

**Trickers, Trolls, and the Ethics of Adaptation:
A Response to Waziyatawin and Jack Zipes**
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When I agreed to participate in this panel on the work of Waziyatawin and Jack Zipes, I figured I'd just improvise my way around my complete lack of experience in the fields of folklore and fairy-tale studies, but when I got my assignment, and when I read Waziyatawin's and Jack's papers, the position from which I have to speak today became abundantly—and a little uncomfortably—clear to me. In order to say anything about the issues Waziyatawin, in particular, has brought to our attention, I have to start with an account of who I am.

I grew up in North Dakota. I am the great-grandchild of Norwegian and German immigrants who settled in the region under the auspices of the Homestead Act of 1862, a cornerstone of nineteenth-century U.S. legislation sanctioning the systematic disenfranchisement, displacement, and decimation of the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains. I'm marking my place in this history not only in the interest of "truth in advertising," but because that legacy, such as it is, brought me in an utterly serendipitous way to a point of departure for my response to Waziyatawin's and Jack's talks.

While I was visiting my family in North Dakota this summer, my sister provided me with some bedtime reading for my seven-year-old son. Among the books she lent me was Fayette Dyrud Thureen's *Troll Meets Trickster on the Dakota Prairie*. Thureen is a Norwegian-American from Minnesota who now teaches Norwegian language at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. In her book, the college-age narrator is inspired by her grandmother's stories about the Old Country to get in touch with her Norwegian roots, and so she undertakes a

study abroad program in Norway. She returns home with a deeper appreciation of all things Norwegian, and in the company of Troll, who is, very loosely speaking, the figure of mischief-making in Scandinavian folklore. Once Troll arrives at the narrator's so-called "ancestral" farm on the Dakota prairie, he comes face to face with "a terrible Trickster Coyote." Trickster is, also very loosely speaking, the figure of mischief-making in many Native American traditions. What ensues is not quite a fistfight in heaven, but the folk heroes get into a tussle that ends with Troll chasing Trickster onto the campus of the University of North Dakota, where the two resolve their differences in the midst of an international cultural festival. If you heard Waziyatawin and Jack yesterday, I hope this is already setting off some bells. But there's more.

When I went to Amazon.com to get my own copy of Thureen's book, I learned that some of the people who bought *Troll Meets Trickster* also bought *The Trickster and the Troll* by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, a Lakota woman married to a Norwegian American. Like Thureen, though in a much more expansive and historically specific way, Sneve entwines folk narratives from her own Lakota background with those of Scandinavia. The structure of her story is quite similar to Thureen's: in Sneve's *The Trickster and the Troll*, first-wave Norwegian immigrants smuggle Troll into Dakota Territory, where he meets Iktomi, Trickster, and the two enter into a kind of cross-cultural bro-mance that spans the period of initial settlement to the present day.

In light of what Waziyatawin and Jack were saying yesterday, I want to ask what it might mean to "buy" and to "buy into" these attempts to integrate and reconfigure indigenous and settler traditions of storytelling in order to accommodate—in all senses of the word—the legacies of imperialist violence on the Dakota Prairie.

I want to ask if we can read these two narratives as enactments of a kind of premature truce or armistice in what Waziyatawin calls “the struggle over story” that “is directly linked to the contemporary state of injustices for Dakota people.” Those are her words. I also want to ask if Thureen’s and Sneve’s books are examples of how, in Jack’s words, the “signs and images” of traditional tales are “organized to create the illusion of a just and happy world in which conflicts and contradictions would always be reconciled in the name of a beautiful ruling class.”

In the context of both Waziyatawin’s and Jack’s talks, what strikes me most about both these books is their effort to enlist the roughly comparable features of Trickster and Troll—both are outsiders, both are troublemakers—to suggest a commensurability, and even a parity, between the experiences of the indigenous inhabitants of the northern plains and the experiences of the Europeans who settled on their lands. It *wouldn’t* be completely fair to say that either author indulges in what Waziyatawin calls “the mythical narrative of benign settlement.” Thureen tells us in her Preface that *only* as a young adult did she discover that the Norwegians weren’t the first people to inhabit the Dakota prairie, and that she wrote her book in part to confront that erasure. In Sneve’s story, displacement is the central motif: Iktomi is always looking for the Lakota and finding settlers instead. Yet Sneve, after listing the similarities between Trickster and Troll in her Author’s Note, goes on to write “Another *commonality* to *both* cultures was the pressure brought upon them by mainstream U. S. society to become Americans. The response of the two groups was a *traumatic* change in lifestyle” (x). While she notes that, in her words, “American Indians were *forced* into change” and that “the Norwegian settlers *voluntarily* chose to become American” (xi), the upshot, and the rationale for her story, is that for both groups, and these are her words, “with the loss of language many cultural elements were also lost or submerged beneath an ‘Americanized’ façade. This story,” Sneve writes, “tells

of this loss through the eyes of folk heroes” (xi). *The Trickster and the Troll* consistently tries to strike a *balance* between these experiences of loss and nostalgia; the book’s final lines, for example, leave us with present-day visitors to the *Black Hills* hearing the ghostly sound of “an Indian singing to a muffled drumbeat” alongside “a deep bass *trolling* a Norwegian folk song” (108).

Thureen’s *Troll Meets Trickster on the Dakota Prairie* represents a much more arresting, and much more interestingly incoherent, attempt to use these folk figures to suture the open wound of genocide and settlement by way of a fantasy of mutuality. But if we look at the text on the pages I’ve passed out, I think we’ll get a sense of the tremendous antagonisms this fantasy of “sharing”—and some pretty shaky prosody—can barely contain. Remember, Troll’s just in from Norway, and he’s just met Trickster:

Proudly I show off/The family farm/My ancestors’ homestead claim.//”But Mother Earth/Belongs to all,”/Trickster hastens to proclaim.//His fur stiffens./**He snatches my deed.**/And Wind carries it to Rain.//The raging Troll/Pursues quick Trickster/Who escapes to the ‘College on the Plain.’”//Confused, I follow/And come upon tipis/Students build to study the past.//Trickster tells Troll/To hold a peg/Until the tipi stands fast.//To the beat of drum/They twist tangled tails/Trading frybread for lutefisk//.” (And listen—if you’ve never tried to choke down a piece of lutefisk, which is, in fact, fish soaked in lye, you have *no idea* how uneven this trade is.)

What’s amazing to me is that the issue of *who now possesses the deed to the farm* is never resolved. That irruption in the narrative of what Waziyatawin identifies as the supreme anxiety of the settler in the face of indigenous claims—circle the wagons, they’re coming for our land!—is completely left in suspension, and we cut to a neatly balanced, demographically

improbable group of native and settler children playing ring-around-the-rosie. The telos of *Troll Meets Trickster on the Dakota Prairie* seems to be very much in line with what Jack observes in Disney's agenda: it aims, in Jack's words, "to shape the vision of the spectators so that they are convinced and believe that they share in the values and accomplishments of the narrative, thus obviating any or all contradictions."

There's no time to go into it now, but there are some very precise contradictions associated with the University of North Dakota, a school that does indeed sponsor lots of folk festivals and native studies programs, *all the while* clinging to its athletic logo, "The Fighting Sioux," in the face of formal opposition from three major tribal groups in the state, not to mention the NCAA.

I don't want to leave the impression that I think finding fault with books like Sneve's and Thureen's is the best way to play out the implications of what Waziyatawin and Jack were saying yesterday. I think both of these stories are kind of Disneyfied, but what's more important to me is that I'm not really sure what the de-Disneyfication program would look like in these cases.

It's one thing to say that we probably shouldn't concoct stories proposing a kind of equilibrium between the traumas of indigenous people and the "traumas" of the settlers who displace them, or stories suggesting that the disparities might be corrected by adding frybread to the smørgasbord. The losses immigration inevitably entails are not equivalent to the losses incurred through dispossession, transportation, and mass slaughter; the waning of a European heritage language is not equivalent to state-sponsored linguicide.

It's something else, I think, to say that we ought to be able to imagine a way of saying that, in the end, the imperialist project wasn't good for anybody.

In taking part in our adopted country's murderous manifest destiny, we homesteaders gave up a portion of *our* humanity, and I'd like to be able to see work like Faythe Thureen's, for all its inadequacy and clumsiness, as a signal that at least some of us now would like to get at least some of that humanity back.

Given all we've heard this week about the marvelous capacities of traditional stories, it makes sense that an entrenched but thoughtful settler like Thureen would turn to folk narratives in the hope of discovering the right spell to change the likes of her, and the likes of me, from trolls back into human beings. Jack has clearly outlined the risks we run when we mess with magic like that, but he's also shown us some of the real potential in retelling stories of wonder in ways that don't wish away antagonisms and contradictions. And Waziyatawin has so eloquently reminded me that what's at stake for us settlers in trying to craft such tales of transformation cannot only be the imaginary rehabilitation of our collective conscience but also the real reallocation of our collective power.

I did read *Troll Meets Trickster on the Dakota Prairie* to my seven-year-old. He fell asleep about two-thirds of the way through. At his age, that might well have been the appropriate response. What I hear Waziyatawin and Jack telling us, in their different ways, along with all the others who have contributed to this symposium, is that at our age, and in our age, it's our responsibility to stay awake until the end.

12- Trickers, Trolls, and the Ethics of Adaptation: A Response to Waz̄-yatawin and Jack Zipes. John Zuern. Read more. Adaptations of fairy tales were particularly popular in the years of early cinema. In the period preceding the year 1903 films consisted of a series of animated tableaux since filmmakers had difficulties in telling a coherent story. Allusions to a well-known tale could then function as a guide for the spectator. At the same time, filmmakers were fond of experimenting with cinematic tricks, such as stop-motion techniques and superimpositions. The fairy tale offers a legitimate backdrop for these tricks and these film adaptations even display an excess of the marvelous a Trickers, Trolls, and the Ethics of Adaptation: A Response to Waz̄-yatawin and Jack Zipes Folktales and Fairly Tales Symposium September 26, 2008 John Zuern. When I agreed to participate in this panel on the work of Waz̄-yatawin and Jack Zipes, I figured I'd just improvise my way around my complete lack of experience in the fields of folklore and fairy-tale studies, but when I got my assignment, and when I read Waz̄-yatawin's and Jack's papers, the position from which I have to speak today became abundantly and a little uncomfortably clear to me. Among the books she lent me was Faythe Dyrud Thureen's Troll Meets Trickster on the Dakota Prairie. Read 12 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Criticism includes seven important assessments of ... Jack Zipes has definitely earned his reputation as knowledgeable in the field of fairy tales. One of my favorite parts of reading his insights is that he speaks clearly and plainly in a way that anyone can understand. Like · see review. Zipes enjoys using droll titles for his works like Don't Bet on the Prince and The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Ridinghood. He completed a PhD in comparative literature at Columbia University. Zipes taught at various institutions before heading German language studies at the University of Minnesota. There can only be zero tolerance for criminal interference in American elections. This international conspiracy must be met with swift action by the President and be fully supported by elected officials for the protection of voting integrity and the prosperity of our great nation." Click HERE for related information. Comment: The above is a Google translation of this article. It includes this video: This may be part of the information warfare contingent of those trying to #StopTheSteal. For example, Johnson (like Sidney Powell and Lin Wood, among others), says there was a military op to r Jack David Zipes (born 1937) is a professor emeritus of German, comparative literature, and cultural studies, who has published and lectured on German literature, critical theory, German Jewish culture, children's literature, and folklore. In the latter part of his career he translated two major editions of the tales of the Brothers Grimm and focused on fairy tales, their evolution, and their social and political role in civilizing processes. According to Zipes, fairy tales "serve a meaningful social