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## **Gold into Straw: Fairy Tale Movies for Children and the Culture Industry**

Donald P. Haase

Following the jubilee of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1987, it seems not only proper but useful to begin a consideration of fairy tale cinema for children by recalling some of the controversy surrounding Disney's influential fairy tale adaptations. In 1964 Frances Clarke Sayers articulated one of the most famous and most trenchant criticisms of Disney's adaptations of traditional fairy tales. Her primary complaint was that Disney destroyed "the proportion in folk tales" (177). Sayers argued that "folklore is a universal form, a great symbolic literature which represents the folk. It is something that came from the masses, not something that is put over on the masses. These folk tales have a definite structure. From the folk tale, one learns one's role in life; one learns the tragic dilemma of life, the battle between good and evil, between weak and strong. One learns that if he is kind, generous, and compassionate, he will win the Princess. The triumph is for all that is good in the human spirit" (117–18). Disney, Sayers maintained, distorted this moral purpose and proportion by sweetening the folktale: "He misplaces the sweetness and misplaces the violence, and the result is like soap opera, not really related to the great truths of life" (124).

"The great truths of life . . ."—inherent in Sayers' critique is the popular belief that folk and fairy tales teach timeless truths. This notion, which is shared by celebrated scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim,<sup>1</sup> privileges the "original" text of a fairy tale because of its alleged nearness to the folk tradition and its pristine expression of timeless values and truths. While Sayers is correct that Disney distorts Grimms' "Snow White," this is not so because the original text's eternal verities have been destroyed. It contained no such eternal truths to begin with. Like any cultural document, Grimms' "Snow White" reflects the specific values of its creator—or in this case creators. Because the Grimms were involved in the active editing and rewriting of tales that had already passed through many transmitters, who in turn filtered them through their own social and moral consciousness, their stories—which are only in a very limited sense "original" folktales—are layered repositories of diverse sociohistorical and moral realities.



*Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Illustrator: Charles Folkard. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1911.

In an iconoclastic essay on the development of the fairy tale, Rudolf Schenda not only states this view succinctly but draws some radical conclusions about the role of the fairy tale in modern media and in the contemporary marketplace. He observes that fairy tales are neither timeless nor ahistorical, but rather incorporate

local color and reference to social conditions, especially concerning children, and are full of peasant world views and biographical bits; they are influenced, furthermore, by the norms and value judgments of bourgeois editors, for instance, with reference to paternal authority, acceptance of poverty, or the punishment of criminals. In a word, fairy tales have their specific, historical frame of reference. And because that is so, as one recognizes more and more today, it is utterly incomprehensible why fairy tale texts from a specific historical framework, which deal with communal work and communal social facts of a particular milieu and which were

once the cultural possession of the people, should be torn from their frame of reference and served up to children in every possible counterfeit form . . . . (81)

Schenda further argues that because the contemporary child's problems are different from those addressed by suffering heroes and magical helpers in traditional tales, their pedagogical, therapeutic value is suspect:

Fairy tales offer children . . . such a thick packet of long outdated familial, social, and conjugal norms that their divergence from actual patterns of living can lead to powerful disorientation. In contemporary reality more and more children deal not with happy weddings but with marriages gone to pieces and unmarried siblings. Children of today hear and read about emancipated women and about feminist ideas, and they see the old patriarchal roles falling apart. (88–89)

All this leads Schenda to a radical conclusion:

If one must bring older children together with fairy tales, then one should leave the text in their unbowdlerized, original form, as they were at the time they were originally written down, to the extent that that can still be determined. If children alone or together with their teachers do not know what to make of such authentic texts, then one should consider whether or not the entire secondary production of fairy tales in books and on tapes, for example, as well as fairy tale pedagogy, should not be given a decent burial. (90)

In contemporary debate over fairy tales, the positions of Schenda and Sayers reflect the two opposing views—one recognizing the historical relativity of the tales and their values, the other assuming their timelessness. Interestingly, despite their opposite assumptions about the value and content of the fairy tale, both Schenda and Sayers advocate allegiance to the “original” text, albeit for contradictory reasons. Still, many contemporary adaptors of traditional tales often depart from the Grimm text, just as the Grimms themselves revised their sources in their own way, despite their claims to be conservators of the original folk tradition. For example, the earliest version of “Rumpelstiltskin” recorded by the Grimms in their notes tells of a young girl who faces a problem radically different from the one faced by the miller's daughter in their published version: given flax to spin into yarn, she is only able to produce gold.<sup>2</sup> She is helped out of this dilemma by promising her first born child to a little man who in turn promises that a prince (who appears only in name) will marry her and take her away. The version ultimately published by the Grimms relies on other variants and turns not on the predicament of a female with such Midas-like power but instead on the girl's inadequacy

and her victimization by three men: her father, the king, and Rumpelstiltskin. While we might see in this transformation evidence of Wilhelm Grimm's patriarchal editorial hand, Wilhelm himself surely saw no betrayal of his original text. For the Grimms, fidelity to the original meant fidelity to motifs: since the motif of spinning straw into gold remained intact, more or less, the original was well preserved.

But the structure and combination of motifs have, of course, profound thematic and ideological consequences. Recognizing this, some revisionists of traditional materials purposely deviate from Grimms' original tales. Their purpose is to subvert the traditional motifs and structures in order to destroy stereotypical fairy tale roles and expectations, and to put forth new paradigms of behavior and relations of power. This has been typical among feminist editors and writers of fairy tales, for instance, who are sensitive to the patriarchal ethos of many traditional tales.<sup>3</sup> Other purveyors of fairy tale media for children will often update the setting of fairy tales in order to make their ostensibly eternal values more relevant to a modern child's experience, as if there were no connection between form and content. When it comes to film adaptations, the problem of the relationship between original written text and the visual counterpart is especially problematic, for a number of reasons. For one, there is the factor of viewer expectation. The normative influences of Disney's animated fairy tales has been so enormous, that the Disney spirit—already once removed from the originals—tends to become the standard against which fairy tale films are created *and* received. Secondly, film adaptations—especially those relying on live actors and not animation—must concretize the abstract, one-dimensional nature of the original fairy tale.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true of feature-length films, which must expand the brief episodes narrated in fairy tales into longer—and presumably—fuller, more concrete scenes. There are other complicating and compromising factors as well, but in the space remaining here, I will focus on several filmic versions of Grimms' tales to explore the thematic consequences of film adaptations and what this reveals about the relationship of film, fairy tale, ideology, and the culture industry.

David Irving's 1987 G-rated, feature-length musical version of *Rumpelstiltskin* is explicitly based on Grimms' well-known tale. Despite the Grimm source, however, Irving's film transforms several important motifs, some of which suggest that the film seeks to restore a sense of power to the Grimms' initially victimized heroine. This apparent attempt at introducing a liberated perspective into the film occurs not through changes in the motif of spinning straw into gold—that motif remains unchanged—rather it occurs through interpolations late in the story during the climactic

confrontation with Rumpelstiltskin over the first-born son of the new princess. Unlike Grimms' heroine, who learns the name needed to dissolve her contract with the little man from a messenger she had sent forth to inquire around the country, Irving's princess is aided by a new figure: a mute servant girl named Emily.

Although she is introduced inconspicuously only midway through the film, Emily's role is crucial, if somewhat contrived. Having befriended a mischievous black bird, who acts as companion to Rumpelstiltskin, by freeing it from a curtain rope in which it had become entangled, Emily is startled awake on the final day of the reprieve granted by Rumpelstiltskin to the voice of the bird giving her the little man's name. Rushing to the baby's nursery, Emily—after considerable effort—manages to articulate the name, thereby enabling Katy—the princess—to foil the designs of Rumpelstiltskin, who descends amid great squealing into a burning pit resembling hell. While the role of speechless Emily is completely contrived, shamelessly designed to tug at our heart strings and intended to appeal to the heroic imaginations of children, who can identify with her more readily than with the adult princess, her critical contribution to the film's happy ending does recall that first Grimm version of the tale where it is a female servant who helps the young mother outwit the little man. That the film intends us to discern a liberated moral from this denouement is obvious in the words of the princess, uttered as a bewildered prince arrives in the nursery—too late to be of any help. Asked what had happened, Katy replies: "Nothing Emily and I couldn't handle. . . . When you're good and smart and kind of heart, there's nothing you can't win."

Yet despite this new character and new twist, the intended message of strength, female solidarity, and liberation falls victim to the film's more powerful ethos, which relies largely, I think, on the Disney model. Put what didactic messages one will into Katy's mouth in the final scene, what the film shows us about her character belies the heroine's apparent transformation. The fact remains that until that point she has been portrayed as a traditionally helpless heroine in the Disney mold, and she has done nothing herself to realize her own strength or resolve her own situation. Even in that final scene she personally has done nothing that contributes to her triumph over Rumpelstiltskin other than *be* befriended herself by Emily (much in the way that Snow White is befriended and aided by her own childlike little creatures—the dwarfs and the speechless forest animals).

The Disney influence becomes even more apparent when we consider another telling transformation undertaken by Irving. Whereas the Grimm tale has a single king who puts the miller's daughter to the test and

ultimately marries her for her apparent skill at spinning straw into gold, Irving bifurcates the role, creating a greedy, materialistic king who seeks to exploit the rare talent of his subject and his son—the prince—who falls in love with Katy during the first scene. Like the princely heroes in Disney's *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, this prince comes upon his beautiful future bride earlier than in the literary versions and falls in love with her as—out of sight—he watches her sing of her longing for love. Katy, too, sings her version of “Someday My Prince Will Come.” And come he does, to promise to protect her from all harm and to take her hand in marriage. While it is true that Katy's prince, despite his promise, does very little to help her out of her predicaments, it is nonetheless also true that she becomes increasingly dependent upon him (and Rumpelstiltskin). Faced three times with the impossible test of spinning straw into gold, she cries first for her father, then for Rumpelstiltskin, and finally enters into the contract for her child with Rumpelstiltskin on the third night because she remembers the prince's promise to protect her. When she has passed all three tests and is wed to the prince, he praises neither her skill nor her cunning, but instead sings her praises for having “proved her worth” and for being a “loyal and true” subject—a subject, remember, of his abusive father! In every way, she has submitted herself willingly to male authority, on which she depends, in the same way as Disney's heroines. In short, in order to appeal to audience expectations, to provide the occasion for musical numbers, and to flesh out the storyline for a feature-length film, Irving transforms the story of “Rumpelstiltskin” into a love story. And the model for transforming the fairy tale of growth, power, and conflict into a tale of romantic love is Disney, whose structures of patriarchal authority and feminine passivity conflict with and triumph over Irving's apparently progressive intentions.

A less generous view of Irving's film might suggest that his Disney-inspired adaptation has co-opted threatening feminist ideas and disarmed them for a middle-class audience. Writing on cinematic adaptations of literature, Charles Eidsvik has argued that “adaptations keep the middle class in shape. The middle class has always relied on being able to co-opt fringe fantasies; the ability to co-opt is necessary to its survival. Hollywood, as the mouthpiece of middle-classness, must be able to co-opt whatever artistic ideas are new and dangerous, if middle-class fantasies are to be kept safe. By turning dangerous books into Consumer Romance (the genre which subsumes most Hollywood genres) our institutions are protected” (260). In the case of Irving's *Rumpelstiltskin*, feminist consciousness and solidarity have been given a certain amount of lip service, but in the end feminist ideas are rendered meaningless by the tale's transformation into the familiar and acceptable Consumer Romance.

Against the background of the original tale's sociohistorical meaning, Irving's disarming transformation of "Rumpelstiltskin" into Consumer Romance becomes even clearer. Maria Tatar has noted that "few tales in the Grimms' collection are so crass as 'Rumpelstiltskin' in depicting purely economic motives for marriage" (124), for it is only her apparent economic value and nothing else that makes the miller's daughter desirable to the king. In making two characters out of the original monarch, Irving divorces the theme of economic exploitation from the motif of marriage and thereby creates a disarming and appealing myth of marriage based on romantic love. And by ultimately ignoring the king's economic exploitation of his subjects (which had been a significant theme of the film's first half) the film plays with but finally withdraws its criticism of a power structure that views human beings merely in economic terms. Moreover, as a spinning tale depicting social advancement without the difficult and disfiguring labor of spinning itself, "Rumpelstiltskin" originally implied a subversion of the work ethic and was in part a liberating fantasy for females.<sup>5</sup> Because this historical dimension of the spinning tales is largely foreign to modern readers, Irving creates a heroine who is characterized as a lazy dreamer and whose liberation comes not simply in the form of social advancement and emancipation from arduous labor, but in the form of romantic love.

A recent (1985) animated version of the Rumpelstiltskin tale written by Alan Templeton and Mary Crawford predictably romanticizes the relationship between the king and miller's daughter, but it effectively incorporates a touch of feminism that gives the woman more depth than Irving's counterfeit heroine. While this miller's daughter is also associated with a cute natural creature—a dove—that in this case, too, reveals the dwarf's name, she manages ultimately to defy the Disney mold. Most remarkable is her assertive speech. When her father apologizes that his daughter's "voice gets ahead of her mind," and the king replies that "many of us chatter on like empty-headed magpies," she shocks both men by objecting: "Your Majesty, the suggestion that my thoughts are of little use to anyone upsets me." Secondly, she explicitly displays an autonomy that sets her far apart from her celluloid sisters. When the king offers her his heart, his love, and the throne as queen if she will marry him, the miller quickly responds for his daughter: "We accept!" She, however, rebukes him sharply and asserts her autonomy: "Father!" (To the king:) "I will consider your offer of marriage very carefully." Such independence on the part of the miller's daughter redefines the romantic love that has become part of the modern fairy tale and challenges our conventional expectations of female behavior in the fairy tale.<sup>6</sup>

Liberating a fairy tale from the Disney model, however, does not ensure



a liberating fairy tale. A case in point is Tom Davenport's award-winning *Frog King* (1981), which is neither a feature film nor a descendant of Disney's fairy tale family. A live action adaptation of the Grimm tale, Davenport's 15-minute film—as well as others in his innovative series *From the Brothers Grimm*—is marketed mainly to teachers and librarians for use with children.<sup>7</sup> Its plot remains very close to the original Grimm tale and even includes the appended episode concerning Iron Henry, which many literary versions of the tale omit. Moreover, Davenport seeks to instill no contemporary messages or ideology in his film, but he does attempt to restate the original tale in visual terms more familiar to American audiences. As it reads in his producer's catalog, "the films translate the deceptively simple language of the original folktales into highly-charged screen images set in an American landscape" (*Film & Video*, inside cover). In other words, Davenport transforms—translates—the motifs and feudal settings of the original tales into images from American culture. In the case of *The Frog King*, the Grimm tale is now set in late nineteenth-century America and takes place on the estate of a wealthy capitalist, who replaces the original king.

In resetting and concretizing the story, Davenport has remained faithful to the essential themes and relationships depicted in the original Grimm tale. However, in concretizing the milieu and in *showing* us how characters act and react with each other—through their expressions and gestures—he gives us more information than the fairy tale itself offers. As a consequence, his adaptation is not simply a translation of the Grimm text, but an interpretation of it.

For instance, while the original fairy tale's representation of the young girl's relationship to paternal authority is articulated simply in the sparse dialogue exchanged between the king and his daughter, the film shows us the stern, authoritarian demeanor of the industrialist father and the submissive behavior of the daughter. There is a strong element of the taming of the shrew depicted in this confrontation between father and daughter, which betrays the film's inherent anti-feminist point of view. At first bemused by his daughter's reaction to the frog, the father assumes a condescending attitude toward her. When she protests, however, he cuts off her words with stern looks and sharp rebukes, which effectively silence her. The dinner guests appear equally bemused as the daughter is rebuked into submission and silent humiliation.

Moreover, flanked by a clergyman at the dinner table, the father's patriarchal authority is overdefined so that the young girl is rendered absolutely powerless. Discussing the sociohistorical values inherent in Grimms' original tales, Maria Tatar observes that "in a fairy tale such

as ‘The Frog King or Iron Heinrich,’ the paternalistic authority of kings is sacred” (121). In Davenport’s film, authority rests with the clergy and the father/industrialist—who is, significantly, called a king by the film’s narrator. This constellation of authority figures—father, industrialist, clergyman, king—and the concomitant equation of capitalistic and feudal power merge into a powerful dramatic statement that goes even beyond the Grimm text and reinterprets the symbolism of a king as it would be understood by contemporary children.

The industrialist as authoritarian figure not only reinforces and expands the patriarchal potential of the original tale, but also contradicts the lesson Davenport tries to teach with his tale. In the *Guide for Teachers* that accompanies the series, it is stated that “the most important thing about the tale may be the way the princess *treats* the frog” (*From the Brothers Grimm*, grades 10–12, 9), which refers of course to the girl’s mistreatment of the frog. Her mistreatment of the frog is frowned upon by her father, and it is he who requires of her proper sympathetic and respectful behavior. Whether a late nineteenth-century industrialist should be presented as a model of integrity, sympathy, and compassion may be debatable; but it is clear that in concretizing the scenes in which the father appears, Davenport has—perhaps unwittingly—surrounded him with visual messages that absolutely subvert the moral integrity he is clearly intended to have. When not admonishing his daughter to treat the frog with proper respect, he is conversing with his dinner guest about the wild animal heads which hang as trophies about the room, and which we must take as signs of his hypocrisy. Worse still, in the background stand the industrialist’s human trophies—his black servants, a sign of the film’s accurate recreation of the historical setting, to be sure; but also subversive evidence of the real nature of the father’s authority.

It would be one thing if this film were meant to be subversive and had recast the Grimm tale in these visual terms in order to expose the duplicity of paternal and capitalistic power and morality. After all, the treatment of the fairy tale generally in the twentieth century has been marked by “the tendency to confront the fairy-tale world through humor, irony, or satire with a more realistic analysis” (Mieder, “Grim Variations” 7). In fact, because it deals symbolically with the relations of power in the family and society, Grimms’ “Frog King” is frequently found in literary and mass-media adaptations that “question the truth of the tale by secularizing and demythologizing its symbolic content.”<sup>8</sup> Viewing folktales as the embodiment of “wisdom and ageless qualities,” Davenport does not seek to question or subvert the structures of power depicted in the original tale (Davenport, “Some Personal Notes” 115). To the contrary,

he intends to remain true to the ethos of the Grimms' tale; and his identification of a feudal structure with that of American capitalism (e.g., king = industrialist) is meant as a positive restatement of the original and not as the devastating commentary it actually becomes. As it is, the layer of self-irony is accidental, and the film, despite itself, subverts its own morality.

In contrast to Davenport's film, Eric Idle's *Tale of the Frog Prince* (1982) very clearly sets out to undermine stereotypical fairy tale motifs and to expose the dubious power structures on which tales such as "The Frog King" are built. The traditional equation of beauty with virtue, for instance, is humorously undone when the king warns his daughter: "You mustn't associate beauty with virtue. That's a common error. On the whole the beautiful are the most vain, selfish, thoroughly unpleasant people on the planet. No, no, no. When it comes to trust, give me an ugly little brute any time." And Idle's king is not portrayed as a sacred paternal authority, but rather as someone who knows all too well the power of his subjects. Instead of simply demanding that his daughter keep her word to the frog, as is usually the case, the king has a fireside chat with the princess in which he lays out explicitly how trust is both the basis of their functioning society and his own authority. It is not, however, a didactic sermon full of platitudes; rather, it is for the viewer an ironic analysis of power and the ultimate vulnerability of the ruling classes. Having established that the social order is based on trust and that the royal family could not function without those below them in the structure, the king concludes: "Now if these people see that you, a king's daughter, cannot keep her word to a little frog who helped her out, how long do you think it will be before they realize that not only are you not to be trusted, you're not needed? And once they've figured that out, how long do you think your pretty neck will remain on your lovely shoulders?" So whereas Davenport's film actually *reconstructs* the feudal ethos in more modern images and thereby perpetuates the myth of patriarchal power, Idle's "Frog King" adaptation acts as a commentary on social politics and seeks to *deconstruct* the same repressive myth.

Despite the encouraging tendencies seen in some films, however, fairy tale movies for children are generally very conventional and of low quality. To be sure, very provocative and highly successful film adaptations of fairy tales are possible—I mention only Cocteau's *La belle et la bête* (1946) and Angela Carter and Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984), a controversial adaptation of "Little Red Riding Hood" based on Carter's literary version. But—like even Idle's *Tale of the Frog Prince* in some respects—these are adult, not children's films; and the irony that

exists in such films is intentional, part of their success. Among the successful cinematic adaptations of fairy tales intended primarily for young audiences (as well as adults) are films such as *The Neverending Story* (1984) and *The Princess Bride* (1987); but these are based on more recent fairy tale *novels* and not on the classic fairy tale itself. With well-developed characters, extensive plots, and a contemporary sense of irony, these stories lend themselves perhaps more easily to successful adaptation than the classic tales. However, the generally low quality of fairy tale films for children results not simply from the apparent incompatibility of the classic tale and film as a visual medium. More significant, I think, is the relationship between children and the growing industry of fairy tale films and videos. Douglas Street has noted how from the birth of cinema, makers of children's films, "appreciating the profits to be had from a loyal family audience . . . soon capitalized on the potential success to be had from the richness of the juvenile literary outpouring" (13). Today, when video cassette players in the home have created an entirely new market for children's films, the culture industry has not grown any less appreciative of the profits to be had from these same audiences, whose expectations of fairy tale cinema have been shaped largely by Disney. By adapting familiar tales and a popular genre to a proven formula, the children's film industry creates an easily recognized commodity for a receptive market. As a consequence, a glut of fairy tale videos currently exists in which those of poor quality far outnumber the good.

That a number of film and video fairy tales are produced and packaged as *series* attests to the easy marketability of the fairy tale as commodity. There is, for example, Shelley Duvall's *Fairie Tale Theatre*, a very uneven yet extremely popular collection of adaptations of classic folk and fairy tales (among which Eric Idle's *Tale of the Frog Prince* is exceptional).<sup>9</sup> Even David Irving's *Rumpelstiltskin* is just one of several fairy tale adaptations in Cannon's *Movie Tales* series. Including low quality feature-length adaptations of *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, Cannon's *Movie Tales* seem to have been produced specifically with an eye to the children's home video market.<sup>10</sup> And, of course, there is Davenport Films' series *From the Brothers Grimm*. While I have reservations about the quality of this series, in contrast to others it does make a serious attempt to understand the genre and produce innovative film adaptations of fairy tales for children. Unfortunately, good intentions are not enough.

Given the industry's success with fairy tale films and videos, as well as the technological advances that continue to enhance their broad marketability, it would be impossible to take Schenda's suggestion seriously

that the media fairy tale be given a decent burial. My critical view of the fairy tale films currently available for children does not bring me to endorse the suggestion of Schenda and Sayers that we rely only on the original texts of the classical tales; nor am I ready to call in the undertaker. Fairy tale movies are imbedded in our culture, and—as Wolfgang Mieder points out—“children for many generations to come will continue to be enchanted by them . . . carrying with them consciously or subconsciously some of the archetypal motifs and structures contained in the fairy tales” (“Grim Variations” 5). Recognizing this, however, we need to understand how and why our children are being enchanted. And we need to understand the values informing the motifs and structures that children will carry with them.

Unless children’s films are freed from what Jack Zipes has called “the spell of commodity production” (*Breaking the Magic Spell* xi), they will continue in large measure to conform to the Disney model and the safe fantasies of Consumer Romance. And unless they are created with a more profound understanding of the fairy tale as genre and with insight into both the emancipatory and the repressive ideologies inherent in the classic tales, they will merely dress up outdated values in new clothes. Our new visual technologies must be used to create new fairy tales of vision. Until then, filmmakers may continue to exploit traditional tales to fill their own coffers with gold while our children are simply spinning gold into straw.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Bruno Bettelheim contends that adaptors like Disney “make it difficult to grasp the story’s deeper meaning correctly” (210n). The controversy over Disney’s fairy tale adaptations has been most recently entered by Lucy Rollin, who curiously lumps feminists, Marxists, and Bruno Bettelheim all together and seeks to discredit their critiques of Disney by labelling them “elitist,” by defining their diverse objections to Disney as a fearful reaction to the power of his popular moral vision, and by suggesting that such critics are unwittingly practicing moral criticism in the guise of esthetic criticism. My own reading of Disney and of the critics cited by Rollin suggests that these arguments and the labels she applies seriously distort and oversimplify important issues.

<sup>2</sup>Rölleke 379–80. The earliest version is from an April 1808 correspondence of Jacob Grimm’s with Karl Friedrich von Savigny. See also the 1810 version (238–40), which is in essence the same. The beginning of this early tale is translated into English in Tatar 125. The final version of the tale, which is the best known and forms the basis of the films discussed later in this paper, is number 55 in the Grimms’ seventh edition of 1857 (Grimm 1: 285–88; English translation in Zipes, *Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* 209–12).

<sup>3</sup>See the critical essays and stories in Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince*. For discussions of the subversive nature of modern adaptations of Grimms' tales see Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 59–67; and Mieder, "Grim Variations."

<sup>4</sup>On the one-dimensionality, depthlessness, and abstract style of fairy tales see Max Lüthi 4–36. See also Eberhard Ockel 21–22, whose discussion of the problems inherent in creating audio-versions of traditional fairy tale texts applies in some degree to the issues involved in concretizing the same texts in film adaptations.

<sup>5</sup>Tatar 123–33. The sociohistorical background of the Grimms' tale is also discussed by Röhrich, "Rumpelstilzchen" 280–91.

<sup>6</sup>This *Rumpelstiltskin* significantly modifies still other conventional aspects of the tale. For instance, the miller's daughter does not actually enter into a bargain for her child with the dwarf; on the third night, after spinning the straw into gold, Rumpelstiltskin simply declares that he will take her first child. In addition, both the tests to which the woman is put by the king and the guessing of the dwarf's name are frequently alluded to as "games," perhaps subtly suggesting something of the capricious exploitation which she experiences at the hands of men. Radical literary treatments of "Rumpelstiltskin" are discussed by Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 177–82; and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 64–66.

<sup>7</sup>The series even has a guide for teachers: *From the Brothers Grimm: American Versions of Folktale Classics. Guide for Teachers*. In 1986 and 1987 the series was broadcast by many public television stations as part of the nationwide Instructional Television (ITV) programming for use in schools. Davenport Films also publishes a newsletter, whose purpose, according to the editor and publisher, "is to support our popular film and instructional television series" and "to stimulate the uses of enchantment in the classroom, library, and home by publishing articles and information on folk/fairy tales and storytelling in general" (*From the Brothers Grimm: Newsletter* 1).

<sup>8</sup>Mieder, "Grim Variations" 14. Subversive literary and mass-media variants of "The Frog King" are also discussed by Mieder, "Modern Anglo-American Variants"; and Röhrich, "Der Froschkönig."

<sup>9</sup>Approximately an hour in length, the tales in Duvall's series are suited intentionally for television. Perhaps motivated by the success of fairy tale series in the home video market, the American television industry has recently rediscovered the genre and made room for several prime time series based on fairy tales: e.g., *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Storyteller*, and—less an adaptation than an extended fairy tale allusion—*The Charmings*.

<sup>10</sup>The early April 1987 review of *Rumpelstiltskin* in *Variety* noted: "Rumpelstiltskin, the fairy tale, is now 'Rumpelstiltskin' the motion picture, the first of Cannon's *Movie Tales* to be released. The Cannon folks must believe any coin to be made is in video, because this effort is skedded to be in the stores by June. Apparently their hunch is right, since it's unlikely any child much over five is going to find this spellbinding entertainment" (Brit.).

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