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The Not-So-Scary Brothers Grimm

This article will be exploring the lives of the Brothers Grimm. Fans of folklore and fairy tales are familiar with the authors known as Brothers Grimm. Although the Grimms did not actually write any stories, they collected them and rewrote them. Some of their retellings include “Rapunzel”, “Cinderella”, “The Frog Prince”, “Sleeping Beauty”, and “Hansel and Gretel”. The Grimms became well-known for their dark retellings of many classic fairy tales. The retellings would include themes of sex, violence, horror, and more. Because of this, an air of dark mystery seemed to surround the Grimms and their lives. Many books, tv shows, and movies have been produced, with the basis that the brothers were magical in some way. The brothers may not have been actually magical, but they did lead incredible lives. They persevered through many hardships and criticism throughout their lives. They made major contributions in the fields of German literature, German linguistics, historical linguistics, lexicography, philology, and medieval studies (Antonsen 1). However, their greatest achievements appear to be in the lives they led, from child to adulthood.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were born in the town of Hanau, Germany. They were the oldest surviving siblings in a family of nine children, three of whom died as infants. Their father, Philipp Grimm, was a lawyer, and their mother, Dorothea Grimm, was the daughter of a city councilman. The Grimms learned in their early childhood a strong love of family, the countryside, and local folklore. They led a happy life during most of their childhood, even after they had re-settled in the town of Steinau and began attending school. However, their world was vastly changed, when their father passed suddenly from pneumonia. Not long after, their mother and the six children, had to move out of the big home they

had. The Grimm family could have met a drastic fate, if they did not have family members to help with financial support, and emotional support. Jacob and Wilhelm, at the ages of 11 and 13, matured quickly as they took it upon themselves, to be the main supporters for the family (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 3 - 4).

In 1798, they were given the opportunity to attend the distinguished Lyzeum High School in Kassel, thanks to their Aunt Henriette, who they saw as a "good fairy" figure. They also were given strong support from their grandfather as well. Their grandfather would remind them, how they needed to apply themselves "industriously", for the sake of helping their family. Their grandfather became an important male figure in the Grimms' lives. He unfortunately passed before he could see the Grimms succeed in their studies. The brothers were able to apply themselves as suggested, despite the ridicule and insults they would receive on a daily basis. This was mainly due the brothers not being from one of the many wealthy families in the area. Even the teachers, would give favorable treatment towards other wealthier students over the Grimms. However, instead of becoming depressed from this, it fueled the brothers desire to succeed even more. Even though the brothers were different in personalities, they both shared the same study habits. They would both spend twelve or more hours a day studying. Overtime, this strengthened Jacob's overall health, while Wilhelm's health ended up taking a hit. Not too long before the brothers were set to graduate from Lyzeum, Wilhelm developed scarlet fever and asthma; Wilhelm had to stop his studies for a whole year. While Wilhelm did recover, it would affect his health for the rest of his life (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 5 - 6).

After the brothers had graduated a year apart, they decided that they wanted to follow in their father's footsteps. They decided to study law at the University of Marburg. However, despite receiving high marks at Lyzeum, they still had to get special permission to attend because of their social standing. They continued to apply themselves diligently to all their studies. (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 6). They did hit a rough patch when their mother passed away, mainly due to bad health. They pushed on despite this tragedy and kept giving support to their siblings. They still tried to keep a caring, watchful eye on their siblings, even after they

grew, and moved away. Most of the Grimm children led somewhat stable lives, while two passed away from homelessness (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 8 - 9).

By this time, both brothers had read many books, especially ones of folklore, romance, and other fictional works. They had even begun building a collection of these books. They also began to collect documents, chapbooks, trinkets, and whatever they could find belonging to old German culture (Zipes, "Two Hundred Years After Once Upon a Time", 65). The more Jacob found himself drawn to the study of German Literature. A few years later, Jacob decided to give up the study of law, to pursue study in philology and literature. Still concerned with the well-being of his family, Jacob joined the Hessian War Commission as a secretary. He was able to work and stay focused on his studies, while Wilhelm finished out his studies of law. After Wilhelm had graduated, he eventually began following suite with Jacob. Wilhelm also became interested in German literature. What led the Grimms to focus in on old German literature was a belief that the most natural and pure forms of culture was linguistic and could only be located in the past. They also believe this is what helped hold communities together. Unlike modern literature, which they considered artificial (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 10).

Later down the road, two friends of the Grimms, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, had recently published a book of German folk songs. For their next project, they wanted to do a book of German folktales, and decided to turn to the Grimms for assistance in collecting oral tales. They knew the Grimms already had passion and experience in collecting old tales. Not long after this, they also published their many researches on German Literature, Linguistics, and other points of study. This all led to gaining teaching positions, as well as librarian positions, at the University of Gottingen. In the years to come, they ended up teaching at a few other universities as well. The brothers were also known for having active voices in the democratic reform movement and the reuniting of German principalities (Zipes, "The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition", 22). This actually cost them their jobs a few times, however, they were always able to bounce back. It never took them long to

find work at a new University. The brothers eventually settled for good, at a university in Berlin. During their teaching lives, is when they began collecting stories to publish, and doing story retellings of their own. After they had settled in Berlin, the brothers began working on a German Dictionary, which would be their final project. However, they passed before they could finish, and the project was finished out by a group of scholars (Zipes, “The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World, Second Edition”, 10 - 11).

The Brothers Grimm led a rough life, but they never let that deter them. They always pushed on and always remained close to one another. Wilhelm Grimm had passed before Jacob Grimm. Wilhelm’s death took such a heavy toll on Jacob and his well-being, that he went into a full reclusive life. It was not long after, that Jacob passed away. In many countries, people only ever learn or know the Brothers for their literary works. However, in Germany, they are praised for much more than that. A statue was even built in honor of the Grimm brothers, and their achievements. The statue resides in their hometown of Hanau.

Works Cited

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