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FAIRY GRANDMOTHERS :

Images of Storytelling Events in Nineteenth-Century Germany

Typical nineteenth-century German images of elderly female storytellers capture them in the act of relating *Märchen* to young children. When these images reached a mass public, they reinforced the idea of a timeless female oral tradition. As researchers of oral tales hardly ever recorded any actual female storytellers, the images belonged for the most part to a romantic myth of Germany's past. Towards the end of the century, artists started to produce more realistic paintings of female storytellers. This coincided with the growing popularity of fairy-tale books which were indeed mostly read to children by women.

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The Storyteller in the Journal

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the German illustrated family journal *Die Gartenlaube* published a number of prints (mostly wood engravings) which had storytelling as their subject (listed in Wildmeister 1998). Apart from their captions, these prints were only occasionally accompanied by an explanatory text; they were not so much illustrations as free-standing art. They functioned not just as visual entertainment but, when based on actual paintings, also helped readers to acquaint themselves with art they might otherwise not have access to. When this kind of image appeared in a storybook, it was usually a frontispiece; that way it can be considered as part of a frame tale, or even as its substitute. Unconnected to a book, however, prints of narrators and their audience acquired a certain independence. They thus give a very strong signal of storytelling without books, especially when they do not show the

storyteller reading or reciting - as is, for instance, the case in Gustave Doré's frontispiece to the very popular Perrault tales of 1862. The *Gartenlaube* prints thus invite questions about their historicity. Seemingly showing a realistic event (without fairies, dragons or castles floating in the air), they would have been seen in the same manner as other images of everyday activities in the journal: something readers could relate to and connect with their sense of German life. But without further verification, the prints become images first and foremost of a certain notion of storytelling.

In this exploratory essay the *Gartenlaube* storytelling prints are examined as evidence of, as historian Peter Burke termed it, "the stereotypical yet gradually changing ways in which individuals or groups view the social world, including the world of their imagination" (2001, 183). The tail end of this statement is essential, for it identifies pictorial material as part of people's way of looking at the world and not necessarily as evidence of some 'historical reality'. Images are part of the 'social construction' or perhaps better: the cultural construction of people's reality, of the way certain groups and individuals comprehended their world, they are "testimonies ... of past ways of seeing and thinking" (185). As a matter of fact, the history of storytelling itself may be as imaginary as the artists' depictions of it, as will be outlined below.

Images cannot be seen within a historical vacuum; furthermore they are embedded in a (more or less stable) artistic tradition. Here I will primarily document the latter, and juxtapose it with descriptions (or the lack thereof) of the practice of storytelling. What this eventually reveals about the worldviews of the artists, their clients, or indeed the editors and readers of *Die Gartenlaube*, has to remain oblique, or at least tentative (see in general: Belgum 1998). This is because these worldviews were not solely informed by these images, and because the former have to be seen as malleable, as adaptive to specific social situations. To describe the interplay between encompassing entities and localized meaning goes far beyond the scope of this essay. Yet to arrive at some kind of analysis it is pertinent to describe the prints in some more detail. So far, I have counted six storytelling images. While this number remains modest, it nevertheless suffices to both identify storytelling as a subject that was familiar to the magazine's public and as a series to be analysed by the later historian.

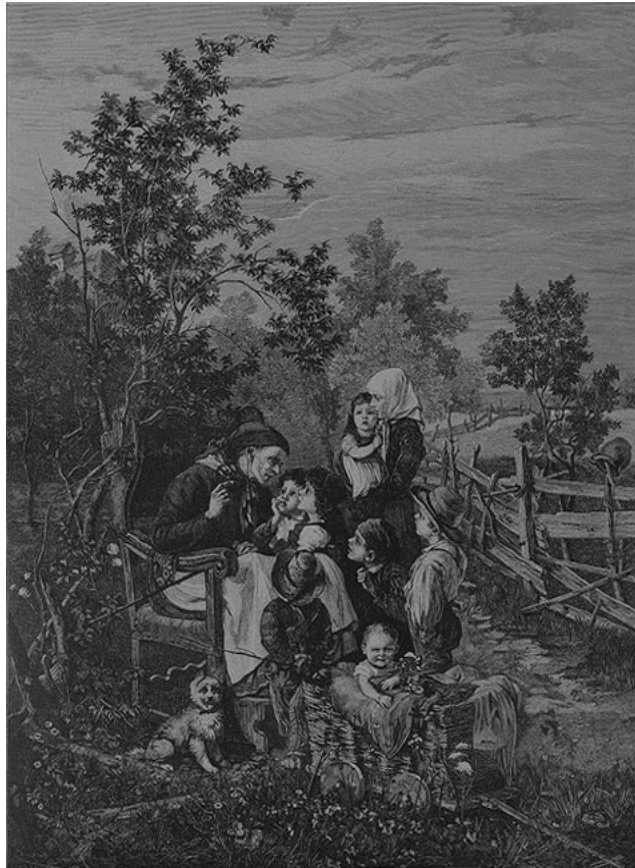


Fig. 1. Julius Adam, Märchenerzählerin, *Die Gartenlaube* 1875, 77.



Fig. 2. Ludwig Katzenstein, Die Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm bei der Märchenerzählerin Frau Viehmann in Niederzwehren, *Die Gartenlaube* 1892, 505.

A description of the prints in temporal order can establish recurrent as well as rare features.

The series starts with what turns out to be something of an exception because of its exotic content: a print after a painting by Anton Robert Leinweber (1845-1921): *Die Märchenerzähler in einem tunesischen Kaffehaus* (The storyteller in a Tunisian café): an old man standing with outstretched arms in a high-ceilinged room, captivating the audience sitting around him (*Die Gartenlaube* 1875, 77). The next print, however, draws the viewer squarely into German cultural life. The *Märchenerzählerin* (fig.1) after a painting by Julius Adam (1852-1913) is set in a rural landscape: a dirt track runs between an orchard and a fenced-off field. On the verge of the road someone has placed an enormous chair with a footstool. In this chair sits a peasant woman of advanced age, her right hand raised and her left in her lap, still clutching her walking stick. Her head is turned towards the two children closest to her; they are hanging on her every word with their elbows leaning on her lap. In front of her stand three boys, who are also fully attentive to the storyteller. At her side is a young woman, wearing a headscarf and with a little girl in her arms. A baby in a cart and a dog are facing away from the woman (1882, 361). A few pages later in the journal, the accompanying text offers a few more clues: the orchard is called a garden, the woman a grandmother, and her story is described as 'something scary' (1882, 372).

Hermann Kaulbach's (1846-1909) *Es war einmal* (Once upon a time) is again unusual as it is situated in some undetermined past. It also concerns another rare male storyteller who is sitting on a chest in front of a door. He is clad in medieval looking, fur-trimmed clothes and wears very pointed boots. His elbows are resting on his thighs and the palms of his hands are turned to the boy in front of him, as if to illustrate a particular twist of the plot. A young girl sits on a stool next to him, with half her back turned to the viewer. Other children are either sitting or standing. They carry toys; one boy a sword and another a crossbow, the girls a doll, some knitting and a tea pot; they have obviously interrupted their play to gather around the man and listen to his story. On the left a stair leads to a brightly lit area. It is not entirely clear whether the scene is in or out of doors (1885, 625).

The two next prints are *In Großmutter's Märchenreich* (In grandmother's fairy-tale realm) (fig. 4) after a drawing by Hermann Vogel (1854-1921) which depicts an old woman in a dark wood (1889, 521) and

Die Brüder Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm bei der Märchenerzählerin Frau Viehmann in Niedierzwehren (fig. 2), based on a painting by Ludwig Katzenstein (1824-1907) (1892, 505). They are more mainstream, and not only because they figure elderly women storytellers; these two prints will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The painter after whose work the final print in the series was made, Emil Adam (1843-1924, a cousin of Julius) followed the convention of featuring a woman narrator in his *Im Märchenbanne* (Enchanted by Stories). Adam, however, depicted her as a nun and set her in a meadow, in the shade of a bush, with a building in the background. She is knitting but looking at four small, attentive children who face her (1898, 473).

Notwithstanding the variety of the settings, the prevalent theme is that of an elderly woman telling stories, more specifically *Märchen*, to young children, generally in the open air. When a male narrator is shown, he is relegated to either the past or the exotic. There are some more prints whose provenance is not certain. Among them is *Eine merkwürdige Geschichte* by a certain I.A. Muenser. This is dated 1900 and shows an elderly woman sitting on a rock with her back to a stream. Her apron suggests that she is a servant; her hand shows that she is telling a story to a boy and a girl who sit facing her in the grass. In the background is a small building with a thatched roof, possibly a water mill. Again other prints, also dating from the same period, are on offer from antiquarian booksellers. They confirm the gender division of the *Gartenlaube* prints: male storytellers are always situated outside Germany, in this case either in Egypt (1875) or in Russia (1885). In the Egyptian scene adults are among the listeners; as far as can be concluded from the brief descriptions, in the mind of the artists and their (unknown) patrons, German tales were only told by women to children. Presumably this idea was also held by a large section of the *Gartenlaube* readers.

The Grimms in the Picture

The question of historical accuracy does not just preoccupy historians; it affected artists and their contemporaries, too. Although the print of the Brothers Grimm at Dorothea Viehmann's abode in Zwehrn is well known to Grimm scholars (e.g. Heidenreich & Grothe, 126) (fig. 2), the details of its production are not and they touch directly on the issue of historical



Fig. 3. Ludwig Katzenstein, Genrebild über den Besuch der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm bei der Märchenerzählerin ..., 1888.



Fig. 4. Hermann Vogel, In Großmutter's Märchenreich, *Die Gartenlaube* 1889, 521.

representation. The print was based on a painting by Louis Katzenstein. This is in all likelihood not the same painting as currently displayed in the Brüder Grimm-Museum in Kassel, because many small differences in the composition point to a related source, and possibly to another, later painting. Katzenstein was a local Kassel artist who specialized in historical reconstructions; he devised an earlier Grimm scene in 1888 (Schweizer 2004, 92-93, 100) (fig. 3). Here there are only two children listening and the whole group is more prominent. The painting in the Museum originated after this, and the *Gartenlaube* print of 1892 is more recent still.

The subtle differences between the painting and the print pertain to the decoration of the room, the position of the children, the animals and even the three main figures, the storyteller Frau Viehmann and the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. For an analysis of the composition, Katzenstein's earlier work is the most relevant. When he started on this project, the Grimm brothers had been dead for several decades and Frau Viehmann had already passed away before he was born. Katzenstein relied on existing pictorial material. He borrowed the brothers' faces and especially their stances from an 1855 oil painting by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819-1881) and an often mirrored print of 1854, after an 1847 photograph (Heidenreich & Grothe, 12). In Katzenstein's reconstruction process the brothers were slightly rejuvenated. Viehmann had been drawn by Ludwig Grimm in 1813 or 1814 and Katzenstein reproduced her in mirror image to fit the composition. In the print this was changed and she was shown in profile - an indication of a next phase in the process of composition; another one is the replacement of Wilhelm's notebook with a walking stick.

Katzenstein's work reflects late nineteenth-century opinion on the activities of the Grimms. Recent research has established that in the summer of 1813 Viehmann frequently went to see the Grimms in Kassel instead of the other way around. These visits were thus never disrupted by children and poultry; even if the brothers had paid her a return visit in the village of Zwehrn, it is unlikely that they took many notes since the surviving recording dates primarily point to the Kassel visits (Lauer 1998). More importantly, the main informants of the brothers consisted of a group of adolescent girls who generally drew their stories from books and also made up a few themselves (cf. De Blécourt 2008); there is no sign of any



Fig. 5. Ludwig Richter, Märchen Erzählerin. Frontispice Ludwig Bechstein, *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (Leipzig 1845).



Fig. 6. Ludwig Richter, Märchenmütterchen. Frontispice Carl & Theodor Colshorn, *Märchen und Sagen* (Hannover 1854).

servants or nursemaids in the background. Far from being typical, the encounters with Viehmann were exceptional. Her material nevertheless resembles that of the group of adolescent girls and reveals many Italian influences, rather than the French influences with which she has always been associated. It can therefore be assumed that at a certain point she may have functioned as the mouthpiece of younger women who belonged to the educated middle classes of Kassel. This is underlined by Viehmann's manner of dictating and the composition of her stories (as they were reported by the Grimms). This points to a short-term process rather than to an experienced narrator who participated in a long storytelling tradition (De Blécourt, in press).

While Katzenstein's reconstruction itself is inaccurate, it is his intention that is of interest here. Katzenstein composed his paintings in so-called *grisaille*, in predominantly mixed grey or, in this instance, brown shades. Normally this served as an underpainting or as a model for a print, but in this case the artist stopped at an early stage. Instead of putting in the final layers he had the *grisailles* photographed so as to attain an even better representation of 'reality' (Schweizer, 90-93). The technique was aimed at fostering a sense of historical accuracy: the photo was meant to show what had actually occurred rather than something that had happened 'once upon a time'. But as well as the rural setting the 1880s perspective also demanded the presence of children.

Whereas Katzenstein attempted to reproduce historical scenes, Hermann Vogel focused on the fantastical. His drawing *In Großmutter's Märchenreich* (fig. 4) shows an old woman sitting in a wood with her back to the entrance of a ruin. She is surrounded by six children, two dogs, and a young woman who may, or may not be the mother or nurse of (some of) the children. The specimen box lying on the ground, which one of the dogs is investigating implies that the group has gone into the woods with a purpose, although this may not have been restricted to exploring natural history but may also have involved sampling grandma's art, indicated by her raised finger. The little monk on the pedestal in the background is a reference to the artist himself, who used to dress up as Brother Gallus (Tanner 2001, 9).

Vogel was primarily an illustrator. For this particular composition he was inspired by Ludwig Richter's (1803-1884) series of woodcuts which served as subsequent frontispieces in the different editions of Ludwig

Bechstein's fairy-tale books, as well as several others. Here the *Märchen Erzählerin* (fig. 5) is sitting in a makeshift shelter, populated by little gnomes. She is surrounded by children, some of them enthralled, but at least two of them look in the direction of the artist or the viewer; there is also a dog, and a big watering can displaying the artist's initials. In another frontispiece Richter underlined the serenity of the scene by placing a doe with two young deer in the very forefront. Later he shifted the group of storyteller and listeners to an indoor environment (fig. 6). In the late nineteenth century the popularity of Bechstein's book was on the wane and the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (KHM) in the ascendant. In 1894, after the copyright had lapsed, a new selective edition of the KHM was published, illustrated by Hermann Vogel. For the cover he composed a similar storytelling scene as in his 1889 drawing, but now he replaced the grandmother with a young, sparsely clad maiden, the wood fairy (*Wald Fee*) reading from a book (fig. 7). He turned the children into fairy-tale animals and an occasional gnome. This display was also inspired by Richter, who in a 1850 frontispiece for a collection of stories by O.L.B. Wolff (1799-1851) had drawn a young woman with a distaff but without a book; birds, deer, a squirrel and a rabbit (fig. 8). (Vogel ironically commented on this in a following drawing of 1894 in which he put himself in the fairy-tale wood, in the middle of a circle of dancing gnomes, rabbits, and puss-in-boots; Tanner, 79).

The medium of the book allowed Richter and Vogel to mediate between the actual and the fantasy world. Rather than attempting a reconstruction of history, they situated the storytelling outside it. The wood was not just a metaphor of nature, if not indeed the German nation, but also the site of a completely different world, the realm of the fairy. Vogel's approach was nevertheless not entirely opposed to Katzenstein's. The grandmother in the former's *Märchenreich* was much more recognizable as belonging to the contemporary middle classes than Richter's timeless crones. Katzenstein, in his turn, quoted Richter's jackdaw in the first of his Viehmann reconstructions. Above all, by selecting Viehmann he not only made mistakes, but also conformed to the concept of the old woman as the keeper of oral tradition. In the accompanying note in *Die Gartenlaube* (1892, 515) Frau Viehmann was celebrated as an oral treasure trove, a valuable heritage preserved for the German people by the brothers Grimm. From being exceptional, she had now become the norm.



Fig. 7. Hermann Vogel. Cover Brüder Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (München 1894).



Fig. 8. Ludwig Richter, Das Märchen. Frontispice O.L.B. Wolff, *Die schönsten Märchen und Sagen aller Zeiten und Völker* (Leipzig 1850).

The *Märchen* in the Book

Before the invention of the fairy tale, the German *Märchen* merely denoted a brief story, a rumour or a lie. In the course of the nineteenth century the concept of the *Märchen* fluctuated between the eighteenth-century *Feenmärchen* (Contes de fée; tales of magic) and the Grimms' reaction to it. This resulted in a broad definition propagated in the *Kinder und Hausmärchen* which included fables, anecdotes, and religious tales and a more narrow definition, centred on the *Zauber Märchen* (contes merveilleux). All these different genres circulated both orally and in print form, the latter being dominant. It was only a particular kind of *Sagen* (legends), the so-called memorates, which were generally transmitted orally; 'fabulates' and historical legends usually had their printed equivalents and the latter were often invented traditions anyhow.

German folklorists of the generation after the Grimms recorded very few *Märchen* in the stricter sense. Karl Müllenhoff (1818-1884), for instance, who in 1845 when his book on the North German traditions was published, worked as a librarian (Köhler-Zulch 1999), was of the opinion that in the thirteenth century the *Märchen* had come from outside Germany, and in the following centuries were disseminated not just through broadsheets but also by itinerants. But he included the much longer 'magical' medieval tales in his definition (Müllenhoff 1845, 17). Most folklorists publishing in the middle of the nineteenth century followed the practice of the Grimms and mentioned geographical provenance rather than individual storytellers. On the one hand they worked on the basis of romantic premises which favoured collectivity and anonymity; on the other they were often not able to provide precise information about narrators since they received most of their material through mediators such as colleagues and pupils. Karl Bartsch (1832-1888), to give another example, received his *Märchen* and *Legenden* (the delineation was not always clear and far exceeded the tales of magic) from pupils of secondary schools, their teachers, priests, and an occasional inn-keeper. When he mentioned their source on one or two occasions, it was an old man. Researchers who did pay regular visits to the countryside themselves, such as Adalbert Kuhn (1812-1881) or Heinrich Pröhle (1822-1895), reported only an occasional male informant. Swiss ethnographer and fairy-tale specialist Rudolf Schenda reached a similar conclusion, but he partly ascribed it to the difficulties men had in contacting women (1993, 152-153). In the field, the

female storyteller was certainly not sought out. She was only paid some attention by the end of the century in the North German collection of Wilhelm Wisser (1843-1935) (Köhler-Zülch 1991). By then, however, even the published folklore collections contributed to the storytellers' repertoire (Zorger 2008).

From the late eighteenth century onwards the scarcity of both female storytellers and oral *Märchen* in the stricter sense of the tales of magic, was counteracted by the enormous mass of illustrated broadsheets (*Bilderbogen*), almanacs, and in the course of the nineteenth century an ever increasing amount of fairy-tale books. The latter catered mostly to a middle- and upper class public. Only a fraction of such publications trickled down into rural oral retellings and when any of them did so, they were also censored by folklorists whenever they recognized an obvious printed source. Folklorists had learned from the Grimms that *Märchen* were the remnants of an ancient mythology and therefore had to be orally circulated from ancient times to the present. Collecting from oral sources was therefore considered as a kind of immaterial archeology which also allowed the collectors to reconstruct stories any way they saw fit.

Actual history was different and more related to the folklorists' own reminiscences. At the beginning of the nineteenth century oral retelling rather than reciting of published fairy tales had been recommended by pedagogues and authors (Hurrelmann et al. 2006, 115, 130), and folklorists as well as artists would no doubt have experienced such events in their youth. This habit is exemplified in an 1829 sketch by Ludwig Grimm, a younger brother of Jacob and Wilhelm, in which he drew the nursemaid 'Ewig' telling *Märchen* to Wilhelm's children. In this case it is hardly plausible that Ewig's tales stemmed from oral tradition since Wilhelm refrained from incorporating any of them in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. It is much more likely that Ewig retold stories already published by the Grimms or other authors. Nevertheless, Wilhelm's son Hermann was one of the experts who propagated the notion of the *Märchen*-telling nursemaid (Rölleke 1986).

Among the educated middle and upper classes of German society genuine oral traditions were classified as 'superstition' and were to be eradicated or at least ignored. Fairy tales, on the other hand, were firmly grounded in print. In terms of media, of class and of genre, orally transmitted 'superstitions' and fairy tales were regarded as opposites. This

seems to hold true for the gender of storytellers, too. In many a bourgeois household mothers rather than grandmothers told children fairy stories; when children were a little older they could read them themselves. Schenda also expressed caution about the storytelling grandmother. On the one hand her repertoire was possibly much broader than mere fairy tales; on the other her stories would have stayed closer to her own experiences (1993, 171). Further research into biographies may bring more insights although there is the danger of adjusted memories - since nationalist ideology privileged the telling of 'German' fairy tales (Hurrelmann et al., 110). In the context of the brothers Grimm history was certainly adapted to fit the image of the elderly female narrator in the countryside.

The Idea in the Image

The prints in *Die Gartenlaube* ensured a mass public for the notion of female-centred, bookless storytelling. In their turn, the paintings on which the prints were based belonged to a larger series of individual German images, which had undergone a slight though significant evolution in the course of the nineteenth century. The early source of these German examples may be found in the Perrault frontispieces (Uther 1993), but that does not need to be of much concern here. Taking the German artistic tradition into account will already make the overall assessment more complex but results in more transparency, too. This time the series under consideration is drawn from a variety of sources.

The main figure of a stylized line drawing by Edward Jakob Steinle (1810-1886) of the early 1840s is a sedentary woman wearing a headdress (fig. 9). She is facing a number of children and is telling fairy tales, as is evident from the dragon-slaying knight in the background. The average age of the children is somewhat older than in the later prints. They all wear simple, pseudo-medieval clothing. The left foot of the boy on the left rests on a book (Von Steinle, nr. 286). An 1869 drawing (fig. 10) by Josef von Führich (1800-1876) places the group in the open air with a hunter and a shepherd listening in; both are clad in similar outdated outfits. The woman storyteller could easily be a twin sister of Steinle's figure. The 1849 painting *Die alte Märchenerzählerin* by Jacob Becker (1810-1872) presents a similar crone, and although her audience, which includes a mother or nursemaid, wear more contemporary dress, the whole scene is still teeming with



Fig. 9. Edward Jacob Steinle, Die Märchenerzählerin, 1841.



Fig. 10. Josef von Führich, Landschaft mit Märchenerzählerin, Kinder und Jägern, 1869.

romanticism. In combination with the Richter frontispieces of the same period these images place the telling of *Märchen* in a mythological past. This is underlined by the single distaff that appears in both von Führich's and Richter's images and can be read as both a reference to the German *Rockenmärlein* and the series of eighteenth-century Perrault frontispieces in which the distaff is a stable element. In later German images the distaff is still occasionally present but then as part of a whole spinning wheel, for instance in the Katzenstein 'painting', though not in the print. By then the entire scene has lost most of its timelessness.

The result of this process is aptly illustrated by a series of paintings of a *Märchenerzählerin* by Hans Thoma (1839-1924), the first one dating from 1877 and subsequent ones from 1878, 1893 and 1900. The second painting (fig. 11) shows a woman storyteller in front of a hearth with a boy and a girl listening to her stories. The scene is much more sober than Katzenstein's and perhaps more historically reliable. The early painting of 1877, currently in Wuppertal, has only the boy listening and in another one of 1878 the children hold dolls (Thode 1909, 516). In the later versions (fig. 12) the artist changed the portraits of the children, inserting his foster daughter Ella and copying the hand of the boy (if not the whole figure) from a 1879 painting (or his sketches) of his Bible-teaching mother.

Thoma also constructed his scenes, but he seems to have stayed much closer to historical reality than his predecessors. One could argue that he used the members of his family to pose for him for compositions that were themselves imaginary. Only he does not seem to have done so. The portraits of his family members show more or less genuine situations, based on either observation or memory. He often painted his mother reading the Bible (she had converted to Protestantism), in a similar set-up to the narrating grandmother. A contemporary identified the storyteller as Thoma's mother and the children as the painter himself as a young boy, together with his sister (Friz 1915, 158-159). According to his own memoir, however, it was his aunt in the Black Forest who had told him stories.



Fig. 11. Hans Thoma, Märchenerzählerin, 1878.



Fig. 12. Hans Thoma, Märchenerzählerin, 1900.

Often I was sitting with her on the bench of the stove or on her lap and she told me stories [*Geschichten*]. Thus I heard from her the story of the Brave Taylor, of Snow White and the Dwarves, of the Machandelbaum, of course as they were called in southern German. I would have liked to know where she had found the tales [*Märchen*]. I am sure that she did not read them in Grimm, for she did not have any books (Thoma 1919, 19).

While Thoma's memory may have been accurate, his explanation does not have to be so. His aunt Katerina could easily have read the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, or have heard someone reading them, for instance at school. In nearby Lorraine stories from the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were rendered in dialect, which even fooled Wilhelm Grimm, who thought them original (Rölleke 1983). At any rate, the very combination of the stories followed the convention set out by the brothers Grimm and Ludwig Bechstein in their books (both works feature the three tales mentioned by Thoma). His own frame of reference points in the same literary direction. Snow White turns up several times in the frames of his paintings, as does the Dragon Slayer, who had a French/Italian ancestry. Although it is generally assumed that Thoma had not illustrated any *Märchen*, when he did so on one occasion, privately, he produced a version of Snow White and Rose Red, which was definitively a Grimm story (Uther 2008, 333-336).

In the case of several other artists there are only references to paintings and none to their precise content. Members of the Düsseldorf group such as Theodor Hildebrandt (1804-1874) and Julius Amatus Roeting (1821-1896) painted a *Märchenerzählerin* in 1834 and 1851 respectively. Eduard Kurzbauer (1840-1879) produced his version in 1867 (*Meyers Konversationslexikon* 10, 353); he may have composed another one at a later date. The sculptor and painter Nikolaus Geiger (1849-1897) drew a *Märchenerzählerin* in 1886 (*Meyers Konversationslexikon* 7, 699). Some years later he turned it into a (later lost) marble statue which was displayed on the mantelpiece of a private dining room in Berlin. Alois Gabl (1845-1893) also painted a *Märchenerzählerin* in 1886 (Ammann 2005).

The paintings that were available to me (if only in electronic form) support a conclusion about the transition from a mythological to a more realistic display. In 1881 an art critic described the painting by Julius Adam (printed in *Die Gartenlaube* in the following year; fig. 1) as refreshing, and contrasted it favourably with the mechanical production of the Düsseldorf artists (Fendler). An 1871 painting by the Munich based artist Franz von



Fig. 13. Franz Defregger, Märchenerzählerin, 1871.



Fig. 14. Adolf Eberle, Die alte Innsbruckerin mit ihrer Enkelin, 1872.

Defregger (1835-1921), who specialised in everyday-life scenes from the Tirol, shows an elderly woman reciting from a large book on her lap (fig. 13). Another of his paintings, also called *Märchenerzählerin*, from 1898, depicts a young woman telling stories to two girls and two boys. Both scenes are situated indoors. With his *Waldlergeschichten* of c. 1905 Defregger went so far as to paint a male Austrian narrator. Hermann Kaulbach (1846-1909), who also worked in Munich and specialised in painting children, produced several paintings of nuns reading stories to children, not necessarily only from the Bible. An early twentieth-century postcard, called *Ein Märchen* and based on another of Kaulbach's paintings, represents a young woman reading a book with two girls on each side. Although these compositions may have been constructed, they would nevertheless have been close to reality as it could be observed. The painting by Adolf Eberle (1843-1914) of a grandmother reading a bed-time story to her granddaughter (fig. 14) is probably one of the closest to historical realism, also because it shows bourgeois protagonists.

The changes that occurred between the 1840s and 1890s were nevertheless not so much toward a greater realism in general, but more in line with the specific artist's style. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Otto Modersohn (1865-1943) as well as Otto Ubellohde (1867-1922) (fig. 16) and Erich Wilke (1879-1936) all in their own way depicted the *Märchenerzählerin* as an old woman, sitting outdoors and telling stories to one or more children. Notwithstanding the historical evidence that *Märchen* were primarily found printed in books, rather than as part of a largely presumed oral tradition, the 'mythological' representation of storytelling remained dominant.



Fig. 15. Hermann Seeger, *Die Märchentante*, last decade 19th century.

The Symbol in the Nation

Die Gartenlaube was by far the most popular illustrated journal in Germany. It was aimed at a mixed public, regardless of class and gender and presented itself as apolitical, although its tendency was conservative. Before 1871 it supported the unification of Germany, it had issues with dogmatic Catholicism and it promoted family values. In all probability (lists of subscribers have not survived) it counted a large number of lower middle-class women among its readership (Barsch 2007). The illustrations of the journal also focused on the family, across the entire social spectrum. They refrained from overt social criticism but presented stereotypes or ideals of human interaction, in which misfortune was mostly a cause for the dramatic and an illustration of proper moral standards, rather than a complaint against social mishaps (Wildmeister, 82-92). The storytelling prints discussed above fit into this larger frame.

By selecting particular prints for publication, the editors of *Die Gartenlaube* made a conscious choice. Many a work by Defregger was featured in the journal, but his storytellers were not; the same applies to Eberle. Kaulbach's historical scenes were preferred to his pictures of children. Thoma does not seem to have been represented at all. Precisely those contemporary paintings that displayed more accurate storytelling scenes were left out and one of the more imaginative works of the time, Vogel's drawing of grandmother's fairy-tale realm, was included. Katzenstein may have started out reconstructing historical events, but when he portrayed the Grimms he largely ended up depicting his own version of the *Märchenerzählerin*. While the journal primarily commissioned prints of recent art and as a consequence disregarded the earlier set of images of storytellers, it still did not present an unbiased view. The myth of the *Märchen*-telling grandmother, a symbol of Germany's undiluted mythological past, was thus perpetuated, even though towards the end of the nineteenth century her image converged more and more with social practice. To present a last example, the *Märchentante* by Hermann Seeger (1857-1945), created in the 1890s and not included in *Die Gartenlaube* (fig. 15), represented at least the possibility of the single aunt taking her nieces and nephews into the woods to entertain them with stories.

The nineteenth-century German specialists of oral tradition did little to question the *Märchen*-telling grandmother. Typical of this is that Wisser's

first collection, which was first published in 1904, was entitled *Wat Grotmoder vertellt*, although he had found almost four times as many male as female narrators (Köhler-Zulch 1991, 99). The reason for the folklorists' bias was a powerful mix of romanticism, nationalism, and a focus on reconstructing Germany (rather than, for instance, colonialism). Moreover, there was the practical aspect of poor access to female narrators of fairy tales, which was partly due the folklorists' class and gender, partly to the scarcity of this kind of storyteller, and partly to a myopic concentration on orality. It might be more fruitful, however, to consider nineteenth-century folklore research into *Märchen* more as a (poorly executed) investigation into the popular reception of *Märchen* books, rather than into an oral tradition. It may then have been the case that as books of fairy tales were increasingly flooding the market, more and more women (including rural women) took to reading fairy tales, especially to young children. The images discussed here may therefore not only represent ideology but also signal genuine historical change.



Fig. 16. Otto Ubellohde, *Es war einmal*, first decade 20th century.

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A note on sources:

Most of the research for this article was conducted online; the latest date of access was 1 August 2010. See for a yet incomplete run of *Die Gartenlaube*:

<http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Gartenlaube>

and [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Gartenlaube_\(Magazine\)](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Gartenlaube_(Magazine)). The print by "Muenser" (no biographical details could be found, even when taking a possible misspelling into account) can be seen at:

[www.erlebnis-shopping.de /eventdetail.php?lang=deutsch&key=52&main=4](http://www.erlebnis-shopping.de/eventdetail.php?lang=deutsch&key=52&main=4).

For some prints for sale, see: www.abebooks.de: *Stichwörter* "Märchenerzähler" and "Holzstich". Other images of this kind may be found in the *Leipziger illustrierte Zeitung* (not online, not consulted). The 'Viehmann' photograph is at:

www.digam.net/dokumente/1388/2.jpg.

Photographs of several other works are accessible in: www.bildarchiv.de (Richter, Führich, Becker). For Defregger's *Märchenerzählerin*, see:

www.artrenewal.org/pages/artist.php?artistid=45.

I have not been able to search the German art database Prometheus.

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