Happily Ever After? Community Engagement and Social Justice through Fairy Tales

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Abstract

Considering that fairy tales have long been popular in second language (L2) education, we ask how these texts can remain applicable to our changing student body. In addition to their use in lower-level German classes for language and culture acquisition, fairy tales also provide a springboard into L2 literary interpretation for more advanced students, both at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The authors demonstrate that scaffolding and historical contextualization can enable students to engage in deep cultural and transcultural readings, public presentations, creative re-imaginings, as well as critical analyses. Examples come from two German programs at institutions with different educational goals—one focused on community-engagement, the other on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Both demonstrate how reading seminal tales through a variety of lenses can serve divergent learning goals. In one language program, they form the basis for community-engaged projects that connect learners to L2-speaking communities; in the other, they allow students to imagine social change by learning to recognize deep-seated inequities and critically examine how concepts of gender, race and ableism shape the spaces in which they live. The activities described are also applicable to other languages.

Keywords: fairy tales; L2 literature; community engagement, social justice

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Introduction

Their predictable story lines, narrative structure, familiar content, and repetitive language make fairy tales accessible for second language (L2) learners at multiple levels of proficiency. For advanced students who are learning to analyze L2 literary texts, prior familiarity with the genre also aids the development of their literacy skills since they may understand the tales and the literary devices they use more easily than other types of fiction. Recent scholarship highlights how courses based on fairy tales can advance students' cultural and linguistic knowledge (Schenker, 2021), help them analyze systems of power and oppression (Peabody, 2021), facilitate discussion of anti-Semitic tropes and other prejudices (Helfer, 2021), even bridge social justice theories and intercultural citizenship to classroom practice in beginning German classes (Meredith, Geyer, & Wagner, 2018). The ubiquity of fairy tales ensures that even in culturally diverse language courses most learners have some shared background knowledge, which allows for a variety of approaches that "can fill a broad range of curricular needs [and] help students improve critical-thinking abilities, strengthen writing skills, and explore cultural values" (Jones & Schwabe, 2016, p. 6); thereby providing opportunities for deep textual analyses.

For this paper's purpose, we define fairy tales as short, folklore-based, made-up stories, that involve magic and supernatural forces or places in which improbable events lead to a happy or successful outcome. Oral in origin, the ones we focus on were collected, edited, and published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the 19th century. The familiarity with the genre makes it both easier for students to engage in deeper, social justice-related readings of the tales and to create fairy tale-based projects for communities beyond the classroom, since community members, too, generally know the story lines.

The combined results of three recent surveys seem to validate the relevance of critical fairy tale analysis for community engagement and persistent social inequities in 21st-century language classrooms. In one survey, boys aged 5-11 viewed females as weak, incompetent, and unable to survive or thrive without a man's help (Hammond & Cimpian, 2021). In another, girls aged 8-15 in the global south internalized White privilege through watching Disney fairy tale films (Uppal, 2019). The third highlighted that post-secondary language programs remained strong if they encouraged "language application in real-life contexts," such as "opportunities to interact with local communities" and courses with "career-focused learning approaches" (Lusin, Peterson, Sulewski, & Zafer, 2023, p. 3). Although two surveys involve younger children, they indicate that these attitudes prevail and continue to color current secondary and post-secondary students' perceptions of fairy tales. The third highlights that community engagement and real-life applications to L2 learning are elements that characterize successful post-secondary programs.

We seek to demonstrate how working with fairy tales can not only enable students to conduct critical analyses of social inequities but also form the basis for meaningful community engagement projects in advanced language classes in two different German programs. The institutions discussed support divergent learning goals: one focuses on community-based instruction and the other fosters curricula

that support approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This DEI focus allows for applying a critical literacy framework to the classroom that encourages learners to question how language, texts, images, spaces, and objects portray race, class, gender, and disability and re-imagine other, more socially just ways of being (Comber, 2016). The examples described below are also applicable to advanced high school classes and other languages.

Introducing the Two Programs

One is a program with a single full-time tenured faculty member and an occasional part-time instructor at a small private university with a strong focus on community engaged learning (CEL) and workforce readiness. The German program offers a major and a minor as well as a 5-year dual degree program with Engineering. The majority of the approximately 25 majors are in engineering; the 10 German minors generally have majors in the College of Arts and Sciences. Roughly 70 students enroll in German classes per semester, most of whom are native speakers of English with the occasional German heritage speaker. In the class GERM 350: Genre Studies in Literature and Film, advanced German majors and minors prepare for a community-based project by first learning how to analyze fairy tales in multiple representations, then interpreting them through the disciplinary lenses of their (other) major, and finally, developing and publicly presenting research posters at an event organized by a local community partner. At the beginning of the course, students develop skills and vocabulary necessary to interpret texts through discussing short stories, film versions, and visual representations. Afterward, they apply these skills in connection with fairy tales and the CEL project.

The second is a mid-sized program at a large private R1institution which prioritizes the development of DEI-focused curricula across campus. A total of six full-time faculty teach around 120 students taking German and up to 100 non-language students in cross-listed literature and film courses per semester. About half are English native speakers, often with study abroad experience, the rest are multilingual international students and a growing number of heritage speakers. Since German is part of a Comparative Literature major program that also includes Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Persian, the number of majors with a German concentration varies widely from one year to the next. Science, Computer Science, and International Relations majors make up the majority of the program's 15 plus minors. In LG 350: Introduction to German Literature, which is a pre-requisite for other, more advanced literature, culture and film courses, and required for all students pursuing a German major or minor, learners spend the first three days of the semester applying different approaches to fairy tale analysis before critically re-reading the same stories in more socially just ways as a preparation for interpreting longer, more complex literary texts.

The First Example: Students Engaging with a Community Partner Through Fairy Tales

In areas where students have access to L2 speakers, language programs have successfully developed community-engaged or service-learning course units. In German, examples range from studying a German community, which increasingly

relies on Mexican farmworkers to "think through the often-contentious negotiations of space and power among different language communities" (Boovy, 2016, p. 142), to developing a partnership between college students and a German Saturday School (Hellebrandt, 2014) to having students connect service-learning projects to environmental sustainability initiatives (Kost & Peabody, 2021). Reasons for community-engaged coursework include helping fulfill a university's community service goal, having students understand "that language is a social practice [...] and that ethical issues are embedded in intercultural learning" (Jorge, 2010, p. 137), or instilling "a sense of civic responsibility to putting course content into action" (Holmes, 2015, p. 50).

The German program at the University of St. Thomas connects students to German-speaking communities beyond their classroom to meet the institution's community engagement mission. Building on previously successful collaborations with the Germanic-American Institute Saint Paul (GAI), the course partnered again with this organization that frequently facilitates public events attracting large groups of guests, both with German heritage and those without, who have an interest in German culture. The advanced German course mentioned above uses fairy tales to facilitate students' hands-on, real-world learning experiences by curating an exhibit for the institute. The project also supports writing proficiency development through scaffolded research and assignments that eventually result in a Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) project.

Pedagogical goals for community-engaged learning

The fairy tale project, like most CEL projects, is designed to ensure that the students learn to work cooperatively toward a carefully organized goal, in this case, the exhibition and presentation of fairy tale-based research posters written in English and intended for the GAI's Open House on the topic of fairy tales and German culture. Projects are presented in German or English, depending on the community partner's specific needs. Through their work, students learn that a group environment can be unpredictable, unless structured guidance engenders positive interdependence and encourages individual accountability (Fushino, 2010). Although successful CEL projects can lead to transformative learning experiences, leaving the safety of the classroom to collaborate with local community partners can "be risky, disorienting, and emotionally demanding for students and teachers" (Holmes, 2015, p. 48). It is therefore incumbent upon the instructor to approach service learning transparently by telling students from the beginning that they will not know beforehand what will happen and encourage open and continuous communication with the instructor, team members, and community partners. Precisely, because teachers have little control over how their experiences" may clash with students' personal worldviews,"they must confront their own biases and "address issues that may have not come up within the relative safety of the classroom." It is therefore understood that community-based learning can be impactful (Holmes, 2015, p. 51). At the conclusion of the project, students have ideally gained a sense of civic responsibility through the curation of a public educational exhibition for the GAI Institute.

Project description and student learning outcomes

For this CEL project incorporated into an upper-level literature course, students engaged in research on German fairy tales by using academic research skills and (digital) media resulting in deliverable products such as an essay, presentations, and a public poster exhibition. Depending on the community partner's needs, the posters were created in German or English. Students' research and analyses allowed them to demonstrate their linguistic and cultural competence, writing ability in English and German, and professional skills such as teamwork, time management, and developing a project from conception to presentation, while learning about German culture, literature, and history.

Learning to analyze fairy tales and multimedia retellings

In a course that introduces learners to literary analysis through L2 fairy tales, students approach the stories from different angles to gain deeper insights into the genre and structure. In this course, learners focus on several tales by the brothers Grimm but, for the purpose of this paper, examples come from one only: "*Rotkäppchen*" [Little Red Cap] (Grimm & Grimm, 1843). Apart from reading the tale itself, students engage with retellings through a comic (Berner, 2008), manga (Ishiyama, 2006), a cookbook (Arnold, 2000), two short feature film versions (Janssen, 1954; Tafel, 2012), as well as an advertising campaign.

In addition to text versions, the different types of filmic and visual representations provide students with varied opportunities for learning in, from, and about the L2 and its culture(s). Students watch, read, analyze, and evaluate the effectiveness of the retellings and compare them to the original Grimm version focusing not only on linguistic-structural components but also at times on the obvious sometimes more hidden cultural messages. While most materials originate from Germany, the manga version traverses cultures. Students first read "*Rotkäppchen*" in its original version, analyze the text and discuss the main characters. Then, they review the simple past tense and other grammatical structures relevant for the next tasks and list elements typical to this fairy tale. Afterward, they read Berner's (2008) comic version, identify the differences and discuss why they were made. Content changes include that the story is set in the present time and features items such as airplanes, cars, an RV, light bulbs, and plot elements which are virtually identical to the original but differ in linguistic structures using contemporary colloquialisms reminiscent of oral communication. Students discuss how the illustrations in the comic version not only change the message but are also comprehensible to a more diverse group of readers than only a written text would be.

For reception-oriented didactic purposes, the next exercises focus on grammatical structures of "um…zu" [in order to] and adjectives. In the comic version, the wolf uses colloquial language, bypassing the final connector um…zu. Students are therefore asked to either come up with their own questions or change Rotkäppchen's statements into *Warum-Fragen* [why questions] and answer them by using "*um…zu*", e.g.: *Was hast du für große Ohren!* changes into *Warum hast du so große Ohren?* and is answered with *Um dich besser hören zu können*. [What big ears you have! So that I may hear you better].

To better understand the change in the portrayal of the main characters in both versions, students compile lists of adjectives for each of the five main characters *(Rotkäppchen*, wolf, grandmother, hunter, mother), explain their choices, and decide which ones fit best for each of the versions. They may come up with adjectives such as *wild, böse, grausam, hungrig* [wild, mean, gruesome, hungry] for the wolf or *verträumt, vergesslich, ungehorsam* [dreamy, forgetful, disobedient] for *Rotkäppchen.*

In a more production-oriented step, students discuss what the wolf may have said to the grandmother prior to devouring her and write these thoughts down in direct speech before changing them to indirect speech. This exercise is followed by students creating short texts in which they describe what the wolf does in the RV. Afterward, they write a suitable short dialogue between the wolf and the grandmother which they first present as a skit to the class and then retell using reported speech.

For the manga (Ishiyama, 2006), which adds a flair of Japanese pop culture too, students decide what is new or different. What changes does the manga make and why were these made such as the marriage between the two principal protagonists. Possible tasks in relation to grammar and production are (a) finding and analyzing separable prefix verbs, then creating a short text using some of the verbs; (b) writing a dialogue between *Rotkäppchen* and the wolf that takes place after they have been married for multiple years using separable prefix verbs they have collected.

Next, students read an abridged version of the tale (Arnold, 2000, p. 149-151) and the recipe for the cake (p. 72-73) *Rotkäppchen* brings to her grandmother in Arnold's fairy tale cookbook. They analyze the dominant grammatical structures typical for recipes such as comparatives and imperatives and then bake the cake for the next class session.

For filmic representations, shorter films and advertisements are watched in class. Students watch both hour-long *Rotkäppchen* films (Janssen, 1954; Tafel, 2012) at home and are asked to look for themes or note character traits. Students then report on their impressions of both films, compare them to the original text and notice potential changes. They reflect on why these changes might have been made and discuss if these films are still relevant today. The 1950s film version tends to spark discussion on cultural changes and on what may have been "acceptable" and the norm then, but no longer is today and students surmise what today's audience might find problematic in this film. Examples include the portrayal of the male as provider and hero and the female as weak and a homemaker which generates a sense of nostalgia and peacefulness, before they come up with ideas how to update this film to fit current sensibilities. In another exercise, using stills from both films, students first put the pictures in the order, then summarize the story as a class using the pictures as a guide, and finally create texts appropriate to the displayed image (monologues, dialogs, narrative texts). Throughout this task, students have an opportunity to apply previously practiced grammatical structures.

In the final section of this course unit, learners analyze the story based on Rotkäppchen Sekt (sparkling wine) advertisements (AlteTVSpots, 2017; El Mansouri, 2017; TVClips10, 2014). Students are aware that an alcoholic beverage is the subject of the advertisement but understand that the activity's objective is to iden-

tify specific fairytale elements and that it neither promotes nor condones alcohol consumption. The commercials' highly condensed story lines facilitate critical reading, analysis, and examination of marketing strategies, as well as aesthetic considerations for advertisements based on literature.

As an introductory exercise, students conduct online research using German web pages about the product and describe the uses and emotions associated with sparkling wine and occasions on which it might be consumed. Their search also helps them delineate the historical trajectory and geographic origins of the brand. Subsequently, learners examine instances of *Rotkäppchensekt* advertisement across print and film media, discerning and describing nuances. They quickly realize that the advertisers' core messaging has changed little over time. They also observe undertones of promiscuity, which were socially acceptable during the 1920s or the beginning of World War II. Students find these advertisements by entering search parameters such as *Rotkäppchensektwerbung* [Little Red Cap sparkling wine advertisement] as the main search parameter and S*ektwerbung in der Weimarer Republik* or in der DDR [Champagne advertising in the Weimar Republic or in the GDR], *Rotkäppchensekt* 1940 [Little Red Cap sparkling wine 1940] as secondary terms. For posters, students add additional terms such as on *Nachkriegszeit* [post-war Germany] and DDR [GDR]. They easily find filmic representations from the 1990s to the present day on YouTube (also see: *AlteTVSpots*, 2017; *El Mansour*i, 2017; TVClips10, 2014). The internet inquiry reveals imagery that, by contemporary standards, can seem inappropriate. After establishing the long history of problematic advertising, students are fascinated with the most recent *Rotkäppchensekt* campaign (Feil, 2023), which drastically changed its message to one of integration of the wolf as an outsider into the community, but also eliminates the obvious connections to the fairy tale. Only the most astute interpreters will understand that some clues, communicated through red, still relate to the fairy tale.

Developing their own research projects based on fairy tale analyses

The activities built around the analysis of "*Rotkäppchen*" provide the template for reading the other fairy tales before beginning the community-engagement segment of the course. Completing the readings and viewings, students decide which fairy tale aspects they want to interpret through their respective disciplines. In preparation for their research papers, class discussions ensure that students dive deeper and above superficial plot lines to devise relevance of these tales to their own projects.

Students are now prepared to analyze different fairy tales, using what they have learned through the *Rotkäppchen* example as a guide. After discussing what constitutes reputable scholarly sources, students first conceptualize a general topic for their projects, formulate a thesis statement, choose one or more fairy tales they want to analyze, and then pose essential questions. Initially drafting their research paper in German, for which they receive both peer and instructor feedback, they subsequently condense their findings into an aesthetically engaging and informative poster in English. Like the written research paper, the CEL poster production

goes through various rounds of scaffolded assignments and peer reviews; though the posters, this time, are not edited by the instructor.

Presenting their work to the community

Fully aware that their work will be publicly displayed at the GAI, and closely following the University of St. Thomas' CEL guidelines, students combine visuals and text to illustrate their disciplinary-specific perspectives. While working on their research papers and posters on campus, students familiarize themselves with the community partner's website, physically visit the Germanic-American Institute, discuss possible volunteer opportunities with the community partner, and view the results of a community project a previous German class completed a few years earlier and was now archived at the GAI. In addition, they complete a CEL module on the course's learning management system and reflect on their community engagement throughout the semester both orally and in writing.

A few examples of the posters show the wide range of topics students chose to pursue: a Neuroscience major analyzed how the Nazis instrumentalized Grimms' fairy tales in film and propaganda and explained the neuroscience behind mob behavior; a Film Studies major traced the evolution of Grimms' print versions through Disney retellings, modern science fiction, and other re-imaginings; an Engineering major postulated that fairy tales are literary artifacts and cultural products but also generally highlight problems that require creative solutions much like STEM experiments do; and a journalist looked at the depiction of power dynamics in multiple fairy tales.

A closer look at one of the posters illustrates what the students exhibited publicly. In her work on Nazi propaganda and fairy tales, the Neuroscience major combined her German cultural knowledge with her scientific insights. In her presentation, the student led the audience through the Nazi government's pseudo-legal maneuvers, beginning with the instrumentalization of fairy tales in schools during the Third Reich. She explained how tales like *Der Jude im Dorn* [The Jew among Thorns] (Grimm & Grimm, 1843) were repurposed to support anti-Semitic tropes to bolster indoctrination endeavors and justify Nazi actions and discriminatory measures against Jews. Similarly, she described how Third Reich cinematic adaptations like *Rotkäppchen und der Wolf* [Little Red Cap and the Wolf] (Genschow & Stobrawa, 1937) seamlessly interwove Nazi propaganda into the Grimms' narratives with characters like the grandmother and the hunter symbolizing so-called true Germans, adorned with swastika-emblazoned caps, while the wolf was cast as the Jewish antagonist. To emphasize the point further, *Rotkäppchen* and her grandmother's savior is depicted as *Onkel Jäger* [Uncle Hunter], decked out in a full SS uniform, and reinforcing the narrative of rescuing German purity from Jewish corruption and evil.

Transitioning to an exploration of the neuroscience of mass behavior, the student then drew upon the Stanley Milgram experiment (Milgram, 1963) to elucidate the phenomenon of blind obedience to authority figures among the German populace. The Nazi Party, as the student contended, engineered similar mass behaviors by cultivating an exclusive German national community and fostering un-

wavering loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Leveraging fairy tales as a conduit for propagating the party's ideology capitalized on their widespread popularity and trusted status. From a psychological standpoint, the brain's oxytocin- and dopamine-driven reward system plays a pivotal role, with studies showcasing the addictive nature of positive social experiences induced by oxytocin-dopamine stimulation. Consequently, the student argued, even antisemitic messages within fairy tales would resonate with German children who are chemically predisposed to associate dopamine-induced feelings of contentment with acceptance into the Hitler Youth and the camaraderie it offered.

The concluding segment of the poster scrutinizes contemporary advertising through the lens of fairy tales. The student analyzes advertisements from global corporations like Volvo, Adidas, and Pepsi, drawing parallels to the Nazis' manipulation of German fairy tales. She observed that modern marketing strategies evoke warm, nostalgic sentiments reminiscent of buyers' childhood experiences, effectively "softening" consumers and enhancing the efficacy of advertising campaigns.

Reflecting on what they have learned

Like the poster described above, all CEL posters reveal a nuanced understanding of the fairy tales the students had chosen. Some discipline-specific interpretations were more compelling than others, but in designing their posters, all students showed that they could use digital tools to communicate well-structured interpretations, and demonstrated a clear understanding of the cultural contexts for the fairy tales as well as cultural, historical, and social factors that have helped shape the stories. Most presentations also illustrate that the students felt secure enough in their subject knowledge to think on their feet, and field unanticipated questions from community members who were not as steeped in fairy tale analysis. Although, in this case, some unanticipated scheduling issues and miscommunications presented challenges, the students' detailed reflection papers revealed that they were able to meaningfully combine the academic course-work related activities and the poster production with the CEL project.

The Second Example: Reading Fairy Tales Through a Social Justice Lens

The second program also introduces learners to literary analysis through L2 fairy tales. Here, students read fairy tales through a critical literacy perspective, which is both a theoretical and helpful framework of practices that facilitates analysis of how power relations work as well as the creation of spaces for learners to contribute to a more critically informed and just world (Comber, 2016).

Students are first asked to find information about Western fairy tale authors and collectors, recall stories from their own childhood, then discuss what they perceive as fairy tales' major themes and topics, before re-reading the tales more closely to uncover underlying societal attitudes toward race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Much like community-engaged work, a focus on social justice activities also requires mental flexibility; in this case, in a respectful and multiculturally sensitive classroom environment that allows students to discuss topics that can be uncomfortable. In both cases, students apply a variety of questions and

interpretive lenses to the fairy tales, which prepares them for their respective L2 projects.

Considerations for the discussion of social justice-related topics

If instructors seek to engage learners with different experiences, preferences, and skills through diversity of content and assessments and believe that students' self-image is affected by ways in which they see their own and second language (L2) communities' lived experiences reflected in the course materials (Criser & Malakaj, 2020), they will also provide opportunities for learners to imagine themselves as speakers of the L2s they are learning (Anya, 2020). This approach provides students' access to multiple perspectives and centers language and culture among issues like power, privilege, representation, and equity.

Critical engagement with racism and other forms of structural and institutionalized exclusion thrives, as Ogette (2020) finds, on disrupting the repeated reproduction of dominant viewpoints. To create a class environment in which students have multiple and diverse opportunities to question White privilege (Hurley, 2005) and heteronormativity (Sandhal, 2003), instructors not only ensure that everyone gets to know one another, but also relinquish their own authority, involve students in decisions about course materials and projects, and acknowledge that they, too, are learners. For course structure, this means that explicitly stated learning goals communicate to students what they will be able to do with the course information and are reminded of these goals throughout the course. In her work on strategies to promote student engagement and classroom equity, Tanner (2013) finds that giving students time to process questions before requiring answers also facilitates the development of a supportive learning environment. In such a collaborative and inclusive atmosphere all students feel comfortable to "disrupt and revise" written and visual texts (Hurley, 2005, p. 229). This not only promotes, as Kishimoto (2018) finds, recognition and discussion of all forms of privilege and bias embedded in dominant narratives but empowers both students and instructors to examine spaces they themselves inhabit critically and share their ideas for possible alternative ways of being.

Linguistically, fairy tales provide learners with multiple chances to apply a variety of language functions because they use repetitive patterns of narrative development and predictable plot devices. In this program, too, students practice the subjunctive and future tense by discussing possibilities and transformations: paupers become rich, frail children grow strong, the youngest surpass their siblings and achieve great things, and the homely become handsome. Originally not intended as children's literature, fairy tales reflect and magnify their creators' anxieties, fears, and dreams (Tatar, 2003) and, since the tale tellers often hailed from working classes, where sudden disabilities or illnesses resulted in living with hunger, even starvation, the tales regularly center around the desire for a comfortable life, in which characters are healthy and have enough food and wealth for their families' well-being (Zipes, 2002).

Additionally, fairy tales often pass on information in a type of code which is only understandable to a subset of the intended audience (Gordon, 1993), espe-

cially when related to trauma (Cleto & Warman, 2019). For students to understand how such codes work, learners could share instances in their own lives when they coded information, such as using a secret language with their siblings or friends that were unintelligible to adults, explain the reasons why, and then consider how they could identify with a protagonist that might have to code their trauma (Cleto & Warman, p. 109). Even when students identify with a story's main character, that "identification comes about differently for different people" because they connect what they read to their own life experience (Gordon, 1993, p. 266).

Since "fairy tales dwell on pain and suffering rather than on blissful happiness" (Tatar, 2003, p. xxxii) they often subliminally convey the idea that even domestic spaces are not safe and use exaggeration or parody to unsettle conventions that constrain women's agency and freedom. The Grimms collected their tales predominantly from female narrators who resisted moving from being their fathers' to becoming their husbands' property. As Bottigheimer (1982) points out, the brothers' editorial liberties diffused but did not erase the women's coded language. A "critical understanding of the classical fairy tale as a mirror of the forces limiting women makes it possible to project alternative ways of constructing lives" and "demonstrate how women could regain autonomy in a society dominated by men" (Haase, 2000, p. 21).

After considering how women send hidden, coded messages through their stories, asking students to think about how they would convey profoundly unrelatable experiences and develop symbols or metaphors to try and do so anyway, helps them develop "empathetic literacy [sic], the ability and willingness to read about experiences far removed from their own lives and be receptive to the complexities of those experiences" (Cleto & Warman, p. 112).

Preparing for textual analysis

Students are first asked to find information about Western fairy tale authors and collectors, recall stories from their own childhood, then discuss what they perceive as fairy tales' major themes and topics, before re-reading the tales more closely to uncover underlying societal attitudes toward race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Students tend to note that collections published by Andersen, Afanasev, the Grimm brothers, Perrault, and others contain similar tales and deliver messages about what is considered normal or mainstream, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, but also what is attainable. They also learn that the brothers Grimm heavily edited their originally published fairy tales in subsequent editions, making them more palatable to critics. As students revisit seminal fairy tales, discuss film versions, and apply critical perspectives, they gradually become aware of racist, ableist, ageist, classist, misogynistic, and sexist symbolism and learn how to uncover hidden, coded meanings. After identifying pervasive inequities and applying multiple interpretive lenses, they imagine other, more contemporary, and socially just outcomes.

Applying different models to re-read the familiar

In both programs, instructors noticed that if students know certain fairy tales through childhood engagement with illustrated or film versions, their emotional association with specific stories seemed to result in their resisting in-depth analy-

ses. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's (1843) "Sneewittchen" [Snow White] and "Rapunzel" tend to be familiar to German language learners. Globally, "Snow White" is known through the wide-spread distribution of Grimms-inspired picture books and especially the animated Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Pearce, 1937). This version has not only "almost erased the cultural memory of earlier variants" (Tatar, 2020, p. 34), but also means that most students never engaged with non-illustrated text versions of the story. Similarly, most of today's language students likely know "*Rapunzel*" through Disney's *Tangled* (Greno & Howard, 2010).

Since students read these tales in a language not their own, the following outlines how they can develop effective reading strategies to interpret the fairy tales using two different approaches: one, by analyzing patterns of motifs prevalent in a specific fairy tale-type (Uther, 2004); the other, by identifying discrete narrative units or functions that comprise the structure of a fairy tale (Holbek, 1987; Propp, 1968).

Reading "Snow White" as a tale-type

The first approach relies on an organizing principle according to which all fairy tales are composed of a certain number of motifs or elements that combine to form narrative patterns to create plot-stories with the same patterns of motifs are grouped as tale-types and given a classification number. The most widely used fairy tale type catalogue is the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU), originally created and published by Finnish folklorist Aarne in 1910, translated and revised by American scholar Thompson in 1928, and most recently expanded by German folklorist Uther in 2004. In this categorization system, "Snow White" and similar tale versions are grouped as an ATU 709 tale-type (Uther, 2004). Despite the existence of numerous ATU 709 versions from across the globe, the Grimms' story is the most well-known in Western cultural traditions and gives this group of tales its overarching name, although the Grimms' is by far the most murderous ATU 709 tale (Tatar, 2003; Abate, 2012) with the (step)mother attempting to kill her daughter four times, all share the following elements: (attempted) murder of a child, clairvoyant mirror, mother-daughter competition, compassionate executioner, and magic or poisonous apple.

Before their initial reading, students consider the motifs and then take notes while they are reading. This step seems to make a more in-depth interpretation of the story easier for language learners. After discussing initial ideas about the story based on tale motifs, the class collectively reduces the actions to descriptions that might appear in a police report: They come up with *aussetzen* [abandonment], *Mordversuch* [attempted murder], *einbrechen* [breaking in or burglarizing], *vergiften* [poisoning], and *ungewollte Annäherung* [unwanted advances], which the instructor collects on the board.

Students then break into smaller groups to discuss what "Snow White" reveals about (1) *Geschlechterrollen* [gender roles], (2) *Schönheit* [beauty], (3) *Behinderung* [disability], and (4) *Gewal*t [violence]. As students discuss the tale, they also contemplate what aspects would be considered problematic behavior in the 21st century, while other elements continue to reflect contemporary realities.

When the class reconvenes, the instructor inputs their observations and examples into a Google document which remains accessible after the conclusion of the class. After class discussion, essays assigned as homework generally reveal versions of the following:

(1) Gender roles: Students tend to note how the women perceived as "good" (Snow White's mother, Snow White herself) are associated with female-coded chores like sewing, cooking, and keeping house. They also see that Snow White's beauty seems to predispose male characters (the huntsman, the dwarfs) to help, rather than hurt her. They surmise that her goodness is equated with beauty and ensures her personal safety, which implies that people perceived as "good" ultimately do not need to worry about abandonment or death. Although nine adult men play a role in this story about a beautiful, unprotected adolescent girl (ten, if you count the absentee father), the story ends with a heterosexual marriage to the prince, while neither the huntsman nor the dwarfs are taken seriously in terms of their masculinity. However, students realize, that the prince is the only one who transgresses by first initiating intimacy without Snow White's consent and kissing her while she is unconscious. Students also note that "happily-ever-after" ending of this and other fairy tales affirms a heterosexual norm, not validating other life experiences.

(2) Beauty: Students recognize that beauty is related to youth and coded as white (the fairest of all, *weiß wie Schnee* [white as snow], Grimm & Grimm, 1843, n.p.). As they find other examples, students discuss that darkness usually signifies evil or ugliness, even punishment, since transgressions often result in a darkening of the culprit's complexion or is signaled by their dark clothing. Given that students are usually familiar with Disney films, they tend to mention the sea witch Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989), Jaffar in *Aladdin* (Clements & Musker, 1992), or the beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991; Condon, 2017) as examples of darkness as evil or punishment. They also discuss that the queen's age-related loss of physical attraction plays one, if not the, crucial role, in the story. When the mirror pronounces that Snow White has surpassed the queen's beauty, students tend to read this as her struggle with her own aging. Also, since physical beauty is equated with influence, loss of beauty could, they surmise, precede the queen's loss of power. Some also note that the German word for mirror, here used in the neuter diminutive (*Spieglein* [little mirror]), is actually a male gendered noun (*der Spiegel*), which leads some more linguistically minded learners to theorize that it represents affirmation in a male-dominated society, also a common Feminist reading first put forth by Gilbert and Gubar (1979). More astute students realize that the queen's weapons are all associated with enhancement of feminine physical appearance or seduction (laces, a comb, an apple). Some also note that Snow White's black hair is unusual for Grimms' fairy tale heroines. When they are asked to research the explicit likening to ebony, they uncover links to Greek mythology: Not only is ebony a dense, black, and heavy type of wood, but

Hades, Greek God of the Underworld, sits on a throne of ebony, which students sometimes interpret as symbolizing Snow White's multiple returns from death.

(3) Disability: While discussing European fairy tale collections at the beginning of the course, students learned that fairy tales often tend to equate physical ability with a character's moral virtue and other positive traits. They also frequently depict disability as a burden to non-disabled people and society at large. According to Leduc (2020), it is therefore virtually impossible for a disabled fairy tale protagonist to find happiness without eradicating their disability. As students discuss that the seven men suffering from dwarfism in "Snow White" can only work underground and live nameless in the forest, segregated from society, they understand that the dwarfs, although seen as positive characters, have no hope for any reversal of their condition, let alone being granted agency. Students also note that the dwarfs are asexual, since Snow White never once questions her safety living alone among seven unknown male adults. In their conversations, students tend to echo what Solis (2007) observes, namely that the dwarfs' perceived physical shortcomings not only signal their asexuality, but also "confirm ideas about manhood; their disabled bodies explicitly contradict normal conventions of masculinity" (p. 127). At this point, the conversations often conflate sexual orientation, gender, and disability since some students agree with Solis' observation that the dwarfs' "de-sexualization and infantilization" (p. 117) "reinforces and extends homophobia and ableism" (p. 127). Deconstructing heterosexism and exposing arbitrary delineations and "the social ramification of attempts to homogenize humanity" (Sandahl, 2003, p. 37) and using fairy tales to uncover "attitudinal and institutional barriers aiming to privatize, seclude, conceal, and silence discussions about homosexuality and disability" acknowledges young readers' concerns (Solis, 2007, p. 116) and allows students to develop empathy with life experiences far removed from their own.

(4) Violence: Students identify (attempted) murder and mutilation. While the Grimms' changed the mother in their first edition to a stepmother, because "Wilhelm Grimm recognized that most children [...] find the idea of wicked stepmothers easier to tolerate than that of cruel mothers" (Tatar, 2003, p. 37), students discuss that violence against the stepdaughter is perpetrated by the very person who is supposed to love, nurture, and protect her. As soon as the queen understands that she is losing her physical attraction, the hatred and envy she develops leads her to see filicide as her last resort. The queen first orders a huntsman to kill Snow White and bring her liver and lungs not only as proof of the girl's death, but so that she can consume them, thus breaking another taboo: cannibalism. Upon learning from her mirror that Snow White is still alive, the queen conducts the next three attempts on the girl's life. Since happily ever after also "means witnessing bodily torture of villains" (Tatar, 2003, p. xviii), the tale ends with the queen's punishment at Snow White's wedding: her dance to the death in red hot iron shoes.

After reviewing the information collected during class discussion in the Google document, students write their essays. During the final discussion of "Snow White," they are asked to theorize why child abuse and murder are so common in fairy tales. Since the introductory literature course exposes students to texts from the Enlightenment through the 21st century, in which they have discussed general features of pre-industrial European societies before reading the fairy tales, they tend to list famine, war, disease, poverty, and abortion as possible reasons, all of which they locate mostly in the Grimm's pre-industrial period or earlier times. Many are shocked when the instructor posits that "Snow White" reflects common patterns of abuse, abandonment, and murder that persist today. Filicide continues to be "a major cause of pediatric mortality" in the US today where children make up over 10 percent of homicide, abuse, and neglect victims, and the queen's attempts also "accurately echo the common methods by which women tend to kill" namely "through suffocation and poison" (Abate, 2012, pp. 187-88).

Lastly, returning to the ATU classification system they encountered at the beginning of this course segment, students consider that it was created and adapted by three white men in different time periods between 1910 and 2004. They discuss problems with classifying a tale that exists in places that have neither indigenous white populations nor snow as a "Snow White tale-type" and reflect on Tatar's (2020) criticism of the ATU classification system as "cultural imperialism." They also consider Tatar's contention that using this particular tale and tale-type moniker to the US with its history of slavery and racism, ensured that the name "Snow White" became charged with new meanings.

Applying a structuralist model to "Rapunzel"

Now familiar with the ATU tale-type index, statistics on filicide, and "whiteness" as idealized beauty, students have understood that the tale version they are reading next likely also has a long, varied, and multi-ethnic pedigree. They already know that these stories often address difficult and horrific, but not uncommon, events and behaviors. After reading "Snow White" through the ATU tale-type lens, students briefly consider the motifs prevalent in ATU 310 "Maiden in the Tower" tale-types to determine commonalities and differences: A (pregnant) woman or her husband steal herbs or fruits from the garden of a witch, and promise the unborn child to appease her; the child is named after a stolen plant; the witch locks her in a door-less tower, which the witch enters by climbing the girl's hair; a prince discovers the girl because of her hair, the witch uncovers the relationship, whereupon they couple flees, and is (eventually) married (Uther, 2004).

After discussing the motifs in "Rapunzel," students consider structuralism as a different methodological approach that identifies elements of the tale as part of a story's underlying narrative structure. Unlike ATU motifs, which can be reconfigured arbitrarily to form a new fairy tale type, the structuralist model understands tales as composed of a fixed, consecutive order of up to 31 functions. After a tale's initial situation is depicted, these functions define the narrative (Propp, 1968). While not expressly introduced to their work, student groups are asked to come up with common structural elements and generate functions that fall some-

where between Propp's (1968) morphology, albeit with far fewer than his thirty-one narrative units, and Holbek's (1987) five moves that reconcile three main tensions between youths and adults, individuals of low and high status, as well as male and female. Usually, they come up with elements such as "heroine leaves home through no fault of her own," "has an antagonist," "finds herself in a forest" or "is separated from society," "does something she should not do," "encounters a prince," "survives a test or trial," and "gets married"—not necessarily in that order.

Applying the narrative structures they generated, students frequently interpret Rapunzel's segregation in the tower during her teenage years as being similar to Snow White's forced sleep in the glass coffin and tend to understand it as meaning maturation before marriage. Already aware of the hair symbolism in "Snow White," students find that Rapunzel's hair functions both to keep her away from others, safeguard her chastity, and to access her.

After the initial discussion, students break into groups to determine what the tale reveals about disability and social status: Once Rapunzel has left the tower, the witch uses Rapunzel's cut off hair to trick the prince, who leaps from the tower where the thorns at its base blind him. Sightless, he wanders the wilderness until he miraculously meets up with Rapunzel and the twins she has borne in the meantime. Rapunzel's tears fall into his eyes, magically restoring his vision and everyone lives happily ever after.

Most students tend to conclude that the prince's blindness is the low point in his life since he wanders the world and no longer seems to have the power normally ascribed to a royal, such as commanding an army to look for Rapunzel – according to Leduc (2020) a diminished, lesser version of his formerly able-bodied self. Yet, somehow, he can survive on roots and berries in the wilderness. Like most fairy tale characters who are considered good, the prince develops alternative senses to counteract his sudden disability, a "compensation" that seems to disregard his actual disability or "psychologically erase the reality of the impairment" (Schmiesing, 2014, p. 148). Since one's disability does not automatically ensure the development of another sense and the prince cannot reclaim his social standing until his blindness is magicked away, this trope is offensive to individuals who do not want to be defined through their disabilities (Leduc, 2020). Students discuss that the prince's disability, although a punishment, is temporary. It does not resemble mutilation and death of Snow White's stepmother, and although they are not necessarily familiar with the pre-industrial belief that disability was considered God's punishment, they usually conclude that the prince must atone for seducing Rapunzel, but, that his fundamental decency will cause his impairment to be reversed.

Exploring alternatives: What if-scenarios for more socially just outcomes

After their interpretations of "Snow White" and "Rapunzel," students are asked to develop several what-if scenarios for both stories. Students often come up with: *Was wäre, wenn die Zwerge Handlungskraft hätten?* [What if the dwarfs had agency?], *Was wäre, wenn Schneewittchens Stiefmutter keine Angst vor dem Älterwerden hätte?* [What if Snow White's stepmother wasn't afraid of getting older?];

Was wäre, wenn Schneewittchens Vater sehen könnte, wie böse die Stiefmutter ist? [What if Snow White's father could see how evil the stepmother is?] *Was wäre, wenn Rapunzel ihr Haar für die Hexe nicht heruntergelassen hätte?* [What if Rapunzel hadn't let down her hair for the witch?]. *Was wäre, wenn der Prinz Hilfe holte und Rapunzel suchte?* [What if the prince got help and searched for Rapunzel?]. After sharing their various "what if" scenarios and suggested answers, students discuss Disney's upcoming live-action remake of *Snow White* (projected release in 2025) and actor Peter Dinklage's critique (Zilko, 2022): They consider that the company has re-cast *Snow White* with a Latinx actress but is not forthcoming about how it intends to change the characterizations of Disney's original seven dwarfs. In class, students propose various alternatives, and after imagining how they would impact the story's message, they have a choice of final assignments that range from the analytical to the creative. Learners can either analyze two different versions of the same tale type from diverse geographic areas, compare one of the tales to a film or graphic novel version, create a visual representation of one of the story's aspects, or retell one of the stories as an infographic. For those students, who enjoy creative writing, they either rewrite "Snow White" or "Rapunzel" to provide agency to those who do not see themselves represented, create backstories, or retell the story from another character's perspective.

Conclusion

In both German programs, in-depth engagement with fairy tales ensures that students produce substantive analytical or creative work related to either community engagement or social justice. In keeping with goals common to advanced L2 literature courses, both groups of learners also develop a more profound appreciation of tales as literary artifacts and a clearer understanding of the cultural contexts in which they were collected, written down, edited, and retold. Their work indicated that students developed the skills to analyze literarary texts, film versions, and visual representations.

Both instructors strongly believe that "engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students" but that "[a]ny classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered by the process" in addition to showing vulnerability themselves "while encouraging students to take risks" (hooks, 2000, p. 21). They therefore seek to create inclusive spaces to discuss gender, race, and class to help students prepare for the potentially disorienting community-engagement segments and possibly fraught social justice discussions.

As students from the first institution apply the conventions of the fairy tale genre to their own academic disciplines to create publicly exhibited interpretive posters, they gain experience with community- and group-work-based projects. In addition to acquiring real-life skills like effective and clear communication, time management, teamwork and presentational abilities, students and their instructor also learned to accept that they would not always be in control of their own learning but had to compromise with others and adjust to unforeseen challenges. Ideally, transformative learning as one of the goals of community engage-

ment involves becoming self-reflective and critically aware of personal assumptions, which can generate feelings ranging from mild disorientation to frustration, anger, guilt or even shame (Holmes, 2015, p. 52). Although community-based projects are unpredictable and this one, too, did not exactly work out as planned, the students' final reflections nevertheless revealed that they enjoyed the experience, liked to be more engaged with the greater community and seeing their work on display, as well as having learned skills relevant for future academic classwork and the workforce.

In the other institution, students who were learning how to analyze literary texts developed deeper awareness of commonly communicated inequities and came to understand how seminal texts and their retellings convey both injustices and find ways to subvert them. As they imagined worlds different from their own and envisioned other more inclusive and equitable ways of telling these stories, their interpretations also situated fairy tales in their historical and cultural contexts, while honing their presentational language skills. Through their analyses and creative work, students were also able to demonstrate detailed understanding of how historical and systemic social, racial, gender inequities occur and are perpetuated.

While the examples come from German college-level courses, the activities outlined here are applicable to other languages, both in high school and the university-level, since they use familiar fairy tales to "enable access to unfamiliar identities and experiences" (Cleto & Warman, 2019, p. 102).

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