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Hansel and Gretel on the Page and Stage: Literary and Operatic Adaptations of Grimm's Fairy-Tale

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Introduction

Over the two hundred years that "Hansel and Gretel" existed in Western cultural imagination—first as a fairy tale recorded by Brothers Grimm, and later as numerous literary, musical, film, and multi-media adaptations of its plot and motifs —its appeal has grown, rather than diminished. Two children lost in the dark wide wood. Cruel and abusive – or traumatized and conflicted – parents who let their offspring go, never to expect them back. The kindly old woman welcomes strangers and later turning into an ogre hungry for human flesh. A gingerbread house, that symbol of joy and abundance, but also a trap. Children who turn into killers, avengers, destroyers of evil… This story is so rich in action, figures, visual detail – it is no wonder that other authors, not the initial "collectors" and "recorders" of the folk text, want to think about it, transform it, make it their own. The goal of writing this project is to explain the attractiveness of the literary text for composers, theater directors, and authors who interpreted, retold, set to music, and analyzed "Hansel and Gretel" as well as introduced it to various audiences in the theatrical and literary form.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an adaptation is "an altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source."[1] When we have a literary work authored by a particular individual in mind, an adaptation of that poem, novel, or short story for stage or screen may be seen as an act of collaboration: for example, a composer, such as Rimsky-Korsakov, collaborates with the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin in transforming Pushkin's tale, "The Golden Cockerel," into an opera. Although the author of the literary text may be already

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[1] Oxford English Dictionary, "adaptation", (accessed January 23 2014), http://www.oed.com

dead, there is obviously a kind of recognition of his authorial power on the part of Rimsky –
what one may call a desire to adapt by appropriating the work's spirit and the voice of its initial
creator.

In the case of "Hansel and Gretel," though, we are dealing with the text that was initially
circulated by word of mouth. It is a fairy-tale, a part of the oral tradition that Brothers Grimm
harnessed in their own unique way. They tracked down folk narratives, recorded and reworked
them, making sure that their national color, linguistic richness, and the symbolic peculiarity is
preserved. How does the work of literature that stemmed from the centuries-long practice of
retelling a narrative and its constant transformation during that passing on from one storyteller to
the other get adapted by artists and creators who recognize its flexibility, its power for self-
evolution? In recent scholarly essays on adaptation as a technique that is similar to translation –
an act of appropriation that crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries – the question of authorship
is very important.[2] Take, for example, the volume of essays, *A Companion to Literature, Film,
and Adaptation* (2012), which outlines the relationship between source texts, their cinematic and
theater versions, and the readers/critics who perceive and analyze them. According to Shelley
Cobb, adaptation studies cannot ignore "biases around authorship, [which] often play out in the
reception of adaptations in a binary between high culture and low culture."[3] Folklore is not
"authored," it is passed on from the depth of time and picked up, somewhere between the
emergence of storytelling and the present, by a conscientious folklorist. Is Brothers Grimm's
interference a mark of great authorship or of literature's bending low to recognize the narrative

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[2] Munchen Klaus Roth, "Crossing Boundaries: the Translation and Cultural Adaptation of Folk Narratives,"
Fabula, Volume 39, Issue 3-4, (published online, 2009), pp. 244-255, https://epub.ub.uni-
muenchen.de/17686/1/fabl.1998.39.3-4.243.pdf
[3] Shelley Cobb, "Film Authorship and Adaptation," *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation,* edited by
Deborah Cartmell, (UK, Blackwell Publishing, 2012),
https://www.lit.auth.gr/sites/default/files/a_companion_to_literature_film_and_adaptation-wiley-
blackwell_2012.pdf, p. 107

potential of low genres, previously nonexistent on paper? "The high culture/low culture binary has meant that adaptation studies, historically, tended to focus on the literary author – evidenced by the myriad books organized around adaptations of a single author (Henry James, Jane Austen, Shakespeare) – and sidelined adaptations of popular novels as not adaptations per se," Cobb writes.[4] In my analysis, I am going to focus both on the very pliable literary text that represents both the "high" and the "low" of the fairy-tale genre, and on its first "authors," the two writers who snatched it out of non-existence and made it known to the world.

The goal of my study of "Hansel and Gretel" is to present it as a source text of literary and operatic interpretations that began in the 19th century and continue to this day. I am fascinated by the story's immense potential for generating new sub-plots, versions of characterization, and thematic sidelines. I am also interested in how easily this tale connects to other works by Brothers Grimm: the fairy-tales that are part of the German folk and literary canon. For example, both in Engelbert Humperdinck's opera and in the 21st century's literary adaptations of "Hansel and Gretel," such as works by Neil Gaiman and Adam Gidwitz, fairy-tale motifs and magical characters from other stories (a Sandman, gingerbread men, dragons, etc.) fit in "naturally" with "Hansel and Gretel's" system of tropes. In my opinion, the very nature of this story – its multifaceted structure, the precarious balance between good and evil, and the ambiguity of its moral message give way for such enrichments and expansions.

In the first chapter, I am going to mainly focus on the origin of Grimm's fairy tale: where did "Hansel and Gretel" come from? Why is it a unique example of a German folkloric tradition? Why is it so popular? I connect my analysis to the studies of folklore, produced by such scholars as Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar, and Bruno Bettelheim. Their ideas built a foundation for our understanding of folklore from a variety of different aspects: structuralist, psychoanalytical,

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[4] Ibid.

narrative theory, and systemic (Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system). Having armed myself with these concepts from folklore studies, I analyze the story's provenance, its thematic and narrative structure, and its controversial elements. Moreover, when exploring "Hansel and Gretel," I also focus on its unique re-distribution of gender roles (the male and female characters of the story and their unusual agencies).

In the next two chapters of my senior project, I address adaptations of "Hansel and Gretel" on stage and on page, translating literary analysis into the language of music inquiry. In Chapter Two, I study Engelbert Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel,* first as an original work of music composition and as a libretto, produced in 1893, and then as two modern stage versions of the opera, the Met's productions of 1892 and 2018. I rely on comparative analysis as my method in investigating the contemporary re-adaptations of Grimm's and Humperdinck's works, approaching "Hansel and Gretel" in terms of the new authors' re-appropriation of its typological motives and images.

I choose two Metropolitan Opera's productions as my operatic and musical subjects not only because the Met is famous for its high-quality adaptations and performances, but also because these two productions, created by different directors and singers, but within the confines of the same institution with a very strong tradition of putting opera on stage, offered me a chance to contrast very different interpretations of the original literary/folk and music source texts, the contrast that is essential for my understanding how adaptations via the change of setting, performance technique, and even recording of the above works.

My Chapter Three concerns literary adaptations of "Hansel and Gretel" in modern children's literature. I study Adam Gidwitz's *A Tale Dark & Grimm* (2010), Bethan Woollvin's *Hansel & Gretel* (2018), and Neil Gaiman's *Hansel and Gretel* (2014). My choice of these

literary works is dictated by their popularity and originality, but also by the narrative complexity of the three authors' responses to the source text. Just as Humperdinck and his sister, the librettist Adelheid Wette, found "Hansel and Gretel" appealing because of its relevance to the German cultural tradition, its multi-layered thematic structure and potential for dramatic impact on the audience, my interest both in the original tale and its modern versions is determined by the source text's unusual subversion. In this chapter, I outline how modern authors transform the traditional fairy-tale motifs and archetypes, linking the trickster narrative to the narrative of victimization of childhood, and add many other deviations from the more conventional fairy-tale plots. Their texts undermine the readers' expectations at every turn in the story-lines. Because of that, I find it important to interpret the work of the interpreters.

Although there are also other tales that made into different forms of adaptations all around the world, such as *Aladdin* (2019), *Puss in Boots* (2011), and *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), "Hansel and Gretel" attracts me as a unique work – a "tale dark and grim," as Gidwitz has put it, but also as a marvel of literary and musical elasticity. The possibilities of interpreting this tale are numerous, and my research has definitely not exhausted all of them.

Chapter One

Hansel and Gretel: Brothers Grimm's Original Fairy-Tale

One can study fairy-tales and their adaptations by using one or several of already well-developed methods. For example, a common way of interpreting fairy-tales is the psychoanalytical approach espoused by Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim claims that "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale," for children can learn "the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society."[1] It shows in his words that fairy-tales are treasures for all the children in the world, for these stories nourish children's mind, telling them who they are, and may help them to overcome different difficulties that they have encountered in real life. Other ways of understanding fairy-tales including functional approach supported by Bronislaw Malinowski, who believes that myth and folklore is "a vital ingredient of human civilization", because they are the "pragmatic charter[s] of primitive faith and moral wisdom,"[2] which maintain the stability of culture, and Claude Levi-Strauss, who relates mythology and fairy-tales with music, mathematic and language, to point out their unique difference and relationship, emphasizes on their structures.[3] Levi-Strauss believes that by comparing their structure, the deeper and hidden meanings that the tales contain will start to appear.[4]

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[1] Bruno Bettelheim, "Introduction," *The Uses of Enchantment The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (USA, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1977), p. 5

[2] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," *Malinowski and the Work of Myth*, Edited by Strenski Ivan, (Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 82.

[3] Arden Ross King, "Cluaude Levi-Strauss: Les Mythologiques," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (1974), p. 102

[4] Shafira Aulia, "Approaches to interpreting folklore," *An Introduction by Stephen and Sims*, (LinkedIn Corporation, 2015), https://www.slideshare.net/ShafiraAulia/approaches-to-interpreting-folklore-53576424

Before the adaptations of "Hansel and Gretel" could be discussed, we need to study the source text itself. It appeared in the collection of fairy-tales put together by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The writers were born in Hanau, the Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel in 1785 and 1786. Their father, Philipp Wilhelm Grimm, was a magistrate in the small town of Steinau.[5] Because of their social status, Brothers Grimm were well educated in childhood. After their father's death in 1796, the entire family was relying on their mother Dorothea Zimmer Grimm's income. In 1798, Jacob and Wilhelm moved in with their aunt, Henrittw Zimmer, to attend the Lyceum Fredericianum in Kassel. By the time their mother died, the brothers had graduated from the University of Marburg. Jacob became a librarian, working, for example, at the castle in Wilhelmshohe, while Whilhem was mainly translating folktales and doing research on medieval literature.[6] They were the first prominent German collectors of fairy-tales – real trailblazers in the field of folklore and the Germanic oral tradition. Ruth Michaelis-Jena pointed out that Brothers Grimm were not merely "philologists, as founders of the study of Germanic languages and literature", their "remarkable work in the gathering of oral traditions is more fully appreciated."[7]

The idea of collecting tales that previously existed only in the oral tradition evolved around the last decade of the 18th century. At that time, German intellectuals, the Grimm brothers included, became concerned about French culture, legal codes, and social norms invading the German-speaking world. Christa Kamenetsky points out that during that period, Wilhelm "never lost his admiration for the French people and their culture, yet he loathed the way in which the French occupation forces suppressed all things German. Such thoughts

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[5] Donald R. Hettinga, "Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm," *The Teller's Tale: Lives of the Classic Fairy Tale Writers*, (SUNY Press, Albany, N. Y. 2012), p. 136

[6] Christa Kamenetsky, "Biographical Sketch of the Brother Grimm," *The Brothers Grimm and their Critics*, (Athens, Ohio University Press), 1992, pp. 18-20

[7] Ruth Michaelis-Jena, "Oral Tradition and the Brothers Grimm," *Folklore*, vol. 82, no. 4, (Taylor&Francis, Ltd., 1971), p. 265

added a further motivation to his plans of retrieving from Middle Ages the neglected German folk heritage."[8] According to Kamenetsky, the motive of the Grimm brothers to collect local folklore was to prevent the disappearance of German customs, the way of life, and the literary tradition. Even Wilhelm Grimm points out that it is important to learn German literature, for those literary works have "directed out attention to the mores, customs, language, and poetry of the people."[9]

When Brothers Grimm published their first volume of *Kinder und Hausmarchen* in 1812, they were little-known. They also underestimated their work's value then, for they rarely mentioned this work to other scholars and writers whom they knew, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.[10] This first volume included tales that brothers Grimm recorded from their friends, read in books in the library that they were working in, and heard from servants and city folk. The Grimm's goal was to collect folklore that represented the voice of Germany and the German culture, thus contributing to the quest for national identity.[11] Eventually, the brother's fame grew: in their lifetime, they published seven volumes of *Kinder und Hausmarchen* and worked on *Deutsches Worterbuch* as well.

There are several tales from Grimm's first collection that are particularly famous, and "Hansel and Gretel" is at the top of that list. Its plot of revolves around two poor little children who are abandoned by their parents in the deep, dark forest because the adults cannot secure enough nourishment for the entire family. They try to find their way home—first, by tracking the pebbles that Hansel scattered along their way. The second time, the trick does not work: Hansel is not able to collect pebbles again, and so he uses bread crumbs instead. However, birds eat all of the crumbs before the children start to return home. In the

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[8] Kamenetsky, p. 16

[9] Kamenetsky, p. 17

[10] Kamenetsky, p. 20

[11] Donald Haase. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: Volume 3:Q-Z*, (Greenwood, 2007), p. 663

forest, Hansel and Gretel discover a beautiful house made out of sugar, gingerbread, and cake: "it was built of bread and had a roof made of cake as well as transparent windows were made of sugar."[12] It is a miracle, really, and the house owner invited the sibling into her house with food and beds provided.

The old witch who owns the house does not offer Hansel and Gretel food for nothing, however. She wants to eat the children and that requires her fattening them up. The wicked woman makes Gretel cook food for her brother, whom she is planning to devour first. To save his life, Hansel tricks the witch by showing her a little bone instead of his finger, thus making the witch believe the boy is still skinny and delaying his death. Moreover, when it is finally time to cook Hansel, Gretel pushes the witch into the oven in her brother's place. Having killed the witch, the children take the treasure from the witch's house and find their way home. In the end, Hansel and Gretel have a happy reunion with their father: they "pulled out one handful of jewels after another. Their worries were over, and they lived together in perfect happiness."[13]

This story appeared in the first volume of *Kinder und Hausmarchen*. Although the setting of "Hansel and Gretel" is the household of a poor woodcutter, positioned at the edge of a forest, the woman who told it to the Grimm Brothers, Dortchen Wild, came from a rich family. She was born to an apothecary, a well-off citizen in Kassel, and later married Wilhelm Grimm.[14] Overall, the motif of poverty and wealth is prevalent in Grimms' tales, for both brothers and many of their contributors experienced need in their youth. Quite a few tales that they collected represented the plight of poor children who had to fight for their survival because their parents could not support them. For example, there are such tales as

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[12] Brothers Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel," *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. By Maria Tatar, (W. W. Norton & Company, NY, 2017), p.239

[13] "Hansel and Gretel," p. 241

[14] Lyndal Roper, "Epilogue," *Witch Craze*, (Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 247–256.

"Four Clever Brothers," "The Star Money," and "Girl Without Hands," which reflect on poverty's influence on people's morals and behavior.

In the present time, fairy tales are classified according to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system. It was first developed by Antti Amatus Aarne, a Finnish folklorist, then expanded by the American scholar of folklore Stith Thompson (1928, 1961),[15] and finally updated by Hans-Jorg Uther in 2004.[16] In this system, each tale has its own number. It records the text's main title, an affiliated title, and then gives a short summary of its main theme and plot. Tales with similar plots or thematic elements are grouped in the same category. In Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification of folk tales, "Hansel and Gretel" is recorded under the rubric the "Tales of Magic" and "The Children and the Ogre," with a variant "The Children with the Witch." However, "Hansel and Gretel" is not the earliest type of fairy tale that contains motifs of abandoned children, a dangerous shelter in the forest, pebbles as markers of a trail, and clever little heroes. The story of "Nennillo and Nennella," collected by Giambattista Basile in his *Pentamerone*, and published by his sister Adriana after his death in 1634 and 1636,[17] combines some elements of "Hansel and Gretel" with other motifs, such as kidnapping, magic dreams, and marring up. This collection preceded

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[15] After the death of Antti Amatus Aarne in 1925, Stith Thompson undertook the work of revising and translating Aarne's *Types of Folktales*. During the translation period in Europe, Thompson found out that the way that Aarne categorize tales is for the specialist in the folktale. So Thompson revised the work with the help of his scholar friends and published it in 1928. In 1955, when Thompson and Dr. Balys found a book called *A Motif-Index of The Oral Tales of India*, Thompson started to revise *Types of the Folktale* and republished it in 1961. See Hari S. Upadhyaya and Stith Thompson, "Reminiscences of an Octogenarian Folklorist. (An Interview of Dr. Hari S. Upadhyaya with Stith Thompson)", *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Nagoya, Japan: Nanzan University, 1968), pp.109-141

[16] In 2004, Hans-Jorg Uther published the third version of the tale type index: *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the system if Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. His work keeps the original number of the tale, but revises the numerical categories and details on it, which works better than the original versions. See Sadhana Naithani, "Book Reviews", *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 1(Nagoya, Japan: Nanzan University, Anthropological Institute, 2006)

[17] Nancy Canepa, "Giambattista Basile", *The Teller's Tale*, ed. By Sophi Raynard, (Albany, USA: State University of New York Press, 2012), p.32

Kinder und Hausmarchen by nearly two centuries. There were also "Thumbling" ("Little Thumb") from Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (1697) and "Finette Cendron," which appeared in Madam d'Aulnoy's collection *Les Contes des Fees* in 1697. They contain thematic features similar to those of "Hansel and Gretel," such as hunger and abandonment of children by their parents. In "Thumbling," the poor woodcutter and his wife decide to get rid of their seven children because the whole family would otherwise die of starvation. The kids find their way back on the first night because of the Little Thumb, the youngest brother, who drops pebbles; but when they are left alone the second time, they discover the ogre's house in a deep forest, where they are again in danger of being eaten. The story ends with Little Thumb's tricking the ogre into killing his own daughters instead of the brothers, and then leading his siblings back home. Moreover, "Pohádka o perníkové chaloupce," a Czech tale, and "Os Meninos Perdidos," a Portuguese story, also have a plot similar to "Hansel and Gretel's."[18] This means that the short-line and motifs used in "Hansel and Gretel" are wide-spread.

Like other stories that the Grimm Brothers collected, "Hansel and Gretel" has many features that mark it as a fairy-tale. Tales of magic derive from ordinary folk-tales. Linda Degh defines fairy-tale as a "story which both the story-listening audience and the story-reading child know is *not true* and *cannot be true*."[19] In another word, fairy-tales are the stories that happen in their own realm that separate from reality. Moreover, they are short works of fiction which contain a simple, repetitive plot, rely on magical beings and magical events, and provide scarce detail about the main characters.[20] Such motifs as a wicked mother

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[18] 327: The Children and the Orge, Aarne- Thompson-Uther Classification of Folk Tales, Multilingual Folk Tale Database.
http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=atu&act=select&atu=327

[19] Linda Degh," Grimm's *Household Tales* and Its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic", *Western Folklore*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (Western States Folklore Society: April, 1979), p. 98

[20] Andrew Teverson, "Definitions", *Fairy Tale*, (Routledges, NY, 2013), pp. 11-33

(or stepmother) and the children's experience in the wilderness create an atmosphere of anxiety and adventure, and make it fascinating for children and adults alike to follow the heroes' plight. The magical elements in the "Hansel and Gretel" narrative include, for example, magic helpers, magic repetition, the sudden appearance of a beautiful place and its subsequent transformation into a chamber of horror. These are the motifs that also commonly appear in other tales, and which comment on the dangers of childhood and coming of age that underlining everyday experience of young people. That said, there is a set of unique features that can be found only in "Hansel and Gretel."

First of all, the most distinctive element of the tale is, certainly, one of its settings, the gingerbread house. It is the place that initially lures the children with a promise of comfort and later serves as their prison and, possibly, an early grave. This image is so striking, partially because it testifies to the children's hunger—they are abandoned, they have had no proper nourishment for days, they are also little and, therefore, fond of sweets. But the lust with which Hansel and Gretel attack the house is also a sigh of their ability to transform into aggressors—the kind of individuals who present danger to others. According to Bettleheim:

> By devouring the gingerbread house's root and window, the children show how ready they are to eat somebody out of house and home, a fear which they had projected onto their parents as the reason for their desertion. Despite the warning voice which asks, "Who is nibbling at my little house?" the children lie to themselves and blame it on the wind and "[go] on eating without disturbing themselves."[21]

Children's hunger, portrayed here as insatiable, puts an interesting spin on the theme of hunger prominent in Brothers Grimm's collections, where there are frequent references to endless food. For example, a magic little pot in "Sweet Porridge," which makes gruel for its owner as long as she wants to eat it;[22] the tablecloth that the youngest brother finds in "The

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[21] Bettelheim, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 275

[22] The provider of this tale was also Dortchen Wild. She seems to have special passion on the tales with

Knapsack, the Hat and the Horn," which provides a great meal for him and the people that he meets along his way; and the endless supply of bread, meat, and wine in "The Raven," which allows the story's young protagonist to save himself from a giant. Interestingly, most of the tales that mention plentiful food appeared in the first and second volumes of *Kinder und Hausmarchen* – the period when the author was in dire need themselves. However, "Hansel and Gretel" starts out in this respect. Nothing is more tempting than a house that is made of gingerbread, chocolate cake for the roof, and pure sugar for windows. From Bettelheim's point of view, the children's desire for it is justified in many ways. For example, he suggests that the gingerbread house is, in fact, "a symbol of the mother," for it supplies food for young children just like the mother's body supplies infants with milk.[23] When the witch dies, the house offers young heroes more substantial rewards, such as jewels. Also, Hansel and Gretel's mother's dying after the death of the witch also suggests the paradoxical relationship between the ogre's place and the conflict with the mother, on which the story's plot is predicated.

The second unique component of "Hansel and Gretel" is its two protagonists. There are a boy and a girl, and they both act thoughtfully and courageously at certain points of the story, which affects its structure: Hansel's resourcefulness dominates the fairy-tale's first part, while Gretel's agency is more noticeable in the second. Moreover, as a pair of siblings, Hansel and Gretel may be seen as the story's single—or united—hero. There are similar Grimm tales that include two close relatives experiencing their adventures together. For example, in "Little Brother and Little Sister," another tale they collected, the sibling run away from their wicked stepmother. In that story, the brother and the sister do not become heroes, though: the danger that they get into is resolved by the king who marries the little sister, thus using the power that does not originate from them. Hansel and Gretel, on the contrary, figure

food.

[23] Bettelheim, "Hansel and Gretel," p.161

out everything on their own: saving themselves and making sure that they escape with a reward.

The structure of "Hansel and Gretel" is related to the siblings' heroic behavior. The fairy-tale has two clearly marked halves, and the divide recognizes the allocation of heroic roles based on gender. The first half part of the story is where Hansel is active. He acts on behalf of both siblings, making decisions, taking the lead in bringing Gretel back home during their first night away from it. However, Hansel's power gradually declines in the story; he loses his heroic power and wisdom completely by its end. There is a hint at the beginning of the story that this may happen: for example, during the second escape when Hansel decides to use little bread crumbs instead of pebbles as road signs. This trick certainly fails to bring the siblings home. Although it is understandable that the siblings' mother locks the door so that Hansel cannot get outside of the house to get pebbles, his decision making is nevertheless flawed. How can he, living near the forest edge, forget that birds will eat the bread? Finally, after the children have reached the witch's house, acquired temporary peace of mind, and received access to food and comfort, Hansel loses his agency completely. It is now Gretel who has to fend for both of them. She becomes the servant of the witch and acts decisively when it is time to bake the witch alive. After her heroic behavior, Hansel is the one who is directed, and Gretel is the one who makes all the decisions. For example, on their way back, they encounter a little duck near a large body of water: "Hansel got on it and told his sister to sit down next to him. 'No,' said Gretel, 'that would be too heavy a load for the little duck. It can take us over one at a time.' That's just what the good little creature did."[24] It shows in this passage that Gretel not only uses tricks to prevent their death from the witch, but also avoid the danger of sink in the water.

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[24] "Hansel and Gretel," p. 241

Young heroines' agency is usually downplayed in folklore: they are supposed to be more helpless than the young heroes and they need to be rescued often. In another word, the behavior of young heroes is more noticeable than that of heroines. For example, Cinderella's happiness and Rapunzel's life depend on the princes' desire for them, while the Sleeping Beauty would never wake up had there been no kiss from her savior. Among these fairy-tale heroines, Gretel stands out. Torborg Lundell comments on her wit and self-sufficiency: "Gretel is best remembered from the better known Grimm's tales precisely because of her aggressive act."[25] This "Aggressive act" is to push the witch in the oven and to cook her alive. However, how can this little girl, who is always crying in the beginning of the story and needs protection from her brother, become a resourceful and brave young female who is shielding her sibling and herself from imminent death in the end? According to Maria Tatar, heroines can acquire agency in a fairy tale narrative, but only if they learn how to be humble and helpful: "Fairy tale heroes receive gifts and assistance once they actively prove their compassion and humility; heroines, by contrast, become the beneficiaries of helpers and rescuers only after they have been abased and forced to learn humility."[26] Yet, Gretel does not learn humility. In spite of her suffering, she does not become meek or take up a secondary role in the narrative as Hansel's helper. Instead, she is growing into ruthless character acting all on her own. When the witch climbs into the oven, Gretel gives her "a big push that sen[d] her sprawling,"[27] and cook the villain alive.

The gender-based structure of the story, with its morally complicated ending, is repeated in the spatial make-up of the narrative. In terms of space, the story consists of two parts: they are connected by the appearance of the witch's house. The parental home is shown to us in

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[25] Torborg Lundell, "Heroines and the Type and Motif Indexes," *Folklore*, Vol. 94, No. 2, (Taylor &Francis, Ltd., 1983), p.244

[26] Maria Tatar, "Born Yesterday: Heroes in the Grimms' Fairy Tales," in *Fairy Tale and Society*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 102

[27] "Hansel and Gretel," p.241

the beginning and the end of the tale. Its substitution, however, emerges in the middle of the story. The gingerbread hut that belongs to the wicked witch imitates a house that every child could only dream of: "It was built of bread and had a roof made of cake as well as transparent windows made of sugar."[28] Hansel and Gretel reach for it, they stuff their faces, they are happy: "Hansel, who liked the taste of the roof, tore off a big chunk, and Gretel knocked out an entire windowpane and sat down on the ground to taste it."[29] In enjoying the sweets, the children seem to have forgotten their parents' dwelling – the poor, dark, and small hovel with no food and little love. It is as if the magic of the witch is not to lure children into her trap with sweets, but to make them forget who they are and what home they belong to. Therefore, the moral of this ambiguous story is placed, atypically, in the center rather than at the end of the narrative. When the children fall for the fake riches offered by the witch, they immediately get captured, threatened, and put to hard work. Thus, the structure, with the witch's house dominating the center of the narrative, represents the moral crux of the tale: use your wisdom to help yourself get better, but beware of getting greedy after satisfying your first need. As Erich Fromm, an American psychologist said in *Escape from Freedom*: "Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfactions." (*Escape from Freedom*, 1941)[30] In a way, having gone greedy, Hansel and Gretel become "exhausted" as individuals: they lose their humanity. Thus, while the gingerbread house turns out to be a dangerous place, it also becomes the middle spot that offers the reader a chance to ponder the transformation of characters into a new type of individual.

As I clarified before, Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system briefly summarizes plots of tales and other folk narratives, pointing out their motifs, and putting them in various

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[28] "Hansel and Gretel," p. 239

[29] "Hansel and Gretel," p. 239

[30] Erich Fromm, "Chapter 4," *Escape from Freedom*, (Britain, 1942), p. 100, https://pescanik.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/erich-fromm-the-fear-of-freedom-escape-from-freedom.pdf

thematic categories. Although "Hansel and Gretel" is a short tale, its rich motifs are part of a bigger folk tradition; they are replicated in many other tales. The first such common motif is that of children, especially young siblings, abandoned to their own resources. They often have to leave their parents' home and embark on a journey. Sometimes, children leave to look for a fortune, or they run away from their wicked step-parents. On their way, they encounter dangers, which they escape with each other's help. Their successful problem-solving leads to a happy ending. There are numerous tales like this, including such stories as "The Twelve Brothers," "The Three Snake-Leaves," and "The Girl Without Hands." Later on, this motif would become incorporated into the novelistic tradition—for example, the picaresque, the novel about a rogue which consists of tightly or loosely linked episodes and tells the story of adventure, danger, and gaining maturity.[31]

The second common motif is that of marriage. In the fairy tale realm, an ending with a happy marriage is very popular. When a story starts with a poor young man going out to seek his fortune, it always ends with the young man marrying a princess, and becoming rich and happy. When the protagonist is a girl who comes from a poor family, she marries a handsome young prince at the end. Tales such as "The Brave Little Tailor," "The Story of a Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was," and "The True Bride" all include this kind of motif. In "Hansel and Gretel," however, this motif is absent. It is interesting that the story that could've ended with one of the siblings' wedding, as, for example, happens in another Grimm's tale, "Little Brother and Little Sister," where the girl marries the king and "the brother and sister live happily ever after," focuses on the motif of return to the parental home as its crowning trope. The family in "Hansel and Gretel" is the world of parents and children, and not of a husband and a wife – the fact which is emphasized by the death of the wicked stepmother at the very end of the story.

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[31] Such stories including *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) by J. K. Rowling, *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950-1956) by C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937).

The third easily recognizable motif is that of negligent parents. In "Hansel and Gretel," like in many other fairy tales that Grimm collected, parents cannot provide their offspring with a happy and comfortable childhood. To avoid death by starvation, they send their children away and expect them to survive or perish on their own. Usually, negligent parents get either punished, or they die by the time the young people succeed on their quest for happiness and self-fulfillment. For example, the wicked stepmother of Snow-White is forced to put on the iron red-hot shoes "until she danced herself to death."[32] Her painful death pays the price of her evil behavior towards Snow-White. Moreover, the story of Cinderella ends with the pigeons' pecking out her vicious stepsisters' eyes: "And thus, for their wickedness and falsehood, they were punished with blindness all their days."[33] In "Hansel and Gretel," however, only the wicked mother dies, because it was she who wanted the children out of the way; the father, who tries to talk her into saving them, stays alive and thus partakes in Hansel and Gretel's new wealth: "[they] pulled out one handful of jewels after another. Their worries were over, and they lived together in perfect happiness."[34]

Another traditional motif in "Hansel and Gretel" is that of the magic helper. Torborg Lundell points out that "helpers are supportive, their power is limited and they do not demonstrate a broader view of the situation".[35] In most fairy tales, a magic helper always shows up when the protagonist cannot figure out a problem. For example, the Fairy Godmother in "Cinderella" gives the girl beautiful clothes and crystal slippers so that she could attend the ball and meet the prince. Similarly, the witch that appears in the story "One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes" teaches the poor Two-Eyes girl, who is suffering from her

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[32] Brothers Grimm, "Little Snow White," *The Complete First Edition: The Original Folk & Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Translated and edited by Jack Zipes, (Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 178.

[33] Brother Grimms, "Cinderella," *The Classical Fairy Tales*, Edited by Maria Tatar, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2017), p. 153

[34] "Hansel and Gretel," p. 241

[35] Torborg Lundell, "Folktale Heroines and the Type and Motif Index", *Folklore,* Vol. 94, No. 2, (Taylor & Francis, LTd.: 1983), p. 240

mother and sisters, magic spells and the way of growing a magic gold and silver tree. Furthermore, in "The Little Folk's Presents," the little folk that the tailor and the goldsmith meet punishes the greedy character and rewards the honest one. However, some magic helpers may not be unconditionally kind. Sometimes, they have an agenda of their own, expecting a payment or services for their labors. For example, the little ugly dwarf in the "Rumpelstiltskin" who asks for the girl's necklace, ring, and her child as a payment for his help.

However, in "Hansel and Gretel," the motif of magic helpers is subverted. The helper exists, but she transforms herself: paradoxically, the kindly old woman who appears to children at the moment when they are weak, lost, and hungry, is neither truly generous nor a maternal figure. She gets transformed into an old witch who wants to kill and eat the children, rather than help them get stronger and return to their family. The witch's precursor in the tale is the bird who leads the children to the gingerbread house: "a beautiful bird, white as snow […] flew ahead of them."[36] Again, the reader expects the bird to lead the siblings back home or to safety. This expectation stems from our familiarity with such fairy tales as "The Robber Bridegroom," for example, where the little bird in the cage warns the bride of a death threat:

> Turn back, turn back, my pretty young bride.
> In a house of murderers you've arrived.[37]

That particular bird outlines the horror that the girl will encounter in her groom's house. Moreover, the old lady that the beautiful bride finds in the house helps to hide her and runs away with her. In other words, "Hansel and Gretel" deviated from these thematic patterns. Its traditional motifs undergo some drastic changes.

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[36] "Hansel and Gretel," p.239

[37] Brothers Grimm, "The Robber Bridegroom," *The Classical Fairy Tales*, Edited by Maria Tatar, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2017), p. 196

Besides the subversive motif of a magic helper, another trope that is turned upside-down is the motif of houses. There are two kinds of houses in fairy tales. The first is the parental house: it provides comfort to children, keeping evil outside. Some parental homes may not be safe, though. The grandmother's house in the "Little Red-Cap" is a place of danger, while the prince's palace in "The Little Mermaid" is far from being a welcome and happy location. In fact, the fairy-tale parental house is often not comfortable: either both parents end up being wicked, or the stepmother alone is greedy, cruel, or simply unkind. The house that Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, and the little boy from "The Juniper Tree" live in are the houses with wicked parents. However, they still provide a kind of protection for the children, for all the magical things, some of them bad, happen when children are locked out and sleep outside. Similarly, the tragedy of "The Little Mermaid" starts for the first time when she stays outside of her parental home for the whole night. In the case of "Hansel and Gretel," the absence of parental home leads to the character's switching roles. Gretel gradually takes charge of deciding what they should do after both of them sleep in the dark forest for the first time. Moreover, they find the magical gingerbread house after sleeping outside three times.

The second kind of fairy-tale houses are the houses that are owned by "magical" people. Not only in "Hansel and Gretel," but in other stories as well, the house that supposes to provide comfort, food, and safety may turn into a tempting but dangerous place. For example, in "The Robber Bridegroom," when the bride gets into her fiancé's house in the forest, she immediately finds out that it is full of blood: her fiancé kills another poor girl in front of her eyes. It is the same in "The Blue Beard": a man who marries a pretty girl turns out to be a murderer; his house is full of dead bodies of his previous wives. As we have already discussed, a magical place of comfort can turn out to be a trap. The gingerbread house thus represents a reversal of the parental home motif. Because of that, its attractiveness acquires a particularly sinister tint.

The final subversive motif in fairy-tales, in general, is the innocence turning into aggression. In another word, it is the motif of children's behaving in a predatory and cruel fashion. One of the important themes in "Hansel and Gretel" is the horrible crimes the witch contemplates but the children carry out. From Lutz Rohrich's point of view, "cruel elements are an important aspect of folklore,"[38] and this tale is a clear testimony of that. From the start, the Grimm's collection of fairy-tales was full of slaughter, cannibalism, and murder.[39] Crimes carried out by children were common in the book, too. For example, in the first volume of *Kinder und Hausmarchen,* the tale "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" shows the horrible crime that innocent children may commit: they play a butcher and a cook, killing the one who plays the role of pig. The story ends with the townsfolk decision on whether the murderers committed their crime in innocence or out of their lack of virtue. Adults put the children on trial. When the boy chooses an apple instead of gold, offered to him by the town councilor, he is immediately released, because his interests still seem to be child-like—a sign of innocence. This is the most controversial part in the story; the children who are covered in blood are still considered not guilty and not responsible for their horrible crime. Rohrich points out that there is no moral baggage associated with this ending. According to this scholar, "the folktale knows no pity; torture is not painful […] folktales removes the reality from crime as well."[40] In "Hansel and Gretel," however, the children's actions towards the witch, and especially their killing her, do seem to ask for an ethical verdict on the reader's part.

In "Hansel and Gretel", the plot of the story implies the transformation of innocent children into all-knowing adult-like creatures. Hansel and Gretel stay outside of their parental house for three nights, which may be the beginning of their changing into more mature

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[38] Lutz Rohrich, *Folklores and Reality*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 112

[39] For example, *The Juniper Tree,* and *The Robber Bridegroom.*

[40] Lutz, p. 136

individuals. They obviously grow by the time when they finally come back to their father. Like the little boy in "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering," they first choose the "apple," nibbling on the gingerbread house as much as they can. However, when they try to defend themselves, they begin to turn into tricksters: Gretel burn the witch alive because if she does not kill her, they will die. But when she does that and when Hansel knows that the witch is dead, they have no regret for taking another's life. Their behaviors changes, too: instead of bringing back food, they loot the witch's treasure and deliver gold, rather than "apples," to their parent's house. In Grimm's tale, the weak ones do overcome the powerful enemy— it is a normal conclusion to a trickster's story. However, in "Hansel and Gretel," it is children who destroy an adult. In the beginning, they are poor, hungry, weak and abandoned; while at the end, they are well-fed murderers with a treasure in their pocket. This is where the moral ambivalence of the story becomes apparent. The first half is about victims, the second, about predators. The problem is, they are still children. And their victory leaves a funny taste in the readers' mouth.

In conclusion, "Hansel and Gretel" is not a tale that is easy to understand. Things like the gingerbread house and the peculiarly quickly maturing little heroes make this tale stands out in Grimm's canon. Throughout the tale, subversive features and motifs suggest to the reader different ways to interpret the tale. The first direction in which the interpretations may go is the gender power structure. The tale starts with the dominating male figure: Hansel is taking care of everything. However, it ends with Gretel who takes over the heroic behavior from her brother: she kills the witch and finds their way home. Another way to interpret the tale is through the invisible progress of the sibling's growing cruelty: instead of choosing an "apple," a childlike treat which symbolizes their innocence, the tale ends with Hansel and Gretel choosing gold and treasure. There is also a very attractive and interesting duality in the tale: spatially, it is split into two worlds (the wild forest and the domestic space), with both

houses alluding to danger to the children. There are two protagonists, two types of tricker, and two possible endings, only one of which is realized (return home with treasure, but no wedding). No matter which way the readers would be interpreting the tale, though, their options are multiple and fascinating.

Chapter 2

Hansel and Gretel Onstage: Engelbert Humperdink's Operatic Adaptation

1.

Romanticism is a cultural paradigm characterized by the rejection of rationalism and the celebration of individual imagination, the idealization of nature, women, and children, and the focus on artistic subjectivity and divine inspiration.[1] Brothers Grimm contributed to German Romanticism by supplying other writers, artists, and composers with folk narratives, which reflected such aspects of Romantic mentality as the fascination with the national past, longing for heroic stories, and sensuality. Their fairy-tales quickly began to be seen as archetypical plots and characters unique for German and, broader, European cultural milieu. This is why many fairy tales from Grimm's collections became foundations for theatrical as well as musical works by composers of the Romantic Era. For example, the plot of Richard Wagner's opera *Siegfried* was partly inspired by Grimm's tale "The Story of a Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear." Structural complexity, emotional depth, peculiarities of gender roles, dramatic plot and the violent ending of "Hansel and Gretel" attracted the attention of composers other than Wagner. They, too, wanted to bring the fairy-tale to the operatic stage. The focus of this chapter is the work of Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921), the student of Wagner, who set "Hansel and Gretel" to music in 1893. The opera premiered in Weimar on twenty-third December 1893, where it was conducted by Richard Strauss, became the composer's most famous work and gave thousands of music lovers a chance to experience the fairy-tale both as a work of literature and as a musical adaptation.

In this chapter, I am going to explore the relationship between "Hansel and Gretel" as the opera's source text and Humperdinck's music. I will look at the libretto and compare Grimm's text to deviations from it in the operatic interpretation of the fairy-tale. I will also

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[1] Definition of "Romanticism", *Oxford Dictionaries*, (Oxford University Press, 2018), https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/romanticism

study the music itself and analyze how Humperdinck twisted and intensified some of Grimm's most important motifs such as the motif of seduction by comfort and the motif of violence. Finally, I will investigate further interpretations of the fairy-tale and the opera in modern productions of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, such as the one at the Metropolitan Opera (1982), with Thomas Fulton conducting, and another Met production (2018), with Richard Hones as the director and Donald Runnicles as the conductor.

The origin of opera as a genre can be traced back to Ancient Greek tragedies.[2] The end of the fifteenth century is when composers and actors started to seriously and systematically put music, songs, stories, and dance together on stage.[3] Those were small, private performances in which entertainers sang and acted mainly to celebrate the marriage of royal couples or glorify national victories in a war.[4] In 1607, the first *favola in musica* (music tale) that Claudio Monteverdi composed, *L'Orfeo,* premiered. It is considered the first opera in the world and is still regularly performed in theatres.[5] Daniel Snowman claims that opera is one of the Renaissance's greatest heritages, because it tries to create new aesthetics by synthesizing music, storytelling, and design.[6] It is an adaptable genre, accommodating "whatever historical contexts, social conditions, economic situations, political regimes and cultural milieus surrounded it," the critic Vlado Kotnik says.[7] This means that a composer of an opera may take a source text and change it significantly so that it would fit into a specific time period and his or her cultural context. These changes are reflective of the relationship

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[2] Daniel Snowman, "The Birth of Italian Opera," *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera*, (London: Atlantic, 2009), p. 16

[3] Snowman, p. 14

[4] Snowman, p. 19

[5] Snowman, p. 14

[6] Snowman, p. 3

[7] Vlado Kotnik, "The Adaptability of Opera: When Different Social Agents Come to Common Ground," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (Croatia, Croatian Musicological Society, 2013), p. 303

between the composer and the literary narrative as well as of the time in which the opera was written.

Engelbert Humperdinck was born in the autumn of 1854. He started his music education when he was seven years old. In 1876, he entered the Cologne Conservatory and his talent began to be recognized: he won three important prizes during that time, including the Mozart Prize of Frankfurt. In the second year of his college life, he heard Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring* cycle for the first time and immediately craved on it.[8] In 1880, Humperdinck paid a visit to Wagner in Naples. The result was that he started to work with and learn from Wagner, and became his good friend: Humperdinck not only helped Wagner with the preparation of *Parsifal*, Wagner's last opera, he also became the music teacher of Wagner's son, Helferich Siegfried Richard Wagner, in 1890.

Humperdinck, as the student of Wagner, inherited some of his teacher's ideas about adapting literary texts and setting them to music. Wagner's influential notion of Gesamtkunstwerk implied that "the works of music should be a union of everything, which is the music drama." A critic of Wagner's work, Michel Pratt, suggests that for the composer, "music-drama is a union of drama and music, […] each must take something from and give something to the other, […] the drama must be worthy and capable of moving us, and […] the music must be a living organism, not an arbitrary collection of badly-jointed limbs with no flow of blood between them."[9]

The idea of a musical work as a coherent, harmonious, "living" organism influenced musicians and artists in Wagner's time and beyond. Wagner wrote thirteen operas, including the famous *The Ring of The Nibelungen* cycle. His works relied heavily on folktales, legends,

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[8] "Humperdinck, Engelbert", *Oxford Music Online*, (UK, Oxford University Press, 2018), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscribe/article/grove/music/O0008740

[9] Dr. Michel Pratt, "Some Aspects and Effects of Wagner's Art-Work of the Future", (NY, Pratt Music Co., 2009), https://michaelpratt.wordpress.com/2009/09/04/some-aspects-and-effects-of-wagners-art-work-of-the-future/

and sagas, including Germanic and Scandinavian myths. For example, *The Ring of Nibelungen* cycle was based on the Old Norse tales and mythologies with Wotan, Brunhilde, Siegfried, and other mythological characters taking center stage in the opera. Moreover, the plot of his famous *Tristan und Isolde* was based on the 12th century romance, *Tristan*, by Gottfried von Strassburg.[10] Wagner had a lot of identities, including that of a philosopher and political commentator, but he is most influential as an artist – specifically due to his ability to adapt and re-interpret Western European cultural heritage.[11] Humperdinck inherited Wagner's special attention to the interpretation of literary archetypes in dramatic, exuberant works of musical composition.

In the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, the most important concept is to have everything serve the drama. To prove this idea, Wagner wrote every opera libretto by himself, and it is noticeable that he is the first person who did this.[12] He also controlled and directed the staging, when his *Ring* cycle first performed in its entirety in Bayreuth.[13] Therefore, it is critical to analyze Wagner's operas – or those by his students – by addressing the music, the librettos, and the staging together. Humperdink's *Hansel and Gretel* needs to be discussed as a whole, too: although the composer did not write the libretto himself (his sister did), and he no longer controls the modern staging and performances of his work, we still have to study these productions as a synthesis of language (the libretto), music, and visual art (the staging).

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[10] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, translated entire for the first time with the surviving fragments of the Tristran of Thomas, (London, Penguin Books, 1960)

[11] Frank B. Josserand, "Richard Wagner and German Nationalism", *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (Wiley, 1962), p. 223

[12] Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs, "Chapter 23 Class of 1813: Wagner and Verdi, " *The Oxford Histroy of Western Music*, College Edition, (New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 676

[13] Taruskin and Gibbs, p. 677

Humperdinck's poetics and musical sensibility require this, because it is he who may be first to inherit the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* from his teacher and applied it to his works.

Humperdinck' sister, Adelheid Wette, is the person who asked the composer to write music for the fairy-tale "Hansel and Gretel." At first, Humperdinck responded by composing merely four folksongs for Wette's children to perform, in 1890. Then, under the persuasion of his family, Humperdinck put these songs into a *Singspiel*: a light opera form with spoken dialogue and magical events in the plot.[14] The enthusiastic response to the performance of his nieces finally encouraged Humperdinck to create a full three-act opera.[15] To support her brother's composition, Wette made some changes to the plot of the original tale while writing this libretto, but she also kept some of its gruesome details, such as the burning of the witch by the children. Until our day, this collaborative project has remained a popular work of music that theater directors keep producing for delighted audiences around the world. My goal is to figure out what is so aesthetically attractive about it.

2

Although the opera *Hansel and Gretel* is based on the original story that Brothers Grimm collected, there are still many differences in details between the text of the fairy-tale and Wette's libretto. Here I am going to compare the deviations between them, scene by scene and motif by motif, to find out the themes in the libretto that Wette changed, reduced, or exaggerated, and the purpose of these changes.

The first act starts with two siblings, Hansel and Gretel, playing and dancing instead of doing their work, such as knitting a sock, making brooms, and cleaning the house. When their mother, Gertrude, comes back, children accidentally break the pot that contains cream, the

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[14] The editors of Encycolpaedia Britannica, *Singspiel*, (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2018), https://www.britannica.com/art/singspiel

[15] *Hansel und Gretel*, Oxford Music Online, (UK, Oxford University Press, 2018), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscribe/article/grove/music/O902157?print=true

only food that they have in the house. Their mother is so angry that she forces Hansel and Gretel out into the woods, telling them to gather berries for food. Surprisingly, the children's father, Peter, a broom maker, comes back with a lot of food because of his great success at a town fair: he had sold his brooms in the highest price. Talking about the children, the parents realize that it is very dangerous to leave the kids in the dark wood, which is, according to Peter, full of evil spirits, so they run out of the house and into the wilderness to find them.

Act two consists of the scene of two children in the depth of the wood. After the siblings have collected a basket of strawberries, they play and eat all of them. When the night comes, Hansel and Gretel start to feel fear of the unfamiliar forest: they are hungry and they cannot find their way home. When they are trembling with fear, the sandman arrives and brings them comfort. After the evening prayer, the two fall asleep under the protection of fourteen angels.

Act three continues the children's adventure in the woods by focusing on their waking up and exploring the territory in the morning. When Hansel and Gretel wake up by the call of the Dew Fairy, they hear a bird's song and follow it. The bird leads them to a house made of sweets. When they are busy filling their mouths with the pastry that is a corner of the roof and a bit of window from the house, the house owner, a witch who disguises herself as an old lady who likes children, comes out and invites them inside. She catches Hansel and fools Gretel while they realize that their captor is wicked, and try to run away from her. The siblings help each other to survive, and eventually bake the witch in the oven alive. In the final scene, Hansel and Gretel discover other victims of the witch, turned into gingerbread children. They bring them back to life by touching them. Soon Gertrude and Peter find their offspring here in witch's house. They sing and dance happily with each other and the rescued children in the end.

When we compare the original tale and the libretto, the biggest difference between them appears to be that of the narrative voice. In Grimm's original tale, the story is told by an

invisible narrator. This is a traditional narrative device; most fairy-tales have a third-person narrative, and the individual who is telling them is usually omnipotent and omnipresent. However, there is no such thing in the opera. Wette takes the words of the Grimm's narrator and transforms them into the lines that the characters sing. Because of this, a lot of clues for future actions of characters are hiding in the conversations between them, which create a first-person narrative. For example, in Act One, the father refers to the existence of the witch by singing with a broom:

> The besom, the besom, why what is it for?
> They ride on it, they ride on it, the witches! […]
> At the midnight hour, when nobody knows,
> Away to the witches' dance she goes.
> Up the chimney they fly,
> On a broomstick they hie—
> Over hill and dale,
> O'er ravine and vale, […]
> On a broomstick, on a broom stick,
> Hop hop, hop hop, the witches![16]

Here, Peter is using a broom to explain the witches' activities, talks about how they ride and fly on it from his perspective. Later in Act Three, when the witch is planning to cook Gretel, she takes a broom and sings a song with a wild delight:

> So hop, hop, hop,
> Gallop, lop, lop!
> My broomstick nag,
> Come do not lag!
> (She rides excitedly round on the broomstick.)
> At dawn of day

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[16] Adelheid Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," *The Opera Libretto Library : The Authentic Texts of the German, French, and Italian Operas With Music of the Principal airs, With the Complete English and German, French, or Italian Parallel Texts*, (New York, Avenel Books, 1980), p. 484-5

I ride away,

Am here and there

And everywhere!

(She rides gagin.)

At midnight hour, when none can know,

To join the witches' dance I go![17]

In the witch's lyric, some of her words are repeated with Peter's, which means that the father's words in the First Act are foretelling the witch's behavior in the Act Three. These words of Peter's become the first perspective narrator, who foretells the later plot. In the libretto, characters plan their actions and project their outcomes. Their first-person perspective actions and words function similarly with the fairy-tale's all-knowing third-person narrative.

Compares to the original fairy-tale, the structure of the story and its many motifs change in the opera libretto. Most importantly, the Grimm's gender dynamics is not recognized in Wette's text: although it seems that Hansel is dominating as an active, heroic character in the first half of the libretto, the sister and brother almost merge together into one heroic figure in the end of the opera. At the beginning of the libretto, when Gretel is singing a nursery rhyme ("Susi little Susi…"), Hansel is the one who points out that they are hungry and poor. There, like in the original tale, Hansel is an adult-like child who can see the danger that the family is exposed to. Moreover, Hansel in the beginning of Wette's libretto also acts as a protector of his sister. In the original tale, for example, he comforts crying Gretel in the woods, when she thinks that they are lost: "'Just wait until the moon appears. Then we will find our way back.'"[18] Likewise, in Act Two of the opera, when Gretel is frightened by the shadows of the trees, Hansel tells her: "Gretelein, stick to me close and tight,/ I'll shelter you, I'll shelter

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[17] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 495

[18] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 237

you!"[19] Although Hansel is also afraid, he still shows a courageous face to his sister and comforts her.

The complete turn-around in gender relations does not fully happen in the libretto, though. In the Grimm's tale, Gretel is the one who pushes the witch into the oven, the act which reveals her unfeminine aggressiveness and cruelty. In the libretto, it happens that the siblings together push the witch into the oven: "Hansel and Gretel give her a good push, which sends her toppling over upon which they quickly shut the door."[20] Here, the libretto puts the burden of killing the witch on the shoulders of both children. Moreover, the action that Wette adds to the traditional plot right after the death of the witch indicates that this murderous urge may actually be heroic behavior, for the burning of the evil creature leads to the saving of the gingerbread children. They are touched by both siblings, who remain heroic as a couple: "We thank, we thank you both!/ The spell is broke and we are free," sing the rescued kids.[21] Here, the joy of gingerbread children and especially the fact that so many little ones come back to the world of the living mollify the uncomfortable feeling the audience may have when watching two youngsters kill a person: the one who died is a witch who turns children into food and eats them, too. Saving the innocents, in Wette's version of the tale, makes Hansel and Gretel equally heroic. This twisted plot completely replaces the gender structure that the original tale provided.

Another obvious difference between the libretto and the original story is Wette's description of the parents: the mother and the father in the libretto are not wicked in comparison to the parents in the Grimm's tale, where the mother in particular wants to abandon the children to save herself and her husband from starving. In the tale, we read: "'tomorrow at daybreak we'll take the children out into the darkest part of the woods. […]

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[19] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 488

[20] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 496

[21] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 493

We'll go about our work and leave them alone. They'll never find their way home, and then we'll be rid of them. […] All four of us will end up starving to death [if we do not do this].'"[22] The libretto, in contrast, gives the mother a reason to force the children out into the woods: Gertrude wants them to pick up berries, because they had broken the jar of cream, their last source of nourishment. The mother shouts at them: "Gracious! There's goes the jug all to pieces! /What now can I cook for supper? […]/ Off, off, to the woods! /There seek for strawberries! Quick, away!"[23] Her words are an example of Wette's cause and effect logic. Wette shows her audience that the children need to pay for their misbehavior, since they have spoiled the dinner of their family. In the logic of a good Protestant mother, they need to atone for their sins by doing work, picking berries for their dinner. When the siblings' father, Peter, points out to the mother that there is danger in the wood, the parents rush out to find their children without any hesitation. Unlike their fairy-tale prototypes, they do care about Hansel and Gretel's well-being.

In addition to this, the figure of responsible parents reappears when the libretto ends. In the end of the original tale, when the siblings come back home with treasure that they pilfered from the witch's house, they find out that their mother is dead: "[The woodcutter's] wife had died."[24] Thus, the fairy-tale has the mother, who suggests abandoning Hansel and Gretel in the wood in the beginning of the story, pay with her life for her immoral behavior. In the libretto, however, after Hansel and Gretel kill the witch and save the gingerbread children, the parents find the siblings in the house of the witch and welcome them to the world of the living. Their behavior is charitable and corresponds to Christian ethics:

Mother: Children dear!
Father: O welcome,

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[22] Brothers Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel," *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. By Maria Tatar, (W. W. Norton & Company, NY, 2017), p. 236
[23] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 481
[24] Brothers Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel", p.241

Poor children innocent![25]

These lines demonstrate that the parents are very happy to have both Hansel and Gretel and other people's children back – they are all "innocent," and, therefore, good. These changes in the libretto turn the parents, and especially the mother, who is cruel in the fairy-tale, into more conventional and ethically acceptable characters. Like the people Wette and her brother, Humperdinck, anticipated to see in the audience, they want their children to survive and feel happy when they get them back. To change the key figures in the story and the plot like this seems more acceptable, from the opera creators' standpoint, for the 1893 public. Watching an opera is a delightful entertainment, and if parents did not want to discuss parental cruelty with the children whom they brought to the theater, that option was not offered them. Instead, they are given the plot that celebrates good parents and children who are capable of overcoming existential difficulties.

Power relationships are a big part of the original fairy-tale, which means that the witch in the Grimm's text is just a horrible old woman who captures lost children and eats them. However, this power gets transformed into a different kind of evil magic in the libretto. This magical atmosphere is first introduced by a set of new characters, whom the Grimm did not include. They are a sandman, a dew fairy, and fourteen angels, who do not influence the opera's plot as participants in any action. As I said in chapter one, the gingerbread house in the original tale is the most unusual, dream-like object in the whole story. It appears in the middle of Grimm's narrative, breaking it into two parts: the common-life story and the fairy-tale events. In the opera libretto, however, the mysterious figures of the sandman, angels, and the dew fairy appear on stage (and make a contribution to music) before the children discover the gingerbread house. They arouse the audience's expectations of something truly wondrous to happen soon. They also usher in references to heavenly protection of innocent children –

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[25] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 498

the theme that is fully absent from "Hansel and Gretel" in the original. Although these characters just have a few lines, or even no words at all, their "unnecessary" appearances become a visible call for opera's transitioning into the realm of magic.

Further, the witch in the libretto does have magical powers as compared with the witch in the original tale. In the original, besides the amazing candy house that she owns, the witch does not have any magic objects, such as a wand and a broom. Neither does she have the ability to put a spell on her victims, which a powerful witch can normally do. In the libretto, on the contrary, the witch is powerful – a true evil spirit – because she is a wicked woman who craves children's flesh and can use magic to procure it. For example, when Hansel and Gretel try to escape her place, the witch puts a spell on both of them: "Hocus pocus, witches' charm!/ Move not, as you fear my arm/[…]/ Hocus pocus, bonus jocus,/ malus locus, hocus pocus,/ bonus jocus, malus locus!"[26] These "Latinized" words show that the witch is capable of repeating strange, but potent phrases, which helps her control the actions of both Hansel and Gretel: "[…] she leads Hansel, *who is gazing fixedly at the illuminated head*, into the stable, and shuts the lattice door upon him."[27] Although later on, the siblings break the spell and save themselves, the audience has no doubt that magic – and even evil magic – is the power which dominates and shapes the opera in the middle of its narrative and musical action. (In the end, the power dynamics shifts, and the magic has to do with the "innocent children's" ability to undo evil deeds with a touch of their hands).

Thus, the libretto's deviations from Grimm's original fairy-tale, includes narrative voice, gender structure, a more nuanced characterization of parents, a set of new characters associated with the theme of magic, and the new power dynamics that is grounded in the nature of that magic – both of good kind (savior children) and the bad (the wicked witch).

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26 Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 493

27 Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 493

When Humperdinck composed music based on his sister's libretto, he connected these new themes and plot changes together and infused them with a harmonious sense.

3.

People usually consider Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* as a Gesamtkunstwerk not only because of the collaborative and transformative nature of Humperdinck and his sister's work on the libretto, but also because the music that Humperdinck composed was not only melodious and thus appealing, and it turned out to be an original score steeped in traditional motifs. Critics noticed in his *Hansel und Gretel* a lot of similarities to Wagner's ideas and musical compositions. For example, Daphne Leong's research on comparing Wagner's *Parsifal* with *Hansel and Gretel* points out that the meters of music in *Hansel and Gretel* imply different facts, such as duple factors try to present truth or reality while triple factors show deceptions and evil designs, which function nearly the same in *Parsifal*.[28] However, Humperdinck did not just take Wagner's idea as his own: he also had his way of understanding music, and developed them into music that he composed.

The first obvious similarity between the two composers' work is their use of leitmotif. "Leitmotif" is a concept that comes from Wagner. In his music, a major event, such as an arrival of a hero is marked by their own musical theme. Once the theme has been introduced, it gets repeated throughout the opera. For example, in Wagner's opera *Gotterdammerung*, Siegfried is riding a boat on the Rhine River. However, the audience senses the coming of Siegfried earlier, before they get to see him on stage, because they are hearing a horn melody, which is the leitmotif that represents the hero. Leitmotifs can combine and intertwine, to create different musical "subtexts" in the opera. Thus the music sometimes undermines thematically with the libretto, including the direct pronouncements that the singers sing. For

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[28] Daphne Leong, "Humperdinck and Wagner: Metric States, Symmetries, and Systems," *Journey of Music Theory*, Vol. 51, No. 2, (USA, Yale University, Fall 2007), p. 223

example, in Wagner's *Segfried,* when Woton speaks about a hero to Mime, he does not name him. Yet, the orchestra gives the answer: they are playing the motif which represents Siegfried, which means that Siegfried is the hero. Humperdinck does a similar thing, for he composes a melody that makes a first appearance in the father's description about the witch:

(Figure 2.1. Father introduces the witch: the orchestra is playing the theme of the witch ride.)

Later, when the Act Two started, the prelude plays the same melody, which introduces the witch again:

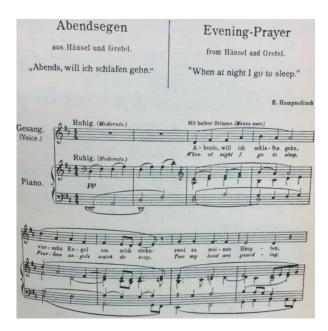(Figure 2.2. The orchestra is playing the same theme as the father sings)

Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* is, overall, a leitmotif-heavy composition. For example, the theme of Christianity, which is densely emphasized in the libretto, gets translated into a simple melody that comes back at the moments when children need heavenly protection throughout the whole opera.

(Figure 2.3. *Hansel and Gretel*, Prelude.)

This peaceful melody played by horns is the first several lines of the prelude, which means that it is also the first music statement that the audience hears in the performance. Humperdinck comes back several times to this obvious tune, thus creating a memorable profile for the audience to recognize. Since this motif represents the theme of heavenly power, it offsets the dark magic that is more pronounced in the opera than it is in the fairy-tale. In Act One, for example, Gretel reminds Hansel of the prayer that their father has taught them: "When past bearing is our grief,/ The Lord God, will send relief."[29] These words are accompanied with the same melody. Later, this music constitutes the evening prayer that children sing before falling asleep in the woods – the slumber that could have been their last, save for the grace that is guarding them.

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[29] Wette, "Hansel and Gretel," p. 478

(Figure 2.4. *Hansel and Gretel*, Evening Prey.)

Most importantly, this "heavenly" motif comes back in the end of the opera, where everyone gathers to celebrate the children's deliverance from danger under the protection from god. In fact, according to Wette and Humperdinck (but not according to the Brothers Grimm), Hansel and Gretel could overcome their difficulties only because they had angels watching over them. In other words, this melody emphasizes the power of god, which is referenced over and over again in the opera, thus replacing the core idea of the original tale: the power relation between the witch and the children, which shifts when the latter gain new, not entirely benevolent, agency. The opera is reliant on the assertion of the existence of the heavenly power everywhere, especially in the beginning. This means that the composer's and the librettist's focus on the presence of god in the life of their characters, the god who is watching and protecting the good people, is determined when the audience hears the first note. This musical beginning predetermines the outcome of the story and its operation representation.

Another important connection between Humperdinck and Wagner's music is their admiration of folklore. Nowadays, people consider Wagner as a key figure of Romanticism because, in vein with the Romantic tradition, he relied on folk archetypes in his art, such as

using characters from Old Norse mythology in his opera. Humperdinck, the student of Wagner, had another perspective. To emphasize his appreciation of Romanticism's indebtedness to folk prototypes in literature and music, he puts multiple nursery rhymes in *Hansel and Gretel*. It is important to understand the origin of these nursery rhymes, since they represent both the oral literary tradition of the German people and Humperdinck's understanding of his audience's connection to that literary form (most parents who would be bringing their children to the opera had exposure to the nursery rhymes as young people and were, most likely, signing them to their offspring as well).

Between 1806 and 1808, two German authors, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Bretano, published an influential book called *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder* (*The Boy's Magic Horn: Old German Songs*).[30] Just like Brothers Grimm's collections of tales from a variety of sources, these volumes offer an introduction to the rich tradition of folk singing, which Arnim and Bretano accumulated over the course of many years. Their book may be seen as the musical version of *Kinder und Hausmarchen*. In fact, the first publication dates of both volumes were relatively close. The "Volkslieder," the word that Achim von Arnim borrowed from Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) to describe the songs, not only inspired Humperdinck, but also influenced Gustav Mahler, Felix Mendelssohn, and Robert Schumann.[31] These composers used the lyrics from Arnim and Brentano's book when writing songs, which people would later sing, accompanying themselves on the piano. Mahler's work was especially important in that respect, for he not only wrote song cycles, but also quoted his folklore-inspired melodies in his own symphonies.

For Humperdinck, the first purpose of including these "household" melodies into his opera was to make connections to his audience, refreshing their memory of familiar tunes and

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[30] Carl Niekerk, "Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Rediscovering the "VVolk", *Reading Mahler, German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna*, (Boydell & Brewer, Camden House, 2010), p. 56

[31] Niekerk, p.56

thus giving them the comfort of recognition. For example, in the beginning of the first scene in Act One, Gretel sings a famous German nursery rhyme, "Suse, liebe Suse." This melody first appeared in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*,[32] and Humperdinck used it as the introductory song for the lead character. To the audience who grew up with their parents singing this nursery rhyme to them, Gretel's song immediately became a symbol which represented the safe, happy, "conventional" childhood. The fact that convention would later be overturned by the cruel events in the fairy-tale and thus, in the opera, takes a while to sink in. There is a hint of the transition, though, for after Gretel finishes her song, Hansel immediately uses the same melody to complain that he is starving:

(Figure 2.5. Hansel sings the same melody but changes the lyric.)

This rearrangement connects the motif of hunger and poverty that is prominent in "Hansel and Gretel" as the Brothers Grimm recorded it to the operatic action that is unfolding before the eyes of the audience. Other examples of nursery rhymes' serving both as a comforting,

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[32] Lisa Yannucci, "Suse, libe, Suse, was raschelt im Stroh?" *Mama Lisa's World*, (2018) https://www.mamalisa.com/?t=es&p=4919

easily recognizable source text and as a subversive link to the theme of cruelty may be the song that Gretel teaches Hansel, "Bruderchen komm taz mit mir," as well as the first song that Gretel sings in the Second Act, "Ein Männlein steht im Walde." Both of these songs are traditional folksongs that emerge in the fabric of the opera at the moment when the audience is to be plunged into a contemplation of another "horror" (children's meeting their angry mother, for example).

Putting these songs, the songs that people may have heard in their childhoods, in the opera also marked Humperdinck's work as a very "German" creation. The *Kinderlieder* not only brought back familiar memories, but also became a reminder of the national identity for those who recognized the proto-texts and proto-melodies. Humperdinck himself was very proud and wanted to bring more elements of the "Germanness" into his own opera. In an interview, when a correspondent asked him the reason of not finishing a symphony that "he has had for a long time in his portfolio," Humperdinck simply replied that he was "occupied with some songs and choruses for '"Die Konigskinder,' a play written by his sister."[33] It shows in his words that Humperdinck would rather write music for his sister's play, which contains elements from German fairy-tales, than a symphony.

While Humperdinck is not Wagner, he does borrow Wagner's idea of leitmotif and two very important elements of German folk tradition to compose his own opera: the plot from a fairy-tale forms the foundation of *Hansel and Gretel*'s libretto, and the nursery rhymes create a melodious texture that reminds the audience of the national song culture they are well familiar with. The success of Humperdinck's opera relied on his ability to articulate the "Germanness" of his work and its subtexts. However, as a form of art which also includes a strong visual component, *Hansel and Gretel* had to encompass references to German artistic or folk art tradition. Although there is no record of the staging details and settings of

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[33] "An Interview With Humperdinck at Cologne," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 36, No. 629, (UK, Musical Times Publications Ltd., 1895), p.442

Humperdinck's original productions, modern theater directors attempt to recognize both the traditional element of the opera's background in their visual representations and to subvert it. The staging of the opera plays an important role in contemporary interpretations of Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel" and its visual adaptations.

4.

To stage a whole opera, it is necessary to recognize the cultural paradigm at its center. For Humperdinck, it is a reliance on the German folk tradition, both in the opera's plot, which is based on a fairy-tale, and in its music, which is indebted to traditional songs, especially *Kinderlieder.* Modern interpretations of Humperdinck's opera are, however, more diverse in their visual treatment of the cultural tradition. There is no homogeneity in their response to the original music and the two texts, the fairy-tale and the libretto. In this section, I am going to compare productions of *Hansel and Gretel* by the Metropolitan Opera, studying its 1982 and 2018 versions. By analyzing the difference between these two productions, I want to show that they deviated from Humperdinck's original intent to represent "Germanness" on stage. To me, it is important that the Met's different – and bold – approach to staging the opera exaggerates its many hidden themes: just as the music adds another layer to our understanding of the story in the libretto, the Met's staging often totally subverts the meaning of the play without changing the music score or any words in the libretto that its artists would be singing.

The staging of the opera always determines the atmosphere of the opera by exaggerates different elements. In the 1983 production, the director Nathaniel Merrill and designer Robert O'Hearn decided to provide a stage which is close to the time when the original fairy-tale had been first collected. For example, things such as customs and the house that Hansel and Gretel are living in looks like real peasants' lives in the late 19th century.

(Figure 2.6. *Hansel and Gretel*, Act One, Met Production, 1983.)

This is the scene from Act One of the 1983 Met Opera production. In this version of the staging, Hansel and Gretel are both wearing clothes that the real peasants may wear in hundred years ago. Their house is mainly made by woods, with hays, brick stove, and wooden chairs as the furniture. Everything in this house represents a true peasants' life in the nineteen century, which is close to the original fairy-tale publishing time.

However, everything is reversed in the *Hansel and Gretel'*s twenty-first-century production. In this new modern production, director Richard Jones creates three different kitchens as the background of each act, which provides scenes that the audience nowadays sees in their daily lives. For example, Act One of this production sets in a modernized small white house.

(Figure 2.7. *Hansel and Gretel*, Act One, Met Production, 2018.)

In this little living room and kitchen with furniture such as a refrigerator, electric stove, and a table that is able to turnover shows a poor modern family's basic needs. This small room, which only takes half of the stage, gets expanded until the whole stage becomes a big witch's kitchen with all the supplies such as blender, stainless steel bowls, and fancy plates in the Last Act. These kitchens and kitchen tools imply to the audience that this story onstage may happen in the present time.

In the 1982 version of Metropolitan Opera production of *Hansel and Gretel*, the design helped the director, Bruce Donnell, to make sure that everything Wette wrote in the libretto would be recognized and put into action on stage. For example, in Humperdinck and Wette's opera, the children fall asleep in the woods not alone, but with guardians from heavens who make their slumber safe and comfortable unbeknownst to them. Humperdinck introduces a prayer that Hansel and Gretel sing before going to sleep, which has strong references to Christian liturgy.[34] In the 1982 Met production, the heavenly guardians come to life. The most incredible part of that staging, for me, is the appearance of fourteen angels on stage in the end of the Act Two.

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[34] "When at night I go to sleep,
Fourteen angels watch do keep:
Two my head are guarding,
Two my feet are guarding,
Two are on my right hand,
Two are on my left hand,
Two who warmly cover,
Two who over me hover,
Two to whom 'tis given
To guide my steps to Heaven."
Wette, *Hansel and Gretel,* p. 488

(Figure 2.8. Angle in *Hansel and Gretel*, Act Two, Met Production, 1983.)

(Figure 2.9. Angels flying and protecting the children, Met production, 1983.)

In Merrill and O'Hearn's version, the angles are gorgeous creatures. They are visual references to Christian paintings: dressed elegantly, having gold "haloes," and they can also fly on their beautiful golden wings. They can be recognized immediately by the audience as representatives of the metaphysical realm that is a "better" and "kinder" world. Although they do not have any language, they move to a beautiful melody that corresponds to the children's "evening prayer." The angel's appearance, movements, and musical representation are emblematic of the heavenly power which protects innocence.

However, the staging of this episode changes in 2018. "Angels" are still present, but they are far from looking as heavenly messengers of the traditional kind. They play their own role in the opera, even acquiring a narrative potential neither Humperdinck nor the Grimms imagined. For example, Jones's angels in Act Two do not seem like sublime creatures anymore.

(Figure 2. 10. Angels in *Hansel and Gretel*, Act Two, Met Production, 2018)

The creatures that enter on the stage after Hansel and Gretel fall asleep look like cooks from a kitchen where everyone eats his full. They are large, stocky, and have dumb, not exactly kind expressions on their faces. Compared with the 1982 version, Jones's visual narrative has switched from representing the metaphysical realm of the fairy-tale as external, which is full of angels whose role is to protect the children, to internal, which zooms into Hansel and Gretel's dream of having good clothing and feast with thirteen cookers and a fishlike housekeeper. Now, these people who provide supplies to the hungry siblings are more likely the true angels to the modern attitude: they fulfill children's spiritual desire of wealth and physical desire of food, which is far better than guarding them from the unknown danger. Fulfill the direct need of people seems more reliable as a divine power nowadays.

However, while providing the need for people, these "angels" also points out the dark elements that people can find in traditional fairy-tale. First is the cannibalism, which is a common theme in fairy tales. By using a fish as the housekeeper, the relationship between food and men is blurred. It implies that those cooks with big heads may use the housekeeper as ingredients if that is necessary. Besides this scene, in the end of the opera, this cannibalic theme gets exaggerates to the highest point, for the whole opera stops right before everyone starts to eat the gingerbread, which used to be witch's flesh. Compares with the 1983 production, which ends with everyone happily dancing together and sings the song of praising the god just like what Wette wrote in her libretto, the 2018 production tries to dig up the real core of the fairy-tale when it first presents to the readers in the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, as a successful opera, *Hansel and Gretel* remain its charm to the audience for a hundred year has its own reason. The libretto that Wette wrote reduces some of the cruel elements that exist in the original fairy tale; Humperdinck's music with beautiful repeated motives and nursery rhymes make comforts to the audience; and the staging, which freely exaggerates or gives its own voice to the understanding of the opera.

Chapter Three

Dark, Grimm, and Enchanting: Literary Adventures of "Hansel and Gretel"

In 1812, when *Kinder und Hausmarchen* was first published by Brothers Grimm, the authors who recorded the folk narratives played a role of trustworthy collectors of the oral tradition. The tales they wrote down were whimsical, but also steeped in history: oftentimes, they reflected on some of the most dramatic situations that happened to German people during wars and the great famine, including the abandonment of children, murders, and even cannibalism.[1] Later, when Wette wrote a libretto based on Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel" and Humperdinck adapted her narrative by turning it into his opera, the violent themes that transpired in the original tale were reduced, some of them getting replaced by the motif of merciful, saving-from-harm Christianity. This was done to attract the audience in the hope that they would appreciate the plot in which the good conquers evil and young heroes overcome serious difficulties. This kind of plot was deemed to be enjoyable for young children and adults alike; Humperdinck's opera was definitely family entertainment, aimed at bourgeois, well-mannered and ethically sensitive audiences. However, in present time, modern adaptations of this famous story again become more and more violent. Even the two productions from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (1983 and 2007), about which I wrote in Chapter Two, changed over the course of the two decades, by moving away from a benevolent fairy-tale setting to the setting which is more horrible and violent (for example, the traditional guardian angels were replaced with horrid creatures that were half-animal and half-human). In modern literary adaptations of "Hansel and Gretel," these frightening tendencies are also very pronounced. Hunger, violence, abuse are getting emphasized again.

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[1] Neil Gaiman, in his afterword to *Hansel & Gretel*, says "historians believe the story may have originated during medieval times, when the Great Famine of 1315 drove ordinary people to abandon their children and eat human flesh." Neil Gaiman and Lorenzo Mattotti, *Hansel & Gretel*, (TOON Graphics, 2014), p. 52

In this chapter, I am going to talk about modern literary reworkings of "Hansel and Gretel" aimed at children and young adults. They include Adam Gidwitz's *A Tale Dark & Grimm* (2010) as well as Bethan Woollvin's *Hansel & Gretel* (2018) and Neil Gaiman's *Hansel and Gretel* (2014).

Nowadays, the quick development of information technologies helps people to entertain themselves with the help of various media – and the incorporation of traditional story-telling into them means that fairy-tales can now reach simultaneously a variety of audiences. Films, television series, video games, audio books, and many other forms of digital-based content are popular now not only among young children, but also among adults. Because of this, many modern story-tellers start to re-interpret and re-create fairy-tales, this ancient form of amusement, into the narratives that appeal to several audiences at once.[2] The violence and dark humor that makes their appearance in those works target adults who may be enjoying the new version of the old tale together with their children (or on their own).

Fairy-tales became a favorite subject of film directors, computer animators, and modern authors because of their often clear-cut conflicts, the famous battle between good and evil, their action-driven plots with happy endings, and the not infrequent motif of the eerie, spooky, or outright horrible – the darkness that attractively offsets the stories' sweetness. These elements are easy to recognize; they are familiar to child and adult audiences alike. Anyone who decides to change some of them or their combination can make an old story seem like a new and different tale all over again.[3]

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[2] In Jack Zipes' *Grimm Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy Tales,* he talks discusses the recreation and reinterpretation of Brother Grimms' tales in present time and different countries. See: Jack Zipes, *Grimm Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy Tales*, (USA, Princeton University Press, 2015)

[3] In another work by Jack Zipes, he mentions the development and changes of Brothers Grimms' fairy-tales, which influenced by technologies. This article mainly focuses on the choices of the film directors. See Jack Zipes, "Chapter Four, The Instrumentalization of Fantasy: Fairy Tales, the Culture Industry and Mass Media," *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, (USA, University Press of

The first media that fairy-tale plots began to infiltrate was film. Starting in 1927, when the first film with a soundtrack, *The Jazz Singer*, was released in America, films became the form of entertainment that reached and gradually surpassed the importance of opera. Daniel Snowman points out that "there were artistic parallels […] between opera and film. Each attempted to create a form of mass entertainment by bringing together a number of different art forms, with the same emphasis on larger-than-life emotions and, perhaps, larger-than-life acting style."[4] When big film industry players started to diversify plots that enhanced cinematic action, fairy-tales became one of the most popular themes on the big screen. For example, Walt Disney produced the first full-length colored cartoon film in America film history, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), in which he adapted Brothers Grimm's "The Snow White." His adaptations not only focused on tales from the Grimm's collection, but also on tales from the broader European canon, such as "Sleeping Beauty," "Aladdin," and Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonder Land."[5] Interestingly, "Hansel and Gretel" is yet to be adapted into a long animated film.

After the big success of the cinematic adaptation of fairy-tales, film companies started to put them into feature films with real actors. In those works, cartoon sweetness gradually disappeared, while elements of violence became more and more obvious. For example, in 2002, a movie under a title *Hansel & Gretel* was released. Its story-line is comparable to the original tale, but the setting has shifted to modern days. This film aims at a young audience; children appreciate its whimsical protagonists, such as elves, its colorful renderings of German customs, and its treatment of the theme of magic. However, another film called *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, released in 2013, has a greater number of violent elements in it. This film tells the story of the siblings who grew up victimized and became witch

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Kentucky, 1979), pp. 104-145

[4] Daniel Snowman, "The Birth of Italian Opera," *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera*, (London: Atlantic, 2009), p. 287

[5] *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* (IMBd.com, Inc.), https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029583/

hunters. The Motion Picture Association of America gave it a rating rank R (restricted), because of such scenes as a beheading, murderous attacks with blood streaming all over the place, and the appearance of horrible-looking witches. This means that children who are under eighteen can only watch this movie with their parents or an adult guardian. There are other productions that adapted "Hansel and Gretel," too, such as a short television fantasy *Hansel and Gretel* (1982), a horror movie *Hansel & Gretel Get Baked* (2013), a Korean adaptation 헨젤과 그레텔 (2007), an Italian adaptation "Hansel e Gretel"(1990) that pivots around the selling of the siblings' organs (they come back for revenge), *Hansel vs. Gretel* (2015), and so on.[6] Most of these features are poorly crafted and aim to arouse the viewer's lowliest instincts (fear, disgust, lust, cynicism). They are only partially connected to "Hansel and Gretel" by Brothers Grimm. They borrow some of the tale's motifs, such as abandoned siblings and a seductive candy house, but they also add an exaggerated amount of bloody violence to the story-line. There is even a video game "Gretel and Hansel" (2009), which is also violent. In this game, the player is controlling Gretel: she moves around and tries to collect pebbles. If the player does not choose his/her steps wisely, Gretel or Hansel would die accidentally.

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[6] These data all comes from http://www.imbd.com

(Figure 3.1. When the player uses the key to open the door, the siblings' mother comes out with an axe to kill them.)

The popularity of the fairy-tale's plot in modern low-style entertainment means that this narrative has a potential for cheap thrills that are a selling point for producers' customers.

Besides the mass media productions, which may or may not be created in good taste, books based on "Hansel and Gretel" also emerge regularly in the modern market. In fact, book as the medium Brothers Grimm introduced for the dissemination of fairy-tales still contributes to the largest amount of adaptations. There are picture books, story books, all kinds of novels that tell or retell the story of "Hansel and Gretel." To me, *A Tale Dark And Grimm* by Adam Gidwitz, *Hansel & Gretel* by Bethan Woollvin, and *Hansel and Gretel* by Neil Gaiman stand out among other adaptations. These three works are particularly interesting, because each of them takes a different psychological and artistic perspective on the original tale, inviting the reader to consider an authorial interpretation of the old text as the key element of its novelty.

A Tale Dark and Grimm is the first book that I am going to focus on. Gidwitz picks several original tales that Brothers Grimm collected, such as "The Faithful Johannes," "Brother and Sister," and "The Seven Swallows" to expand the source text, "Hansel and Gretel." He uses Hansel and Gretel as the main characters; added stories merge together to expand and complicate the protagonists' adventure as we know it. Gidwitz explores the possibility of placing the character from the original in the context of "borrowed" events which, nevertheless, seem compatible with the more familiar elements of plot: abandonment, capture, escape, conquering of evil by the "innocent" but also empowered heroes.

That said, when Gidwitz maintains several important motifs from the original tale, especially the motif of murder, he gets very close to the ambiguity of this subject in Grimm's version of the narrative. For example, the book starts with the story of "The Faithful

Johannes." Johannes is a loyal servant. To protect the prince's cursed wife, he sacrifices himself by turning himself into a stone. When the prince becomes the king and fathers Hansel and Gretel, he learns that the only way to save Johannes from the immobility and darkness of his stone-like existence is to cut off his children's heads and spread their blood on the stone. Convinced that this is the right thing to do, the king kills his children: "He stood, beckoned Hansel and Gretel to his side, drew a sword from its place on the wall, and cut off their heads. Their lifeless bodies dropped to the floor. The king took their blood on his hand and smeared it on the statue. Just as he had foretold, Johannes returned to life, covered in the children's blood. "[7] Here, Gidwitz both alludes to the plot of the original story (the father kills his children himself) and adds much more severity to it, while explaining the murderer's motifs (the murder is done to save the king's faithful servant). Other examples of Gidwitz's benefitting from the violence prevalent in Grimm's collections of folklore abound: Gretel cuts her finger off to open the door in the Crystal Mountain where the swallows are living, while a young man she observes chops up an innocent girl into pieces. All of these details come from the original Grimm's tales ("The Seven Ravens," "The Robber Bridegroom").

Besides the parts that owe their themes and structure to the original tale, Gidwitz also adds original, unprecedented elements to the source story. In the book, when he explores the relationship between the parents and their children, he lets his imagination roam. For example, in the original tale of "The Faithful Johannes," the story ends with Johannes recovering and children coming back to live: the family of the king "lived happily together until they died."[8] However, in his adaptation, Gidwitz also adds a new ending to the well-known one: when the murdered children recover, Hansel and Gretel feel afraid and run away from home because they hear that their father had killed them to save the servant; they are

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[7] Adam Gidwitz, *A Tale Dark and Grimm*, (USA, Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2010), pp. 25-27

[8] Jacob and Whilhelm Grimm, *"Faithful Johannes, "* translated by Margaret Hunt, (2002), https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm006.html

also disturbed by the fact that their mother was happy with the solution. Their doubts show in their conversation:

> "Did you hear what Father said?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "He cut off our heads to save that ugly old man."
>
> Hansel was silent.
>
> "And Mommy was glad that he did. Do you think they hate us?"
>
> Hansel was silent still.
>
> "I think we should run away," Gretel said. "In case they want to do it again."
>
> "That's just what I was thinking," Hansel answered. "Just what I was thinking…."[9]

Here, the dialogue between the siblings raises the question of their relationship with their parents, which also challenges the expected "need and abandonment" motif from the old tale. Similarly, when the original "Faithful Johannes" is praising the kings' great sacrifice, by celebrating his decision of killing his children, the agency of the children is not specified: they seem like schematic victims, just words on white paper. Death for a greater cause is a symbol of their identities. However, Gidwitz goes directly to the perspective of the children, asking a question in their own words: was it really necessary to kill them? Did the king ever regret killing them? What if they never came back? Is it an ethical decision to sacrifice innocent children to save one person? These questions were never considered in the original tale, and Gidwitz's addressing them adds more depth to the plot that is subversive and cruel.

However, Hansel and Gretel's journey to find a new home which can accept them is not a happy affair, for Hansel and Gretel discover that their new places of residence are as dangerous as the first one, where parents seem to be ready to give up their lives. "[Hansel] thought back to all the other parents he had known. His own father had cut off his head. The baker woman had tried to eat Gretel. And then this new father had wished his sons into

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[9] Gidwitz, p. 35

birds."[10] Here, the description of the families that the siblings stayed with points out other unhappy experiences in the protagonists' lives. All parental homes in Gidwitz's work are dangerous, but they are all different from the original motif of parents sacrificing their offspring out of need, that transpired in the tales that Brothers Grimm collected. The problems that Gidwitz is interested in concern not the poverty of the household or neglectful parents, but the grown-ups as a peculiar, insane, not-to-be-trusted tribe. Gretel asks Gidwitz's most important question when she witnesses the young man's killing the innocent girl: "'Are there no good grown-ups anywhere?' she cried."[11] Throughout the story, it seems like that Gidwitz's adults are the real danger for children, no matter what kind of identities they adapt. The adults in his *A Tale Dark and Grimm* are infantile, irrational, and in need of help from the younger generation. The narrator summarizes this idea when saying: "Maybe in real life there are perfect parents and amazing adults who will never disappoint you. But Once Upon a Time, no grown-up was perfect. You, my dear reader, we have certainly learned that by now."[12] This twisting of the paradigm of parental reliability is a comment on all the adults who may be the snapshot of a dysfunctional modern society as a whole. It gets more attention of Gidwitz's young readers, who may begin to question the security of the world in and outside of their parental homes.[13]

Apart from describing the faults of parental homes and bad parents, Gidwitz spends plenty of time describing Hansel and Gretel's coming of age and the relationship between them: these kinds of information does not exist in the original fairy-tale. For example, when the siblings released the swallows, Gretel looks at her brother, thinking of him and their

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[10] Gidwitz, p. 66

[11] Gidwitz, p. 104

[12] Gidwitz, p. 123

[13] The text is not entirely subversive, though. Luckily for H and G, the adults realize their faults: "They see their foolishness now. And so do I. Faithfulness is important. Under-standing is important. But nothing is as precious as children. Nothing." Gidwitz, p. 153

journey: "[Gretel] looked up at Hansel. He was leaner and stronger than she had ever seen him. They had both grown much over the difficult journey to the Crystal Mountain."[14] The journey of leaving home is hard, and it leaves marks of time on their body: they grow taller and stronger, they get scars. Moreover, the relationship between siblings becomes tighter and more meaningful. When Hansel and Gretel run away from home, they are just children who are afraid. There are no adults they can rely on; all the adults that they trust have betrayed their faith. This means that the siblings can only lean on each other. When Gretel thinks that Hansel is dead in the middle of the story, the narrator says: "Gretel fell to the ground and sobbed and sobbed. She was alone, in a great forest, in a dark tale. Her father has tried to kill her. She'd been nearly eaten by the baker woman, and had cut off her own finger. And now her brother, Hansel was dead."[15] Before this point, the siblings were staying together all the time, but the traumas made their relationship into something far beyond a normal brother-sister connectedness: they took care of each other and ran away from danger. Suddenly, however, when the only person that Gretel could trust was gone, the pain of this loss became greater than all the misfortunes that had happened before. The separation broke breaks Gretel's heart: from now on, she could only rely on herself, alone, as if she were abandoned by the entire world. Hansel feels the same way too. This is the reason why, when they meet again, the siblings are the happiest people in the world:

Hansel and Gretel came together like two magnets meeting, like meteors that have been screaming through space toward this one moment of collision. […]

They stared at each other, sitting in the puddle.

Lost and then found.

Dead and then alive.

Covered in mud.[16]

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[14] Gidwitz, p. 66

[15] Gidwitz, pp. 80-1

[16] Gidwitz, p. 168

The reunion of the sibling is the climax of the story, emotionally it is even more important and impactful than the scene in which they fight against the dragon. The rainy day and a muddy path seem to be a peculiar place and time for them to meet: but it is a miracle, and for Gidwitz, miracles require no gold or diamonds. It is true that they are relatives. But more importantly, they are each other's friends, partners, and teachers, embarked together on a long journey. This psychological bond and the richness of emotional ties between Hansel and Gretel is missing in the original tale as well as in its operatic adaptations.

The most important element that Gidwitz adds in his adaptation is his own voice. He introduces a storyteller who occasionally appears in the middle or the end of Hansel and Gretel's adventure, trying to explain and predict the things that will happen next, or add his own common-sense perspective on the Grimm's version of the events. Moreover, the narrator is engaged in a relationship with the reader – another agent of the narrative action in *A Tale Dark and Grimm*. For example, Gidwitz's narrator always warns child readers, suggesting that they should keep away from his book:

And as for the little ones, if they are still around, I warn you, I *plead* with you: Make them go away. Don't let them hear this story. They may have nightmares.

At least read it yourself first. Then, if you think they can take it, maybe, *maybe* you can read it to them. And then you have only yourself to blame if they can't sleep for a week.[17]

This passage appears when Gretel thinks that Hansel has been killed, which is a sad story in itself. It includes detailed descriptions of dead animals that Hansel killed, appearing not only a victim of violence, but also its perpetrator. Before the readers begin *A Tale Dark and Grimm*, they do not know whether the story will be creepy or not, but Gidwitz's sequencing of events is such that suspense leads to curiosity, which, in its turn, allows his readers to withstand the onslaught of harsh images and ethical challenges and read on. The narrative

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[17] Gidwitz, p. 67

structure – storytellers' appeals to the reader, his attempts to lure the reader into the trap of following characters' decisions without judging them – is such that the reader ends up identifying not with the protagonists, but with the implied member of Gidwitz's audience: someone who is a brave explorer of a literary text. Moreover, the narrative voice comments on the characters' thoughts as well as those of the readers, thus bringing the perceiver of narrative action and the perceived on the same cognitive and moral plane. For example, when Gretel ignores the voice of the rain, which warns her of the danger (the house that she is going to arrive at is unsafe), she tells herself that "rain can't talk."[18] The narrator immediately halts the story there to contemplate her decision in an ironic vein:

No, of course it can't. The moon can eat children, and fingers can open doors, and people's heads can be put back on.
But rain? Talk? Don't be ridiculous.
Good thinking, Gretel dear. Good thinking.[19]

Here, the storyteller's voice is full of mockery, sarcasm. The reader may skip it as another aspect of Gidwitz's playfulness. But, in fact, the narrator's tone points out the main conflict in the story. How can Gretel not realize that in a work of fantasy, a children's book that is an adaptation of a quirky and violent fairy-tale, even the rain can talk? Gidwitz's narrator addresses Gretel, but what he seems to do more directly is engage in a conversation with the readers by predicting what they readers may think about the character's poor judgment, density, bad decision-making skills. These readers are Gidwitz's co-authors, or, if we look at it from inside the text, the co-narrators of *A Tale Dark and Grimm*. They are expected to follow not only the protagonists' logic, but also that of their creators.

Gidwitz's reading and re-writing "Hansel and Gretel" demonstrates how his understanding of Grimm's fairy-tales as subversive, ambiguous literary works contributes to

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[18] Gidwitz, p. 97
[19] Gidwitz, p. 97

his own writing strategies. Not only is he able to "edit" Grimm's narratives and connect them into a new story-line; he is also doing it in such a way as to interest his readers in the storytelling process itself. This kind of adaptation is an intertextual version of the latest production of *Hansel and Gretel* at the Met. There, the director and stage designer choose to summon the audience to interpret their visual and musical decisions and agree or disagree with them. Here, readers are constantly reminded that a story like this one may end differently. It is their moving through the text that propels it forward.

Bethan Woollvin is another contemporary writer who makes her own, unique, perspective on "Hansel and Gretel," the centerpiece of her retelling the story for children. In her picture book *Hansel & Gretel*, a good witch named Willow appears to be innocent and kindly while the children are wicked and dumb – up until the very last pages. These perceptions are illusionary, though. Child readers soon discover that Willow, who lives in the forest in her little gingerbread house, is kind only to a point. Woolvin tells us how Willow meets Hansel and Gretel, who are dropping bread crumbs, and tries to be kind to them. She invites the siblings over for dinner at her house. Here real evil ensues: the children are not only hungry, but also naughty and even mean: they eat some of Willow's house and all the food that she cooked. Even when she asks them to leave a little morsel for her, they do not oblige. Playing with her magic spells and wands, Hansel and Gretel then let the magic intensify until every fantastic object in existence explodes and destroys the house. Most importantly, they push Willow into her oven because they want to take over the house, make it their own. The surprise comes at the very end, when the reader discovers that Willow's patience is not limited. She gets so angry that she cooks the children and turns them into ginger cookies.

Woollvin's version of "Hansel and Gretel" is fascinating, because its evildoing has a psychological foundation as well as a hint of social commentary: the perpetrators of "crimes"

are Hansel and Gretel, and their transformation is a "just" punishment for their "crimes." Woollvin maintains several main motifs from the original tale, such as the gingerbread house, the siblings who drop the bread crumbs, and the person who gets cooked in the oven. However, Woollvin reverses the original story's most important theme, that is, the witch's evil nature confronted by the quintessentially moral, honest protagonists. Her children are "bad," while the witch appears to be "good." This change totally re-channels the story, giving a new direction to its final outcome. Readers may be surprised, but they are not shocked at the epilogue: the familiar plot simply receives a daring new twist.

Woollvin starts the story by introducing the witch as the story's positive hero: "Deep in the forest, in a home made entirely out of gingerbread, there lived a witch named Willow, Willow wasn't like most witches. She only used good magic, because Willow was a good witch."[20] In the original tale, the story starts with the woodcutter's children – impoverished and sad, hungry and forlorn. Eventually, it is they who will become heroes and conquer the evil. In Woollvin's version, the witch, Willow, becomes the "hero," while the children are allocated the anti-hero status. In fact, when the siblings are introduced, the reader may notice that they bear some features of the old witch from the original tale, such as rudeness and abruptness of manner:

> At the end of the trail, she found two children.
> "We're Hansel and Gretel," one said.
> "What do you want?" the other demanded.[21]

Here, unlike in the original tale, Woollvin does not explain where do the children come from or why they arrive in the middle of the woods: they just show up, walking in the forest, and dropping bread crumbs – a familiar couple, a cliché, an archetype. Moreover, the illustrations that accompany the story show Hansel and Gretel in a dark, ironic light. The siblings are in

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[20] Bethan Wollvin, *Hansel & Gretel*, (Atlanta,Peachtress Publishers, 2018), p. 2

[21] Woollvin, p. 4-5

an unhappy mood, they are not laughing: they stare at Willow as if she has messed up their game. By introducing the children this way, Woolvin sends the signal to the reader that the positions of the children and the witch are switched and that the evil in the story may be harbored in a different set of characters.

Because this is a picture book, the illustrations that Woollvin creates play a big role in the narrative. Their role may be that of a narrator: they comment, suggest outcomes, question the readers' judgment. First of all, there are always little details hidden in every picture. For example, a black cat lives in Willow's house. The story never mentions it, but the cat does feature in the pictures and it does play a major role in the plot: he is the main reason why the gingerbread house collapses, for the dangerous magic spells that Hansel and Gretel play with make it grow bigger and bigger, until it bursts and finally explodes the house as well.

(Figure 3.2. The cat makes the house collapse.)

Although the narrator does not tell what happened to this gigantic cat later, the illustration shows it clearly. After Willow crawls out from her oven, the cat leaves home and applies for a job at a circus.

Willow's home collapsed.
It was only made out of
gingerbread after all.

And this time, Willow did get angry.

(Figure 3.3. The witch escapes the oven; her cat leaves for a circus.)

Because these details are very easy to miss for the readers who read the book for the first time, pictures become a prompt for them to re-read the story again. Aside from the cat, there are also a mouse and a bird, which have their own little stories within the bigger narrative. Woollvin even makes the front page and the final page meaningful, adding details which do not comment on the plot of "Hansel and Gretel." The front page addresses the scene when the witch meets Hansel and Gretel in the forest. When the story ends, the "epilogue" picture shows Hansel and Gretel being made into bread, while the last spread provides an explanation for how Willow, who has lost her house, is going to make a new and better one by means of magic – and with some assistance from her big black cat.

(Figure 3.4. The new castle that Willow made for herself in the end.)

Besides the little details that Woollvin adds to each page to expand and enrich the plot, readers may construct their own narrative in addition to the story of Hansel and Gretel by following visual clues in illustrations. For example, when the witch is angry at the naughty siblings, the readers realize that she decides to cook them. However, Woollvin does not include any no words to express her intent. Instead, she draws it:

(Figure 3.5. Willow cooks the children.)

There are two pages that show how Willow cooks the children. She has butter, salt, flour, a spoon, a rolling pin, and clouds of magic spells surrounding a big pot with Hansel and Gretel in it. Willow, the good witch, is putting an egg into the pot. Because what Willow is doing is definitely a criminal act, these pages are left without an accompaniment in words: it is as if

the author is speechless, but continues to look at the "horror" and represent it. The pictures deliver the information about the witch's acts to the readers, leaving space for them to imagine what happens, how and why.

Only three colors constitute the book's palette, but Woollvin uses them well to create a world of fantastic occurrences and surprise. The same device – stark visual props accompanied by a text that offers a drastic re-interpretation of Grimm's fairy-tale – is also used in the last book that analyzes in this chapter, Neil Gaiman's and Lorenzo Mattotti's *Hansel and Gretel*. In this slim volume, full of illustrations, Gaiman and Mattotti work together as a team to retell the original tale. Mattotti's illustrations interpret the original story in broad black and white ink brushstrokes (illustrations take over the entire space of the book spread, but they appear only on every other page). This adaptation basically retells the story of "Hansel and Gretel," but Gaiman also adds much background information and psychological details to it. Because of these added nuances, his adaptation is more vivid, emotionally impactful, and thought-provoking as compared with the original fairy-tale.

The tales that Brothers Grimm collected seem to happen in a wonderland where time stands still; it is told by a detached observer who is invisible. On the contrary, Gaiman's story creates the feeling of time in progress, and it also has a more vociferous collective narrator. For example, the story starts with Gaiman's introducing the parental couple, the woodcutter and his pretty wife. In the original tale, the narrator does not explain when and how Mr. and Mrs. Woodcutter had their children. But in this modern adaptation, Gaiman gives a clear description of the gestation and birth of both children: "Shortly after they were married, her belly began to swell and, in the winter, when the snows were high, she gave birth to a girl. […] Two years later, [she gave birth to a boy]."[22] In these sentences, the sense of passing time is obvious; Gretel's coming to life is associated with the end of winter and the beginning

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[22] Gaiman, p. 8

of spring – a symbol of rejuvenation. The replacement of the fairy-tale's eternal present with a personal history of the woodcutter's family is a significant difference between the original tale and Gaiman's version of it.

When Gaiman adds historical information to his storytelling, the tale acquires a sinister, but also very specific temporal tome. The mention of Great War, added by Gaiman, incorporates such details as hungry soldiers and the gradual disappearance of everyday security and comforts from protagonists' lives. In the beginning of the story, Hansel and Gretel's family is not rich, but they can still feed themselves with good food; Hansel and Gretel are innocent children who stay in their house but can also safely and happily roam the wilderness around it. Gaiman explains their ability to sustain themselves and freely move around: "Even so, their father taught them the way of the woods, and their mother taught them how to cook and to clean and to sew."[23] These details of their family life create a feeling of a harmonious family where nothing bad could possibly happen. "That was in the good days, before the war, before the famine."[24] Here, the reader's sense of time has been expanded. They begin not simply to absorb a familiar fairy-tale, but also think that the story might be true. When Gaiman steps outside of the fairy-tale realm, he transgresses into the "safe" territory that the child readers are expected to stay safely moored in. By describing the war in gruesome detail, Gaiman explains not only expands narrative time, but also gives the famine a real foundation and thus, invites his readers to contemplate the eerie that frequently befell their ancestors in the past.

The second aspect of Gaiman's storytelling that makes his tale stand out from the Grimms' is that he has added psychological nuance to his narrative. Consider his sketch of Hansel and Gretel's parents: in the tale that Brothers Grimm recorded, the depictions of parents are minimal. For example, the source text only explains the background and gives the

[23] Gaiman, p. 9

[24] Gaiman, p. 12

names of characters: "At the edge of a great forest, there once lived a poor woodcutter with his wife and two children."[25] This is the only description of Hansel and Gretel's parents before they decide to abandon the children. In Gaiman's version, on the contrary, we learn a lot about the mother and the father. For example, Gaiman writes: "[Hansel and Gretel's] mother was sometimes bitter and sharp-tongued, and […] their father was sometimes sullen and eager to be away from their little house."[26] Here, the author elaborates the figures of the parents from Hansel and Gretel's perspective, which means that there is no idealization and no expectations of a miraculous change in their natures when disaster strikes. Another example of the psychological depth of Gaiman's narrative is the dialogue between the parents when they are discussing the fate of their children:

"There are four of us," his mother was saying. "Four mouths to feed. If we keep going like this, we'll all die. Without the extra mouths, you and I will have a chance."

"We cannot," replied the woodcutter, in a whisper. "It would be a monstrous thing to do, to kill our children, and I will have no part of it."

"*Lose* them, not *kill* them," said the woodcutter's wife.

[…]

"Two dead are better than four dead. That is mathematics, and it is logic."

"I care for neither your mathematics nor your logic," grumbled the woodcutter. "But I can argue no more."[27]

This conversation is peculiar. It obviously represents the inner struggle of the father, in a response to his wife's suggestion to abandon the kids that, speaking from the perspective of a fairy-tale text, is relatively long. But what is most interesting, the mother's statements and replies are not simply cruel; they also exhibit her ability to manipulate her spouse both logically and emotionally. In comparison with the original tale, the exchange between two

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[25] Brothers Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel," *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. By Maria Tatar, (W. W. Norton & Company, NY, 2017), p. 236

[26] Gaiman, p. 9

[27] Gaiman, p. 13-16

adults is more persuasive: the audiences immediately see which of the two parents is the source of all evil. Furthermore, the mother's and father's words make them appear multi-dimensional – both of them are committing a crime, but only one is a true villain; both suffer, but only one can make think of the death of children "mathematically." The details of verbal exchange transform schematic figures into breathing individuals. Just like our sense of time, our sense of protagonists' mentality expands.

Besides adding more information and nuance to the old story, Gaiman's narrative also provides a deeper insight into the relationship between the siblings and the witch. In the original tale, the witch is merely an evil creature; she exists, because witches are part of the folk tradition, and they are expected to act bad around people. For example, when the children are eating parts of her house, the words of Grimm's witch alludes to crispy bones: "Knusper, knusper Knauschen" and thus, to her willingness to eat humans. These words are even more horrifying, since her evil deed is shown to the readers from the very beginning.

In Gaiman's story, however, the figure of the witch evolves: Gaiman adds more information about the wicked creature's actions and speeches, thus elaborating and de-schematizing the character. For example, when the children first hear the witch's voice while they are snacking on her house, Gaiman describes not only the words of the witch, but also how she speaks: "A voice from inside, gentle and amused: 'Who nibbles my house? Is it a mouse?'"[28] The phrase "gentle and amused" that Gaiman uses hides the fact that this woman is actually evil. Similarly, when the children first see the witch in his story, she does not seems dangerous at all: "The person who came out of the little house was not an ogre or a monster, but a kindly-faces old woman, leaning on a stick, who peered about her shortsightedly with dim eyes."[29] Appearances are deceptive, Gaiman seems to imply. The weak old woman, who relies on a stick, successfully deceives the siblings by looking so frail

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[28] Gaiman, p. 32

[29] Gaiman, p. 32

and vulnerable. But this is why, when she sheds her disguise, her coming out is more horrible than the witch's transformation in Grimms' tale:

> The old woman was stronger than she looked—a sinewy, gristly strength: she picked Hansel up, and carried the sleeping boy […]. She dropped him onto the straw, for there was only straw on the floor, along with a few ancient and well-chewed bones, and she locked the cage, and she felt her way along the wall, back to her house.
>
> "Meat," she said, happily.[30]

In this portrayal of the old woman, many details point out to her evil nature, immorality, and power. First, it is her "sinewy" and "gristly" strength. These two adjectives create a strange image: a skinny woman uses her long fingers to pick up the child and carry him on her bony back across the room. Further, when she drops the boy onto the straw, there are "a few ancient and well-chewed bones" there. These bones left there immediately construct another portrait of the witch as someone who chews on her victims until the last bit of flesh is gone. It is important to note here that Gaiman never mentions the word "witch" in his story. By doing so, he makes his narrative echo the original tale, where the power relationship between the old woman and the children is less obvious from the start. In the opera, the witch's magic power is immediately stated; in the text versions, it reveals itself gradually.

Gaiman also changes Hansel and Gretel, the main characters of his tale: these children become more "dangerous" in his interpretation of the original. First of all, the siblings are not heroes anymore: they become avengers and survivors. For example, the old woman never thought that Gretel could kill her, but Gretel "had learned more from her than the old woman suspected."[31] Moreover, after Gretel pushed the old woman into the oven, she "closed the door, and held it closed, and listened while the old woman's screams died away."[32] When Gretel acquires great power as an agent of resistance that stands in opposition to the power of

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[30] Gaiman, p. 36

[31] Gaiman, p. 44

[32] Gaiman, p. 44

evil, her behavior leads to a scene that can make the reader uncomfortable: it is unnatural and scary when a child commits a murder. Further, when Gretel stays beside the oven and listens to the screams of the woman who is burned alive, she seems calm, like a housewife waiting for her dinner in the oven to be ready. This image is, perhaps, the creepiest in the entire story. Before this point, the siblings never worked as a team, for, in Gaiman's version, they are only able to protect themselves when they leave each other to rely on their own resources. For example, after Gaiman's Gretel releases Hansel from the cage, she is "wondering about his refusal to let go of the bone he held as firmly as if his life might have depended upon it."[33] Here, Hansel, being a victim of trauma, loses his ability to speak about his pain. His silence is a clear symptom of a survivor's behavior, but it is also something that makes it clear that in Gaiman's story, the siblings have secrets from each other. This kind of secretiveness never happened in the original tale and other adaptations before: Hansel and Gretel in Grimm's tale and in the opera survive because of their luck, their abilities, and their reliance on one another.

Gaiman's tale is dark, and Mattotti's illustrations to it are also very dramatic. From the very start – the book's cover – they give a hint that this story might not be pleasant or even suitable for children's reading. Mattotti's black and white drawings contain more black then white: there is always night in Gaiman's world, or it is a space enveloped in sinister darkness of spiritual nature. His brush is powerful, strokes may appear disorderly, but the resulting image is clear. On every page, black ink spreads out over the whole leaf, with tiny outlines of characters or details of setting appearing in white. This gives the reader an uncomfortable feeling of pressure that comes from the evil which is central to the story and needs to be conquered.

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[33] Gaiman, p. 44

In conclusion, the three new adaptations by three different authors provide unique perspectives on Grimm's original story. The three authors and one illustrator interpret the source text differently, but they all make an effort to add psychological, cultural, and visual nuance to their versions of "Hansel and Gretel." Apart from their desire to adjust, expand, or re-shape the source text in the process of adaptation, all authors have one approach in common, which is their adding a strong new voice to the storytelling – that of the narrator. In Gidwitz's story, the narrative voice invites the reader to a collaboration with the author as well as adds some humor to the *A Tale Dark and Grimm*; Woollvin's picture book plays with the narrative conventions of fairy-tales and creates a surprising ending for a familiar plot; in Gaiman and Mattotti's book, both the illustrations and the narrative provide a sense of emotional intensity. The "darkness" of their work grabs the readers' attention and remind them of the mysterious and violent provenance of the original fairy-tale the Grimm Brothers discovered.

Conclusion

After a long journey of the seeking the origin of Brothers Grimm's fairy tale, it is time to conclude what I have learned a lot from studying the original narrative and its adaptations. When writing the first chapter of my project, I focused on such elements of the source text as motifs and narrative structure. I have discovered that "Hansel and Gretel" was a challenging text to explore: its organization determined by the violent beginning offset by the no less violent ending as well as by the tale's peculiar take on gender: it is women who determine the course of action in the story. Following the development of these features, I have proceeded to contemplate a great number of adaptations, cinematic, literary, and operatic, choosing Humperdinck's opera as my case study. The writers and composers who adapted "Hansel and Gretel" used particular, often diverse, ways and medias to retell and reinterpret the story. My exploration of the adaptations has brought me to an in-depth understanding of the role of source texts' original narrative features in determining the adaptations' form and function.

"Hansel and Gretel" is an immediately recognizable part of German literary canon. Due to the richness of its motifs and fascinating plot, the fairy-tale has spread all around the world. Many other adaptations and books based on Grimm's tales are released or on their way, such as the three books that I analyzed in Chapter Three, as well as the films such as *The Frog King* (2001 and 2009)*, Cinderella* (2015), and *Little Riding Hood* (2011). These works not only provide the viewers and readers with solid entertainment, but they also force us to think about the dissemination of cultural tradition in a new way. "Hansel and Gretel," for example, has fit in with the modern culture's fascination with violence. The adaptations of the tale also recognized the modern interest in the empowerment of women as described or featured in film, opera, and literature. Through observing the transformation of "Hansel and Gretel" through the original tale's adaptations, I could remark on the change of cultural and

social expectations and the authors' strategies of reimagining the old narratives to accommodate the audiences' changing tastes.

Will this free treatment of tradition continue to expand in the future? "Hansel and Gretel" turned into an opera in the twentieth century was only relatively violent, but new works that remodel its plot in twenty-first century are more and more reliant on violent, if not sadistic, content. Is this development a good or a bad thing to children? For example, a 2014 interview explored the opinions of the children who watched the new staging of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. Their reaction to the opera was different: some said that lyrics that the singers sang were too fast and they could not understand them; there were those who said that they enjoyed the high and low notes that appeared in the music; yet others said that they wanted to recommend the production to their family. However, the most important statements concerned the scene of Hansel and Gretel's killing the witch. One child said that the only scene scared him was the scene with the oven, for the setting was so real that he though the fire in the oven was not fake. He though "Oh, god," when he saw the witch kicked into the fire.[1] On one hand, the child's reaction demonstrates how effective the director's approach to featuring the murder on stage was. On the other hand, we are observing a child who is happy that a character is burned alive on stage in real fire. Is this the effect the Met's crew was trying to achieve?

Thus, I would like to end my project with some questions: How to make new adaptations from the original tale while making sure that the outcomes of those adaptations would not be darker and more disturbing than the initial work of Brothers Grimm? Where will the authors' focus on violence lead them to? Should we explain the dark elements to young children the way Neil Gaiman did it? Or should we delete some of the bloody parts, and present the revised version of the early narrative to modern audiences? The composer, directors, and

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[1] New York Daily News, Kids review Hansel and Gretel at Metropolitan Opera,(2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdv-i0Jy0Uc.

authors I have worked with have responded to these challenges – each in their own way. But I am sure there will be others interested in adapting "Hansel and Gretel," and it is they who will need to pay attention to the source texts' complexity, its coming through in adaptations, and the modern audiences' expectations.

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