

Schmiesing, Ann. *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014. Index. Bibliography. xii + 225 pp. \$29.99 (paper). ISBN: 978-0814338414.

Performance studies is a discipline that has led to important revelations. First it made scholars aware of the tremendous impact that the audience have on the performer and the text that s/he produces. Awareness of external influences on the text has now expanded to include collector biographies and how these have shaped which tales were collected and how the tales were then processed for publication (e.g. *The Teller's Tale*, ed. by Sophie Raynard, SUNY Press, 2012). Ann Schmiesing's contribution falls in the latter category and takes the investigation of collectors in a new and fascinating direction. Herself suffering from hearing loss, Schmiesing has chosen to look at the Grimms' ideas of wellness and illness and to see how these ideas played out in the work for which they are famous. She discusses the health of the brothers themselves and the historical context of their work to give the reader a new and revealing way to view some of our most familiar stories.

Schmiesing begins by giving a brief survey of disability studies in general. When it comes to folktales, discussions of disability are few and many of them, psychoanalytical interpretations in particular, view disability in tales as symbolic. Schmiesing, on the other hand, argues that, when tale characters are presented as disabled, their physical condition should be interpreted in historical context. From this introduction, the author moves to the views that Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm had of the German folktale tradition and its tellers, especially the main source of stories, Dorothea Viehmann. The brothers felt that the soul of the German folktale tradition was healthy but that its current "incarnation" was flawed. The transmission of tales was not what it once was and they set out to fix the situation, to "heal" the tales. Their editorial corrections, the author argues, were their attempt to make the tales whole.

After presenting the attitude of the Grimms to folktales in general, Schmiesing turns in chapter two to specific tales and examines "The Three Army Surgeons" and "Brother Lustig." In the first of these tales, army surgeons boast of their skills and demonstrate them on each other by removing eyes or other body parts and then restoring the parts and the health of the subject. Of course, something goes wrong (in one version a crow flies off with one of the removed eyes) and an animal body part must be substituted for the missing one. Brother Lustig is a discharged soldier who travels with St. Peter and sees the latter bring the dead back to life. He tries to imitate his companion with disastrous results. Here Schmiesing relates the events in the tales not only to the Grimms' own experience with the medical profession and its cures but also to the historical events of the period, specifically the large number of soldiers returning from battle and needing prostheses. This was my favorite chapter and it is a central one because Schmiesing argues that the Grimms saw their editorial work precisely as providing prostheses to aid and restore crippled oral tales.

In chapter three Schmiesing goes from soldiers' prostheses to "The Maiden Without Hands" and the silver arms that she receives in place of the natural ones

chopped off by her father. Gender plays a role in how disability in tales is perceived and disabling women makes them more passive, while disability marks men as Other, even monstrous, as in the case of Hans My Hedgehog who actually kills with his deformity. Disability is not uniformly gendered, Schmiesing points out, and one of the virtues of her work is precisely her complex and nuanced analysis of tales. In “The Maiden Without Hands,” for example, she sees a series of substitutions which contradict Alan Dundes’ interpretation of the tale as one about a woman’s desire for her father and the resulting punishment.

Chapter four deals with super-cripples, seemingly monstrous creatures who have an extraordinary ability to survive and thrive and are rewarded with a normal body in the end. Super-cripples can be amputees like the runner in “How Six Made Their Way in the World,” who must detach his presumably prosthetic leg to run at ordinary speed. More often super-cripples are children who are born deformed, yet have extraordinary abilities. Misbirth was seen as a moral problem, as well as physical one, and children who did not look normal were considered to be God’s punishment; they were monstrous and questionably human and, in tales, even their parents express a desire to destroy them, thus eliminating the anomaly. Yet deformed characters can be endowed with remarkable abilities and Donkey, from the tale with the same name, becomes a marvelous lute-player, despite his hooves. Many tales conclude with the erasure of disability and Donkey and Hans My Hedgehog are rewarded for their efforts to function in society by being granted the ability to shed their animal skins and to assume fully human form.

Not all disabled characters achieve normalcy in the end. Aging animals, the super-small Thumbling, and the Dummy, all discussed in chapter five, remain as they are. They learn to compensate for what they lack physically or mentally and even use their disabilities to achieve their goals. Thumbling, for example, uses his small size to sneak into small spaces and thus gain an advantage. The naiveté of the Dummy, or simpleton, proves similarly advantageous under certain circumstances. This chapter offers the most direct validation of disability.

The book concludes with a chapter that focuses on aging and the misunderstandings that it brings. As Schmiesing argues, the Grimms were quite concerned with disability. They saw their own bodies as flawed and felt that, like the cripples in their tales, they needed to compensate, doing mental work to make up for the physical things they could not do. This view was especially characteristic of Wilhelm, the brother who worked most extensively on the tale collections. The brothers’ view of themselves as physically flawed led them to champion the underdog, disabled characters included.

Schmiesing’s book is an excellent contribution to folk and fairytale scholarship and provides a new way to view classic tales. My only objection to this book is the fact that the tales discussed are not provided or summarized anywhere in the text. The reader needs extensive knowledge of *Kinder und Haus Marchen* and also the earlier tale collections mentioned in the book. I realize that including all of the tales discussed would have made this a large, expensive, and unwieldy tome, so perhaps Wayne State University Press could publish a companion volume of tales.

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