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Christian Themes in German Fairy Tales

Nikolaus Foulkrod

Cedarville University, nfoulkrod@cedarville.edu

Grant Friedrich

Cedarville University, grantmfriedrich@cedarville.edu

Jen Johnson

Cedarville University, jenniferjohnson@cedarville.edu

Nathaniel Burrell

Cedarville University, nburrell@cedarville.edu

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Literary Analysis

• “Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.” (F. Schiller qtd. in Bettelheim, 1976)

• G. Ronald Murphy (2000), the author of the book *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove*, explores the Christian themes and elements in a few of the well-known Grimm fairy tales.

• “Folk talks are rooted in the most universal and fundamental human emotions: love, hate, jealousy, envy, greed, fear, ambition. Pride is a mortal sin, kindness the cardinal virtue; these are the values of people who see the world as a dangerous place, where a helping hand may be required to snatch you from the clutches of capricious fate” (Wendy Smith, 2013)

• Bettelheim (1976) agrees that psychological meaning is not the only interpretation found in the Grimm fairy tales, but also sees that “Fairy tales also abound in religious motifs...Most fairy tales originated in periods when religion was a most important part of life; thus, they deal, directly or by inference, with religious themes.”

• The Bible is similar to fairy tales in that one can take several meanings from the same passage and interpret it differently depending on that individual's stage in life.

Methods

• Read 12 fairy tales randomly chosen from the Grimms' collection.

• Analyzed them for Biblical, moral, and ethical themes.

• Aligned these themes with Scripture.

Christian Themes in German Fairy Tales

“Das Mädchen ohne Hände”

(“The Girl with no Hands”)

- Mercy (Hebrews 4:16)
- Perseverance
- Faithfulness (John 14:1)

“Die Alte im Wald”

(“The Old Woman in the Forest”)

- White Dove (Luke 3:22)
- Prayer (Luke 11:9-10; Ephesians 6:18; Isaiah 62:6-7)
- Faith and obedience (John 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-23)

“Der Wolf und der Fuchs”

(“The Wolf and the Fox”)

- Gluttony (Genesis 25:30-34; Hebrews 12:16-17; Matthew 4:4)
- Greed (Luke 12:15)

“Der Schneider im Himmel”

(“The Tailor in Heaven”)

- Concept of Heaven (John 14:2-4)
- Character of God (Hebrews 13:8)
- Sins (Romans 5:12-21)

“Der Igel und der Hase”

(“The Hedgehog and the Hare”)

- Pride comes before the fall (Proverbs 16:18)
- Equality of all people (Galatians 3:28)

“Der Mond”

(“The Moon”)

- Gospel similarity (John 8:12, 14:6; Psalm 119:105)

“Die Sieben Raben”

(“The Seven Ravens”)

- Baptism (John 3; Matthew 28:17)
- Number symbolism of the seven brothers
- Self-sacrifice (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:3-8)
- Gospel similarity (John 16:33)

“Frau Trude”

(“Mrs. Trude”)

- Obeying parents (Proverbs 1:8-9)
- Discernment (I John 4:1)
- Evil people (Romans 1:18-22)

“Die Kristalkugel”

(“The Crystal Ball”)

- Power corrupts (II Peter 2:19)
- Bravery (I Corinthians 16:13)

“Das Arme Mädchen”

(“The Poor Girl”)

- Selflessness (Proverbs 19:17)
- Gathered treasure in Heaven (Matthew 5:42, 13:44-46)

“Die Drei Sprachen”

(“The Three Languages”)

- Respect for creation (Numbers 22; Genesis 1)
- Dove symbolism (Mark 1:10)
- Sanctification (I Corinthians 6:11)

“Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten”

(“The Bremen Town Musicians”)

- Helping others (Luke 10:25-37)
- Greater purpose in life (Proverbs 16:4)

Conclusion

- The fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm have served as tools to enforce morals and ethics into the listener's mind while also serving as a means of entertainment.
- Christianity, which played an important role in the history of the Germanic countries, is portrayed in the folk literature of the German language.
- These important stories affect lives, whether viewed psychologically, aesthetically, religiously, or through other various perspectives.
- Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm did a thorough job of infusing Biblical themes into their collection of tales.

