

# **The Transformation of the Folk Witch into the Fairy Witch in *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The character of the fairy tale witch, which appears in more than fifty fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, plays a vital role in creating a gruesome plot representing the evil of the magical fairy world reflecting extraordinary controversial fairy tale themes such as cannibalism, child abuse, neglect, revenge and infanticide. The attributes and the characteristics of the character of the fairy witch appears to be influenced by the beliefs of the folklore witch, which turned in to be a very popular form of supernatural belief with the beginning of the witch trials from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. The execution of witches, from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was a common act in Central Europe and was widely spread in Germany. Mostly women who were considered to have extraordinary powers in healing, who were capable of using homemade herbal remedies to cause natural abortions, which was against the law of the church, and those who believed to be engaged in holding ceremonies with the devil, called “witch sabbats”, where sacrificial infanticide and cannibalism were believed to have taken place, and those who were believed of having supernatural powers of casting spells were being accused as witches. They were forced to confess their evil practices by numerous methods of torturing and later executed publicly. The most common method of execution was called burning at the stake, where the victim was bound to a large stake surrounded by wood. When comparing the Grimm’s fairy witch character with the traditional folklore witch, the authors have completely changed the traditional folklore appearance of the witches’ cottage, which was described as a place haunted by evil spirits, into a sugar house in *Hansel and Gretel*, which radiates an attractive and an inviting appearance and conveys the

feeling of protection, comfort and shelter. Therefore, it is evident that the authors have changed certain aspects of the traditional beliefs of the folklore which, and have presented it with a more child friendly nature.

The effort in presenting the attributes of the witch to be suitable for children, seem to be neglected in the next description, where cannibalism and infanticide have used to convey the viciousness of the witch, relating it's attributes with the superstitious beliefs of the folk witch. Therefore, as readers one might get confused whether it was truly the intention of the authors to present the fairy witch character with a more child friendly approach or whether there could be a hidden intention in using the witch character symbolically in fairy tales, where one might doubt whether these fairy tales are truly appropriate for children as readers.

## **PURPOSE**

The aim of this research is to examine the hidden motive of the use of the witch character in the fairy tales of Brothers Grimm to identify whether it was used merely as a fairy tale character to develop an interesting plot, while giving the children a moral value about the difference between good or evil, or whether the authors have tried to convey a hidden message by the use of the witch character in fairy tales.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Three fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm were selected for this study to examine what kind of roles the character of the witch plays in every fairy tale and how the character contributes to its plot. The characteristics of the witch in these three stories were compared with the written scholarly articles of the witch in folklore to identify how the characteristics differ, and what similarities could be identified. Finally, these characteristics were compared with the scholarly articles based on the witch trials in 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany, to examine how the Brothers Grimm used the witch

character in fairy tales symbolically to narrate the execution process and the plight of women who were executed as witches at the time.

## **FINDINGS**

When comparing the attributes of the fairy tale witch with the characteristics of the folklore witch, it is evident that the imagination of the authors in creating the fairy witch character was influenced by the belief of the folk witch. However, the hidden motif of the authors by the use of the fairy witch character in fairy tales was to symbolically narrate the plight of women during the execution process.

## **REFERENCES**

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## **KEYWORDS**

folklore, Brothers Grimm, fairy tales, folk witch, fairy tale witch

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