Draft:
Optimizing Vulnerability:
The Grimm Fairy Tales as
Product of Serial Reproduction

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Abstract:
The repeated retelling of narratives tends to crystallize core patterns that resonate with the members of a culture. This article focuses on the folk fairy tales from the Grimms' collection and asks what the core pattern was that the collectors of the stories, their readers, and story tellers favored in these short stories that could explain their fantastic success. The basic hypothesis is that the retelling of folk tales around 1780–1815 emphasized and optimized a narrative arc of vulnerability and rescue. More specifically, Grimm folk fairy tales conflate two basic and distinct narratives: 1) the rescue of the most vulnerable characters, such as children and 2) the triumph and reward of morally good characters. By sharing the same ending, the reward in the moral narrative not only positively sanctions the moral hero, but also the vulnerable character for nothing else but being vulnerable. This conflation of the ending leads to a tale that directly rewards vulnerability, independent from moral virtue. In short, the specific formula of the Grimm fairy tale elevates vulnerability to a virtue—which helps to give credence to the Enlightenment agenda to elevate the status of changeability, care, and affect. The paper begins with a consideration of the process of serial reproduction of narratives, then offers a structural narratological examination of the fairy tales, and ends with a historical reflection on affectability and vulnerability at the end of the eighteenth century, when the new ideology of the time was to sanction vulnerability as such. While it is a far horizon for the present study, it should be indicated that the article wishes to contribute to the analysis of the factors that enabled the rise of contemporary presentations and uses of vulnerability from Trauma Studies to #MeToo movement.

1. Introduction

What happens when narratives get told and retold over and over? How does repeated retelling shape them?

The psychologist Frederic Bartlett famously came to this question in the first part of the twenty century. Originally, he had set out to discover the fundamental forms of visual stimuli and of narrative texts via immediate memory. "On a brilliant afternoon in May 1913 … the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology in the University of Cambridge was formally opened," Frederic C. Bartlett recalled at the opening of his book *Remembering. An Experimental and Social Study* (1932: v). He set out to find the "simple" visual and narrative forms people remember. That day, he withdrew from the sun and sat "in a darkened room exposing geometrical forms, pictures and various optical illusions to … a long string of visitors." The task of these experimental participants was to remember what Bartlett showed them. But quickly, problems arose. Simple forms are not simple; even isolated visual forms proved to be overly complex. Too many factors influence our memories. And when he finally published his book

almost two decades later, the results were less significant than the method he pioneered to reach them: he called his method "serial reproduction," which laypersons know of as the telephone game. Bartlett suggested that serial reproduction reveals the "stereotyped form" of images and stories.

Concerning the study of storytelling, Bartlett used two types of serial reproduction. In one, he asked the same subjects over the course of many years to retell the same short story for him. In the other, he produced strings of retelling: a first reteller hears or reads the original story and is asked to retell it. The resulting story is passed on to another participant who will retell it, and so on. After several iterations of retelling, myriad changes occur and accumulate.

Bartlett's study could be described broadly as an act of sense making. This becomes especially clear if one considers the text he asked people to retell, a fairy-tale-like text, taken from Native Americans in Canada called the "Tale of the Ghost," which involved elements that were unusual and challenging for the mostly British population that he used in his studies. Among the changes in the retellings, Bartlett found that retellers tended to "rationalize" the story elements that they cannot make sense of by inventing new causalities. Once new causalities were established by the retellers, further retelling did not bring about significant changes and the "stereotyped" or stable form was reached.[1]

Bartlett's choice of using a fairy tale not only unknown to his study participants but also from an unfamiliar cultural context is an interesting one. On the one hand, the choice of fairy tale is intuitive since fairy tales have a long history of oral retelling. But this means on the other hand that his stimulus text is already the product of countless iterations of serial reproduction, approaching a "stereotyped form," though in a different cultural context. In his case study, we do not know how a non-stereotyped form is transformed into a stereotyped form. However, we gain insights into how a foreign narrative with mythic elements is translated from one form into another.

Scholars have used the approach of serial reproduction in a large variety of disciplines, ranging from biology (see Mesoudi et al. 2008) to folklore (see Oring 2014). Recent findings have stressed the role that story emotions and affects can play to bring about a stereotypical or schematic form that stabilizes retellings (in the case of surprise, see Breithaupt et al. 2018) or amplifies it (in the case of riskiness, see Moussaïd et al. 2015). Likewise, this article will focus on the role of an emotional and affective evaluation of narratives.

This article takes up the question of the serial reproduction of fairy tales, with the assumption that fairy tales are the product of repeated retelling.[2] Departing from this line of thinking, we can see how retelling has shaped numerous elements of the fairy tale. In contrast to

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[1] Bartlett also noted how certain details and elements were privileged by some retellers. Bartlett called a detail "outstanding" if it had pre-formed significance for a recipient, and he called details "dominant" if they were prominent elements within a story (Bartlett, *Remembering*, 93, 78).

[2] To be sure, the retelling does not have to be oral. Willem de Blécourt has challenged the view that fairy tales are a product of many hundred years of oral retelling (de Blécourt 2012). Still, de Blécourt also assumed that there are multiple levels of reproduction at work, including print reproduction, in the spreading of the tales. To be sure, there is a lot of evidence pointing to at least some tradition of oral retelling and oral serial reproduction (see for some new evidence is Tehrani, Nguyen, and Roos, 2015). This debate is not central for the general hypothesis of this paper and will hence not be pursued here.

Bartlett's focus on timeless patterns, this paper emphasizes the specific historical dimension of retelling: What emerges at a specific time as the predominant pattern of short narratives? The underlying assumption of this paper is that there is no ahistorical optimal narrative or stereotypical form, but rather a core that is highly determined by specific cultural and historical expectations. Specifically, this article will focus on what was retold and collected in tales around 1780–1815 in the German-speaking lands and how this pattern of new fairy tales may have come about.

The eminent scholar of Grimm fairy tales, Jack Zipes, has offered an account of the oral retellings by focusing on the theory of the meme to look at particular story elements that stick and survive, thereby elevating certain stories, such as "Cinderella," above others (Zipes 2006; Jones 2002). In contrast to Zipes, I will propose a single narrative-stereotyped pattern for the Grimm tales.

In justification of the assumption, there are clear cases of continuous change of fairy tales via retelling. For example, the legend of the "Pied Piper of Hamelin" (ATU 570) morphed into a fairy tale in the Grimm collection, which ends with the riddle of what became of the children. A different version from the fairy tale collection of Franz Xaver von Schönwerth (dated between 1855–57) shrinks the entire legend/Grimm fairy tale to just a few lines, now comprising the prehistory of another tale. This new tale focuses on what became of the children and tells of their eventual rescue by a beetle (Von Schönwerth 2015). In general, the collection from 1855–57 shows a different pattern than the Grimm tales (and also operates on different scales, such as the perspective of insects). And this is what is of interest to us; not detailing the progressive change of fairy tales to a timeless optimal form, but finding stability and what Bartlett called the "stereotyped form"[3] at a specific cultural-historic moment.

There is indeed something close to a stereotypical form in the Grimm tales, but it is not a timeless optimal form, but rather a time-specific construct that helped to promote an agenda of that age. As indicated, I will suggest below that one should describe the form of the Grimm folk talks as a peculiar narrative overlap of an arc of vulnerability and a narrative of reward, and we will approach this idea in small steps.

To be sure, there is much disagreement what the basic pattern of the Grimm tales is and how one should go to establish it. While it would be tempting to consider the generation of basic fairy tales by machine learning or computer models of narratives (Finlayson, 2016), we currently lack the technological means to do so. In fact, it is not clear whether computers will be able to produce fairy tales without some clear, top-down guidance. Once a top-down model or classification is in place, one can begin to see tensions between different variants of a story and the emergence of transgressive variants.[4] The various forms of Grimm folk fairy tales suggest that there is no timeless narrative pattern; instead it seems that narrative patterns are mediated by socio-historical factors. And to describe this pattern as a top-down mechanism would be to overtly simplify and falsely reduce complex cultural dynamics ex post to a general rule.

Fairy tales have been a preferred subject of narratology since Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928). As indicated, Bartlett also chose a fairy tale for his serial reproduction studies in the 1920s. Monika Flundernik uses fairy tales as core examples in her

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[3] Jack Zipes has emphasized the normalizing function of retelling that focuses on the unsurprising (2002: 207–29).

[4] While we cannot (yet?) generate basic types, one can begin to compare many variants of one tale (see de Lima, Furtado, and Feijó 2015).

Towards a 'Natural' Narratology (1996), and as noted, work continues on the basis of the Proppian functions. There is much narratological sophistication in these and others works, which I will not address in the following; instead I will focus on a core structural pattern underlying the Grimm fairy tale.

In this article, I will use the notion of fairy tale as a short script for folk fairy tale, meaning a story that is not labeled as the tale by an author, but instead collected from oral traditions, or claimed to be collected from oral traditions, and thus presented as one version of a variety of possible versions or retellings. Although my focus is on the folk fairy tales of the Grimm collection, this is not to say that the Grimm fairy tales are more authentic as oral tales than other fairy tales.[5] Rather, the Grimm fairy tales are used because they are so interconnected with other fairy tale collections, which enables comparisons to be made and changes between versions to be tracked; these connections range from Perrault and other collections with an identifiable author to newer versions, such as the mentioned collection by Schönwerth. The Grimm fairy tales are also deeply intertwined with Western cultural history, with Hollywood in particular, and some are quite well known.

In the past decades, scholars have had great success explaining the agenda of the Grimm brothers in a nationalist context, which shows how their collection of fairy tales, folk tales and their dictionary were to contribute to a yet to be established German empire.[6] These ambitions can, among other things, help to explain some of the seemingly arbitrary choices of which fairy tales were counted as "German" and which were excluded from their collection. The ambition of the Grimm brothers also included advancing philology into the position of a kingmaker, as Jakob Norberg has demonstrated (forthcoming). Most, but not all, fairy tales are conservative and hold up the existing feudal political structures and the patriarchal order (Zipes 1983). Family structures also underwent drastic changes in the eighteenth century and morphed from large households to the modern nuclear family with different rituals, such as the bedtime story, and changed the audience of stories. It is highly likely that these changes also contributed to a desire in the middle class for stories deemed appropriate for children. There are also seem to be a general correlations between 1) the rise of fairy tales and 2) print culture and (rural) literacy, both in 16th century Venice and Europe around 1800 (Bottigheimer 2010). What I would like to add to these accounts is an understanding of the overall narrative patterns that allow for such cultural analysis.

Now, let us consider two basic narrative patterns that appear in the majority of the fairy tales from the Grimm canon: vulnerability and comeuppance.

2. Narratives of vulnerability

The vulnerability of the protagonist sets a variety of audience expectations in motion. These expectations include an entire narrative arc with exposure, danger, potential wounding, searches for help, rescue, protection, healing, and a final comeuppance. Vulnerability also provides meaning to the stories by activating a powerful moral foundation, namely care (Haidt 2012).

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[5] There is also a valid argument to be made against using the Grimm collection as standard for comparison (Haase 2010).
[6] Already in 1950, Louis Snyder focused on the themes of obedience, feudal order, and anti-Semitism in the tales (1951).

Taken together, it offers "ending the state of danger" as an intrinsic end or goal of narratives. It seems reasonable to assume that the heightened vulnerability of fairy-tale protagonists might be the product of serial reproduction and thereby narrative optimization.

When we consider the differences between tales attributed to identifiable authors or compilers–such as Basile or by Perrault–and their Grimm analogues, we can notice how the arc of vulnerability acquires central importance. Yes, the characters in Basile and Perrault can appear to be vulnerable. However when we look from the Basile and Perrault tales to the Grimm tales, narrative elements that are outside the vulnerability arc disappear, such as names of protagonists, judgments on the behavior of the protagonists, explicit morals, psychological insights, and side actions of other characters. Instead, a series of elements become more pronounced, which I will describe. Also, the tales by Basile and Perrault pair the vulnerability with naivety, stupidity, and some vices (as in "Bluebeard"), thus focusing less on vulnerability and innocence, but on weakness, inexperience, and stupidity.

But first, it is helpful to ask what it means to be vulnerable. How is vulnerability tied to narratives?

a) First, vulnerability means that one can be shaped and impressed by the environment. Vulnerability means that one is not closed off from the world. It also implies that one is not a finished product, but is a work in progress, open to change, and without a clear identity. Put differently, it also means that one can be reached by other people and can be affected by them. (**Non-closed, incomplete, affectable)**.

b) At the same time, this openness exposes the vulnerable character to danger and harm. The vulnerable person or character suffers, can be hurt, destroyed. (**Fragility, susceptible to destruction)**.

c) The combination of the first two aspects suggests that vulnerability will lead to a learning process. Being vulnerable, as one can reason, will motivate subjects to seek healing after a wound. The vulnerable person will be sensitive to actual harm and will also learn to avoid the sources of pain beyond a certain threshold. (**Seeking protection, immunity**).

d) In learning to avoid pain, one must pay attention to the environment. The vulnerable subject is likely to develop heightened awareness and sharpened senses. Evaluating degrees of danger but also moments of being moved and affectability becomes a core task of the vulnerable person. A system of evaluation of external stimuli is likely to emerge. (**Observation, evaluation of the environment**).

As this list indicates, vulnerability expresses itself as a process with a temporal dimension. Vulnerability is likely deeply intertwined with narrative in general since it (vulnerability) motivates development and gives a meaning to events. Meaningful is what could harm or could prevent harm. In fact, many conceptions of narrative are implicitly or explicitly centered on processes set in motion by the affectability and harm of (or potential harm of) a character in a story. In the Grimm fairy tales as well as in some other fairy tale traditions, vulnerability often motivates the entire story arc:

1) A being that seems highly vulnerable stands at the center of the narration. Many fairy tales feature a child, perhaps an orphan, who stands alone. The protagonist is the "child alone in the forest." This child is not just stripped of his or her family but also from many

features, often even a name. Just by being alone, featureless and weak, the being or child is in danger. (**Character is alone, exposed**).

2) Sometimes, the pre-story dramatizes the process by which the protagonist becomes detached and vulnerable. The child has lost his or her beloved family that provided protection and experiences displacement (Kujundžić 2014). The father has gone away. The child is abducted, exposed, or gets lost in some unfamiliar place. The mother gets replaced by a bad stepmother, etc. (**Pre-story of exposure and loss**).

3) Once the child is detached from his or her protective shield or group, actual danger appears, often in the form of another character. Usually, the danger is specific, has a face, and is highly intense, often fantastic. It is demonized. Many tales include the actual wounding, petrification, forceful transformation, or even killing/near killing of the vulnerable character, such as snow white or little red riding hood. (**Specific danger, potential or actual wounding**).

4) Similar to the demonic nature of the danger, the help that appears is magnified. If the help comes in form of a person, the hero is typically lionized. In most cases, the act by the helper is decisive and final. The source of danger is destroyed. (**Heroic rescue. Final resolve and end of danger**).

5) It is not always clear what the outcome means for the vulnerability of the protagonist. Is the protagonist saved just from the specific source of external danger or has the state of vulnerability as such come to an end? Some texts add a new layer of vulnerability to the story that affects the next generation, such as "Rumpelstiltskin" (ATU 500) where the mother first escapes her own danger, but at the cost of her child. (**Ambiguous final state of vulnerability)**.

Some of these aspects require more elaboration and commentary.

In fairy tales, most protagonists are young people, perhaps princesses or princes, children or animals. Typically, they find themselves alone and without protection. Or, instead of being alone, they might find themselves isolated in a family with a bad stepmother, etc. It is interesting to note that the state of isolation can come about by an act of fate, by a consequence of another's actions, as in "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327), or by the child's willful transcendence a taboo, such as running away, as in "Iron John" (ATU 502), "Bluebeard" (ATU 312), or "Jorinde and Joringel" (ATU 405).[7] In many of the cases of taboo violation, vulnerability seems to be paired with being seducible or some tacit acceptance of danger. Vulnerability typically goes hand in hand with innocence. Still, innocence is not always invoked and some protagonists are not innocent.

It is as if the state of vulnerability and suffering itself gives birth to the specific danger that will emerge in narrative form. From the face of any grandmother a wolf may smile and behind any door, there may be a Bluebeard's secret chamber.[8] And of course, the children want to nibble on the gingerbread house in the dark forest, and whatever comes next seems to be just what one might expect.

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[7] Bruno Bettelheim offers a psychoanalytic interpretation for the separation of the child from the parents and the figure of the evil step mother: The child needs to become independent and this task is made easier if the mother is demonized (Bettelheim 1989).

[8] Bluebeard may be the most discussed fairy tale today (see for example, Bronfen 2012; Menninghaus 1995).

As I noted, this state of danger often but not always crosses the line to actual bodily harm. Strangely, it does not seem to be of decisive difference to the fairy tale whether the danger is simply maximized in potential form (as in "Hansel and Gretel" or "Bluebeard") or whether the line is crossed, the child is killed, and then revived (as in "Little Red Riding Hood" [ATU 333], the "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids" [ATU 123], or "Snow White" [ATU 709]). In either case, most fairy tales clearly end their narrative arc when the source of danger is eliminated or an often unlikely healing is accomplished. In a few fairy tales, the good end fails to come. The fairy tales leave it open whether the solution consists in an elimination of the external danger (the wolf is killed) or whether it consists in a fortification of the protagonist's self (the hero marries, becomes queen or king). Perhaps the difference does not concern the fairy tale too much as long as the story can proclaim an end.

It should already be noted, though, that a new genre around 1800 takes a decidedly different turn. In the bildungsroman or formation novel, but also in many novellas of the time, the wounds suffered during childhood vulnerability are less likely to be overcome permanently; instead they leave a permanent and often traumatic presence that cannot be overcome. The comparison to the bildungsroman is not arbitrary since both the folk fairy tale and the new novel are linked together in many ways–not just by the fact that the first European folktale ever printed appeared within the one of the earliest, if not the first, bildungsroman. In fact, the age that discovered the folk fairy tale 1770 to 1800, also invented the modern conception of trauma in autobiographies, novels, and Karl Phillip Moritz's *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (Journal of Empirical Psychology) (Fohrmann 1998; Sütterlin, in press).

We can now return to the idea that vulnerability in fairy tales approaches an optimal form through repeated retellings. Once a character is presented as vulnerable, a large number of expectations come into play along with clear preferences and values attached to the protection of the vulnerable character. Vulnerability thereby also provides a link for the audience to "enter" the scene by identifying either with the vulnerable character or with an imaginary helper who should rescue the child and who then arrives to do so as if he or she were born from the desires of the audience. In one word, vulnerability targets the empathy of the audience (Keen 2007). The situation of danger is immediately clear to everyone as are most of the emotions of the vulnerable character–in general, fairy tales tend to eliminate character emotions that are not immediately tied to their present situation.[9]

The emphasis on vulnerability in the folk fairy tale seems to echo Christian values. Still, there is a difference in that Christian vulnerability and openness seems to operate as a goal for the saint and believer, whereas vulnerability is a state that is overcome in the end by the fairy tale.

3. Narratives of comeuppance

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[9] The first printed folk fairy tale, namely "Jorinde and Joringel", is an exception in that regard since the loving couple is partly inexplicably overcome by fear in the beginning without the presence of danger. However, later the fairy tale adds the source of danger. We will return to the exceptionality of this tale below.

The second core narrative of the folk fairy tale is the rendering of justice served for each character at the end: good deeds are rewarded and bad ones are often punished harshly.[10] According to William Flesch, the core pattern of fiction, and perhaps narrative itself, consists in everyone receiving what he or she deserves. Tracking good and bad characters may be even more central to fiction than empathy and may provide greater adaptive advantages (2007). Flesch argues that literary texts develop a finely-tuned perceptive apparatus to evaluate not just explicit actions, but also more subtle acts and motivations, such the inaction by free loaders who do not intervene and leave the dirty work of moral punishment to others.

The applicability of Flesch's thought to fairy tales is obvious. It is interesting to note though that reward and punishment in fairy tales is not limited to overtly moral behavior. The cunning of many heroes that one would have to describe as morally neutral is also rewarded. And rewarded are those who manage to escape from danger, like Gretel who outwits the witch without ever having done much of moral value. Rewarded are those who pass tests.

In this sense Vivasvan Soni has considered the passing of tests as one of the two core narrative patterns of fiction (2007). According to Soni, the central feature of the test is that it suspends the pursuit of happiness until the test is resolved. His examples include narratives of temptation (Jesus in the desert), the endurance of hardship (Job), and the solving of difficult tasks including moral dilemmas. Using this expanded view of the comeuppance narrative, one can suggest that the characters in fairy tales receive what they deserve if they pass their (moral and nonmoral) tests.

Morality-immorality in fairy tales is regularly connoted by means of color. The good guys who pass tests receive gold. The first girl in "Mother Holle" (ATU 480) ("Goldmarie") is rewarded with gold. In many fairy tales, gold becomes the mark or guide of the heroes, including "Iron John" and the "Golden Bird" (ATU 550). Often, gold is the reward at the end. Marriage is symbolized by the golden ring. Reversely, colors such as black or the red are markers of punishment, be it the black of the second girl in "Mother Holle" ("Pechmarie"), the blood in the shoe of Cinderella, and characters that, "sich Schwarz ärgern," or "anger themselves until they turn black."

In short, the good and bad characters are painted or marked during the tale or at the end. This coloring of the characters allows for the tracking that William Flesch highlights. The color serves as warning signal that stigmatizes the bad characters from then on in front of the community (for stigma in general, see Goffman 1963).

The final coloring and dispensation of justice completes the fairy tale. At the end, the role of the audience is not one of empathizing with the protagonist, but of approving the final judgment. The reader or listener can be satisfied when the end is reached, and he or she can leave the story world at that point to return to himself or herself.

4. The double structure of the fairy tale

The conclusion of the last section (3) should give us pause. The end, we just said, consists in the reward of good characters and the punishment of bad ones. In the section before (2), we had similarly concluded that the end of the fairy tale consists in the healing of the wounded child or

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[10] Andre Jolles views the simple or naive morality as the defining feature of fairy tales (2017).

his or her return to safety. That is, the end concludes both narratives simultaneously, the narrative of vulnerability and the narrative of comeuppance. This makes perfect sense insofar as the bad guys get punished; it is a bit more odd when considering the hero. The child is at the same time saved (vulnerability) and rewarded (comeuppance). But why the reward? What has the child done to deserve it?

Let us review. The first narrative progresses from profound vulnerability (sometimes including suffering bodily harm) to rescue from the danger at the end. This rescue could be driven by the appearance of a hero or by the cunning of the vulnerable child. Often, the rescue is combined with a return home ("Mother Holle", "Hansel and Gretel," etc.) or a marriage that serves as the foundation of a new home. The second narrative takes the form of a challenge that the protagonist can pass or fail. Many stories feature three siblings of which only the final one passes the challenge. At the end, the heroes get rewarded and painted gold, whereas the villains become punished and blackened (on blackness, see Schmiesing 2016).

What is remarkable about the simultaneity of the two endings is that the reward of the comeuppance narrative also rewards the outcome of vulnerability tale. It appears that vulnerability as such is rewarded. This point demands attention since vulnerability in itself is not a moral value and is also not a useful for solving problems, such as cunning would be. The double ending sanctions vulnerability as if it were a morally positive value. In short, fairy tales elevate vulnerability to the status of an as-if-morality. Vulnerability in itself should not be a quality, but serves the status of moral virtue. Of course, it seems right to protect children for being children. But there is more to this rewarding than mere protection.

Before we consider the oddity of rewarding vulnerability as such, let's consider some examples and variations of the basic scheme. An example is provided by Mother Holle. The young protagonist becomes separated from her mother who has died, and lives with her stepmother (first instance of vulnerability). This is just her first exposure to danger. She then jumps into a well passing into a strange land (second instance of vulnerability). Now in the strange lands among the clouds, Marie has to pass three tests that show her altruism, and only after she passes is she sent back to earth (test-comeuppance). Her return home ends both her exposure to the strange world (second instance of vulnerability) and rewards her with gold (test-comeuppance). In contrast, her stepsister fails the altruism test and is not truly vulnerable since she already knows what to expect from her stepsister and how to return home. Goldmarie's return is a reward for her good deeds *and* her vulnerability as such (Figure 1).

Of course, one could object that Goldmarie deserves a reward since she has been morally good. However, what about "Hansel and Gretel"[11], the "Town Musicians of Bremen" (ATU 130), the "Vailiant Little Tailor" (ATU 1640), "Sleeping Beauty" (ATU 410), the "Golden Bird" or the girl from "Bluebeard," to mention just a few tales that are still well known today with characters who receive a similar reward at the end with little or no altruistic actions before. From the perspective of these later tales, it almost seems as if the morally good action of "Mother Holle" or "Snow-White and Rose-Red" (ATU 426) is simply added to justify the reward.

<Insert Figure 1 Here>

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[11] Of course, one can make the case that Gretel helps her brother. Still, it seems more correct to say that they jointly rescue themselves by outwitting the witch.

Fig. 1. The two standard plots of fairy tales are a 1) rescue narrative of the vulnerable character and the 2) rewarding of a hero who passed a test. Both overlap in the ending, indicating that rescue and reward assume the same structural position.

From here, we can point schematically to a couple of common patterns of this double structure of the Grimm fairy tale. As is typical for products of serial reproduction, many actual fairy tales may have morphed, duplicated, or dropped some of their story elements.

To repeat the basic and most common scheme among the Grimm tales and related stories: A child or protagonist is isolated from his or her group; in this state of high vulnerability, danger or a test presents itself; and at the end she receives an appropriate reward or is rescued by an external force. The reward can be for moral behavior but also for cunning ("Hansel and Gretel", "Golden Bird," "Valiant Little Tailor," etc.).

Departing from the basic scheme of vulnerability, most Grimm tales can be seen as variations of this scheme, and it is easy to imagine how these variations could be the result of serial reproduction as Bartlett described them. One of these variations comes in the form of an inversion. Instead of positing vulnerability at the beginning of the story and the overcoming of vulnerability as the goal of the tale, vulnerability itself may be the solution or goal. The primal type of this tale could be "Sleeping Beauty": Only when her powerful guards come down, can she be happy. We can identify different patterns of how this might happen in "The Six Swans" (ATU 451) (or "The Twelve Swans" in H.C. Andersen's version), and in "Frog King" (ATU 440).

In "The Six Swans," a sister becomes isolated when her brothers become bewitched. Her task will be to expose herself, not to defend herself against false accusations, and thus to remain radically vulnerable. (She has to make shirts from nettles for her brothers, without speaking a single word). Here, vulnerability is not simply the starting point, but also the means for passing the test since her vulnerability will magically lead to the rescue of her brothers. Both, the narrative of vulnerability and the narrative of the test, have truly become one.

This pattern is taken further in "Frog King." At least, this is a what Eugen Drewermann suggests in a reading that highlights how the frog first suppresses vulnerability and how he needs to find it in the end. In the tale, the frog is transformed into a human when he is brutally thrown at the wall (the kiss of the frog is a later retelling that replaces this violence). It turns out that this violent act rescues the frog-prince. This odd progress makes sense if we consider that the vulnerability of the frog here literally merges with the goal of the tale. To go beyond the state of being a frog, the frog needs to become vulnerable to mature. How can one make sense of this pattern? Perhaps one does not need to make sense of it but to note how it fits in the tradition of the vulnerability tale where vulnerability itself becomes the answer and solution. Still, there are ways to read this tale. The psychoanalytic reading by Eugen Drewermann is particular successful in this regard. Drewermann suggests that "Frog King" presents a classic paradigm of adolescent or immature relationships: The frog suffers from a helping complex, constantly assisting princesses to restore their lost golden childhood. The slimy creature then feels entitled to rewards for his helping behavior, and structures the relationship as a contract of self-sacrifice and demand. The aggressive act of the princess is the only way out of this immature arrangement for both. Instead of demanding her services, he has to face his own insecurity or vulnerability, while she has to overcome her longing for a golden childhood she never had (see Drewermann 2003). (A different reading of this fairy tale would stress the struggle by the princess against rules

imposed by her father that have to be broken like the rings around the heart of the servant Heinrich).

These "inverted" fairy tales provide good evidence for our suggestion that vulnerability is the center of Grimm folk tales. Vulnerability can occur as starting point, means, and even goal of the tale.

It is curious that the Grimm brothers accepted "Bluebeard" into their first collection, before rejecting it, given that it can be traced back to Perrault. It may be the most self-reflective fairy tale in their collection that depicts the law of the genre. The story responds to the question: Who or what would force children to go through the narrative of vulnerability? The answer is a monstrous being that isolates, tests, and punishes the hero. This monster is the law of the genre itself, depicted in the character of bluebird.

There are some other fairy tales of interest here. As one would expect as a result of repeated retelling, there are both simplifications and diversifications. "Iron John," one of the longer tales presented by the Grimms, rehearses the basic pattern of isolation, vulnerability, test, and reward three times, before it leads to a closure with reward. In the repetitions, the same narrative element can occupy different functional positions within each chain. A case in point is the golden hair. The boy gets golden hair when he cannot keep the pond pure; the gold is a mark of his failure and his shame; consequently, he hides his hair. However, later the golden hair leads to his recognition as the hero and marks him as deserving a princess as reward.

This observation leads us to several possible interpretations of "Iron John." The first interpretation could be called the traditional reading. In this reading, the tale presents the formation of a young hero who fails twice (he cannot keep his home castle safe, he cannot keep the forest dwelling and pond pure) until he finally learns his lesson, protects his new castle, and is rewarded for it. The second reading would consider the duplications within the tale and suggest that the prince gets rewarded for his failures, for his immaturity including sexual immaturity, and thus vulnerability. Not passing the test leads to his further isolation by being forced to leave the forest, thus more vulnerability, while it simultaneously is a distinction and gives him the golden hair. The end only brings out this benefit of failure/vulnerability.

The table shows several common patterns.

<Insert Table 1 here>

The narrative of vulnerability is closely related to that of suffering. It also has a strong implication on shaping gender stereotypes, a discussion that I will bracket for the current article. Jorgensen has found that female characters are more likely described as suffering in fairy tales, but also are more likely to be described as morally negative than male ones (2019). It seems to me that female characters are highly polarized: On the one hand, they can establish their moral value by being vulnerable along the lines this article describes. On the other hand, they are much more likely to be demonized if they fail to perform vulnerability and are cast in a negative light.

5. Fighting for vulnerability in the Enlightenment

What should one make of this focus on vulnerability, and especially the rewarding of vulnerability? It seems that the German Enlightenment thinkers stumbled across the folk tale and its focus on vulnerability as the missing piece to promote their agenda. Their agenda was to show that man is shaped by the environment, is affected by his situations, and thus can learn, can

be taught, and can be formed. This focus on formation, affectability, and vulnerability clearly was a battle cry of middle-class authors against the ruling aristocracy, which defined itself by privilege and birthrights. In this regard, the fairy tale dealt a twofold blow to the aristocracy: first, by presenting vulnerability in its most extreme form, the fairy tale emphasizes environment, luck, and upbringing's power to shape people, overriding blood and (in)heritage; second, the fairy tale kindles sentimentality in the audience, and elicits a response of empathy with the common person. That is, the folk tale does not simply characterize man as vulnerable, rather it evokes strong audience affects of caring and being moved for this vulnerable creature, thereby offering direct emotional support for the Enlightenment's point of view. While the focus on vulnerability is not unique to fairy tales and folk tales, but also occurs in discourses such as pedagogy, this evocation of emotions was more unique. Vulnerability turned out to be a great weapon for the cause of the middle class.

The ideology of the Enlightenment that the good man is the man (but not necessarily woman) who can be shaped, finds its narrative proof in the folk tale. It cannot come as a surprise that Herder and many others assigned a privileged truth value to these texts that they also described as especially natural. Rewarding vulnerability in folk tales thus fit perfectly into the core of Enlightenment thought. In the fairy tale, the Enlightenment thinkers could shed tears for their own cause.

In this respect, the discovery of the folk tale shows close affinity to the discourse of pedagogy, which had first promoted the idea of the vulnerable person. In many respects, the focus on pedagogy is the project of the Enlightenment. Various metaphorical fields were mobilized in the middle and end of the eighteenth century that established the changeability and vulnerability of man, and thereby also the potential to improve man ("Bildung"). A core metaphor, not surprisingly, is the "seed" of becoming – see for example the biological project of Blumenbach who coined the term "Bildungstrieb" (drive of formation), or the pedagogical version of Johann Bernhard Basedow (1764). Another core metaphor is the "impression" and the long-term impact of wounds on the impressionable soul of the child, which metaphor can be found in the literature following Rousseau's *Emile ou de L'Education*, such as texts by Tiedemann, Salzmann, Campe, Basedow, Pestalozzi, and many of their kindred spirits (Krupp 2009; Steedman 1995). Joachim Heinrich Campe in 1787 also uses the metaphor of the child as a canvas that is painted by its surroundings (1787: 81-82). The coloring, similar to the gold or black reward within the folk fairy tale we discussed above, marks and shapes the person.

In the late eighteenth century, good characters are those who can be impressed, affected, and influenced and who are open to others. These considerations of changeability and vulnerability culminate in the idea of trauma–a strong event or impression in one's past that remains imprinted in a person and prefigures later perceptions and behavior. And indeed, the German thinkers articulate this very idea starting around 1790 in organs such as the *Magazin zur Erfahrungssseelenkunde* and as an underlying pattern of plot in fictional works (Breithaupt 2005; Sütterlin, in press). These and other related developments in the Enlightenment are well-known. For present purposes, it will suffice to refer to them briefly.

Vulnerability became a weapon in the Enlightenment – and still is today –, but the story does not end there. Vulnerability not only became a value, but also gained persuasive and propagandistic appeal. By being vulnerable, the protagonist gains seductive power. Romantic and post-romantic tales stress how the vulnerable person more or less self-confidently uses her (or his) seductive power over others. The (mostly) latent erotic power of the Grimm fairy tales is swept to the foreground in later retellings and in Romantic tales that feature the seductive female.

In fact, as Maria Tatar has shown, the erotic tale was already present in the earlier versions of the fairy tales before the Grimm versions tamed the overtly sexual content of these tales of girls getting undressed and boys reaching for manhood (1992). In the Grimm tales, the seductive power of children and vulnerable characters becomes less explicit and latent, but not less potent, thereby directing the focus away from the specific characters toward the more abstract idea of being-vulnerable.

It should be noted that the tale of vulnerability is different both from tales of innocence and dramas of victimization. Tales of innocence, such as the martyr legends are similar to fairy tales in that they feature a hero who does not deserve his or her bad fate. However, in contrast to the tale of vulnerability, the tale of innocence rewards the martyr for his mental righteousness. This is not required for the tale of vulnerability, which rewards anyone who is exposed to danger or for being vulnerable.

The drama or tale of victimization is close to the tale of vulnerability insofar as both feature a character who falls prey to an undeserved fate (on the way how moral dyads like victim and perpetrator structure our thinking, see Wegner and Gray 2016). The difference between the two narrative sequences is found in their aftermath. In the Grimm fairy tale, i.e. the tale of vulnerability, the hero can be rescued without permanent damage and the tale ends with the rewarding of the hero. In the tale of victimization, there is no simple solution that can undo the victimization. It seems that the victim is changed in their core. There are many variants of this change including the marking of the victim as untouchable and taboo, but the change can also be manifested as the lionization of the victim. In fiction since the early eighteenth century, being the victim increasingly serves as a powerful trigger for empathy (Hunt 2007).[12] Especially since the twentieth century, there is a powerful association in legal and political presentations that attributes power to the victim. In the following, we will address the split of the fairy tale and the victim tale when we address the invention of trauma around 1800.

6. Retelling (in)vulnerability

To the best of our knowledge, the first complete (German) folk tale appeared in print in 1777 (Grätz 1998). The genre of the fairy tale, however, was already well established. Fairy tales had been printed before, namely translations of *One Thousand and One Nights*, erotic texts, satire, and versions of authored tales, such as the ones by Perrault. The first printed folk fairy tale appears within another first, namely the autobiographical prototype of the formation novel or bildungsroman, namely *Henrich Stillings Jugend. Eine wahrhafte Geschichte* (1777), written by Heinrich Johann Jung. This fictionalized autobiography was edited and printed without the consent of its author, by none other than Johann Wolfgang Goethe who later published the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1794/95) that lead to the coining of the term "Bildungsroman." The embedded fairy tale is one we have already mentioned, namely "Jorinde and Joringel." It is embedded and integrated into the context of the novel as a text that young Heinrich hears and finds uncanny. Later, the Grimms simply copy the text as if they collected it from villagers. Manfred Grätz suggests that members of the middle class and the major authors of the Enlightenment may not have been familiar with folk fairy tales, that many may not have heard a

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[12] Lynn Hunt has famously suggested that the sentimental novel of the eighteenth century led to the universal Human Rights in the French Revolution and beyond.

single one, but that they then reacted enthusiastically to the first one they did hear. In fact, this one tale may have started the search for fairy tales culminating in the Grimms' effort to collect more tales in which the vulnerable characters get rewarded for little more than being vulnerable. The Grimm brothers seem to have fine-tuned their lenses on these uncanny texts in which vulnerability itself leads to success and moves the audience, helped by a retelling process that discovered the double structure of fairy tales to bring about effective endings.

Unfortunately, we do not have an archive of diachronic retellings of oral folk fairy tales from the eighteenth century, and nothing close to meet the standards of folklore studies (Oring 2014). However, here is a somewhat risky speculation: "Jorinde and Joringel" as it was published in 1777 triggered the interest in folk fairy tales. Thirty years later, the Grimms published their famous fairy tale edition. What would we see if we describe the pattern of "Jorinde and Joringel" as an earlier iteration and the other Grimm texts as later iterations that "optimized" the pattern of the earlier text in sync with the spirit of the age?

In that case, we could observe the shift from "Jorinde and Joringel" toward the above described pattern of rewarding vulnerability. In "Jorinde and Joringel," we already find all of the elements of the later Grimm fairy tales, but not the arrangement of these elements into the described pattern of rewarding vulnerability. In this sense, "Jorinde and Joringel" offers an incomplete prototype. In that tale, the young male hero Joringel gets paralyzed when the young loving couple wanders too deep into the forest. The witch magically transforms Jorinde into a bird. Joringel wants to rescue her but cannot get close to the tower of the witch without getting paralyzed—until he dreams of a solution of a magic flower that provides invulnerability. Once he dreams of the solution, he does not even need to do much. The mere feeling of a solution makes him untouchable and invulnerable—and he can defeat the witch and rescue Jorinde. The imagined invulnerability becomes the means toward the goal of rescue.

What the later "iterations" change—if we follow this line of speculations—is that they strip away the reached invulnerability by the hero. The magic flower disappears. Instead, the later fairy tales discover that vulnerability is less a state to be overcome, but rather the very solution that will be rewarded. While "Jorinde and Joringel" tells a classic rite-of-passage tale with an uncanny state, the folk fairy tale emerges when this pattern gets retold and the temporal order gets short-cut. Invulnerability stops serving as the means toward a goal and is instead replaced by affectability/vulnerability as the means of success. This is where the Enlightenment vision of man, at least the sentimental version of German Enlightenment gets the upper hand over the image of the stoic man.

7. Genres of vulnerability and narrative around 1800

From here we can talk a brief look at the German literary genres around 1800. Instead of following the intense eighteenth-century debate about the status of the fairy tale by authors such as Schummel, Bertuch, Campe, Musäus, Herder, and Wieland, our task is to understand the new model of the hero that entered the narrative stage at that time, and determine what it meant for narrative in general. The protagonist of the fairy tale is neither the stoic subject of the early Enlightenment drama and prose who has to prove that he does not get bent and affected by anything (Kiss 2010), nor is he the radically changeable hero of the picaresque novel who is not permanently scarred by strokes of fate and who constantly reinvents himself (Malkmus 2011). Instead, the vulnerable subject of the fairy tale does change and is shaped by the environment.

Joringel's efforts to rescue Jorinde might fail and both might remain in their state of fear around the witch that transforms them. The danger is real, and some fairy tales end badly.

Narratives of vulnerability show that the progression of the story matters. Listeners are concerned about the well-being of the vulnerable subject since serious harm could be in store, harm that will not be healed. The goal of the story becomes to prevent harm or heal. In this sense, narratives of vulnerability both imbue the vulnerability of characters with meaning and find meaning in the vulnerable characters by rescuing them. This is a form of meaning or grounding that the shifts of fortune, in the picaresque novel, fail to deliver. By providing meaning to the story, the vulnerability of the subject strengthens the value of the change of events by the narrative since the narrative development moves the protagonists to his or her rescue. Narrative change can move into the center of Enlightenment discourses since these narratives concern the essence of man and his happiness. Reversely, humanity can be promoted because it can be told, narrated. One may be tempted to naturalize this point by arguing that human development and narrative are two sides of the same coin, as Jerome Bruner did (2003). But by doing so one would neglect the novelty of the cultural paradigm of narrative at this point of the late-eighteenth century. Whereas the older plots of the early Enlightenment, the Baroque, and preceding periods tended to juxtapose the subject and some external forces of fate, luck, gods, and the like, the new narratives unfold vulnerability without many external references as if from within.

Certainly, this emphasis on narrative change and affectability can be found in many places before the fairy tale, including pietist conversion tales. Still, what is mostly novel is this focus on narrative changeability without external meaning, explicit morals, and even significance. By centering narratives on vulnerability, the new story arc from exposure to rescue is grounded in the meaningfulness of caring for the vulnerable child. Nothing else and few external references are needed. Unlike many religious stories, there is no need for the search for divinity. Unlike Basile's prose, there is no hidden ironic meaning. Unlike Perrault's tales, there is no explicit lesson. And unlike tragedies, there is no sublime moment of considering mankind as such. Instead, the fairy tales empower narrative as such. Vulnerability plays out differently in specific narrative forms around the year 1800, though of course all forms start to mix and mingle.[13] On a very basic level, the different approaches to vulnerability could be described as follows.

The novel, especially the German Bildungsroman discovers trauma as structural principle of telling its tale: In the future, the hero will discover and perhaps overcome the shaping and thus traumatic moment of his or her past. Therefore, vulnerability is transformed into an epistemological or hermeneutical issue for the narrative: a search for the primal moment of a wounding or imprinting. In general, characters in the novels become increasingly portrayed as being shaped by past events that often haunt them (for the drive toward coherence and understanding in the tradition for the bildungsroman, see Wellbery 2010). These past events

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[13] In his essay "Schlegel's Theory of Poetical Genres," Peter Szondi remarked, following Friedrich Schlegel's comments, that the distinction of genres became fluid around 1800. Instead fixed genres, such as tragedy, comedy, and the novel, the age around 1800 introduced different forms of presentation that were tragic, comic, novelistic (Szondi 1986).

hover around them as their always-near, never-quite-catchable moment of truth. The code behind this use of trauma is truth.[14]

In the drama since the mid eighteenth century, the honor code frequently regulates vulnerability. Vulnerability, abuse, and weakness are often translated as a danger to honor and threaten loss of honor. In response to such violations, specific and almost ritualized operations were called for to restore honor (duels, vengeance, doing heroic deeds, etc.) or to acknowledge one's defeat. The honor code thereby used a symbolic code to translate vulnerability into action items, which also allowed characters to act on behalf of others (as in the common pattern when a male hero acts to restore the honor of a woman). The common pattern of self-sacrifice in many plays around 1800 and the Hegel-Schelling paradigm of drama also fits into this context: A hero voluntarily takes up the struggle against a superior force, like *Don Carlos* by Friedrich Schiller, fails, but in his failure proves his superiority and honor in the eyes of the spectators (Lacoue-Labarthe 1998).

In comparison to the Bildungsroman and the tragedies of the time, the folk fairy tales favored by the Grimms around 1800 do not translate vulnerability into other codes, such as truth or honor. Rather, they are tales of vulnerability and they remain tales of vulnerability. This means that the narrative evolves around the double structure of balancing maximum vulnerability with the rescue of the protagonist in a temporal-narrative progression. Put differently, fairy tales are a product of retelling.

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[14] In *S/Z,* Roland Barthes relatedly describes the hermeneutical code of riddles and mysteries as one of only two codes that has a temporal extension (1974).

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