärchen* may also vary. One folktale from Japan (Seki 1963:59-65) ends with the hero failing his tasks and causing a great flood which leads to the creation of the Milky Way. Nevertheless, the overall assumption that the *Kunstmärchen* will not end happily, unlike the *Volksmärchen*, is at least partially accurate.

Irony also differentiates oral from written literature. In oral narrative, as Robert Scholes notes, there is no ironic distance between the author and the teller of a traditional story. The audience shares the

narrator's knowledge and values and adopts the narrator's god-like view, while the use of writing permits the individual artist to add the persona, thereby creating a difference between the fictional narrator and the author (Scholes 1977:53). While Scholes's observation is generally true, irony can be a part of oral narrative as Gustave Hennigsen and Richard K. Lunt have noted in their studies of tall tales (Hennigson 1965:180-219; Lunt 1968:3-53). As we shall discuss later, irony is a major feature of the *Kunstmärchen*--especially in E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales.

Formal literary categories may provide a means of differentiating the *Volksmärchen* from the *Kunstmärchen*. However, there is an inherent bias here since we are judging oral literature using formal categories from written literature. The differences in the media often prevent a fair comparison; ultimately, written and oral categories have more in common than previously suspected.

#### Hoffmann's and Brentano's Tales:Metamärchen?

Since formalism does not wholly define the *Kunstmärchen* and since there are many types of Romantic *Kunstmärchen*, we must instead discuss the qualities of the *Kunstmärchen* displayed by each particular author. For Brentano and Hoffmann, the *Kunstmärchen* can be distinguished from the *Volksmärchen* in terms of its foregrounding of language, use of parody and romantic irony. As Michaelis-Jena has noted, "the Romantic poets, especially Brentano, did not care for the 'unimproved stories' and called them boring and slovenly. Even Arnim thought that there was too much erudition and that it would have been better to have neither preface nor appendix" (Michaelis-Jena 1970:53). Brentano's criticism and dislike of *Volksmärchen* is thus inherent in his parodic form.

The Kunstmärchen thus engages the Volksmärchen in an active dialogue, using a meta-folkloric form of commentary, and the reader is forced to question the genre that he previously accepted.

While the folktale is characterized by its transparency and simplicity, the Kunstmärchen may foreground the very language that creates it. For example, Brentano's playful manipulation of his character's names calls attention to the artifice. In one of his tales, Klopstock's five sons are called Gripsgraps, Pitschpatsch, Piffpaff, Pinkepank and Trilltrall. In **Gockel, Hinkel and Gackelia** we have Eifrassus the egg-eating king and the three Jews, Halsab (cut throat), Kropfauf (open maw) and Steinkauf (buy stone). The latter three appear when Gockel recites Alektryo's famous ancestral poem and prophecy:

Der Gockel Hahn	The rooster Gockel himself
Bringt Glucke selbst	Spare the hen (from)
Um Undank,	Ingratitude (and from)
Hals ab,	Cut throat,
Kropf auf,	Open maw,
Stein kauf,	Buy stone, (and he)
Brot gab.	Gave bread.
(Brentano 1977:27)	

Throughout Brentano's Märchen we find characters whose names identify their actions. While this may also be true in the Volksmärchen, as in the case of Aschenputtel, the degree to which Brentano creates names often goes beyond the Volksmärchen. Rabbi Süß Oppenheimer Mayer Lob Rothschild Schnapper Robert, defies anything we might encounter in the Volksmärchen thus foregrounding and playfully manipulating the language. As Marianne Thalmann notes, "the wealth



of details that pours forth (in Brentano's works) attests not only to Brentano's insatiable vocabulary but also to his delight in creating images" (Thalmann 1963:76).

The number of functions in **Gockel and Hinkel** goes well beyond anything that Propp could imagine. The plot, based on Basile's stories, "The Cock's Stone" (4-1) and "The Large Crab-Louse, the Mouse, and the Cricket," (3-5) is filled with so many motifs, combined in such an artful manner, that they go well beyond the linear plot of the *Volksmärchen*. This acts as a commentary on the "boring and slovenly" *Buchmärchen* of the Grimms and ideologically attempts to declare the supremacy of artistic genius.

But how different are oral reworkings from written reworkings if the end product is some artistic variation? The difference perhaps lies in the media used. With Brentano there is more of a deliberate reshaping; and yet, folklorists can find examples of very deliberate artistic embellishment in *Volksmärchen*.

Irony also differentiates the *Volksmärchen* from the *Kunstmärchen*:

We find in the *Märchen* a form of Romantic Irony in which the creative mind and the creative act appear in the work of art as objects of representation. One would hardly expect to encounter such artistic narcissism in the *Volksmärchen*. It usually does not appear as directly in other *Kunstmärchen* of the period, but some form of artistic preoccupation is normally visible in these *Märchen* and constitutes part of the action (Frye 1981:137).

Romantic irony may be found particularly in E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales. For example, at the end of **The Golden Pot**, the narrator intrudes and says:

How deeply did I feel, in the center of my spirit, the blessedness of the Student Anselmus, who now, indissolubly united with his gentle Serpentina, has

withdrawn to the mysterious land of wonders, recognized by him as the home towards which his bosom, filled with strange forecastings, had always longed. But in vain was all my striving to set before you, favorable reader, those glories with which Anselmus is encompassed, or even in the faintest degree to shadow them to you in words... I feel myself enthralled amid the paltriness of everyday life; I sickened in tormenting dissatisfaction; I glided about like a dreamer, in brief, I fell into that condition of the Student Anselmus, which, in the Fourth Vigil, I endeavored to set before you (Hoffmann 1967:65-6).

The ultimate irony comes in Vigil Twelve when the narrator receives a letter from one of his characters, Lindhorst (the father of Serpentina), who criticizes the narrator for exposing his secret identity as a salamander. Hoffmann's Märchen abound with similar examples and they suggest the artist's playful manipulation, distance from his work, and ultimately his ambivalent feelings towards it.

One technique, however, recreates the folktale performance situation. Hoffmann often addresses the reader, as in **The Golden Pot**:

Gracious reader, may I venture to ask you a question? Have you ever had hours, perhaps even days or weeks in which all your customary activities did nothing but cause you vexation and dissatisfaction; when everything that you usually consider worthy and important seemed trivial and worthless? If, favorable reader, you have ever been in such a mood, you know the state into which the Student Anselmus had fallen (Hoffmann 1967:17).

The direct address to the audience not only awakens the reader but also recreates the importance of the audience in the storytelling process. It reminds the reader of his power of imagination and his role in the performance process. As such, Hoffmann

also attempts to return the storytelling process back to its original status by acknowledging the audience.

Finally, parody is a major aspect of the metafolkloric process. Both Hoffmann and Brentano use this technique to distinguish themselves from their predecessors and perhaps also to poke fun at the *Volksmärchen*. Brentano parodies such conventions as the law of threes in *Volksmärchen*, as Thalmann notes:

Gockel, Hirkel and Gackelia stand opposite to Eifrassus, Eighelia and Kronorus. The action goes back between Hanau, Gelnhausen and Hennegau. Three Jews try to gain possession of the magic ring. Three times Gockel and Hinkel meet in the ancestral hut (Thalmann 1963:82).

Parody is also conveyed through the work within a work. In Hoffmann's *Nutcracker*, "The Story of the Hard Nut" is filled with parodic commentary. For example, when the magic nut which will cure the princess is found after fifteen years, the word "Crackatook" is engraved on the shell in Chinese letters to verify that it is the much sought-after nut. Another such example is the cure for the princess:

Now this nut Crackatook had a shell so hard that you might have fired a forty-eight pounder at it without producing the slightest effect on it. Moreover, it was essential that this nut should be cracked, in the princess's presence, by the teeth of a man whose beard had never known a razor, and who had never had on boots. This man had to hand the kernel to her with his eyes closed, and he might not open them till he had made seven steps backwards without a stumble (Hoffmann 1967:156).

This outrageous formula goes well beyond the *Volksmärchen*. The ultimate parody comes when Godpapa Drosselmeir's nephew trips over Dame Mouserink on the seventh step—an obvious play on the lucky number seven. Clearly the rules of the *Märchen* are reversed

through Hoffmann's tale within a tale commenting on the nature of the outer form. No critic could deny the degree of artistic fabulation nor the self-conscious parodic play with the conventions of the *Volksmärchen*. As such Hoffmann engages in a dialogue with his folkloristic contemporaries, asserting his supremacy.

Linda Hutcheon's discussion of metafiction can be transferred onto the *Kunstmärchen*, a kind of *metamärchen*:

In self-conscious parodic literature, the reader-character identification circuit is often broken. It is sacrificed in order to engage the reader in an active dialogue with the generic models of his time... By reminding the reader of the book's identity as artifice, the text parodies his expectations, his desire for verisimilitude, and forces him to an awareness of his own role in creating the universe of fiction (Hutcheon 1980:93).

Since the folk audience is missing the parodic elements engage the reader in an active dialogue with the generic models and remind him of his role in creating the universe. As such the written text is partially broken down and the performer-audience process is partially resurrected.

### Conclusion

In summary we have noted that:

1. Three terms are necessary for classifying the tale: folktale (*Volksmärchen*), literary tale (*Buchmärchen*) and art tale (*Kunstmärchen*).
2. *Kunstmärchen* and *Volksmärchen* can be differentiated in terms of formal features. However, this inevitably involves a literary bias.
3. *Kunstmärchen* ultimately have to be defined by their individual authors. Brentano and Hoffmann engage in metafolkloric commentary on the *Volksmärchen* through language play, Romantic irony and parody.

Perhaps Tismar and other Kunstmärchen historians were correct. Ultimately it is too difficult to reduce widely varying types of Kunstmärchen down to any one descriptive category. While formalistic categories may be useful for differentiation, they often involve literary biases. Moreover, the differences in the two media should be a warning to literary scholars, who should not attempt to force oral genres into Procrustean literary beds. And yet, the two forms share more similarities than formerly acknowledged. Perhaps the major differences are sociological and the Kunstmärchen is just a continuation of the Volksmärchen? Ultimately however generic study becomes too reductionistic and hence it is probably safer to pursue an auteurist approach when dealing with literary authors. The best solution may be to take the value-judgements and prejudices out of scholarship. The Märchen, whether Volks, Buch, or Kunst, fulfills an innate human need for both author and audience--which is worthy of exploration on whatever level.

## APPENDIX

### Summaries of Kunstmärchen Cited

#### E.T.A. Hoffmann, **Der Goldne Topf (The Golden Pot)**

**The Golden Pot** first appeared in a collection of fantasy pieces in 1814. It is a many-leveled story that deals with a bumbling student named Anselmus, who falls in love with a golden snake; the two are eventually wedded and return to man's primary paradise in the garden of Atlantis. Two worlds are portrayed in the story: the middle-class world of Dresden and the garden paradise of Atlantis. Anselmus is a copyist of Oriental manuscripts and through his love for Serpentina the snake, he is able to enter the magical garden. His visions, however, are interpreted as madness by the bourgeoisie and Hoffmann tends to deliberately allow for two major interpretations: a supernatural and a psychological one. The Märchen world of witches and earth spirits is transcended in the final chapter where the persona of the author receives a letter from his character, who complains about having his secret identity exposed. This thumbnail sketch cannot do justice to a rich and complex tale that has all the trappings of a reflexive, modernist novel and yet subtly uses all the magical and archetypal folk motifs and characters of the Märchen.

#### E.T.A. Hoffmann, **Nussknacker und der Mausekönig (Nutcracker and the Mouse King)**

Those readers familiar with the ballet will be charmed to discover how rich the original tale is. Written in 1816 as a Christmas gift for his godchildren, **Nutcracker** tells the story of Marie's Christmas gift which comes to life. The story, with its Chinese-box-like structure, is a romantic statement on the artist and his imagination. Moreover the parodic Märchen of Pirlipapp, embedded within the main story, engages the more simple folktale in a dialogue in order to declare the supremacy of high art.

Like most of Hoffmann's works, the plot defies a linear description. It involves the Nutcracker's battle with the King of the Mice and his quest to regain his "human" status. As the tale within the tale tells us, the Nutcracker

was bewitched when he freed Princess Pirlipapp from an evil spell and destroyed the King's mother. In her visions, Marie is able to perceive the Nutcracker's struggle, and helps him to defeat the mice. While her parents think that she is making up stories, Marie has solid evidence from the battle that suggests that what she saw was real. As in many Hoffmann stories, the rigid, limited vision of the adult world is contrasted with the imaginative character of the child. Hoffmann's ambiguous stance suggests his own fascination with the artist's creative powers, which are likened to the madness of a child "making up" stories. A supernatural element is also present in the figure of Godpapa Drosselmeir, an eccentric clockmaker who feeds the children the raw material for their fantasies.

#### Clemens Brentano, **Gockel and Hinkel**

Written in 1815-6, this delightful Kunstmärchen is a more artistic rendering of the Grimm tale #104a ("The Faithful Animals") and the Pentamerone tale, "The Cock's Stone." It tells the tale of Gockel, a former assistant to the King who is banished from the town of Gelnhausen. He returns to his ancestral home and becomes a chicken farmer until he discovers King Solomon's ring in his pet rooster, Alektryo. He and his wife then wish for a huge castle back in Gelnhausen and the whole family is transformed into aristocratic friends of the King. All goes well until three wicked men steal the ring and Gockel and his wife Hinkel are transformed back into peasants. However, with the aid of two mice that Gockel had previously helped, he recovers the ring and transforms his ancestral castle into an aristocratic chicken ranch. The story ends in a self-begetting manner with the wish that they could all become children again and listen to their story told by their resurrected Alektryo.

Brentano expanded the Pentamerone tale from five to eighty-one pages through vivid characterization, description and plot complexity. Moreover, the tale is filled with numerous puns involving chickens and like most Kunstmärchen, it self-consciously looks at the plight of the artist and his creation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bettelheim, Bruno  
1981 Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing. In Fairy Tales as ways of knowing: Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature, ed. M. Metzger, pp. 1-24. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Bleich, Erich  
1909-10 Volksmärchen und Kunstmärchen: Zur Geschichte des deutschen Kunstmärchens. Eckhardt 4:153-65.
- Brentano, Clemens  
1977 Gockel und Hinkel. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- David, Alfred and Mary  
1964 A Literary Approach to the Brother's Grimm. Journal of the Folklore Institute 1:180-96.
- Frye, Lawrence  
1981 Making a Märchen is the Trying Test of Romantic Art, Magic and Imagination. In Fairy Tales Ways of Knowing, ed. M. Metzger, pp. 137-55. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Henningsen, Gustave  
1965 The Art of Perpendicular Lying. Journal of the Folklore Institute 2:180-219.
- Hoffmann, E.T.A.  
1967 Best Tales of Hoffmann. New York: Dover Books.
- Hutcheon, Linda  
1980 Narcissistic Narrative. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried and Laurier University Press.
- Lobeck, Helmut  
1958 Kunstmärchen. In Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 2nd ed., vol. 1, pp. 909-12. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Lunt, Richard  
1968 John Tracy: Tall Tale Teller. Northeast Folklore 10:3-53.
- Lüthi, Max  
1982 The European Folktale. Philadelphia: Ishi.



- Michaelis-Jena, Ruth  
1970 The Brothers Grimm. New York: Praeger.
- Scholes, Robert  
1977 The Nature of Narrative. New York: Oxford Press.
- Seki, Keigo, ed.  
1963 Folktales of Japan. Trans. Robert J. Adams.  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thalmann, Marianne  
1963 The Romantic Fairy Tale: Seeds of Surrealism.  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Thompson, Stith  
1974 The Hearth-Cat. In One Hundred Favorite Folktales,  
pp. 173-76. Bloomington: Indiana University  
Press.
- Tismar, Jens  
1977 Kunstmärchen. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Zipes, Jack  
1977 Breaking the Magic Spell. Austin: University  
of Texas Press.