

European Fairy Tales: Meaning and Interpretation

Lecturer: Barbara Storchová, PhD

Course Description:

Traditional fairytales are a significant part of cultural heritage, drawing the attention of scholars from various disciplines. Through their variety, diversity, and vivid imagery, fairytales reflect the richness of the world, while their unique features and peculiarities highlight the distinctiveness of individual countries, peoples, and cultures.

This course introduces the genre of European fairytales within a broader historical, geographical, and cultural framework. It situates fairytales in relation to other European folk genres, such as myths and legends, with a particular focus on Czech fairytales and their specific characteristics.

The primary aim of the course is to explore fairytales as symbolic narratives that offer insights not only into the world around us but also into human nature. Numerous theories examine the hidden symbolic meanings of European fairytales and the significance they convey. While folklorists have worked to organize and classify these tales, psychologists, literary critics, and scholars from other fields have sought to interpret them—uncovering the values, beliefs, social rules, and customs embedded within, as well as the human desires, dreams, and fears they reflect.

The course also surveys the evolving scholarly approaches to the study of European fairytales, presenting a range of interpretations, including sociohistorical, psychological, anthropological, biological, gender-based, and feminist perspectives. Topics include ethical and moral principles in fairytales, representations of gender and social roles, and the influence of historical and political contexts on fairytale adaptation.

Course Prerequisites:

There are no formal prerequisites for this course. However, students should be aware that the course goes beyond simply reading fairytales. It places a strong emphasis on the analysis and interpretation of these narratives through various scholarly lenses so students should be prepared to engage not only with stories but also with a substantial amount of academic literature from various fields.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will:

- Understand the fairytale as a literary genre within the context of European folklore and identify its core characteristics.
- Compare major theoretical approaches to fairytales and apply their interpretive methods.
- Use key concepts from selected schools to analyze common European motifs and themes.
- Develop an in-depth interpretation of a chosen fairytale using one or more theoretical frameworks.

The course also fosters creative engagement with fairytales and strengthens students' ability to think critically and express ideas clearly, both in writing and discussion.

Course Requirements:

Homework assignments and class participation: Written assignments and active oral participation in class discussion equally form the most important part of students' final grade. Students need to read the text assigned prior to class, for most of the topics questions on the reading will be posed so students must think through and submit their answers. By answering the questions in advance, students should develop and organize their thoughts, ideas, and opinions so that they can more easily participate in class debate – to answer the questions, make relevant comments, pose relevant questions, discuss the topic and defend their views. For some topics, class participation will include some other forms, for example making oral report on a particular part of the study or exploring some small theme on their own.

Reading assignments are generally 20-30 pages per week. Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to make up for any missed work.

Presentation I: team work of 2-3 (or more) students who share a topic. The work consists of creating of an illustrative powerpoint (6-10 slides) reporting on the main ideas of the given study and an oral performance (cca 20 minutes).

Midterm Test, Final Test: written tests that examines students' knowledge and comprehension of class topics (the tests include multiple choice, matching questions and short essay questions).

Presentation II: individual work or pair work consisting of creating of a powerpoint (6-12 slides) and presenting the topic in class (15-20 minutes + 5 minutes for class discussion). Students should demonstrate their abilities to analyze a fairytale of their choice and to apply the covered theory; they must be also able to present the topic to the audience convincingly enough, to pose relevant questions, and defend their opinion.

Final project: creative type of assignment whose format is not strictly given and can vary from reflection essay to more poetic, dramatic or even visual art genres. It should demonstrate primarily students' deep engagement and creative, original, independent point of view, invention, ability to look for interesting connections and willingness to share or perform their experience or emotion. The extend should be 5-10 minutes of in-class performance (including class discussion).

More detailed study guides and specific instruction to each of the requirements will be provided in the course website.

Assessment and Final Grade:

1. Assignments + Class participation: 25%
2. Presentation I: 15%
3. Midterm Test: 15%
4. Final Test: 15%
5. Presentation II: 20%
6. Final Project: 10%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series
AEP Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2

What Is a Fairytale? What Is Interpretation?
Introduction to the Topic

Features and borders of the genre. What can we seek in fairy tales.
Fairytale as part of folk tradition, fairytale among other folklore genres.

In-class screening: *Till the Leaves Will Fall from the Oaks* (Fimfárum Jana Wericha, 2002).

Week 3

Czech Fairytales in European Context.
Similarity vs. diversity. Genesis and evolution.

Ancient roots of European fairytales. Most famous European fairytale collections and their specifics.
Historical, political, social and other influences shaping European fairytales.

Readings and watchings due:

Selection of European fairy tales: *The Juniper Tree*; *Rumpelstiltskin*; *Frau Trude*; *Baba Yaga*; *Father Frost*; *Jump, Cudgel, Jump*; *The Plague and the Peasant*; *The Diligent Girl and the Lazy Girl*; *Two Princes with Hair of Gold*; *The Three Golden Hairs*; *Long, Wide and Sharpeyes*; *Clever Manka*; *Prince Bayaya*; *Clever Princess*; *The Gypsy and the Priest*; *Doja, the Gypsy Fairy* (see the course website).

Week 4

Fairytale and Society, Fairytale and World around Us.
Sociohistorical approach to fairytales.

Diffusion and expansion or parallel evolution? First classification of fairytales, first theories of origin.
Beliefs, habits, rituals. Social orders and practices. Rules and breaking the rules. Emancipatory and subversive aspect of fairytales.

Readings due:

The Fire Bird and the Red Fox (see the course website).

Lutz Rohrich: "*The Folktale and the Reality of the Magical Worldview*" (Rohrich 1991, p. 57-73, 92-111).

Vladimir Propp: *Historical Roots of the Wondertale* (Propp 1984, p. 100-115).

An additional short class material.

Watching due:

The Slipper Tearing Princesses (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52pnZYdeS6k>)

Optional:

Lutz Rohrich: "*Man and Animal – Transformation and Disenchantment*" (Rohrich 1991, p. 73-92).

Week 5

Fairytales and the Other side. Ritualistic theory on fairytales.

Borders and approaching the borders. Rites of passage, a shamanic aspect of fairytales. Realm of Death.

In-class screening: *Krabat, the Sorcerer's Apprentice* (dir. K. Zeman, 1978)

Readings due:

Karel Jaromír Erben: *The Twins*

J. and W. Grimm: *The Rapunzel*

Optional film to see:

László Arany: *Son of the White*

Mare (<https://archive.org/details/son-of-the-white-mare-feherlofia-1981-hungarian-film-english-sub-k-vz-kl-4-b-9slv>)

Week 6

Meeting the Archetypes. Jungian Approach to fairytales.

Archetypes and collective unconscious, Individuation, amplification. A Grimm fairytale through the lens of Jungian psychoanalysis.

Presentation I.

Readings due:

Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm: *The Dummeling and the Three Feathers*. See

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm063.html>

Marie Louise von Franz: "*A Tale Interpreted: 'The Three Feathers'*" (von Franz 1996, p. 46-69, 70-90, 91-113; one specified chapter of these three – up to lecturer's instruction.

An additional short class material.

Week 7

Dreams, Drives and Desires. Freudian Look at Fairytales.

Jealousy, rivalry, repression, regression... Freudian psychoanalytical concepts applied to European canon of fairytales.

Readings due:

Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm: *Hansel and Grethel*, *Little Red-Cap*, *Little Snow-white*, *Briar Rose*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*.

See: http://www.worldoftales.com/fairy_tales/Grimm_fairy_tales.html

Bruno Bettelheim: „*Hansel and Grethel*“, *Little Red Riding Hood*“ (Bettelheim 1991, p. 3-22, 159-166).
An additional short class material.

Week 8

Intermezzo. Midterm Exam Period. Cultural Trip across Genres I..

Review activities. **Midterm Test.** Czech mythology, old Jewish legends.

Based on the lecturer's instruction, the second half of the class will be done in a form of an outclass excursion (**a field trip** to Vyšehrad).

Week 9

Maiden in Distress. Feminist Criticism on Fairytales.

Traditional gender roles, gender stereotypes in fairytales. Gender issues in contemporary perception of fairytales. Historical and social aspects of traditional fairytales messages, modern renderings of fairytales.

In-class screening:

The Seven Ravens (dir. A. Nellis, 2015), class discussion on the film.

Readings due:

Andrea Dworkin: *The Fairy Tales* (Dworkin 1974).

Ellen Pandolfo: *Feminist Critique of Walt Disney's Cinderella* (Pandolfo 2007).

Week 10

Nurture o Nature? Evolutionary Biology on Fairytales.

Literary Darwinism as opposition to feminist criticism. Struggle for life, struggle for reproduction. Cinderella syndrome, mating strategies in fairytales.

Readings due:

David and Nanelle Barash: *The Cinderella Syndrome* (Barash and Barash 2005, p. 153-182).
Karel Jaromír Erben: *Zlatovláska the Golden-haired* (see the course website)

Week 11

Crossing of Perspectives. Analysis, synthesis, application.

Presentation II.

Week 12

Final Test. Conclusion of the course.

Review activities. Final Test. In-class screening, class debate on the film.

In-class screening:

Reason and Luck (DVD Fimfárum 3, dir. D. Súpup, 2011)

Week 13

Final Projects. Cultural Trips across Genres II.

NOTE: This class will be considerably shorter than regular class (60-90 minutes). It will be made up in a form of an outclass excursion (a **theatre performance** based on or related to European fairytale topic) which will be done **beyond the weekly schedule** in the second half of the semester. The **term will be specified** during the first weeks of the course.

Readings:

Mandatory readings

Secondary Sources:

- Barash, Danielle P. and Barash, Nanelle R.: *Madame Bovary's Ovaries. A Darwinian Look at Literature*, 153-182. Delacorte, 2005.
- Bettelheim, Bruno: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. 30-22, 159-166. Penguin Group, 1991.
- Dworkin, Andrea: "The Fairy Tales". In *Woman Hating*, 29-49. Dutton, 1974
- Franz, Marie-Louise: *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, 46-113. Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1996.
- Haase, Donald P.: *Fairytales and Feminism. New Approaches*, selected parts. Wayne State University Press, 2004
- Heuscher, Julius: *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, selected parts. Thomas, Springfield 1974.
- Propp, Vladimir J.: *Theory and History of Folklore*, 100-115. University of Minnesota, 1984.
- Röhrich, Lutz.: *Folktales and Reality*, 57-111. Indiana University Press, 1991

Primary Sources – books of fairytales:

- Erben, Karel Jaromír, Němcová, Božena: *Czech Fairy Tales*. Vitalis, 2012.
- *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories*, selected parts. Anchor, 1983.
- Lomová, L.: *The Greatest Czech Fairy Tales*. Práh, 2008.
- Werich, J.: *Fimfarum*, selected parts. Baset Prague, 2001.

Recommended readings:

- Aarne, Aarne, Thompson, Stith: *Types of the Folktale. A Classification and bibliography*. Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 1928
- Ashliman, D.L.: *Folk and Fairy Tales. A Handbook*. Greenwood Press 2004.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth (ed.): *Fairytales and Society. Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*. University of Pennsylvania Press 1989
- Campbell, Joseph: *Hero with Thousand faces*. New World Library, 2021
- Davidson, H. E., Chaudhri, A.: *A Companion to the Fairy Tale*. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2003
- Eliade, Mircea: *Rites and Symbols of Initiation. Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*. 1994
- Franz, Marie-Louise: *Archetypal Pattern in Fairy Tales*. University of Toronto Press 1997
- Franz, Marie-Louise: *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1996.
- Franz, Marie-Louise: *The Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales*. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1974
- Gotschall, Jonathan - Wilson, David Sloan (eds.): *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 2005.
- Lieberman, Marcia: *Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale*. *College English* 34, no. 3: 385 1972.
Dostupné z: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/375142>
- Luthi, M.: *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Indiana University Press 1982
- Propp, Vladimir J.: *Theory and History of Folklore (Morphology of the Folktale, Ritual Laughter in Folklore)*. University of Minnesota 1984.

- Segal, R.A.: *Jung on Mythology*. Taylor and Francis Group 1998
- Tatar, M.: *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton University Press 1987
- Tatar, M.: Introduction. In *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism*, ix–xviii. New York, Norton 1999.
- Von Walker, S.F.: *Jung and Jungians on Myth*. Routledge 2002
- Zipes, J.: *The Irresistible Fairy Tale. The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. University Press 2012
- Zipes, Jack.: *The Irresistible Fairy Tale. The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, (selected parts). University Press, 2012
- Zipes, J. (ed.): *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*. Oxford University Press 2015.

Additional Resources

Films

- *Doja, the Gypsy Fairy* by M. Horváth, 2015
- *Fimfárum Jana Wericha* by Vlasta Pospíšilová and Aurel Klimt, 2002
- *Fimfárum 2* by Vlasta Pospíšilová and Břetislav Pojar, 2006
- *Fimfárum 3* by Vlasta Pospíšilová and Kristina Dufková, 2011
- *Krabat, the Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Karel Zeman, 1978
- *Little Otik* by Jan Švankmajer, 2000
- *The Diligent Girl and the Lazy Girl* by M. Jankovics and L. Lőrincz, 1985
- *The Seven Ravens* by Alice Nellis, 2015
- *The Slipper Tearing Princesses* by M. Jankovics and L. Lőrincz, 1985
- *The Two Princes with Hair of Gold* by J. Haui, J. and M. Jankovics, 1981
- *Three Nuts for Cinderella* by Václav Vorlíček, 1973
- *Son of the White Mare* by Marcell Jankovics, 1981

Online Resources

- <http://www.worldoftales.com>
- <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2591/2591-h/2591-h.htm>
- <https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/c.php?g=1083510&p=7901911>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUm8BtZd5pI&list=PLOOwSORhCX7aUBJPwirrTnf60ii8ltV_w&ab_channel=AudioBooks
- <https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/c.php?g=1039894&p=7609090>