

Shanna J. Bice

*Enchanted Statues, Candy Cottages, and Bloody Keys:
The Modern Tourist Experience on Germany's Historical Fairy Tale Road*

ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the travel narratives of modern English-speaking visitors, who are touring Germany's historical Fairy Tale Road, to determine what it is about this tourist destination that attracts travelers and leaves a lasting impression on them. It particularly considers how this tourist attraction connects to its literary and historical background.

KEYWORDS: modern history; Germany; Brothers Grimm; Children's and Household Tales; fairy tales; tourism; architecture; Märchenstrasse (Fairy Tale Road); travel narratives; travel guides

Introduction

At the center of the German town of Hanau, located just east of Frankfurt, a bronze statue of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm shows the two brothers bent over a large, open book. Jacob is standing, holding on to the back of his younger brother's chair, while Wilhelm is sitting and balancing their object of interest on his knees. Local legend has it that, at the "witching hour," the two brothers switch places, allowing Jacob a rest from the daylight vigil at his brother's side.¹ More than a mere sculpture, this statue is considered the starting point of Germany's famous Fairy Tale Road, and fittingly so, as it serves as an appropriate metaphor for what this route has to offer, namely, historical art, fantastical lore, and the Brothers Grimm.

The German Fairy Tale Road is a tourist attraction that spans from the town of Hanau to the city of Bremerhaven on the country's North Sea coast and includes fifty-three distinct communities.² Known as the *Märchenstrasse* in German, it measures approximately 470 miles in length and features a variety of locations related to either the Brothers Grimm or the lore of specific fairy tales.³ While the origins of the Fairy Tale Road can be traced back centuries, it was established as an official tourist destination on April 11, 1975.⁴ Today, visitors from all over the world travel to Germany to visit this route. Japanese tourists in particular express a fascination with the attraction and are more likely to visit the Fairy Tale Road than their American counterparts who tend to prefer Munich or the Black Forest. One Japanese *manga* artist, Kei Ishiyama, went so far as to travel the route to

¹ Eberhard M. Iba and Thomas L. Johnson, *The German Fairy Tale Landscape: The Storied World of the Brothers Grimm* (Hameln: C. W. Niemeyer, 2015), 22.

² Jeff Kavanagh, "Welcome to the Fairy-Tale Road," in *Fodor's Germany*, 27th ed. (New York: Random House Inc., 2014), 537-559, here 539; Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 13.

³ "Follow Germany's Fairy-Tale Road," in *Great Escapes: Enjoy the World at Your Leisure*, ed. Elizabeth Jones, Ali Lemer, and Gabrielle Stefanos (Footscray, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2015), 226-228, here 226.

⁴ Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 8.

writers focus on three distinct topics when traveling the Road: the Brothers Grimm, the fairy tales themselves, and the architecture along the Road. Using the Word Cloud as a reference and examples from the underlying texts as evidence, this article examines possible explanations for the popularity of these topics.

While the number of texts evaluated for this article may seem relatively high and thus “representative,” there are at least two caveats to consider. Firstly, many of them originally appeared in newspapers (for example, the *New York Times*), though some texts published in professional journals or essay anthologies were included as well. This means that the texts varied greatly with regard to their length, personal voice, level of scholarship, and inner reflection. Secondly, all were written by English-speaking travelers, most of them Americans or Canadians, and the level of interest that certain subjects enjoy often depends on the language and nationality of the writers. For example, if German travelers were to share their opinions about the Road, they might choose to focus on the Germans’ preferred tale, “Hansel and Gretel,” or on rather different attractions, perhaps the puppet shows or traditional cuisine.⁶ Thus, this analysis is not an overall summary of what people in general seek from this attraction; it only pertains to a very specific subset of the world’s population.

Due to the Fairy Tale Road’s relatively young age as an official tourist destination (1975 to the present), academic scholarship on the Road itself as it exists today is relatively scarce. However, the Road does span centuries and reaches back not just to the lives of the Brothers Grimm in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also to the tales’ organic formation over many generations (in some cases dating back to the Middle Ages). As certain as the Road is a tourist destination, it is also a historical location; thus, in this case, tourism is closely linked to history. Visitors do not visit the *Märchenstrasse* for modern theme-park rides and artificial charm. Rather, they come searching for a sense of authenticity and a link to the past—be it in the form of “historic” fairy tales, traditional German culture, potential family ties, or merely the nostalgia they associate with their own childhood. Because of the importance of history and literature to what is, in essence, a modern tourist attraction, the most frequently cited scholarly works in this article are critical biographies of the Brothers Grimm, as well as professional editions and translations of their works. Jack David Zipes, a renowned Germanist and Grimm scholar, features prominently with his original biographies and analyses, but also with his exemplary English translations of the original German sources.⁷ Eberhard Michael Iba’s and Thomas L. Johnson’s 2015

⁶ Scott Harshbarger, “Grimm and Grimmer: ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and Fairy Tale Nationalism,” *Style* 47, no. 4 (2013): 490-508, here 490.

⁷ Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forest to the Modern World* (first published 1988; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Jack Zipes, “Introduction,” in Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 660-663.

study, *The German Fairy Tale Landscape: The Storied World of the Brothers Grimm*, provides invaluable information and is the most in-depth guidebook on the Fairy Tale Road.⁸ Finally, though a little older, Murray B. Peppard's *Paths Through the Forest: A Biography of the Brothers Grimm* (1971) remains an important resource.⁹

I. The Brothers Grimm

Considering the theme of the *Märchenstrasse*, the fact that “fairy” is the most frequently appearing word at 262 occurrences is unsurprising. “Tales” and “tale” are the third and sixth most common terms at 241 and 183. What is somewhat startling, though, is that “Grimm” ranks even before “tale(s)” at 246 instances; “brothers” follows closely at 240; and “Grimms” also appears 128 times. This does reveal something profound about Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, namely, that they are very rarely mentioned separately from each other. At 85 occurrences, Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) appears slightly more often than Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), but for this there are at least three explanations. Firstly, Wilhelm continued to augment and edit the future editions of their set of children's stories, *Children's and Household Tales*, while Jacob moved on to other endeavors, thus connecting the younger brother more strongly to their joint publication of fairy tales.¹⁰ Secondly, Wilhelm is often mentioned in relation to his wife and children, while Jacob remained a lifelong bachelor, so that any time an author speaks of Wilhelm's nuclear family, for example, when mentioning the tales supplied by Wilhelm's wife Henriette Dorothea (1793-1867), the younger brother's name shows up as a reference.¹¹ Thirdly, Jacob's name appears with more than one spelling: 78 times as Jacob and 4 times as Jakob. Other terms in the Word Cloud associated with the brothers include towns where they both resided in the course of their lives.

Contrary to their portrayal in popular media, such as the 2005 adventure film named after and loosely based on the brothers, the Grimms were not two adventurous young go-getters who braved wilderness and wild beasts as they traversed the dark forests of what is now the Fairy Tale Road, collecting their stories from peasants and farmers.¹² In fact, the brothers did very little wandering, and many of their sources were female friends and family members who would seek out tales from other women and then pass them along to the chroniclers.¹³ When the brothers did set out in search of new stories to add to their collection, they mostly formed connections with upper-class women who had the leisure to

⁸ Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*.

⁹ Murray B. Peppard, *Paths through the Forest: A Biography of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

¹⁰ Ruth Michaelis-Jena, *The Brothers Grimm* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1970), 4.

¹¹ Michaelis-Jena, *Brothers Grimm*, 48.

¹² *Brothers Grimm*, directed by Terry Gilliam (Burbank: Dimensions Films, 2005), DVD; Zipes, *Brothers Grimm*, 1.

¹³ Peppard, *Paths through the Forest*, 50.

engage in storytelling.¹⁴ Dorothea Viehmann (1755-1816), an older woman of more modest means, was an exception in this respect. Known as the “Fairytale-Wife” and somewhat of a Mother Goose figure, Viehmann was one of the Grimms’ most prolific sources who contributed over twenty stories to their publication, but traveled herself to visit them to share her tales rather than the two men seeking out her company.¹⁵ Indeed, given Wilhelm Grimm’s lifelong health ailments, the folk vision of him and his older brother as two hardy adventurers is rather absurd.¹⁶ The Grimms were scholars, and their first 1812/1815 publication of German fairy tales, *Children’s and Household Tales*, was intended for an adult audience. They compiled folk tales and songs throughout their lives – not for the sake of childish entertainment but as a way to preserve their German heritage.¹⁷

The brothers have been associated with the Fairy Tale Road from the beginning. In 1977, just two years after the Road’s official designation as a tourist attraction, Ralph Blumenthal, a graduate of the Columbia University School of Journalism and longtime award-winning reporter for the *New York Times*, published his impressions of the Road. Early on, Blumenthal clears up a common misconception about the Grimms’ part in the stories: “The Grimms didn’t make up the tales—they collected stories that until then existed largely in oral tradition.”¹⁸ Almost all authors make it clear that the Grimms did not compose but, rather, compiled the tales, though a few are more ambiguous. Peter Lacey, for example, is rather vague in his descriptions, referring to one of the stories as a “Grimm tale” and stating that the Grimms “made them” compelling when, at least in the first edition of 1812/1815, the brothers sought to preserve them as they were recited to them.¹⁹ As Ruth Michaelis-Jena explains in her biography of the brother, “[a]ll was to be taken down faithfully, nothing left out, nothing added, the turn of phrase of the teller was to be carefully preserved.”²⁰

Many travel writers only cover the basics concerning the Brothers Grimm, including when and where they were born, where they grew up, and where they lived as adults. Lucy Gordan—who is a Mark Twain Travel Journalism Award winner, a magazine and newspaper editor, and a consultant for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization—provides some additional information on the Grimm’s extended family. Jacob’s and Wilhelm’s younger brother, Ludwig Emil Grimm (1790-1863), was an artist who contributed colored illustrations to

¹⁴ Valerie Paradiž, *Clever Maids: The Secret History of the Grimm Fairy Tales* (first published 2005; New York: Basic Books, 2009), xiv-xv.

¹⁵ Michaelis-Jena, *Brothers Grimm*, 59-60.

¹⁶ Peppard, *Paths through the Forest*, 4.

¹⁷ Michaelis-Jena, *Brothers Grimm*, 52.

¹⁸ Ralph Blumenthal, “The Brothers Grimm: Touring in the Land of Once Upon a Time,” *New York Times*, February 13, 1977.

¹⁹ Peter Lacey, “West Germany,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 18, 1982.

²⁰ Michaelis-Jena, *Brothers Grimm*, 50.

later volumes of their texts. Their father, Philipp Grimm (1751-1796), served as a local magistrate in Steinau but died when Jacob was eleven. After his death, Jacob and Wilhelm were sent to school in Kassel and then to the University of Marburg. Jacob became a linguist and Wilhelm a literary scholar and critic.²¹ This information is not necessarily pertinent to enjoying the sites along the *Märchenstrasse*, but it does demonstrate that at least some of the visitors are as interested in the Grimm family as they are in the stories they delivered to the world. Certain writers, in fact, travel to the various sites on the Road specifically to learn about the Grimms.

In 1986, American photographer and freelance writer Tom Grimm, a graduate of Bradley University, traveled the Fairy Tale Road to explore his personal roots (at that time, the Internet was not yet readily available to aid in such an endeavor). That year, Germany was celebrating the bicentennial of the brothers' births – Jacob was born in 1785 and Wilhelm in 1786.²² Tom Grimm had no proof of a potential connection to the famous line of German Grimms, but he was aware that his great-grandfather had been born in Heidelberg in 1848, so a connection was not beyond the realm of possibility. He chose to visit Steinau first, the town where the brothers had spent the majority of their childhood, but information was lacking at this location. He did learn that Jacob's and Wilhelm's parents (Philipp and Dorothea) had had nine children; of those nine, six survived infancy; of the six who lived to adulthood, only three married; and of the three who married, only Wilhelm's offspring carried on the Grimm name, but there were no further records following Wilhelm's children to either confirm or deny them as Tom Grimm's possible ancestors.²³ This article may appear somewhat unsatisfying, as the reader expects some sort of revelation – perhaps that Tom Grimm is a long-lost descendant of the brothers – but there is no direct evidence of relation. That said, Tom Grimm was afforded the opportunity to peruse the Grimms' complete genealogy which dates back over 37 generations to the year 708 – doubtlessly an enlightening experience regardless of birth connection. His account also offers a unique perspective on the Brothers Grimm, one that may escape those modern readers who view the Grimms akin to imaginary authors like Mother Goose, namely, that Jacob and Wilhelm were historical agents who left a legacy beyond their *Children's and Household Tales*.

There are numerous other instances of the Grimms being discussed in the texts analyzed for this article: some authors provide short biographies, others share only a few essentials. Given the prominence of terms associated directly with the brothers in the Word Cloud, including less obvious references like Steinau, Kassel, and Marburg, it is clear that it is all but impossible to discuss the Fairy Tale Road today without mentioning the Brothers Grimm.

²¹ Lucy Gordan, "Germany's Fairy-Tale Road," *The World & I* 17, no. 9 (September 2002): 110.

²² Tom Grimm, "On Journey with Fairy-Tale Ending," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1986.

²³ Grimm, "On Journey with Fairy-Tale Ending," *Los Angeles Times*.

II. The Fairy Tales

On to the stories themselves. Apart from “fairy” and “tale(s),” the adjective “Red” (with the first letter capitalized) appears 116 times, and “Little” (also capitalized) appears 115 times, which suggests that the most frequently mentioned tale must be “Little Red Riding Hood,” also known as “Little Red Cap.” Next comes “Sleeping” at 105 instances and “Beauty” at 88 instances. “Piper” appears 86 times, but “Pied,” its respective counterpart, appears only 68 times, which is understandable since the character in question, once he has been introduced, is often simply referred to as “the Piper.” “White” clocks in at 61 and “Snow” at 54. Poor “Rapunzel” only earns 38 mentions, and “Cinderella” fares worse at 27. The “Bremen Town Musicians” take the statistical stage only seven times, but their clumsy title simply does not “flow” like the titles of other, more popular tales and thus does not lend itself to repetition. At the very least, it is reasonable to say that the most highly regarded stories for English-speaking writers of travelogues are “Little Red Cap,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and the “Pied Piper of Hamelin.”²⁴

What do these three stories have in common, and why do they appear more often in writings on the Fairy Tale Road than other, better-known fairy tales? Why is “Cinderella,” a story arguably more famous than that of the “Pied Piper of Hamelin” among English-speaking travelers, less frequently mentioned? Well, for starters, “Cinderella” originated in France, not Germany, and the version featured in the *Children’s and Household Tales* came from the aforementioned Viehmann, a woman of French Huguenot roots.²⁵ While French fairy tales may be of interest to readers, they have no direct connection to the German Fairy Tale Road. Meanwhile, “Little Red Cap,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and the “Piped Piper of Hamelin” are genuine German stories with traceable roots to exact locations.

In 1990, Phyllis G. Sidorsky wrote about Alsfeld, a town on the Fairy Tale Road, where tourists pay a visit in hopes of spotting older women dressed in “a snug, heavily embroidered bodice and a skirt worn over countless petticoats [...] topped off by a tiny red pillbox hat.”²⁶ Alsfeld is said to be the home of Little Red Cap.²⁷ Sidorsky, not a travel writer by trade, presents a different perspective on the Fairy Tale Road than many of the other authors. A librarian at the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., she has contributed multiple scholarly articles to *Childhood Education* and regularly submits reviews on children’s literature to the

²⁴ “Little Red Cap” is the default term used in this article since it is the more traditional German variant and relates more directly to the sites on the Fairy Tale Road. Spelling switches between Hameln and Hamelin, depending on the source; Hamelin, the town’s traditional name, is the preferred spelling in this article since it is the more recognizable term in relation to the story.

²⁵ Paradiž, *Clever Maids*, 154.

²⁶ Phyllis G. Sidorsky, “Along the German Fairy-Tale Road,” *Childhood Education* 66, no. 3 (1990): 151-154, here 152.

²⁷ “Follow Germany’s Fairy-Tale Road,” in *Great Escapes*, 228.

School Library Journal.²⁸ Thus, Sidorsky is not a reporter but an expert on children's literature. In her article for *Childhood Education*, she focuses on the Road's child-friendly aspects; thus, there are no poetic descriptions of sipping wine or sampling local beers. Instead, Sidorsky delights in stables now used to put on puppet performances of "Puss in Boots" and in the face of a prince hidden within a bronze frog's head at a local fountain.²⁹ Her description of Hamelin and its association with the Pied Piper captivates the reader: she talks about a show in the market square, featuring the Piper with pheasant feathers in his cap as he leads a parade of rat-costumed children with his clarinet. It is difficult to judge whether her description of rat-shaped bread dough and marzipan, both for sale in the town, should be considered fanciful or unsettling.³⁰ Either way, she chooses to focus on easily recognizable tales that children would recognize and enjoy, weaving in a number of whimsical depictions to draw in her young readers and visitors alike. Sidorsky's writing clearly reflects her love for the stories themselves.

Susan Spano, a travel author who has written for both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, also shows an appreciation for the classic tales in her travelogue, but her approach is less kid-friendly. In her 2014 essay, "Happy Endings on the Fairy Tale Road," Spano opines that she does not "recommend this trip for little ones, because, apart from summertime puppet theaters and the occasional 'leisure' and 'aqua' parks, there are no Disney-esque magic castles."³¹ Eve Schaenen, the current executive director of the Yogi Berra Museum in New Jersey, relates her own experience in a 1999 *New York Times* article, "Where 'Once Upon a Time' Is Now." On the way to Sleeping Beauty's castle (Sababurg), she and her husband felt the need to clarify to their young children, "Remember, it's not Disneyland," presumably to mitigate unrealistic expectations.³² This is, of course, a controversial opinion, contradicted by several other articles in which authors share their children's excitement over their travels. *Great Escapes* lists the *Märchenstrasse* among the "Family" destinations in their 2015 piece, "Follow Germany's Fairy-Tale Road," musing that "there's at least a week's worth of myths, folklore, and bedtime stories to fire little ones' imaginations."³³ To be fair, despite her "not-for-the-little-ones" assessment, Spano points fondly to the positive association between fairy tales and her own childhood: her favorite story

²⁸ Sidorsky, "Along the German Fairy-Tale Road," 151.

²⁹ Sidorsky, "Along the German Fairy-Tale Road," 151; Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 2-5, 652-655. "The Frog King" or "Iron Heinrich" is the first tale listed in Zipes's translation of *Children's and Household Tales*. "Puss in Boots" is placed under the "The Omitted Tales" section in Zipes's translation.

³⁰ Sidorsky, "Along the German Fairy-Tale Road," 154.

³¹ Susan Spano, "Happy Endings on the Fairy Tale Road," in Susan Spano, *French Ghosts, Russian Nights, and American Outlaws: Souvenirs of a Professional Vagabond* (Berkeley: Roaring Forties Press, 2014), 119-130, here 120.

³² Eve Schaenen, "Where 'Once Upon a Time' Is Now," *New York Times*, December 12, 1999.

³³ "Follow Germany's Fairy-Tale Road," in *Great Escapes*, 226.

was “Clever Elsie,” and she states that the heroine “reminds me of my past.”³⁴ Spano also considers the Pied Piper at length, including the play enacted in the square, but—unlike Sidorsky in her article two decades earlier—makes no mention of actual children in the performance. Yet, this aspect of the play has apparently remained unchanged: *Fodor’s Germany*, published the same year as Spano’s essay, mentions that from “May to September, local actors and children present a half-hour reenactment each Sunday at noon,” so Spano most likely just omitted this detail.³⁵ However, she does provide the tale’s possible backstory. Unlike most fairy tales, the Pied Piper’s story seems to contain a nuclear truth, and Spano refers to it as more of a “folk tale” than a “fairy tale.”³⁶ According to the museum in Hamelin, 130 “children” disappeared from the village on June 26, 1284, and while there is no definite proof of their whereabouts, the most likely reason for their disappearance is that they were recruited to colonize new settlements in eastern Germany.³⁷ Spano lists several other theories of varying credibility: they were recruited to colonize a new territory in Moravia, or sent off to fight in the Children’s Crusades, or died as victims of the St. Vitus’s Dance plague.³⁸

Sidorsky and Spano may have differing opinions on the Fairy Tale Road’s appeal, but they share a love for the old tales. As a children’s librarian, Spano tries to see the Road through the eyes of modern children and concentrates on kinder, simpler themes as well as attractions that would appeal even to the youngest visitors. Spano’s emphasis on adult activities is more nostalgic, rose-tinted, and the perspective of an “inner child,” but her love of the tales is still apparent as she gushes over her own fond memories. This cannot be said of Raphael Kadushin, an award-winning Jewish American travel writer and senior acquisitions editor at the University of Wisconsin Press, who explores the Fairy Tale Road on the basis of a question posed by his sister: “What about all the fairy-tale Jews?”³⁹ Without a doubt, German (Ashkenazi) Jews had their own tales by the time the Grimms were collecting the tales that would be published in *Children’s and Household Tales*, but the Grimms were not seeking any and all folk stories but specifically those of German origin. Certain tales included in earlier editions were removed in later volumes due to their foreign roots, among them “Bluebeard” and “Puss in Boots,” both considered of French origin.⁴⁰ It is sometimes said, albeit incorrectly, that

³⁴ Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, shows the title as “Clever Else” but Spano’s spelling is used here.

³⁵ Kavanagh, “Welcome to the Fairy-Tale Road,” 565.

³⁶ Spano, “Happy Endings,” 127.

³⁷ Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 278.

³⁸ Spano, “Happy Endings,” 127.

³⁹ Raphael Kadushin, “Driving the Fairy-Tale Road,” in *Inspired Journeys: Travel Writers in Search of the Muse*, ed. Brian Bouldrey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 119-135, here 123.

⁴⁰ Zipes, “Introduction,” xxxvi.

“Bluebeard” was removed due to its violent imagery. In this tale, a young woman is forced into an arranged marriage with the villainous title character, only to find a blood-soaked room with the corpses of his previous wives. When she drops the room’s key into the blood, it becomes permanently stained, and this is the only evidence needed to transform Bluebeard from a faithful husband into a murderous fiend.⁴¹ A variant of this tale, “Fowler’s Fowl,” equally gruesome but of more authentically German origin, was instead included in *Children’s and Household Tales*.⁴² The Grimm version has a slightly more upbeat ending, with the dead women being brought back to life by their sister, though she must first collect and assemble their dismembered body parts.⁴³ Clearly, the Grimms were not overly concerned with their tales being “child friendly” in the original editions, as long as they were traditional German folk stories and did not contain any French roots. Unfortunately, given their history and varying degrees of acceptance throughout European history, German Jews were often considered non-Germans. Growing into adulthood in a pre-unified Germany during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), Jacob and Wilhelm eventually became associated with nationalist ideologies.⁴⁴ Under Emperor Wilhelm II (r. 1888-1918), their tales were taught in schools to promote Christianity and German patriotism, while simultaneously rejecting socialism.⁴⁵ The Nazis took this even further, completely ignoring the Grimms’ broad research into international folk tales and placing the brothers on a pedestal as early nationalistic prophesiers of the German “folk community.”⁴⁶ While the extent of the Grimms’ inclination toward nationalism is debatable, the question about the Jews’ place in German fairy tales is also a complex one.

Kadushin initially explores the Pied Piper and his infamous rats. This particular tale seems to be a favorite of those travelers who are most interested in the stories, which makes sense, since it is one of the few tales with concrete evidence of a significant historical event. While there are a few stories which hold a grain of truth, the history of the Pied Piper, according to Kadushin, “is scrawled all over town, if you know where to look,” and he mentions a glass window that once told the tale of the children’s disappearance.⁴⁷ Kadushin informs his readers that nothing was built in Hamelin for a century after the event and that the 1352

⁴¹ Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 660-663.

⁴² Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 157.

⁴³ Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 167-171. Here, the tale is titled “Fitcher’s Bird.”

⁴⁴ Ruth B. Bottigheimer, “The Publishing History of Grimms’ Tales: A Reception at the Cash Register,” in *The Reception of Grimms’ Fairy Tales: Responses, Reactions, Revisions*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 78-101, here 191.

⁴⁵ Christa Kamenetsky, *The Brothers Grimm and Their Critics: Folktales and the Quest for Meaning* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 236.

⁴⁶ Kamenetsky, *Brothers Grimm and Their Critics*, 242.

⁴⁷ Kadushin, “Driving the Fairy-Tale Road,” 130.

Hamelin book of statutes was still showing a “collective sense of shock.”⁴⁸ It was also in Hamelin that Kadushin found what he was looking for. In the “adult section” of the local library, he discovered an “uncensored” version of the Grimm tales.⁴⁹ One of these, “The Jew in the Bramble,” recounts the story of a Jewish merchant who has his skin ripped by barbs as he is twirling in a thorn bush (forced by someone who is playing a magic fiddle) and is later hanged before a group of spectators.⁵⁰ Though it may have been sequestered by the time Kadushin visited Hamelin, “The Jew in the Bramble” was included in the Grimms’ original 1812/1815 edition and in their subsequent augmented editions. Meanwhile, some tales were removed in later editions: “How Children Played at Slaughtering” and “The Children of Famine” were considered too “gruesome,” and a number of others, like “Prince Swan,” were omitted for being too similar to other tales.⁵¹

Sidorsky, Spano, and Kadushin all present different takes on the stories and their connection to the Fairy Tale Road. Today, many have a love-hate relationship with the tales: some associate them with happy childhood memories and a simpler time, others associate them with racism, sexism, and violence. Without these tales, however, there would be no Fairy Tale Road. As the relationship between modern society and historical fairy tales continues to change, the Fairy Tale Road will likely also see changes in the dynamics between sites and travelers as they struggle to negotiate history and fiction.

III. The Architecture

The Word Cloud generated for this article contains numerous references to architecture. The stand-outs here are “castle” – the fifth most common term at 187 occurrences – and its plural “castles” at 45. That castles are intriguing to travelers on the German Fairy Tale Road seems rather self-explanatory: many of the stories are associated with royalty or nobility and their homes. Sleeping Beauty’s castle, encircled by a forest of thorns, is a popular image.⁵² Castles also feature prominently in the texts and images of the tales’ adaptations in book and film. However, there is another reason behind this fascination: the Americas are not known for their castles, and any castle found in the United States or Canada (for example, Hearst Castle in California) is not centuries old and does not come with the same level of authenticity as those on the Fairy Tale Road.

The castle at Sababurg, located to the north of Kassel, is the most frequently mentioned of all the castles, ranking high on the list of terms with 73 mentions. John Dornberg, the former bureau chief at *Newsweek* and author of a dozen books

⁴⁸ Kadushin, “Driving the Fairy-Tale Road,” 130.

⁴⁹ Kadushin, “Driving the Fairy-Tale Road,” 132.

⁵⁰ Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 398-402. Here, the tale is titled “The Jew in the Thornbush.”

⁵¹ Grimm and Grimm, *Original Folk and Fairy Tales*, xxxvi.

⁵² Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 186-189. Here, the tale is titled “Briar Rose.”

on Soviet and German modern history, provides a detailed account of the castle in a 1985 *New York Times* article. First built in 1334, Sababurg was converted during the Renaissance into a hunting château with one of the earliest zoos in Europe, complete with a three-mile-long, 13-foot-high wall to enclose the animals. This wall became overgrown with roses and thorns and, so Dornberg proposes, thus became associated with Sleeping Beauty. After being shut down for over a hundred years, it reopened in 1961 as a hotel and restaurant.⁵³

Suzanne Wilding and Anthony Del Balso, a wife-husband duo more renowned for their publications on the history of racehorses in *Parents* magazine than their travel writings, discuss another castle on the Fairy Tale Road in a 1989 *Gourmet* magazine article. The biographical note at the end of the article states that they spent ten happy days on the Road with “assorted children,” though they fail to mention how they came by said children.⁵⁴ Within easy hiking distance of Sleeping Beauty’s castle is Trendelburg castle, owned by Baron Hans-Ludwig von Stockhausen and best known for its medieval tower that stands over 130 feet tall.⁵⁵ The word “tower,” which fairy-tale connoisseurs associate with a certain long-haired princess, appears 52 times in the texts analyzed here. Indeed, according to Iba and Johnson, this tower is linked to the story of Rapunzel, but there appears to be no historical truth to the legend of a girl entrapped within its walls.⁵⁶ Besides this tower, Trendelburg castle includes a dry moat, although the drawbridge has since been replaced by a wooden walkway and sixteen-foot-thick walls. By the time of Wilding’s and Del Balso’s visit, Trendelburg castle also included guest rooms, a wine tasting area, and a gift shop.⁵⁷ There is also a recreated “torture dungeon” on display for visitors interested in a more visceral experience.⁵⁸

However, no land is only inhabited by royalty and nobility. If there are castles and towers with kings, princesses, and evil-queen stepmothers, there must also be cottages with peasants. Did not the evil witch from Hansel and Gretel live in a cottage made out of candy?⁵⁹ Little Red Cap’s grandmother may have lost her life in a cottage, depending on whether one is referencing the darker French variation or the more optimistic Grimm version. Yet, cottages do not seem to be as common along the Fairy Tale Road as one may think – maybe because straw-thatched roofs do not hold up very well over time? Instead, travelers frequently reference the “half-timbered houses” found in many villages and towns along the Road.

⁵³ John Dornberg, “Tracing Germany’s Folklore Trail,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1985.

⁵⁴ Suzanne Wilding and Anthony Del Balso, “Germany’s Fairy-Tale Road,” *Gourmet* 49 (1989): 52-86, here 86.

⁵⁵ Wilding and Del Balso, “Germany’s Fairy-Tale Road,” 82; Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 237.

⁵⁶ Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 238.

⁵⁷ Wilding and Del Balso, “Germany’s Fairy-Tale Road,” 82.

⁵⁸ Iba and Johnson, *German Fairy Tale Landscape*, 238.

⁵⁹ Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales*, 58-64, 101-105.

According to Jay Clarke, a freelance writer and former travel editor for the *Miami Herald*, these structures are numerous in the smaller towns along the Road, while larger cities, like Kassel, are lacking in comparison due to their destruction in World War II.⁶⁰ Dornberg states that some of these houses are over 800 years old.⁶¹ Göttingen, a town where both Jacob and Wilhelm worked as professors, houses entire streets of these structures that hold their own intrigue. For example, Göttingen's *Rote Strasse*, or Red Street, is rumored to have received its name because the homes' timbers were originally painted with oxblood. The more mundane reason behind the street's name is that it was simply named after the Rote family.⁶² The half-timbered houses do resemble gingerbread houses, though, which should inspire anyone looking for witches on Germany's Fairy Tale Road.

These examples reflect only a few of the types of architecture mentioned in our texts. Other common terms include museum, university, church, and Gothic. Inns, hotels, cobbled streets, fountains, and statues are also common themes across the board. While the *Märchenstrasse* is rarely visited just for its buildings and art, few seem to be able to resist admiring this aspect of the Road.

Conclusion

It is not always easy to distinguish between the different categories of importance when it comes to the Fairy Tale Road. In some instances, the tales and the architecture are intertwined, like in the case of Sleeping Beauty's thorn-covered wall or Rapunzel's looming tower. In other cases, the Grimm legacy and architecture are clearly combined, such as in the case of the museum that was their former home or the university where they both taught for years. Still, it is clear that the Fairy Tale Road weaves together the legends of the Brothers Grimm, fanciful fairy tales, and romantic architecture into a tourist destination ripe with both history and fantasy.

Future scholarship on the subject calls for a broader scope of study. By limiting the sources for this article to English-language articles and essays, its analysis has focused mostly on an American and Canadian media audience, thus excluding a wide range of travelers from across the globe. The Grimm tales are not just among the favorites of English-speaking Westerners. As Burkhard Kling, the curator of the Grimm museum in Steinau, told travel writer Kevin Pilley twenty years ago: "The Grimms' is the most edited book in the history of the world. Millions have been published in over 160 languages and dialects. More than the Holy Bible. More even than the great Harry Potter."⁶³ This article has also omitted other types of

⁶⁰ Jay Clarke, "Princesses, Wolves, and Witches Haunt German Fairy Tale Road," *Gazette* (Montreal), March 23, 1985.

⁶¹ Dornberg, "Tracing Germany's Folklore Trail," 14.

⁶² Wilding and Del Balso, "Germany's Fairy-Tale Road," 80.

⁶³ Quoted in Kevin Pilley, "Grimm Tales Meant for the Grown-Ups: Kevin Pilley Travels the Fairy Tale Road in Germany and Finds the Grimm Brothers' Stories Were Really a Collection of Legends That Had to be Heavily Sanitised," *Financial Times* (London), January 20, 2001.

sources and media, such as personal blogs, videos, and oral accounts. Scholarly travelers will doubtlessly show a different kind of interest in the attractions than families visiting for “just the experience.” “Mommy blogs” could prove to be an interesting new source for this research, considering how many of the authors of these articles, even those traveling with their own children, approached the Road through the eyes of a professional writer. Moreover, not all English-speaking visitors share the same tastes; for example, British, American, and Australian audiences may be drawn to separate attractions. Great Britain has an extensive history of its own unique fairy tales, and most of these are – naturally – missing entirely from the Grimms’ collections. It is entirely possible that British travelers connect primarily with tales that the two nations share, while Americans are more likely to associate with those either reimaged in Disney films or commonly published in children’s picture books. The differences in taste would likely become even more evident with tourists visiting from other areas across the globe. For example, Japanese tourists with their own rich history of folk tales may seek out stories that mimic their own country’s tales, or they may follow a more American path and lean toward ones introduced to them through film. As Spano’s discussion of “Clever Elsie” suggests, some readers identify with more obscure tales, despite various other cultural influences.

As the *Märchenstrasse* continues to establish itself as a must-see tourist destination among international travelers, it remains to be seen whether the Road’s historical importance will satisfy future visitors, or whether modern tourists will demand newer, more “exciting” attractions to match those found elsewhere. Either way, if you travel the Fairy Tale Road, try to stop in Hanau – just to make sure that Jacob Grimm has not usurped his younger brother’s seat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Shanna J. Bice of Anaheim, California, earned her B.A. in History at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) (2020). Her article printed above originated in a seminar on Travel and Travel Narratives offered by CSUF’s History Department.*