

Fairy Tales in Higher Education

Fairy tales taught as a university course is not something people often hear about. Fairy stories are mostly considered to be only for children in order to teach the basic moral principles by which we should live our lives. However, there are a few people who believe that fairy tales can be just as valuable, if not more so, to adults. Utah State University Professor Dr. Christa Jones is one of those people. So, in 2013, she decided to teach a special topics class on fairy tales.

“I thought, ‘Why not?’ French fairy tales are famous and students usually know the fairy tales, but they haven’t actually read the original sources in French or German explained Jones. In fact, many times the well-known fairy tales of today have been edited and sanitized to barely resemble the originals that are well-known to every child in France. Dr. Jones believed that a class centered on reading Charles Perrault’s fairy tales would be a great opportunity for students to practice their language skills, as well as a chance to really expose USU students to a pillar of French culture. “So, I ordered the [fairy-tale] books and then I thought, ‘Well, how do I structure my course? How do I go about this?’” Dr. Jones looked to current research, including USU’s large Folklore archives, in an attempt to answer her questions. After looking for any information to help her, Jones explained, “I did find a lot of materials, a lot of books, a lot of essays, but nothing about *how* to teach fairy tales. There was literally nothing on the market at that point.” So she turned to colleague and fairy-tale scholar, Dr. Claudia Schwabe, and pitched the idea to write a book about the proper method for teaching fairy tales in higher education.

Dr. Schwabe is well-versed in fairy tales with a particular focus on the original German stories, and after hearing Jones’ idea, Schwabe explained, “I knew this would be great because, as [Dr. Jones] said, there’s nothing like that on the market. So, I knew it would be something

tremendous.” Traditionally, fairy tales are associated with children and taught mostly in elementary or middle schools, but very little is taught about fairy tales at the high school or college level. In an effort to change that, Jones and Schwabe endeavored to create something that was not currently available; a guide for others to help teach fairy tales in a higher education setting. Coincidentally, Dr. Schwabe had recently returned from several fairy-tale conferences and made connections with fairy-tale scholars who would later contribute to the book project. “These were big conferences because it was the 200th year anniversary of the Grimm’s fairytales. So, they had all these international conferences which was great, and they were so beneficial for this project.” Schwabe was able to meet people and form connections not only throughout the United States, but internationally as well. “We have contributors from Europe, for example from Portugal, the UK, and Switzerland, but also from Canada. So, it ended up being a very international project,” said Schwabe. These connections allowed the project to receive articles from expert fairy-tale scholars, rather than having to send out a call for papers. As Jones explains, “It’s easier to just commission articles if you already know the important people in the field, than [to receive] hundreds of abstracts, and have to go through them and figure out which ones [fit the project].” Several high profile names such as, Maria Tatar, Pauline Greenhill, and Donald Haase can be found within the pages. “[Haase] wrote the Foreword, and coming from somebody who is considered one of the ‘holy trinity’ of fairy tale [scholars] in the United States, it was a huge endorsement for us to have [him] saying this is an important book and that it really fills a need in our field,” said Jones.

From start to finish, the project took a little over three years, which, according to Dr. Jones, is remarkably fast for a university press. “It’s a long term project, you know, from the first stages of thinking, ‘Okay, how are we going to conceptualize this? How are we going to

structure it, put it together, who's going to contribute?' and then once people say, 'Okay, we'll participate, we'll contribute,' that doesn't necessarily mean they'll end up in the final version," explained Schwabe. In addition to the creation and writing of the manuscript, university books are required to go through double-blind peer review, meaning that the press sends the manuscript to two different scholars in the field. These scholars read and review the book, after which they either recommend the book for publication, or rejected it; this can take up to six months. "We got the comments back, and they were very good, and they had both accepted it. They had comments for each individual chapter with suggestions, so then we have to have time to make the changes, put everything back together again, and send it again to another [reviewer]," said Jones. After the manuscript has been edited to perfection it is sent to the university press where it takes another ten to twelve months for production.

The now completed project, *New Approaches to Teaching Folk and Fairy Tales*, is 252 pages long and contains fourteen different articles discussing different aspects of fairy tales. The book is separated into four parts: environment, sociopolitical and cultural, semantics, and gender. Each category contains different stories and approaches to teaching and discussing different ideas within those stories. Some discuss the feminism contained within the original or adaptations of the story, while others question the political motives behind when a story is released. Each article gives examples of class questions or activities to be used during the course and introduces new ideas to help teachers in their classroom. Jones and Schwabe designed the book to be useable in a variety of classroom settings. As Dr. Jones details, "It's really a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort and that's what makes it interesting. I teach in French, but a lot of the professors here teach in English; they're folklorists. So, you can take this material and implement it in your classroom. That's what makes it [so versatile]." Fall 2016 is the first

semester that Dr. Jones has implemented the new book in her classroom and it has been well received. History and French major, Kelcie Morris took Dr. Jones' special topics French class and explained what she thought about it, "I really like this class, actually, it's one of my favorites, but I'm into fairytales and just the fantastical kind of things. It's actually been really interesting because I'm a history major, and we've covered, not just fairy tales, but she's tied it into history; why they're important and why they started being published when they did." Kelcie explained that the students had opportunities to read the fairy tales and discuss them in class or ask questions; the class has even performed a few of the fairy tales in front of their classmates. "She gives us a choice on what we want to write about the tale. There are questions at the end of each story, usually, and we can either respond to those with very factual things, 'This is what happened next in the fairy tale, this is who this person was.' Or we can rewrite the fairy tale to be modern day, how we perceive it, or write the end of a fairy tale differently. So she's given us the opportunity to kind-of dig our fingers into the fairy tale kingdom of it." Students are required to read the originals in French as part of the class, but according to Morris, "[Dr. Jones] actually wants you to get the material, she's not just about, 'get the work done,' she actually wants you to think about it and do it, but also, she inspires a lot. It's a good class and environment all together." Morris believes that if the class was offered in English and available to all students, it would still be just as successful.

The versatility of this book will truly shine through in, Fall 2017, as Dr. Schwabe explained, she will use the book to teach a new class, "I will actually teach a graduate level class for folklore students. So for me, that's really cool because it's the first time I'll be using this [book] to teach graduate students." This jump from a French or German language classroom to a Graduate level folklore class is just one of the books many applications. The book even includes

a chapter on how to teach the course for an online classroom in areas where students are not always able to be on their school's campus. Each article and story is chosen specifically to focus on different teaching methods and strategies that will help other professors be successful. Dr. Schwabe explained that they wanted to ask, "How do you make it a success in the classroom and successful for the students? How is your curriculum structured or your lesson planning? What kind of out-of-the-box thinking strategies do you use?" According to Dr. Jones, the book has already received favorable reviews including a review which called the book "wall-breaking." It is clear that this carefully created text will continue to serve as a guide for those who wish to bring the magic of fairy tales into their classroom, but are unsure how to do so.

By Sarina Hicken