XXXXXX

Professor Turner

Eng 250

24 April 202X

Violence in The Brothers Grimm’s *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales* and the Effects it Has on Behavior in Children

Over time, the views on children have altered and adapted again and again. Society’s mindset is constantly changing and in doing so, changing the rules of what’s acceptable according to social standards. These modifications to the social norms, especially with parenting, have impacted how children are raised and perceived. If children are no longer seen as individuals who need to be protected or cared for, they can be exposed to media that can be harmful to their emotional development and perception. Not that all children now are being neglected and ignored, but when did it become normal, or at the very least acceptable, to allow children to watch or read content where characters are constantly harming and/or killing each other? This paper will discuss some of the more violent fairy tales from The Brothers Grimm’s *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales*, use the stories to explore how the violence in them has once again altered what is considered normal for children and how these new standards have caused maladaptive behaviors to form in children today.   
 In the 1800’s, Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm were two brothers from Germany who wrote stories that over time, became fairy tales. These stories originally featured violence, sex, incest, other mature topics that are very obviously not meant for children and were bowdlerized once the stories became more popular in children’s literature. Bowdlerization is the process of editing texts to make them more suitable for children, named after Thomas Bowlder, who first edited a text by Shakespeare to make it more appropriate for women and children (Hintz 482). One of the most popular stories by the Brothers Grimm is “Cinderella”. Some examples of violence in “Cinderella” are when her stepsisters cut off parts of their feet to get them to fit it in the glass slipper (Grimm 85). Another example is when the stepsisters are punished for their cruelty towards Cinderella by having both of their eyes plucked out by pigeons (Grimm 86). These are aspects of the story that aren’t featured in modern versions. In “The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales” Maria Tatar presents Julia Roberts in “*Pretty Woman”* as an example of a modern-day Cinderella story because of her “rags to Rodeo Drive riches” transformation (23).

In the story, “Cat and Mouse in Partnership” there was a cat and a mouse that lived together and kept their stash of food under the alter of a church nearby (Grimm 4). The mouse didn’t know that the cat had been sneaking off to the church to eat their food alone. When the mouse found out they got into an argument and the cat ended up eating the mouse. They were friends and had put trust in each other, but the cat got greedy and broke that trust. In the story, “The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was” there was a boy who wasn’t very bright, he didn’t know what it was to be afraid, and he wanted to learn (Grimm 10). The boy went off to learn what fear was with a sexton who offered to teach him. One night the boy went into a clock tower and the sexton was waiting there to show him fear, but he was not scared. Not knowing that it was the sexton, the boy pushed him down the stairs, killing him. On his next journey to learn what fear was, someone told him that if he could spend the night under a specific tree, he would learn what fear was. So, he decided to do it.

“And as the wind knocked the hanged men against each other, and they moved backwards and forwards, he thought to himself “You shiver below by the fire, but how those up above must freeze and suffer!” And as he felt pity for them, he raised the ladder, and climbed up, unbound one of them after the other, and brought down all seven. Then, he stirred the fire, blew it, and set them all round it to warm themselves. But they sat there and did not stir, and the fire caught their clothes. So he said “Take care, or I will hang you up again.” The dead men, however, did not hear, but were quite silent, and let their rags go on burning. At this he grew angry, and said, “If you will not take care, I cannot help you, I will not be burnt with you,” and he hung them up again each in his turn.” (Grimm 12)

These are perfect examples of the futility of the violence in stories, especially in “The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was” for involving a child in committing murder. Both situations could have been avoided, the cat could have apologized about the food and moved on, and the boy could have walked away from the tower and left bodies set around the fire. As a child, watching or reading a story with this kind of energy can cause distortions and misconceptions in real life.

The Just-World Hypothesis, developed by Melvin Lerner and Carolyn Simmons in the 1960’s, says that people tend to assume that others will get what they deserve because the world is a fair place (Just-World Hypothesis – IResearchNet). These next three stories can be justified by this hypothesis. If we assume the world is a fair place, then the bad things that happen aren’t as bad. For example, the murder of a politician can be justified by the assumption that they were corrupt and a bad person, so they deserved to die. In the story “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids”, after chasing and harassing the children, the wolf tripped, fell into a well and the kids cheered for his death (Grimm 18). In the story, “Mr. Korbes” a group of objects and animals broke into Mr. Korbes home and placed themselves in different areas of the house (Grimm 150).

“The mice drew the carriage into the barn, the hen flew with the cock upon a perch. The cat sat down by the hearth, the duck on the sink. The egg rolled itself into a towel, the pin stuck itself into the chair cushion, the needle jumped into the bed in the middle of the pillow, and the millstone laid itself over the door.” (Grimm 150)

When Mr. Korbes arrived back at home, he was met with a big surprise. He went to light a fire, but the cat threw ashes in his face, when he went to wash off, the duck threw water at him, when he went to dry his face, the egg rolled out of the towel and glued his eyes together. When he went to sit, he was stuck by the pin in his cushion. When he felt the prick, he got up and ran outside but didn’t make it because of the millstone laying in front of his door. He tripped and died, and the story ends with “Mr. Korbes must have been a very wicked man!” In the story, “The Death of the Little Hen” a cock and a hen agreed to work together to find food and share whatever they found (Grimm 284). The hen got greedy, decided to eat alone, and ended up choking on her food. When the cock found her, he left to get help. Everyone he asked, wanted something in return. Eventually, the cock was able to bring help to the hen but on the journey back to her, everyone who had come to help drowned in a river they needed to cross, and he was the only one who made it. By the time the cock got to the hen she was already dead, and he was completely alone. Maybe this story isn’t violent, but it is harsh. It’s sad that she died but one could say that she was a bad hen for betraying the cock, so she deserved to die.

In 1982, a report by the National Institute of Mental Health identified three significant effects of seeing violence on television, they were, lack of sensitivity to pain and/or suffering of others, becoming more fearful of the world around them, and being more likely to behave aggressively and/or in harmful ways towards others (Violence in the Media - Psychologists Study TV and Video Game Violence for Potential Harmful Effects). In the article “The Effects of Violent Literature on Children” Erin Beck says that the response of aggressive behavior after observing violence occurs because “Unlike television and movies, books engage the reader as an active participant in the violent storyline because the reader must use his imagination”. “The Grimm anthology has been a continual source of inspiration for writers, artists, composers, and fellow folklorists. W.H. Auden even praised the collection as one of the founding works of western culture.” (How the Brothers Grimm Shaped Modern Fairy Tales).

The Brothers Grimm’s *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales* has played an enormous part in the evolution of children’s literature in both good ways and bad. The violence in the stories created a ripple effect, changing the path that was taken with television shows, movies, video games and books for children and adults leading from the 1800’s all the way to today. Inspiring new versions of stories like “Cinderella” relating to *Pretty Woman* and “Cat and Mouse in Partnership” being like *Tom and Jerry* because of the harsh relationship between the cat and the mouse. At-present there is no direct link of cause and effect from observing violence to causing psychological disorders or extreme mental health problems in children. However, it has been proven that the exposure to violence in non-fiction can cause behavioral problems in young children. The constant adaptation of social standards has also affected what’s going to be considered acceptable when it comes to behavior in children now and in the future.

Works Cited

Beck, Erin. “The Effects of Violent Literature on Children.” *Healthfully*, 11 Jan. 2021, healthfully.com/261586-the-effects-of-violent-literature-on-children.html.

Dundon, Alice. “How the Brothers Grimm Shaped Modern Fairy Tales.” *Culture Trip*, The Culture Trip, 25 July 2018, theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/how-the-brothers-grimm-shaped-modern-fairy-tales/.

*Grimm's Fairy Tales*, by Jacob Grimm et al., Canterbury Classics, 2011.

Hintz, Carrie, and Eric L. Tribunella. *Reading Children's Literature: a Critical Introduction*. Broadview Press, 2019.

“Just-World Hypothesis - IResearchNet.” *Psychology*, 26 Jan. 2016, psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychology/social-cognition/just-world-hypothesis/.

Myint, B. “5 Facts About The Brothers Grimm.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 30 Sept. 2020, www.biography.com/news/brothers-grimm-facts.

Tatar, Maria. “The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales.” *Google Books*, Google, books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=p4abDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA21&dq=why%2Bdid%2Bnursery%2Band%2Bhousehold%2Btales%2Bbecome%2Bfairy%2Btales&ots=y8slU6h94P&sig=2YCPZkdRllSMiHTTDRhIGpd7kfA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

“Violence in the Media - Psychologists Study TV and Video Game Violence for Potential Harmful Effects.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, Nov. 2013, www.apa.org/action/resources/research-in-action/protect.