

BOOK REVIEWS

Jack Zipes, ed., trans. **Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days.** Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989. Pp. ix + 211, notes, bibliography. \$25.00 cloth.

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This latest work by Jack Zipes continues his discussion of the utopian nature of fairy tales begun in earlier works such as *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre of Children and the Process of Civilization*. Collected, translated and edited in this volume are twenty-seven tales, written by sixteen German and Hungarian left-wing authors in the Weimar Republic.

With this collection Zipes skillfully illustrates how the literary fairy tale was instrumentalized in the politics of culture in Weimar Germany. The Weimar Republic, the turbulent and short-lived period of German democracy between monarchy and dictatorship, was marked by political instability and intense class struggle. It was in this context that both left- and right-wing political groups turned to traditional materials in their efforts to win support for their respective political ideologies.

The perverse adaptations and interpretations of folklore materials by the National Socialists have been documented in the often-cited articles by Hermann Bausinger, Christa Kamenetsky, and Wolfgang Mieder, as well as in recent conference publications from (West) Germany. With the exception of studies by (East) German folklorists (which for the most part remain untranslated), the uses

of folklore by the Socialist or Communist parties in Germany, however, have received little attention in comparison. In translating these "proletarian" fairy tales and situating them in the contexts of the left-wing youth movements for which they were written, Zipes has provided an important dimension to our understanding of the political culture of the Weimar period.

But why did individuals committed to class struggle turn to the fairy tale as a medium through which to raise political consciousness and promote change? Zipes sees the answer to this question in the inherently political and utopian aspects of the folktale. Recognizing the importance of the fairy tale in the socialization of German children, many left-wing authors and artists sought to create a "proletarian" fairy tale in the effort to foster a revolutionary consciousness.

Although the discussion of both the left-wing youth movements and literary publications in the Weimar Republic is informative, unfortunately a clear picture of the relationship between the youth movements, on the one hand, and the literary fairy tales of the progressive writers on the other, does not emerge. I would like to have had more information about how these two areas of agitation propaganda influenced one another.

Zipes identifies two characteristics of the progressive fairy tale in the Weimar period: 1) the refashioning of traditional tales to correspond to changing sociopolitical conditions and 2) the creation of new tales with clear utopian and radical messages for a proletarian audience. Most of the tales in this volume are examples of the latter tendency.

One of the most obvious markers of the fairy tale, which nearly all of the authors employ, is the formulaic opening "once upon a time." There are nonetheless occasional departures from convention, such as Joachim Ringelnatz's tale "Kuttel Daddeldu Tells His Children the Fairy Tale About Little Red Cap," which opens with: "So kids, if you can keep your mouths shut for just five minutes, then I'll tell you the story about Little Red Cap if I can still make sense out of it." His introduction is not the only variation on the Grimm versions. In Ringelnatz's parody the wolf arrives at the grandmother's house, disguises his voice and (in a nice bit of intertextual humor) identifies himself as Sleeping Beauty! But the grandmother is not fooled; she promptly eats the wolf, as well as the hunter and Little Red Cap, who arrive later (after a romantic tryst in the woods).

The endings of the tales depart even more clearly from the traditional folktale. Despite the explicit utopian aspect of the tales, not one story ends "happily ever after." Rather, they often conclude with exhortations—there is work to be done, lessons to be learned, dictators to be conquered, equality to be achieved. Moreover, unlike the folktale, few magic helpers intercede on behalf of the characters. Instead people must learn from their mistakes and undertake some action to change existing conditions. Herein lies the utopian thrust of the tales, the principle of hope as outlined by Ernst Bloch.

There are, of course, other notable differences between the tales in this volume and the traditional folktale, and while the point of this review is not to list the ways in which these tales deviate from the folktale, several uniquely "socialist" dimensions of the tales deserve mention. Whereas folktales generally feature a single protagonist in search of happiness, many tales in this volume focus on "the people" collectively in search of equality and harmony. Even in the tales involving individual characters, the moral invariably has implications for society as a whole. As one would expect, the morals often challenge the bourgeois values of riches and happiness. Equality rather than happiness, cooperation rather than success, and peace rather than war are the goals that people and society should strive for.

Although the tales often depict grim social conditions such as war, unemployment and poverty, they also give expression to the hope for a new social and political order. For example, when the people appeal to God to help them get rid of their cruel king in "A Fairy Tale about Gods and Kings," God answers that kings are not his invention and the people must find their own way

to overcome inequality. The tales not only envision a better life but empower their readers/listeners to act.

Written in the period following World War I, and after the failed revolutions of 1918/19 by authors committed to the cause of political change, it is not surprising that many tales associate social evils with capitalism, war, machines, and rulers. Two tales by Hermynia Zur Muhlen depict the evils of private ownership and capitalism. In "The Servant," a wise magician creates a power saw to improve the working conditions, but cautions that the "servant" must always remain the collective property of the people. When a greedy stranger arrives and persuades the people to let him buy the machine and manage the lumber industry, the "servant" becomes their master and the source of their oppression. In "The Fence," egalitarian and harmonious social relations are disturbed when one greedy individual builds a fence around his property and steals resources from the community, which he then uses in exercising power over his neighbors. Peace and harmony are restored only when people rise up in revolt against tyranny and oppression.

I personally found the utopian spirit of these tales and the biographies of the authors, most of whom were either persecuted by the Nazis or went into exile during the period of the Third Reich, to be most intriguing. At a time when our country has just emerged from war, these fairy tales make for both sobering and inspirational reading.

Norbert Krapf, ed, trans. **Beneath the Cherry Sapling: Legends from Franconia.** New York: Fordham University Press, 1988. Pp. xv + 138, poems, introduction, list of sources. Cloth.

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An enthusiasm for the regional folk literature he discovered in Franconia while researching his family's German "roots" prompted Norbert Krapf, poet and professor of English at Long Island University, to collect and translate the fifty-two legends contained in this volume. *Beneath the Cherry Sapling* is both informative and interesting, although the analysis a folklorist would expect to find in a new publication of legends is sometimes overshadowed by the editor's inability to move beyond his personal connection to the region and uncritical approach to the material.

The volume opens with two poems which Krapf wrote about his visit to the villages of his ancestors. In addition to skillfully combining rich ethnographic detail with poetic imagery, they underscore the author's sensitivity to the regional context and local color of these legends. The poems contextualize the legends in such a creative and compelling way that one wishes more folklorists would foreground the literary construction of their work as candidly and explicitly as Krapf has done.