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Returning to the Scene of the Crime: The Brothers Grimm and the Yearning for Home

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**RETURNING TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME:
THE BROTHERS GRIMM
AND THE YEARNING FOR HOME**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

MASTER OF ARTS (HONOURS)

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

MAUREEN CLACK, BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS)

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

2006

CERTIFICATION

I, Maureen Clack, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Honours), in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Maureen Clack

31 October 2006

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In conclusion, I would like to dedicate this project to Connor, my warrior with a kind heart, and Rachael, my independent princess, for making my house a home.

Thesis Abstract

Almost two hundred years ago, in 1812, two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, collected folk stories, and revised and published them in a book of fairy tales. The publication, Grimm's Fairy Tales, remains amongst the best sellers in contemporary western children's literature despite increasing feminist concerns that the tales deliver outdated and inappropriate patriarchal messages. This thesis seeks to discover what other messages are contained in the tales that are enticing and strong enough to over-rule the well supported feminist warnings.

Considering that most support for the tales praises their value in regard to the psychological development of children, and acknowledging the psychological premise that childhood experiences determine later adult behaviour, this paper proposes that events in the Grimm Brothers' own childhood dictated the themes of the tales and the messages they contain.

After establishing the connection between fairy tales and the crime fiction genre and then providing a forensic reading of the tales, a less emotive reading which isolates the various parts of the story and sifts through the details for hidden evidence, this paper will show that the death of their father in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's early years, and the consequent loss of the family home and social status, together with the responsibility that these events placed on their young shoulders, provided the reoccurring theme of the tales: the attempt by a young protagonist to regain or replace a lost home, and to re-establish a family.

A similar forensic review of artwork by several contemporary visual artists who have used childhood as a theme for their work further demonstrates that childhood trauma can be a catalyst for creative practice. The works investigated in this paper were selected from two contemporary exhibitions: Scene of the Crime, Armand

Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, 1997; and Mixed-up Childhood, Auckland Art Gallery, 2005. In addition to these works several of Louise Bourgeois' sculptures and drawings which, by her own admission, refer to unhappy childhood memories are compared and contrasted with the works constructed by Javier Lara Gomez, who created happy and peaceful "homes" from memory and longing whilst an inmate in Sydney's Long Bay maximum security prison. Reflecting the Grimm's creative endeavours and the practice of the visual artists whose work is discussed in the paper, the artworks in the accompanying exhibition, Defective Stories, investigate the conflicting construct of home as a haven and home as a site of trauma, in fairy tales and our own childhood experiences.

By launching a forensic investigation into the role of the home in Australian society from the early days of colonial settlement to the present, a period of approximately two hundred years which corresponds to the lifetime of Grimm's Fairy Tales, the paper will also demonstrate that the psychological need for a safe haven is inherent in all humans, child or adult. Furthermore, it will explain how a capitalist society that depends on consumption for survival exploits this need through the exaggeration of external dangers and the promotion of products that promise security. Adults are enticed to invest in larger, safer homes, which are increasingly self contained and ensure protection from the supposed threats of an alternative society while the financial and emotional pressures of such existence create a bubbling pot of tension within those walls; children are cajoled by fairy tales that convince them they are able to secure and defend their own safe haven (and themselves) in a threatening world when the adult population fails them.

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