

Stefania Carioli

FAIRY TALES YESTERDAY AND TODAY.
REVIEW OF ARTICONI A., CAGNOLATI A.
(EDS.), LE METAMORFOSI DELLA FIABA,
TAB EDIZIONI, ROMA, 2020

The review of “Le metamorfosi della fiaba” underlines the importance of concepts such as meta-history and metamorphism in the study of fairy tales. The collection of essays displays a variety of approaches, which allows the reader to tackle this issue from very different points of view. Particular attention is paid to the re-creation and re-mediation of fairy tales according to different narrative media, from oral story to musical theater, from cinema to picture books. The overall impression given by the book is that the metamorphoses of the fairy tale continue to confirm its significance even today and through a symbolic and figurative language reveals the variety of relationships between human beings in an intuitive and polysemantic way.

Keywords: metamorphism, fairy tale, re-mediation, meta-history, transpositions, cross cultural analysis

“*Le metamorfosi della fiaba*” is the first title of the new *Wonderland* editorial series, edited by Antonella Cagnolati, full professor of history of pedagogy, who teaches the history of gender education and children’s literature at the University of Foggia, and Angela Articoni, PhD at the University of Foggia, an expert in children’s literature. Meta-history and metamorphism have allowed the fairy tale to go beyond space and time, and the authors explore this theme from various and original points of view. Symbolic and figurative language, intuitive rather than rational, gave the fairy tale the gift of polysemous; a fantastic and universal form allowed the fairy tale to convey archaic wisdom, in which every individual – as Italo Calvino states – was able to recognize that “part of

Stefania Carioli
University of Florence
Italy
stefania.carioli@unifi.it

life that is precisely the making of a destiny: youth, from birth that often brings with it a wish or a condemnation, to detachment from home, to the trials to become an adult and then mature, to confirm oneself as a human being. And in this summary drawing, everything...¹. The volume explores this world while reflecting on the fairy tale – its origins, its forays into genres such as fantasy, its interpretations and metamorphoses, which make it recognizable in every time and every place, and every narrative medium: from oral story to musical theater, cinema, picture books.

Antonella Cagnolati, in “*I do want him to grow up*’. *La saga di Harry Potter come Bildungsroman dell’eroe*” [“*I do want him to grow up. Harry Potter Saga as Bildungsroman of the hero*], proposes an analysis of the complexities of the phases that pre-adolescent encounters on his journey to adulthood. The changes, the disappointments, the dependency – these are the small steps that Harry takes on his journey of building his own identity. As in the most classic of fairy tales, from the beginning we are aware of the drama that scarce cues and allusive phrases only hint at, the tragic result of which is the disappearance of Harry’s parents (p. 171). The entire saga adopts the methodological category of *Bildungsroman*, which reflects millions of adolescents who find themselves suspended between desires for self-affirmation, bitter defeats, and pessimistic disappointments. The saga has reached young audience also thanks to the colossal fantasy film series. And precisely the fact that the cinematic medium declined on the theme of the eternal charm of the fairy tale in the cinema is at the center of Angela Articoni’s analysis.

Despite their apparent simplicity both animated and live-action films introduce existential issues: death, suffering, sex, pedophilia, poverty, and injustice (pp. 52–53); on these taboo topics, the most powerful references to fairy tales emerge. The author of the essay recalls the first time when fairy tale and cinema had really met each other; the French master George Méliès had used them to show magical metamorphoses. Méliès was a genius, a true creator of cinema at the beginning of its time, and he had intuited the potential of the fairytale-cinema union. However, what the fairy tale in cinema requires is not a simple transposition but rather a work of re-creation, of authorial appropriation of the original, which the author shows through Italian fairy-tale cinema: from Francesco Rosi’s *C’era una volta* [*Once upon a time*] (1967) up to the recent Matteo Garrone’s *Racconto dei racconti* [*The Tale of the Tales*] (2015), a fairytale film more faithful to the Giambattista Basile’s *Pentamerone* (1634), which tries to perturb through a disturbing vision between the imaginative, the pathetic, the horror and the obscene (p. 73).

Gian-Luca Baldi also addresses the topic of re-creation or re-mediation, but in the theatrical mode of expression, proposing a musical fairy tale that looks to the future, that opens to utopia and hope. 'To imagine' means 'to create', and for this reason imagination becomes the central point of his essay (p. 85). The author refers to two Italian writers, Italo Calvino and Gianni Rodari, who left an important legacy to recover the dream of the future, underlining the inescapable need for fantasy. Above all Rodari had valued imagination, playfulness, joyfulness, and divergent thinking, and so entrusted them to the third millennium as pedagogical tools intended for changing the society. Baldi starts from some main elements of Charles Dickens' novel *Hard times* (1854), and from its striking parallels with current environments and characters, without the slightest trace of fantasy, proceeds to build his fairy tale. In this fairy tale, he imagines another world, completely different from Dickens' world, in which the future is extinguished and the utopia of a better world dies.

Another optimal combination of expressive methods is the one that takes place today in the merging of a fairy tale and a picture book. In contemporary literature for children, the "millennial narrative device" of a fairy tale meets a picture book, a "narrative device" of the last decades. The author, Susanna Barsotti, highlights how today in the picture book the fairy tale gains the most fertile ground to reconfirm its narrative strength and its pedagogical and educational value. The fairy tale also permeates contemporary children's literature with its own characteristics, and not only in the explicit rewritings of classic fairy tales. Thanks to its ability to travel in space and time, it changes shape and readapts itself to new historical eras and new languages, insinuating itself, sometimes silently, into various story forms, and allows to discern itself only by traces and clues (p. 116). The meeting point between fairy tale and picture book lies in the privileged relationship that both establish with children.

Gabriella Armenise focuses on the fairy tale writer Emma Perodi (1850–1918), who left her indelible mark in the tradition of the fairy tale world and in Italian cultural history, as she contributed to the broader project of people's literacy that has began after the Unification of Italy (p. 18). The author of this essay underlines how the ideal models on which Emma Perodi focused are simple and at the same time effective. Of these was born the *Novelle della nonna* [*Grandmother's short stories*] (1893, Salani, Firenze), a collection of fantastic fairy tales (mostly Tuscan), which have their roots in myth and magic. They are the source of the narrative power of an unconventional pedagogical project, which

is intent on giving voice not only to a historical universe but also to an ethical one, albeit within the limits of the thought that has characterized the passage between two centuries (p. 21). Therefore, to fully understand Emma Perodi's educational functionality, it is necessary to put her work in that historical and ideological context in which she lived (p. 23).

In his contribution, Lorenzo Cantatore questions himself about the distinction between a male writer and a female writer for children and teenagers, and identifies this distinction in the way of telling stories with animal-characters and in the interpretation of the "otherness". In male writings the feeling of otherness mainly emphasizes the autonomous wild nature, eternal enemy and challenger of the animal; in female writings the animal otherness mostly functions to reaffirm the paradigm of welcoming and reproducing a model ideal of a happy life, even when it is limited to the childhood years of the child-characters or child readers. The author's first essay on pedagogies narrated by women draws on the works of three writers, different in age, country of origin, genre, literary style, and social environment to which they belong: Ida Baccini, Beatrix Potter and Marjorie Rawlings.

Leaving the animals, we move on to minor fairy-tale characters — the elves, and in particular the Brownies from the famous series by the American writer Palmer Cox. Subject of Dorena Caroli studies is the literary and iconographic metamorphosis that had happened to these modern elves in translations of the first book of the series in Russia and in Italy. Comparison of the two translations reveals that this two countries have different patterns of accepting Brownies. In Russia, they inspired the character of Murzilka who underwent an interesting metamorphosis linked to the evolution of the Soviet political context of the 1920s and 1930s, in particular of the ideology before and after the October Revolution (p. 246).

In her essay Daniela De Leo explores the structure of fantasy through a phenomenological reading within the oppositional dialectic between representation and perception. The goal is to outline the field of the imagination — as an opening of possible worlds — with reference to Husserl's texts on fantasy and images. As an example, the author uses fantasy genre, which looks at the immediate reality to inhabit the imaginary scenario. The image of the world that is being proposed is never a false one as in fairy tales, but an image that relates to actual reality and where the actual reality completes its metamorphosis. In each fairy tale, the reader is present as in his own world of experience, and the fantasy is encamped on this world, which does not need to clash with the actual reality of experience, as it can exist in a parallel way.

The latest essays show how the fairy tale has crossed and continues to cross cultural and geographical boundaries.

In *La fiaba yiddish tra ricerca identitaria e sionismo: Temerl (1917) di Moyshe Broderzon* [*Yiddish Fairy Tale between the Search for Identity and Zionism: Temerl (1917) by Moyshe Broderzon*] Mattia di Taranto chooses a case study representing the stylistic quality and thematic richness reached by the Yiddish-language fairy-tale genre between the 19th and 20th centuries. From the lexical, content, and iconographic examination emerges the multiplicity of references to an extremely refined literary product, also highlighting the inimitable typical features of Jewish cultural contribution.

Ewa Nicewicz-Staszowska points out that from second half of the 20th century to this day the fairy tale has undergone incessant rewritings and textual and iconic adaptations. In a reality like ours, which is becoming more and more hybrid and heterogeneous, the fairy tale is no longer considered a real literary genre, but an immense reservoir of reasons to draw on to discover new possibilities of interpretation. It is reborn in Italy under different forms and transmits new contents, specifically represented by Gianni Rodari and Bruno Munari, and by Bohadan Butenko in Poland. Butenko reinterprets the fairy tale material that has been stratified over the centuries and repurposes Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, and Snow White, creating unique rewritings: he introduces plots and characters from different fairy tales, reverses characters' roles, exploits the power of error, often resorts to the rhetorical figure of hyperbole, disrupts the Proppian functions, inserting itself, albeit unwittingly, in the trend wrought by Gianni Rodari.

Irena Proscenc examines the modern fairy tales of Svetlana Makarovič, one of the most important and prolific Slovenian children's writers. In this contemporary writer's texts the typical creatures of the classic fairy tale are introduced in new environments, semanticized anew, modernized, and often connoted with ironic nuances that question their traditional roles. On the one hand, the tales of this writer are linked to ancient Slavic traditions, and on the other hand, they deviate from traditional narrative strategies through the recontextualization of mythological characters.

As this volume shows, the metamorphoses of the fairy tale continue to confirm its significance, with or without the "Once upon a time...", the power of its traditional knowledge, which through a symbolic and figurative language reveals the variety of relationships between human beings in an intuitive and polysemantic way. This allows us to read the

fairly tale differently according to who we are, filling it with the reality that most appeals to us.

Notes

¹ Calvino I. (2015) *Fiabe italiane*, Milano: Mondadori.

Стефания Кариоли

Университет Флоренции, Италия; ORCID: 0000-0002-2697-2997

СКАЗКИ ВЧЕРА И СЕГОДНЯ. РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ ARTICONI A., CAGNOLATI A. (EDS.), *LE METAMORFOSI DELLA FIABA*, TAB EDIZIONI, ROMA, 2020

В рецензии характеризуется содержание книги, подчеркивается важность для нее таких понятий, как метаистория и метаморфоза. Сборник демонстрирует разнообразие подходов, что позволяет читателю подойти к этим понятиям с самых разных точек зрения. Особое внимание уделяется воссозданию и переосмыслению сказок в соответствии с различными повествовательными средствами: от устной истории до музыкального театра, от кино до книг с картинками. Общее впечатление от книги в том, что метаморфозы сказки продолжают подтверждать ее значение и сегодня, и через символический и образный язык интуитивно раскрывают разнообразие отношений между людьми.

Ключевые слова: метаморфоза, сказка, ремедиация, метаистория, транспозиции, кросс-культурный анализ