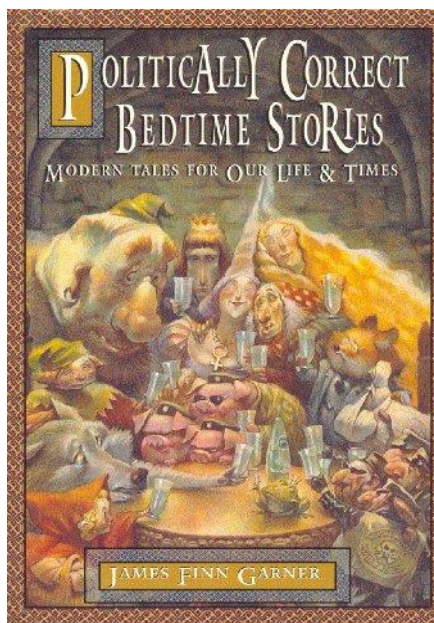


BOOK REVIEW:

POLITICALLY CORRECT BEDTIME STORIES



James Finn Garner, Politically Correct Bedtime Stories- Modern Tales for Our Life and Times, USA, Souvenir Press Ltd, 2011, Expanded Edition.

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Originally published in 1994, Politically Correct Bedtime Stories spent more than 60 weeks on the New York Times Bestseller list, eventually hitting the #1 spot. Also a best seller in Canada and Great Britain, it has been translated into more than 25 languages and adapted numberless times for stage and radio. According to the Times of London: "It is beautiful. It demolishes, in few but elegant words, a dozen kinds of silliness. It is better than I can possibly convey. «Only one thing was wrong with the original edition – the number of innocent trees that gave up their lives to print it. Now, with this 100% tree-free edition, readers can enjoy these classic bedtime stories in up-to-date, aggressively progressive versions without guilt, especially if their e-readers are solar-powered. From Cinderella rejecting unrealistic ideas of feminine beauty, to the Three Little Pigs arming themselves and overthrowing their imperialist wolf oppressors, all right-minded people will feel comfortable reading these enlightened versions to their little pre-adults.

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Introduction

“Politically Correct Bedtime Stories”, written by the American writer and satirist James Finn Garner, was firstly published by MacMillan in 1994 and included 12 tales. In fact, there were fourteen tales including “The Duckling That Was Judged on Its Personal Merits and Not on Its Physical Appearance”, but it was deleted for some reason. In this expanded version that is being reviewed, the book consists of the rewriting of 13 fairy tales and/or classical stories in a satirical manner.

Having been on the bestseller list in New York, Canada and London for weeks and translated into more than 25 languages, it takes a stand against patriarchy. What can be inferred from the book is that these kinds of literary texts are a guide for the construction of each and every cultural norm and can be rewritten from the point of gender equality. So, the writer puts into words his aim of writing this book as generating a literary style free from every kind of biased discrimination such as sexist, racist, nationalist, etc. that will enlighten our modern times by carrying non-discrimination in society to the next generations.

The writer was born in the USA in 1960 and worked in theatre artist for a long time along with other work. Nevertheless, he has always been very famous for his ironic and satiric style and considering this fact, he challenges patriarchy and other traditional norms and reflects this humorous manner in his works which he calls “political”.

Content

The book consists of fourteen chapters; introduction, Little Red Riding Hood, The Emperor’s New Clothes, The Three Little Pigs, Rumpelstiltskin, The Three Codependent Goats Gruff, Rapunzel, Cinderella, Goldilocks, Snow White, Chicken Little, The Frog Prince, Jack and The Beanstalk and The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

The first chapter, Little Red Riding Hood, focuses on gender equality by reflecting the cooperation of “womyn” (the word used by feminists instead of “women”, which was derived from “men”), some public places being dangerous for women, using “sexist remark” in daily dialogues. At the end of the story, Red Riding Hood, her grandma and

the Wolf live together happily without any kind of difference in society. Just like the first chapter, the eighth chapter also focuses on patriarchal norms and marginalized peasants who are almost completely excluded from social justice. Other tales that discuss androcentric cultural traditions and social classes by mentioning economic exploitation are The Emperor's New Clothes, Rapunzel and, of course, the famous tale The Frog Prince. Especially in Rapunzel, the "woman witch" is not a symbol of wisdom, but a symbol of evil and physical exploitation.

Snow White is important because of sisterhood and violence. It is a very sharp example that a woman can harm another woman; nevertheless, sisterhood will remain.

The tale 'Goldilocks' gives some important clues about the family structures of that society and underlines that nuclear families are the traditional forms in which gender inequality has been present. Moreover, the tale also gives special attention to privacy. Racial prejudice is another theme of the tale that has been on the agenda for many years.

The Three Little Pigs has some connotations regarding environmental problems and capitalism, the pigs in the place of the proletariat and the wolf in the place of the bourgeoisie. The pigs establish a democratic socialist system in which every person has a right to education, health care and housing.

The tale about a democratic system without any financial and sexual injustice and low infant mortality rates is Rumpelstiltskin. The Three Codependent Goats Gruff, the fifth tale, focused on ecological balance and individual rights and freedoms. Chicken Little is another work that handles individual rights and freedoms. Centring upon animal welfare policies, Jack in "Jack and The Beanstalk" is an important figure. The Pied Piper of Hamelin lets the writer explain many sociological aspects such as pollution, public transport, urbanization and respect for different religions exist in life.

It can be inferred from the book that the writer used feminist epistemology in order to interrogate inequities and injustice of sex, race, gender, class, all kinds of violence but especially domestic violence, workplace issues, social justice, equal pay, discrimination, etc. Binding the epistemological background and the aim of the book together, the writer seems to have accepted that the roots of the patriarchal ideology is in language and a change and/or a reform in language is necessary for women's secondary status in society. So, the writer may be called as a linguistic feminist or French feminist,

as he took the functions of the language into account just as Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, etc.

Conclusion

The writer changes the traditional fairy tales into modern enlightened ones as tales are mediators that support the social reproduction of patriarchy and gender roles. Surely, some weaknesses in some chapters of the book are worth setting forth. The writer has a claim that he wants to “leave an indelible mark on our children”. However, a child cannot understand this style as it is full of social terminology. Nevertheless, as all of the tales finish positively, for a society free from all kinds of discrimination, it is a valuable source for all inter and multidisciplinary fields working on women’s studies and gender studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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