

Bryn Mawr College

Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

German Faculty Research and Scholarship

German

2011

Barometers of GDR Cultural Politics: Contextualizing the DEFA Grimm Adaptations

Qinna Shen

Bryn Mawr College, qshen@brynmawr.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/german_pubs



Part of the [German Language and Literature Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Citation

Shen, Qinna 2011. Barometers of GDR Cultural Politics: Contextualizing the DEFA Grimm Adaptations. *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*. Vol. 25, No. 1. Detroit: Wayne State University Press: 70-95.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College.
https://repository.brynmawr.edu/german_pubs/17

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

Barometers of GDR Cultural Politics

Contextualizing the DEFA Grimm Adaptations

From its first adaptation of the Grimms' "Das tapfere Schneiderlein" ("The Brave Little Tailor") in 1956 to its last adaptation of the Grimms' "Die Gänsemagd" ("The Goose Girl") in 1989, the East German state studio, known as DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft), produced twenty-three feature-length live-action films for children based on tales by the Brothers Grimm.¹ This count does not include animation films, silhouette films, and particular Grimm adaptations shown only on television. Out of the two hundred children's films made by DEFA between 1946 and 1990, more than 10 percent are Grimm adaptations. Filming the Grimms' folktales served DEFA's designated task of educating and entertaining young audiences. The importance of children's films was reflected in the fact that they constituted a separate production category alongside feature films, news and documentary films, and popular scientific films.²

Most children's films DEFA made during this period were adaptations from literary sources, among which the Grimms' printed collection of folktales is by far the most frequently utilized. DEFA set out to transpose these fairy tales onto the screen in order to extrapolate political, ideological, and didactical significance for the present. This essay analyzes selected film adaptations of the Grimms' fairy tales by situating them in their respective historical period; it also examines how these adaptations evolved with the changing political stakes from 1956 to 1989. The essay looks into the reception of the films within the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and evaluates the reviews against the cultural atmosphere of their respective periods. It shows that the

conception of the films, as well as their reception by reviewers, responded quickly to vacillating liberal and repressive trends and thus functioned as a barometer of GDR cultural politics. Generally speaking, the films of the 1950s and 1960s are co-opted to serve the official rhetoric that the newly established proletarian state is antifascist and anticapitalist. In the ambiance of the Cold War, these films suggestively associate the capitalist West with wealth and power represented by the aristocracy and the socialist East with virtues like diligence, love, and humanity exemplified by the working class. The films of the 1970s are politically interesting because they move from critique of capitalist regimes to internal critique, encoding the latter, however, in seemingly innocuous fairy-tale films. In the last decade of the GDR, the films seem to be less politically significant and instead present topical diversification, high technical achievement, and aesthetic pleasure.

Filming fairy tales was not an uncontested decision for DEFA, which explored this genre with much reservation due to the initially believed contradiction between the cultural politics of the GDR and the fairy-tale tradition. As literary products, fairy tales have been subjected to the censoring hands and minds of editors, who—like the Grimms—usually belong to the bourgeois class. Thus, published tales contain layers of revisions and additions that reflect the middle-class belief and value system. The conviction that they "bear the stamp of their reactionary bourgeois recorders" made them highly dubious in the eyes of the GDR cultural functionaries (Bathrick 167). Moreover, a narrow understanding of realism in the GDR let the tales appear "idealistisch, illusionär-romantisch und mystisch" ("idealist, illusorily romantic and mystic"; Richter-de Vroe 19). Gruesome details contained in the tales were also suspected to cajole devious thoughts and behavior. For all of these reasons, the question arose in the GDR whether to expose young minds to fairy tales, especially the collection by the Grimm brothers. The Grimms' tales were repudiated accordingly during the immediate postwar years in the GDR.

The GDR was not alone in its initial trepidation toward fairy tales, which had received the same fate of condemnation and rehabilitation in the Soviet Union. "According to Felix J. Oinas, in the early 1920s, 'the belief that folklore reflected the ideology of the ruling classes gave rise to a strongly negative attitude toward it. . . . A special Children's Proletkult sought to eradicate folktales on the basis that they glorified tsars and tsareviches, corrupted and instigated sickly fantasies in children, developed the kulak attitude, and strengthened bourgeois ideals'" (Balina 106). Folktales were consequently censured as "bourgeois rubbish" until Maxim Gorky's rehabilitation of this genre at the first congress of Soviet writers in August 1934. Gorky argued that folktales belonged to the people and were thereby compatible with the cause of socialism and its socialist realist aesthetic (Staples 901). Fairy tales have since been restored to

Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2011), pp. 70–95. Copyright © 2011 by Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 48201.

socialist culture and art—however, “not as a free agent” but “to fulfill an important ideological function in the education of the future” (Balina 108). Apparently, politicization of fairy tales is the only way they could be reintegrated into socialist cultural production. This approach to fairy tales calls to mind what the Weimar writers accomplished in proletarianizing fairy tales to express utopian politics and their antagonism to capitalism (Zipes, “Recovering the Utopian Spirit of the Weimar Fairy Tales and Fables”).

Gorky’s reaffirmation of fairy tales did not spare the GDR from its early qualm with the genre. However, the recognition of the importance of the Grimms’ tales for the GDR’s claim to the German cultural heritage calls for the self-serving interpretations of the tales. As David Bathrick observes, “Contrary to previous assessments, the fairy tales were now seen as important documents of class struggle, ‘a fantastic revolution of the suffering people against the suppression of their feudal masters and bourgeois property relations’” (168). As is expected, the first GDR edition of the Grimms’ tales in 1952 was a sanitized version with “a number of revisions and deletions to make the stories conform to prevailing socialist sensibilities” (168).³

Making fairy-tale films was indeed a “virgin land” for the DEFA studio (Hortzschansky 175). A vital influence came from the enthusiastic reception of the 1946 Soviet fairy-tale film *The Stone Flower* by Aleksandr Ptushko, which premiered in the Soviet Occupation Zone in 1948 and galvanized the indigenous fairy-tale film production according to GDR’s own artistic and cultural-political criteria (Richter-de Vroe 19). A great number of Soviet fairy-tale films became popular in the GDR and were frequently shown in GDR cinemas. They were also carefully studied by GDR followers (Hortzschansky 175). With Paul Verhoeven’s *Das kalte Herz* (*The Cold Heart*, 1950) and Wolfgang Staudte’s *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (*The Story of Little Muck*, 1953), both based on Wilhelm Hauff’s nineteenth-century fantastic tales and honored at international film festivals, DEFA established its fame for fairy-tale films and created models for later fairy-tale films (Höfig; Trumpener; Silberman).

Spanning four decades and involving multiple directors, the Grimm adaptations encapsulate an interesting synthesis of politics and aesthetics in the GDR visual culture. Although most adaptations operated within the GDR’s political ideological framework (with few exceptions in the 1970s and late 1980s), the fairy-tale genre enabled the filmmakers to take an aesthetic break from the binding limitations of cinematic realism. Filmic technology made it possible for the fantastic and the magical to appear as “reality” for children; nonetheless, the fantastic nature of the fairy tales created an oasis for the fairy-tale films to be exonerated from the imperative socialist realist aesthetic.⁴ Fantastic fairy-tale films were thus tolerated long before fantastic literature was permitted during the early Honecker era (1971–1976), when a relatively lib-

eral cultural policy relaxed governmental control of literature (although this changed with the expatriation of Wolf Biermann). This indicates that the didactic and entertaining value of the fairy-tale films outweighed their formal divergence from the state-sanctioned aesthetic. Reviews show that the films were judged based on their sensitivity toward the target audience as well as their pedagogical relevance. Hence, even “magic,” a familiar component in the fairy-tale world, is instrumentalized and presented “less as dazzling special effects than as an expression of social relations” (Trumpener).⁵ In *The Blue Light*, for instance, the magic dwarf’s power can go as far as the protagonist trusts himself. Magic is didactically appropriated here as equivalent to self-confidence and self-agency. Thus, these films demonstrate an interesting negotiation between artistic freedom and ideological alignment.

According to Jack Zipes, who has analyzed the presence of class struggle and power shift in folktales, the Grimms’ stories lend themselves to a Marxist reading. Since most folktales originated and circulated among the lower class in precapitalist societies, they incorporate the aggravation, fantasies, and utopian dreams of the lower class. As Zipes writes, “The initial ontological situations in the tales generally deal with exploitation, hunger and injustice familiar to the lower class in pre-capitalist societies. And the magic of the tales can be equated to the wish-fulfillment and utopian projections of the people, i.e., of the folk, who preserved and cultivated these tales” (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 8).

Not surprisingly, many of the fairy-tale heroes come from the lower class. With their integrity, intelligence, and perseverance, they become kings by marrying princesses and thereby attain power, wealth, and presumably happiness as well. The tales’ themes of class struggle and power shifts present themselves as ready-made material for Marxist and East German appropriation. The dichotomy of weak and strong, low and high, poor and rich, and the reversal of power relations in the end can be utilized to represent German Communists’ final triumph over the fascists, the bourgeoisie, and eventually the hopeful triumph over the capitalists. The new king of humble origins is implicitly a political allegory for the East German Communist government, which understood itself as a democratic political unit representing the peasants, workers, and soldiers. Thus, the romantic concept of the *Volk* was adapted into the East German context and acquired political and ideological contemporaneity.

In Helmut Spieß’s 1956 *Das tapfere Schneiderlein* (*The Brave Little Tailor*), the protagonist, emboldened by killing seven flies with one stroke, leaves the oppressive tailor master and his wife and sets out on an adventurous journey. He solves a bride-winning task and additional tasks set by the disingenuous king. In the original Grimms tale, the princess schemes to get rid of her husband after discovering his true identity. Despite her attempts, the tailor-king remains married to her. As is often the case in the Grimms’ tales, the peasant-turned-king

assimilates himself into the existing political structure and becomes a member of the upper class, without any intent of enacting radical social change. As Zipes has observed, “Whereas it is true that change is realized in the tales, this change reflects the desire of the lower classes to move up in the world and seize power as monarchs, not necessarily the desire to alter social relations. The endings of almost all folk tales are not solely emancipatory, but actually depict the limits of social mobility and the confines of the imagination” (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 33).

Since the GDR modified class structure, the DEFA film adds a new character to the story—the princess’s maid, who is a gardener’s daughter. The tailor predictably no longer marries the princess, but instead marries the gardener’s daughter, who is one from the masses. The film depicts aristocratic society in a risible manner. For instance, the whiny king sometimes hides an onion in his hand to produce tears. Prince Eitel (“Vanity”), cowardly and vain, is a good match for the princess, who is not loving, as her name, Liebreiz (“loving charm”), implies, but rather is conniving and vicious. A significant change made in the film is the added presence of an agrarian crowd. Instead of the hunters in the Grimms’ original tale, it is peasants who come to the palace to demand that the king send the Warrior Seven with One Blow to subdue the wild boar that has been destroying their land. The peasants carry the tailor on their shoulders as a hero of the people after he outmaneuvers the beast. In the final scene, the *Volk* rejoices when the entire royal court flees, afraid that the almighty tailor will kill them all. Not only do the royal guards flee as in the Grimms’ tale, but all aristocrats hasten away too. Thus, the country has a new king from the lower class and an entirely new government composed of people from the social class to which this new king belongs. Unlike in the Grimms’ tale, the film heralds an absolute overhaul of the political system.

The Grimms’ “The Brave Little Tailor” is conveniently crafted to signal class conflict and the liberation of the proletariat. Surprisingly, many East German reviewers found the Marxist interpretation of the film overkill and accused the film of “die vulgäre Anwendung marxistischer Grundsätze” (“vulgar use of Marxist principles”; König, Wiedemann, and Wolf, *Zwischen Marx und Muck* 97).⁶ The negative reaction toward the tendentious, but politically correct, interpretation of the tale was somewhat unexpected, arising from the GDR’s short-lived “thaw” (“Tauwetter”) and desire for reform in the wake of Stalin’s death in 1953, and especially following Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in February 1956.

However, any aspirations for social reforms and greater freedom in cultural production were soon crushed. The Hungarian uprising in October 1956 alarmed the East German leadership and stirred a fear of similar revisionism on its own soil. The resulting recalcification of GDR politics was soon reflected in the reception of the 1957 film *Das singende, klingende Bäumchen* (*The Singing,*

Ringing Tree) by the West German guest director at DEFA, Francesco Stefani.⁷ The film follows the transformation of a haughty princess who has caused the rejected prince to be turned into a bear, though eventually her redeeming love disenchanting him back to his human form. Like many later films, this film shows that love has transformative power and can overcome black magic. The film received severe criticism and was accused of “Idealismus” and “Flucht in kleinbürgerliche Idylle” (“idealism” and “flight into petit-bourgeois idyll”; König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 109; Habel 553). One reviewer criticized the film for paying too much attention to form at the expense of a politically and socially useful message. Another reviewer faulted the film for being self-indulgent and “voll verlogener Monarchenromantik” (“filled with false monarchic romance”). It was thus unable to contribute to the character building of the young viewers and was actually more appropriate for the capitalist entertainment industry (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 109; Habel 553). The reception of Stefani’s film shows that evaluation of the form and content of a film in the GDR was sensitized to the ideological, political, and aesthetic standards upheld at that particular historical moment. The fate of a film was thus quite often a matter of luck.

The negative review of *The Singing, Ringing Tree* was a portent of heightened dogmatism that was to be regularized by the 1958 film conference steered by the Ministry of Culture (Allan 10). Another meeting on children’s films a year later made it imperative for children’s films to follow the ideological and pedagogical guidelines more closely (Wiedemann 23). Bernhard Thieme’s 1961 children’s film, *Das hölzerne Kälbchen* (*The Wooden Calf*, produced in 1959), an adaptation of the Grimms’ “Das Bürle” (“Little Farmer”), is a cheerful, uplifting socialist propaganda film.⁸ Here the political goals necessitated revision to the Grimms’ tale. In the original version, the little farmer ends up being the single heir to all the wealth of the village by scamming and killing the rich farmers as well as people of his own class. He is indiscriminate in choosing his victims. He takes the cowherd to the mayor after his wooden calf is stolen. The mayor, apparently a member of the upper class, does not try to find the thief but rules that the cowherd should compensate the little farmer’s loss by giving him a replacement calf—a real one, of course. Next, the little farmer extracts three hundred talers from the miller, a member of his own class, by revealing to him that the miller’s wife has been hiding a delicious meal and its intended consumer—the priest—at home. He then tricks a shepherd, also a member of his own class, into believing that the latter could become mayor if he is rolled into the water in a barrel full of holes. The little farmer saves his own life by causing the shepherd to drown. In the end, the little farmer has wiped out the entire village and becomes a rich man. However, his motivations are undoubtedly individualistic and egoistic. He has indeed outwitted the rich farmers, but he has also victimized his own

people. He clearly lacks the potential to be a leader for any proletarian revolution, and as such his rags-to-riches story is a questionable model for the lower class.

Like other printed folktales, "Little Farmer" has undergone multiple revisions, such that it is impossible to recover its original politics in their entirety. Zipes points out that bourgeois editors tend to downplay and curb tales' revolutionary potential to prevent them from inciting real revolution. The bourgeoisie want only a "limited enlightenment," having recognized the class difference between the "people" and themselves (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 29). As a likely result of the bourgeois censorship on the folktales, many folktale heroes demonstrate a mixture of virtue and vice. They resort to illegitimate means to get their revenge or change their circumstances, such as stealing in "The Master Thief"; kidnapping in "The Blue Light"; and lying in "Puss-in-Boots," "Doctor Know-It-All," and "Little Farmer." In tales like "Little Farmer" that seem to fit the mode of class struggle, the lower-class hero deceives members of his own class, thereby sowing seeds of discord and undermining class solidarity.

As can be predicted, the original Grimm version of "Little Farmer" is modified to better suit the East German context. In the DEFA adaptation the little farmer is recast as an absolutely positive hero—in fact, he is a proletarian leader. Under his leadership, the poor farmers stand their ground and expose the scheme of the rich farmers, who steal the poor farmers' calves so as to dispossess the poor farmers and remove them from the meadows. The little farmer carves a wooden calf, no longer because, as in the Grimms' tale, he has faith in magic and believes that the wooden calf is bound to grow into a real cow, but because he wants to fool and catch the thief. Unlike in the Grimms' tale, he sides with the cowherd against the court's decision and demands that the court discover the thief's identity. This demand is rather tongue-in-cheek, since it is clear to everyone that the judge—a rich farmer—is the thief. Like Adam in Heinrich von Kleist's comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug* (*The Broken Jug*, 1806), the culprit has left evidence of his misdeeds. Likewise, the episode about tricking the shepherd is revised. Although the little farmer still gets three hundred talers from a smith, his camaraderie with the smith throughout the film preempts the interpretation that the little farmer has taken advantage of him. The charming actor Günther Haack also anticipates positive identification with the main character.

In the end the poor farmers give the rich farmers a good beating and chase them away from the village. DEFA thus adapts the tale to depict the proletarians' successful struggle against their oppressors. In the film the little farmer has three children who chase the thief and cooperate in the adults' fight against the rich farmers. The addition of child characters brings the film closer to the

young audience and facilitates the education of children about class struggle. Children's innocence and their sense of justice fortify the legitimacy of the revolutionary cause. The film can also be seen as a propaganda film for land reform of the immediate postwar years, in which the lands of former Nazis and Junkers were redistributed to small and landless farmers. The state regarded hoarders of wealth as feudalistic, fascist, and capitalistic. The equal distribution of wealth, on the other hand, was seen as a crucial economic principle for a socialist society. In both the Grimms' fairy tales and the DEFA versions, hoarding was considered a crime. Thus, the witch in *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*) and the dwarf in *Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot* (*Snow White and Rose Red*) are both punished for secretly hoarding treasure.⁹

As *The Brave Little Tailor* and *The Wooden Calf* have demonstrated, the Grimm adaptations of the 1950s assisted in constructing a new identity for the fledgling socialist country as an antifascist and proletarian state. The collaboration between the film industry and the state continued in the intensified Cold War atmosphere in the 1960s, when the adaptations defended East German perspectives and echoed Cold War rhetoric. The oppressors—usually the old king and his retinue—generally served as an allegory for capitalists and imperialists. They were exaggeratedly depicted as stupid, immoral, and obsessed with power and money; the oppressed, on the other hand, were presented as positive and likable heroes who were bound to prevail.

In this vein, Christoph Engel's 1960 *Das Zauber-Männchen/Rumpelstilzchen* (*The Magic Dwarf*, with the working title *Rumpelstiltskin*) rewrites the titular hero into a socialist hero who despises accumulation of wealth, represented by the king and his treasurer's greed for gold. In the Grimms' tale, Rumpelstiltskin at first appears to be the magic helper for the miller's daughter, who must spin straw into gold or die. But he soon turns into the villain by demanding the first-born of the soon-to-be queen in return for his help.¹⁰ The DEFA film, however, explains the rationale behind Rumpelstiltskin's seemingly cruel demand for the stipulated child: Rumpelstiltskin does not want the child to grow up among people for whom gold is the most important thing. That is also the reason why he left mainstream society and lives in a little house off the beaten path. Rumpelstiltskin's world is presented as a utopian alternative to the world ruled by wealth and power, and his is a better world in which to raise children.

Appropriately for a Workers' and Peasants' State (Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat), *Rumpelstiltskin* contrasts industriousness and laziness through character types. The positive characters (the lad in the mill, the miller's daughter, and Rumpelstiltskin) are all hardworking and serve as role models for the young audience. In the end their hard work pays off. The lad in the mill replaces the greedy and parasitic treasurer, who is banished out of the land, and the lazy, mendacious, and bragging miller is returned to work in the mill. Rumpelstiltskin

does not tear himself into two pieces, but seems to have become “the uncle” of the happy royal family, satisfied that the king has changed his priorities.¹¹ The film revises the king from the villain found in the Grimms’ tale into someone merely young and inexperienced, initially seduced by the allure of gold but finally willing to give up his gold to reward the person who can reveal the dwarf’s name. Only after he has overcome the domination of gold is he rewarded with familial bliss.

Rumpelstiltskin no longer concerns itself with the proletarian taking over power, which was so crucial to *The Brave Little Tailor* four years earlier, but rather focuses on criticizing the prioritization of money over humanity while emphasizing the virtue of hard work. The Grimm brothers’ tale collection praises industriousness as a virtue. In the East German Grimm adaptations, however, industriousness acquires significant economic and political valences in the context of postwar reconstruction and the building of a socialist state. While West Germany, buttressed by the Marshall Plan, boasted an “economic miracle” and attracted thousands of East Germans before the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the GDR government preached against the corrupting power of gold. As it fell behind economically, the socialist state waged psychological warfare by contrasting socialism and capitalism in terms of the fairy-tale dualism of good and evil. It was also suggested that if East Germans worked hard enough, their country would not only be able to catch up with West Germany economically but would also be morally superior to their western counterparts.

Industriousness continues to be a prevalent theme in many 1960s adaptations. In Gottfried Kolditz’s 1961 *Schneewittchen* (*Snow White*), the princess Snow White goes into the kitchen and works with the kitchen staff to prepare another extravagant dinner ordered by the narcissistic and self-aggrandizing queen. By her diligence at housework, Snow White endears herself to the dwarfs. The dwarfs dig for ore with discipline and in high spirits.¹² Their work scenes are cheerfully presented with theatricality, songs, and humor. Their “brigade,” to use the GDR terminology, represents an ideal working community.¹³ Kolditz also chose to adapt “Frau Holle” (“Mother Holle”), which, in keeping with the Grimms’ tale, contrasts the diligent stepdaughter and her reward of a rain of gold with the lazy stepsister and her punishment with a bucket of pitch. Although this 1963 film was shot in twenty-eight days, its cast, its unique and highly stylized production design, and, more importantly, its emphasis on the work ethic contributed to very positive reviews at the time (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 142). The review in *Film Spiegel* (11/1964), for instance, pointed out that the director succeeded in shaping the fundamental idea that “diligence is rewarded” from the East German point of view, and the

definition of work had a very different moral implication for children in the GDR than the toil that the blond Marie had to endure in the Grimms’ tale (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 142; Habel 179–80). Later commentators tended to be more critical, expressing their frustration with the one-dimensional, flat, and “intolerable” plot, suggesting that the reviews at the time were overrated (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 142). In Walter Beck’s 1965 *König Drosselbart* (*King Thrushbeard*), the princess, as in the Grimms’ tale, is punished for her arrogance by learning to work to earn a living. In the Grimms’ tale, when she is caught hiding food under her skirt, the princess is likewise humiliated as she previously humiliated her suitors. The film, however, does not contain this episode, thereby establishing work as having the desired edifying power that guarantees change in the princess.

Beck’s 1971 *Dornröschen* (*Brier Rose*) culminates the usage of similar strategies and politics in adaptations and reinterpretations. The thirteenth fairy, who is not invited to the celebration of Brier Rose’s birth, is “die Fee des Fleißes” (“the Fairy of Diligence”) and offers the gift of diligence to the princess, which is symbolized in a spinning wheel. The king excludes her because diligence is a virtue befitting the poor, not a princess. The king, who in the Grimms’ tale lacks detail, is now obsessed with power and wealth. The young prince, who will finally awaken Brier Rose, is subjected to three tests by the Fairy of Diligence. In these tests he must resist the temptations of power, wealth, and the attraction of another princess. Only then does he earn entry to the castle where Brier Rose lies. Their leadership is suggested to be better and more virtuous.

Although the Grimms use only one sentence to cover the fact that the king orders every spindle in the entire kingdom to be burned, the film elaborates in extended scenes the struggle between spinning women and those responsible for executing this senseless order. In the film, spinning is not lamented as a deforming and resented task, as Ruth Bottigheimer observes regarding Grimm tales such as “The Lazy Spinner” and “The Three Spinners” (114). The film starts and ends with a group of women spinning in good spirits, singing the praises of diligence. Their livelihood apparently depends upon spinning.¹⁴ The feminist critique of spinning would not have served the economic needs of the GDR. It is instead Wilhelm Grimm’s editorial assertion of diligence as a womanly virtue that is carried on in this film. As such, when the royal soldiers come to coerce the confiscation of the spindles, spinning women become “resistance fighters.” They shout slogans as if in Soviet-style agitprop theater: “Der König stürzt uns alle ins Elend. Er verdirbt Leute und Land. Der König soll verflucht sein. . . . Der König soll vertilgt werden” (“The King plunges us all into misery. He destroys people and land. The King should be cursed! . . . The

King should be eliminated!"). Both the content and the form of this episode evoke association with Nazi book burning and the Communists' antifascist struggle, aligning the film with proletarian revolutionary cinema.

When the Grimms' Brier Rose awakens, everything resumes as though not a single day had elapsed. The film, however, questions whether it is right for such a king to continue his reign. The thirteenth fairy interrupts the king's carousing and announces the end of his despotic regime. As she removes his crown and scepter, his face begins to visibly pale. The entire aristocratic retinue flees while the common people come to celebrate the new king's coronation and wedding. The princess does not show any emotion for the downfall of her father and gladly accepts her role in the new society. Symbolically, she disavows her ties to the fascist past and eagerly joins the new socialist order. In the Grimms' tale, the thirteenth wise woman is the offended, and therefore vengeful, witch. But the film endows her with moral and judicial authority over the king. Her initial curse that the princess would prick herself with a spindle apparently inspired the filmmaker to equip the thirteenth wise woman with a spinning wheel. The positive connotation of the spindle as a sign of diligence in an East German context warrants this positive rewriting of the thirteenth fairy. The film ends with the queen spinning to show people how to spin again. Spinning is thus no longer derogated as beneath the princess or queen, but is embraced as a sign of equality and unity that blurs class boundaries. With a popular government and exemplary rulers, the country will emerge from misery, rebuild itself, and thrive.

The 1971 adaptation of "Brier Rose" still dwells, almost anachronistically, on the antifascist and anticapitalist mentality. This could be cited as an example of the cultural stagnation resulting from the 1965 Eleventh Plenum of the SED (the ruling Socialist Unity Party) Central Committee, which banned many films, including *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (*The Rabbit Is Me*, dir. Kurt Maetzig, 1965) and *Denk bloß nicht, ich heule* (*Just Don't Think I Will Cry*, dir. Frank Vogel, 1965). Hopes for reform inspired by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 were crushed by the Eleventh Plenum. However, most adaptations from the late 1960s to the late 1970s differ from earlier adaptations in that they turn to criticize the GDR as an oppressive state. The Prague Spring and the western students' revolts of 1968 encouraged filmmakers to engage with contemporary society. A new generation of directors emerged onto the scene, many of which debuted with a children's film, if not a Grimm adaptation.

Rainer Simon debuted in 1969 with *Wie heiratet man einen König* (*How to Marry a King*), an adaptation of the Grimms' "Die kluge Bauerntochter" ("The Clever Farmer's Daughter"). The main plot of the film remains true to the

Grimms' tale. Simon realistically tells the story of a peasant girl who wins the heart of the king through her intelligence. As queen she revises the king's arbitrary decisions and falls into disgrace. When offered to take one thing endearing to her as she leaves, she uses a sleeping potion to subdue the king, who later finds himself in a peasant's hut. Touched by her love, he takes her back to the palace.

Most of the actions in the film take place in the courtyard of the palace. In contrast to the enclosed and unwelcoming palace, the courtyard is an open space that is unpretentious and accessible to the common people. It is the threshold to the palace that connects the rulers and the ruled. Here the king receives his people and addresses their grievances; here the king gives his people seemingly unsolvable riddles to solve and thereby obliges them to work for him. However, it is also here where the clever peasant girl solves his riddles and the wedding celebration takes place.

The film is now one of the most praised DEFA Grimm adaptations, but at the time of its release it was heavily criticized in the Babelsberg Studio on many fronts, and the decision over its quality had to be put off for months (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 167; Habel 692–93). Similar to the sarcastic depiction of the aristocracy in many earlier DEFA Grimm adaptations, the courtiers in this film are portrayed as stupid, corrupt, and preposterous. The target of this ridicule seems to be different from that of previous antifascist and anticapitalist films. The king was suspected to be a parody of the SED government under Walter Ulbricht (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 167; Habel 692–93). He shows a certain sense of justice, though this sense of justice is downplayed by his playfulness. He fines his marshal for killing a peasant's goat but keeps half of the fine for himself and ignores the peasant's plea that he cannot buy a goat with the money he receives. He friskily determines that his tax collector has stolen eggs from the peasant women, but the peasant women do not get their eggs back. As careless and despotic as he is at times, the king cuts a sympathetic figure who disregards class difference and cherishes intellect. The director transcends the conventional fairy-tale formula of good and evil and thereby gives the king a more nuanced portrayal. The king initially decides to send the queen home because she appears more clever and fairer than him. However, he revises his decision to divorce the queen and brings her back to the palace, implicitly as his clever adviser. Thus it is suggested that this king is capable of reform. This capacity to reform was received as a spoof of Ulbricht's inability to initiate reform. The king is played by the famous DEFA actor Eberhard Esche, who costarred with Manfred Krug in the banned film *Spur der Steine* (*Traces of Stones*, dir. Frank Beyer, 1966). With this stain on his acting career, Esche's portrayal of the king was even more easily suspected as an

Ulbricht caricature and thus frowned upon. The negative reception of the 1969 film indicates that even constructive criticism aimed at the current regime was not welcome.

In addition to the film's potentially subversive political parody, the film was accused of formalism, apparently because of the use of stylized images that evoke the Renaissance paintings of Dürer, Holbein, and Breughel, and the reportage style employed in shooting the wedding montage sequence (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 168; Habel 692–93). The wedding celebration oscillates between scenes in the new queen's chamber and scenes of music, dancing, and feasting in the courtyard. Together with the alternate images, the sound track also alternates between loud music and quiet conversation. The director tested the permissibility of aesthetic experimentation, and the condemnatory reception of the film proved that the formalism debate of the early fifties, which resulted in a rejection of modernist art, continued to hold sway in the late sixties.

How to Marry a King was also accused of being antagonistic to the people, because not only the courtiers but the peasants, too, are depicted in an exaggerated manner as silly, primitive, and even vulgar. For example, a peasant woman is seen picking her nose. Both the courtiers and the peasants run for their life in a fast-motion sequence, taking the peasant girl for a ghost when she comes to the king, having solved the riddle he posed. Moreover, the film was considered hostile to the lower class because of the assertion that a clever peasant girl cannot find a husband of her equal among peasants. Käthe Reichel's portrayal of the hearty peasant woman Ulrike was unconventional, overly realistic, and thus objectionable (König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 167). Apparently, the fairy-tale film mirrored a reality that the GDR did not want to see. The director, however, praised Reichel in 1995 as having plenty of insightful suggestions to contribute to the scenes, dialogues, and costumes. She almost always made better arguments than the director himself, just as the clever peasant girl who always outwits the king.¹⁵

How to Marry a King already endorses a king's respect for the people's intellectual power. This theme continues to inform Simon's second Grimm adaptation in 1972, titled *Sechse kommen durch die Welt* (*How Six Made Their Way in the World*). The story describes how one underpaid soldier gains control of the entire state treasure by gathering five men of supernatural abilities.¹⁶ More so than in *How to Marry a King*, this second adaptation contains an even clearer critique of the GDR regime.

The film changes the Grimms' original title, "Sechse kommen durch die ganze Welt" ("How Six Made Their Way in the Wide World"), to "Sechse kommen durch die Welt" ("How Six Made Their Way in the World"). Although there does not seem to be much difference at first glance, the world turns out to be the kingdom of Malabunt only, a place where the five men cannot use

their special abilities. Unlike the Grimms' original, the five talented men in the film are there not only to assist the soldier in settling his scores with the king but also to resolve their own grievances. Thus, under the auspices of Honecker's liberal cultural policies initiated in 1971, Simon chose to adapt this specific Grimms' tale to criticize how the GDR stifled its own talents. One of the most prominent dissidents was Wolf Biermann, a singer, songwriter, and guitarist who was banned from the stage for eleven years (1965–1976). He could be the reason that Simon changes the blower into a fiddler. The choice of Jiri Menzel as the main actor is also quite telling, because the Czech actor and director had been banned from his profession in his own country in the clampdown following the 1968 Soviet invasion (Habel 532).

Viewed from the Marxist perspective, the film, like the Grimms' tale, thematizes the collective power of the lower class: when the ill-treated lower class unites their talents, they incapacitate the ruling class. For Zipes, the ending of the Grimms' tale, in which the six men go home with the entire treasure of the king, appears anticlimactic, since the heroes are "pacified with money" and "the social relations are not changed" (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 38). The deplorable lack of radical sociopolitical changes in the Grimms' tale rests on the curbed desire of the lower class. Yet in the DEFA adaptation the same ending seems to suggest that the film intentionally aims to provide internal criticism rather than regime change. The king is no longer considered the enemy of the GDR, regardless of whether he represents feudalism, fascism, or capitalism, but in fact the GDR ruling party itself is villainized.

This change came about because of historical and political changes that had occurred. In its founding years the GDR needed to focus on class struggle and justify the rule of the working class. The DEFA films' power shift from a despot to a peasant-born leader was symbolic of the political events of that era. Yet after the building of the Berlin Wall, and especially after 1973, when the GDR became a member of the United Nations, the need for self-justification diminished. The Grimm adaptations henceforth tended to become more reflexive and critical of GDR society.

The six men in *How Six Made Their Way in the World* have humiliated the upper class and left them penniless. The film thereby prompts the state to think about the consequences of mishandling its citizens. However, the 1976 expatriation of Biermann while he was giving a concert in West Germany shows that the 1972 film had fallen on deaf ears. The intellectual exodus following the Biermann affair retrospectively proved Simon's film was prophetic. Among those who expatriated themselves were many talented actors and actresses, including the popular DEFA star Manfred Krug, who played King Thrushbeard. Their voluntary self-exile left the GDR brain drained, a condition from which it would never recover.

As in *How Six Made Their Way in the World*, no regime change takes place in Iris Gusner's 1976 Grimm adaptation *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*). The film tells the story of a wounded soldier who is discharged without pay and gets his revenge with the help of a dwarf who appears whenever the soldier lights his pipe on a magic blue light. One significant change made in this film is the ending, where the soldier neither becomes the king nor marries the princess. Instead he lets the king keep his crown and his daughter and leaves for home with his lover, an inn maid, an added character in the film.¹⁷ This is an important revision to the Grimms' story. It suggests that the reference of the king has indeed changed. However, *The Blue Light* is pessimistic about the GDR's ability to reform and has the soldier predict that the king would go back to his old ways that very same day.

The most subversive adaptation was yet to come in Egon Schlegel's 1977 *Wer reißt denn gleich vor'm Teufel aus* (*Who Would Run from the Devil Right Away*). Schlegel takes great liberty in adapting the Grimms' "Der Teufel mit den drei goldenen Haaren" ("The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs"). The title of the film portrays the devil, played by Dieter Franke, as a sympathetic and attractive character. The richly colored wooden puppets in the beginning of the film, as the credits are shown, later turn out to be stage props in hell. They become animated as the devil plays his "grand piano." Indeed, the film presents hell as colorful, mechanized, and modern. It is a jovial world with music and dance, which stands in stark contrast to the desolate, bleak world under the king's rule. Hell is filled with vibrancy, and the devil is full of humanity, generosity, and humor. The protagonist experiences "eine Hölle Spaß" ("a hell of fun") in the literal sense: he plays the devil's wife, cooks the devil's soup with gasoline, plucks three golden hairs from the devil, and receives answers to the three questions on the misery of the people. He fools around with the devil but still gets away unscathed, whereas under the king's rule he is almost killed if not for the magical objects he received from the people whom the devil's answers had helped. The suggestion that this world is worse than hell is a caustic critique of the current state of affairs in the GDR.

In the Grimms' original tale the hero is prophesized to marry the princess, and the king's attempt on the hero's life is intended to rid his daughter of an undesirable suitor. In the film the king's fear of the people ironically makes him believe that the protagonist, who is actually timid in nature, is a robber and arsonist. The king's letter is no longer simply to get rid of an undesirable son-in-law from the lower-class, but rather to do away with an enemy of the state. The transformation of the protagonist from a naïve, unwitting boy to a conscious and determined rebel is of the king's own making.

In the film the king is not only the antagonist of the protagonist alone; he is also the antagonist of the people. Knowing there are no robbers in the coun-

try, he nonetheless imposes the so-called robber tax, which turns a few incensed smiths into "robbers" to justify the robber tax. These "robbers" throw bouquets at the king along with horseshoes and switch the letter that the protagonist carries to the palace. The letter carrier is originally ordered to be killed immediately, but now he is to marry the princess. These "robbers" also plot revolution, which is violently suppressed. In the Grimms' version the robbers merely serve as the hero's donors by forging the letter.

Schlegel's 1977 film contains the political undertone that the government has turned its people against itself. In contrast to the open and welcoming courtyard in Simon's *How to Marry a King*, the palace in Schlegel's film is subterranean, accessible only with signals, elevators, iron gates, and drawbridges. All of these measures are taken against "saboteurs," which further indicates the king's paranoia. The meaningful change from the courtyard in Simon's 1969 film to the impenetrable fortress in Schlegel's film reflects the alienation of the government from its people in the course of the mid-1970s. However, the king seems unable to accept the fact that his administration is unpopular; he instead insists on the fake notion that "Wir sind ein heiteres Regiment" ("We are a happy government") and comforts himself compulsively with sips of wine.

Having found out about the falsified letter, the furious king demands that the protagonist pluck three golden hairs from the devil in order to validate the marriage to the princess. Along his journey to hell, the protagonist collects three questions, to which only the devil knows the answers. In the Grimms' story the questions seem tedious and typical of a fairy-tale world. The film, however, infuses meaning to the "depthlessness" of the original three questions. Now the questions seek to uncover the reasons for the people's misery, and the devil reveals the king to be the cause. In the end the king is condemned to row the ferry, while the hero becomes the new king, celebrates the wedding with the common people, and the devil is his hilariously entertaining guest. The solidarity between the people and the devil seems to suggest that the people have formed a "diabolical" alliance in resisting the antagonistic regime. As in Simon's and Gusner's films, the king still refers to the current GDR governing body. However, unlike in Simon's and Gusner's versions, in which the king continues to rule, Schlegel seems to be disillusioned with well-meaning, but ineffective, internal critique and camouflages his bitter, subversive sentiments in a fairy-tale film.

Such a reading of the film as entailing subversive regime critique, however, went undetected by the reviewers and censors. The mostly positive reviews praised Dieter Franke's adorable portrayal of the devil and the comic, imaginative spectacle in the sequence that takes place in hell. This is because the regime critique is encrypted in the film and thus not easily discernible. The film audience could have watched it simply as an innocent fairy-tale film. To

disguise critique could well be the intention of the director in order to avoid banning of the film. Discussing the literary fairy tales in the GDR from 1976 to 1985, Gert Reifarth points out that the fairy tale is one of the genres that facilitate veiled social and political critiques. Reifarth categorizes fairy tale as “Verschlüsselungsliteratur” (“literature of codification”) that belongs to the “unverdächtig” (“unsuspicious”) genres, which enable the author to evade censorship, because the censors could unsuspectingly read them in a harmless way and fail to detect criticism of the socialist regime in the artfully dissimulated “allegories,” or they are unable to identify with confidence the camouflaged critique. However, it is important for the reception of such politically subversive tales that the reader participates in the decoding process so as to actualize the intended effect of the texts (Reifarth 39–42, 75–79). The directors of these 1970s films articulate their criticism precisely in such an indirect manner by choosing specific tales that could be appropriated to mirror the current circumstances in the GDR and by making meaningful changes to better embody the allusions the films make.

Technologically enhanced and visually pleasing, adaptations from the 1980s tend to aim more at providing diversion than offering political criticism. They suffer from the cultural depression prevailing in the wake of the Biermann affair. DEFA also faced strong competition from West German and American motion pictures and TV programs. Although a young generation of directors showed great ambition and the potential to restore faith in DEFA, they were deprived of opportunities to realize that potential. Well-established children’s film director Walter Beck was able to make three Grimm adaptations in a row: *Der Prinz hinter den sieben Meeren* (*The Prince behind the Seven Seas*, 1982), *Der Bärenhäuter* (*The Bearskin*, 1986), and *Froschkönig* (*The Frog King*, 1988). Though stylistically innovative, they lack the readiness needed to address East German reality and thus appear anachronistic. The making of these Grimm films seems mainly to fulfill the quota of yearly production of at least three children’s films.¹⁸

After Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, his political and economic reforms known as glasnost and perestroika had major repercussions in the GDR. In 1988 DEFA changed its leadership, which brought about a surge of new films addressing controversial topics such as homosexuality, disability, and environmental issues (Allan 16–19). The young director Karl Heinz Lotz chose to adapt the Grimms’ “Der Eisenhans” (“Iron Hans”) in advocacy of the peace and ecological movements. In the Grimms’ tale the king’s huntsmen mysteriously disappear in the forest so that no one dares venture into it until another huntsman captures the bogeyman—Iron Hans—at the bottom of a deep pool. The young prince frees Iron Hans, but only in order to retrieve his golden ball. In return, Iron Hans helps the prince defeat armies and win a

princess. The story has a big surprise in store for the reader by revealing Iron Hans as a mighty king who was turned into a wild man by a magic spell. This ending renders his murder of the huntsmen merely as a savage’s terror and his help for the prince as ultimately self-serving. Hence, the Grimms’ version concerns individual disenchantment and pursuit of happiness.

In Lotz’s 1988 film, however, Iron Hans becomes the forest’s guardian, bogging down the king’s huntsmen to deter them from destroying wildlife, meanwhile thwarting their endless greed for game meat. He helps the prince for the sake of preserving nature and restoring peace, because the prince and the princess have both rebelled against their fathers and represent hope and change. Since Iron Hans embodies the abstract concepts of nature and peace, the way to capture him is not, as in the Grimms’ version, to bind the wild man with rope and lead him away to the castle, but to pollute the water and set fire to the forest. The destruction of nature signifies simultaneously the imprisonment of Iron Hans. Although Iron Hans is also locked in a cage, as in the Grimms’ original tale, we only hear his voice and do not see him as a physical person. After his release he is shown as a gigantic, awe-inspiring, stern, and sad human face, which is superimposed onto a mountain. The film anthropomorphizes rocks, hills, and animals, with which mankind can interact and to which mankind should show love and respect. Iron Hans’s invincible, supernatural power indicates the force of nature and warns of the consequence of destroying nature. The film ends on an optimistic note, with the desiccated tree that appears in the first scene of the film starting to grow green leaves in the last scene.

The last DEFA Grimms’ adaptation was Konrad Petzold’s 1989 *Die Geschichte von der Gänseprinzessin und ihrem treuen Pferd Falada* (*The Story of the Goose Princess and Her Loyal Horse Falada*), adapted from the Grimms’ “Die Gänsemagd” (“The Goose Girl”). The film changes the maid into a foster sister who volunteers herself to be the “trustworthy” maid to accompany the princess to marry the prince of the neighboring country. In the Grimms’ version as well as in the film, the maid tricks the princess into switching identities, and the princess is thus forced to tend geese. The perfidious foster sister is finally exposed with the help of the princess’s horse, Falada. The king asks the false bride how to punish a crime that is neither murder nor robbery of goods or money, but rather the theft of love and trust. Petzold chose to end his career with an adaptation of this Grimm tale, because the story apparently allowed him to address the theme of trust. At a time when the GDR government had lost the people’s trust, the film’s political overtone would not go unnoticed. Petzold himself once placed too much trust in the political leniency of the GDR. His adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes”—*Das Kleid* (*The Dress*, 1961)—alludes to the East German state as the walled-in dictatorial country of the film. Seen as a parable film about the Berlin Wall, *Das Kleid* was shown neither in cinema nor on TV. It stayed for

thirty years in the archival vault until a synchronized version was belatedly premiered in 1990 after the wall fell (Trumpener; Hobsch 17–18). The fate of *Das Kleid* shows that the cryptic nature of a fairy tale does not necessarily grant the film immunity from being banned.

In chronological order this essay has focused on the politics of the Grimm adaptations by interpreting them against their political, ideological, and cultural-historical backgrounds. It has addressed the use of fairy tales for social and political purposes by DEFA through examples of Grimm adaptations. After all, these films are made by the state film monopoly of the GDR. The films' aesthetics are inevitably politicized, in both conception and reception. The choice to adapt a certain tale is determined by the implicit political signification of the adapted tale proper for that historical period. The director also chooses a certain tale to adapt that could carry his or her personal politics. This essay has noted that early on it was generally those tales enabling a Marxist interpretation that were transposed onto the screen, whereas in the 1970s the films shifted from GDR propaganda against fascism and capitalism to criticism of the GDR itself.

No matter what the political message is, the DEFA Grimm films were made for children in the first place and thus must at minimum be entertaining for them as well as for adults who are watching. Reviews show that the evaluation of these films depends considerably on their makers' sensitivity to a young audience. However, reviews also indicate that it was crucial for these children's films to contain proper didactic lessons and serve as ideological transmitters. East German directors had to walk a fine line between their rights and duties. The masquerade of social criticism in fairy-tale films enabled some directors to air their political opinions. This is partly the reason that they utilized this genre and catered to this particular audience. Concluding from the Grimm adaptations, these ambitious directors infused their political views, explicitly in the films true to the party lines and implicitly in the critical ones.

Appendix

DEFA Grimm Adaptations

	Premiere	German Title	English Translation	Director	Original title in the Grimms' collection, if different, and its numbering
1	1956	Das tapfere Schneiderlein	The Brave Little Tailor	Helmut Spiëß	KHM 20
2	1957	Das singende, klingende Bäumchen	The Singing, Ringing Tree	Francesco Stefani	Fragments (see endnote about this film)
3	1960	Das Zauber-Männchen / Rumpelstilzchen	The Magic Dwarf / Rumpelstiltskin	Christoph Engel and co-director Erwin-Anders	KHM 55
4	May 1961	Das hölzerne Kälbchen	The Wooden Calf	Bernhard Thieme	KHM 61 Das Bürle (The Little Farmer)
5	Oct. 1961	Schneewittchen	Snow White	Gottfried Kolditz	KHM 53 Sneewittchen (Snow White)
6	1962	Rotkäppchen	Little Red Riding Hood	Götz Friedrich	KHM 26
7	1963	Frau Holle	Mother Holle	Gottfried Kolditz	KHM 24
8	1964	Die goldene Gans	The Golden Goose	Siegfried Hartmann	KHM 64
9	1965	König Drosselbart	King Thrushbeard	Walter Beck	KHM 52
10	1969	Wie heiratet man einen König	How to Marry a King	Rainer Simon	KHM 94 Die kluge Bauerntochter (The Clever Farmer's Daughter)
11	1971	Dornröschen	Brier Rose	Walter Beck	KHM 50

DEFA Grimm Adaptations (cont.)

12	1972	Sechse kommen durch die Welt	How Six Made Their Way in the World	Rainer Simon	KHM 71 Sechse kommen durch die ganze Welt (How Six Made their Way in the Wide World)
13	1976	Das blaue Licht	The Blue Light	Iris Gusner	KHM 116
14	1977	Wer reißt denn gleich vor'm Teufel aus	Who Would Run from the Devil Right Away	Egon Schlegel	KHM 29 Der Teufel mit den drei goldenen Haaren (The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs)
15	1978 TV, 1979	Der Meisterdieb	The Master Thief	Wolfgang Hübner	KHM 192
16	1979	Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot	Snow White and Rose Red	Siegfried Hartmann	KHM 161
17	1979 TV, 1981	Die Gänsehirtin am Brunnen	The Goose Girl at the Spring	Ursula Schmenger	KHM 179
18	1980 TV, 1981	Gevatter Tod	Godfather Death	Wolfgang Hübner	KHM 44 Der Gevatter Tod
19	1982	Der Prinz hinter den sieben Meeren	The Prince behind the Seven Seas	Walter Beck	KHM 88 Das singende springende Löweneckerchen (The Singing, Springing Lark)
20	1986	Der Bärenhäuter	The Bearskin	Walter Beck	KHM 101
21	1988	Froschkönig	The Frog King	Walter Beck	KHM 1 Der Froschkönig oder der eiserne Heinrich (The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich)

22	1988	Der Eisenhans	Iron Hans	Karl Heinz Lotz	KHM 136
23	Jan. 29, 1989	Die Geschichte von der Gänseprinzessin und ihrem treuen Pferd Falada	The Story of the Goose Princess and her Loyal Horse Falada	Konrad Petzold	KHM 89 Die Gänsemagd (The Goose Girl)

Notes

1. The primary source for the count of twenty-three adaptations is Habel's *Das Grosse Lexikon der DEFA-Spielfilme*. This count includes those films that were initially commissioned as TV films but later made their way to cinema. (See table in appendix.) The Czech-DEFA coproduction *Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel* (*Three Hazelnuts for Cinderella*, 1974), directed by Václav Vorlíček, was listed as adapted from a tale by Božena Němcová, thus it is not included in this essay. The German titles of Grimms' tales are taken from the 1996 Diederichs edition of the Grimms' 1857 version. The English translation of the fairy-tale titles is based on Jack Zipes's edition of the Grimms' fairy tales. Where English titles are not available, the translation is my own.
2. In 1952 DEFA formed a production group that was solely responsible for making children's films, alongside three other subdivisions respectively responsible for feature films, news and documentary films, and popular scientific films. In December 1953 an independent department for children's films (Kinderfilmabteilung) was established, thereby institutionalizing and regularizing the production of children's films. Although this department later underwent various changes, 1953 was generally considered the start of children's films at DEFA. See Kersten 120–21 and Wiedemann 22. According to Willi Höfig, "A studio for animated pictures with a focus on short films for children was created in Dresden in 1955. . . . In 1958, the GDR inaugurated its National Center for Children's Films and Television Productions (Nationales Zentrum für Kinderfilm und-fernsehen der DDR), which became a member of the UNESCO's Centre International du Film pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (CIFEJ) in 1960" (259).
3. The first GDR edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is edited by Walther Pol-latschek and Hans Siebert and published by the Kinderbuch Verlag in Berlin in 1952. It is very likely that (some of) the scriptwriters of the DEFA films used the GDR edition as their literary model. But this essay does not compare the DEFA adaptations with the tales in this "sanitized" literary edition, since this would require a project on its own.
4. The second party conference of the SED made it the fundamental goal of the GDR to build a socialist society and made socialist realism the sole and only aesthetic form to attain that goal (see Deltl 137). However, some of the earliest fairy-tale films already have highly stylized visuals, such as *Das singende, klingende Bäumchen* (*The Singing, Ringing Tree*, 1957), *Frau Holle* (*Mother Holle*, 1963), and *König Drosselbart* (*King Thrushbeard*, 1965).
5. It is to be noted that there is not always magic in the fairy-tale films; for example, there is none in *The Wooden Calf*, *King Thrushbeard*, and *How to Marry a King*.
6. Günter Stahnke writes in *Junge Welt* (5 Oct. 1956): "Warum diese unangebrachte Aktualisierung, daß schließlich der König und die Prinzessin, flüchtig werden und

das tapfere Schneiderlein mit der Magd Traute bereits im fernen Märchenzeitalter, im 'Es-war-einmal,' eine Volksmacht begründen müssen?" ("Why such an inappropriate update that the king and the princess flee in the end, and the brave little tailor, with the maid Traute, must establish a people's rule already 'once upon a time' in the distant fairy tale age?") See König et al. *Zwischen Marx* 97; Habel 600.

7. The film's credits indicate that it is based on some stories the Grimm brothers collected. However, according to Rosemary Creeser: "A careful search of the *Grimms' Tales* fails to reveal any story of the same name or with a direct connection to the film's plot. It can only be assumed that, having chosen to adopt several of the common themes and motifs, the director Franco Stefani and his co-writer Anne Geelhaer created a title for the film by juxtaposing fragments of the names of the *Grimms' Tales*—for example, *the Juniper Tree* and *The Singing, Soaring Lark*" (123).
8. Originally the film contained a much stronger critique of the church. However, such confrontation with the church was not desirable at the time. Thus the director had to cut and alter some of the shootings. This may explain the two-year delay in the film's premier in 1961.
9. Discussing the witch in the Grimm tale "Hansel and Gretel," Zipes writes, "the witch (as parasite) can also be regarded here as representative of the entire feudal system or the greed and brutality of the aristocracy, responsible for the difficult conditions. The killing of the witch is symbolically the realization of the hatred which the peasantry felt for hoarders and oppressors" (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 38).
10. In "Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity," Zipes disagrees with Aarne-Thompson's categorization of the tale "Rumpelstiltskin" as tale type 500, The Name of the Helper; he examines the Grimms' revision of the tale from a sociohistorical perspective by looking at the devaluation of women's spinning—a symbol of female productivity—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He concludes that the tale "Rumpelstiltskin" is about female oppression and male domination of the mechanized linen manufacture in the nineteenth century.
11. In the Ölenberg manuscript of 1810, Rumpelstiltskin flies out of the window on a spoon. Professor D. L. Ashliman puts together three different versions of "Rumpelstiltskin," based on the manuscript of 1807–1810, the first edition of 1812, and the second edition of 1819. See his website at www.pitt.edu/~dash/rumpelstilzchen.html. The 1810 version can also be found in Zipes's "Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity," 53–54.
12. As Zipes argues, a parallel political move was found in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, where the happy working dwarfs represented the American workers, who needed to keep their spirits high during the Depression of the 1930s. See Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," esp. pages 346–49.
13. To a great extent the feminist critique of "Snow White" applies to the DEFA version, since the main story has not changed. Snow White still does the domestic housework for the dwarfs. Yet in the East German context, wage labor does not seem as gendered as in capitalist societies, since most women work outside as well as inside the household. Snow White voluntarily helps the kitchen staff in the palace, thus her diligence is already announced at the very beginning of the film. It is implied that it is her diligent nature that compels her to be a useful member in the dwarfs' household. Disney's *Snow White* (1937), on the other hand, suggests that women belong to the household, whereas men belong to the

workplace. In Disney's *Snow White* the princess finds the dwarf's home covered in dust and cobwebs, with dirty dishes and clothes piled up. Thus, dwarfs—being implicitly both men and children—are diligent breadwinners, but they are dirty, lazy, and need a woman and a mother at home, a feminine and maternal role that Snow White plays perfectly. In the Grimms' tale, however, the dwarfs are tidy, thus Snow White's help in the household is not indispensable, but required by the dwarfs. Hence, Disney's *Snow White* asserts traditional gender roles and undergirds the capitalistic labor division. For early feminist criticism of fairy tales, including "Snow White," see Stone and Liebermann.

14. Zipes points out the positive side of spinning for women in their social advancement, considering the importance of spinning in the economy of Europe from the medieval period to the end of the nineteenth century. See "The Fate of Spinning," 584, and "Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity," esp. pages 61–66.
15. In the words of the director, "Ihre [Käthe Reichel's] Argumente waren fast immer besser als meine, dienten nicht nur der Rolle, sondern dem Film, ihre Genauigkeit eröffnete Räume für die Phantasie des Märchens" ("[Käthe Reichel's] arguments were almost always better than mine, served not only her role, but also the film; her exactness opened room for fantasy about this tale"). See Habel 693.
16. The director changes the man who cannot wear his hat straight (because otherwise it would cause frost) into a woman character, who, instead of the princess, would become the soldier's wife.
17. The inn maid is played by Blanche Kommerell. She was the child actress for the role of Little Red Riding Hood in Götz Friedrich's 1962 adaptation when she was eleven years old. See Habel 495–96.
18. According to Wiedemann, in the 1960s production of children's film reached a certain stability. In 1970 DEFA announced that it had produced more than sixty children's films in the past twenty years. The Hauptverwaltung Film discussed problems surrounding children's films in order to guarantee future production of three children's films per year. As a result of this discussion, a "Ständige Kommission Kinderfilm" ("standing committee of children's film") was established. See Wiedemann 24.

Works Cited

- Ashliman, D. L. "Rumpelstilzchen von den Brüdern Grimm: Ein Vergleich der Fassungen von 1810, 1812 und 1819: zusammengestellt von D. L. Ashliman." 27 Dec. 1997. www.pitt.edu/~dash/rumpelstilzchen.html.
- Allan, Seán. "DEFA: An Historical Overview." *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992*. Ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999. 1–21.
- Balina, Marina. Introduction (to part 2, Fairy Tales of Socialist Realism). *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*. Ed. Marina Balina, Helena Goscolo, and M. N. Lipovetsky. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005. 105–21.
- Der Bärenhäuter (The Bearskin)*. Dir. Walter Beck. DEFA 1986. DVD. Icestorm, 2004.
- Das blaue Licht (The Blue Light)*. Dir. Iris Gusner. DEFA 1976. DVD. Icestorm, 2002.
- Bathrick, David. *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B. *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987.

- Creeser, Rosemary. "Cocteau for Kids: Rediscovering *The Singing Ringing Tree*." *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment: Lectures, Seminars and Essays*. Ed. Marina Warner and Duncan Petrie. London: British Film Institute, 1993. 111–24.
- Deltl, Sylvia. "Vorwärts und nicht vergessen . . . : Zur Propaganda in DEFA-Filmen." *Der Geteilte Himmel: Höhepunkte des DEFA-Kinos 1946–1992. Band 2. Essays zur Geschichte der DEFA und Filmografien von 61 DEFA-RegisseurInnen*. Ed. Raimund Fritz. Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2001. 133–48.
- Dornröschen (Brier Rose)*. Dir. Walter Beck. DEFA 1971. DVD. Icestorm, 2001.
- Der Eisenhans (Iron Hans)*. Dir. Karl Heinz Lotz. DEFA 1988. DVD. Icestorm, 2003.
- Frau Holle (Mother Holle)*. Dir. Gottfried Kolditz. DEFA 1963. Videocassette. EuroVideo, 1991.
- Froschkönig (The Frog King)*. Dir. Walter Beck. DEFA 1988. Videocassette. Progress, 1997.
- Die Geschichte von der Gänseprinzessin und ihrem treuen Pferd Falada (The Story of the Goose Princess and Her Loyal Horse Falada)*. Dir. Konrad Petzold. DEFA 1989. DVD. Icestorm, 2002.
- Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen: Nach der großen Ausgabe von 1857, textkritisch revidiert, kommentiert und durch Register geschlossen*. Ed. Hans-Jörg Uther. München: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1996.
- . *The Complete Fairy Tale of the Brothers Grimm*. Trans. Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam Books, 2003.
- Haase, Donald, ed. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. 3 vols. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007.
- Habel, E-B. ed. *Das Grosse Lexikon der DEFA-Spielfilme: Die vollständige Dokumentation aller DEFA-Spielfilme von 1946 bis 1993. Mit Inhaltsangaben von Renate Biehl*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf and Schwarzkopf, 2000.
- Hobsch, Manfred. "Deutsche Märchenfilme für das Kino." *Lexikon des Kinder- und Jugendfilms im Kino, im Fernsehen und auf Video*. Vol. 9. Ed. Horst Schäfer, Christel Strobel, and Hans Strobel. Meitingen, Germany: Corian-Verlag, 2001.
- Höfig, Willi. "DEFA Fairy-Tale Films." Haase 1: 259–61.
- Das hölzerne Kälbchen (The Wooden Calf)*. Dir. Bernhard Thieme. DEFA 1961. DVD. Icestorm, 2004.
- Hortzschansky, Werner. "Das Märchen im Film." *Beilage zu Deutsche Filmkunst*, Berlin/DDR, 4 (1955) 175–77, and 5 (1955) 17–20.
- Kersten, Heinz. "Junge Pioniere, Tagträumer und Indianer: Die Kinder- und Jugendfilme der DEFA." *Der Geteilte Himmel: Höhepunkte des DEFA-Kinos 1946–1992. Band 2. Essays zur Geschichte der DEFA und Filmografien von 61 DEFA-RegisseurInnen*. Ed. Raimund Fritz. Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2001. 119–32.
- König Drosselbart (King Thrushbeard)*. Dir. Walter Beck. DEFA 1965. Videocassette. EuroVideo, 1991.
- König, Ingelore, Dieter Wiedemann, and Lothar Wolf, eds. *Zwischen Marx und Muck: DEFA-Filme für Kinder*. Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1996.
- Lieberman, Marcia K. "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale." *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, 1986. 185–200.
- Der Prinz hinter den sieben Meeren (The Prince behind the Seven Seas)*. Dir. Walter Beck. DEFA 1982. Videocassette. Icestorm, 1998.
- Reifarth, Gert. *Die Macht der Märchen: Zur Darstellung von Repression und Unterwerfung in der DDR in märchenhafter Prosa (1976–1985)*. Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen and Neumann, 2003.
- Richter-de Vroe, Klaus. "Zwischen Wirklichkeit und Ideal." *77 Märchenfilme: Ein Filmführer für Jung und Alt*. Ed. Eberhard Berger and Joachim Giera. Berlin: Henschel, 1990. 15–23.
- Rotkäppchen (Little Red Riding Hood)*. Dir. Götz Friedrich. DEFA 1962. DVD. Icestorm, 2002.
- Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot (Snow White and Rose Red)*. Dir. Siegfried Hartmann. DEFA 1979. DVD. Icestorm, 2001.
- Schneewittchen (Snow White)*. Dir. Gottfried Kolditz. DEFA 1961. DVD. Icestorm, 2001.
- Sechse kommen durch die Welt (How Six Made Their Way in the World)*. Dir. Rainer Simon. DEFA 1972. DVD. Icestorm, 2002.
- Silberman, Marc. "The First DEFA Fairy Tales: Cold War Fantasies of the 1950s." *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany*. Ed. John Davidson and Sabine Hake. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007.
- Das singende, klingende Bäumchen (The Singing, Ringing Tree)*. Dir. Francesco Stefani. DEFA 1957. DVD. Icestorm, 2000.
- Staples, Terry. "Soviet Fairy-Tales Films." Haase 3: 900–907.
- Stone, Kay. "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us." *Women and Folklore*. Ed. Claire R. Farrer. Austin: U of Texas P, 1975. 42–50.
- Das tapfere Schneiderlein (The Brave Little Tailor)*. Dir. Helmut Spieß. DEFA 1956. DVD. Icestorm, 2001.
- Trumpener, Katie. *Divided Screen: The Cinemas of Postwar Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP (forthcoming).
- Wer reißt denn gleich vor'm Teufel aus (Who Would Run from the Devil Right Away)*. Dir. Egon Schlegel. DEFA 1977. DVD. Icestorm, 2000.
- Wiedemann, Dieter. "Der DEFA-Kinderfilm—zwischen pädagogischem Auftrag und künstlerischem Anliegen." In König et al., *Zwischen Marx* 21–31.
- Wie heiratet man einen König (How to Marry a King)*. Dir. Rainer Simon. DEFA 1969. DVD. Icestorm, 2003.
- Das Zauber-Männchen/Rumpelstilzchen (The Magic Dwarf/Rumpelstiltskin)*. Dir. Christoph Engel and Erwin-Anders. DEFA 1960. Videocassette. EuroVideo, 1991.
- Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney Spell." *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Ed. Maria Tatar. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999. 332–52.
- . *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. Rev. and exp. ed. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2002.
- . "The Fate of Spinning." *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm; Texts, Criticism*. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 584.
- . "Recovering the Utopian Spirit of the Weimar Fairy Tales and Fables," *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days*. Ed. and trans. Jack Zipes. Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1989. 3–28.
- . "Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity." *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994. 49–71.