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Mardi Gras proved to be a critically important cultural and social litmus test for the survival of New Orleans after Katrina. Mardi Gras is more than a party in the street. It is a profound expression of community solidarity and identity. As early as the 2006 season, just a few months after the flooding, community leaders throughout the city understood that if New Orleans was to have a chance to recover, they had to manage some sort of Mardi Gras. Fi-Yi-Yi Chief Victor Harris articulated this understanding in the documentary *Tootie’s Last Suit* (2009):

People say they were gonna cancel Mardi Gras, or there wasn’t gonna be a carnival, or there shouldn’t be a carnival. But I said, “Why shouldn’t there be a carnival?” And I said, “They’ll never be able to cancel Mardi Gras, not in our community.”

In the same documentary, Mandingo Warriors member Collins “Coach” Lewis hammered this message home as his Indians emerged from still-broken houses to parade defiantly and proudly in the streets:

The culture is the thing that’s gonna bring us back. And this is the message that we’re trying to bring forth, especially this Mardi Gras season, that’s because there’s healing in the culture. We got to make a stand! We gotta let ’em know! We’re people! We are people! This is for real! It’s not a mystery. This is about our history. I’m calling on the people to come back home. Back to New Orleans where you belong. Boy, it feels good just to have my feet on this ground. That’s right. This is the promised land. This is the promised land.

In *Downtown Mardi Gras*, Leslie A. Wade, Robin Roberts, and Frank de Caro examine some of the interesting and important developments that have occurred on the New Orleans Mardi Gras scene since the flooding associated with Hurricane Katrina ruined much of the city in 2005. Their study, based on extensive interviews and observations, focuses on the new krewes that have emerged among natives, including some who stayed and some who eventually returned, as well as newly arrived transplants who chose to settle in New Orleans to be part of the changes that were taking place there. The underlying message throughout this collection of essays is that Mardi Gras does indeed matter, so much so, in fact, that new krewes emerged after Katrina to express the changing nature of the community.

The newness of these downtown krewes leads the authors to consider the relationship between history and tradition, between preservation and innovation, and perhaps most interestingly, the issue of authenticity in the context of such contemporary cultural improvisation. They take into consideration the pedigrees and evolution of the various krewes, as well as issues of performance art, style, and crafts among people inventing cultural expressions in real time. The post-Katrina reviving of carnival traditions provided the opportunity to reconsider, reinvent, and reimagine performance in ways that stray from historical continuity. They gleefully and deliberately ignore race and class boundaries and invert gender roles and sexuality.

Throughout the book, the authors note the deliberately popular, accessible nature of these new krewes, in contrast to the exclu-
sive nature of the older krewes. Interestingly, many of these new krewes celebrate with walking parades, which enables them to be much more mobile and logistically improvisational than the huge established krewes such as Rex, Comus, Momus, and Endymion. A consistent aspect of these downtown krewes is the homemade nature of the masks, costumes, floats, and throws, often involving easily accessible household items, such as beans and bones, and featuring individual artistry and personal creativity. Their playful nature is also evident in the wordplay of the names, including Chew Bacchus and ‘tit Rex, that signal deeper inversions of the practices of the established krewes, which ironically have grown distant from the inversion and subversion that are at the heart of carnivalesque play.

The importance of improvisation is particularly interesting in this discussion of what has always been an improvisational tradition. One might wonder about the authenticity and cultural continuity of these new krewes and their practices. However, they are nevertheless steeped in the same long-standing New Orleans traditions of improvisation that contributed to jazz, the blues, and rock ‘n’ roll. The difference is that we are witnessing the invention as it happens, which is the challenge that the authors of this study are attempting to negotiate. As Wade notes in her study of the Skinz and Bonez krewe, "despite any attempt at cultural policing, change is inevitable" (p. 79). These krewes are, as the authors point out, deeply thoughtful as well as deeply playful. And while they may have ruffled feathers in the wider community, who should judge them?

One of the goals of carnivalesque play, after all, is to ruffle feathers, to challenge perceived norms, to tickle society. Ultimately, what works, works, and what doesn't, and as a Louisiana French expression suggests, “Que le plus géné se retire” [Let the one who is most bothered withdraw]. Wade, Roberts, and de Caro guide us deftly through these and other thorny issues, including funding, permits, and legal challenges, with a solid sense of living tradition, as well as an unfailing sense of humor.


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In Teaching Fairy Tales, Nancy Canepa has assembled articles from a mix of fairy-tale and non-fairy-tale scholars with the goal of providing "concrete and practical ideas for bringing fairy tales into the [college] classroom" (p. 5). Comprised of articles describing the authors’ personal classroom experiences and teaching methods and materials, the book promises to "offer teachers a variety of approaches, informative materials, and instruments for navigating the central issues of fairy-tale studies and for creating and teaching meaningful and innovative course [sic] or units on the fairy tale" (p. 4). This promise remains largely unfulfilled due to the narrow range of approaches actually presented.

Teaching Fairy Tales begs the question: “Who is the intended audience?” Pauline Greenhill suggests that it is for "students and faculty not trained in fairy-tale studies" (back cover), but one wonders how and why anyone not trained in fairy-tale studies, student or faculty, would find value in a book on fairy-tale pedagogy. If, on the other hand, the book is directed at those teaching these classes, the overly generalized summaries presented in the “Foundations” section should already be familiar. Additionally, many of the course outlines and materials align so specifically to the individual author’s research that their use for further course development is limited.

Without a clearly defined audience, Teaching Fairy Tales is organizationally confused. The slight Part I, “Foundations of Fairy-Tale Studies,” presumably directed at those untrained in fairy-tale studies, consists of only four articles, which are putatively engaged with “the big questions that stand at the fore of fairy-tale studies” (p. 6). But such a short and spotty review begs the question as to why attempt it at all. This brevity, coupled with the inclusion of the work...