

Robert darnton's peasants tell tales



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BUSTER**

appears here] appears here] appears here] appears here] Robert Darnton's Peasants Tell Tales The foremost among historians who have concerned themselves with folktales is Robert Darnton, whose path breaking essay on the meaning of Mother Goose warns us to avoid the hazards of treating folkloric texts " flattened out, like patients on a couch, in a timeless contemporaneity." Folktales are historical documents, he tells us, each colored by the mental life and culture of its epoch. Interpreting a folktale without troubling oneself to learn about its genesis and historical context can spell disaster.

Thus into this environment stepped Robert Darnton, the eminent Princeton University and quondam All Souls College historian of books as well as print in early modern France. In a piece of writing " Peasants Tell Tales" published in the New York Review of Books in February 1984 Darnton asserted that Europe's fairy tales presented an unusual door into " the mental world of the early modern peasantry", for the reason that those tales integrated centuries of peasant acuties. To Darnton, the fairy tales of Perrault plus the Grimms took on an influential new implication, due to their potential to imitate peasant worldviews and quick looks of lives lived in centuries past. Darnton further recommended in his article " Peasants Tell Tales" that French and German variant of the same storyline consistently measured national characteristics as well as national differences.

The influence of Darnton's essay lay in his collection of familiar contentions on the subject of the origins and spread of fairy tales. Nineteenth-century postulations had turn into twentieth-century verities. Without facts, the majority scholars and just about all the public thought that Perrault's and the Grimms' tales had been produced by unlettered folk writers; that these

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accounts had been passed along from grandparent to grandchild over generations; that peasant tales came into the bourgeois world when peasants themselves were betrothed as servants in affluent households; that the fairy tales that Charles Perrault provided to the Academie Francaise in the 1690s had come from one of his own household servants, most likely a nursemaid; also that the Grimms' bourgeois informants were in the same way collecting tales from household servants. (Hilda Ellis Davidson, Anna Chaudhri, 2003)

Also, Robert Darnton discusses in detail the social function of fairy tales for French peasants and bases his remarks in part on du Fail's account. He asserted fairy tales were retired to the nursery when they became unfashionable, just as "shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room." Exactly when the function of folktales shifted from amusement for adults to the edification and diversion of young children is not clear. From Nol du Fail's account of the *veille*, where men and women listened to tales while discharging household chores, we know that folktales were still very much adult fare in sixteenth-century France. In certain parts of Germany, the art of composing and narrating folktales persisted as a widespread custom among adults up to the time of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. But as industrialization gradually curtailed the need for the kinds of collective household chores and harvesting activities that had created a forum for oral narration, folktales as a form of public entertainment for adults died out. There may still exist many pockets of culture both rural and urban in which oral performance of tales and songs thrives, but on the whole it is safe to say that the nineteenth century witnessed a steady decline in the once intense preoccupation of adults with folktales. Thus his article, "Peasants Tell Tales: <https://assignbuster.com/robert-darntons-peasants-tell-tales/>

The Meaning of Mother Goose," presents an instance of how an historian can cautiously read folk tales and accordingly divulge peasants' lives.

Work Cited

Hilda Ellis Davidson, Anna Chaudhri, 2003. A Companion to the Fairy Tale; D. S. Brewer