Intellectual and Cultural Leaders of Minnesota: Oral History Project 2013-14

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Jack Zipes: I never thought I would be a professor, and intellectual, an academic. When I was younger, my great dream was to become a Royal Mounted Policeman with some German shepherds and to roam the Northwest with my brother. My second dream was to become a professional basketball player. But, given that I am only 5’9” tall and was a good player but never a great player, that dream also went down the tubes. I think that my other aspiration, which I also didn’t fulfill, was to become the great American novelist. My love for writing began very early. My love for writing and drawing began when I was in my second or third grade. That dream stayed with me through college and into graduate school. At one point in graduate school at Columbia University, in 1961, when I was almost burnt out from graduate studies, I decided that I would interrupt my studies for a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature and go to Germany and take a year or two and try to write a novel or two or stories. I did that. I went to Germany, and I discovered that I was not going to be a great novelist. I wrote some interesting short stories, but I realized that my talents weren’t so great as I thought perhaps they might be. I also realized that I had to earn a living, and, because I had to earn a living, I thought it might be best to finish my Ph.D. at Columbia and to see what happens – but to stay near literature. That led me on a great adventure, led me into a field that I was never prepared for, because German was not my number one language at college or even in high school. It was two languages: Latin and Spanish. The interesting thing was, when I returned to Columbia University from my two years, the interruption of my studies, I finished my degree in comparative literature, writing about the great American hero in English and German literature, which enabled me to teach in either English departments or German departments. The first step I made was to go back to Munich, where I had studied, and to teach there as an assistant professor for about two years. There I taught American literature and liked doing that, but I didn’t want to stay in the German system. I wanted to return and teach in the United States. Being a New Yorker, I only wanted to teach in New York. I applied at NYU and Queens College, and I was offered the position in the English Department at Queens College in New York City, and a position as a German professor at NYU. I decided to take the German position with the belief that I could do work in other departments. Once I began teaching, the more I taught, the more I read, the more I wrote about what I read, I became interested in becoming a critic, in analyzing literature and also in trying to study authors whom I thought had been neglected. I have always been interested in the outsiders, in topics that were not part of the great canon of literature. So that’s where I began to do a lot of the important work that I’ve continued to do, up to today.

Peter Shea: What was it about Germany – it’s a different place to write the great American novel? What was attractive to you there?

Jack Zipes: What attracted me to interrupt my studies and to go to Germany? There were three factors. One was a disastrous romance in the United States that I wanted to flee. That was one factor. Another factor was: I’m Jewish, and a very good friend with whom I had studied at Dartmouth College kept writing me letters – he too was Jewish and had wandered about the world – he kept writing me letters and saying, “If you really want to know what a Jew is, you must come to Germany.” And that fascinated me, because it was
the last thing in the world I had ever thought I would do. The third interest was a literary
interest. When I was an undergraduate, I had taken two or three courses in comparative
literature and, though I couldn’t read German, I read the translations of Kafka and Hesse.
Both authors captivated me. That really led to a desire to study the German language and
German literature. So, for three reasons, I went to Germany, and I did discover exactly
what my friend meant. It took me a couple of years to understand what he meant about
discovering what it means to be Jewish, because, ironically or maybe paradoxically, to
understand what it means to be Jewish, you have to understand what it means to be
German today—what German culture’s about, German history, and so on. That was a
great learning experience for me. In fact, learning to read German, speak German,
become part of German culture when I was there, really opened my eyes to many
different things about America, not just being Jewish, but also about American culture.
But I also realized that, although I could write stories and write a novel, I also learned
that I had certain limitations and that I had other gifts that I began to develop once I
finished graduate school.

Peter Shea: Could you tell me what you learned about being Jewish?

Jack Zipes: Basically, by the time I left college — I graduated in 1959 from Dartmouth
College — I had become an atheist. I had read a great deal of French literature: books by
Camus, also Sartre and many other French writers, as well as German writers, at
Dartmouth. I had abandoned all my religious beliefs that I was brought up with. I still
identified, not with Jewish religion but with Jewish culture. Coming from New York,
where there are so many Jews, you can’t escape the Jewish culture of New York. That
was part of me, and I didn’t want to deny that. I realize that I was Jewish, culturally
speaking; I wasn’t Jewish, religiously speaking. There was a great tradition of critical
thinking and critical philosophy that I discovered in Germany. In particular, there was a
school called the Frankfurt School, a Neo-Marxist school, and other philosophers going
back to Nietzsche and Hegel and, of course, Karl Marx. This was a new way of thinking
for me. Dartmouth College was a very conservative, if not elitist, college, and Columbia
was a drop better, a little more cosmopolitan. There were many interesting thinkers that
were not even taught when I went to college. As an autodidact, I had to do a great amount
of reading on my own and discuss these books with German students when I was over
there. They helped me understand a lot of the problems, social problems and political
problems, that we had in the United States and of course in Europe. The more I began
reading what we called critical theory – the German critical theory, not French critical
theory, although I am somewhat conversant in French critical theory as well – that led to
my developing a very unique approach to literature, to particular types of literature,
because I’m rather eclectic as an intellectual. I’ve written on German Jewish writing, on
philosophy, on critical theory, on children’s literature, on folklore, on fairytale, theatre.
I’ve had my own children’s theater in Milwaukee. I’ve done many, many different things,
and at the basis of most of the work that I’ve done is this critical thinking that originated
in the 1920s in Weimar, Germany, which I began reading first when I was in Germany
from 1961 to 1963. I came back to Columbia. Then I returned to Germany for another
two years. After I began teaching at NYU, I was in Germany almost every year of my
life. Since 1961, I’ve spent close to 20 or 30 years in Europe, not just in Germany, but
Also in France and Italy, where I’ve also learned a great deal about myself and about American culture and about the cultures of the countries where I was living.

**Peter Shea:** What’s at the heart of this Frankfurt critical theory, and what does it have to do with being Jewish?

**Jack Zipes:** It does have a great deal to do with being Jewish. When you're in a minority group of any kind, you're an outsider. You're on the margins. You tend to be excluded, for all kinds of arbitrary reasons, from the mainstream of a particular culture. To be excluded provokes one to ask, “What is it about me, or my religion, or ethnic group, or my culture, that causes other people to look down on me or to criticize me or to have stereotypes about me and my friends. I think that leads to a kind of questioning of the norms and morals and values of a culture, particularly when it pretends to be democratic and free and tolerant. There is a connection, I think, between my Jewish culture and the type of critical theories that attracted me. The Frankfurt school was basically an interdisciplinary school. It developed methods to analyze the relationship between culture and social and political conditions. One could say Karl Marx did that, to a certain extent, during the 19th century. There were other writers – but not really, not comprehensively, the way the Frankfurt School did. And not dogmatically: the Frankfurt School was always very self-critical. One of the key books of the Frankfurt school is called *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Those were two of the foremost thinkers in the critical theory school, also called the Frankfurt school because that’s where they developed their theories in the 1920s and the early 1930s. Now, these two particular thinkers – and there were others who fled to either the United States, when Hitler came to power, and some went to Russia or other countries – the key thinkers, Horkheimer and Adorno, made their way to the United States and eventually to California, of all places. While they were there – this is the early ’40s – (They stayed to about ’48 or ’49, when they realized they might be persecuted because of the McCarthy period. Since they were leftists and Germans, they had a difficult time living in America.) This is where they wrote *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The basic thesis of that book is that the rise of the Enlightenment in Europe, Western countries, Western civilization, in the 17th and 18th and 19th centuries, was very important because it led to a smashing of the myths of Christianity and of the type of absolute monarchies, the hegemony of elite classes, and gave rise to democracy, gave rise to a rationalism that led to a critique of the ruling classes and gave rise to the middle classes, to school systems, to a civilizing process that enabled common people to take control of their lives. This was all well and good, but, what Horkheimer and Adorno point out in this book is that, in the dialectics, you have a thesis being developed, and automatically, out of this thesis, an antithesis develops, and then they collide and form a new thesis, and then there is a new antithesis that develops… In this case, they said, though the enlightenment was a very important period, in the 19th century, the seeds of an instrumentalization of rationalism, of reason and secularism, led to a new domination by the bourgeoisie, by the middle classes, by capitalism, by corporate forces, so that the Enlightenment was perverted and allowed also for fascism and other totalitarian forms. There were seeds of fascism and totalitarianism in the United States and in England and in France and in other countries. The question was – and they left it open – whether the dialectic of the Enlightenment –
the Enlightenment was now being perverted in different ways – whether we would be able to prevent that and develop a type of society that was more humane, more democratic, more civil than the directions in which a lot of democracies were going, a lot of nation states that were being formed. The type of thinking appeals a great deal to me, because I think that, if you look at society today, I’ve called it, in a recent talk that I wrote, the dialectics of perversity. We’re living at a time when everything is perverted. Basically, lies are being told. Everything is exaggerated. Everything does not resemble what we are experiencing. We are induced through culture, through politics, through the media, to believe in things that really do not benefit the majority of people in the United States – or for that matter in France, or England, and so on. We are living in a very disturbing time, and so it is important that we take a critical reflection and understand what forces are at work that delude us, that deceive us, that prevent us from really living meaningful lives. I am talking about the majority of the people. I am not talking about privileged groups – I belong to a privileged group – that can, basically, enjoy themselves, to a certain extent, but, at the same time, deprive many, many groups of people of having the same types of lives that we have.

Peter Shea: You’ve had, through your life, this Germany America comparison and contrast, back-and-forth. You said earlier that that was helpful for understanding America. How?

Jack Zipes: I think that would’ve been true had I spent a good deal of my time in France or Italy or some other European country. I think leaving America is important for everyone for a while. If you spend more than a year or so in another culture, have to abide, to a certain extent, by the rules, the values, the systems in these particular cultures, and they are very different from the way we run our lives in the United States, although there has been, through globalization, an homogenization. We’ve come closer together in a bad way. When I went to Germany, it was a very delicate time, because it was 10 or 15 years after World War II, after Nazism, a period in which the younger people with whom I mixed had no ties whatsoever to what happened during the Shoach, during the Holocaust, or just during the rise of German fascism, or German domination of Europe, so that the people with whom I mixed, and whom I was supposed to detest, according to my parents and all my friends at home – they were very critical of me for going to Germany – were young people who were just like the people in America in ways. They had different customs and belief systems, of course, but they were very forthright, honest, decent. (Of course, there were a lot of bad eggs, as well.) They were people who were suffering in a different way because their parents would not talk about their complicity during the Nazi period. A lot of them there were missing their parents, who had died or were killed. It was a very traumatized generation whom I met – and also when I taught there. It opened my eyes to the fact that these young people were not to be blamed for what happened during the Nazi period. Secondly, it made me try to understand what was it that happened in the 1920s and ’30s that led to Nazism, because Germany during the 1920s and early ’30s was considered a cultural mecca. It was a country that also welcomed Jews, welcomed to a lot of immigrants to the country, and it was a bastion of humanity. It had a great culture to build on, going all the way back to the 18th century, to Goethe and Schiller and the German romantics. It had also produced great thinkers like
Freud and Marx – and musicians. What I experienced and listened to the stories, and met their parents, and lived in that culture and tried to understand that culture, I was also trying to understand myself, America – to make comparisons, which I still do today. It may seem provocative or controversial when I say this: when I return to America in the 1960s, I realized that the Vietnam War, in which our government was responsible for lying to the citizens of America, a war was fought in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and we called the Vietnamese people gooks and used racist policies to cover up and conceal the political interests of the United States – it made me realize that there is something to what the critical theory said about the seeds of totalitarianism in the United States. It’s very, very important to try to understand, I think, what it is that propels America, United States, in the name of freedom and democracy and so on, to begin wars, to become involved in wars in the name of democracy and humanity, to open up military bases, to support dictators throughout the world, to put down revolutions that are basically democratic. All of my experiences have helped me to grasp tendencies in American culture by looking at other cultures, by looking at what we’ve done there and what they have tried to do themselves.

Peter Shea: Let me pick up on one strand of your interest: the folklore fairytale strand. This is how you’ve been introduced to me, and also an area in which we share interests. Can you tell me how that came into your intellectual life, given the story you’ve told?

Jack Zipes: If you recall, I mentioned the importance of being a marginal person, or marginalized, being part of a minority, being an outsider. I was attracted to writers in Germany who were basically outsiders. In particular, I was attracted to the German Romantics: Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, E.T.A  Hoffmann, Joseph von Eichendorff, Adelbert von Chamisso and the Grimm brothers and Achim von Arnim. I can give you a long list. When I was in Germany from ’61 to ’63 and then later, those were the writers I was reading– not Goethe, not Schiller, not the classical writers (although I read them). All the writers we are talking about were writers who rebelled against the norms – of course Germany was not a nation state at that time – of German people and German culture. These writers intrigued me because they began developing by writing fairytales, literary fairytales, based on all lot of the oral tales they had heard. The Grimms, of course, were collecting oral tales and literary tales at the same time. I was intrigued: what was it that drove them to use this symbolical, this metaphorical language in fascinating ways, in tales that were very difficult to interpret. What were they saying to us? Were they already critiquing what the critical theorists said was a perversion of the enlightenment? Were they already experiencing bureaucracies in Germany of the 19th century? What were the connections? The dissertation I wrote at Columbia University is called The Great Refusal: a Study of the Romantic Hero in German and American Literature. I published it as a small book. I think I have become so invested in folk and fairy tales because I see in both the oral tradition and the literary tradition a way that individuals and communities use these tales or leave these tales in order to articulate what their needs are, what their criticisms are. They cannot or do not want to bluntly state them. They do it in the form of narratives that are intriguing because they are much deeper or more profound than we actually realize. They deserve our attention and our study. Once I had more time to reflect on the tradition of the folk and fairytale, I began using critical theory, which
nobody else had ever done, to look at folk and fairytales. Sometimes people think that
I’m a folklorist. I’m proud that people think that. Really, I came to folklore and to
fairytales from critical theory, but what I’ve tried to do is to understand both the
ideological and aesthetic appeal and meaning of folk and fairytales in different cultures,
at different times, and I’ve tried to use an interdisciplinary, critical method to bring out
the richness, the profundity, of folk and fairytales. I continue to do that to the present.

Peter Shea: Do you have a favorite?

Jack Zipes: No, I really don’t have a favorite author or favorite tale. Depending on my
moods, there are tales that I lean to. I have written an entire book about Little Red Riding
Hood, called The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood. A lot of people think
that this must be my favorite tale. It’s a wonderful tale. There are many variants, actually
hundreds, if not thousands, of variants or versions of Little Red Riding Hood. Sure, it’s
one of my favorites, but I also like tales like The Sorcerer’s Apprentice or How Six Went
Out Into the World. I can list many tales that people don’t read that much, that are not as
popular as some of the classical tales. I have great admiration for the way serious artists
have adapted Grimm’s tales or Charles Grove’s tales or Hans Christian Andersen’s tales
in film or in theater or in opera. Fairytales, people don’t realize, inundate us daily either
in our advertisements, commercials or cartoons. They are all over the place. We grow up
with these tales. It’s the only genre in the world we are exposed to when we’re babies,
and they stay with us till we die. You can’t say that about the sonnet. You can’t say that
about the novel. You can’t say that about most genres. That’s why these stories are so
powerful.

Peter Shea: I’ll vote for the Goldilocks and the Three Bears, not because I think it’s the
most profound, but because I think it might be the only one I understand. How do you
bring critical theory to bear on Little Red Riding Hood?

Jack Zipes: Up until the time my book came out, there were some signs that people
understood what the tale was about, but no one up until my book appeared did a critical
analysis of the notion of rape and violation in the tale. Basically, if you look at the two
classic literary versions by Charles Perrault that came out in 1697, and the Brothers
Grimm’s tale in 1812, both of them imply that the girl is stupid, disobedient, naïve, and
responsible for her own rape and the rape of her grandmother. If we don’t want to use the
word “rape,” we can just say “violation.” That plays very much into a notion that still is
common today among the most males in the world, “She was asking for it. She deserved
what she got, because she seduced a man, a male, to rape her. If she had really behaved
herself, if she had really paid attention to what her mother had told her, she wouldn’t
have been raped, she wouldn’t have been violated, she wouldn’t have caused the death of
her grandmother – and her own death,” depending on what tale you read. (Most people
don’t realize that, in the Charles Perrault tale, it ends with the girl just simply being eaten,
gobbled up, and there is a moralité end of that tale that says, “Little girls who invite men
into their parlors deserve what they get.” It’s in rhyme. The Brothers Grimm were a little
softer on the girl; they invented the huntsman, forester who comes and saves her, saves
the grandmother. Of course, women can’t save themselves; they always have to be saved
by a male. So there are a lot of problems in folktales and fairytales that further certain ideologies that are rather negative. They’re sexist or racist or elitist, and so on and so forth. If you don’t look at these tales, and talk about the way they are disseminated in societies, how they are used and abused, then I think that you are doing these tales a disservice. I think that we have to look at literature critically, not to destroy it or to tear it apart. There’s always the critique of a lot of people that intellectuals destroy literature because they take away the pleasure, and it’s just literature, it’s just pleasure, it’s just amusement. That may be true of the worst kind of art that we produce, but it’s not true of very good, simple art that has profound meaning, or has meaning because we share in it; it’s part of our culture. We identify with it, to a certain extent, and therefore we have to try to understand it critically, and also gain pleasure out of identifying with it.

**Peter Shea:** I take it you are imagining that Little Red Riding Hood was told in some version for a very long time, in villages; parents would tell it to their daughters.

**Jack Zipes:** Yes.

**Peter Shea:** My guess has always been that, when it’s told, it’s advice.

**Jack Zipes:** Not really. First of all, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of versions. There is an amazing amount of variance in ways of telling the tale. Paul Delarue, a great French folklorist who’s dead right now, he and Yvonne Verdier, another French sociologist and anthropologist, studied the way it originated in the oral tradition before Perrault wrote it. They argue that the tale was told by women seamstresses. She never had a red hood. There was never a doting grandmother. It is a tale about a young girl who is simply given bread and milk to take to her grandmother. The grandmother is not even sick. She goes into the woods and meets a werewolf. The werewolf says to her, “Which path are you taking: the path of the pins or the path of the needles?” She quite often says, “I’m going to take the path of the needles,” meaning, “I am now mature enough; I have learned how to sew. I don’t just pin up and help my mother. I am ready to take that path.” The werewolf, who could have been in human shape – he’s never described – dashes off, gets to the grandmother’s house, kills her, takes some of her blood, puts it in a bottle and her flesh in a bowl, and gets into bed. The girl arrives and says to her granny, “Granny, I’ve brought you some milk and bread.” He says, at first, “Help yourself to the meat and to the wine that’s on the table.” So, she begins to eat the flesh of her grandmother and drink her blood. A cat who is on the fireplace says, “A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny.” Then she’s done, and the werewolf says, “Take off your clothes and get into bed with me.” She becomes nude and gets into bed. She is already savvy and understands what is going on. She begins by saying, “What big eyes you have, what big shoulders you have, what big legs you have!” She is teasing him. Finally, she has to say, “What big teeth you have!” At that point, he says, “All the better to eat you with.” She says, “No, I’ve got to go, I’ve got to go.” He says, “Well, do it in bed.” “No, no, I don’t want to make peepee; I’ve got to go kaka.” The werewolf says, “Ok.” He ties a rope around her ankle and sends her into the courtyard through a window. She unties the rope, ties it around the tree, and runs off home. In the meantime, the werewolf is sitting there, sitting there, waiting. He pulls the rope and yells out, “What are
you doing out there: are you making a load, are you making a load?” He runs to the window and realizes that the girl is beyond his grasp. This was a tale that was told by peasants, not by the aristocrats, not by the middle-class writers like the Brothers Grimm. It is a tale that preceded the tales where the girl is responsible for her rape, where she wasn’t smart enough to get away. The tale is a warning tale. It is also a tale that celebrates the coming of age of a young girl who is ready to become a seamstress. She has to prove that she is smart enough to defend herself by herself against the werewolf. This is why it is so important to understand the history of folk and fairytales. Not all of them are this way. This is a good example that shows: with some critical investigation, with an understanding of anthropology, sociology, politics, and so on, we can understand why a tale like this was transformed in patriarchal, upper-class societies in which women were being exploited and why this tale is so popular all over the world, because we have a problem, all over the world, with rape. So Little Red Riding Hood opens up a discussion about violation, violence and so on, and how can we resolve it. I think one of the responsibilities of literary critics and intellectuals is to open up literature so that we can discuss its implications, its hidden meanings. And they are there.

Peter Shea: It sounds like also: the changes in them, the evolution, is readable as ideologically based or influenced in clear ways?

Jack Zipes: Yes. As we evolve, or develop our civilizing processes, we respond to these tales. In particular, the great American poet Anne Sexton, in 1968 I believe it was, revised 25 Grimm’s fairytales from the feminist point of view – Angela Carter, the great British writer, in her book of tales called *Bloody Chamber and Other Tales*, which came out in 1978. There was, in the late 20th century, a huge amount of rewriting of these classical tales, and it continues today, into the 21st century, with different meanings, different connotations, different ideologies, different aesthetics. It’s fascinating. In order to have a full appreciation of these magnificent tales of the past and present, I think we have to know something of the history and – as you say – the evolution of these tales.

Peter Shea: You have studied German outsiders. There's a sub-group of outsiders in Germany about which I know very little, but they fascinate me. It keeps coming up at the edges of the consciousness a very great people– like Goethe, like Wittgenstein. They always say, “I’m pretty smart, but the really smart guy is …” – and then there comes a name that nobody has ever heard. It's usually somebody who spent a fair amount of time in a mental institution – or at least, half the people that person knew thought that’s where he or she belonged. Hamann is one of these people in Germany, constantly referred to by amazing people as “the really bright one.” There is an Austrian anti-Semite at the edge of Wittgenstein story, “Here is the guy who really had it.” In America, I’ve started to run into these. Chauncy Wright is brought up, and a fellow I just learned about yesterday, Ellery Channing, who went to the woods ten years before Thoreau did and said, “Thoreau, you’ll only be happy if you go to the woods.” I’m wondering about these unstable people who were at the edge of the culture and yet in some way fuel it. I’m wondering whether you’ve run into this phenomenon in your own study and what you make of it?
Jack Zipes: I think that these artists – they’re painters, musicians and so on – that many of them, who were considered insane, they may have produced very little, but what they produced was so provocative, insightful, mind-blowing, sensitive, and so on, that you must admire them, despite the fact that they are a little wacky or a little strange. Let me begin with a quote that I have often used when I’ve given talks. It’s from a writer you’ve probably never heard of, Hermann Broch, who was an Austrian Jewish writer who also fled the Nazis, came here, and lived in New Haven, Connecticut. He wrote a trilogy called *The Sleepwalkers*. In one of the volumes, the omniscient narrator says, “Are we insane because we have not gone insane?” The context: he’s talking about the Second World War. If you’ve complied with Hitler, as all “normal” Germans did in the ’30s and ’40s, you were normal. If you were against Hitler, and were really a sane person, and tried your best to resist and protest, you would either be killed or declared neurotic or sent to an insane asylum. I think this holds true throughout the world. Civilization means constraining the imagination and also denying a lot of the needs of people, and so we basically become neurotic. Those neuroses are important to understand because they are symptoms of what is wrong in society. There is no reason, really – when you look at the world and what we have and what we can afford and distribute – that anyone should go hungry, that anyone should be deprived of work or good health care and so on, but we live in a society that is basically very irrational. That irrationality is what we are taught is the norm, what we should all be doing. The great writers – this is why I have trouble some times with THE great writers; I don’t want to dismiss Goethe or Shakespeare or Milton, because they too saw this – but I think more so are the ones who became highly neurotic, highly pathologically sick: they tried to make their mark in the world the best they could do as artists. I have a tendency, because I subscribe to the underlying tendency of their work, so for instance, I edit a series at Princeton University Press now called “oddly modern fairytales.” But I’ve been trying to do is to rediscover fairytales that were written by highly talented and somewhat neglected writers from the turn of the 19th century, 1900 to 1940, that period, because we don’t know too much about the great fairy tale writers of that period. There’s a painter-writer by the name of Kurt Schwitters, whose works I’ve published and edited, in the first book of the series. The second book was Béla Balázs, a Hungarian Jew, a communist, who also wrote a group of fairytales in 1920 when he was fleeing the Hungarian fascists (in 1919) and went to Vienna. There are other books that are now being published, being edited by Marina Wornoff, Phillip Pullman, Maria Tatar. I have asked other people to come in and edit books by writers from that period whose books we don’t read because they have been neglected and because they were written by people who were very disturbed by what was going on in that period from about 1920 to 1940. So I do think it’s extremely important to pay attention to these so-called minor writers or writers who were insane. As you were talking, I was thinking about a crazy writer, an anti-Semitic writer, Oscar Panizza. Panizza wrote a long short story at the end of the 19th century called *The Operated Jew* – and other stories. He was in an insane asylum at the end of the 19th century. Walter Benjamin discovered him and wanted to understand him. There was a story written by a Jewish writer in the 20th century called *The Operated Yid*, which was a response to Panizza’s story. The fairytale has been used quite a bit by people who are slightly or very neurotic. Some of them were driven to insanity. Some of them committed suicide. They’ve written some brilliant tales.
Anne Sexton, for instance, suffered a great deal and committed suicide. She used those Grimm’s tales to help us focus on what is disturbing in the classical fairytales. She did that in her verse in very subtle and unusual and provocative ways.