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## Making Mythology: The Role of Ancient Faith in Crafting a Unifying Narrative in *Teutonic Mythology* and *Children's and Household Tales*

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In their journal's first volume (*Altdutsche Walder*, 1813), Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) proclaim, "We want to do our part, as an old poet so beautifully said, so that slumbering writings are awakened, and sweet lessons are retrieved from the shadows, to be discovered once again"<sup>1</sup> (iii). In considering the Germanic medieval "writings" that the brothers found "slumbering," it is important to remember that *Altdutsche Walder* broadly sought to assemble materials pertaining to the German vernacular culture and language, including oral tales and folk beliefs. They believed that those artifacts could restore a nearly lost connection to the Germanic past. According to the Grimms, the past and the Germanic ancestors are not dead if they can live on in the stories that are read and shared by the people. The nature of the "sweet lessons" that they seek to rescue is revealed in their belief that the old tales are connected to life itself, and that denying that vital bond would "take away the teachings of history"<sup>2</sup> (ii).

Their collections of often fantastical stories such as *Children's and Household Tales* [*Kinder- und Hausmarchen*] (1812-1857) and *German Sagas* [*Deutsche Sagen*] (1816-1818), among others, display a frequent longing for the past and for a time radically different from their present. Jacob and Wilhelm take part in an ongoing collective conversation among nineteenth-century writers and intellectuals who sought clear definitions of borders and nationality. Thus, *Children's and Household Tales* is often framed by notions concerning the origins of the German people and by prognostications of their ostensible destiny. By the same token, Jacob's *Teutonic Mythology* [*Deutsche Mythologie*] (1835) emerges as an essential work documenting the attempt to define and describe the Germanic past through an in-depth study of mythological tales and Germanic paganism. Scholarship on the Grimms demonstrates that their historical approach to the reconstruction of Germanic paganism

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led to the (re-)discovery of mythology as a critically influential part of German history.

These studies include important and quite thorough investigations of the many changes Jacob and Wilhelm made to the tales in their ambitious project of committing orally transmitted stories to paper. Jack Zipes, for example, attributes the narrative modifications to a desire on the part of the brothers for children to find the tales in their collections both entertaining and didactic (“Changing Function” 20). Zipes further points out their attempt to adapt the folklore to Christian bourgeois tastes and norms at a time in the nineteenth century when the bourgeoisie was ascending to power (*Stick* 99; see also Tatar *Hard Facts*). Gunnell relates the tales to the process of National Romanticism and to the creation of a national image (12). Battles explicates the Grimms’ declaration that orally transmitted medieval sources had left them with the bones and joints of ancient mythology, thus requiring them to reassemble and add flesh to the skeletons (67). As Orton emphasizes, the Grimms were also founding philologists who were deeply invested in uncovering the origins of language. The brothers equated denial or neglect of ancient, indigenous paganism with a disregard for the historical continuity of the German language (303). By incorporating folktales and modern folk beliefs into their reconstructive efforts, they made possible a systematic reassembly of Germanic history and mythology.

Going beyond a historical approach, I aim to show how the Grimms worked to reconstruct the vital, spiritual significance of a Germanic pagan faith and reinfuse it into a nineteenth-century German identity. The newly awakened interest in myth and religion at that time was a way for a disoriented people to search for inclusion and belonging. Their reconstruction was historical, but also undoubtedly spiritual. Their deep belief that the tales themselves were remnants of faith cannot be overlooked when investigating the brothers’ mission of discovering and reconstructing the ancient Germanic religion as a vital element of German identity.

It is undeniable that certain aspects of the tales and myths within *Children’s and Household Tales* and *Teutonic Mythology* are “typically pagan” (Zipes, *Irresistible* 31). These collections present a colorful and lively world filled with creatures both good and evil. Throughout a variety of tales, we find mention of traditional mythological figures

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and of creatures such as witches, soothsayers, spirits, and dwarves. Species possibly less known to many readers, such as wights, brownies, and changelings, also materialize. The folktales present an animistic world where the wind can tell secrets, the sun and moon are demigods, and trees can transform into helpful protectors. Yet, the two works move beyond merely intimating that the tales and myths have pagan elements; they further evoke a spiritual meaning to the fantastical manifestations that arise from superstition and fable. Such faith is a pivotal connection to an ostensible ancient Germanic culture, not simply because the belief system provided their contemporaries with an unbroken historical continuum for the Germanic people, but, even more importantly, because it supplied an identification that was unconcerned with territory or political boundaries. It connected to an ancient faith that fundamentally revolved around ancestry, culture, and language as its defining characteristics. These two works, then, establish a Germanic identity that existed outside of any particular geographical location and recreated a Germanic paganism that is a cornerstone of both ancient and modern German society.

An overview of my investigation of the Grimms' attempt to reconstruct Germanic mythology and certain aspects of Germanic paganism<sup>3</sup> consists of two general thrusts. I first consider how they work to debarbarize ancient Germanic customs and, along with them, the Germanic tribes themselves. They do so by demonstrating how these traditions shaped later "civilized" iterations of German culture and society. Gerster describes myth and religion as "nearly inseparable," in that both can serve as bonding agents of culture, i.e., as a foundation of identity (159). Nonetheless, the lore of a culture can diminish in meaning over time. For a story to live on in a group, it must hold what Assmann calls a "significant truth" (24). The Grimms seek to vivify the myths and discover in folktales a significant truth that derives from pagan beliefs. In turn, these tales can connect elements of ancient pagan faith to the concerns of contemporary Germans.

Other topics discussed below support a second major theme of my investigation: the blending of pagan and Christian religious symbolism. A basic ingredient in that admixture is the veneration of heroism and heritage, as reflected in the folktales and mythology. Concomitantly, Christian morals also serve as a socializing context for the bourgeoisie.

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## The Debarbarization of the Germanic Noble Savage and the Revival of Faith

Very little popular academic history existed at the time of *Children's and Household Tales*' and *Tentonic Mythology*'s publication. Thus, many German intellectuals sought to popularize history in other ways. Peterson notes that, during this period, most Germans learned of historical events through literary adaptations, such as historical fiction, as well as through collections of folktales and legends (289). Around 1800, the term *history* changed in meaning. Previously understood as an abstract concept, history became increasingly viewed in more substantial ways, including as a bedfellow of politics and economics. The evolution of the concept of history marked a major turning point in European thinking. Reality itself came to be regarded as less determinable and thus less predictable than previously believed. Such developments usually indicate an intellectual crisis. Indeed, as Lampart details, the problem of coping with this emerging perception of the historical world began to dominate philosophical thinking in Germany around 1800 (173-75). In the face of such cultural and historical uncertainty, the Grimms present their collections as unifying symbols, as texts that quite literally proclaim to have recovered a lost history of the German people. In *Tentonic Mythology*, Jacob tellingly refers to the fraternal folktale project as a history of "our paganism" [unser heidenthum] (549).

To discover one's roots and to escape the world's uncertainty, folklore provides a unique opportunity. Dusche observes that instead of looking to the future or focusing on changes brought about by modernity, many people began to ask themselves where their roots lay (44). Peterson points to turbulent years of conquest and control as the context for the Germans' struggle over a sense of identity. It was a time when *Deutschtum* or "Germanness" was under threat (287). Indeed, as Morton finds, the philosophy of the "French" Enlightenment, which celebrated reason and secularism, fell into disfavor among some thinkers who regarded it as the antithesis of German values (8).

Without dwelling on the contributions of Enlightenment thinking to liberal democratic movements, many Germans were in awe of rising nationalism and political revolution in France and in the newly created United States of America; they were likewise inspired to nationalism. Dusche reveals that many intellectual circles saw an

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intimate link between the project of cultural discovery—or rather rediscovery—as it was propositioned, and the project of liberating German culture and lands from foreign rule, both practically and ideologically (42). Violent political upheavals produced a drive for national unification. First came reactions to the Napoleonic invasions and subsequent Wars of Liberation, followed by the political unrest that led up to the 1848 March Revolution. As Morton has described, with their future seemingly as tenuous as the frequently changing and often disappearing borders of German lands, many Germans sought to formulate a sense of self that was not based on location or on political affiliation with their current ruler. Accordingly, a sense of shared history, language, and customs held considerable appeal (8). In their study of the connections between Romanticism and modern mythology, Feldman and Richardson observe the growing awareness of loss among many Romantics, who felt bereaved of tradition and belief, and who sensed a widening separation between the self and the world (303). The exploration of mythology and an accompanying search for origins offered remedies for this unease. In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jacob describes myth as a “more general, shifting element than the historical, but it wins in scope what it loses in consistency”<sup>4</sup> (iii). Clearly, the wide, overarching scope of myth and folklore was a helpful tool in the quest for a sense of belonging and cultural identity.

During the nineteenth century, the ambiguously ancient period of Germanic tribal migration was frequently depicted as an era of triumph. Reusch points out that this conception of the ancient past coincided with the Romantic fascination for a rustic, even primitive lifestyle, which was portrayed as somehow prototypically German, especially when compared to more lavish lifestyles associated with Romanized, Francophile culture (102). Jacob’s writings posit multiple coequal states of early civilizations and eschew the search for a universal ideal that is typical for the Enlightenment. If multiple coequal stages of civilization existed, the earlier Germanic age could be presented as equal to (if not better than) the celebrated Greek and Roman antiquities. In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jacob specifically separates the Germanic pantheon from the Roman, noting that they are unrelated: “the names of German gods are clearly not translated from the Latin, nor modeled after them”<sup>5</sup> (x). Likewise, in the preface to the first *Altdeutsche Wälder* volume, the Grimms note that by preserving

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the writings of medieval Germans, they hope to preserve the memory of “the noblest people of antiquity”<sup>6</sup> (ii). Norton demonstrates that among other objectives, they sought to set Germanic culture off against Romanic civilizations (1). As Cowan has pointed out regarding a Romanic influence contemporary to the Grimms, there was also a growing “outspoken German disdain for the classical imitations of French Neoclassicism” (327).

Jacob often ascribes great importance to the time of Arminius (the Latinized form of “Hermann”). The renowned chieftain of the Germanic Cherusci tribe is famously described by Roman historian Tacitus as defeating three Roman legions in 9 CE in the Teutoburg Forest (see *Deutsche Mythologie* ix, 208, 211). The battle was a crushing defeat for Rome and a stunning victory for Germanic tribes. By noting the importance of Arminius and his victory, Jacob emphasizes a time that stands in stark contrast to the tumultuous present. The story of Arminius presents a vision of liberty and self-determination. Significantly, these goals are accomplished by throwing off the oppressive yoke of foreign rule. Shippey notes that the ancient era, as well as the myths that were believed to stem from it, became associated with a heroically defiant spirit that was perceived to be intrinsic to the Germanic temperament (14). However, equally important, the period was also a time of widespread Germanic paganism. Jacob again emphasizes the indissoluble connection between religion and the heroic past, noting that the Germanic people and their tribal heritage of “higher antiquity” [höheres alterthum] “could not have been without religion”<sup>7</sup> (iv).

Some of the Grimms’ contemporaries forged analogies to the Roman colonization of the Germanic tribes to emphasize a present need for liberation. Indeed, the contempt with which Romans wrote about the Germanic “barbarian tribes” prefigured the strategies of colonialist discourses of subsequent eras in its “othering” of colonized peoples, including nineteenth-century descendants of Arminius and his tribesmen. Reusch notes that philosopher and classicist Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) saw comparative similarities between the colonized peoples of the Pacific and the Americas and “uncontaminated” Germanic tribes (101-02), suggesting that there was some sort of “pure” Germanic culture or perhaps even a “pure” genetic heritage in the distant past.

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Both Jacob's description of the colonialization of Germanic people and lands, along with his treatment of the subsequent forced conversion of Germanic pagans, concentrate on Rome's effort to destroy a German "national feeling" [nationalgefühl]. The conquerors, who were in "subservient dependence on distant Rome, had to harm the national feeling [of the Germanic tribes] in many ways"<sup>8</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* 4). In other words, separating the German people from their religion was tantamount to detaching them from a sense of national identity. While applying the idea of a cohesive, national identity to Germanic tribes is anachronistic, it does highlight Jacob's firm belief that religion played a prominent role for those migratory ancestors as they acquired a stable sense of identity.

His brother, Wilhelm, finds that remnants of Roman colonialization persist in the writing system: "the Latin alphabet," he writes, "we have to suffer it"<sup>9</sup> (*Ueber deutsche Runen* 21), and notes that the Roman alphabet is unequipped to represent certain sounds in the German language. He further maintains that a writing system specifically designed to reflect the German tongue would be "more fitting" [angemeßner], given that the Roman alphabet brings with it a "Roman sense of learning and culture" [römische Bildung] (*Ueber deutsche Runen* 21). By working to rediscover Germanic myth and faith, the Grimms simultaneously strive to illuminate aspects of contemporary Germanic life that accrued from ancient colonization and that represent the abridgement or eradication of indigenous heritage.

In describing members of the Germanic tribes, Jacob departs from the dominant discourse and emphasizes the civilized character of the German forebears, noting that "our forefathers, up into the time of paganism, did not speak a wild, rough, irregular language, rather a fine, smooth, and quite coherent one, which had given itself over to poesie even in the earliest of times. . . ."<sup>10</sup> (iv). Jacob's specific reference to the composition and recitation of poetry by the tribes shows his intent to elevate them in the eyes of his readers. *Poesie*, a highly stylized and sophisticated endeavor, necessarily demonstrates control and understanding of language. Indeed, in Romantic aesthetics, the term *Poesie* refers not to poetry in a narrow sense, but rather to a competence, a creative enterprise capable of synthesizing disparate components of reality. Lampart describes it is an "archetypal and anthropological

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force that can help overcome the problematic fragmentation of the modern world” (176). Jacob thus presents *Poesie* as further proof of the refinement of the Germanic culture, effectively presenting the tribes as “noble savages” rather than as the barbarians they were often described to be.

In *Ueber den altdutschen Meistergesang* (1811), Jacob repeats his insistence on the importance of *Poesie* even more stridently by equating it with “life itself” [das Leben selbst] (5). Indeed, in the preface to the 1812 edition of *Children’s and Household Tales*, the Grimms describe a close affinity between these tales and the simplest forms of life from earlier times (41). They maintain that *Poesie* is not the property of the poet, but instead is the very blood that flows through the whole body of the people (7). Along similar lines, Aczel notes a connection to Johann Gottfried Herder’s concept of *Naturpoesie*, which embodied an organic unity of both community and tradition, a unity that Herder believed contemporary poets and authors no longer understood (367).

The work of the Grimms coincided with discussions among numerous German intellectuals critical of traditional churches for their complicity in feudalism and tyranny. It was around this same time that Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, among others, were exploring various Christian denominations, as well as pantheism and other faiths. Similarly, the brothers’ Calvinist background provided no obstacle to their focus on a Germanic paganism that revolves around the god Woden (also Wotan, Woutan, Odin). In a sense, their accentuation of a primary god could be considered “monotheistic,” insofar as it suggests a parallel between Germanic paganism and nineteenth-century Christian beliefs. Jacob even seeks to redeem Woden/Woutan’s name, which has origins in the Old and Middle High German word *wuot*, meaning “rage,” from what he sees as a later attempt by Christian missionaries to discredit Germanic paganism. Insisting that the etymological origin of *Woutan* is *Wunsch* or “wish,” Jacob writes that “Woutan was only later connected with ‘rage’ or ‘fury’ because of the Christians”<sup>11</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* 92-93).

This debarbarization of Germanic paganism allowed many nineteenth-century middleclass Germans to think of themselves as former tribespeople and as colonial subjects whose culture was in danger of annihilation by outsiders—in the past, due to Roman conquest, and, in the present, through French dominance. In turn,

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these revised self-assessments led to a romanticized view of ancient Germanic tribes. Reminiscent of Virgil in Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century epic poem *Divine Comedy*, the tribes of the past appear in works by the Grimms as virtuous pagans or as noble savages.

Nineteenth-century thinkers ceased to disparage myth as pagan and, therefore, false, viewing it instead as a vivifying phenomenon rich in religious truths. In this regard, Feldman and Richardson note a tendency among the Grimms' contemporaries to consider myth as crucial for the understanding of life itself (xxi). In the search for a cultural and national identity, myth became a key to an earlier, primitive state of mind, to a somehow more pure and creative imagination. This form of regression, seeking to return to a supposed past of primitive, indeed often tribal, simplicity allowed the bourgeoisie to connect with one another through an iconic ideal. Thus, a mythology and ancient religion accessible through folk stories and traditions was quite appealing. Jacob writes that at their core, folklore and legends are "myth, that is, theistic belief."<sup>12</sup> He continues by noting that legends and lore "cannot be conceived of without this mythic foundation, just as history could not be without events"<sup>13</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* iii).

Indeed, as Winterbourne has described, the Grimms' evocation of Germanic paganism and their reconstruction of ancient mythology placed those elements of the Germanic experience at the center of an extensive social system in which communal life was permeated by religious rituals and cult practices (22). Jacob believed that his work went well beyond uncovering figures and creatures from an ancient mythology and saw his contribution as the illumination of an entire religion (*Deutsche Mythologie* iv). Restoring the Germanic pantheon to its rightful place in German history and culture, he noted, "brings pleasure to make the empty house fuller again"<sup>14</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* v). As Feldman and Richardson elucidate, Jacob did not perceive myth simply as a body of knowledge or collection of characters and stories with historical particulars, rather myth took on a religious quality, a way to restore modern man to an earlier simplicity—an earlier primeval union with faith and nature (297). According to Murphy, giving Germanic paganism its rightful place in the continuum of history engendered in the brothers a "serene reverence" for a pagan religious awareness (3).

It is important to clarify that the Grimms did not conceive of a return to this primal, ancient nature as a real possibility. They believed

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that history progresses in a linear fashion and is the connection between the ancient past and the present; breaking that line of progression would be unnatural. Moreover, as scholars have noted, linear historical progression creates the opportunity to investigate how ancient pagan beliefs transformed to modern sensibilities. One such modern sensibility, they candidly recognized, was the intervening permeation of Christian tradition in German life. The brothers often emphasized that folk traditions, as they were passed down through time, became a careful blend of Christian and pagan religious elements. Jacob explains that “in my experience, Christianity and paganism, since they came into contact after *the conversion*, have exercised reciprocal influence on one another: . . . that paganism . . . sought to conceal itself under Christian forms”<sup>15</sup> (xviii). As Dusche correctly points out, the Grimms saw the individual as rooted in the past and indeed determined by it (44). Feldman and Richardson add an important forward-looking dimension to the historical discourse with their observation that myth and ancient belief promised a transcending unity for the people (304).

While the Grimms succeeded in creating linkages to the tribal past, and even though representations of free and somehow unified Germanic tribespeople became popular, the brothers encountered decidedly more difficulty in forging a connection to pagan religion. In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jacob spends considerable time, often quite heatedly, refuting claims of his contemporaries that the Germanic people of the past were “godless” [götterlos] and maintains instead that they were deeply driven by polytheistic religion (v). In addition, as Murphy has noted, one of the challenges that Wilhelm faced, as he edited and revised stories in *Children’s and Household Tales*, was how to revive, in the hearts of Christian contemporaries, the religious feeling of fragmented pagan mythology found in many folktales and customs (7).

### **Roots of Folklore and Religion**

Intellectuals of the time began to search for a specifically Germanic mythology, one that did not rely on the myths and beliefs of cultures such as ancient Greece, Rome, or India. In his introduction to *Minnelieder aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitalter* (1803), Ludwig Tieck praises other nations for placing renewed emphasis on their bygone literatures, noting that Shakespeare, Italian and Spanish poets, and even Nordic poetry were all being read and translated with unprecedented avidity (iii-iv). Tieck writes further

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that, as in other lands, it is now time for Germany to honor its old poets again, since “the larger [German] public is still unfamiliar with the ancient German period”<sup>16</sup> (v).

In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jacob writes that myths of the gods have been preserved in “individual, contemporary folk- and fairy tales still being told”<sup>17</sup> (9). He further notes that when the Germanic tribespeople were deprived of their myths and religious belief during forced conversion, persons of high position and status were the first to succumb to the pressure of acculturation, whereas the common people, by and large, came around to Christianity much later. Consequently, the Grimms saw remnants of myth in the folklore and fairy tales told by contemporary common folk because these stories had ostensibly survived by means of unbroken oral transmission over generations of peasant story-telling culture (2).

In *Children's and Household Tales*, they claim that the elderly figure embodied by “Frau Holle” represents the Germanic Goddess of Death, “Hel,” “Helche,” or even “Holle.” They mention in a footnote that the character “Briar Rose”/”Sleeping Beauty” carries remnants of the myth of Brunhild. However, the brothers diligently point out that this fairy tale is not a reference to the well-known Brunhild of the medieval *Nibelungenlied* and assert instead that she reflects Brynhildr the Valkyrie<sup>18</sup> of Old Norse legend (1812 vol. 2, vi). The Old Norse figure famously distinguished herself by disobeying Woden. In turn, Woden punished her by pricking her finger with a magical thorn from the tree of sleep. Murphy provides a clear overview of the mythological narrative (140-41). While Brynhildr slept, Woden locked her inside a castle surrounded by a wall of fire. She is then cursed to take no husband, save the one man courageous enough to ride through the wall of flames and awaken her from her slumber. The Grimms note immediate connections between this myth and the folktale of “Briar Rose,” in which a girl pricks her finger and falls asleep, only able to be awakened by the prince who can navigate passage through the thorn hedge (1812; vol. 1, vi). Here they assert their belief that the tales can be used as fruitful means to reconstruct Germanic ancient myth. Clearly, they also see the tales as evidence that these gods and the legends about them were prevalent throughout Germanic lands and that the folklore is a resource for their rediscovery.

While the tales in *Children's and Household Tales* do evoke various gods, goddesses, and famous heroes, they are likewise sites

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where remnants of faith itself can be uncovered. The notion of faith is especially notable in the context of forests and trees, both of which are famously influential in the development of the stories. Indeed, woodlands and trees feature prominently in nearly half of the collection. Forests conjured by the Grimms have been described as “natural and patriotic symbols of unity” (Thesz 108), sites of memory (McGonagill 64), as well as a more generic realm or domain of magic (Tatar, “Introduction” xvi).

The forest is where the natural and supernatural meet. In describing the beliefs and customs of Germanic tribes, Jacob notes that the ancient forebears did not build temples because they considered trees and forests to be the dwelling places of the gods. The tale “The Two Travellers,” for example, makes a direct comparison between the quiet of the forest and the reverent stillness inside a church (*Complete* 425). The narrative connects two different conceptions of a place of worship: the pagan veneration of the forest as the residence of the gods, and the Christian symbol of a house of God. In fact, in his description of forests, Jacob writes “*Temple* is ipso facto *forest*”<sup>19</sup> noting time and again that forests and trees are “holy sites” [heilige stätte] (*Deutsche Mythologie* 41). This blending of pagan and Christian symbolism created a supportive context for the continuous retelling of the myths after the conversion of the Germanic tribes. He affirms that Christian and pagan belief had a mutual influence on one another (*Deutsche Mythologie* xvii) and that pagan myths often sought to “hide themselves under Christian forms”<sup>20</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* xviii).

It might seem that the forest, as a sacred place, should be a source of helpful magic and divine revelation, but Jacob writes that a dualistic concept of good and evil “was foreign to our paganism”<sup>21</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* 549). The Germanic gods can be helpful and harmful. They protect as often as they trick and, as Davidson has recounted, ancient myth often portrays life as harsh and unfair (218). In *Children’s and Household Tales*, such a worldview is reflected in the often ambivalent nature of the forest, the place that, as Jacob reminds us, was the primary site of worship for the Germanic pagan ancestors (*Teutonic Mythology* 41). The forest can be helpful, as in “The Old Woman in the Wood,” where trees provide nourishment, clothing, and shelter for a lost young girl (*Complete* 488-90); yet, it can also be a place of trickery, deception, and danger. A striking example is found

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in Hänsel and Gretel” (*Complete* 64-67), where the children are not only abandoned and lost in the woods, but are also subsequently captured and nearly eaten by a forest-dwelling witch.

At other times, as in “The Two Travellers,” the forest is presented as a crossroads that demands a decision of the protagonist. As a travelling cobbler and tailor reach the edge of a large forest, the tale reads, “when they had travelled for some time, they came to a great forest, through which passed the road to the capital. Two foot-paths, however, led through it, one of which was a seven days’ journey, and the other only two, but neither of the travellers knew which way was the short one. They seated themselves beneath an oak-tree and took counsel together” (*Complete* 424). Here, it is entirely up to chance whether the journey will be perilous or safe.

However, although the forest is often ambivalent to the lives of folktale characters, it is almost always a site of magic. A heightened spirituality is evident in the “holy forests” [in heiligen wäldern] (*Deutsche Mythologie* xxi), again conveyed through a combination of pagan and Christian symbols. In “The Old Woman in the Wood,” it is not the forest and trees alone that help save the young girl protagonist, rather a cursed prince appearing in the form of a tree and a white dove that helps her discover secrets hidden within the trees. After she has been lost in the forest and all but given herself up to her fate, a white dove flies up with a key in its beak. The tale continues:

[The dove] put the little key in her hand, and said: “Do you see that great tree, therein is a little lock; open it with the tiny key, and you will find food enough, and suffer no more hunger.”

Then she went to the tree and opened it, and found milk in a little dish, and white bread to break into it, so that she could eat her fill.” (*Complete* 488)

The forest and trees represent safety and security. The maiden’s magical surroundings provide her with food, shelter, or clothing whenever she requires them. As needs arise, the prince, who daily takes the form of a dove for a brief period, drops a key into her hand and gives her the ability to unlock another tree and gather the provisions concealed there.

As Jacob noted in *Teutonic Mythology*, in order to survive, pagan symbols have hidden themselves in Christian form. We can

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see the mutual influence of both paganism and Christianity when the maiden crawls into a tree containing a soft, warm, safe bed, where she prays for “God to protect her during the night” (488). The tree is Germanic paganism’s highest symbol of salvation and rescue, which Jacob likewise acknowledges (*Deutsche Mythologie* 47, 57). It is “under the shadows of ancient forests” that “the souls of humans felt filled by their proximity to the prevailing deities”<sup>22</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* 42). He stresses that forests remained a place of holiness even in the early period of the conversion to Christianity (43). According to myth, it is the forest, Hoddmimir’s Holt, which provides protection to one boy and one girl at the end of the world. After the end, the forest will have survived, and the two children will emerge to start a new world (Snorri 83). In “The Old Woman in the Wood,” included in *Children’s and Household Tales*, the protection and help provided by trees is made possible by the white dove, the representation of salvation through Christ or the Holy Spirit, as it brings the girl a succession of necessary keys. Thus, the tale combines myth and pagan spirituality, which the Grimms sought to preserve, with the Christian symbolism that had evolved as the story was passed down.

*Teutonic Mythology* and *Children’s and Household Tales* are attempts at forging a unity between, on the one hand, the serenity of the soul offered by Christianity and, on the other hand, an identity-affirming memory of the forefathers. Without mutual exclusion, it seems that the Germans can have their customs, as preserved in myths and ancient religion, while also participating in present-day culture and professing contemporary beliefs. Jacob writes that, while Christianity is the nourishing grain for the people, paganism is a beautiful, but strange plant worthy of wonder (*Deutsche Mythologie* 6) and therefore worthy of use as a unifying symbol of the past. Though he sees Christianity as the nourishing religion to which people have been drawn with the advancement of time and understanding, he laments that “for the acquired peace of the soul with the promise of heaven, man gave up his earthly pleasures and the memories of his forefathers”<sup>23</sup> (4). Their collections, then, worked to reunite the beliefs of the ancestors with the bourgeois Christian beliefs of the present—a historical and spiritual reconstruction that promoted the reunification of a disoriented people.

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## Heroes, Ancestry, and Social Belonging Based on Pagan Heritage

Especially in the first edition of *Children's and Household Tales*, the Grimms stress the connection between folktale and heroic myth. Myth was not only viewed as a window to the primitive mind and the creative imagination, but also to the heroic and the unifying power of heritage. Shippey points out the many rediscoveries of cultural artifacts during their career, which begged the question: why ancient mythology, perhaps disguised in other forms, such as folktales and superstitions, could not likewise be resurrected (21). Warner also affirms folktales and fairy tales as an ideal means to promote a connection between past and present and notes that “one of the things that the fairy tale promises is an unbroken link with the past” (53).

In investigating the prominence of heritage and ancestry, as well as blended Christian-pagan religious symbolism in their collection of folktales, I take as an example one of their most famous accounts, “Cinderella” [Aschenputtel]. My analysis aligns the tale with the Grimms’ push to uncover roots of pagan religion and myth that survive in contemporary folktales and coexist with Christian symbolism. Moreover, “Cinderella” clearly demonstrates the importance of ancestry and blood relation, which are essential elements of ancient, pagan heritage. “Cinderella” has been interpreted as a tale representing child abandonment, sibling rivalry, and bourgeois socialization, among other themes. Bacchilega emphasizes, and I agree, that multiple voices and various interpretations are what gives life and relevance to the fairy tale (66). Accordingly, it is not my aim to discount these views, but rather to offer another voice and another interpretation too often absent from discussion of the Grimms’ tales—the central importance of a pagan faith. This faith is of paramount importance in defining Cinderella’s societal identity as a Germanic heroine.

After the death of Cinderella’s mother and her father’s subsequent remarriage, he asks her and her stepsisters what they would like as gifts when he returns from his journey. While her stepsisters desire beautiful clothing or pearls and jewels, Cinderella requests and receives the first sprig that falls onto her father’s hat when he returns home. After she buries the sprig in the earth of her mother’s grave, a beautiful tree grows. The tale continues, “Thrice a day Cinderella went and sat beneath [the tree], and wept and prayed, and a little white bird always came on the tree, and if Cinderella expressed a wish, the

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bird threw down to her what she had wished for” (98). Unlike the helpful fairy in Charles Perrault’s version “Cendrillion” (1698), of which the Grimms were aware, a protective tree and a white bird watch over Cinderella in their German rendition. Davidson has noted that ancestors in pagan lore would often return in the form of helpful spirits to provide protection and wisdom for their living descendants (214). Consequently, the choice of tree and bird as guardian spirit and helper is quite intentional—these devices are in keeping with the literary and intellectual movements of the time. Warner aptly observes that the emphasis in the Grimms’ tales on nature and spirits is recognizably Romantic in its reliance on the idea of natural magic, and she specifically attributes the protective role of the tree to the spirit of Cinderella’s mother, which flows through nature as a sapient force and animates the tree to protect her daughter (23).

*Teutonic Mythology* unequivocally exalts the tree as Germanic paganism’s highest symbol of salvation and rescue (47, 57). Jacob’s alignment of the protective tree with the great tree Yggdrasil attests to its centrality. He finds the symbolism of the holy tree so obvious and so widespread that he writes, “one hardly needs to be reminded”<sup>24</sup> of the holy tree Yggdrasil (47). As Snorri has detailed, myth dictates that the forest will provide protection at the end of the world (83). Larrington affiliates the forest Hoddmímis Holt to Yggdrasil as another name for the World Tree (47). Clearly, the Grimms regarded the magical tree in “Cinderella” in the context of a well-established, overarching belief system.

In addition to its power as a protector, Yggdrasil is the source of all knowledge and fate, a symbol for the coherence of the world. The protective tree in “Cinderella” has a similar function in clarifying the protagonist’s fate and assisting her emergence from an incoherent existence of torment. It is important to remember, however, that in “Cinderella,” as in many of the Grimms’ tales, the tree is not unoccupied. As Lecouteux notes, a perched bird is always part of the Grimms’ woodland setting (323). Moreover, as we have seen, the choice of bird is not random. The tale visually combines pagan and Christian symbols by describing a white bird, identified later as a dove, which is clearly a representative of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. In keeping with Jacob’s observation in *Teutonic Mythology* (xviii) that pagan myths often intertwine with Christian beliefs, “Cinderella” depicts an

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emblem of Christianity's Holy Spirit perched atop a pagan spirit tree, which in turn emblemizes the sacred tree Yggdrasil.

Later, endeavoring to trick the prince into believing that they are the rightful brides, each of Cinderella's stepsisters successively mutilates her feet to fit into Cinderella's small shoe. Here it is not one, but two, doves that appear atop the tree and warn the prince that he has taken the wrong woman for his bride. As each stepsister passes by, the birds cry, "Turn and peep, turn and peep, / There's blood within the shoe, / The shoe it is too small for her, / The true bride waits for you" (102). Once the prince discovers that the beautiful woman he had seen was Cinderella and not one of her stepsisters, he decides to take her as his wife. The doves then proclaim, "Turn and peep, turn and peep, / No blood is in the shoe, / The shoe is not too small for her, / The true bride rides with you" (103). The dual bird imagery appears elsewhere in Germanic mythology. In the foreword to the 1819 edition of *Children's and Household Tales*, Wilhelm interprets birds in a pagan mythological context and reminds the reader that Woden enjoyed two feathered companions, one on each shoulder (xxiii, xxxi). They are the ravens Huginn (thought) and Muninn (memory or mind). These two ravens fly daily throughout the world and return to Woden to inform him of what they have learned. Similarly, the birds in "Cinderella" serve as a reliable source of intelligence that exposes the stepsisters' trickery. In his analysis of the transformation of pagan symbols to Christian imagery, Jacob remarks that the change is often superficial (xxi); for example, an evolution from raven to dove. The adaptation supports Jacob's claim in *Teutonic Mythology* that Christianity took any positive beliefs and traditions from Germanic paganism and incorporated them into Christian practice (639).

At the tale's end, the two doves famously perch on Cinderella's shoulders and mete out the stepsisters' punishment by pecking out their eyes. Walking away with a bird adorning each shoulder, the protagonist melds with the Germanic religious image of one who is divinely inspired, like Woden and his raven confidants. Yet, as Murphy reminds us, while the doves are distinctly reminiscent of the divine inspiration of "thought" and "memory" in Germanic paganism, the birds also exhibit Christian morality by admonishing Cinderella to remain good and devout, in accordance with her mother's wishes (110). Fate

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decrees that the stepsisters be punished for their wickedness (Grimm, *Complete* 104) and for their intrusive claim on Cinderella's birthright. By tale's end, Cinderella has not only reclaimed her position within the family, but she has also exceeded her previous social standing by marrying a prince. Greenhill goes so far as to suggest that her triumph over adversity and her demonstration of moral superiority over the stepsisters earns her the status of "the chosen one" (186). It is quite possible that Cinderella's struggle against bellicose and oppressive outsiders resonated with nineteenth-century German readers, who were highly receptive to tales of triumph over foreign oppressors and who looked to the past for messages of hope and inspiration.

Group identity resides with culture, language, and heritage, all of which go hand in hand with an emphasis on ancestry and blood relation, i.e., on descent from common ancestors. Nowhere is genealogical enthusiasm clearer than in Jacob's appendix to *Teutonic Mythology*, where Wilhelm's blood brother dedicates twenty-eight pages to genealogical tables. (The German language, in perfect consonance with Germanic cultural heritage, refers to such charts as genealogical "trees" [Stammbäume].) Emphasizing the importance of roots and origins in reclaiming Germanic heritage, Jacob writes, "it is much to be lamented that within Germany such genealogical tables, which were without a doubt available, escaped record"<sup>25</sup> (xxiv). The brothers were not operating in a vacuum. Zipes notes the dramatic expansion of interest in biology, eugenics, and race during the nineteenth century (*Fairy Tales* 84). In the case of a Germanic identity, it is important to note that enthusiasm for identifying heritage could provide a connection between contemporary Germans and an ancient culture that proclaimed divine origins. Davidson notes that ancient followers of pagan belief systems often credited the gods, especially Woden, with the founding of royal dynasties (56). The longevity of dynasties, Davidson further observes, and of the legends that survive their rule correspond to the special emphasis on achievement and glory in the Germanic-pagan belief system, which placed a premium on being remembered in song, long after death (216). Peterson adds an important dimension to the emphasis on common ancestry with his discussion of the attempt by many in the nineteenth century to simulate an intact

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community at a time when traditional links to the village, workplace, and principality were breaking down (290).

Folktales collected by the Grimms accentuate the importance of hereditary ties by treating step relations very differently from blood relations. Tatar writes “folklorists would be hard pressed to name a single good stepmother, for in fairy tales the very title ‘stepmother’ pins the badge of iniquity on a figure. One can safely argue that the phrase *wicked stepmother*, which has a nearly formulaic ring to it, is pleonastic” (*Hard Facts* 141). In tormenting Cinderella after her father remarries, the stepsisters put Cinderella’s membership in the family circle in question by forcing her to live the life of a maid, bereft of the status of familial connection. Yet, the reader is continually reminded that these stepsisters are “false” (Grimm, *Complete* 103), precisely because they bear no hereditary ties to Cinderella. As Zipes points out, however, despite the torment that she must endure at the hands of her step relations, and notwithstanding her dirty, ragged appearance, the readers (and later the prince) recognize Cinderella as the “true princess” (*Stick* 107).

Zipes even compares the dynamic in “Cinderella” to a battle of genetics, noting that the stepmother seeks to extend her own lineage by marrying off a daughter to the prince, just as the restoration of the mistreated protagonist to her rightful place will secure the survival of Cinderella’s family line (*Stick* 113). Following a similar line of reasoning, Tatar finds that stepsisters and stepmothers in folktales represent extrinsic competition that threatens the traditional family unit. The frequent obscurity of their paternity, or even their maternity, seems to heighten their scariness (“Rags” 32). This lack of provenance is certainly true in “Cinderella,” where the stepsisters are ultimately shown to be disruptive outsiders.

The Grimms helped answer the contemporary question of their day, namely what it meant to be German. The tales that they collected stress the discovery of “false” family members, i.e., those without hereditary ties and, consequently, they indirectly venerate the nomadic tribespeople of the ancient and shared Germanic past. Fortuitously, given the ambiguous political borders at the time, the Germanic identity they promoted was not based on territory; instead, membership in society relied on hereditary ties. Religion was a key part of the identity. Gerster reminds us that ancient faith forged identity

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out of a sense of blood and belonging (159). Clearly, Jacob viewed religion likewise when in *Teutonic Mythology* he equated the conversion of Germanic tribes to the appropriation of national feeling (4).

By ostracizing Cinderella, the stepsisters ironically expatriate themselves. Their attempts to remove her from the family circle result in their own categorical separation from that nucleus. Recall that Woden's birds, the creatures that blind the stepsisters in the end, are manifestations of "thought" and "memory." By invoking a mythological conception of the natural world, the tale permanently purges from minds and memories the threat that the stepsisters pose to hereditary family membership. As Tatar writes of the Grimms' tales in general, "nature (in the shape of flora and fauna) helps the hero to restore the natural order of things by reinstating the . . . child to his [or her] true social position" (*Hard Facts* 32). The Cinderella narrative restores the "natural order of things" by placing the Germanic heroine, assisted by birds borrowed from Woden's aviary, back into a position that ensures the continuation of her genetic lineage.

Jacob writes "when the metal of pagan idols was reformed as vessels for the church, at least the old substance remained"<sup>26</sup> (*Deutsche Mythologie* xxi). He proposes that the pagan symbols have not disappeared, but have been transformed. The cultural, folkloric, and philological work of the brothers demonstrates that if one knows how and where to look for it, the ancient religion can be rediscovered. Assman appropriately observes that myth and identity are inextricably linked; they both seek to answer questions about who we are, from where we come, and where we belong (123). In a time when many intellectuals saw themselves culturally suppressed, alienated, and marginalized, a revived ancient past of nomadic tribes consisting of virtuous pagans or "noble savages" provided welcome roots to an unsettled Germanic identity. Reusch finds that the bourgeoisie sought to forge a national, cultural, and ethnic identity out of a longing for the tribal ancestors, as well as from the desire to return to a more simplistic, tribal state that was ostensibly uncontaminated by foreign influence (100). Obviously, a strong, unifying force for middleclass Germans lay ready at hand, once cultural origins could be attributed to the beliefs of a reconstructed religion that emphasized heritage, courage, adventure, and familial ties over an identity determined by territory.

For the Grimms, the key to this past was found in folktales

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and in the religious truths hidden within them. They portray Germanic paganism, this “curious plant” [seltsam(e) pflanze], which is simultaneously “colorful [with] fragrant blooms,”<sup>27</sup> as worthy not only of scholarly study, but also as a subject to be regarded “with awe” [mit verwunderung] for how it influenced, and continued to influence German culture and society in their time (*Deutsche Mythologie* 6). In the opening sentence of the foreword to *Children’s and Household Tales*, they write:

When a storm, or some other catastrophe sent from the heavens, levels an entire crop, we are relieved to find that a small patch, protected by tiny hedges or bushes, has been spared and that some solitary stalks remain standing. When the sun shines once again and favors them, they will continue to grow alone and unnoticed (38).

The Grimms claim to have located these untouched grains, whose hedges and bushes, in the form of enduring folktales and superstitions, have safeguarded them through the passage of time. For their own preservation’s sake, the remnants of the crop have been adapted to Christian beliefs. Yet, from these surviving grains, we can glean connections to tribal Germanic spiritual beliefs and their ongoing role in the German character and in German identity.

Thanks to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the crop remains ours to harvest.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>“wir wollen dazu beitragen, wie ein alter Dichter so schön sagt, daß die schlafende Schrift wieder erweckt, die süße Lehre, die beschattet war, wieder aufgedeckt werde.”

<sup>2</sup>“der nähme die Belehrung der Geschichte hinweg.”

<sup>3</sup>In drawing connections between the Grimms’ tales and ancient pagan faith, I use the term “Germanic paganism” to denote broad beliefs held by people of Norse and Germanic regions of Europe. In their work, as well as now, the belief structures and mythologies of these regions are often presented in comparative terms, thus deducing a general conception of ancient faith without dividing belief structures into various regions. See also Lecouteux and Davidson.

<sup>4</sup>“ein viel allgemeineres, unstärteres element als das historische, aber an umfang gewinnend was ihm an festigkeit abgeht.”

<sup>5</sup>“die deutschen götternamen sind aber sichtbar nicht aus den

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lateinischen übersetzt, noch ihnen nachgebildet.”

<sup>6</sup>“die edelsten Menschen des Alterthums”

<sup>7</sup>“kann nicht ohne religion gewesen sein.”

<sup>8</sup>“in knechtischer abhängigkeit von dem fernen Rom, musten das nationalgefühl vielfach verletzen.”

<sup>9</sup>“das lateinische Alphabet”... “wir müssen es ertragen.”

<sup>10</sup>“...unsere voreltern, bis in das heidenthum hinauf, keine wilde, rauhe, regellose, sondern eine feine, geschmeidige wolgefuge sprache redeten, die sich schon in frühster zeit zur poesie hergegeben hatte.”

<sup>11</sup>“Woutan [wird] nur später wegen der Christen mit ‘Wut’ und ‘wütend’ verbunden.”

<sup>12</sup>“mythos, d. h. götterglaube.”

<sup>13</sup>“ohne solche mythische unterlage lässt sich die sage nicht fassen, so wenig als ohne geschene dinge die geschichte.”

<sup>14</sup>“macht überhaupt freude das leere haus wieder voller zu stellen.”

<sup>15</sup>“meiner erfahrung nach haben christenthum und heidenthum, seit sie sich berührten d.h. nach *der bekehrung* wechselseitigen einfluss auf einander geübt: . . . das heidenthum . . . suchte sich unter christlichen formen zu bergen.”

<sup>16</sup>“das größere [deutsche] Publikum [ist] immer noch mit der ältern deutschen Zeit unbekannt.”

<sup>17</sup>“einzelne, heutzutage noch lebendige volksagen und kindermärchen.”

<sup>18</sup>A Valkyrie (literally “choosers of the battle-slain” from Old Norse) are female spiritual beings in Woden’s service who descend on battlefields and choose the fallen who are worthy of admission into Walhalla, a paradise for fallen warriors. See Lecouteux, pp. 299-300.

<sup>19</sup>“*Tempel* ist also zugleich *wald*.”

<sup>20</sup>“es suchte sich unter christlichen formen zu bergen.”

<sup>21</sup>“war unserem heidenthum fremd”

<sup>22</sup>“unter dem schatten uralter wälder” . . . “fühlte sich die seele des menschen von der nähe waltender gottheiten erfüllt.”

<sup>23</sup>“für die gewonnene ruhe der seele, für den verheissenen himmel gab der mensch seine irdischen freuden und die erinnerung an seine vorfahren.”

<sup>24</sup>“braucht kaum erinnert zu werden”

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<sup>25</sup>“es ist sehr zu beklagen, dass in dem innern Deutschland solche stammbäume, die ohne zweifel vorhanden waren, der aufzeichnung entgangen sind.”

<sup>26</sup>“wenn das metal heidnischer idole zu kirchengefassen umgegossen war blieb wenigstens der alte stoff.”

<sup>27</sup>“farbig, [mit] duftende[n] blüte”

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