

Of Monsters and *Märchen*: Figures and Forms through the *Märchen*
Genre

by

TAYLOR DUNCAN BUDDE

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(Dr Mathias Nordvig, Chair)

(Dr Lauren Stone)

(Dr Ann Schmiesing)

Date_____

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Of Monsters and *Märchen*: Figures and Forms Through the *Märchen* Genre
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between the *Märchen* genre and monsters, arguing that a key component of both is a mutable nature that allows them to shapeshift or transform in such a way that destabilizes imposed limitations to each of their forms, and the ability to transform the world around them. Specifically, it analyzes three *Märchen* that contain shapeshifting monstrous figures which are thematically connected to the genre. The first part of the thesis looks at Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, as both critique of the Enlightenment fairy tale's focus on rationality and how Tieck represents in the figure of *die Alte* the ability for art to affect reality. Secondly, it examines Hans Christian Andersen's *Den lille Havfrue* as a representation of the Danish social system and its conception of the way to gain immortality through works. Lastly, this thesis analyzes the Grimms' editorial practice in conjunction with *Hänsel und Gretel* arguing that they have created a hybrid genre of *Märchen* that exists uneasily between distinct categories like the figure *die Hexe* found within it.

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Introduction

“Wie wundervoll sind diese Wesen,
Die, was nicht deutbar, dennoch deuten,
Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen,
Verworrenes beherrschend binden
Und Wege noch im Ewig-Dunkeln finden.”¹

There is something monstrous about the *Märchen* genre.² Beyond housing an innumerable variety of monsters, *Märchen* themselves have the capacity to terrify, inspire awe, and suggest previously unimaginable alternatives to gain a “happily ever after.” They are repositories for communal fears and utopic hopes expressed through the lens of individual storytellers, which have a tenacious resistance to being confined or easily interpreted. The focus of this study is on this last aspect of monsters and *Märchen*. Both seem to have an intrinsic propensity to shapeshift and transform, either by their powers or through the will of their creators. It is this mutable nature that allows them to on one hand resist boundaries of any sort, whether they be formulaic, locational, or realistic, and on the other be so easily adapted to new contexts.

Many scholars outline these aspects in theoretical discussions of what constitutes *Märchen* and monsters which uncannily overlap. Jeffery Cohen discusses the birth of monsters as arising out of “a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” who go to signify “something other than itself” and always changing.³ Along similar lines Max Lüthi claims that “The individual compilers cast the fairy tale in the garb of their time” and that “a significant, constantly reoccurring process is at work: danger and redemption, paralysis and rejuvenation,

¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Tor und der Tod* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1913) 32.

² Throughout this thesis I use the terms *Märchen* and fairy tale broadly as umbrella terms, in the sense that instead of demarcating and defining the multiple different types of *Märchen* (for example *Volksmärchen*, *Kunstmärchen*, *Zaubermärchen* etc.) I will let *Märchen* represent all of them. I will occasionally use a more specific version of the term when necessary.

³ Jeffery Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

death and resurrection.”⁴ David Gilmore notes that monsters are fascinating to us because they “observe no limits, and respect no boundaries” opening up new ways of thinking about the conditions which gave rise to them in the first place.⁵ “Metamorphosis” Maria Tatar argues “is central to the fairy tale, which shows us figures endlessly shifting their shapes, crossing borders, and undergoing change” affecting not just the form itself, but also its audience.⁶ Marina Warner ties both the figure of the monster and form of the *Märchen* together writing “Shape-shifting is one of the fairy tales dominant and characteristic wonders...More so than the presence of fairies, the moral function, the imagined antiquity and oral anonymity of the ultimate source, and the happy ending...metamorphosis defines the fairy tale.”⁷

Shapeshifting and a power to undergo and cause transformations are essential elements for both the *Märchen* genre and monsters. As this thesis argues there is a distinct parallel between their respective forms, I will also parallel their definitions. Both monsters and *Märchen* are forms that incorporate and embody the fears, anxieties, desires, and utopic hopes of the ones who created them. Through their capacity to shapeshift, they paradoxically are forms filled with dangerous potential delimiting spaces of normalcy through their otherness which once questioned, threatens to destabilize cultural or societal structures, yet defy any attempt to be limited or placed with boundaries of any sort themselves. This creates difficulties for any singular approach of interpretation, as being unable to fully understand a nature that is meant to

⁴ Max Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 34.

⁵ David Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Penn Press, 2003), 12.

⁶ Maria Tatar, “Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative,” *Western Folklore* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 55.

⁷ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), XIX-XX.

ambiguous. Because of this they also possess a revelatory nature that opens alternative ways of thinking and challenges the understanding of the world around us.

This thesis will thus examine three separate *Märchen* and the ways their composers represent fears and desires in both monsters and the genre of *Märchen* as shapeshifters, and transform and reconstitute the forms itself.⁸ First, it will examine Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* as a text that critiques the Enlightenment's focus on rationality, which relegates the realm of the fantastic into the background reducing the state of art to a shadow that no longer has the ability to affect reality, before embodying in the form of *die Alte* the *Märchen* genre itself as a shapeshifter that destroys the boundary between the fantastic and the real bringing them together. Secondly, this thesis looks at Hans Christian Andersen's *Den lille Havfrue* as representing the Danish social system Andersen belonged within, turning what it refuses to understand into monsters, and how the monster can overcome its status to gain immortality. Lastly, it analyzes the foundation and enactment of the Brothers Grimms' editorial practice in conjunction with the tale *Hänsel und Gretel* arguing that they have created a hybrid genre of *Märchen* based in an oral tradition and infused with their own ideals, that exists uneasily between distinct categories, mirroring the figure of *die Hexe* found within the tale. In approaching both the monsters that inhabit these texts and the *Märchen* qualities of the texts in the same manner, it will become clear that both are shapeshifting forms that transform not just themselves, but the world around them.

⁸ I use the term composer, as it would be disingenuous to call the Grimms authors per se. Although certainly leaving their mark by editing the tales within the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, none are completely unique products of their imagination.

Section 1: Crossing Boundaries in *Der blonde Eckbert*

First published in 1797 as one of the *Volksmärchen von Peter Lebrecht*, Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* is a text that has caused considerable scholarly disagreement, especially in regard to the figure of the *die Alte* and *Märchen* form of the tale. William Lillyman discusses the former in *Reality's Dark Dream* highlighting the often contradictory ways of approaching and understanding her role in the text.⁹ What becomes immediately clear however is that her ability to shapeshift is almost never a focus of any of the approaches, and when it is brought up is nearly always presented as evidence of Eckbert's insanity and her own non-existence. Ingrid Kreuzer on the other hand looks at the structure of the text itself while also pointing out the numerous ways in which the form has been analyzed in *Märchenform und individuelle Geschichte*, as a fairy tale, horror novella, psychological thriller, and even as a semi-autobiographical text, suggesting that it has "eine fast unübersehbare Zahl von Deutungsversuchen hervorbrachte."¹⁰ Evident in these studies of *Der blonde Eckbert* then is a certain unbound nature present in the figure of *die Alte* and form of the tale not unlike that of a monster. Both defy locational and formulaic boundaries placed upon them through a specific capacity to shapeshift themselves and break through from the realm of fantasy into reality.

This thematization of the fantastic being able to affect reality is, in part, Tieck's response to what he perceives as problem with the Enlightenment's focus on reason, which he wishes to

⁹ William Lillyman, *Reality's Dark Dream: The Narrative Fiction of Ludwig Tieck* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 82-3.

¹⁰ Ingrid Kreuzer, *Märchenform und individuelle Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 163-4. She herself concentrates on a "Strukturen von Weg und Ort" arguing that the text operates as three separate *Märchen*.

challenge with his own *Märchen*.¹¹ Through a series of letters to his friend Wilhelm

Wackenroder from 1792-93, Tieck develops his thoughts on this issue writing in one:

“Ich habe doch...oft dieselbe Dame, wenn sie noch mit nassen Augen aus dem Schauspiele kam, den Bettler mit den härtesten Ausdrücken wegschelten sehen; wozu arbeitet dann der Dichter, wenn die Empfindung nicht wirklich veredelt wird [...] wir tändeln jetzt mit einem Schatten.”¹²

At the beginning of his literary career, Tieck is confronted what the role of the author should be when it appears art has lost its ability to affect reality in a meaningful way, reducing it to an immaterial shadow. Art has lost the ability to challenge its audience. He later goes on to connect this issue with an overreliance on triumphant rationality by the Enlightenment to the exclusion of all else, comparing it to a process of attempting to render everything great and noble that creates “das blinde Ungeheuer Zeit” which will annihilate all of their works.¹³ In particular he sees the form of the *Märchen* as having been particularly maligned by the works of the Enlightenment, through the way writers such as Christoph Wieland and Johann Musäus limited its fantastic elements to brief episodes, where in the end rationalism inevitably triumphs.¹⁴ For Tieck, this runs directly counter to the artistic potential of the form as the power of *Märchen* lie in the way in which they “mischt sich das Liebliche mit dem Schrecklichen, das Seltsame mit dem Kindischen, und verwirrt unsre Phantasie bis zum poetischen Wahnsinn, um diesen selbst nur in unserm Innern zu lösen und frei zu Machen.”¹⁵

¹¹ Jack Zipes writes “All his fairy tales attempted to explode the bounds of instrumental thinking and provincialism... The imagination was set free to explore seemingly limitless possibilities for expression and self-realization.” *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 90.

¹² Ludwig Tieck to William Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1967), 293.

¹³ Ludwig Tieck, “Die Ewigkeit der Kunst,” in *Deutsche Literature*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 1978), 89.

¹⁴ Although *Märchen* are not traditionally associated with the Enlightenment which preferred the more didactic fable or parable, Jack Zipes points out that eventually “fairy tales themselves were being rewritten and watered down with moralistic endings, or they began to serve compensatory cultural function.” *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 17. See also Susan Stickney-Bailey’s *Tieck’s Märchen and the Enlightenment: The Influence of Wieland and Musäus* (Diss., University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 1986) for more information on how Tieck was influenced by Enlightenment writers, and reacts against them.

¹⁵ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 129.

Drawn to the form precisely because its freeing power, Tieck understands *Märchen* as something that has ability to bring the fantastic and realistic together into a totality, such that art no longer remains as a shadow unable to teach or truly affect its readers and is able to change their perception of the world around them. Like monsters, *Märchen* are not things that can be constrained by strict limitations of form, and the destruction of these restrictions reveals something about the world. In *Der blonde Eckbert* he embodies this power into the shapeshifting figure of *die Alte*. Beginning with Berth's tale of her childhood, Tieck first presents a formulaic story that, much like the Enlightenment *Märchen*, separates the real and fantastic with an eventual fulfillment of Berth's desires. Just as importantly Bertha is never aware of *why* she decides every pivotal choice of action, as if the path before her had been predetermined, preventing her from actively changing her understanding of the world or taking in any moral lesson from her experience, in such a way that is representative of the failings Tieck sees as present in the Enlightenment's focus on rationality. Although Bertha ends the tale with her marriage to Eckbert, the *Märchen* continues in the form of *die Alte*, who leaves her realm for Bertha's. From here, Tieck enacts through the figure of *die Alte* a monstrous invasion of the fantastic into the real, blending the two together such that power of the fantastic to affect and change reality is revealed.

1.1: Bertha's *Märchen*

Der blonde Eckbert begins with the introduction of the titular knight and his wife Bertha. Although both keep mostly to themselves, their friend Walther is a frequent visitor, enough so that Eckbert convinces Bertha to tell him the story of her childhood. She agrees but asks him

“Nur haltet meine Erzählung für kein Märchen, so sonderbar sie auch klingen mag.”¹⁶ Bertha is fully aware that her story is one that greatly resembles that of a *Märchen* and chooses to preempt any questions about its veracity. Before the story even begins then, there is an expectation that the fantastic elements of Berth’s childhood are somehow incompatible with reality, which must be addressed. A tension seems to exist between ideas of the real world in which the story is told and its resemblance to the form of a *Märchen*, but that it should be treated as realistic, already elevating the rational world over the fantastic. Although, she asks for the tale to be treated as “kein Märchen” the very necessity of asking creates a sense of uncertainty about its nature, suggesting there is something monstrously ambiguous about it that Bertha wishes to hide by downplaying the fantastic elements.

This tension between the *Märchen* form and its realistic elements is expressed constantly throughout Berth’s tale. She begins it with:

Ich bin in einem Dorfe geboren, mein Vater war ein armer Hirte. Die Haushaltung bei meinen Eltern war nicht zum Besten bestellt, sie wußten sehr oft nicht, wo sie das Brod hernehmen sollten. Was mich aber noch weit mehr jammerte, war, daß mein Vater und meine Mutter sich oft über ihre Armuth entzweiten, und einer dem andern dann bittere Vorwürfe machte. Sonst hört’ ich beständig von mir, daß ich ein einfältiges dummes Kind sei, das nicht das unbedeutendste Geschäft auszurichten wisse, und wirklich war ich äußerst ungeschickt und unbeholfen, ich ließ alles aus den Händen fallen, ich lernte weder nähen noch spinnen, ich konnte nichts in der Wirthschaft helfen, nur die Noth meiner Eltern verstand ich sehr gut.¹⁷

The description immediately resembles the opening of a fairy tale. Through the use of past tense and it taking place in a “Dorf[],” it presents both the structure and frequent opening staging associated with the form, as a way of establishing poor social conditions that will later be overcome.¹⁸ Bertha, with her current lack of knowledge and skills to help change the situation

¹⁶ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 146.

¹⁷ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 146.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2 of Jack Zipes’ *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

falls directly under many of the “Unpromising Heroine” motifs prominent in *Märchen* as outlined by Stith Thompson in *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*.¹⁹ Structurally, the passage is almost archetypal by its use of setting and motifs in establishing the opening to a fairy tale in which Bertha is the central stock figure. In only looking at these particular aspects, the tale perfectly represents the structure and form of a fairy tale opening.

What follows and is continued until Bertha concludes her tale is a formulaic *Märchen* in almost every way. She leaves home and travels through a forest, eventually finding herself in the fantastic realm of *die Alte*. Once there she learns spinning and how to read, all while taking care of *die Alte*’s dog and singing bird which lays eggs filled with gems. After a number of years Bertha steals the bird and returns home to marry the knight Eckbert, after which she ends her story.²⁰ Combining motifs from a wide range of folk narratives and following a stock fairy tale structure, Bertha’s tale is unrecognizable as anything but a *Märchen* with a happy ending. However, while the form is that of an almost too perfect fairy tale, the tone of the descriptions is of a far greater and more realistic detail that would normally be found in one based solely out of an oral tradition.

What Bertha’s tale lacks is a certain matter of fact nature generally associated with *Volksmärchen*, as the structure is paired with highly realistic descriptions.²¹ It is not just that Bertha’s family does not know where they will get their next meal from, but also that the situation is dire enough for her parents to “oft über ihre Armuth entzweiten” and “bittere

¹⁹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, Vol. 5 (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1957) 6-16.

²⁰ Although similar to many *Märchen*, Bertha’s travels and return greatly resemble tales of Frau Holle in the figure of the *die Alte*, who lives in an enchanted area with talking objects who tests children that come to her, rewarding those that work hard and punishing those that are lazy. The treasure producing bird can be found in stories of the English Jack who steals a golden egg laying goose from a giant, and which Tieck was likely familiar with through his studies of Shakespeare who quotes *Jack and the Beanstalk* in *King Lear*.

²¹ Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 41.

Vorwürfe machte.” Bertha is not simply “dumm” but called “ein unnützes Geschöpf” by her father, for her inability to help the situation.²² Even after leaving her home, Bertha’s journey through the forest and mountains is presented in realistic terms where the word “Berg” alone frightens her and “die Felsen wurden immer furchtbarer... in der Nacht hörte ich die seltsamsten Töne, bald hielt ich es für wilde Thiere, bald für den Wind, der durch die Felsen klage, bald für fremde Vögel.”²³ Nature itself takes on a strange and terrifying quality, due to her own lack of experience and can only be explained with adjectives such as “furchtbar” and “fremd” creating a sense that the *Märchen* structure is wholly alien or even antagonist to reality. There is a disconnect between what needs to happen for the tale to be a *Märchen* and the actual experience of progressing through one, with the fairy being relegated to the background to give way for almost hyper real descriptions of what is happening. However, this ends once Bertha arrives in the realm of *die Alte*. While she lives within this world, it only at first that she find the fantastic elements around to be strange, such as the bird that sings a poem and the form of *die Alte*, before “nun war mir, als müßte alles so sein, ich dachte gar nicht mehr daran, daß die Alte etwas Seltsames an sich habe, daß die Wohnung abentheuerlich und von allen Menschen entfernt liege, und daß an dem Vogel etwas Außerordentliches sei.”²⁴ Even the supernatural space of *die Alte* is more of a quickly forgotten novelty than a place that deeply affect Bertha in any way. Presenting a clear separation between the realm of *die Alte* and the one which Bertha comes from, not unlike the way in which Enlightenment authors such as Wieland and Musäus create barriers between the real and fantastic in their own fairy tales, Tieck limits the fantastic elements to an episode

²² Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 147.

²³ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 148-9.

²⁴ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 153-4.

where the protagonist acquires the means to change their material conditions, but does not take with them anything that changes their understanding of the world.

Although Bertha's tale appears as one in which a heroine has overcome the supernatural to gain a happily ever after, she does not understand how she arrived at this point, as every choice she makes is done without her knowing why she has made them. Her entire journey is predicated on leaving home, but her choice to do so is made "fast ohne daß ich es wußte," just as her decision to steal the bird forms as if her "Vorhaben schon vor mir stände, ohne mich dessen deutlich bewußt zu sein."²⁵ Because her tale is "kein Märchen" Bertha attempts to impose a rationality on the steps of her journey that are normally never explained in fairy tales. Her struggle arises from her inability to accept the fantastic on its own terms. Instead, she purposely downplays its resemblance to a *Märchen* and finds that reason is inadequate to explain everything in the story. Because of her refusal to look beyond the rational she cannot understand when *die Alte*'s tells her "wenn man von der rechten Bahn abweicht, die Strafe folgt nach, wenn auch noch so spät."²⁶ Bertha does not heed her warning but seems to connect it with bird. It is here that she chooses to steal the bird and return to her parents; during her journey home she begins to think "mehr und mehr als jemals fühlt' ich, daß ich Unrecht gethan hatte."²⁷ In this moment, it is revealed that for all her time with *die Alte* Bertha has only managed to change her material existence. She has not come to understand her world as anything different than it was before, taking with her only a feeling that she has done something wrong but not why or what causes the feeling. Her final act before meeting Eckbert and ending her tale, is to kill the bird,

²⁵ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 148, 157.

²⁶ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 156-7.

²⁷ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 161.

severing the last tie she had to the fantastic. With its death, Bertha has fully succeeded with separating the real from fantasy.

The use of the *Märchen* form appears as a means to an end to have rationality suppress any ambiguous acceptance that not everything can or should be easily explained. Returning to Tieck's letters to Wackenroder, this is precisely the monstrous problem he sees as prevailing in Enlightenment influenced works. For Tieck, the use of reason over all else cannot represent something which has the power to teach or change the conditions of reality. Without the fantastic, what is "real" becomes stagnant, unable to imagine different views or ideas that might let it grow and expand to reach new conceptions of what "real" can be. It lacks a true foil, such that what it produces can only be a reflection of itself. Because of this, an artistic approach that holds up reason more than anything else cannot create the "poetischen Wahnsinn" that frees the mind present in the form of the *Märchen*, and as demonstrated in Bertha's tale actively prevents any chance of this happening. The monstrosity Tieck thus sees, is a cage, a set of limitations and boundaries that prevents the monstrous power of the *Märchen* from being realized.

1.2 *Die Alte* Breaks Through

In concluding her tale, Bertha marks the traditional endpoint of the Enlightenment fairy tale. This is what should be the triumphant moment of reason as the means through which she acquired her wealth and marries Eckbert. However, while Bertha believes her time in the *Märchen* world to be over, this proves not to be the case. *Die Alte* has left her realm to make good on her warning that when one strays from the right path, punishment will follow no matter how long it takes. Where the story of Bertha's childhood was a critique of the Enlightenment fairy tale, what follows is an invasion of the *Märchen* embodied in the figure of *die Alte* that breaks through into reality.

When the text first introduces *die Alte* Bertha notices right away that there is something “wunderlich” about her “Stimme” and “Wesen.”²⁸ It is not just *die Alte*’s voice and being that are remarkable as Bertha later discovers “Indem ich sie so betrachtete, überlief mich mancher Schauer: denn ihr Gesicht war in einer ewigen Bewegung, indem sie dazu wie vor Alter mit dem Kopfe schüttelte, so daß ich durchaus nicht wissen konnte, wie ihr eigentliches Aussehn beschaffen war.”²⁹ While the first aspects did not frighten Bertha, the fact that she cannot actually grasp what she looks like is disturbing enough that it makes her shudder. What is singled out as being either “wunderlich” or causing “Schauer” are specific elements tied to fairy tale. The adjective “wunderlich” is very often used in descriptions of and within *Märchen*, which draws attention the fact Bertha seems to have found herself in a fairy tale world. However, that it is used to specifically describe the “Stimme” and “Wesen” of *die Alte* suggests that that there is something also like a *Märchen* in her in her form, literally her “Wesen,” and her whimsical voice matches a tone commonly associated with the fairy tale. There is also her age, which on one hand is also associated with the *Märchen* genre, and on the other causes her head to shake so much Bertha has no idea how to determine her “eigentliches Aussehn,” as though through her great age she has lost a defined form.³⁰ It is this aspect that is of particular importance for us here, as we discover later in the text *die Alte* has the ability to shapeshift, and that her unsettled form is one of unlimited potential for her to transform, as well her immortal nature. Returning to Tieck’s own thoughts on the powers of the *Märchen*, she blends in her form the “Liebliche mit dem Schrecklichen, das Seltsame mit dem Kindischen,” such that she can create the “poetischen Wahnsinn” absent in Enlightenment fairy tales. What *die Alte* appears to be then is a direct

²⁸ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 151.

²⁹ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 152-3.

³⁰ See footnote 7.

embodiment of the of the *Märchen* genre and its powers. She is the rebuke to the Enlightenment fairy tale, in that she, like *Märchen*, refuses to be contained in her own world and invades Bertha's own.

Because *die Alte* is a monstrous living embodiment of what Tieck sees as the power of the *Märchen* form, she is able to break through the barriers imposed on form by Bertha in her tale and affect the world around her. Unknown to both Bertha and Eckbert, their friend Walther is *die Alte* who mentions the name of the dog from Bertha's tale, which she herself could not remember, and afterwards begins to grow cold towards the two, shunning their friendship. Bertha becomes ill because of this, telling Eckbert "Ein gewaltiges Entsetzen befiel mich, als mir ein fremder Mensch so zu meinen Erinnerungen half."³¹ The invasion of *die Alte* into their world, has resurfaced memories for Bertha, as if the world of the fantastic comes rushing back to her and she can no longer rationalize it. Eckbert also falls under the power of the *die Alte*, growing paranoid that "Walther" now aware of their treasure will attempt to steal it. While out hunting one day, they encounter each other and "ohne zu wissen was er that legte er an" Eckbert shoots and kills Walther.³² Like how Bertha acted not of her own accord to follow the fairy tale structure, it now seems to be imposing itself on the real world. Once he returns home, Eckbert finds that Bertha has died and "hatte vor ihrem Tode noch viel von Walther und der Alten gesprochen."³³ Although never explicitly stated, it is likely that Bertha had discovered the truth of Walther being *die Alte*, the realization of which lead to her death.

Alone now, Eckbert becomes even more of a recluse and "daß ihm sein Leben in manchen Augenblicken mehr wie ein seltsames Märchen, als wie ein wirklicher Lebenslauf

³¹ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 164.

³² Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 165.

³³ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 165.

erschien.”³⁴ The real world is now receding into the background, with the seltsam[] overpowering the wirklich[], reversing the process carried by Betha in her tale. *Die Alte*, as the embodiment the fairy tale, is directly enacting and showing the power of art to affect reality which can only be done in the bringing together of the real and the fantastic, blurring the lines between the two. Eckbert finds that he cannot escape or go back to the way things were before. Once affected by the “poetischen Wahnsinn” that frees one’s mind, there is no way to go back to a more limited understanding of the world. He discovers this after fleeing from *die Alte* in the form of Hugo, the first friend he had made in years as he transforms before Eckbert’s eyes into Walther. However, he runs so far that he arrives in the realm of *die Alte*, who drives him insane to the point of death, through the revelation the Bertha was his half-sister. In the end, Eckbert has been fully subsumed and destroyed by the monstrous power of the *die Alte*. This is the danger present in freeing power of the fantastic. Tieck does not moralize with his conception of *Märchen*, merely describing how they challenge in ways that have the potential to be both helpful and harmful. They are freeing, opening alternatives ways of understanding the world and can even break down the barrier between the fantastic and real, but that does not mean one will like everything they learn, and once the door has been opened it cannot be shut again.

Lillyman writes of the text that it appears as “a puzzle to which there is no solution.”³⁵ However, if we are to understand the text as a *Märchen* embodied in the figure of *die Alte* who brings together the fantastic and real, this may in fact be the point. Instead of offering a clearly defined moral or lesson to be taken away from the text, it is left ambiguously open. It is the presentation of a challenge that cannot be understood rationally, resisting structures of

³⁴ Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1828), 165-6.

³⁵ William Lillyman, *Reality’s Dark Dream: The Narrative Fiction of Ludwig Tieck* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 89.

understanding that would attempt to constrain the text in some way. The text creates an intentional struggle to draw meaning from it, asking the reader to imagine new ways of understanding. Like how the shapeshifting nature of the *die Alte* allows her to affect the world of the real, Tieck's construction and use of the *Märchen* form, is one that breaks through the boundaries of the text reconceptualizing what a fairy tale is, and what it can do to affect its audience.

Unbeknownst to Tieck at the time of its publication, *Der blonde Eckbert* would go on to break through yet another barrier, by enacting his desire for art to affect reality not just in the text, but for Tieck himself. Often called the "King of the Romantics," Lillymann points out that through his *Märchen* Tieck had "elevated the fairy tale to the central genre of German Romanticism" with some marking the publication of *Der blonde Eckbert* as the beginning of German Romanticism.³⁶ Tieck's transformation of the *Märchen* form is not just one that challenges the Enlightenment fairy tale, but one that upends expectations of fairy tale themselves, suggesting through the figure of *die Alte* an unlimited potential of form and expression present within *Märchen*. It is this conceptualization that seems to draw Tieck to the form in the first place, and the one he passes on to those he would come to influence.

³⁶ William Lillyman, *Reality's Dark Dream: The Narrative Fiction of Ludwig Tieck* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 77-8.

Section 2: Andersen and the Monster's *Märchen*

Throughout his life Hans Christian Andersen was obsessed with acquiring fame. At times, it appears he would suffer any real or imagined slight so long as it served the purpose of attaining an immortality through his art. That he felt he suffered to do so, was deeply tied to his lower-class birth and upbringing which very often was the driving force behind his artistic output. Elias Bredsdorff notes in his biography that “Andersen’s background was, from a social point of view, the lowest of the low: grinding poverty, slums, immorality and promiscuity.”³⁷ The social conditions of his class, marked him forever as an outsider to those that had power to grant him the fame he craved, creating near insurmountable barriers of entry. Because of this, Andersen mirrored himself in his own works, as a living embodiment of his own social differences that was unfairly maligned or misunderstood by those above him.³⁸ Unable to cast off his status as an outsider, Andersen turned to the *Märchen* as a form through which he could represent his own social conditions and outline alternative ways of gaining immortality. Jens Andersen in his own biography of Andersen states that “he invoked the human right to use the fairy tale and, through the retelling, to refine it.”³⁹ Stemming from a long history of use and adaptation and filled with stories of protagonists who are treated as outsiders, Andersen suggests ways not connected to social classes to find his own “happily ever after.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Elias Bredsdorff, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Story of His Life and Work, 1805-75* (London: Phaidon, 1975), 16.

³⁸ In Andersen’s own words “Most of what I have written is a reflection of myself. Every character is taken from life.” Quoted in Sven Rossel, *A History of Danish Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 233.

³⁹ Jens Andersen, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 247. Because they share last names and this biography is extensively drawn from, I will always use Jens Andersen’s full name to differentiate him from Hans Christian Andersen.

⁴⁰ Andersen in his stories often portrayed an upper aristocratic class as selfish or arrogant, with protagonists who struggle to accepted. In particular see his *The Swineherd*, *The Nightingale*, and *The Gardener and the Lord and Lady*.

As a *Märchen*, *Den lille Havfrue* departs from traditional stories of water spirits as dangerous beings attempting to drown humans, as the tale is told from the perspective of the monster.⁴¹ The mermaids' status as monsters stems not from an intrinsically threatening nature, but through an unintelligibility between themselves and humans. They are monsters of the human failure in transforming what we do not—or refuse to—understand into monsters. In her essay “Contrastive Values in Hans Christian Andersen’s Fantastic Stories,” Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru notes that Andersen often challenges traditional *Märchen* oppositions in this text such as these writing “they are revitalized according to the perceiving subject...and the poles of the opposition coexist and alchemically turn into each other.”⁴² Andersen thus embodies his own dissatisfactions towards the Danish class system and desires for fame in the figure of the little mermaid as a misunderstood monster, criticizing the social stratification and the limited ways one could overcome it.

2.1: Monstrous Misinterpretation and Unintelligibility

First published in 1837, Andersen presents the world of *Den lille Havfrue* as a highly stratified one. There is a distinct separation between the humans that live on land and the sea folk who are perceived as monsters that live beneath the water. The mermaids inhabit a dangerous space that is unclear for humanity due to its inability to survive beneath the water for extended periods of time. This in turn seems to connect the mermaids not only with their liminal space, but also its dangerous power. In order to create a dialectical approach to the question of human vs.

⁴¹ Although aware of Fouqué’s similar *Märchen Undine*, Andersen disliked the ending, and that it relied too much on chance. See Maria Tartar’s *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 120.

⁴² Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru, “Contrastive Values in Hans Christian Andersen’s Fantastic Stories,” in *Hans Christian Andersen: A Poet in Time* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999), 437. Although she does not discuss the shift between human and monster, this dichotomy plays an intrinsic role in the tale, as one of the many oppositions that are played against each other.

monster and challenge the social order he finds himself apart of, Andersen adapts narratives of mermaids from a Germanic tradition. Mermaids were considered dangerous beings representing a capricious nature of the sea, taking human beings both as lovers and luring them to their deaths through their beautiful appearance and song.⁴³ Andersen uses these motifs as a way of establishing the sea folk as both monsters and misunderstood beings. For example when the fifth sister visits the surface, she encounters a group of ships during a storm “og alle Seilere krydsede forskrækkede uden om, hvor hun sad og lod Blæsten flyve med sit lange Haar... Paa alle Skibe tog man Seilene ind, der var en Angst og Gru, men hun sad rolig paa sit svømmende Iisbjerg og saae den blaa Lynstraale slaa i Zikzak ned i den skinnende Sø.”⁴⁴ There is a gap between human and mermaid here, with the sailors terrified of the mermaid’s presence, viewing her as a water spirit tempting them to their deaths as the storm rages around them. Whether from previous experience or foreknowledge from stories they have heard the sailors view her as a threat.⁴⁵ In contrast to this the sister is entirely unafraid, more curious about the situation, calmly watching both the ships and storm. There is no malicious intent behind the action of the mermaid, only a “serene” interest in what is happening due to her lack of understanding toward the situation. The sailors are never actually in danger from the mermaid but have an inability to grasp her intentions and thus view her as a threatening figure.

Occasionally all five of the older sisters rise to the surface together that further delineates differences based in knowledge:

⁴³ For a more in-depth discussion of water spirits in the Germanic tradition see Bengt Holbek and Iørn Piø’s *Fabeldyr og sagnfolk* (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1967), 55-98.

⁴⁴ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 107-8. “and all the ships seemed terrified, giving her a wide berth as she passed... The sails were taken in on all the ships, but amid the general horror and alarm, the mermaid remained serene on her drifting iceberg, watching the blue lightning bolts zigzag down toward the glittering sea.” Taken from Maria Tartar’s *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*, 129. All subsequent translations of *Den lille Havfrue* are taken from this edition.

⁴⁵ Much of the reading audience was also likely familiar with stories of dangerous water spirits that give the sailors pause.

naar det da trak op til en Storm, saa de kunde troe, at Skibe maatte forlise, svømmede de foran Skibene og sang saa deiligt, om hvor smukt der var paa Havets Bund, og bade Søfolkene, ikke være bange for at komme der ned; men disse kunde ikke forstaae Ordene, de troede, at det var Stormen, og de fik heller ikke Deiligheden dernede at see, thi naar Skibet sank, druknede Menneskene...⁴⁶

Here again Andersen plays off folkloric conventions of mermaids, having the sisters, with voices he describes as being more beautiful than any human's, appear during a storm as what is sure to be an ill omen for the sailors. However, they come not to entice the sailors to their deaths but to tell them about the beauty of the world beneath the sea should they sink. The gap between human and mermaid widens through a continued misunderstanding of the mermaids. Those on the ship do not understand their song or intentions, tying them to the power of the storm finding no comfort in their singing. For them, the sight of mermaids always portends some sort of harm, as an embodiment of sea's dangers in all its possible forms. On the other hand, the sisters' comfort is ultimately a false one as they seem to not understand "visiting" their wondrous realm is a death sentence for the sailors through no fault of their own. But as we discover later mermaids are able to understand the speech of humans, suggesting there a way to overcome the miscommunications between them. However, they are never afforded an opportunity to learn more about the world above them, as the humans avoid any attempt to communicate with them. Although there are ways for a mermaid to bridge the gap between them—which we will return to later—at the present moment in the text the differences between human and monster appears artificially insurmountable, in particular due to the fear expressed towards the mermaids no matter the beauty of their productions.

⁴⁶ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 108. "If a storm was raging and they expected shipwreck, the sisters would swim in from of the vessels and sing seductively about the delights found in the depths of the sea. They told the sailors not to be afraid to go down there, but the sailors never understood the words they sang. They thought they were hearing the howling of the storm. Nor did they ever see the beauty promised by the mermaids, because when their ships finally sank, the sailors drowned..." (131).

This separation of language is immediately present in the first words of the tale “Langt ude i Havet,” that the sea folk are the liminal others in relation to humans.⁴⁷ Even though the story is told primarily from the little mermaid’s perspective, the unknown narrator and presumed audience must imaginatively travel to a separate realm, framing the story in terms of someone who lives on land. The passage continues with describing the depth of the sea kingdom in terms of church steeples, which are completely absent below, creating a dependence on language that its inhabitants cannot access.⁴⁸ In fact, nearly all descriptions of the sea kingdom are compared with or put in relation to that of the human world. For example, later when the Little Mermaid asks for more information about the world above, her grandmother is forced to adjust her descriptions to make them understandable. She changes *Fugel* to *Fisk* “for ellers kunde de ikke forstaae hende, da de ikke havde seet en Fugl.”⁴⁹ To paraphrase Wittgenstein “The limits of their language mean the limits of their world.”⁵⁰ Although both humans and mermaids suffer from an inability to communicate with one another, the sea folk are at a constant disadvantage in the expression of language. The human world’s terminology is given priority, whether via the narrator in describing the world of the sea kingdom in terms of the surface or via the constraints placed on how knowledge is imparted to and through the lens of its inhabitants. This leads to the mermaid’s curiosity that cannot be fully satisfied or properly expressed in their own terms. Because they are viewed as monsters to be feared and avoided, they are never afforded the opportunity to overcome this particular challenge.

⁴⁷ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 100. “Far out at sea.” (120).

⁴⁸ The absence of church steeples is also a physical representation of Christianity, highlighting the pagan nature of the mermaids, who are later revealed to lack an immortal soul.

⁴⁹ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 102, 105. “because otherwise, the little sea princess, having never seen a bird, would have no idea what she was talking about.” (127).

⁵⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Cosimo Books, 2007), 88.

In many ways the relationship between human and monster mirrors Andersen's own understanding of the Danish social system at the time, which he was uniquely able to observe. As many scholars point out Andersen became the first "proletarian" artist in Denmark to achieve success and from roughly 1825 on was counted among the Danish elite, many of whom he saw as arrogantly depreciative of the lower-class.⁵¹ For all their education and access to recourses, Andersen viewed them as profoundly unable or refusing to see the beauty in the works of the class he was born into. In particular, language played a significant role in this separation, as provincial dialects were mocked and seen as unable to produce true art.⁵² This almost certainly included the *Märchen* Andersen had grown up with, which would have been maintained orally in their own local speech. Brought together this mirrors the social stratification often seen and expressed in Andersen's texts and *Den lille Havfrue* in particular.⁵³ He disguises in the maligned *Märchen* form an upper-class that utterly fails or refuses to recognize a separate class of beings drawing a line between them which they are "intent on maintaining."⁵⁴

By shifting the perspective to that of the mermaids, Andersen thus illuminates a process of creating monsters. Because we see that mermaids are benign—even benevolent—beings their status as a monster is given to them by humans through their own failings. They misinterpret the arrival of the mermaids as an extension of the storm which also makes their singing unintelligible. There is no recognition of the beauty inherent in the sea folk and their world, only feelings of terror and desire to avoid them. This causes the sailors and human world to fear the

⁵¹ Jens Andersen's, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 64-100 and Sven Rossel's *A History of Danish Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 228-237.

⁵² See Jens Andersen's, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 60.

⁵³ For example, this is also thematically present in Andersen's 1882 *The Apparition at Palnatokes Grave* where a deacon's wife becomes trapped in a bog and believes the provincial fiddler who saves her to be the devil.

⁵⁴ Jens Andersen's, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 33.

mermaids and treat them as monsters intentionally preventing any meaningful communication between the groups, directly paralleling Andersen's own views of the social stratification in Denmark.

2.2: Transgression of Boundaries and the Possibilities for Immortality

The Little Mermaid is fascinated by the human world. She, unlike her sisters, never grows tired of observing its wonders. This interest only grows after her first trip to the surface: “Meer og meer kom hun til at holde af Menneskerne, meer og meer ønskede hun at kunne stige op imellem dem; deres Verden syntes hun var langt større, end hendes... Der var saa meget hun gad vide”⁵⁵ For her, the world above is one of a literal vastness which far exceeds the space and limitations of her own. She wishes to experience the mountains, forests, and fields that are absent beneath the sea, but cannot due to her status as a monster. Lacking legs and viewed with fear it appears impossible for her to ever rise out of the water with any permanency. Most troubling for the little mermaid though is that humans have an immortal soul, which all mermaids lack. As her Grandmother explains to her, they will live around 300 years but upon death turn to “Skum,” (Foam) while humans will rise above to a world “dem vi aldrig faae at see.”⁵⁶ Stopped not only from leaving the sea, mermaids simply become a part of it after dying, unable to ascend to the level of humanity in their afterlife. The only way for them to gain a soul, the little mermaid's grandmother tells, is when a human loves her enough to let ““Præsten lægge sin høire Haand i din med Løfte om Troskab her og i al Evighed, da flød hans Sjæl over i dit Legeme og du fik

⁵⁵ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 115. “The mermaid grew more and more fond of human beings and longed deeply for their company. Their world seemed far vaster than her own... There was so much she would have liked to know.” (138).

⁵⁶ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 115-6. “that we shall never see.” (139).

ogsaa Deel i Menneskenes Lykke.”⁵⁷ However, because they are viewed as monsters and are anatomically incompatible, this is according to the grandmother, an impossible thing to achieve.

As noted by Dan Andersen and Jens Johansen this mirrors Danish social structure at the time—arranged marriages included—as “[o]ne of the criteria for deciding social status is the possibility of estimating the extent of social mobility, and this seems to have been very restricted.”⁵⁸ This also has the effect of bringing members of the lower-class to the level of that of the mermaids. Unable to rise the social ladder via marriage, both are consigned to forever remaining locked within their worlds as nameless avoided entities and eventual “Skum” denied the chance to acquire any immortality afforded to class above them.

Unwilling to accept her lack of soul, the Little Mermaid travels to the *Havhexe* (sea witch) to find a way to join the world above.⁵⁹ The process comes with a warning however ““(M)en det gjør ondt, det er som det skarpe Sværd gik igjennem dig. Alle, som see dig, ville sige, du er det deiligste Menneskebarn de have seet!... hvert Skridt du gjør, er som om du traadte paa en skarp Kniv, saa dit Blod maatte flyde.”⁶⁰ The process of shapeshifting into a human is one of terrible and constant pain for the Little Mermaid, who will suffer with every step she takes in their world. No matter her beauty, she must bear a constant reminder that she does not belong above the sea, to which she may never return. If she fails in her task to marry the prince, she will

⁵⁷ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 116. “the priest places his right hand in yours with the promise of remaining faithful and true here and in all eternity—then his soul would glide into your body and you too would share in human happiness.” (140). This again returns to the misunderstanding between human and mermaid, as the Grandmother describes the process of a marriage ceremony, without seeming to understand its significance.

⁵⁸ Dan H. Andersen and Jens Chr. V. Johansen, “Economy and social conditions,” in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 494.

⁵⁹ The Sea Witch is also a monstrous figure within the text, however, as she does not shapeshift or transform, she is not the focus of this thesis.

⁶⁰ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 120. “But it will hurt. It will feel like a sharp sword passing through you. Everyone who sees you will say you are the loveliest human child they have ever encountered... every step you take will feel make you feel as though you are treading on a sharp knife, enough to make your feet bleed.” (143).

die at the following sunrise. Shapeshifting also costs the Little Mermaid verbal expression through the loss of her tongue, giving up what was previously described as the most beautiful part of herself. Where before she could at least sing and be understood by her sisters or to herself, she will now be completely without the ability to communicate verbally. Internally nothing has changed. She still remembers her life, saving the prince, and her desire for a soul, only now hidden in a new form. What is lost in this process is her outward status as a monster. She no longer has the ability to describe her own experiences, in particular the pain and sacrifices she made to become human, or present alternative understandings of the world, but can now be accepted by those above her. That the Little Mermaid can lose the traits that define her as a monster, questions the designation and further reveals the its artificial nature borne out through human failure. Differences between human and monster are shown to be mutable, through the act of shapeshifting, and thus the apparatuses that kept the Little Mermaid away and distinct as a monster are destabilized.

Accepting the *Havhexe*'s terms, the Little Mermaid can expand the limits of her existence though the act of shapeshifting herself into a human. After being found by the prince she joins him in the world above, where regardless of her inability to communicate, "Alle vara henrykte derover."⁶¹ Through her beauty and graceful movements she, in turn, fascinates humans and grows close to the prince who decrees that she accompany him everywhere, which allows her to experience the "duftende Skove" and "høie Bjerge" that so enamored her below the sea.⁶² After years of waiting, she may finally explore the "vastness" denied to her as a mermaid. The chance to learn more about her new surroundings, is worth even the cost of constant pain when walking

⁶¹ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 126. "Everyone was enraptured." (147).

⁶² H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 126. "fragrant woods" and "high mountains." (147).

and not being able to speak. For a time, the *lille Havfrue* has found a more utopic existence, exploding the boundaries and potentialities of her life.⁶³

No matter how enchanting the *lille Havfrue* may be however, her mute status prevents romantic feelings between her and the prince that would grant her a soul. If anything, the prince sees her as something akin to a pet. She is a curiosity that he has sleep outside his bedroom on a “Fløiels Pude” and for whom he has a boy’s riding outfit made, never viewing her as autonomous or anyway sexual being.⁶⁴ There is an immaturity of the prince in that in during his one-sided conversations with the *lille Havfrue*, he describes her as his greatest friend and admirer, as if he only enjoys her company because it validates his own being. Andersen himself experienced this sort of behavior with his patrons. Often staying in their homes, he was surrounded by wealth and opulence but was expected to perform his stories for visitors. However, when he was brought out to meet with guests they frequently mocked him for his provincial accent and manners as well as tying the stories he performed as arising out of his lower-class birth.⁶⁵ No matter his literary success, Andersen was constantly viewed as an oddity, an exception that proved the rule of social divide, seemingly kept around and supported as a means of entertainment and occasional validation of the separation between classes.

Only once does the prince mention even the possibility of a marriage between them during a conversation about the girl he believes saved him years ago from drowning, who “var den eneste, jeg kunde elske i denne Verden.”⁶⁶ Because of her inability to explain it was in fact her

⁶³ As noted earlier this parallels Andersen’s own rise to fame. Through his writing he had become much like the Little Mermaid as seemingly the first member of his class to rise up socially and observe the world above him. See footnote 14.

⁶⁴ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 126. “velvet cushion” (147).

⁶⁵ Jens Andersen’s, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 59-60. Although

⁶⁶ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 127. “is the only one in the world whom I could ever love.” (148).

that saved him, the Little Mermaid is unable to prevent the prince from reuniting with this girl, who become engaged. Where before the price of her voice seemed to be bearable, it has now condemned her to death the following morning. Her challenge to overcome the sacrifices and monstrous transformation she made to become human is a failure born out through the impossibility of the task.⁶⁷ Moments before death, her sisters arrive and offer her a way out: kill the prince and become a mermaid again. She refuses this however, choosing instead to die rather than return to her former limited existence as a monster. However, because of this selfless act and the beauty she created in the world, she does not die. Instead she finds herself transformed into one of “Luftens Døttre” (The Daughters of Air) who explain to her ““Naar vi i tre hundred Aar have stræbt at gjøre det Gode, vi kunne, da faae vi en udødelig Sjæl og tage Deel i Menneskenes evige Lykke.””⁶⁸ Having failed to find a way to overcome her limitations as a human being and gain a soul, the Little Mermaid is given the opportunity to earn one through good deeds of bringing more beauty into the world. Through another process of transformation agency is returned to her hands. No longer dependent on the human world, it is through works and not marriage that she can attain her ultimate goal: immortality.

Many have found a certain strangeness about this conclusion which has caused significant disagreement in how to interpret it.⁶⁹ Most point out the fact that the text seemed to be leading up to an unhappy ending for the Little Mermaid, and some argue her transformation into a daughter of air is disingenuous or even an artistic cop-out to tack on a happy ending for

⁶⁷ Andersen never married during his life and likely died a virgin struggling throughout his life with his own sexuality. Jack Zipes notes this as well writing “He recorded his disappointments in the women and men of his real life in almost all of his works, and he often portrayed himself as the ‘victim’ of unreciprocated love.” *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17.

⁶⁸ H. C. Andersen, *Eventyr og Historier*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reikels Forlag, 1873) 133. “the daughters of the air” and “Once we have struggled to do all the good we can in three hundred years, immortal souls are bestowed on us, and we enjoy the eternal happiness humans find.” (153).

⁶⁹ Jacob Bøggild and Pernille Heegaard provide an excellent overview of these views in “Ambiguity in Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Little Mermaid’,” in *Andersen and the World* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993).

children. However much like a monster, the ambiguity and difficulty of interpretation may in fact be the point. At the time of its writing Andersen stood at crossroads in life where no matter how hard he tried he could never fully succeed in not being viewed as an outsider. Although having some success which raised him—at least partially—out of his lower-class origins, he is still never truly accepted. Deeply dissatisfied with this impossibility of integration, Andersen envisions an alternative path to obtaining lasting fame not based in one's social class. That number of years the Little Mermaid must perform good deeds as a daughter of air coincides with the average lifespan of a mermaid is no coincidence, as he considers a possibility to gain the immortality of fame through a lifetime's worth of one's own beautiful works. The ending is not necessarily a "happy" one, rather it suggests a potential path of finding one through transformation, which bypasses layers of limitations that had formerly prevented it from being realized.

Andersen conceptualization of gaining immortality through works is a highly prescient one. Acting on the suggested path to fame as outlined by the end of the *Den lille Havfrue*, he produced a prolific number of *Märchen* throughout his life, publishing 163 tales before his death in 1875. As noted by Jackie Wullschläger 1845 in particular was a turning point for Andersen as *Den lille Havfrue* along with other *Märchen* were first translated and published in English finding immediate and lasting popularity.⁷⁰ In fact he became so internationally successful that at least ten of his later tales were first published in English not Danish.⁷¹ Through the form of the *Märchen*, Andersen has untethered himself from reliance on Danish society, transforming into a writer that reached a global audience, becoming like a Daughter of the Air in spreading beauty

⁷⁰ Jackie Wullschläger, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 262-80.

⁷¹ See the introduction to Jean Hersholt's *The Andersen-Scudder Letters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

throughout the world. In a letter to his friend B.S. Ingermann Andersen himself states the success of his *Märchen* has allowed him to “take flight,” metaphorically elevating himself into the air as a freeing gesture that he may now write what he wishes.⁷² More than even this, Andersen found through his *Märchen* the fame he so desperately sought, it is the transformative medium that gains him a literary immortality intrinsically tying his own name to that of the fairy tale genre.

Den lille Havfrue, both the character and *Märchen*, are monstrous. They embody and enact the social forces and differences in class Andersen feared, which prevented him from being viewed as anything but an outsider to the world above. The Little Mermaid’s very existence and capacity to shapeshift into something other than a monster, reveals the arbitrariness of the system that marked her as one at all, threatening to destroy it simply by showing its non-essential artificially constructed nature, paralleling Andersen’s own views and experiences within the Danish social system. In doing so, they also embody utopic alternatives, suggesting another way through transformation and work that overcome one’s given social status Andersen creates through them possibilities and new paths to break out of the constraints placed upon him, leading both the Little Mermaid and himself to immortality. Monsters and *Märchen* are vital and necessary for Andersen because they become an alternative way to save himself and his own works from becoming “Skum” relegated to the ocean of forgotten artists’ works after his death.

⁷² Quoted in Jens Andersen, *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 266.

Section 3: The *Buchmärchen* of the Brothers Grimm

Within the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (hereafter referred to as *KHM*) of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, one will find a multitude of monsters. From giants to dwarfs, the tales are filled with supernatural and dangerous figures that imperil or help the people who encounter them, often through a process of shapeshifting and transformation. Whether via a careless comment, witch's curse, or talking animals, in the *KHM* characters are altered into something non-human or exist in a state between them as hybrids. What is unique of the *Märchen* compiled in the *KHM* though, is a particular ambiguity that is expressed not just in the monstrous figures that inhabit them, but also extends to the form of the tales themselves. As Maria Tatar writes about this relationship "The magic spells cast by witches, ogres and fairies have a habit of transforming not just a single character, but an entire universe."⁷³ Directly enacting the shapeshifting and transformations they describe in monstrous figures, this process of changing the tales is a reflection of the fears and hopes they had for the *KHM*. Through a specific practice of editing, the Grimms brought together and altered tales they feared would be lost and wanted to preserve, with a particular literary style which could save it and like the monsters they portray resist easy categorization.

One of the most well-known tales of the *KHM* for example, *Hänsel und Gretel*, is highly representative of this process. All versions contain essentially the same story beats: a brother and sister are abandoned in the woods due to their father and mother's fear of starvation. Eventually they find their way to a house made of food inhabited by a witch, who then captures and plans to eat them. The witch is tricked by the children and burned alive, allowing the pair to return home with newfound wealth. However, through these versions extensive details are edited to create, in

⁷³ Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 57.

the view of the Grimms, a more perfect form of the tale. The following will examine the figure of *die Hexe*, who shapeshifts via editing into a monster that mirrors the fears and desires of the Grimms for the *Märchen* genre.

3.1: Editing as Practice

To understand why the Grimms edited the tales of the *KHM* and how monsters played a role, I will outline why they felt compelled to collect and edit them in the first place, and how this practice creates monstrous hybrid genre. It seems, the Grimms were interested in saving what they viewed as natural and pure expressions of a German *Volk*, a certain *Poesie* that belonged to all German speaking peoples, which at the time they see as being forgotten in part due to contemporary misappropriation of the material. In a letter to Achim von Arnim from 1811 Jacob outlines his thoughts on this, claiming that *Naturpoesie* is something that arises out of “*das Ganze*.”⁷⁴ It is something that both naturally emanates from itself and represents in simple language the community that cultivates it. In contrast to this is *Kunstpoesie*, which is intrinsically tied to authors and hides its origins through a complexity of language. They are representative products of authors and not communities. It is only by collecting and preserving the *Naturpoesie* they feel, that it will be able to survive.

This act of collecting was not only one based in a fear of losing the *Naturpoesie*, but also one of hope that it would help define a sense of what it meant to be German in a yet to be united Germany.⁷⁵ Because the Grimms saw *Naturpoesie* as a reflection of the community, existing continuously through an oral tradition, its language could be studied to rediscover a purely

⁷⁴ Quoted in Gunhild Ginschel, *Der junge Jacob Grimm* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967), 40.

⁷⁵ At the time of Jacob's letter to Arnim, there is no Germany per se, just a collection of kingdoms and states that all share a language, parts of which—including Kassel where Jacob was living at the time—were still under French control from the Napoleonic Wars.

German culture. This is in part why the Grimms would omit tales they had collected or received if they felt it did not stem from a German tradition or came from literary invention.⁷⁶ After the publication of the first edition of the *KHM*, the Grimms continued to search for new tales or variations on those they already had to expand and further define this “Germanness.” To do so Jacob in 1815, with help from Wilhelm, distributed a *Circular wegen der Aufsammlung der Volkspoesie*, which asked for:

Sagen in ungebundener Rede, ganz besonders sowohl die vielfachen Kindermährchen von Riesen, Zwergen, Ungeheuren.... Überglaube von Geistern, Gespenstern, Hexen.... Es ist vor allem daran gelegen, daß diese Gegenstände getreu und wahr, ohne Schminke...aufgefaßt werden... Denn es können alle der andern Abweichungen, Wiederholungen und Recensionen einer und derselben Sage im Einzelnen wichtig werden...wie den auch manches, was modern erscheint, oftmals nur modernisirt ist, und seinen unverleßlichen Grund unter sich hat.⁷⁷

Noticeably, *Märchen* and the monsters that inhabit them are singled out as desirable as part of this project. In their forms, the Grimms saw a direct representation of fears and anxieties of a German *Volk*, as well as the values and morals that could defeat them. Both the monsters and tales they hoped to collect were part of an unbroken tradition that stretches as far back as the German language and is therefore indispensable for defining what it meant to be German. Therefore, variations are singled out and must be recorded as exactly as possible. Even seemingly modern inventions may contain a kernel of truth. It is through finding and studying a wide range of versions would someone be able to come to a more complete understanding of its inner workings and the culture shaped it. The Grimms, through their understanding of

⁷⁶ For example, after the first edition the tale *Blaubart* was omitted for too closely resembling the French literary fairy tale *Barbe Bleue* of Perrault, and the *Fee* in *Rapunzel* becomes a *Zauberin*. Additionally, specific German versions of tales coming from areas of French occupation are given precedence as they are at the highest risk of being corrupted or lost.

⁷⁷ Jacob Grimm, *Circular wegen der Aufsammlung der Volkspoesie*, ed. Ludwig Denecke, Afterword Kurt Ranke (Kassel Brüder Grimm-Museum, 1968), 3-4.

Naturpoesie, recognize the malleability of the both the *Märchen* genre and the monsters, and it is because of this mutable nature the German culture could be discovered.

What this meant was while an individual tale might have dozens of regional variations, it still arose from the same natural source. These variations are to be expected—even desired—because they reflect the values of said community. A witch in one version of a tale may be a wolf in another, but as both arise from a *Naturpoesie* both are equally important for understanding the culture that created them. It is in the similarities between the witch and the wolf that the cultural fears and values can be gleaned, while the differences speak to the specific community's expression of these fears and values. In practice, this means the Grimms would edit tales they found to be sufficiently German by combining versions of them together while stylizing the language, hybridizing them to create a purer example that speaks to a wider understanding the German soul.⁷⁸ All variations they received of any tale are considered as part of a greater whole. If turning them into hybrids better expressed its true nature, then this would create a more ideally German *form* of the tale.

But this process is still one of selection by the Grimms. They are the arbiters of what constitutes a Germanness within a tale and would omit unsavory details or add ideals they thought *should* be part of an ideal German heritage. For example, in the 1819 second edition of the *KHM* Rapunzel no longer becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and the king who wishes to marry his daughter in the tale *Allerleirauh* is told by his advisors that “Gott hat (daß) verboten.”⁷⁹ As these changes are not part of other existing versions of the tales, the removal of sex outside of wedlock and adding a religious condemnation of the king are conscious decisions

⁷⁸ Jack Zipes writes about this practice in *The Brother Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* noting “Paradoxically, they sought to recapture truths by changing and synthesizing different versions they collected over time.” (32)

⁷⁹ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1819), 68 and 357.

made by the Grimms. The German past they wish to reconstruct is infused with their own values and becomes a moralistically Christian one that may not contain adulterous or incestuous behavior.⁸⁰ This process of sanitation and moralization becomes an intrinsic part of the editorial practice of the Grimms.

Writing in the *KHM*'s second edition, the Grimms align their editing to that of the “halb unbewußten” poetic reshaping carried out by those that have preserved the tales.⁸¹ In their minds, they are not editing the essential qualities of the tales, but creating versions that are revitalizing the *Naturpoesie* of Germany.⁸² This is contrasted to the works of *Kunstpoesie* which they liken to Midas: “Die geübte Hand solcher Bearbeitungen gleicht doch jener unglücklich begabten, die alles, was sie anrührte, auch die Speisen, in Gold verwandelte, und kann uns mitten im Reichthum nicht sättigen und tränken.”⁸³ Viewed as such, the Grimms see something in the way artists have taken up and adapted *Märchen* that is monstrously destructive. *Kunstpoesie* as a synthesis is obscuring its origins in the *Naturpoesie*, threatening to permanently subsume it and this is what the Grimms hope to overcome. Through their editorial practice of hybridizing the variations of tales into a new form and style however, they transformed their *Mächen* into a new monster. Belonging fully to neither an oral tradition or the Grimms’ own literary invention, they have created a genre of *Märchen* that uncannily resembles the monsters within it, as a form that

⁸⁰ Just two examples among many, very generally the Grimms removed anything that even suggests sexuality outside of a marital context, and added, often religious, censure to actions they found distasteful but could not remove.

⁸¹ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1819), XVII.

⁸² This has caused some scholars to see the Grimms as intentionally misrepresenting their own work and practice. See John Ellis’ *One Fairy Tale Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), where he accuses the Grimms of “fraud and deception” and Donald Ward’s critique of Ellis “New Misconceptions about Old Folktales” in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

⁸³ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* Band 1 (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1819), XIX.

combines various oral narratives with the Grimms' fears and hopes for the tales and pushes back against easy categorization.

3.2: *From Brüderchen und Schwesterchen to Hänsel und Gretel: Shapeshifting die Hexe*

Present through all seven of its editions as well as the 1810 Ölenberg manuscripts, *Hänsel und Gretel* was recorded by the Grimms before they formulated their editing practice, making clear how they enacted it.⁸⁴ The form of the *die Hexe* is emblematic of this hybridizing process. Within the versions of the text, she does not shapeshift herself, but is instead hybridized by the Grimms as they transform the tale through the editions of the *KHM*. As a monster, she is always a physical expression of fears and dangers, but changes from a figure defined only by her status as a *Hexe*, to a therianthropomorphic being connected to the Grimms themselves.

The earliest written example of *die Hexe* by the Grimms is *Das Brüderchen und das Schwesterchen* which was collected from an oral source for a project their friend Clemens Brentano was working on. Because the Grimms were merely recording the tale, not editing it for their own future publication, it contains a simplicity of language and plot absent in its later reiterations. *Die Hexe* is introduced after the brother and sister begin eating her house made of bread:

Die Kinder erschracken sehr: bald darauf kam eine kleine alte Frau heraus, die nahm die Kinder freundlich bei der Hand, führte sie in das Haus, und gab ihnen gutes eßen, und legte in ein schönes Bett. Am anderen Morgen aber steckte sie das Brüderchen in ein Ställchen, das sollte ein Schweinchen seyn...⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Heinz Rölleke, *Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm* (Cologne-Geneva: Martin Bodmer Foundation, 1975) 9-14, 70-81. The Ölenberg manuscripts contain the earliest recorded versions by the Grimms of some of the tales later found in the *KHM*.

⁸⁵ Rölleke, *Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm*, 74. It is not until the end of the tale when she is thrown into the oven that she is almost offhandedly referred to as *die Hexe*.

Die Hexe here is a monstrous representation of the fears of starvation that caused the parents to abandon the brother and sister earlier. Her cannibalistic intent is tied to this act of abandonment, for if the parents are to have enough food to eat, they must leave their children to be eaten. She is a cautionary figure of what risk of starvation will drive a person to do to survive as well as the real dangers that could be found in forests, i.e., to be eaten. These sorts of fears are not just products of the imagination but grounded in daily experiences finding expression through the form of the witch as monster.⁸⁶ It is also through her, that the brother and sister find their salvation. As part of her nature is expanding the possible, this extends to the children in tricking her to burn to death. By overcoming their fears (literally killing them) through their own industriousness and clever tricks, they are rewarded with the precious stones found inside her house allowing them to return home to their father and live without worry of starvation again.⁸⁷ This returns to the transformative function of monsters, in that after being defeated the limitations imposed on the slayers beforehand are also overcome, allowing for better conditions to be obtained. The brother, sister, and their father have now achieved a wealth that secures them a more comfortable life. The form of the witch as a monstrous embodiment, is more than just a living being that stands in for fears grounded in lived experiences, but also one creates the conditions for a utopic return, understandable to anyone who has been subject to the possibilities of starvation.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Maria Tatar notes when discussing *Hänsel und Gretel* in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* that these types of tales “originated in an age marked wars, plague, and famine” and thus often reflect a view point of being subjected to these conditions. (73).

⁸⁷ Upon returning the mother is found to have died. As it was her idea to abandon the children in the first place condemning them to die in the forest so that she will not starve, she is thematically connected to the witch’s death.

⁸⁸ Jack Zipes discusses this in *Breaking the Magic Spell* that folktales are to be highly understandable to a community. Heroes and monsters are meant to be put in relation to the social conditions of the mostly agrarian communities which spawned them. (50).

With the publication of *Hänsel und Gretel* in the 1812 first edition of the *KHM*, which changes the name of the tale and is twice as long as the one they recorded in the Ölenberg manuscripts, the Grimms do not change these qualities of the witch. For them it is vital that these fears and hopes that belongs to the German *Naturpoesie* remain intact. The editorial changes they do choose to make though, infuse the tale with new meaning through a form and style that crystalizes the witch as one that specifically belongs to a German people as defined by the Grimms.

Things left unsaid, such as why the witch wants to capture children at all in *Das Brüderchen und das Schwesterchen*, are now made more explicit, but also filtered through their understanding in how best to retain the tone of the earlier version while expressing their own literary style. The most obvious change made by the Grimms is that now the titular Hänsel and Gretel are abandoned and defeat the witch. Like “Jack” for the English or “Ashlad” in the Scandinavian tradition, they are the stock characters that appear again and again in *Märchen* and are a naming convention that marks a tale as being German.⁸⁹ No longer an unnamed brother and sister, the pair are now transformed into heroes that belong to a specifically German cultural history. Their abandonment and journey to the witch has been hybridized with a national character. Recalling their claim that that *Kunstpoesie* is Midas-like in leaving the audience “starved,” the parents abandonment has now taken on the dual meaning of leaving both their children and heritage to die. The introduction of the witch continues this process of reflecting the mission of the Grimms:

⁸⁹ The 1857 7th edition of the *KHM* has at least eight tales where a “Hans” plays a major role in the narrative and is part of the title.

Die Alte aber war eine böse Hexe, die lauerte den Kindern auf, und hatte um sie zu locken ihr Brodhäuslein gebaut, und wenn eins in ihre Gewalt kam, da machte sie es todt, kochte es und aß es, und das war ihr ein Festtag.⁹⁰

Again, the witch remains the monstrous cannibal that speaks to an early German people's struggle with starvation but is stylized by the Grimms who immediately identify her as monstrous figure acting with sinister intent to make her a more direct agent in capturing the children. From the 1837 edition on, the Grimms add that she is also "gottlos[]," paired directly against Hänsel and Gretel who are given multiple instances of additional dialogue appealing to God to help them.⁹¹ As they are now direct links to the German people, the witch in threatening to eat the children becomes an conscious attempt to construct her as a pagan threat to the German heroic figures and unconscious expression of the Grimms' own fears towards the forces they see as preying upon and "eating" the German *Naturpoesie*. Whether through monstrous artistic over-stylization or as a foreign invader, the witch is made to embody those that Grimms see as suppressing or destroying the potential for a recapturing a heritage belonging to every German.

But if Hänsel and Gretel are to be heroes to the German people, the witch must also be transformed to a monster to the German people. Beginning in the 1850 6th edition of the *KHM* the Grimms add the following to the description of the witch "Die Hexen haben rothe Augen und können nicht weit sehen, aber sie haben eine feine Witterung, wie die Thiere, und merkens wenn Menschen heran kommen."⁹² Witches in general have been transformed into therianthropomorphic beings, made more monstrous and less-human as a hybrid existing

⁹⁰ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* Erstausgabe 1812 Band 1 (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1812) 55. This passage remains the same through the 1837 third edition. Two minor changes occur in the 4th and 5th edition of the *KHM* where "locken" becomes "herbei zu locken" in the former and that *die Alte* "hatte sich nur so freundlich angestellt" in the latter.

⁹¹ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* Band 1, 3. Auflage (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1837) 93-101.

⁹² Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* Band 1, 7. Auflage (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1857) 84. The tale has ballooned in length through addition such as these growing from 1967 words in the first edition to 2684 in this edition.

between human and animal with supernatural powers. These are also aspects of witches found in other tales, combined to create a more German monster. That all witches have red eyes comes from the *KHM* tale *Jorinde und Joringel* while the animalistic qualities likely stem from a Swabian variant of *Hänsel und Gretel* they had received where the witch is replaced with a wolf.⁹³ By hybridizing different attributes of witches from different regions of German speaking peoples, the Grimms create more internal consistency in the form of the witch, effectively flattening it out across certain tales of the *KHM*. The witch of *Hänsel und Gretel* thus becomes connected to wider conceptualization of witches arising out of an especially German tradition. Although similar tales exist in other countries about abandoned children encountering and overcoming a dangerous figure, The Grimms have attempted to codify a version that defined by its Germanness.⁹⁴ For them, *die Hexe* is *the* witch of Germany expressing the distinct qualities of a German culture that speaks to its fears and hopes, and not those of any other nation.

At the same time, the overcoming of the witch takes on this new context. The utopic return of Hänsel and Gretel is now combined with the hopes the Grimms' had for the *KHM*. As a manifestation of the forces which threaten the *Naturpoesie* of Germany, the witch—once defeated—creates the possibility of saving it. The Grimms take on the industriousness of Hänsel and Gretel by exploring the transformative possibilities present in of the tales. The defeat of the witch is the defeat of the embodiment of the destructive forces aligned against the *Naturpoesie* of Germany, and the change of circumstances that will allow it to survive. Again however, this cannot be fully disentangled from the Grimms themselves, as the German history they are

⁹³ Rölleke, *Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm*, 79. Wolves are very often the antagonist in the tales, the most famous coming from *Rotkäppchen*.

⁹⁴ Classified under the Aarne-Thompson index as type 237 "The Children and the Ogre," *Hänsel und Gretel* is very similar to other tales of this type such as *Molly Whuppie* from England or *Askeladden som stjal sølvendene til trollet* from Norway.

attempting to save, is the history they wish it to be. Their hybridizing editorial process becomes the method of tricking the witch into the oven as it were, presenting its own utopic path which remains true to the form and spirit of the cultural history they wish recapture, combined with a style that appeals to wide reading audience insuring its future popularity.⁹⁵

What the Grimms have created is a monstrous figure and genre that becomes difficult to categorize. That many scholars struggle with whether to look at the *KHM* as a collection of folk or fairy tales, they often use the term *Buchmärchen* as a hybrid term between the two, or phrase them as belonging to a *Gattung Grimm* shows the difficulty and lack of agreement in defining these texts.⁹⁶ Maria Tatar writes that “The tales in the *Nursery and Household Tales* seem to lead an uneasy double life as folklore and literature.”⁹⁷ This “uneasy double life” is precisely the quality that makes the both the witch and tale so monstrous. Existing between conceptions of human, animal, and supernatural it becomes impossible to explicate her in terms of any single aspect. This is mirrored directly in the form of the text itself, existing between a communal oral tradition, stylistic conventions that are found in other tales, and the Grimms’ own personal additions. What this creates is an interpretive difficulty, as any purely literary, historical, psychological, or anthropological approach will be resisted by its hybrid nature, pushing against any attempt to come to an understanding of itself that ignores its multifaceted nature.

As a monstrous figure the witch as a hybrid operates on distinct levels. The first comes from her origins in oral tradition as a figure, as a communal manifestation of the fears based in

⁹⁵ Success in this sense occurred after the publication of the *Kleine Ausgabe* in 1825, a collection of fifty tales they saw as exemplary with illustrations and without the scholarly notations. This selection of tales saw immediate success and went through ten printings during the Grimms’ lifetimes, which validated to themselves their practice of collecting and editing. See Jack Zipes, *Grimm Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms’ Folk and Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 33-57.

⁹⁶ See Tatar *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* for a more in-depth look of how the *KHM* has been categorized. (32-35).

⁹⁷ Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 32-33.

lived experience through starvation or famine. The second is that the Grimms wish to have her represent as not just a witch, but the witch of the German people. In reconstituting her form with depictions from with witches from other tales, they embody in her their own fears and utopic dreams of preserving the cultural heritage of Germany. Lastly, through their practice of hybridizing the witch, the Grimms have also hybridized the text itself, creating a *Märchen* that resists categorization. The text like the monster, cannot be said to belong solely to the oral tradition of a “folk” community or as existing as pure literary invention of the Grimms. This leaves the tales in a suspended state between what are normally considered distinct forms, and which like the monsters they contain, rebuke attempts to limit themselves as belonging wholly to any single one. The interpretive difficulty this created did not just play out in an academic vacuum, as Linda Dégh points out that many of the invented motifs and ideas of the Grimms found their way into oral narratives, becoming in a sense retroactively “authentic.”⁹⁸ Even beyond this the immense popularity the *KHM* acquired has led to their tales being disseminated around the world, adapted over and over again in different cultural contexts that take up the work of the Grimms themselves by infusing the tales and monsters with their own hopes and fears.

Monsters and *Märchen* are vital for the Grimms. Without them they would not be able to carry out their mission of recapturing the German *Naturpoesie*. Because of the shapeshifting aspect of monsters, the Grimms feel they are able to record and reconstitute the various monsters present within the tales together into a hybrid form that is more representative of the German people as a whole instead of individual regional expressions. Like *die Hexe* of *Hänsel und Gretel*, the tales of the *KHM* also have a mutable nature, with which they frame and give form to the fears and utopic desires of both the oral tradition which spawned them, and the Grimms

⁹⁸ Linda Dégh, “What did the Grimm Brothers Give and Take to the Folk?,” in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 66-91.

themselves. This propensity for shapeshifting present in both the monsters and tales of the *KHM*, ask us to question to why and how we have created categories like folk, literature, human, animal, hero, nation, and monster. In doing so they constantly opens alternative avenues of approach, for as soon as we seem to grasp them, they slip out of hands and transform into something new.

Conclusion

In *Der blonde Eckbert* Tieck represents two different sorts of monstrosity. The first through Bertha's tale, in which brings the form of the *Märchen* under the power of rationality at the cost of the everything else, leaving her completely unable to take from her time with *die Alte* any sort of lesson and only changing the materiality of her life, not her perception of it. This is the Enlightenment fairy tale that brings forth the "blind monster of time" destroying all its works, because it cannot affect reality through realism alone. The second is through the embodiment of the fantastic power of *Märchen* within the shapeshifting form of *die Alte*, who invades the realm of the real, bringing it together with fantastic in such a way that it can affect reality. Through this act, Tieck suggests the *Märchen* and monsters cannot be contained to fantasy alone if it is to affective, while reconceptualizing and revitalizing the form itself.

Andersen, in *Den lille Havfrue*, adapts folkloric motifs of dangerous water spirits representing the Danish social divide between classes in the figures of the mermaids as misunderstood monsters. Their status as monsters is brought on by the human world's failure in refusing to understand them as benign and artistic beings. That the Little Mermaid finds a way to become human through terrible sacrifice, brings to light the arbitrariness and cruelty of her status as a monster, directly mirroring Andersen's own experiences with the Danish upper-class. In the end, the Little Mermaid is given a chance at obtaining the immortality she seeks by completing a lifetime's worth of beautiful works. Far from a tacked on happy ending as some have described it, the ability to gain immortality through a prolific output of works is what Andersen perceives as an alternative path to gaining the immortality of fame he craved, which he later successfully enacts through the *Märchen* genre.

For the Brothers Grimm, monsters and *Märchen* are vital in their project to save and preserve the *Naturpoesie* of Germany, as the records and direct representations of the fears and

hopes of the German people. They find their mutability of particular importance, as this allows them to establish motifs they see as rising out of a purely German tradition and hybridize them together within the the *KHM* in order to express tales and figures that represent a wider conception of the German people. This editorial process can be traced through the changing versions of *Hänsel und Gretel* in the form of *die Hexe*, who reveals that the Grimms not only hybridize the tales with a more German character and literary style, but also with their own conceptions of what the German character that is represented *should* be, adding to the texts in a way that they become linked to themselves. Via this editorial practice the Grimms have not only made *die Hexe* more monstrous, but have hybridized the text as well, creating a tale that exists uneasily between an oral folk tradition and literary invention which resists interpretation.

There is something monstrous about the *Märchen* genre. Through its mutable nature and capacity to shapeshift it continues to live on today, still filled with monsters that reveal our fears, desires, hopes, and dreams for a better life. One aspect of monsters that has not yet been discussed is that, as Jeffery Cohen puts it, they “always escape.”⁹⁹ No matter how many times a monster is slain, they will always return after having transformed themselves, becoming a repository for the fears and hope of a new age. This too is present in the *Märchen* form. With every new way of creating art, the fairy tale rises up adapting itself to any medium and pushing against new boundaries that expands the possibilities and potentials of the form and medium. It comes as no surprise then that all three of the texts continue to live on today in both their original forms and transformed ones, having been adapted into plays, operas, films, comic books, and television shows. Along the way they create new interpretive problems that force those who encounter them to question why they have returned. The longevity of both monsters and

⁹⁹ Jeffery Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

Märchen, is a direct result of their shapeshifting and transformative natures, which not only allow them to adapt to new “cultural moments” but continue to break through their boundaries and change the world around them.

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