

LITERARY FAIRY TALES AND IDEOLOGY

Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale. Jack Zipes. University Press of Kentucky, 1994. 192 pp. \$33.00 US, \$15.95 US cloth, paper. ISBN 0-8131-1890-5, 0-8131-0834-9.

For the last decade and a half, Jack Zipes has been the leading Marxist critic of fairy tales. He has, indeed, established what amounts to a cottage industry, weaving into numerous articles, anthologies, and books one clear design. In each case, Zipes argues that we need to see the contexts of their production to understand literary works, especially the literary fairy tale for children. In many ways, his latest book, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, is but one more iteration of his favourite theme. Readers familiar with such earlier books as *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1983) may even be tempted to dismiss this new work as too repetitive of earlier arguments.

Admittedly, the Introduction and six essays collected here do cover familiar ground. They do so, however, in a manner that makes their arguments accessible to a wide audience. Whereas his earlier books were a thick ooze of opaque jargon, this one, possibly because some of the essays were designed for oral delivery, speaks in ways that non-specialists will understand. Zipes does not entirely abandon the polysyllabic and neologistic terminology of theorists, but he generally presents a reasonably clear definition of terms so that moderately patient non-specialists can follow him with ease.

Zipes argues that literary fairy tales are not, as many who have promoted them claimed, timeless or universal. Rather, he says, they seem to contain universal psychological and moral truths because they have become mythicized. These fairy tales, that is, have been stripped of their overt ideological, historical, and political contexts so that they have become "frozen speech," speech that seems generalized and innocent. As Zipes shows in his first essay, however, the literary fairy tale actually began with ideological intentions. In seventeenth-century France, it was part of an elegant conversational game that permitted women to imagine the improvement of their lives. As they came to be written and then directed at children, the tales were subverted to support enforcement of a patriarchal code that actually was detrimental to the women who told the tales. Zipes argues this case clearly and persuasively by following the development of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale. His analysis shows his strengths: a close reader, he connects textual details to social and historical facts, thereby grounding the tale in a specific context and exposing its ideological premises. In the case of Beauty, Zipes convincingly shows that she is an exemplary figure who teaches women that they must curb their own desires, or make men's desires their own.

The same Marxist/feminist agenda is evident in other chapters. In his analysis of "Rumpelstilzkin," he says that the tale has been misread by critics, who have focused on the title character. By looking at the origin of the tale and the way in which the Grimms reworked it from a number of separate tales, he supports his contention that we should really look at the tale as one about a persecuted woman

and female creativity, which has traditionally been symbolized by the craft of spinning. In other essays, Zipes takes on familiar targets, Disney and Robert Bly's *Iron John*, pointing to the ways in which each involves self-figuration and the development of a nostalgic patriarchal ideology. Although these are less successful because they are less specific in pointing to details that form the patterns that Zipes investigates, the most disappointing chapters are the final two, on Frank Baum and the possibilities of American fairy tales, respectively. The former is too thin and polemical, a pale reproduction of his analysis of Baum in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. The latter tries to analyze too many authors in a brief chapter.

In *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, Zipes repeatedly notes the limitations of other critics and attempts to fill in the gaps they leave. Although the erection of critics as straw men is something of a rhetorical and stylistic tic with him, he does an admirable job. Readers concerned only with children's books may be disappointed that so much of his analysis involves movies and contemporary adult books, but most readers unfamiliar with Zipes's other books will find the collection stimulating. In fact, the Introduction, which presents a theory of fairy tales as myth, and the opening two essays, which explore the origin of literary fairy tales and the representation of women in "Beauty and the Beast" and "Rumpelstilzkin," are outstanding introductions to Zipes's radical method of examining literary fairy tales: they alone justify the purchase and the reading of the book.

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MINI-REVIEWS

Circles: Shapes in Math, Science, and Nature. Catherine Sheldrick Ross. Illus. Bill Slavin. Kids Can Press Limited, 1992. 80 pp., \$10.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-064-4.

Aiming to help children understand and enjoy math is the goal of this little theme book from Kid's Can Press. And it succeeds. What child can resist the challenge to squeeze the ends of a raw egg together to test its strength, or amaze her friends like Queen Dido did by cutting an ordinary index card into a circle big enough to step through?

The author has researched the subject of circles well and made it enjoyable to read in the process. Organized into nine, well-designed chapters, the book also contains a helpful glossary, table of contents, and an index. The mathematic principles are accurate, and the easy-to-read directions, with the exception of step 8 in the yin and yang instructions on page 25, are clear enough. But not to worry, Bill Slavin's illustrations help clarify the directions. It is so cram-packed with interesting facts, such as saving 17 black spruce trees by putting 350,000 pages of text on a CD-ROM, that my curiosity was aroused, and I found myself