

The Grimm Fairy Tales: An Analysis of Family and Society

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The original Grimm Brothers' fairy tales aim to teach important morals about life, just like the Disney versions that we grew up with. However, these stories also show very common themes about the structures of family and society as a whole. To analyze how these themes are portrayed throughout the Grimm tales, I read the German versions of the fairy tales of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel and Hansel and Gretel. In my honors project on these stories, I deduced that there is an emphasis on family structures and society's yearning for social mobility. These issues are mainly explained through the exaggerated portrayal of beauty, violence, poverty and wealth.

Each story supports a common theme for family structure. The mothers, step mothers and women in general are often greedy and willing to do heinous things to achieve wealth and beauty. The fathers, although they mean well for their family, are very weak and submissive and thus make mistakes that often have grave consequences. As a result of the conflicts from the parental figures, the children are always the ones who suffer. Although they must encounter dangerous and chaotic situations, they are always successful in either saving themselves or being rescued by a prince. Many stories begin with starvation and poverty and progress to a successful ending of wealth and a higher social standing - usually as a result of marriage.