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LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

3

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Intercultural Connections within
German and Irish Children's Literature

Editors/Herausgeber/Eagarthóirí

Susan Tebbutt
Joachim Fischer

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The politics of fairytales: Oscar Wilde and the German tradition¹

Stefan Neuhaus

Fairytales and politics

Niemand mißt da, was geschieht, an gewöhnlichen Umständen; niemand pocht auf Wahrscheinlichkeit oder gar auf die Regeln der Vernunft. So waren und sind sich noch viele darin einig, dem Märchen eine Zone irrationaler Fantasiebewegungen zuzuschreiben,²

asserts Volker Klotz in his seminal work *Das Europäische Kunstmärchen*.³ In doing so, he reflects a widely accepted scholarly view which he partially undermines with his own argumentation. Klotz is primarily interested in the link between industrialisation and literature, that is, the extent to which fairytales deal with economic development and the ensuing social problems. This question stems from a perspective developed in the 1970s, so-called *Ideologiekritik*, a view that today appears one-sided as it excludes other interesting aspects.

It is highly instructive to examine the tradition into which Klotz places Oscar Wilde's fairytales. At the beginning of the eighteenth century fairytales are still a typically French genre. However, this changes fundamentally later in the century: "In der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts geht die Geschichte des Kunstmärchens von Frankreich auf Deutschland über. Für geraume Zeit so gut wie ausschließlich."⁴ It is not until the mid-nineteenth century that an autonomous English-language tradition of the literary fairytale emerges, led by Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll. As far as Wilde is concerned, Klotz still emphasises the influence of Hans Christian Andersen⁵ who, in turn, stands within the German-language tradition of fairytales. Given that Wilde read a wide range of literature, it is impossible to determine the precise sources that influenced him. Scholarly references indicate, however, that the

1 The article was translated by Isabelle Esser.

2 *Engl. transl.*: No one compares what happens with ordinary circumstances; no one insists on probability or even the rules of reason. Thus many were and still are in agreement that the fairytale is a zone of irrational movements of the imagination.

3 Volker Klotz, *Das europäische Kunstmärchen*. Munich: dtv, 1987, 4.

4 *Ibid.*, 94. *Engl. transl.*: In the second half of the eighteenth century the history of the literary fairytale shifts from France to Germany. For a long period of time almost exclusively so.

5 Cf. *ibid.*, 311.

German-language tradition should not be neglected in this context. One such reference is by Peter Funke, who cites E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Klein Zaches*.⁶

The tradition of the "fantastic children's tale" ("phantastische Kindererzählung") is not, as asserted by Emer O'Sullivan, "nach Hoffmann vorwiegend außerhalb Deutschlands weitergepflegt".⁷ It is sufficient to cite just a few well-known names to contradict this view: Wilhelm Hauff, Ludwig Bechstein, Gottfried Keller and Theodor Storm, and for the twentieth century Erich Kästner, Otfried Preußler, Michael Ende and Paul Maar. One can disagree over Keller, although the same applies to authors such as Charles Dickens whose fairytales target adults rather than children. On the whole, the authors mentioned can be said to have written their works for a variety of different groups, children as well as adults, judging by the texts' intentions as far as they can be (re-) constructed from their structure and possible meaning. I personally prefer the more open term of multiple coding (*Mehrfachcodierung*) because it also embraces the perspective of the reader.

I will attempt to illustrate that Klotz is incorrect when he claims that Wilde inserts "die Optik Andersens [...] um den Alltag von sich fernzuhalten".⁸ Like all his works, Wilde's fairytales are remarkably political, which incidentally suggests that Andersen is unlikely to have had an excessive influence on Wilde and authors such as the well-known Hoffmann⁹ acted as greater stimuli. Wilde's fairytales reflect social structures and expose their deficiencies.

Why does this occur in the medium of the fairytale? For two main reasons:

1. Censorship, which also embraces the unwritten laws against the backdrop of which literary texts are read and judged. By selecting an exotic setting, exotic characters and devices the author creates a double, ambivalent form of alienation, or *Verfremdung*. Initially, it appears that the text has little

6 Cf. Peter Funke, *Oscar Wilde in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1969 (Rowohlts Monographien), 111.

7 Emer O'Sullivan, *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2000 (Probleme der Dichtung. 28), 63. *Engl. transl.*: continued mainly outside Germany.

8 Cf. Klotz, *Das europäische Kunstmärchen*, 311. *Engl. transl.*: Andersen's perspective [...] as a means of warding off everyday life.

9 Hoffmann was widely read outside Germany and his influence on many authors, composers and artists can not be overestimated. For example, in 1881 Jacques Offenbach's *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* appeared, based on a play by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, published in 1851. Only one year after Wilde's second fairytale collection Peter Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker*, based on Hoffmann's *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, was first staged in St Petersburg.

to do with the reality of its readers. In popular fiction¹⁰ this results in escapist literature allowing the reader to forget his/her problems for a few hours. In literary fairytales *Verfremdung* creates a necessary distance to allow reflection on central problems of the real world.

2. Literary texts differ from non-literary texts in that they are open to interpretation. This openness, the fact that different readers may read and relate them to their own lives in different ways, can be achieved by using *Verfremdung* effects such as those found in fairytales. A setting in a concrete, realistic environment assumes that the reader has a prior knowledge of the environment in question. This could partly explain why the English-speaking world displays little interest in contemporary German-language literature which is primarily concerned with specifically German issues, such as coming to terms with the past (what the Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) and the conflicts of identity arising from specific historical circumstances.

The critical reflection of social structures through the medium of the fairytale was – as far as I can see – first demonstrated in German-language literary fairytales. Goethe's *Das Märchen*, for example, which rounds off the novella cycle *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* ('Conversations of German Emigrants') dating from 1795, directly refers to the French Revolution. The purely allegorical fairytale culminates in a utopian model of society. All the characters use their individual abilities to create a new state which, whilst remaining a feudal society, is headed by rulers who only have their citizens' best interests at heart. The ideal order is therefore based on the ideal behaviour of the citizens who carry out their social roles with a sense of responsibility. This reflects the concept of *Weimarer Klassik* writers which asserts that positive social changes cannot be achieved through revolutions, i.e. through changing only the political structures, but through evolution, involving the education and development of the individual.

The politics of Romanticism

German Romanticism is not, as Klotz claims, unpolitical. Firstly, Romanticism represents a counter movement to the Enlightenment, or to be more precise to an Enlightenment that has become ideological and, therefore, meaningless. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann prototypically demonstrates this criticism and change. He chooses to present his social satires through the medium of the fairytale. In *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober* published in 1819 the First Minister says to Prince Paphnutius:

10 I.e. texts fitting into the German concept of *Trivialliteratur*.

Ehe wir mit der Aufklärung voranschreiten, das heißt, ehe wir die Wälder umhauen, den Strom schiffbar machen, Kartoffeln anbauen, die Dorfschulen verbessern, Akazien und Pappeln anpflanzen, die Jugend ihr Morgen- und Abendlied zweistimmig absingen, Chausseen anlegen und die Kuhpocken einimpfen lassen, ist es nötig, alle Leute von gefährlichen Gesinnungen, die keiner Vernunft Gehör geben und das Volk durch lauter Albernheiten verführen, aus dem Staate zu verbannen. – Sie haben Tausendundeine Nacht gelesen, bester Fürst! [...] Aus jenem völlig konfuse Buche werden Sie, gnädigster Herr, wohl die sogenannten Feen kennen, gewiß aber nicht ahnen, daß sich verschiedene von diesen gefährlichen Personen in Ihrem eignen lieben Lande hier ganz in der Nähe Ihres Palastes angesiedelt haben und allerlei Unfug treiben.¹¹

The fairies are thus banished which illustrates that as soon as reason becomes a doctrine, it ceases to be reasonable. The young prince Paphnutius succeeds a wise ruler and, in his first act in office, appoints his valet to the position of first minister because he often lent him money. This is just the beginning of Hoffmann's criticism of the feudal system of government in this fairytale. A magic spell makes the dwarfish, ugly and mean Zaches appear handsome, capable and gifted to all who set eyes on him. This fundamental concept was adapted one and a half centuries later by Patrick Süskind in his international best-selling novel *Perfume (Das Parfüm)* of 1985, except that the fragrance replaces the spell, and the hero is not stupid but extremely cunning.

Zaches dazzles not only the prince but all the officials of the small country. Hoffmann capitalises on this constellation. He clearly holds up a mirror to the feudal power structures of his day that were reinforced by the decisions of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the Karlsbad decrees in 1819.

The banishment of the fairies by the prince can be interpreted allegorically as the decision to relinquish imagination in favour of reason. One of the most important motifs in fairytales, since Hoffmann, has been to highlight the importance and necessity of imagination by means of allegories. A more recent internationally renowned example is Michael Ende's novel *Die unendliche Geschichte*, published in 1981, which targets both children and adults

11 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober. Prinzessin Brambilla. Meister Floh*. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1994 (Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben. 7), 18f. *Engl. transl.*: Before we proceed with the Enlightenment, that is, before we chop down the woods, make the river navigable, cultivate potatoes, improve the village schools, plant acacias and poplars, before the youth sing their morning and evening song in two part harmony, and we lay out avenues and inoculate with cowpox, we must banish from our land everyone with a dangerous cast of mind who fails to lend an ear to reason and seduces the common people with foolishness. – You have read *The Thousand and One Nights*, my dear prince! [...] You no doubt know the so-called fairies from this muddled book, sir, but you are surely unaware that several of these dangerous persons have settled here in your own beloved country, in close proximity to your palace, and are getting up to all sorts of mischief.

(and was greatly damaged by two atrocious films). The historical development of the motif thus begins with Hoffmann or, to be more precise, with *Der goldne Topf* which was published in 1814. Even the subtitle, *Ein Märchen aus der neuen Zeit (A Fairytale from Modern Times)*, sets the tone, and, in keeping with this, the book opens with the following words: "Am Himmelfahrtstage, nachmittags um drei Uhr, rannte ein junger Mensch in Dresden durchs Schwarze Tor [...]"¹² Unlike the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the fairytales collected by the Brothers Grimm which were first published around the same time (1812-1815), Hoffmann chooses a precise location and a precise time. By describing bourgeois life in Dresden it becomes clear that the fairytale is set in the present time of the reader; that is why the term *Wirklichkeitsmärchen* ('reality fairytale') was introduced to classify this kind of text.

The criticism of the social discourse of the day is illustrated by contrasting philistines, or ignorant citizens, with people endowed with the gift of imagination, capable of perceiving a fantastic level of reality. The philistines do not possess this ability; for them nature has a purely functional character. Contrary to many interpretations of this aspect of Hoffmann's fairytales, Hoffmann does not lead the way to a new form of transcendence as was characteristic of the work of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg). Like Goethe's fairytale, Hoffmann's can be broken down allegorically, but it is extended to encompass a significant additional feature. Anselmus ultimately enters the wonderful realm of Atlantis. Archivarius Lindhorst representing the intermediary between the fantastic world and bourgeois reality, reassures the narrator (who has similarities with the author) when the latter laments his own sorrowful fate:

Still, still, Verehrtester! klagen Sie nicht so! – Waren Sie nicht selbst in Atlantis, und haben Sie denn nicht auch dort wenigstens einen artigen Meierhof als poetisches Besitztum Ihres innern Sinns? – Ist denn überhaupt des Anselmus Seligkeit etwas anderes als das Leben in der Poesie, der sich der heilige Einklang aller Wesen als tiefstes Geheimnis der Natur offenbaret?¹³

12 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier. Blätter aus dem Tagebuche eines reisenden Enthusiasten. Mit einer Vorrede von Jean Paul*. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1994 (Sämtliche Werke in Einzelausgaben. 1), 221. *Engl. transl.*: On Ascension Day, at three o'clock in the afternoon a young man ran through the Black Gate in Dresden [...].

13 *Ibid.*, p. 315. *Engl. transl.*: Hush, hush, kind sir! Do not grumble so! – Were you not yourself in Atlantis, and have you not at least a decent dairy farm there as a poetic possession of your inner being? – Is Anselmus's bliss any different at all from a life immersed in poetry, unto which the sacred harmony of all creatures reveals itself as nature's deepest secret?

The central goal to be achieved and preserved consists of a poetic sensitivity that can simply be described as imagination. If one also considers Hoffmann's other literary fairytales, the extremely diverse and varied portrayal of the fantastic level of perception shows that Hoffmann was not attempting to establish a new approach to religion or to create new and different myths. One might therefore conclude: only those with an imagination can shape reality in a positive manner.

The power of fairytales

To start with, we must distinguish between stereotypical fairytales that fail to offer any new horizons for interpretation and those that do. 'High-quality' fairytales can be made to speak in the manner described by Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, reading a text in a way that does justice to literature avoids structuring the text excessively and "stars the text, instead of assembling it".¹⁴ In doing so, we can explore the social and political contexts of a text. We can turn this round and link it with a thesis: a good literary text always stands against the political situation of its time. We have seen this with Hoffmann: living in a feudal system the author exposes the deficiencies of the feudal order of society.

And yet texts such as *Klein Zaches* do not stop here. They devote themselves not only to the macrostructure but also the microstructure of power. As Michel Foucault argues, power is basically defined as that which suppresses.¹⁵ If we take this definition of power as a starting point, the literary fairytale focusses on the representation and criticism of suppression in the relationships between its characters. Anselmus in *Der goldne Topf*, for example, is suppressed and excluded by bourgeois characters who, above all, accuse him of madness. This process commences when he perceives the fantastic for the first time. Anselmus has just fallen head over heels in love with Serpentina who appears to him in the elder tree as a golden green snake. He embraces the tree and calls after her, provoking the following reaction:

14 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. Transl. from the French by Richard Miller. Preface by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 13.

15 Michel Foucault, *Dispositive der Macht: Über Sexualität, Wissen und Wahrheit*. Berlin: Merve, 1978, 70. The statement comes from a lecture about power given on 7 January 1976.

"Der Herr ist wohl nicht ganz bei Troste!" sagte eine ehrbare Bürgersfrau, die, vom Spaziergange mit der Familie heimkehrend, stillstand und mit übereinandergeschlagenen Armen dem tollen Treiben des Studenten Anselmus zusah.¹⁶

The mechanisms of exclusion which click into motion here are described by Foucault as follows: "As social beings, madness brings them to the fringes of culpability and condemnation."¹⁷ The discourse on madness, as presented here by Hoffmann, stands in contrast to the discourse of the day and latches onto earlier views which saw madness as an expression of a special ability: "The nature of madness was to be a secret reason."¹⁸

All the characters who are not endowed with the gift of imagination exert pressure on Anselmus to conform with behavioural norms. As to his career path this would above all mean to become a court counsellor, marry the daughter of Konrektor Paulmann and lead a bourgeois life. Imagination is therefore non-bourgeois and non-conformist.

Wherever we encounter a fantastic world separate from the real world in a fairytale, imagination is presented as madness, thus exposing the power of the philistines. Even where we encounter a world in which realistic and fantastic elements appear seamlessly interwoven, as is the case in the German-language tradition of Ludwig Tieck or Wilhelm Hauff, and largely in Wilde's texts as an example for English-language literature, the critical reflection on power is not eliminated, it has just a different base.

Swallows and nightingales are better people

The Happy Prince and Other Tales appeared in London in 1888. The collection contains *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket*. *A House of Pomegranates* of 1891 comprises *The Young King*, *The Birthday of the Infanta*, *The Fisherman and His Soul* and *The Star-Child*. The first two fairytales of the second volume first appeared in a magazine in 1888 and 1889 respectively.

The first two fairytales in the first volume initially appear very different, however, the fundamental concept behind them is in fact very similar. In both cases it is a bird that behaves humanely whilst the humans treat each other

16 Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, 227f. Engl. transl.: "The gentleman seems not quite in his right mind!" said an honourable woman who, returning from a stroll with the family, stood stock still and, with folded arms, watched the mad antics of the student Anselmus.

17 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*. Ed. by Jean Khalifa. Transl. from the French by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa. London/New York: Routledge, 2006, 127.

18 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 177.

inhumanely. One could, therefore, conclude that birds are the better people. As scholars have often noted, there are many parallels between Wilde's biography and the conception of his characters. Particularly in the fairytales, for example, in the eponymous character of *The Happy Prince*, it is evident that despite his self-stylization as a dandy Wilde also developed binding moral principles in opposition to the power discourse of his day. From this perspective, his views of society, often attacked from various quarters, appear not so much contradictory but consistent. As a satirical writer, Wilde opposed social constraints, although the satirist (like all satirists) was also an idealist who refused to give up his hope for change. *The Happy Prince* is the story of a prince who does not detect the suffering and injustice prevalent among men until he becomes a statue. The statue tells a swallow:

When I was alive and had a human heart, [...] I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep.¹⁹

This quote is structured by means of symbols and contrasts. The garden is the tightly enclosed idyll, the wall represents the boundaries of knowledge; the raised position of the Prince symbolises knowledge and reflection which go hand in hand with a loss of blissful ignorance. His condition when alive was not one of happiness but simply "pleasure" which indicates the higher quality of his new found knowledge, though its acquisition entailed suffering.

The subsequent comment of the swallow exposes the pathos of the speech but not its content: "What! is he not solid gold?" said the swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud."²⁰ In the course of the fairytale the swallow becomes familiar with the suffering on earth and, like the Happy Prince, will sacrifice itself for it. Wilde uses this structure several times, as, for example, at the end of the framework story in *The Devoted Friend*. A poor naïve man has just sacrificed himself for a rich man who he believed was his friend. By telling this story the linnet wants to instruct others; the aim is to denounce exploitation in the public and private spheres, which in this case is combined within two characters (they are

19 Collins *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde. Centenary Edition*. Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1999, 272.

20 Ibid.

friends and represent the contrast between rich/powerful and poor/helpless). However, the exemplary listener is angry:

"Do you mean to say that the story has a moral?" "Certainly," said the Linnet. "Well, really," said the Water-rat, in a very angry manner, "I think you should have told me that before you began. If you had done so, I certainly would not have listened to you; in fact, I should have said 'Pooh,' like the critic. However, I can say it now;" so he shouted out "Pooh," at the top of his voice, gave a whisk with his tail, and went back into his hole. "And how do you like the Water-rat?" asked the Duck, who came paddling up some minutes afterwards. [...] "I am rather afraid that I have annoyed him," answered the Linnet. "The fact is that I told him a story with a moral." "Ah! that is always a very dangerous thing to do," said the Duck. And I quite agree with her.²¹

The irony of the narrator's comment "And I quite agree with her" does not question the story – otherwise the narrator would not have told it. Instead, in the last sentence the narrator adopts the view of the water-rat and the critic as a means of exposing both satirically.

Society's failings are illustrated in *The Happy Prince*, on the one hand, through poverty, and on the other, through the incapability and incompetence of society's functionaries. This is the portrayal of a character representing the world of education and scholarliness:

When day broke he [the swallow] flew down to the river and had a bath. "What a remarkable phenomenon!" said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. "A swallow in winter!" And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper. Every one quoted it; it was full of so many words that they could not understand.²²

Critics and professors are just two of many educated people that Wilde portrays satirically in his fairytales. We meet one self-appointed authority in *The Remarkable Rocket*:

"I like hearing myself talk. It is one of my greatest pleasures. I often have long conversations all by myself, and I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying." "Then you should certainly lecture on Philosophy," said the Dragon-fly, and he spread a pair of lovely gauze wings and soared away into the sky.²³

The Rocket's failure reveals the contrast between inner perception and external reality. In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, Wilde devotes himself to the student he once was. The two creatures of nature of the title experience a feeling of love which is utterly alien to the character of the artist in the story and his beloved, who are only interested in fulfilling social norms. After the

21 Ibid., 293.

22 Ibid., 273.

23 Ibid., 299f.

girl arrogantly rejected him, the artist throws the red rose bought so dearly by the painful death of the nightingale into the gutter.²⁴

The ironic treatment of the traditions of fairytales is particularly visible at the end of *The Star-Child*. The settings bring both dominant traditions together. The story starts in places reminiscent of the Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and ends in a realm that appears to have been borrowed from *The Thousand and One Nights*. The main character is exposed to a process of learning, making this a short *Bildungsroman*, comparable with Wilhelm Hauff's well-known fairytale *Zwerg Nase* [*Dwarf Nose*]. In the end the child finds its parents and becomes a wise ruler. The laws of fairytales would normally dictate that the story ends at this point; Wilde, however, adds the following paragraph:

Yet ruled he not long, so great had been his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing, for after the space of three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly.²⁵

This changes the meaning of the entire story, shedding an ironic light on the process of education whilst illustrating the despotism of power.

Wilde may well have been influenced by Andersen in his criticism of the balance of power; the latter, however, rarely makes use of irony and satire. Of course the tendency in Wilde's fairytales to stress God's saving grace points towards his influence as in the salvation of the Happy Prince and the Swallow through God and of the selfish giant through Jesus. The criticism of power, however, which finds expression in the characters and the plot via irony and satire, is very much in the tradition of Hoffmann and Hauff. The conclusion of *Klein Zaches* is thoroughly ironic. Balthasar is betrothed to Candida; both are given a splendid gift by the wizard Prosper Alpanus and Fairy Rosabelverde:

Außerdem hatte Rosabelverde der holden Braut einen prächtig funkelnden Halsschmuck verehrt, der eine magische Wirkung dahin äußerte, daß sie, hatte sie ihn umgetan, niemals über Kleinigkeiten, über ein schlecht genesteltes Band, über einen mißratenen Halsschmuck, über einen Fleck in der Wäsche oder sonst verdrießlich

24 Cf. *ibid.*, 281.

25 *Ibid.*, 270.

werden konnte. Diese Eigenschaft, die ihr der Halsschmuck gab, verbreitete eine besondere Anmut und Heiterkeit auf ihrem ganzen Antlitz.²⁶

The apparently private idyll corresponds to the public one, as the fateful minister Zinnober can no longer exert his disruptive influence and Prince Paphnutius continues to spread the Enlightenment undisturbed.

Hauff's *Zwerg Nase*, which appeared in 1826, also has an ironic ending, with the satire focussing in this case on the public sphere:

Nur so viel will ich noch sagen, daß nach seiner [des Zwerg Nase] Entfernung aus dem Palast des Herzogs große Unruhe entstand; denn als am andern Tage der Herzog seinen Schwur erfüllen und dem Zwerg, wenn er die Kräuter nicht gefunden hätte, den Kopf abschlagen lassen wollte, war er nirgends zu finden; der Fürst aber behauptete, der Herzog habe ihn heimlich entkommen lassen, um sich nicht seines besten Kochs zu berauben, und klagte ihn an, daß er wortbrüchig sei. Dadurch entstand denn ein großer Krieg zwischen beiden Fürsten, der in der Geschichte unter dem Namen "Kräuterkrieg" wohlbekannt ist; es wurde manche Schlacht geschlagen, aber am Ende doch Friede gemacht, und diesen Frieden nennt man bei uns den "Pastetenfrieden", weil beim Versöhnungsfest durch den Koch des Fürsten die Souzeraine, die Königin der Pasteten, zubereitet wurde, welche sich der Herzog trefflich schmecken ließ.²⁷

26 Hoffmann, *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober*, 121. *Engl. transl.*: Furthermore, Rosabelverde had given the fair bride a splendid sparkling necklace, whose magic powers manifested themselves when she wore it, such that she never became ill-tempered over trifles, over an inadequately fastened ribbon, a mis-shapen necklace, a stain in the linen or anything else for that matter. This power, given to her by the necklace, infused her whole countenance with a special grace and cheerfulness.

27 Wilhelm Hauff, *Werke*. Ed. by Hermann Engelhard. 2 vols. Essen: Magnus, 1981 (Special ed.; reprod. of the ed. I. G. Cotta'scher Verlagsbuchhandel). vol. I, 719f. *Engl. transl.*: All that remains for me to say is that after his [Dwarf Nose's] removal from the Duke's palace great unrest arose; for when, the following day, the Duke wished to fulfil his vow to have the dwarf's head chopped off if he failed to find the herbs, he was nowhere to be found. The Prince, however, claimed the Duke had secretly let him escape so that he would not lose his best cook, and accused him of breaking his word. Thus a great war flared up between the two princes that became famous in history as the "Herb War"; many a battle was fought but peace was forged in the end, a peace we called the "paté peace", because at the feast of reconciliation the Prince's chef served Souzeraine, the queen of patés, which was much to the Duke's liking.

On satire and critique in Hauff, cf. Stefan Neuhaus, *Das Spiel mit dem Leser: Wilhelm Hauff. Werk und Wirkung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

The end

These examples show that Oscar Wilde's fairytales fall within the tradition of satirical fairytale writing which commenced in the German-speaking countries at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The politicization of the fairytale with its questioning of the discourse of social order takes on the form of an analysis and criticism of the balance of power in the guise of fantasy. At the same time, the fantastic world stands for the potential of society, in which the influence of Romanticism with its idea of the Golden Age continues to reverberate. Set against the backdrop of what seems possible, social reality must appear deficient. The fantastic sensorium forms a basis for recognising the bigotry and ridiculous nature of everyday reality, on the one hand, and what is essentially important on the other. Through the medium of literature many possibilities can be explored as to how rigid structures can sensibly be broken down.

In an era imbued with relativism where film-makers attempt to turn reality into myths (*Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Men in Black* and many more) not in order to make the audience think but rather to offer them a chance to escape from reality and thus from responsibility for themselves and others, the fairytales of the nineteenth century appear both modern and political.

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