



New Approaches to Teaching Folk and Fairy Tales

Edited by Christa C. Jones and Claudia Schwabe. 2016. Boulder: Utah State University Press. 248 pages. ISBN: 9781607324805 (soft cover).

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Christa Jones and Claudia Schwabe designed their book to support teaching folklore and fairy tales from a cross-disciplinary perspective (3-18). Since, in practice, folklorists and literary scholars continue to teach fairy and folk tales far more than do historians and sociologists, the new approaches necessarily entail adapting their interpretations to research results in other disciplines. An earlier instance of the same process emerged with the advent of Women's Studies and allied feminist revisionism that reoriented academic thinking in disciplines long held to be unassailably independent, from theology, human psychology, and animal behavior to drug trials, economics, and even book history.

What is the evidence that fairy and folk tales can absorb and put to use fundamentally new approaches to their teaching? To answer that question, let us start with *old* approaches to teaching folk and fairy tales. Customary introductions to essays about fairy tales include former approaches, such as fairy tales as refigurings of planetary motion, remnants of past belief systems from paleolithic to medieval, instances of nascent nationalism and/or ethnic identity, and responses to children's psychic needs. In the 1980s fairy tales were presented and analyzed as examples of hegemonic repression of rural proletariats, while book-history scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s suggested that fairy tales were literary products of newly introduced print for mass readership.

Most recently fairy tales have been understood as meme bearers of cultural experience. The large number of Jack Zipes's books has imprinted his vision of fairy tales as accepted fact, an observation that is abundantly evident in the Jones-Schwabe volume, beginning with their own introduction. So powerful have his views become in fairy-tale discussion that they are often not tagged as his approach but as assumable fact, and thus his name appears in relatively few of the article bibliographies.

Jones and Schwabe claim to "dare to de-compartmentalize traditional fairy-tale research-based, analytical scholarship by shifting and expanding our focus of analysis to include international research on pedagogy in a higher-education setting" and "to turn our attention to the neglected field of fairy-tale pedagogy and teaching methods" by incorporating "teaching strategies and methodologies in folklore, storytelling and fairy-tale classrooms, and in other academic disciplines that use the age-old device of storytelling, including anthropology, cultural studies, history, linguistics, literature, philosophy, political studies, psychology, theology, women and gender studies, and beyond" (5).

Contributors support the teaching initiative beginning with Donald Haase's enthusiastic endorsement (vii-xvi) and continuing with close reading (Maria Tatar and Christina Phillips Mattson, Cyrill François, et al.), eliciting

student responses to fairy-tale material and secondary literature (Lisa Gabbert 35-37), using film to teach fairy tales (Claudia Schwabe, Pauline Greenhill and Jennifer Orme, Anne Duggan, Jeana Jorgensen), small group discussions (Christa C. Jones et al.) and teaching online (Greenhill and Orme), and the process of translation (Christine A. Jones, Anissa Talabite-Moodley). Contrastive reading of two or more verbal and/or visual texts is a recurring methodology but takes center stage in articles by Armando Maggi and Cyrill François. One of the most innovative approaches in the volume is Doris McGonagill's description of grouping tales by shared ecocritical content in the context of an introductory general studies course (673-78). The most intellectually appealing article for me is Anne Duggan's exploration of Hansel and Gretel and Sleeping Beauty, using films to queer potential interpretations of character and plot.

Four general content-groupings structure the volume. In Part I: Fantastic Environments, Maria Tatar and Christina Mattson's "Fairy Tales, Myths, and Fantasy" (21-34) defines fairy tales as "foundational stories from the childhood of culture and also from the culture of childhood" and links current tales to myths purported to have existed in a preliterate past (21) and to have progressed from fireside to literary text (24). In "Teaching Fairy Tales in Folklore Classes" (35-47), Lisa Gabbert assumes an intimate linkage between fairy tales and folklore (36), a hypothesis elaborated by Juliette Wood in "At the Bottom of a Well: Teaching the Otherworld as a Folktale Environment" (48-59). Here she presents fairy tales in the context of English literature, envisaging an Otherworld (50-52) in the broadest possible sense and location (52-58).

The four essays of Part II: Sociopolitical and Cultural Approaches to Teaching Canonical Fairy Tales begin with Doris McGonagill's "Fairy-Tale as Memory Site," which explores "Romantic Imagination, Cultural Construction and a Hybrid Approach to Teaching the Grimms' Fairy Tales and the Environment" (63-78). Claudia Schwabe continues with "Grimms' Fairy Tales in a Political Context: Teaching East German Fairy-Tale Films," addressing films produced between the late 1940s and the 1989 reunification of Germany, in which content differences between East German editions of the Grimms' tales and those in the West were filmically reified (79-98). I myself remember East German editions in which Snow White's mother did *not* dance herself to death in red-hot iron shoes, and Sleeping Beauty lay on her side during her long sleep, chastely unavailable to sexual predation. Schwabe's essay reports on her expansive investigation and teaching of films produced by the then East Germany's state DEFA unit, investigating gender equality, punishment and reward, and social class as a "looking glass of society" (82), although many of the films Schwabe cites reflect that socialist society's ideals rather than East Germany's actual practices at the time. Evocative images in this article remind us that many shared visual conventions linked East and West in the decades of DEFA's prominence. Christa C. Jones's "Teaching Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* in the Literary and Historical Context of the Sun King's Reign" (99-112) highlights the tales' specifically seventeenth-century characteristics in order to contrast them with modern adaptations. In "Lessons from Shahrazad: Teaching about Cultural Dialogism" (113-129), Anissa Talabite-Moodley discusses the cultural specificity of different *Arabian Nights* translations, understanding translators' choices as cultural dialog.

Part III: Decoding Fairy-Tale Semantics opens with Christine A. Jones's "Significance of Translation" (133-146), a sophisticated and thoughtful exploration of translation itself and its use in teaching fairy tales in the L2 classroom, in examining characters, and in fairy tale history (136). Armando Maggi's "Giambattista Basile's *The Tale of Tales* in the Hands of the Brothers Grimm" (147-158), an exemplary evidence-based revision of the Grimms' own beliefs about the oral nature of fairy tales, analyzes the ways in which their transformative rewriting of Basile's "Three Crowns" changed a fundamentally seventeenth-century fairy tale into a nineteenth-century one. Cyrill François takes a linguistic tack. His "Teaching Hans Christian Andersen's Tales: A Linguistic Approach" (159-171), a close reading of (translated) tales, also draws on the aesthetics of the book as object and on an up-to-date understanding of Andersen's authorial intentions (161-162). His aim is to focus students' attention on Andersen's colloquial register within the complex syntax of his tales' language (165-169). Francisco Va da Silva's "Teaching Symbolism in 'Little Red Riding Hood'" (172-188) closes the section with an account of his students' fascination with fairy-tale symbolism, a concept he uses to link real text with hypothetical abstractions from disparate and unrelated areas of human experience. His enthusiasm rests on unexamined leaps of logic (equating a single person's telling with "oral tradition" as a whole) and ahistorical assumptions about tale content (that nineteenth-century tellers' werewolves were independent of and unrelated to nineteenth-century popular French press publications on werewolves).

Part IV: Fairy Tales, Gender, and Fairy Tale Adaptations opens with Ann Duggan's description of her use of selected French fairy-tale films to queer students' readings of the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel" and Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty," for which queer theory becomes an integral component ("Binary Outlaws," 193-205). Part IV continues with Pauline Greenhill and Jennifer Orme's "Teaching Gender in 'Fairy-Tale Film and Cinematic Folklore'" (206-226), complete with syllabus, and with Jeana Jorgensen's exploration of "Intertextuality, Creativity, and Sexuality" (227-240), in which she recounts her success with small-group exercises in recreating a given tale in differing styles and contexts.

Each essay is an integral whole with supporting bibliographies, references, and endnotes. Some names recur with predictable frequency in the essay bibliographies: Bettelheim, Propp, Uther, Tolkien, Dundes. Notable absences from all essays are book-history research results (when did the Grimm tales become "wildly popular"? [38]); and a corresponding absence of the role of print and publishing in the history of fairy tales, as is evident in the work of Rudolf Schenda, Manfred Grätz, Willem de Blécourt, and myself. The essays held this reader's interest with their lively prose and their attractive blend of familiar texts with frequently novel forms of explication.