The Scandinavian fairy tale tradition is one of the world’s richest and most important bodies of lore. Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75) was born a poor shoemaker’s son, yet became one of the most popular and translated authors the world has known, an emblem for the enchantment of human imagination. From his imagination we have such unforgettable tales as “The Little Mermaid,” “The Ugly Duckling,” and “The Snow Queen.”

But are they Fairy Tales?

Beginning with an overview of Scandinavian and Germanic Folktale and storytelling traditions, we will proceed to embark upon a close reading of Andersen’s most popular and beloved tales. We will ask questions about Andersen’s relation to oral tradition, trace his influence upon modern Scandinavia and World literature, and examine his position on issues such as class, gender, genre, and religion. We will conclude the class by looking at the reception of Andersen and his stories into contemporary culture vis-à-vis Walt Disney, Joyce Carol Oates, and Neil Gaiman.

This course satisfies Arts & Letters and IP Multi-cultural requirements.