When Dreams Came True
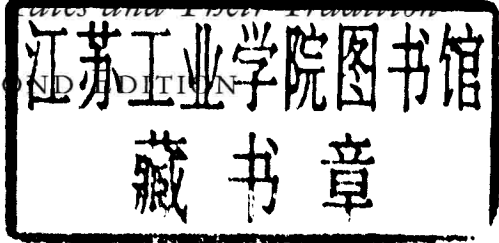
Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition

SECOND EDITION

JACK ZIPES

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For Catherine Mauger and Charlie Williams, wonderful friends, who helped many of my dreams come true in Paris

2005. These new essays elaborate my critical views on Andersen that I presented in my book study and make clear why Andersen is such a troubling writer of fairy tales. Chapter 12, "Revisiting J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* and Neverland," explores another "troublesome" writer of a fairy tale whose major protagonist has become iconic for many different reasons. As icon, Peter Pan seems to represent what is still missing in our lives and may also be missing in our dreams.

In revising *When Dreams Came True*, I want to express my gratitude to Caroline White and Michael Millman, who encouraged me to write introductions to new editions of classical fairy tales at Viking Press and gave me great counsel and support. Special thanks goes to Marte Hult, with whom I collaborated on a new edition of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, and to Joachim Neugroschel, whose new translations of Hoffmann and Dumas's "The Nutcracker and the Mouseking" are splendid. As usual I have benefited from Matt Byrnie's sage editorial advice and from Christine Andreasen's thorough and careful supervision of the final production of the book. Finally, I would like to thank Mary Bearden for her meticulous copyediting and Bev Weiler for preparing a useful index.

Jack Zipes
January 1, 2007

Preface to the 2007 Edition

In the first edition of *When Dreams Came True* I remarked that the scholarship on fairy tales, as well as the genre itself, had flourished during the past twenty years, and in the time that has passed since the initial publication of this book, the situation has not changed. More and more studies about the significance of the fairy tale have appeared, and more and more innovative experiments with the genre in the fields of painting, film, advertisement, literature, the internet, theater, opera, toys, and clothing have been produced almost daily—and not just in the West. It is almost as if there were a fierce drive to keep the utopian spirit of the fairy tales alive, even when this spirit may be commodified in our age of consumerism.

Though the fairy tale is frequently emptied of its substantial utopian longings through commodification, it still denotes a loss or a lack. The postmodern giants, ogres, and witches that haunt us may twist meanings and deplete the quality of our lives by destroying our hope and maiming our lives, but they will never be able to eliminate the essence of dreams for a better life.

In revising and expanding *When Dreams Came True*, I have corrected some minor factual and stylistic errors that appeared in the first edition. The major changes involve the addition of four new essays, which, I believe, will make my book more comprehensive and more substantial. Chapter 5, "The "Merry" Dance of the Nutcracker: Discovering the World through Fairy Tales," deals with the brilliant writer E. T. A. Hoffmann, a German romantic, whose presence is much more with us than we realize. Chapter 6 contains two new essays, "The Hans Christian Andersen We Never Knew" and "Critical Reflections about Hans Christian Andersen, the Failed Revolutionary," which replace "Hans Christian Andersen and the Discourse of the Dominated." I have eliminated this latter essay because I have republished it in my book, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller*, which appeared in

to collections of fairy tales with an eye toward writing a social history of the literary fairy tale. My focus has been on the role that the literary fairy tale has assumed in the civilizing process by imparting values, norms, and aesthetic taste to children and adults. If the fairy tale is a literary genre, I have insisted that we try to grasp the sociogeneric and historical roots of the tales and investigate the manner in which particular authors used the genre of the fairy tale to articulate their personal desires, political views, and aesthetic preferences. The fairy tale has been historically determined and is overdetermined by writers with unusual talents and tantalizing views about their search for happiness, which is coincidentally ours as well. The dramatic quality of the best fairy tales lies in the tension between the author's utopian longings and society's regulation of drives and desires.

It is my hope that in bringing together the diverse introductions and afterwords that I have written, I can provide a sociohistorical framework for the study of the classical tradition of the literary fairy tale in Western society. I make no claims for complete coverage of the classical fairy tales, but I do try to deal with the most significant writers and their works in Europe and North America from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. And I do try to raise questions and provide partial answers to the sociocultural web woven by fairy-tale writers and the ramifications of this web for our use and abuse of fairy tales today. Most of the scholarship that I have used in writing this book will be apparent in my text. Therefore, I have decided to forgo footnotes in this work. Readers may consult the bibliography for further study. I have listed the sources of my own essays at the end of the bibliography. All of the essays have been revised and brought up to date with respect to details important for drafting a social and literary history.

As usual, I should like to thank Bill Germano, who prods me with magical ideas and has been most supportive in all my endeavors at Routledge. Lai Moy has done a great job in managing the production of my book, and I am very grateful to Alexandria Giardino for the careful and thorough copyediting of this volume.

Jack Zipes
June 1998

℘reface to the 1999 ℰdition

During the past twenty years the scholarship dealing with fairy tales has exploded, and we now have numerous enlightening studies about those mysterious tales that delight and haunt our lives from the cradle to death. We now have every conceivable approach, I think, that reflects how seriously we interpret and value fairy tales. Most recently Marina Warner has incisively explored the role women play as tellers and heroines of the tales in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers* (1994) to recuperate the significance of their contribution to the oral and literary tradition. Lewis Seifert has examined how fairy tales use the marvelous to mediate between conflicting cultural desires in *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France 1690–1715: Nostalgic Utopias* (1996). Philip Lewis has situated Charles Perrault in the literary and philosophical debates of the late seventeenth century in *Seeing Through the Mother Goose Tales: Visual Turns in the Writings of Charles Perrault* (1996) and demonstrated how Perrault reappropriated what was vital to institutionalizing culture in his fairy tales. Cristina Bacchilega has dealt with the question of gender and highly complex contemporary tales from a feminist viewpoint in *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997). Nancy Canepa has edited a superb collection of essays in *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France* that lays the groundwork for a comprehensive history of the genre. U. C. Knoepflmacher has undertaken a psychological exploration of the constructions of childhood in Victorian fairy tales in *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (1998) that were shaped by a common longing for a lost feminine complement. All six of these exceptional studies advance our knowledge of literary fairy tales, yet they leave many questions unanswered because we do not have a social history of the fairy tale within which to frame their findings.

My present study is a move in that direction. During the last fifteen years I have written approximately twelve introductions and afterwords

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Spells of Enchantment

An Overview of the History of Fairy Tales

I t has generally been assumed that fairy tales were first created for children and are largely the domain of children. Nothing could be further from the truth.

From the very beginning, thousands of years ago, when all types of tales were told to create communal bonds in the face of inexplicable forces of nature, to the present, when fairy tales are written and told to provide hope in a world seemingly on the brink of catastrophe, mature men and women have been the creators and cultivators of the fairy-tale tradition. When introduced to fairy tales, children welcome them mainly because the stories nurture their great desire for change and independence. On the whole, the literary fairy tale has become an established genre within a process of Western civilization that cuts across all ages. Even though numerous critics and psychologists such as C. G. Jung and Bruno Bettelheim have mystified and misinterpreted the fairy tale because of their own spiritual quest for universal archetypes or need to save the world through therapy, both the oral and literary forms of the fairy tale have resisted the imposition of theory and manifested their enduring power by articulating relevant cultural information necessary for the formation of civilization and adaptation to the environment. Oral and literary fairy tales are grounded in history. They emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces that have

terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out, using various forms and information, to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors that are accessible to readers and listeners and provide hope that social and political conditions can be changed.

Though it is impossible to determine when the first *literary* fairy tale was conceived and extremely difficult to define exactly what a fairy tale is, we do know that oral folk tales, which contain wondrous and marvelous elements, have existed for thousands of years and were told largely by adults for adults. Motifs from these tales, which were memorized and passed on by word of mouth, made their way in the Western world into the Bible and the Greek classics such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and the Greek and Roman myths. The recent important studies, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (2000) by Graham Anderson and *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales* (2006) by Jan Ziolkowski, shed light on this evolution. The early oral tales that served as the basis for the development of literary fairy tales were closely tied to the rituals, customs, and beliefs of tribes, communities, and trades. They fostered a sense of belonging and hope that miracles involving some kind of magical transformation were possible to bring about a better world. They instructed, amused, warned, initiated, and enlightened. They opened windows to imaginative worlds inside that needed concrete expression outside in reality. They were to be shared and exchanged, used and modified according to the needs of the tellers and the listeners.

Tales are marks that leave traces of the human struggle for immortality. Tales are human marks invested with desire. They are formed like musical notes of compositions, except that the letters constitute words and are chosen individually to enunciate the speaker/writer's position in the world, including his or her dreams, needs, wishes, and experiences. The speaker/writer posits the self against language to establish identity and to test the self with and against language. Each word marks a way toward a future different from what may have been decreed, certainly different from what is being experienced in the present: The words that are selected in the process of creating a tale allow the speaker/writer freedom to play with options that no one has ever glimpsed. The marks are magical.

The fairy tale celebrates this magic: marks as letters, words, sentences, signs, and discourses. More than any other literary genre, the fairy tale has persisted in emphasizing transformation of the marks with spells, enchantments, disenchantments, resurrections, and re-creations. During its inception, the fairy tale distinguished itself as genre both by appropriating the oral folk tale and expanding it, for it became gradually necessary in the modern world to adapt the oral tale to standards of literacy and to make it acceptable for diffusion in the public sphere. The fairy tale is only one type of appropriation of a particular oral storytelling tradition: the wonder folk tale, often called the *Zaubermärchen* or the *conte merveilleux*. As more and more wonder tales were written down in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, they constituted the genre of the literary fairy tale that began establishing its own conventions, motifs, topoi, characters, and plots, based to a large extent on those developed in the oral tradition, but altered to address a reading public formed by the aristocracy and the middle classes. Though the peasants were excluded in the formation of this literary tradition, it was their material, tone, style, and beliefs that were incorporated into the new genre during this time.

What exactly is the oral wonder tale? In Vladimir Propp's now famous study, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1968), he outlined thirty-one basic functions that constitute the formation of the paradigm, which was and still is common in Europe and North America. By functions, Propp meant the fundamental and constant components of a tale that are the acts of a character and necessary for driving the action forward. To summarize the functions with a different emphasis:

1. The protagonist is confronted with an interdiction or prohibition that he or she violates in some way. Often the protagonist commits an error or seeks to improve his or her social status by embarking on a journey. One way or another the protagonist is commissioned — sent on a mission.
2. Departure or banishment of the protagonist, who is either given a task or assumes a task related to the interdiction and prohibition, or to the desire for improvement and self-transformation. The protagonist is *assigned* a task, and the task is a *sign*. That is, his or her character will be marked by the task that is his or her sign.

3. The protagonist then encounters: (a) the villain; (b) a mysterious individual or creature, who gives the protagonist gifts; (c) three different animals or creatures who are helped by the protagonist and promise to repay him or her; or (d) three different animals or creatures who offer gifts to help the protagonist, who is in trouble. The gifts are often magical agents, which bring about miraculous change.

4. The endowed protagonist is tested and moves on to battle and conquer the villain or inimical forces.

5. The peripety or sudden fall in the protagonist's fortunes is generally only a temporary setback. A wonder or miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune. Sometimes a fairy, hermit, wise man or woman, or magically endowed human or animal will intervene to benefit the protagonist.

6. The protagonist makes use of gifts (and this includes the magical agents and cunning) to achieve his or her goal. The result is (a) three battles with the villain; (b) three impossible tasks that are nevertheless made possible; and/or (c) the breaking of a magic spell.

7. The villain is punished or the inimical forces are vanquished.

8. The success of the protagonist usually leads to (a) marriage; (b) the acquisition of money; (c) survival and wisdom; or (d) any combination of the first three.

Rarely do wonder tales end unhappily. They triumph over death. The tale begins with "once upon a time" or "once there was" and never really ends when it ends. The ending is actually the true beginning. The once upon a time is not a past designation but futuristic: The timelessness of the tale and lack of geographic specificity endow it with utopian connotations — utopia in its original meaning designated "no place," a place that no one had ever envisaged. We form and keep the utopian kernel of the tale safe in our imaginations with hope.

The significance of the paradigmatic functions of the wonder tale is that they facilitate recall for teller and listeners. They enable us to store, remember, and reproduce the utopian spirit of the tale and to change it to fit our experiences and desires due to the easily identifiable characters who are associated with particular assignments and settings. For instance, we have the simpleton who turns out to be remarkably cunning; the third and youngest son who is oppressed by his brothers and/or father; the beautiful but maltreated youngest daughter; the discharged soldier who

has been exploited by his superiors; the shrew who needs taming; the evil witch; the kind elves; the cannibalistic ogre; the clumsy stupid giant; terrifying beasts like dragons, lions, and wild boars; kind animals like ants, birds, deer, bees, ducks, and fish; the clever tailor; the evil and jealous stepmother; the clever peasant; the power-hungry and unjust king; treacherous nixies; and the beast-bridegroom. There are haunted castles; enchanted forests; mysterious huts in woods; glass mountains; dark, dangerous caves; and underground kingdoms. There are seven-league boots that enable the protagonist to move faster than jet planes; capes that make a person invisible; magic wands that can perform extraordinary feats of transformation; animals that produce gold; tables that provide all the delicious and sumptuous food you can eat; musical instruments with enormous captivating powers; swords and clubs capable of conquering anyone or anything; and lakes, ponds, and seas that are difficult to cross and serve as the home for supernatural creatures.

The characters, settings, and motifs are combined and varied according to specific functions to induce *wonder*. It is this sense of wonder that distinguished the wonder tales from other oral tales such as the myth, the legend, the fable, the anecdote, and the exemplum. It is clearly the sense of wonder that distinguishes the *literary* fairy tale from the moral story, novella, sentimental tale, and other modern short literary genres. Wonder engenders astonishment. As marvelous object or phenomenon, it is often regarded as a supernatural occurrence and can be an omen or portent. It gives rise to admiration, fear, awe, and reverence. The *Oxford Universal Dictionary* states that wonder is "the emotion excited by the perception of something novel and unexpected, or inexplicable; astonishment mingled with perplexity or bewildered curiosity." In the oral wonder tale, we are to wonder about the workings of the universe where anything can happen at any time, and these happy or fortuitous events are never to be explained. Nor do the characters demand an explanation — they are opportunistic. They are encouraged to be so, and if they do not take advantage of the opportunity that will benefit them in their relations with others, they are either dumb or mean-spirited. The tales seek to awaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life and to evoke in a religious sense profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process, which can be altered and changed to compensate

for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience. Lack, deprivation, prohibition, and interdiction motivate people to look for signs of fulfillment and emancipation. In the wonder tales, those who are naive and simple are able to succeed because they are untainted and can recognize the wondrous signs. They have retained their belief in the miraculous condition of nature, revere nature in all its aspects. They have not been spoiled by conventionalism, power, or rationalism. In contrast to the humble characters, the villains are those who use words intentionally to exploit, control, transfix, incarcerate, and destroy for their benefit. They have no respect or consideration for nature and other human beings, and they actually seek to abuse magic by preventing change and causing everything to be transfixed according to their interests. Enchantment equals petrification. Breaking the spell equals emancipation. The wondrous protagonist wants to keep the process of natural change flowing and indicates possibilities for overcoming the obstacles that prevent other characters or creatures from living in a peaceful and pleasurable way.

The focus on wonder in the oral folk tale does not mean that all wonder tales, and later the literary fairy tales, served and serve an emancipatory purpose. The nature and meaning of folk tales have depended on the stage of development of a tribe, community, or society. Oral tales have served to stabilize, conserve, or challenge the common beliefs, laws, values, and norms of a group. The ideology expressed in wonder tales always stemmed from the position that the narrator assumed with regard to the developments in his or her community, and the narrative plot and changes made in it depended on the sense of wonder or awe that the narrator wanted to evoke. In other words, the sense of wonder in the tale and the intended emotion sought by the narrator are ideological.

Since these wonder tales have been with us for thousands of years and have undergone so many different changes in the oral tradition, it is difficult to determine the ideological intention of the narrator. When we disregard the narrator's intention, it is often difficult to reconstruct (and/or deconstruct) the ideological meaning of a tale. In the last analysis, however, even if we cannot establish whether a wonder tale is ideologically conservative, sexist, progressive, emancipatory,