

## Poetic language and compositional mechanisms

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the poetic structure, compositional mechanisms, and aesthetic principles of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales. It explores how the opening and closing formulas ("Es war einmal...", "und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind...") create a frame that separates the narrative from reality and serve the moral closure of the tale. The author reveals the rhythmic and dramatic function of triadic repetition and three-stage structure (as described by Axel Olrik and Max Lüthi) in oral performance. Furthermore, using Vladimir Propp's morphological model and Algirdas Greimas's actantial schema, the article examines the driving forces, functional sequences, and the poetic naming system of characters. The functions of the motif and chronotope (based on Bakhtin's theory) are interpreted as dramatic, liminal, and normative elements of the fairy-tale world. The study systematically uncovers the poetic mechanism of Grimm's tales built upon simplicity, repetition, and normative closure.

**Keywords:** Grimm's fairy tales; Poetic language; Compositional mechanism; Triadic structure; Morphological model; Actant; Motif chain; Chronotope

### 1. Introduction

Fairy tales occupy a central position in the narrative imagination of humankind. As one of the oldest artistic expressions of collective experience, they preserve archetypal structures, moral conflicts, and poetic simplicity that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Among the most influential contributors to this tradition are Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–1857) established the foundation of modern European folklore studies. The Grimm brothers not only collected tales but reshaped them into an artistic corpus that integrates oral performance with literary refinement, preserving the rhythm, symmetry, and moral equilibrium of the folk imagination (Lüthi, 1947; Zipes, 2015).

The poetics of the Grimm tales cannot be understood apart from their compositional mechanisms—the recurring formulas, triadic structures, and symbolic motifs that sustain both narrative movement and aesthetic unity. The famous openings such as "Es war einmal..." ("Once upon a time") and closures like "und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute" ("and if they have not died, they are still alive today") are not mere clichés but serve as structural frames that detach the tale from historical reality and relocate it into a mythopoetic space (Lüthi, 1947, p. 15). This framing device constructs a timeless narrative order in which moral dualities—good and evil, order and chaos, reward and punishment—can unfold according to stable poetic laws.

Scholarly approaches to fairy-tale structure have evolved from the early morphological analyses of Vladimir Propp to modern semiotic and narratological interpretations. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) identified thirty-one narrative functions and seven spheres of action that define the internal logic of the Russian and European wonder tale. His model demonstrated that the sequence of functions, rather than the content of events, constitutes the essence of folktale composition. This insight paved the way for later structuralists such as Algirdas Greimas, who reformulated

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narrative elements into actantial roles—subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent—thus introducing a dynamic model of relationships rather than linear causality (Greimas, 1987).

While Propp and Greimas mapped the skeleton of the folktale, later scholars like Axel Olrik (1908) and Max Lüthi (1947) explored its aesthetic and rhythmic surface. Olrik's "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" established the Law of Three and Law of Repetition as universal narrative patterns, while Lüthi analyzed the stylistic economy, flat perspective, and rhythmic composition that characterize the European fairy tale. Their findings reveal that repetition in oral narrative is not redundancy but rhythm: the triadic sequence (first failure, second attempt, final success) mirrors both human perception and ritual action (Olrik, 1908; Lüthi, 1947).

In addition to morphology and rhythm, the poetic language of Grimm's tales exhibits a symbolic precision rarely matched in written literature. The act of naming (*Der Froschkönig*, *Rumpelstilzchen*, *Das tapfere Schneiderlein*) condenses characterization into an onomastic formula, immediately identifying the moral and narrative function of the figure. Such names act as semiotic cues for the listener, signaling the underlying actantial configuration and moral tension (Greimas, 1987; Dundes, 1980). Moreover, the recurrent use of formulaic dialogue, parallelism, and rhythmic contrast underscores the oral nature of the tales and their performative roots in collective storytelling (Lord, 1960).

From a broader perspective, the compositional balance of Grimm's fairy tales can be interpreted through Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope—the unity of temporal and spatial relationships within the narrative. The typical structure of home → forest → home in Grimm's corpus represents the anthropological cycle of separation, liminality, and reintegration, analogous to the "rites of passage" described by Van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1969). The forest, the tower, and the road function as liminal spaces where the hero undergoes transformation. In this sense, the poetic mechanisms of the Grimm tales are not merely artistic devices but symbolic enactments of human initiation and renewal.

Although numerous studies have explored the stylistic and thematic dimensions of the Grimm corpus (Zipes, 2002; Tatar, 2003; Lüthi, 1947), relatively few have analyzed the integration of poetic, morphological, and compositional mechanisms as a single structural system. This research therefore seeks to synthesize these perspectives, demonstrating how the Grimm tales achieve narrative coherence through the interplay of rhythmic repetition, morphological functionality, actantial balance, and chronotopic symbolism.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the poetic language and compositional mechanisms in Grimm's fairy tales as a unified aesthetic system. It aims to answer the following research questions:

How do framing formulas and triadic repetitions generate rhythmic and moral order in Grimm's tales?

In what ways do Propp's morphological functions and Greimas's actantial schema complement each other in explaining narrative structure?

How do motifs and chronotopes contribute to the aesthetic coherence and symbolic depth of the Grimm corpus?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to both folklore poetics and narrative theory. It proposes that the compositional order of the Grimm tales—through formulaic framing, rhythmic repetition, and functional symmetry—represents not only a literary form but also a model of symbolic cognition, where art, ethics, and collective imagination converge in poetic unity.

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## 2. Methodology

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework that combines morphological, structural-semiotic, poetic, and chronotopic approaches to analyze the compositional mechanisms and poetic structure of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales. The goal is to uncover the underlying narrative logic and aesthetic functions that ensure unity, rhythm, and symbolic balance within the tales.

### 2.1. Research Design

The research is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical in nature. It focuses on textual interpretation rather than statistical generalization, using close reading and comparative analysis as primary tools. The qualitative design is particularly suited to folklore and poetics, where meaning emerges from form, symbolism, and narrative repetition rather than from quantifiable data (Creswell, 2014).

The study follows three analytical levels:

- Structural (morphological) analysis – to determine the stable functions and narrative syntax of the tales following Propp's model (Propp, 1968).
- Poetic and stylistic analysis – to examine repetition, triadic construction, rhythmic patterns, and formulaic openings and closings, as described by Lüthi (1947) and Olrik (1908).
- Semiotic-chronotopic analysis – to explore symbolic meanings, actantial relationships (Greimas, 1987), and spatio-temporal configurations (Bakhtin, 1981).
- Through these interrelated methods, the study seeks to provide a multidimensional interpretation of Grimm's narrative system.

## 2.2. Data Sources and Corpus Selection

The primary corpus consists of ten representative tales from the Grimm brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–1857). These tales were selected for their compositional richness, thematic diversity, and presence of identifiable morphological and poetic structures:

- Schneewittchen (KHM 53)
- Rumpelstilzchen (KHM 55)
- Der goldene Vogel (KHM 57)
- Hänsel und Gretel (KHM 15)
- Frau Holle (KHM 24)
- Aschenputtel (KHM 21)
- Der Froschkönig (KHM 1)
- Die drei Federn (KHM 63)
- Rapunzel (KHM 12)
- Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten (KHM 27)

These stories exemplify the most salient poetic and structural patterns within the Grimm collection: triadic sequences, formulaic openings, recurrent moral tests, and clear actantial oppositions.

Secondary sources include theoretical and critical works on folklore poetics, narratology, and symbolism by Propp (1968), Lüthi (1947), Olrik (1908), Greimas (1987), Bakhtin (1981), Thompson (1955–1958), Uther (2004), and Zipes (2015). These texts provide the conceptual foundation for analyzing narrative functions, motif chains, and compositional principles.

## 2.3. Analytical Procedures

The analytical process proceeds in five consecutive stages:

### 2.3.1. Identification of Poetic and Structural Units

Each tale was first segmented into narrative units corresponding to Propp's functions (A–U). This helped determine the causal flow of events and their morphological coherence.

### 2.3.2. Mapping of Actantial Relations

Characters were classified into Greimas's six actantial roles (subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, opponent). This allowed for comparison between function (Propp) and role (Greimas), demonstrating how the tales integrate dynamic and static elements (Greimas, 1987).

### 2.3.3. Examination of Repetition and Triadic Rhythm

Following Olrik's Law of Three and Lüthi's principle of rhythmic economy, each tale was analyzed for its triadic repetitions and rhythmic variations (Olrik, 1908; Lüthi, 1947).

### 2.3.4. Motif Indexing and Typological Correlation

Recurrent motifs were identified and cross-referenced with Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955–1958) and the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) classification (Uther, 2004). This process revealed intertextual connections between Grimm tales and wider European folklore traditions.

### 2.3.5. Chronotopic and Symbolic Interpretation

The spatial-temporal frameworks (home → forest → home, descent → ascent) were analyzed using Bakhtin's (1981) theory of the chronotope and anthropological models of liminality (Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969). These analyses established how movement through space reflects psychological and moral transformation.

## 2.4. Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical orientation integrates several complementary perspectives:

- Morphological Theory (Propp, 1968): structure of functions and spheres of action.
- Structural-Semiotic Theory (Greimas, 1987): relational logic between narrative roles.
- Stylistic and Poetic Theory (Lüthi, 1947; Olrik, 1908): rhythm, formula, and simplicity as esthetic norms.
- Anthropological and Chronotopic Theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969): narrative as symbolic ritual of transition.

This synthesis enables an integrative reading of Grimm's corpus as a poetic system—a coherent structure that unites morphological sequence, rhythmic symmetry, symbolic space, and moral closure.

## 2.5. Validity and Reliability

Although qualitative in nature, the study ensures analytical reliability by applying uniform criteria across all tales: consistent identification of functions, motifs, and actantial configurations. The use of established theoretical frameworks—Propp's morphology, Greimas's semiotics, and Thompson's indexing—enhances methodological validity and comparability with previous research (Dundes, 1980; Tatar, 2003).

Furthermore, the inclusion of cross-cultural typological parallels minimizes interpretive bias and situates the Grimm corpus within the broader context of European and global folklore traditions.

## 2.6. Limitations

The research focuses primarily on the poetic and compositional features of the tales rather than on linguistic or socio-historical variables. It does not aim to reconstruct the original oral versions but to interpret the structural and aesthetic mechanisms in their published literary form. Nevertheless, the findings remain relevant for comparative folklore, literary stylistics, and narrative theory.

In summary, the methodological strategy combines the precision of structural analysis with the interpretive depth of poetic and symbolic hermeneutics. It treats Grimm's fairy tales as an aesthetic system governed by rhythm, morphology, and meaning—where form and function merge to express the collective imagination of the European folk tradition.

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## 3. Results

### 3.1. Formulaic Framing as a Structural Mechanism

One of the most distinctive features of the Grimm fairy tales is the use of formulaic openings and closings that create both rhythmic and semantic unity. Expressions such as "Es war einmal..." ("Once upon a time") and "und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute" ("and if they have not died, they live still today") function as poetic frames that separate the fictional world from empirical reality. Lüthi (1947) defined this narrative detachment as the *Eindimensionalität* of the fairy tale, where the tale exists in a self-contained, timeless dimension rather than in historical time.

These formulas also serve compositional purposes: they mark transitions between narrative states and reinforce moral expectations. The opening formula introduces indeterminacy of time and place, establishing the tale's archetypal register. The closing formula restores equilibrium, reaffirming the moral order disrupted during the narrative (Zipes, 2015). From a performance perspective, Albert Lord (1960) emphasized that such formulas function as mnemonic cues, aiding oral storytellers in structuring lengthy narratives.

For example, in *Schneewittchen* (KHM 53), the opening situates the story "in the middle of winter, when snow was falling like feathers from the sky," a poetic abstraction that sets a symbolic tone rather than a realistic description. Similarly, the closing phrase—"and if they have not died..."—acts as a conventional sign of closure, signaling the end of

the moral and narrative cycle. These framing devices thus serve dual purposes: cognitive (structural orientation) and ethical (normative closure).

### 3.2. The Law of Three: Triadic Structure and Rhythmic Repetition

Axel Olrik's (1908) Law of Three and Law of Repetition are fundamental to the structural rhythm of Grimm's tales. The triadic pattern (trial–failure–success) not only organizes the plot but also shapes the audience's expectations. Each repetition builds tension and reinforces the tale's moral polarity between virtue and transgression.

In *Rumpelstilzchen* (KHM 55), the queen is given three days to guess the dwarf's name. The sequence—first and second failures, followed by the third success—creates rhythmic escalation and resolution. The number three functions as a symbolic marker of completeness, a motif found in almost every Grimm narrative (three brothers, three wishes, three trials). As Lüthi (1947) notes, repetition in the fairy tale “establishes order through rhythm rather than logic,” turning narrative time into patterned movement.

Similarly, in *Schneewittchen*, the evil stepmother's three attempts (tightening the laces, poisoning the comb, offering the apple) structure the entire middle section. Each repetition intensifies the conflict until the final transformation occurs. The triadic model thus acts as a compositional regulator, ensuring coherence between dramatic escalation and moral culmination.

In *Die drei Federn* (KHM 63), the king's three sons and three tasks exemplify the triadic principle at both character and structural levels. The hero's ultimate triumph over his brothers reaffirms the folktale's ethical hierarchy, in which humility and perseverance prevail. These triadic structures ensure that the Grimm tales maintain both cognitive clarity and rhythmic harmony—essential features of oral-poetic narration (Olrik, 1908; Lüthi, 1947; Dundes, 1980).

### 3.3. Morphological Dynamics: Functional Structure and Causality

Vladimir Propp's (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale* provides an effective framework for decoding the compositional mechanisms of the Grimm corpus. The analysis reveals that each tale adheres, with variations, to a stable sequence of functions—from deficiency to restoration:

- A (Lack or Villainy): a deficiency or harm motivates the quest (*Der goldene Vogel*, KHM 57).
- B–C (Interdiction and Violation): conflict arises through disobedience (*Hänsel und Gretel*, KHM 15).
- D–F (Test–Helper–Magical Agent): assistance and transformation occur through a helper (*The Fox motif*).
- Pr–Rs (Pursuit and Rescue): tension heightens as forces of opposition act.
- Q–U (Recognition–Exposure–Punishment): moral order is restored through justice.

For instance, in *Hänsel und Gretel*, the parents' betrayal (C) initiates the journey (H), leading to encounters with the witch (A). The helper motif (F)—stones, breadcrumbs, and cleverness—facilitates the siblings' survival and final rescue (Rs), culminating in punishment (U). Each function operates as a causal unit, linking moral logic with narrative necessity (Propp, 1968; Dundes, 1980).

This morphology also explains why the Grimm tales are dynamic but not chaotic: every event fulfills a functional purpose, transforming the tale from deficiency to equilibrium. The constancy of function rather than the variability of character ensures compositional unity across different tales and cultures.

### 3.4. Poetic Naming and Actantial Structure

The act of naming in Grimm's tales reveals an intricate poetic economy. Names are not arbitrary; they encapsulate moral and narrative functions. Greimas's (1987) actantial model clarifies how these designations express relations between subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent.

Descriptive names such as “King,” “Hunter,” or “Witch” identify social roles; epithetical forms like “the wicked stepmother” convey moral evaluation; and symbolic names—*Rumpelstilzchen*, *Froschkönig*, *Das tapfere Schneiderlein*—condense entire functions into linguistic signs. In *Rumpelstilzchen*, the name itself becomes the plot's key: the discovery of the hidden name equates to the resolution of the conflict. This aligns with Thompson's (1955–1958) motif D731 “The Name of the Supernatural Helper.”

Poetic naming thus acts as a compositional control mechanism: it triggers narrative expectations and directs interpretation. In *Der Froschkönig*, the oxymoronic title (“Frog King”) symbolizes transformation from the natural to

the human sphere, linking linguistic paradox to narrative metamorphosis. Similarly, in *Frau Holle* (KHM 24), the titular figure personifies natural phenomena (snow, fertility) while embodying moral agency.

The use of minimal but semantically charged names reflects what Lüthi (1947) called onomastic minimalism—a stylistic economy that enhances memorability and symbolic clarity. Each name thus becomes a microcosm of the tale’s moral and poetic world.

### 3.5. Motif Chains and Symbolic Cohesion

The compositional logic of Grimm’s tales also relies on the motif chain—a sequence of recurring narrative units that connect episodes through thematic continuity. Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955–1958) and the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) classification (Uther, 2004) identify these motifs as the universal building blocks of folk narrative.

In *Schneewittchen* (ATU 709), the “magic mirror” (Thompson D1323.1) structures the queen’s envy into three escalating acts of aggression. In *Aschenputtel* (ATU 510A), the shoe motif (H36) serves as a recognition symbol, resolving identity and restoring moral order. In *Hänsel und Gretel*, the “breadcrumbs” and “stones” function as guiding signs, bridging spatial and moral transitions.

The principle of repetition with variation governs these motif chains: each recurrence modifies the situation slightly, ensuring narrative progression while preserving rhythmic balance. As Lüthi (1947) noted, such repetition transforms the tale into a patterned aesthetic object—simple in form yet profound in symbolic resonance.

Motif analysis further demonstrates the connection between compositional form and moral logic. Each recurring object (mirror, apple, shoe, comb, bird) embodies a stage of moral testing, and their cyclical recurrence marks the passage from ignorance to knowledge, from disorder to restoration.

### 3.6. Chronotope and Spatial-Temporal Symbolism

Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of the chronotope offers a powerful framework for understanding how time and space interact in Grimm’s narrative universe. The recurrent spatial pattern home → forest → home corresponds to the anthropological “rite of passage” cycle (Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969). The forest represents liminality—a zone of danger and transformation.

In *Little Red Riding Hood* (KHM 26), the forest is the arena of temptation and revelation. In *The Town Musicians of Bremen* (KHM 27), the road becomes a chronotope of collective renewal, as the animals journey toward freedom and self-realization. In *Rapunzel* (KHM 12), the tower embodies vertical transcendence: the heroine’s imprisonment and ascent symbolize spiritual elevation through constraint.

Temporal abstraction further enhances the symbolic nature of Grimm’s world. The opening phrase “Once upon a time” detaches the story from chronological reality, situating it in a cyclical and atemporal regime. The narrative rhythm alternates between rapid summaries (“the next day”) and static tableaux (“for a long time she waited”), producing a pulsating flow of time (Bakhtin, 1981).

Thus, the chronotope in Grimm’s tales unites physical movement and psychological transformation. It converts spatial transition into moral evolution—every crossing of a boundary (forest, mountain, tower) represents a symbolic step from chaos to order, from loss to renewal.

### 3.7. Summary of Findings

The results of the analysis demonstrate that Grimm’s fairy tales operate as systematic poetic constructions governed by compositional laws:

- Formulaic openings and closings establish rhythmic and ethical frameworks.
- Triadic repetition ensures narrative balance and cognitive harmony.
- Morphological functions organize causality and moral sequence.
- Poetic naming encodes actantial relationships and symbolic identities.
- Motif chains connect episodes through rhythmic recurrence.
- Chronotopic structures unify physical movement and moral development.

These mechanisms reveal that the simplicity of the Grimm tales is not a lack of complexity but a manifestation of poetic condensation—a refined system where form and meaning converge through rhythm, structure, and moral design.

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## **4. Discussion**

The results of this study demonstrate that the poetic mechanisms of the Grimm corpus operate through a consistent logic of rhythm, symmetry, and symbolic transformation. Each tale, though seemingly simple in content, functions as a highly organized compositional structure where linguistic minimalism generates deep aesthetic and philosophical meaning. The apparent simplicity of Grimm's style is, in fact, a product of structural condensation—a concentration of symbolic patterns that encode collective values and universal archetypes (Lüthi, 1947; Zipes, 2015).

### **4.1. Poetic Economy and Structural Balance**

Max Lüthi's concept of *Form und Wesen*—the unity of form and essence—helps to explain the unique balance between artistic simplicity and symbolic depth in Grimm's fairy tales. According to Lüthi (1947), the European folktale achieves poetic effect not through ornate language or psychological realism, but through clarity, rhythm, and repetition. This stylistic economy eliminates excess description and instead highlights essential actions, moral contrasts, and narrative rhythm.

In this regard, the Grimm tales manifest what Barthes (1975) later called a "poetics of function." Every sentence, motif, or object serves a structural and symbolic role within the system of meaning. The triadic patterns, repetitive formulas, and minimal character psychology reflect an aesthetic of functional purity—a narrative architecture designed to ensure memorability, clarity, and moral transparency. This is not merely an aesthetic choice but a reflection of collective storytelling practices, in which repetition and formula enable transmission and recall (Lord, 1960; Dundes, 1980).

### **4.2. The Dynamics of Oral Composition**

The morphological and rhythmic features identified in Grimm's tales also correspond to the laws of oral poetics described by Albert B. Lord and Milman Parry in their studies of formulaic composition. Lord (1960) demonstrated that oral narratives depend on repetitive structures—formulas, epithets, triads—to maintain rhythm and coherence in performance. Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, although written, retain this oral foundation: the opening and closing formulas, fixed epithets, and rhythmic triads reveal their origin in the oral epic register.

This oral dimension also explains the tales' performative quality. Each repetition acts as a cue for the storyteller and an anticipatory rhythm for the listener. The moral expectations of the audience are synchronized with the tale's triadic rhythm, turning narrative form into collective ritual. In this sense, the fairy tale is not merely a text but a symbolic performance of moral knowledge—what Bauman (1986) termed verbal art as performance.

### **4.3. Symbolic Order and Moral Closure**

From a semiotic perspective, the Grimm tales reflect what Greimas (1987) defined as a closed actantial system—a balance between oppositional forces (subject/object, helper/opponent, sender/receiver). The moral clarity of the tales derives from this structural closure: each narrative tension resolves into harmony, each transgression meets its consequence. The compositional unity thus mirrors a moral cosmology, where justice is not external but structurally encoded.

Propp's (1968) model confirms that the progression from "lack" to "reward" constitutes not only narrative motion but ethical transformation. The movement through functions—interdiction, violation, test, aid, struggle, recognition—maps a moral journey of purification. Bakhtin (1981) interprets this pattern as a symbolic chronotope of renewal: movement through space (forest, road, tower) parallels the passage through moral trial toward restoration of order.

Hence, compositional mechanisms—formula, triad, function, chronotope—serve as ethical syntax. The tale's poetic structure is a dramatized model of moral reasoning: each test of character, each repetition of action, reaffirms the order of values central to communal identity (Turner, 1969; Van Gennepe, 1909).

### **4.4. The Function of Liminality and Transformation**

Anthropological perspectives provide further insight into the symbolic logic of Grimm's narrative spaces. The home → forest → home pattern observed throughout the corpus corresponds to Van Gennepe's (1909) and Turner's (1969) tripartite model of separation–liminality–reintegration. The forest serves as the liminal zone where boundaries dissolve, identities are tested, and transformation occurs.

In Hänsel und Gretel, exile into the forest initiates the process of trial and moral awakening. In Rapunzel, the tower represents vertical liminality, isolating the heroine until symbolic elevation (the descent of her hair and subsequent rescue) restores balance. The crossing of thresholds in these tales dramatizes inner metamorphosis: every spatial movement encodes an ethical passage from ignorance to wisdom, from isolation to community.

Bakhtin (1981) interprets such spaces as chronotopes of transformation, where time slows and moral meaning intensifies. The fairy tale's chronotope is cyclical—events begin and end in symbolic symmetry—signifying that transformation, though temporary, renews cosmic order.

#### 4.5. Interrelation of Poetic and Cognitive Structures

The structural repetition and rhythmic economy of Grimm's tales also reveal their cognitive dimension. Scholars such as Bruner (1990) and Lakoff & Turner (1989) have argued that narrative form mirrors human thought patterns: sequences of tension and resolution, opposition and balance, reflect how the mind organizes experience. Grimm's triadic structures—"three trials," "three brothers," "three wishes"—function as cognitive templates that render moral abstraction intelligible.

Thus, the poetic mechanisms of the Grimm tales may be understood as mental schemata that mediate between sensory and symbolic cognition. The simplicity of the fairy-tale language is not primitive but heuristic—it enables communal understanding through symbolic condensation (Dundes, 1980). In this sense, the Grimm corpus represents not only literary art but a model of cognitive poetics, where narrative rhythm becomes a form of reasoning.

#### 4.6. The Aesthetic of Universal Form

Across the entire Grimm collection, compositional unity emerges from the interplay between morphological logic and poetic rhythm. The opening and closing formulas ensure formal closure; triadic sequences establish balance; motifs sustain coherence; and the chronotope maintains orientation. Together they produce what Lüthi (1947) termed *Gestalthaftigkeit*—the quality of wholeness that defines the European wonder tale.

The Grimm tales therefore transcend national and historical boundaries. Their poetic language and compositional design encode universal narrative principles: transformation through trial, restoration through justice, and meaning through structure. The moral and aesthetic dimensions of these tales are inseparable; each aesthetic form performs an ethical function. As Zipes (2002) observed, the Grimm legacy endures precisely because it transforms collective ethical patterns into enduring poetic form.

#### 4.7. Summary of Discussion

In summary, the discussion affirms that Grimm's fairy tales exemplify an integrative poetic system, uniting oral rhythm, morphological structure, semiotic clarity, and symbolic space into a coherent aesthetic whole.

Their compositional simplicity conceals a sophisticated architecture of meaning that operates simultaneously on artistic, moral, and cognitive levels. The tales thus achieve what every classical narrative seeks: order through rhythm, meaning through form, and transformation through repetition.

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### 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the poetic and compositional system of the Grimm brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* represents one of the most refined manifestations of European oral poetics. Beneath their apparent simplicity lies a highly organized network of morphological, rhythmic, and symbolic mechanisms that sustain narrative coherence and aesthetic balance.

The analysis reveals that the Grimm tales operate according to a unified poetic logic in which form and function coincide. Formulaic openings and closings ensure structural symmetry; triadic repetitions create rhythmic harmony and anticipation; morphological functions (Propp) provide causal sequence; actantial configurations (Greimas) clarify moral oppositions; and motif chains (Thompson-Uther) weave thematic continuity across episodes. The spatial-temporal framework (*home* → *forest* → *home*) expresses a cyclical chronotope (Bakhtin), transforming spatial movement into moral and psychological development.

The findings affirm that these tales are not primitive folklore but complex cognitive and ethical models encoded in poetic form. Their rhythmic and symbolic organization reflects the collective imagination of European folk culture, where



narrative order embodies moral order. The Grimm tales thus preserve a timeless aesthetic equilibrium: simplicity as structure, repetition as rhythm, and transformation as meaning.

Ultimately, the study establishes that the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* corpus functions as an integrative poetic system—bridging morphology, symbolism, and cognition—thereby offering a universal template for understanding the unity of art, morality, and imagination in traditional narrative.

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