

Transformations: How Fairy Tales Cast Their Spell

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The Philoctetes Center

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Cattaneo: Anne Cattaneo
Lamos: Mark Lamos
Napoli: Donna Jo Napoli
Rahtz: Roger Rahtz
Tatar: Maria Tatar
Zipes: Jack Zipes
A: Question from audience

Levy: I'm Francis Levy, co-director of the Philoctetes Center, and welcome to Transformations: How Fairy Tales Cast Their Spell. Ed Nersessian is the other co-director of the Philoctetes Center. I would now like to introduce Jack Zipes. Jack Zipes is professor of German at the University of Minnesota. In addition to his scholarly work, he is an active storyteller in public schools and has worked with children's theaters in Europe and the United States. Some of his major publications include *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, and *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. He has also translated *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* and edited *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* and *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*. He served as the General Editor of the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* and Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Professor Zipes will moderate tonight's panel and introduce the other panelists. Thank you.

Zipes: Thank you. I'd like to introduce the panelists. Anne Cattaneo is the Dramaturg of the Lincoln Center Theater and creator and head of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors' Lab. A three term past President of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, she is the recipient of LMDA's first Lessing Award for lifetime achievement in dramaturgy.

Mark Lamos is director of the Lincoln Center's production of *Cymbeline*, which is opening Sunday night, right?

Lamos: Yes.

Zipes: He has directed numerous productions on Broadway and at Lincoln Center, as well as at Off-Broadway venues such as Playwrights Horizons, Signature, and the New York Shakespeare Festival. He was the Artistic Director of Hartford Stage from 1980 to 1997, receiving a Tony Award for the theater's body of work. Regionally he has directed at the Kennedy Center, Williamstown, La Jolla Playhouse, the Old Globe, the McCarter, and the Guthrie, among others, as well as Canada's Stratford Festival and Moscow's Pushkin Theater. As a director of Opera, he

has overseen productions at the Met, New York City Opera, Glimmerglass, Chicago Lyric, and L'Opera du Montreal, among many others.

Donna Jo Napoli is both a linguist and a writer of children's fiction. She writes picture books, young adult novels, historical fiction, contemporary humorous tales, gothic horror, and, of particular interest to this roundtable, she works on fairytales, myths, and religious stories. She is Professor of Linguistics at Swarthmore College. She holds degrees in mathematics, a BA at Harvard, and Romance linguistics, a PhD at Harvard, and did her post-doctorate work in linguistics at MIT.

Roger Rahtz, sitting to my right, has a private practice in child, adolescent, and adult psychiatry and psychoanalysis. He is President of the New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute and Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at New York University Medical Center. In addition, he is Associate Director of the Parent Child Center at the New York Psychoanalytic Society and an attending psychiatrist at Lenox Hill Hospital.

Maria Tatar, over here on my left, is the John L. Loeb Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University. She served as Dean for the Humanities at Harvard—during some troubled times—and currently teaches courses there on German culture and on folklore and children's theater—or, children's literature, I'm sorry. Her most recent books include *The Classic Fairy Tales*, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, and *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*. She is currently working on *Enchanted Hunters: The Transformative Power of Children's Literature* and *The Annotated Peter Pan*.

Welcome. I am supposed to ask some type of provocative question, which will generate sparks and some responses, and I thought about what I could possibly say, and I thought that I would begin by just summing up a tale that I think is significant and might get us going to talk about why the fairy tale today is still so potent, so important, so significant in not only American culture but in all cultures throughout the world.

The tale goes something like this. It's actually based on a tale that a Danish writer, his name is Karl Ewald, wrote in the 19th century. Nobody knows him because when everybody thinks of Danish folktales they think of Hans Christian Anderson. But Karl Ewald was an interesting writer and he wrote this tale, and it begins with, "One time truth disappeared from the earth," sort of like today. People were very upset, so they called for five wise men and they sent these five wise men out into the world to look for truth. They all came back and each one of them had a different truth. One said religion was truth, another said love was truth, another said gold was truth, another said wine was truth and so on. They began fighting among one another, and they fought so hard and they bickered so much that they destroyed one another, and the people who were watching this, thousands of people, began fighting among themselves. This fight went on for some time until they were all so tired they sat down and were very sad and in mourning.

All of the sudden a young girl comes out of the forest and says, "I found truth." Nobody believed her. And she kept insisting, "I found truth, come with me." One by one people started following her, and thousands of people followed her through the forest until they came to a meadow. In the middle of the meadow was this amazing figure. It looked like a woman, or a man, or a young person, or an adult. Nobody could make it out. But it had wings on it, and it was very angelic and

awesome, just awe-inspiring. All of the sudden it stood up and in a voice that rang like a bell it said, “I am truth.” Nobody said a word. And then it said again, “I am truth.”

Then the wise man who had found science as truth said, “Poppycock! That’s just a fairy tale.” And all the other five wise men said, “Yeah, that’s just a fairy tale,” and they stormed off and began fighting, and everybody ran after them and they started fighting again, except for a small group of old people and a few young people and thousands of children remained there, and they remain there up until this day, and that’s where truth might be.

So I’m wondering, is it truth that fairy tales bring? What is it about fairy tales? Why do we keep coming back to them, not just as children but throughout our lives? This is really a genre that stays with us, that we use in all forms and we develop into plays, movies. It’s on the Internet and so on. We keep using all of these fairy tales.

Lamos: I have just one observation about the structure of that story, actually, which is something that I’ve thought about, and am thinking about this evening in a number of fairy tales—namely that there is a back story, a very troublesome, anxiety-producing story. Truth is gone. As the story unfolds, there is an enchanted quality. You’re kind of on the edge, waiting to see how it evolves, what develops. Then often anyway, in a number of fairy tales and myths, you’re hit again with a reality that is unpleasant. Sometimes there’s a magical resolution, but often the back story, what I would think of as representation of reality, returns from the enchanted world. That’s something I can speak a little more about later on, but I think in many ways fairy tales offer that escape from the real world, but in a way one doesn’t forget entirely about that troubling back story, and often it does return. There’s the enchantment of being able to escape, but there’s still that tension of often an unpleasant reality. In fairy tales in particular I think that reality is often a family that’s unhappy.

Cattaneo: So we’re sitting here looking at each other, because you’re describing the play that we’re opening on Sunday night.

Tatar: As I listen to you, I think of this potent cocktail that is always released when you hear a fairy tale, and then when you start to talk about it as well. I like to think of the terms that you just defined as being aluminous and bituminous and maybe reverse that order, starting out in darkness and then coming across this extraordinary beauty, glitter, sparkle and shine, something so attractive, and awesome, as you described it, angelic, and finding a real transformative power in that beauty, which may be truth. But truth is always so hard to get at, so I wonder about those people who wandered off and what paths they took.

Zipes: We tend to think, when we talk about fairy tales, that fairy tales are not truthful. We often use that phrase, “Oh, that’s just a fairy tale.” And yet are fairy tales perhaps more truthful than so-called realist stories? Is that why we keep coming back to them? Or do they expose the contradictions in our society, or in any society, and therefore metaphorically have much more truth to them than the so-called realist stories?

Cattaneo: I guess I can respond by saying I feel like the one person on this panel who doesn’t belong on the panel, because I know nothing about fairy tales, but I’m working with Mark on

Cymbeline, so I'm totally immersed in fairy tales. That's why I'm here, other than I think this panel was my idea, am I not correct?

But I'm totally excited listening to the two of you, who are the experts—the three of you experts on fairy tales—because so many things seem relevant to what we've been working on in rehearsal for the last two months. You just described the plot of *Cymbeline*, by Shakespeare, but also, as the person who doesn't know anything about this trying to think of something interesting to say tonight, what I honed in on, and maybe I'll sort of throw this out because you're hitting it now, is there is something about the structure of fairy tales, the experience that you go through when you listen to a fairy tale, that seems to me to bear some similarities to what you go through when you are in the audience of a play that is working well, and that has to do perhaps with theater's ritual origins, and the actual experience of going through this. Numbers come up, things happen three times, you go forward, you go back. All plays that speak to us in any great way have a kind of hidden code, a coded structure, and the plot of the play, the plot of *Cymbeline*, while it is extremely interesting and busy and filled with details, is really hiding something much more profound, a kind of profound transformation that I think under Mark's direction or production has really risen—which is almost unheard of in productions of this play—but you have to go behind what the play is about, underneath, as we do in the theater, to find a subtext. That's why it's always so hard to read the plays—any plays—because what's happening is not in the text. It's behind the text somehow. It's hidden. I think in fairy tales—I know nothing about them—it's not so much the *Rumpelstiltsken* as it's the voyage out or the secret person. It's what is somehow coded to get behind or underneath it that seems very psychically resonant in the same way that going through a ritual, which is what the theater's origins are, makes it special in that way. So I'm throwing that idea out.

Lamos: But also I wonder if fairy tales rely on a suspension of disbelief, as all fictive experiences do, whether it's television, a novel, or watching a play. I was going to say you do need to suspend your disbelief, and children seem particularly apt at suspending disbelief at a tale. On the other hand, when I think about my own experience as a kid listening to a fairy tale read to me at bedtime or what have you, or watching some version of it dramatized or something, I don't recall suspension. I recall instant identification and troubling anxiety, and taking that journey that you were describing of the back story being terrible potent, the quest, et cetera. Now it seems in order to get back to that, one of the things that theater blesses us with in a funny way is this attempt to suspend our disbelief.

In a play like *Cymbeline*, no less than a play like *Lear* or *Merchant of Venice*, just to be dramatic about it, they all ask for a tremendous suspension of disbelief. Once upon a time there was an old king who had three daughters, you know? If you follow the plot of *Lear*, it almost is a very rejuvenating fairy tale until the very end, when Cordelia is suddenly hanged. If Cordelia was alive, and there's a theory there was a version where she lived, it is like a romance all of the sudden. Same with *Merchant of Venice*. There was a rich woman who had three caskets that her father gave her, based on a story that starts that way. But they're not that far off from the oral traditions of *Snow White*, which we discovered extent in Renaissance England while Shakespeare was working—orally but not written down yet. I think there's something about the suspending of disbelief that takes us into these stories that then we suspend our disbelief in order to get at truth, or at least I'd like to think, toiling in the theater, that's what we do.

Tatar: But I think that there's an important difference, because with Shakespeare you get real depth and psychological analysis, and you're immersed in the complexities of the characters. In fairy tales I think sometimes everything's just hidden on the surface. That it's all superficial. Maybe that's one reason why it's so easy to identify with a character, because there's nothing there. They're such blank slates, and you could just jump right into that role, whereas I think with Shakespeare, if I'm watching *Lear* I won't jump into one of those characters or try to channel them right away, so that you have the challenge of—or maybe you don't want to draw people in, maybe you don't want them to identify. Maybe you prefer keeping the critical distance, which doesn't happen in fairy tales, I would say.

Lamos: Unless we're subconsciously identifying. I was reading an essay—does a girl reading *Snow White*, say, or hearing *Snow White*, is she identifying both with Snow White as well as the mother figure, who then becomes bifurcated, and is the listener actually becoming—are all of the characters somehow identifiable?

Tatar: Sure, *Little Red Riding Hood*, you could identify with the grandmother, the wolf and the girl. In fact, there's a doll, isn't there, that has all three, sort of a patchwork of all three?

Zipes: Some nuns used to make these dolls and they would send them to me because I'd written a book on *Little Red Riding Hood*. I have a collection of about 30 dolls like this that are little red riding hood and the wolf and—

Lamos: Do they transform?

Zipes: You can transform that doll any way you want.

But Donna Jo, you actually transform and adapt fairy tales in great depth and tremendous psychological depth to get at what? The truth of something? To get at the truth of the tale, the truth of particular characters?

Napoli: It's kind of strange for me to hear people talking about suspending their disbelief, because when I write a tale I totally believe every detail of the tale. I think with what you were saying about how fairy tales are easy to identify with each of the different characters, you're talking about the tales as the Grimm Brothers wrote them, or—. In those tales there may be a page or a page and a half or two pages, or whatever. Essentially I think what they are is plot lines. If you were to take those plot lines and step away and look at them from a purely logical point of view, you'd say, "Why, these people are insane. They just go from one bizarre behavior to another." But if you say, "This happened. *This* happened," and you ask, "How do you get from this step to the next?" I found that there's always a very clear path. It's not at all bizarre how they got from one place to the next. I think it is because the people are doing these things because of real things that drive us to dramatic behavior in life. I think fairy tales are about how much you're willing to give up in order to be a decent person. That's why I think they stick with us, because we all face that.

Zipes: How do you mean 'give up?' Let go of?

Napoli: Yeah.

Zipes: Let out into the world, or—?

Napoli: I have worked on so many fairy tales that I see them now in my very limited way. For example, if you talk about *Hansel and Gretel*, you ask yourself, how does a little girl push a witch into an oven? There's no way she could do that unless the witch wanted her to. I mean the witch could have done any number of things. She could have turned Gretel into a frog. She could have turned herself into a huge monster. Instead she went into that oven. She was giving up everything in order to not eat these children.

Tatar: That's really interesting. Frank's writing this down.

Zipes: Donna Jo has actually written a book about this witch.

Tatar: But I think that just points to the extraordinary elasticity of these tales, the way that they do shape shift. One of the exercises I have my students perform early on in my course on fairy tales is to write down the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Then of course they compare versions, and even that really simple story, which you would think they would all sort of have the same version of, turns out to appear in—well, if there are 50 students there are 50 versions of it. They're not all radically different, but there is a change that takes place as we process the story.

Zipes: Do the women's versions differ from the men's?

Tatar: Good question. I've never thought about it along gender lines. I would say not, maybe because most of them encountered the story when they were very young, and so they sort of go way back when they think about it. I would say that women tend to have better recall.

Lamos: I was reading this essay by Alison Lurie about the oral tradition being carried mostly by women and the written tradition by men, so that fairy tales essentially were codified by men but developed by women, and in more than just European cultures, which I found utterly fascinating.

Zipes: Yeah, except that's wrong.

Lamos: Is it? Jack, fill us in.

Zipes: It's preposterous to say that women cultivated the tales more than men. We don't know. The oral tradition was told by both men and women. We have ample evidence that in the Medieval period men told tales just as much as women did. In the 19th century there was a change, and women began telling tales more so than men, as in middle class homes and nurseries, which were first built during that time. So there was a shift, but I think it's really misleading to say that women gave birth to the tales.

Lamos: She doesn't really say that. She says what you're saying about the 19th century, when the Brothers Grimm went around sort of gathering things.

Zipes: Right. But even in the 19th century collections of the oral tales there is a gender difference, by the way. We can compare different versions of, let's say *Rapunzel* or *Rumpelstiltsken* and so on, and you can see that women, depending on the collections, really did tell tales differently. I've been translating Sicilian folktales, where it's quite clear that the collections in which women

were the dominant storytellers had different outcomes with regard to the female protagonist, and the males were generally somewhat sexist or misogynistic. So it's very complex. But what is fascinating is that there are gender differences in terms of narrative. Like in the study that I did of *Little Red Riding Hood*, hypothetically I argue that there was a tale that prefigured Charles Perrault's tale, in which the little girl is basically violated or raped and then punished for that.

There was a tale in which a girl meets a werewolf, goes to granny's house, granny's been eaten. She eats the flesh of her grandmother and drinks the grandmother's blood, does a striptease, gets into bed with the werewolf. There are about six or seven questions where the girl is toying with the werewolf, and finally she pops the question, "What big teeth you have," and the werewolf says, "All the better to eat you with." She says, "I've got to go." And the werewolf says, "Do it in bed, my dear." "No, I've got to go caca." And he says, "Okay, okay." He ties a rope around her ankle, sends her through a window. She unties it with a needle, and then ties it around a plum tree and runs off. The werewolf is sitting there, sitting there, and after a while he yells out and pulls the rope and there's no response. He says, "What are you doing out there, making a load, making a load?" That's how the tale ends. She escaped.

Lamos: That's Sicilian?

Zipes: That was told probably by women in a sewing society, because there are signs they used to gather in, say, one cottage during the day when the men were out in the fields working or so on, and what would they do when they were weaving or sewing? They told stories. Quite often this was an initiation story where a young girl had to prove that she could replace her grandmother and also fend off a predator, a male. So what Charles Perrault did in 1697, he turned it ideologically around so that basically a girl is punished and she doesn't survive this test.

Rahtz: I'm actually quite interested in the gender issues, and particularly what struck me as the frequency, or even preponderance of female, girl protagonists in fairy tales. But I wonder if maybe we could table that for one second, because I wanted to pick up the thread about elasticity. I think what you demonstrated was the multiplicity of possible identifications in these stories. You, Donna Jo, were in a way identifying with the witch, and plumbing her character and finding something generous, let's say. The elasticity of these tales, and probably a lot of other types of literature and art, is part of what we think of as an aspect of mental functioning that particularly is evident—though there are differences in what I've read about this—in children who presumably at one point were the intended recipients or auditors of these tales. I guess there's some question about that.

Zipes: A big question.

Rahtz: Yeah. But what I wanted to add is the degree of elasticity in children's play, and as a child therapist, child analyst, this is something so evident in the clinical situation, where there's tremendous fluidity, particularly in the younger ages of children, so that when a child is telling a story, playing out a story, it's remarkable how quickly the identifications the child is making change. There are battles. The child seems to be taking on identification with one party in a battle or another with an evil character, with a good character, a rescuer, a sadist. This is part of the experimental freedom that the child has in play to express a great deal of his or her inner conflicts. It's not obviously the same when this is written as an art form, or even part of a

received community product, like a fairy tale or a myth, but I think it does adhere to some of the same principles and mental functioning, namely the fluidity of identifications I think your example illustrates. Often as a therapist one is confused as to what's topmost for the child in a session. I think one is, at times anyway, confused in the fairy tales as well: what the hell is going on here, and whom am I supposed to be sympathizing or empathizing with, identifying with? A lot of times I think, perhaps luckily, advantageously, it's not resolved. There's a good deal of ambiguity, even at the end.

Napoli: I think that if a child doesn't know who he's supposed to be identifying with in the story, then maybe the writer didn't do a very good job, because one of the things that you want to do is invite the reader into the story via giving them a person that they can be in this story. But I think that one of the things that I always want to do, and one of the reasons why I often work with fairy tales, is that I want to give them a character who does face really evil things within herself or himself, as well as from the outside. Censorship is probably the biggest concern for me as a writer for young people, and I think there might be no one as lonely as a child who thinks that her own thoughts are the worst thoughts in the world. So to read that this character is not only thinking something, but doing something that is horrible, and yet you can still see why, and you can still come to love and care about this character, is very important for accepting ourselves in all of our frailties. Fairy tales are a wonderful therapeutic thing for everyone, I think.

Zipes: I think one of the difficulties we will probably have is that you are a writer who writes very sophisticated and complex fairy tales, versus, say, the oral tradition, the shorter tales going back to the Grimms or the 19th century, so that you can say, rightfully so, that if the child or the reader doesn't really get your point, or get what you want to convey, you've probably not done a really great job. Within the oral tradition that wasn't necessarily the case, because telling a tale there's so much going on in your mind while you're telling it you can't really shape it, mold it, go back to it and so on. So there is a really big difference, I think, between the literary tradition and the oral tradition. I think what Roger is saying is really interesting in terms of, let's say the shorter tales from the oral tradition, in that they really do enable a child to play around with the different characters, and maybe even imagine different endings. In fact, in my work with children in elementary schools and the storytelling program, they are always playing around with the tales and the plots, and given the freedom to do that they will. I think that your tales, Jane Yolen's tales, contemporary writers, or even going back to Anderson, really did want to convey, or at least enable a certain identification through their artistry.

Tatar: This is so interesting because I see that you're taking a slight turn from the therapeutic mode. We always think about identification and how do these stories help children get control over these very powerful emotions that they have, that they feel alone with? But I love the way that you are using the tales for creative purposes. That is, this idea of play, using the characters and the plots, reshaping the stories, puts children in charge.

What I spent the last year thinking about is the way in which they also awaken intellectual curiosity, so that you have Richard Wright having the story of *Bluebeard* read to him by a schoolteacher, and the story just opened this new world for him because it engaged with all of these powerful dark secrets about the adult world. After that all he wanted to do was read stories and learn. I think it's, "I burn to learn every word that I read." He was constantly pestering his mother about the definitions of words. So the power of the stories, I think, is not just in their

therapy, their ability to heal us, but also to lead us forward into the future. Maybe you could say something about envisioning utopian possibilities, looking at other modes, perils and possibilities.

Lamos: Right. I find it fascinating that we're talking about child's play as something that is role-playing, and the idea of the oral tradition versus the written tradition in these things, where a writer is going to want us to empathize with a certain character. A modern writer I think is going to want us to empathize with a certain character and lead us through the story with him or her, whereas what I've always found—and this is purely personal—so odd about fairy tales is that I don't know who I'm supposed to be in that tale, and when it's over it's left me with this odd feeling that's very alive, and I find very much like Shakespearian skepticism. In a great Shakespeare production you are constantly asked to realign your thinking. Is Shylock the right guy? Well, he's done some awful things. Is Portia? Well, she seems sort of cold and heartless. Is Bessanio? Well, he's got a good heart, but he seems rather stupid.

You can go to each character in *Lear*, in *Macbeth*, in *Hamlet*, and you find that what he's doing is always pulling you back. You identify, and then he pulls you back by something that's said by another character, by some action of the protagonist that's utterly foolish or ridiculous, or fool hearty or brave. What happens for me in fairy tales is similar, I've noticed, to what happens to me when I'm studying a Shakespeare text, which is that it's a very slippery slope. Sometimes I'm Jack, but sometimes I'm the giant.

Rahtz: And doesn't that grab you more than this is it, this is the recipe?

Lamos: Absolutely.

Rahtz: That's why we come back again and again to see Hamlet, or a child re-reads, or re-hears fairy tales again and again. There's tension. There's conflict.

Lamos: It's why, when you're directing a play like *Lear*, or any of them, you have to make, say, Regan and Goneril sympathetic, to the extent that they are not just dragons, so that, as you were saying, there's something there in those two, the so-called 'wicked' sisters, that you've got to at a certain age absolutely identify with. No, I don't want my father drooling around the house with his horses and his cows and his knights. I want my husband and me to have some success in life. They're very primary concerns that humanize those characters, but also keep you from absolute loathing of them. *Lear* is an idiot, as well as a great man. That these things are constantly kept in motion in a far more complex way than, say, in a fairy tale, however there's still that constant slippery slope you're on that's provided by Shakespearean skepticism, and in the oral tradition of these tales. At any rate, it's a kind of evening out for me. I don't know quite who I am. I sort of want to be the wicked witch that offers the apple, but I feel like Snow White recoiling from her, and I want to be the prince that rescues her, and I am one of the dwarfs, so that I'm constantly playing within the very loose and lucid structure of those characters and the events.

Cattaneo: I wanted to bring up something. You mentioned the word, but it's a digression, because we're blessed to be living in the world of Shakespeare so intensively for the last month and a half. Shakespeare clearly knew fairy tales as a child. He probably read fairy tales, and somehow they come into this work in a literary way, but it's part of his lived tradition as well. In

this particular play one of the mysteries that we've been thinking about and investigating is this very strange conjunction between what you immediately put your finger on are the sort of fairy tale elements of the play. The play is written in 1609. It's set in a sort of historical time, around the time of the Roman Empire, but it has a very glamorous appearance—very glamorous in our production—by a deity, and the deity is Jupiter.

I think I ask you this in the interview: what is the connection between myths and fairy tales? We're asking ourselves why does Shakespeare, in this, almost his final play—he's going to write *The Tempest* and a few other lesser works—but why does he put these all together in this way? Why does he have these fairy tale elements, but then there are religious deities, as there are sometimes in Shakespeare, but not often, and why these ones? Are fairy tales just a western, more contemporary version of myths? Do they have the same resonance? That's what we are asking ourselves in trying to make a unity out of what Shakespeare has given us in this play.

Zipes: If you recall, I had a brazen answer to your question. I said Shakespeare didn't know what to do with the plot after a while, and so he threw in Jupiter at that point and said that should do it.

Cattaneo: We always assume Shakespeare knows what he's doing.

Zipes: A British scholar, Graham Anderson, has written two excellent books about the fairy tale and the ancient world. He argues that the word 'mythos' actually meant fairy tale in the Greek and Roman times. Whether that's the case or not, it's quite clear that the fairy tale that comes out of an oral tradition borrowed from all types of genres, from the fables, animal stories. You see elements in the fairy tales that gelled into a literary tradition at a certain time where you have recognizable motifs. But there are buried in almost all of the major fairy tales mythic elements, or elements that come from the Middle East, the notion of reincarnation. When Cinderella, for instance, needs help—there are thousands of *Cinderella* tales, but generally the helper figure is a dead mother who comes back to her in the form of a dove, a tree, and so on and so forth.

Cattaneo: We're looking at each other for a reason.

Zipes: Is there something in *Cymbeline*?

Lamos: Yeah, before Jupiter appears, posthumous dreams of his father, mother and two brothers, all of whom are dead, and the mother died giving birth to him, hence his name: Posthumus. Their appearance leads to the appearance of Jupiter.

Cattaneo: All of you therapists can come and see the play and explain it to us. We haven't even talked about the headless corpse yet.

Tatar: I always think of fairy tales as being sort of up close and personal, unlike myths. They're sort of like miniature myths, taking place in the domestic arena. So you have something like *The Juniper Tree*, with the father devouring the son, who has been cut up into pieces by the stepmother and put into a stew. You have this kind of recycling—

Cattaneo: That's very familiar from the Greeks.

Tatar: It's the same dysfunctional family situation.

Cattaneo: Yeah. In my somewhat anxiety about what would I say here tonight, I xeroxed this article, which I just showed to Ed and to Frank, which I made 75 copies of, because when we did *King Lear* at Lincoln Center my co-editor of this magazine, the playwright John Greer, who's always reading the most amazingly wide variety of interesting things, was on a plane going from Rome to England and was reading volume XII of Freud's collected works—not something that we in the theater do that often—and he found this incredible article.

Levy: Do you want to pass it out?

Cattaneo: Yeah, you can pass it out. Freud, whenever he wrote volume XII, is looking at *The Merchant of Venice* and *Lear*, and he's tracking it back to prehistory, basically. He's found coded in the plays this ancient mythological history, which is why he feels these plays work subconsciously in the way that they do. So I edited it down. It's slightly longer, and I'm sure you all have the completed works, but it's a fascinating take on the power of these. And it's completely subconscious. I think that's one of the key things for us in the theater. We work largely, I don't want to say unconsciously or subconsciously, but we don't ever approach anything with too much design. We have to sort of unlock the play and then let it show us what it's about.

One of the remarkable things about *Cymbeline* is the grand design of the play, which I must say almost every critic from Bernard Shaw on back has questioned—the play doesn't work, the play has problems. The play actually does work. It's just very hard to figure out how. It tells you how to do it in a way. I've come to feel, watching these rehearsals, a series of harmonics, that there are these triads of things that start happening. Once they are all cooking, then the play resolves itself in this incredible and incredibly moving 25-minute last scene in which everyone in Greek drama fashion turns out to be related to each other, to have some information—It's like 25, as Aristotle would say, anagnorises. It's an experience that is so satisfying to the audiences. We're playing to 1100 people a night, and they actually start applauding in the scene as each revelation comes out on a play no one's ever seen, no one knows. There's something underneath there that's very powerful, very ritualistic, very rewarding in a way that is hard to talk about because it's not a particular conscious thing.

Levy: Don't they come from the power of the emotions? You talked about a very cannibalistic image of the witch sort of throwing herself in the oven.

Cattaneo: Well, in *Cymbeline* we have a woman whose husband is banished, and she is pursued by the son of the queen, who chases her into the forest, dressed in her lover's, her husband's clothes. He is decapitated—

Lamos: By her brothers.

Cattaneo: But she doesn't know they're her brothers. His head is brought on and then thrown into water and disappears. Then his headless body is brought on to the stage. You've got to bring it on, and we do. She is asleep with a potion, like many Shakespeare heroines are—Juliet—and she awakes to find the body of what she thinks is her husband, because he's dressed as her husband.

Now, I said to Jack, what is that about?

Lamos: It does sound like a fairy tale, doesn't it? In mourning this headless corpse, the act of mourning elevates the character of the husband, who we know is alive, and actually begins his journey towards wholeness and salvation of some kind. But it's her act of mourning this dead body of the clown villain that starts the journey towards the sort of fulfillment of this coupling at the end of the play. So the simplicity that you were talking about, I thought so interestingly, that's in fairy tales, actually is in this particular play, and it seems to also exist maybe in *Pericles*, another of the romances. One of the things that I've had to deal with in rehearsal is to keep a couple of the leading actors from getting too complex, bringing too much depth to the characters, because it would overload them and take us into a murkier place. Clearly Shakespeare was asking for a slightly more primary colored people, because he was peopling this enormous canvas somehow.

Cattaneo: Because we've only mentioned about a third of the plot. As I said, we assume Shakespeare knew what he was doing.

Should we open this up to some questions?

A: I was listening to your little story at the beginning, and it made me think that the spell is cast by the teller, and how much the teller knows or how much the teller himself creates, not the story itself but the way he tells it. It made me realize also that for the spell to be cast, the listener also casts the spell, just like with *Cymbeline*, when you say that Bernard Shaw said it didn't work. Well, it didn't work for Bernard Shaw. He didn't go with it. But maybe a lot of people did, including this wonderful back page here by Auden, where he describes what Shakespeare did, and, of course, why some great writers stay great or do more. We create the spell, as well as the teller. And like it says here in the introduction, fairy tales originally were not for children. I didn't want to be bothered with *Snow White* when I was a kid, or any of them, but there are others that you really want to cast your own spell from the greatness of whoever is the teller. I thought it was wonderful. It gave me a clue to what this is about that I could really take in. Wouldn't you say that's so?

Zipes: Yeah, as a storyteller I must say that my stories will only work if the audience is receptive or if I have feedback from an audience. I think that's also true with regard to writers, and obviously plays. Every performance is different, depending on the atmosphere. I don't know whether 'casting a spell' is the right word, but I think context is extremely important in terms of writing, telling a tale.

Tatar: I think you've created a kind of contact zone between you and the children who are really creating and collaborating with you.

Zipes: Right.

Tatar: Because you're responding to cues from them.

Zipes: Yes.

Tatar: I love the way you're going back to that oral storytelling tradition, but when you write, of course, you don't have the audience right there. What happens—does the reception of the works affect the next novel?

Napoli: Well, I do have an audience.

Tatar: But you don't have it in front of you. Or do you test out some of your ideas?

Napoli: Oh, yeah, I do. I write my first draft. I write it out loud so I am multiple people. Then I take my first draft and I inflict it on my children, who are savage. And then I rewrite and I bring it and read it to kids, and I listen to what they say.

One of the interesting things about writing, and I'm sure everyone in this room has written many different sorts of things in their life, so you know it, but you don't know it that well. You need to be told it over and over again that you think that what was in your head got on the page, and you don't know what got on the page until you see how other people receive it, and then you realize that they thought it was about a girl and it was about a boy. It completely changes how they took it. When I see a child in the library reading a book of mine, I can't tap him on the shoulder and say, "Hey, you were supposed to laugh there." My chance to know that this is working as funny or not is long before that. So, yeah, I definitely have an audience.

Can I bring this back to something we said earlier?

Zipes: Sure.

Napoli: I've been thinking about this, and I think the difference between a myth and a fairy tale and a religious story is just what kind of term we want to call it. Because I can think of myths and religious stories and fairy tales that deal with a whole range of things, all of them, and I think we call it a myth when we know that it used to be somebody's religion and we don't believe anybody is believing that today, or we think it would be absurd if they believed it. I think we'd call it a religion if we are trying to show at least lip service to some deference for what they might believe. And I think we call it a fairy tale if there aren't gods in it. But they're all the same kind of stories, I think.

Zipes: Yeah, I tend to agree. I think that most of these stories come out of very basic experiences that we've had in nature, in our environment, and depending on the modality in which we want to convey our experience, we tell it in one metaphorical way using certain conventions, and these conventions and motifs and narrative structures and plots have changed and developed over thousands of years, so that even when we tell fairy tales, we use other media, like film and the radio, now the Internet, and of course plays and musicals and operas. I think that why we choose or continue to come back to certain canonical tales is that they are unresolved. Even though they are resolved, they're still unresolved.

For instance, I've written on *Cinderella* recently in which I've tried to understand—I've always looked to a sort of feminist critique talking about the passivity of Cinderella, but really what the story is about is what happens to a child when a mother dies and a non-biological mother comes and maltreats a daughter that's not of her own making, and favors her own children. Now that's very common today, with broken families and single parents or new parents, or sometimes there

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are third marriages and so on. If you do a study of recent children's books, plays, and so on, *Cinderella* is probably the most popular tale in the world right now in terms of redoing it, reexamining it, exploring it. So these are deep-rooted problems that come out of our drives, our instincts, that we store in our memories and work through and keep trying to work through. Because a particular tale is so artistically well done, at a certain point it becomes sort of the focal point that we continue to pass on and disseminate and revisit to try to continue to deal with these problems. As long as the problems remain, we will continue to tell the same tales, I think.

Lamos: I wonder about the differences between myth and these other forms—I really am asking this terrific group of people. In my experience, I've directed some Greek tragedies, and I read *The Aeneid* this year, and if those are based on myths, there is always a god that's doing something. I am in the grip of god X, Y or Z, which is why I want to murder my daughter. Or goddess X is preventing Odysseus from getting there. You know what I'm saying? I know there's a lot in Freud about how these gods are all sort of manifestations of various feelings that we all actually have in ourselves, and yet in myth it's so marvelous that they constantly find themselves. They consider themselves powerless, until the god either tricks them or begins to act in a completely candidly, ridiculous way, and causes this tremendous upheaval: death, murder, war, what have you. You know, the fake Helen of Troy and the real Helen of Troy, some little whim on the part of some wretched god. That to me is what sets those tales apart from the others, where you don't have them. Somebody said you don't have a god in *Snow White* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*, or what have you.

A sidebar to that lengthy adumbration is I remember when I was doing these Greek plays—I did a cycle of them—and my mother had died very suddenly just before I went into rehearsal for these, so clearly there was a lot of catharsis for me, especially, I noticed night after night, working on the play in which Arestes kills his mother. Even now I get chills thinking about how culpable I felt, though obviously I had nothing to do with her death. She died of a stroke in another town, in another state, far, far away. Although, thinking about the fact that she raised somebody who went into the theater—

But, at any rate, I felt completely responsible for her death. In fact, I felt as if I was taking her life as I was mourning her in real life. That seems to be something that myth can make us do somehow in a way that maybe fairy tales can't. I don't know, and I'm just putting that out there.

Levy: We have a patient person waiting.

Q: This is directed, I hope, at Jack Zipes and at Dr. Rahtz as a starter. Raising the issue about the universality of fairy tales, and the origin of fairy tales emerging out of the oral tradition, isn't it fair to see them as events that come from children's minds? I mean this is the Freudian way of seeing it, that these are all out of oedipal conflicts that children—I mean where did the fairy tales come from? They have emerged over the history of mankind, and is it fair to say that perhaps in different societies, if you were to look at the Samoan society, would there be universalities among that spectrum, and are those universalities reflective of understandable oedipal conflicts that all human beings have as they move through that life period with all sorts of ambivalent feelings, all sorts of hostile feelings, all sorts of cannibalistic feelings, et cetera, and those are what intrigue us so much about fairy tales. So my question is about universality, and is it fair to couch them, and I suppose Dr. Rahtz would also know a great deal about that.

Rahtz: Well, I think the question has two parts, a kind of historical part, which I would leave to the scholars, but in terms of the issue of universal fantasies, certainly this is what all of us are all about all the time. And they're not just oedipal issues. They're issues of loss and separation and betrayal and deception and death. They are what I think grabs our interest in so many, let's say, verbal art forms, any representational form of art. The historical question is how did these tales originate. I don't think we can likely say they originated from the mouths of children, but certainly they're from adult people's reworkings of their childhood fantasies and preoccupations and fears and conflicts.

Napoli: Could I?

Zipes: Yeah.

Napoli: When I write stories I often set them in different places and times, and so I've done quite a bit of historical research. I find in the studies that I've done that storytelling, like in the days of the Vikings, was everybody gets together. It's children and adults together. It's not people talking to the children. It's everybody telling a story. There are plenty of societies today where people are still telling stories all the time. One is the Inuit people—you know, it's a long winter, and you all get around together and the children are falling asleep all over people, but people are telling their stories. And in Italy today, in Venice, if you become friends with Venetians, people sit around together and tell stories and they can be the most ribald stories, and children are right there with these stories going on. And it rolls right off them. What they get they get, what they don't get they don't get, and it's just fine.

Lamos: Do they contribute to the stories as well in some way?

Napoli: No, there's a storyteller. There's somebody who's telling it. People may clap, people may take turns, whatever, but usually you don't interrupt the storyteller.

I work a lot with deaf people, and storytelling in deaf culture is a very big deal. I've worked mostly with American deaf people, although I've worked some with Italian deaf people, and I see a difference between American and Italian deaf people in that American deaf people will tell appropriate stories for children, or what we consider to be appropriate in the presence of the children, and it's only when the children leave that they'll get into the other stories. But the Italian deaf culture just does the same thing that the Italian oral culture does. I think we all have oedipal desires or whatever.

Q: One of my colleagues told me a story that when 9/11 occurred, one of his patients, a six year old child, watching television and watching these planes go into the World Trade Tower over and over again, he thought that actually these planes were continuously doing this, and they would do it forever. It raised the question, why in the world was he thinking that? The thing that struck me, and I'd like to have your response to this, is that the reason was he wanted some resolution. He wanted some reassurance about this terrible thing which was threatening his existence. The thought that occurred, not just to me, but to other people—the difference between fairy tales and myths is that fairy tales seek reassurance. They seek a resolution for the person who is reading the fairy tale, so that, for example, there wouldn't have to be a multiple identification for the person to become the witch, to allow herself to be thrown into the fire, but

the reader or the storyteller required that to make peace with one of the issues or fears that every adult and child has about being eaten up, being absorbed and so on. As opposed to having a fairy tale's design to reassure, a myth subsumes what the real issues in the culture are, so that there is this particular difference. I'd like to have your reaction. Is it true that fairy tales are designed to reassure and myths are designed to simply present what the existing real issues are in that particular culture, if not in man?

Zipes: I wouldn't make those distinctions. I'd go back to what Donna Jo said before, that myths really were religious tales. They were connected to a belief system, and the values in the tales reflected what the Greeks believed at that time. Just like today with Christianity, or in any religion that exists today, the stories reflect the values of a particular culture. So that's really what distinguishes the myths—what we call myths today—from the fairy tales.

Now fairy tales have a very complex tradition. There are many different types of what we call 'wonder' oral tales. Some are initiation tales, some are warning tales, some are tales of celebration or acclamation. Some are tales of voyages, where a young woman or a young girl has to find herself and so on. So fairy tales have a fairly wide terrain or spectrum in terms of the many different types. They generally tend to be Pagan. The notion of fairies was to a great extent developed by the Italians, but the French really developed the fairies, and representing, to a certain extent, opposition to the Christian church, the fairies in many French fairy tales, but also European fairy tales, tend to resist the Christianization that was going on in the early part of the 14th—well, in the Medieval Period.

But getting back to the whole question of universality and whether fairy tales are universal—and then you should say something about this as well—yes and no, because the creation tales are just so different depending on the culture, and they don't necessarily have universal application. For instance, there's an Inuit tale that I recently read about a grandmother dying. She's put in a box in a tree, and there's darkness on earth. Nobody can see. A young boy is born after the grandmother dies. He goes and sleeps with the grandmother, and they fornicate and they have a child. The child eventually is a shape shifter and flies up to the sky and combats an old man and a woman to get light to bring back to the earth. Now, that tale would not go over well in America or in other countries. When I've told it to storytellers whom I train, they were so upset with me about the grandmother having sex with this little boy and so on.

The Inuits believe that dead people return through a child that is born almost immediately after the death. It makes perfect sense to the Inuits and so on, and they raise children to deal with death in a much different way than we deal with it. There's a wonderful book by Hugh Brody called *The Other Side of Eden*, all about the Inuit culture and these tales.

So it is true that we can find some universal themes and problems. We're all genetically wired in more or less the same way. We respond to nature in very similar ways, so it's not by chance that we have very universal tales. But I think we also have to remember that there are very peculiar and particular ways that we develop these tales. Maria?

Tatar: Just briefly, because I do want to hear your question, I really liked what you said because I think that myth takes up these cultural contradictions, and never really resolves them. I'm borrowing from Lévi-Strauss here, but fairy tales have that moment of reassurance which makes

them so wonderful for children. Somehow with courage and cunning you can find a way out and you will live happily ever after, you'll be able to get through it. Myth doesn't necessarily send that message. It says you're going to keep repeating the same vexing problems.

Q: Actually, my question is kind of related to what you said. I'm sure most of you are aware, right now at the Museum of Natural History they have an exhibition called 'Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns and Mermaids.' I'm a tour guide there, and I just led a tour of that exhibition today. That's why I'm so interested in this. The working definition that we're using is that a myth is a sacred story of a people, and the definition of sacred is those things that link you to the power of a god or spirits that you believe in. At least what I've found, and we have a lot about the Inuit: the creation story of Sedna and how the sea mammals came, but to me there's a very big difference between fairy tales and myths, because the word 'sacred,' is not just with religion. Sacred has a very specific meaning, and I would like to know how you react to that concept, because that is the definition that we're working with.

Napoli: I think that's just right. Myths and religious stories are one thing and fairy tales are different. I think fairy tales are not just secular. Like Jack said, a lot of the tales, especially the German ones, have witches in them. The witches were the Catholic church's concession to Paganism in order to not turn everyone away from the church, in order to let Catholicism grow.

Q: So they're nuns? That's every Catholic boy's dream come true.

Napoli: Witches were extremely pious people—this is Catholic doctrine through the Middle Ages, through like the 1600s—and the lord would channel power through these people to help them do things, to be healers mainly. They would draw a magic circle around them with something that was blessed by the Pope, and call up a devil and banish that devil from someone to heal somebody, whether it was a mental illness or a physical illness. But if they forgot about the magic circle, if they became so involved in their own power or whatever and stepped outside it, the devil could snatch them, and then they had to work for the devil. So a witch was a very interesting person.

Q: Indeed.

Zipes: But it's not by chance that in the 1960s in the feminist movement a lot of feminist groups started calling themselves witches and tried to rehabilitate the reputation.

A: I'm an MFA student at Towson University in Baltimore. My question for you all is based on my thesis, which is based on fear and paranoia in children in direct connection to childhood literature, such as fairy tales. In specificity, I'm working on an adaptation of the *Shock-headed Peter* series. I was wondering if you could maybe talk about, instead of the good aspects of fairy tales, the fear and paranoia that is inflicted because of these tales. You know, the Grimm's fairy tales were quite violent, in direct opposition to the Disney tales that children are focused on today.

Napoli: You said the *Peter* tales?

Q: The *Shock-headed Peter* tales.

Zipes: *Slovenly Peter*.

Q: Yes. Thank you. For example, in one tale that I wrote already, instead of saying don't suck your thumbs because they'll get infected, it's don't suck your thumbs because the tailor man will come and chop them off. And indeed he does, and Conrad is left bleeding and—

Nersessian: Well, that should cure him from sucking his thumb.

Q: Right.

Nersessian: It seems to me this question relates to a comment you made earlier in distinction to what Roger was saying. I think you said when you write your books you try to convey certain values, and I'm assuming you are saying you try to convey some worthy values. Whereas, if I understood Roger, with children playing that's not an issue. It's expressing whatever is bothering them, and so if they are feeling angry, they'll be more like the bad guy, and if they're feeling something else they'll be more like the others. Children don't have that sense at that point that he's talking about of value.

Napoli: Yeah, maybe I'm misrepresenting myself. I don't try to present a value. I try to face each character's needs and desires honestly, no matter how awful or ridiculous or whatever they may be. I don't have an agenda in terms of trying to teach anything. When we were asking before is a fairy tale to be reassuring and you said that fairy tales are reassuring, I don't know if they all are. As you were saying, I was thinking about the Grimm tales. They do always wind up with poor little Rumpelstiltsken getting his leg ripped off and stuff like that, and the queen gets to keep her baby. He tears himself in two. Richard Peck, a wonderful children's writer, said at a conference I was at once that writers for children cannot traffic in happy endings, because if we do we risk leaving our reader defenseless. I think it's really true. I don't try to resolve everything. I try to leave it, when I'm writing for children, that with good will and hard work you may be able to find a decent way to live within your world. But I don't try to make it that you can win in your world in an external way.

Tatar: I think we've had this fight before. Because I firmly believe—here's where I agree with Bettelheim—that the one requirement for a children's story is that the child survives and triumphs. Obviously this is up to a certain age, but I think children when they're young really need to have that kind of reassurance that you can make it in this world. Not necessarily that you'll get the pot of gold and the prince or the princess and all of that, but that symbolically that pot of gold or prince simply means that you will find a path.

Lamos: I'm puzzled, because I thought there were versions, of *Little Red Riding Hood* for example, where she's devoured and that's it.

Tatar: Yeah, absolutely. And I would say we shouldn't read those versions. We should not read Perrault's version in which the girl gets devoured, end of story, to young children.

Lamos: Then you're not saying they're not fairy tales. They're not the kind that you would advocate people read.

Tatar: Right. I'm moving to a different level, not thinking historically, but—

Cattaneo: We're all children or we have children of our own. I'm just thinking as you're talking, and I have no experience other than I'm a mother, when you read a fairy tale to a child it's a completely different thing that you're perceiving than your child is perceiving. You read about Hansel and Gretel, and all you're thinking is, my God, who would walk these children and leave them by this fire, and your kids aren't thinking like that. Somehow they see it, I don't know, as if they can overcome it, or as an adventure. I think they like the adversity. I think the pain of it somehow isn't disconcerting to them. They don't see it in a real way like you see it.

Lamos: I think it's much healthier if the stories are violent. *Struwwelpeter*, for instance, getting the thumbs chopped off, I found as a kid terrifically satisfying. And frankly, Little Red Riding Hood getting eaten, I thought was just great. Maybe it's because I'm a boy, I don't know, but I thought, yeah, go ahead, eat her. I didn't relate to her at all. I related to her as much as I related to the wolf that chewed her up.

Tatar: I hear what you're saying. When I took my daughter to see *Snow White* when she was very young she loved the wicked queen. She thought she was just great.

Zipes: Well Snow White's boring.

Tatar: But my son would run out of the room whenever there was any sort of violence going on on the screen. So I think you have to sort of take each child, and I suppose some children can handle those tragic endings and be happy.

Zipes: Or find them amusing.

Tatar: Or find them amusing, and then they're therapeutic.

Levy: My wife always talks about the brooms in *Fantasia* that she saw as a child. But why are they so frightening? What are the brooms in *Fantasia*?

Rahtz: Inanimate objects that can—there are fairy tales about inanimate objects that come to life, I'll bet.

Zipes: Many.

Nersessian: I just wanted to ask about the Italy/US deaf. When you said the stories are different, they're more sexual in Italy, or—?

Napoli: Yeah, sure.

Nersessian: More aggressive?

Napoli: You don't censor in front of the children. You just tell a funny story. Very much like the oral tradition. And this oral tradition that I'm talking about, I've never heard it in standard Italian. I've only heard it in dialects. It's sort of like when people get together, and we all know each other. This is our group. And then people can do it.

Nersessian: I ask because I wondered if as parents it is not possible to become anxious and try to put a better ending or better face to these stories, whereas the children, like your reaction, have no problem with it. What they understand they understand and what they don't understand they don't understand.

Lamos: That reminds me of a wonderful tape that Wendy Olesker shows of the mother who is watching her little boy play, and there is clear enjoyment that the boy is having over a violent scene. I think the boy is axing his father or something like that. The mother becomes quite anxious and tries to stop the play. "You don't want to do that. That's not very nice," or something like that. I think that really illustrates what some of the possible intergenerational feedback can be.

Napoli: And I think if we don't give children stories that deal with adversity, sometimes gigantic adversity, that they'll make up those stories themselves. When I first started having children, I wanted very much to have a completely peaceful family. I am a pacifist, and I thought that everything should be that way. I did not allow my oldest son to have a gun. Well, he would take an apple and bite it until it was in the shape of a gun.

Levy: That's great.

Napoli: I finally had to understand that children need guns because you can't have a war without them. They've got to have wars. I never bought them guns, but I wound up no longer crushing them when people gave them to them.

Tatar: That's true. You need conflict and violence, and children have to work through that, but the question is what about the child dying in the story? That's the issue that I have. I wonder if young children can really handle that.

Zipes: I think that if we go back and examine how people told stories with children always around, and it was always the adults telling the stories, they told them any story. They used curse words, gestures of all kinds, and whether the children understood or didn't understand, it didn't matter. They were within that community. These were stories that were shared, and they knew even though the tales might be violent that there was a certain security, and that the tale might have some sort of meaning depending on their age, that they would eventually figure it out.

Tatar: But Jack, I'm sure that you have also talked to dozens of German men who have been traumatized by the thumbs being lopped off in that story.

Zipes: Not really. No.

Tatar: We're both in the field of German literature, but I've just heard so many stories—

Zipes: All I know is that when my daughter was born I put a sign above the cradle that said, "Life Is Unfair." I mean, let's face it.

Tatar: It's violent, yeah.

Zipes: And so the stories I used to tell my daughter, who is still alive today—

Rahtz: But deeply traumatized.

Zipes: They varied. Some ended happily, some didn't end happily. In other words, she saw that there were different possibilities in things. I never really wanted to blind her to the fact of—

Tatar: No, no, no. Again, violence is okay. The death of the villain is okay. But the death of the child for a four year old is tough to—. But we have questions.

Q: First, a comment on the way to a question, I think. An important hallmark of primitive or childlike thinking in psychoanalysis is the omnipotence of thought, which provides on the one hand a link between myths and fairy tales, and also in dreams, because it's a weigh station between reality and fantasy. But it's a distinction in terms of fairy tales and myths in that myths are for older people to explain their—. Even very religious people maybe don't believe literally in a Job, for instance, but children when they hear *Little Red Riding Hood*, it's still pitched to a level of somewhere between fantasy and reality. So it allows them, I think, to work through things that they're feeling already, but without it being either quite in reality or in fantasy, which is a distinction from religious thought later. I think that's part of what explains their power and their function.

Nersessian: That was a comment.

Q: That was more a comment.

Levy: Do we have another?

Q: I have a short comment, then a question. I know some German men who have given their children *Struwwelpeter* recently. I'm sorry to say. I tried to stop it, but I couldn't.

Levy: What did they give them?

Q: That book about Peter.

Nersessian: But left their thumbs intact?

Q: No, they didn't actually chop off their thumbs. That is true. What are those tales called? They're not fairy tales. Are they called horrifying tales, reverse fairy tales?

Tatar: Cautionary tales?

Q: But now comes my question: at what point historically did fairy tales get happy endings? They certainly didn't always have them. And it certainly was not a concern about how the child would feel upon hearing that the child died in a fairy tale, so I'd like to know where that switch occurred.

Zipes: That's a wonderful question. We don't know. What we do know is that tales of all kinds were told with children present, and so it is the context. I don't think it's the tale. Tales can be very effective, whether they are gruesome and horrific or optimistic and utopian, and so I think that quite often it will depend on the parent or adult and the context in which the tale is being

told to a child. We're talking now mainly about children. I'm thinking of *Pan's Labyrinth*, I don't know how many of you have seen that tale, where a child is experiencing fascism firsthand, and using the fairy tale, her imagination, to cope with this. She actually has very horrific tales that she's telling herself in order to overcome the whole problem of atrocity and sadism.

I have a lot of trouble when we talk about children or the child in the abstract, because the whole notion of childhood and the child continues to change up through the present day. We treat children as objects and consumers. We no longer treat them as human beings. So the psyches of our children and their problems have changed immensely. My childhood was so radically different from my daughter's that I have difficulty talking about childhood, because the meanings have shifted. I think that we as adults, in whatever our professions are, have to be attentive to the fact that generalizations don't work. We have to pay very careful attention to the stories that we tell, why we tell them, what we expect in certain situations. I think that we also have to be very, very careful about how we talk about children and how they receive things, because we don't really know most of the time.

Lamos: It's funny, because the one book of myths that we haven't addressed here is *The Bible*, where you've got some of the scariest, creepiest, most violent stories on earth, whether you're a Christian, a Jew, whatever you happen to be. If you are into *The Bible*, you've got guys nailed to crosses, you've got women impregnated by God and told by angels that they are so, you've got David and Goliath, a classic fairy tale story. You've got all kinds of mythic nuttiness going on, and a great deal of anger and a great deal of violence, aligned with teaching, which is one of the great liberating things about fairy tales, which seem to me never to teach anything. And in so doing, they can be liberating in their violence, or liberating in their—

Levy: Well that was a wonderful question she made about when this change—pertaining to your question, also, because there were many crucifixions before the resurrection.

Tatar: Well, and I think also *Rose Blanche*, which is a kind of *Little Red Riding Hood* story, but the girl brings bread to the inmates of a concentration camp, to other children, and then when she goes back a second time discovers they're not there and she's shot. She dies at the end of the story. This is a picture book for children. I don't know whether you know about its reception in Italy when it was first published.

Zipes: No, except that it's considered a classic.

Rahatz: When was it first published?

Tatar: I think it was in the '80s. Then of course we have this whole genre of stories along the lines of *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Walk Two Moons*, where there's death and—

Zipes: Isn't there also evidence in the concentration camp—was it Terezin—where a lot of children were incarcerated and led to death, but they left a huge amount of pictures.

Levy: Terezin, yeah.

Zipes: The storytelling, and working out the trauma of what they were living in and creating these sort of silvery beautiful tales of hopefulness and—

Q: I want to ask a minor question to Donna Jo Napoli, but first I want to make a little comment about what I think is a whole new genre, and that's Holocaust kids. I think there's a steady readership of children who want to read about that time in history, and there are some very good books about it, but there are also some really exploitive things, like *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which I have to say I haven't read, but I looked at it and I believe it's about a boy who was the son of a commandant of a concentration camp, and he makes friends with this little kid behind the fence who was wearing striped pajamas, and he can't figure out what is going on. It sounds like a terrible amount of bullshit to me, but I didn't want to talk about that. I'm also a children's writer, and I admire Richard Peck, and I was very intrigued by your quote that he said happy endings risk leaving readers defenseless, which really intrigues me. I was wondering if you would say a little more about that, because I can't figure it out. Happy endings are very tempting and we all have to try to avoid them in one way or another. But what did he mean exactly?

Napoli: I visit a lot of schools, and when I go to third graders, I will ask them to tell me a book. "Find a book in your head that was read to you this year or that you read that you really wish your best friend could read. And now tell me why. Don't tell me about the book. Tell me why you want your friend to read it." And they will say, "Because it will make her cry," or, "It will make her laugh," or, "It will make her scared," or, "She'll never be able to figure it out," or whatever. It's not because they're third graders. It's because they're readers. We go to fiction in order to have a vicarious experience, and there's all different kinds of vicarious experiences. I think you can write funny books and happy books and sentimental books, and scary books, and completely absurd scary books so that they're not really scary. They're phony scary, like a lot of children's books are. And then really scary books, too. The question is what do you do?

I think what Richard Peck was talking about was you don't just slap a happy ending onto a book. I don't want to reveal the book that I'm talking about now, because I don't want to say anything bad about fellow children's authors, but let's say that it's a time when marriages are arranged, and you have to get married to this really hideous old man who is a nasty piece of work. So you have him drop dead, and his younger brother who's really delightful you get to marry instead. Well, that's trafficking in happy endings. You said 'bullshit.' This is pernicious bullshit, because if you're going to set it in a realistic place, a realistic time, you're really dealing with it. Then let's face what this little girl had to deal with because there are a lot of children today who need to know that you can face horrible things and you can still find a way to live decently, even if it's only inside your head. There are so many things that are happening behind closed doors, not just in poor families, in all kinds of families. We are writing for everyone. We are not just writing for the child who is a protected child.

Q: That's a very inspiring answer. I will try to remember it. Thank you.