**The Brothers Grimm**

Historical and Biographical Context Related to the famous work *Children's- and Household Tales*written by the Brothers Grimm

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Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1786-1859) were well known German scholars who collected and assembled folklore into documented fairy tales. In order to understand their adaptation of these folk tales, one must first understand the history, social movements, and motivation behind their work.

As children, Jacob and Wilhelm played games that might have seemed peculiar to other children. Jacob often liked to organize the many old items that were scattered throughout the Grimm's attic, while Wilhelm liked to sort through the collection of insects that he and his brother collected together. These activities foreshadowed their "*Sammlergeist*" ("collector spirit") as well as their tendency to work together. This tendency they possessed lead them to collect and organize folk tales, folk songs, myths, legends, children's games, proverbs, epic poetry, and put together a German dictionary during their adulthood. (Kamenetsky 12)

Along with their natural tendency to sort and collect, the Grimm brothers were deeply influenced by Romanticism, a social movement brought on by the Enlightenment. Romanticism was in full  swing during the brothers' lives and created a new interest in culture, tradition, and the people of Europe. Many German Romantics wanted to create a unique identity for Germany by compiling things such as its history, language, and folklore. Jacob and Wilhelm contributed to this creation of identity, with their most famous work being *Kinder- ind Hausmärchen*or *Children's- and Household Tales.* This work was published for the first time in 1812 and was revised many times after.

*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*was a compilation of folktales directly gathered from German peasants. Romantics viewed peasants as being close to nature and God. Their pure and simple way of living was considered a treasure, and they were known for having strayed less from tradition than other social classes. This made them the best and most accurate sources for Jacob and Wilhelm to collect folklore from.

Historically, folktales were originally used for adult entertainment. The Brothers Grimm compiled these folktales together for two main reasons. First and foremost, they were attempting to organize German culture in a way that could be studied effectively. Each story and any deviants that were recorded were included in the collection. Their intention was not to state that there were similarities between stories, but to display these similarities in a way that was undeniable to the reader. Secondly, they intended these stories to be entertainment for children. This followed Charles Perrault's example, who made the "fairy tale" genre popular.

Knowing these few background details about the creation of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* gives insight into many components of the compilation. Using this information can lead to an intelligent analysis of the work and can open doors into further exploration.