

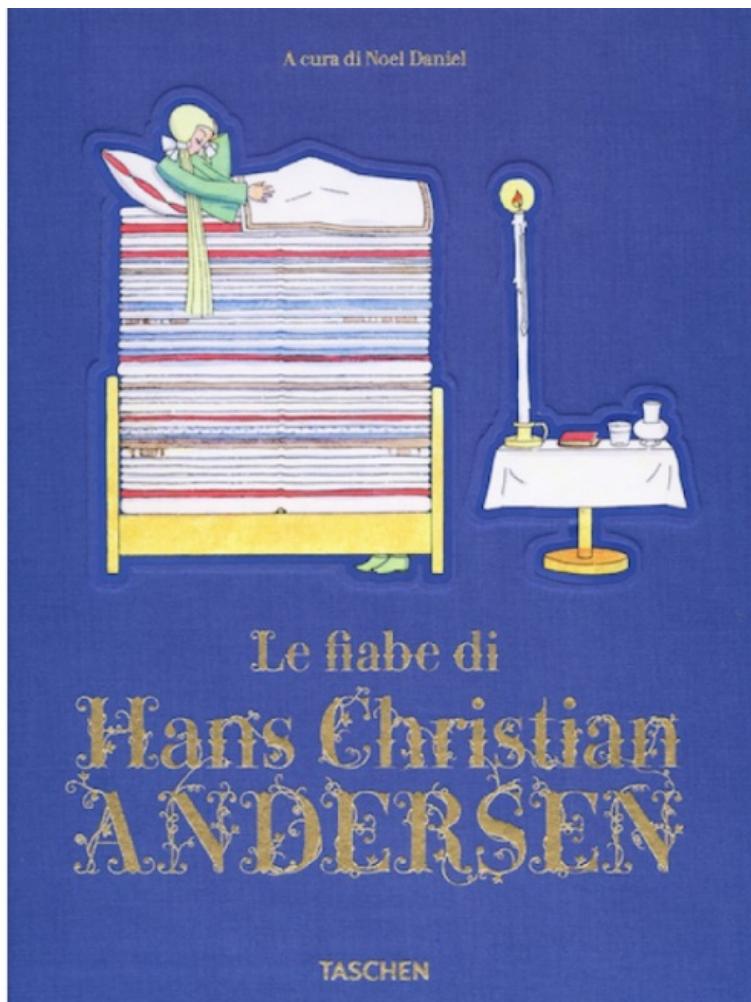
DOPPIOZERO

Prendete i bambini sul serio

[Giovanna Zoboli](#)

18 Dicembre 2015

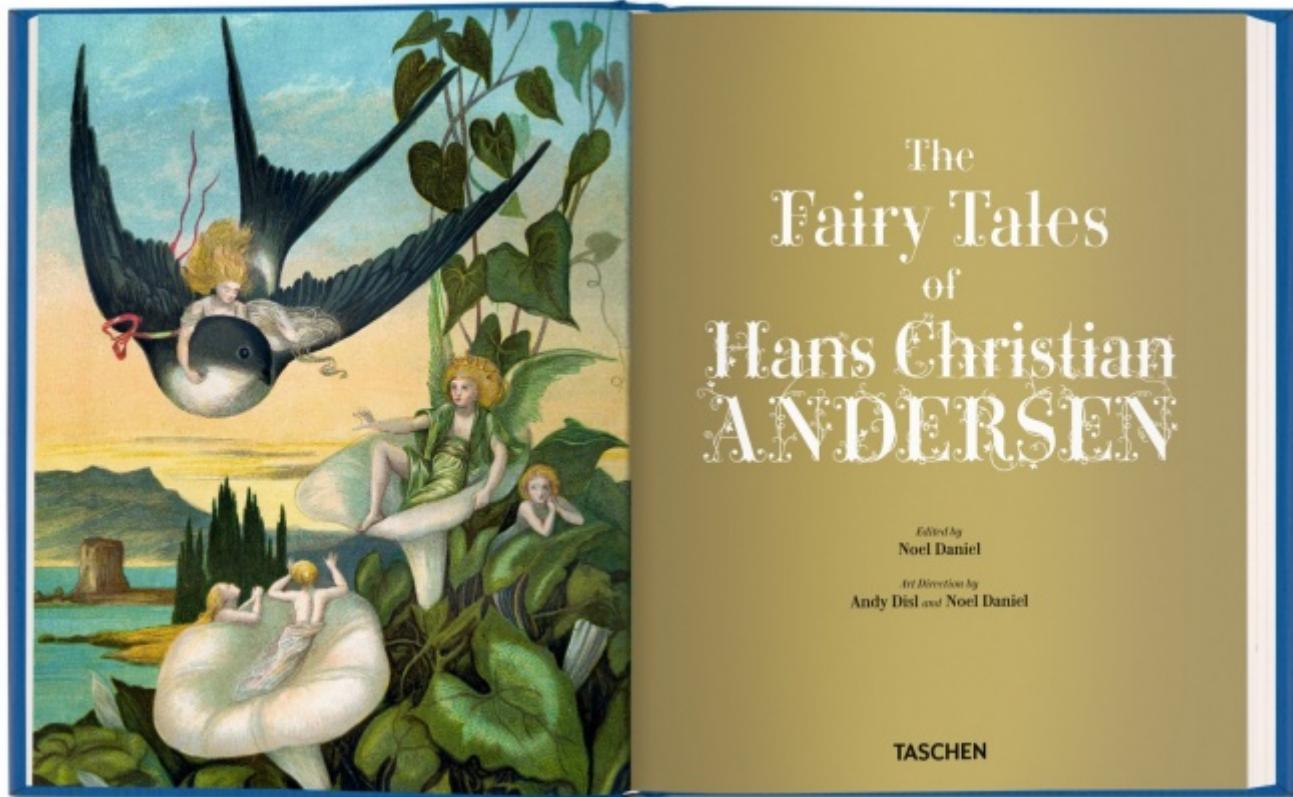
Tempo fa, mi trovai nella condizione di dover convincere una colta e raffinata scrittrice in merito all'opportunità di leggere le fiabe di Andersen ai nipotini. Lei dubitava: i bambini sono spensierati, lontani dai dolori e dalle vicissitudini della vita, perché far loro una lettura che può turbarli? E, pur essendo stata da bambina una appassionata lettrice di fiabe, concludeva che le fiabe di Andersen non sono adatte ai bambini di oggi. Per convincerla, le spedii in omaggio [Letture facoltative](#) (Adelphi 2006), la magnifica raccolta di recensioni che Wis?awa Szymborska ha dedicato ai "libri inutili" in cui le capitava di imbattersi – manuali, compendi, raccolte di consigli, libri divulgativi sugli argomenti più strani – fra i quali è annoverata la raccolta di fiabe di Hans Christian Andersen. Scrive la Szymborska:



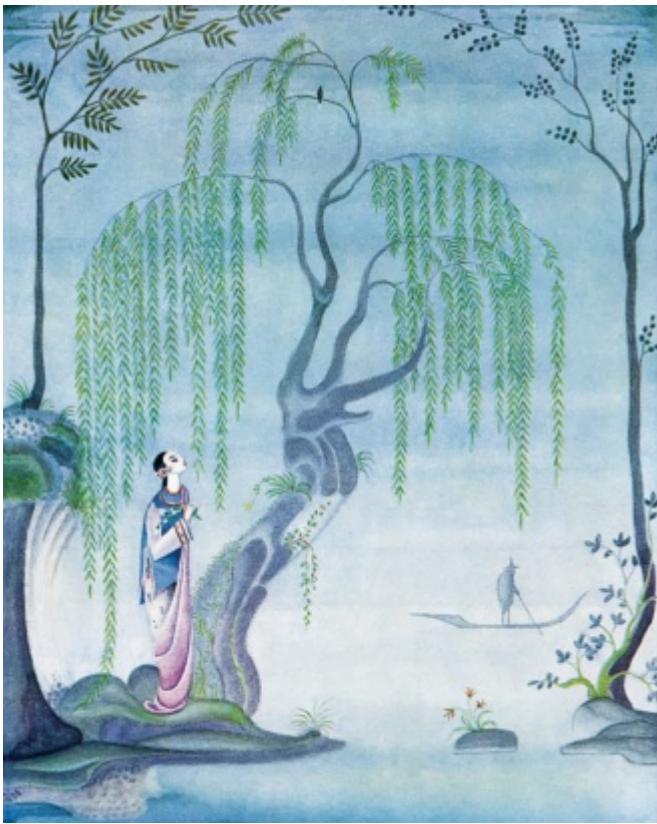
La principessa sul pisello, illustrazione di Tom Seidmann-Freud, 1921

I bambini amano essere spaventati dalle favole. Hanno un naturale bisogno di sperimentare emozioni forti. Andersen atterriva i bambini, ma nessuno di loro, una volta diventato grande, gliene ha mai voluto. Le sue splendide favole sono piene di creature soprannaturali, senza contare gli animali parlanti e i secchi dal pronto eloquio. Non tutti i membri di questa confraternita sono cordiali e innocui. Il personaggio che ricorre con maggiore frequenza è la morte, figura implacabile che irrompe all'improvviso nel cuore della felicità, portandosi via i migliori, i più amati. Andersen prendeva i bambini sul serio. Non parlava loro soltanto della radiosa avventura della vita, ma anche di disgrazie, sventure e sconfitte non sempre meritate. Le sue favole, popolate di creature immaginarie, sono più realistiche di quintali di odierna letteratura per l'infanzia, così ansiosa di risultare verosimile da sfuggire gli incantesimi come la peste. Andersen aveva il coraggio di scrivere favole con un finale triste. Riteneva che non si debba cercare di essere buoni per un tornaconto (proprio quello che i racconti moralistici di oggi si ostinano a divulgare, e che non sempre, in questo mondo, corrisponde a verità), ma perché la cattiveria è frutto di un limite intellettuale ed emotivo, l'unica forma di miseria da cui tenersi alla larga. Ed è ridicola, quant'è ridicola!

Se vi interessa, trovate [qui](#) l'intero brano.



Pollicina, illustrazione di Eleanor Vere Boyle 1872



L'usignolo, illustrazione di Kay Nielsen, 1924

INTRODUCTION

version. "The Nightingale," from 1843, about a singing superset by an artificial one, is considered one of Andersen's masterpieces, and Kay Nielsen's 1922 illustration explores its otherworldly faerie. When younger, Andersen had been called "The Nightingale of Faerie" for his voice. He was in love with singer Jenny Lind, "The Swedish Nightingale," but her feelings were unreciprocated.

near: Tim Seidensaus-Fried, sister of Sigmund Freud, was a groundbreaking children's book writer. Her 1882 book *Kleine Märchen* (Little Fairy Tales) includes an early version of her retelling for "The Princess and the Pea," on this book's cover and pages 22-22.

presaged artistic movements of the early twentieth century and later Surrealism. While artists and thinkers such as Freud in the modern era tried to capture the unconscious or, in the case of many modern artists, unleash its creative potential, Andersen's approach was to stand ready to act on the wild thoughts within his own mind.

The truth of his childhood and the persistent longing need he experienced as a social outsider could have easily condemned him for a lifetime and dispirited him to the point of giving up his dreams. But Andersen's drive—also described by historians as a belief in his own special destiny—made him eternally prepared. While the critical reception of Andersen's plays, travel writings, and novels has shown them to be somewhat uneven artistically, his fairy tales remain brilliant examples of his unique imagination and his obvious total control in and mastery of the imaginary worlds he conjured in his mind, a safe place to which he returned time and time again in the face of adversity. It was there that he integrated his emotions with reality. Fairy-tale historian Jack Zipes writes: "His fairy tales were of the life he did not lead, and they spoke what he wanted to say publicly but did not dare. His writings were majestic acts of self-affirmation and self-deception."

The Pain and Pleasure of Subjectivity

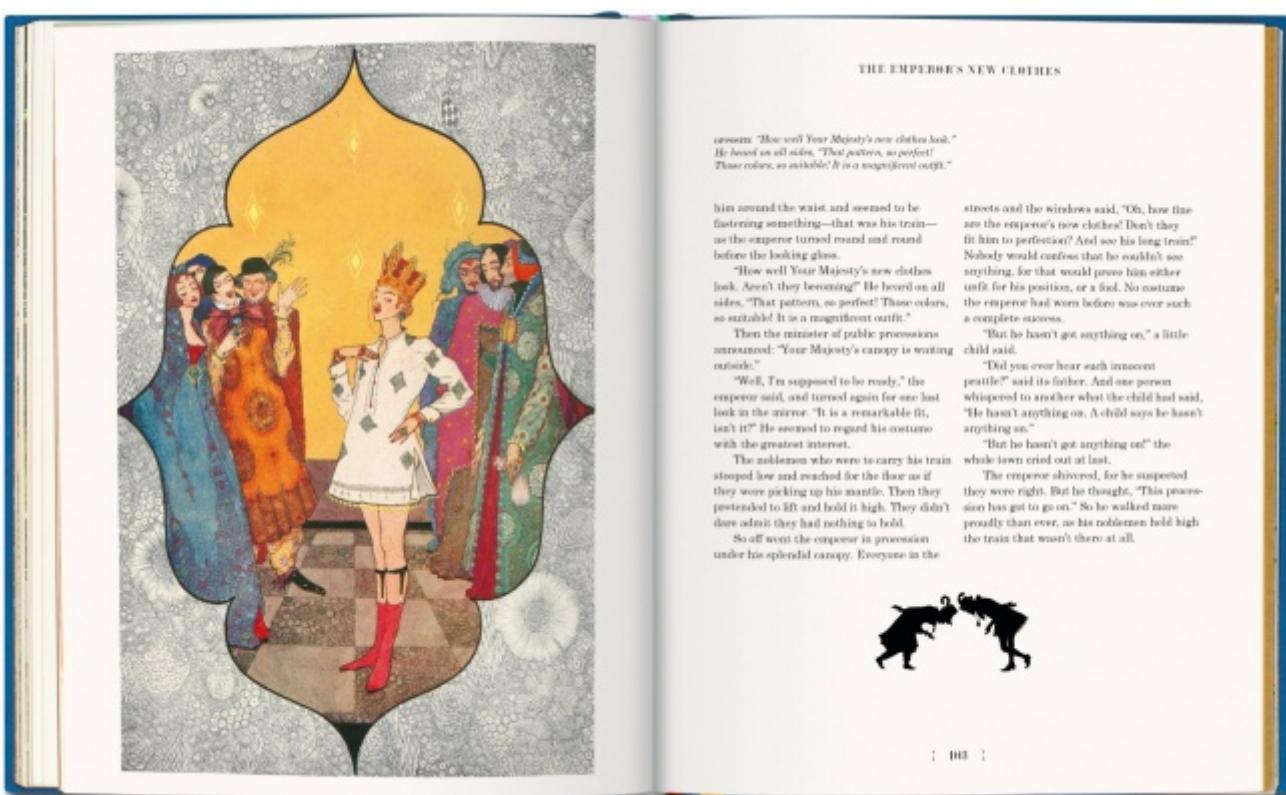
Andersen imbues a simple inkstand, a toy soldier, a bird, a pea, a spinning top with their own drives,



blind spots, desires, arrogance, and courage. Andersen's characters are humanlike in their passions as well as their frailties, and often have a slightly kinked perspective, unable to see their real fate or position, as if Andersen were sharing a light on the limitations of our own human subjectivity. In this way, perhaps the real subject of his tales is the limitations of subjectivity as the essence of human experience.

But it is precisely this subjectivity that also allows for love, to be deeply possessed by one's own experience, to become engulfed and even consumed by caring for another person. For Andersen, this is both a powerful creative engine and a source for potential hurt and disappointment. His tales are infused with the enormous depth of feeling he was capable of, but which remained unfulfilled in his own life. Zipes writes of Andersen's relationship to his own personal story: "Andersen tried desperately to give his life the form and content of a fairy tale, precisely because he was a troubled, lonely, and highly neurotic artist who sublimated in literary creation his failure to fulfill his wishes and dreams in reality. His literary fame rests on this failure, for what he was unable to achieve for himself he craved for millions of readers, young and old, with the hope that their lives might be different from his." The imperfect, unresolved psychological recesses and emotional landscapes in children's tales were his gifts to us, and his heart and soul took refuge there.

1-17-1



I vestiti nuovi dell'imperatore, illustrazione di Harry Clarke, 1916

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

version: "How well Your Majesty's new clothes look! He looks on all sides. 'That pattern, so perfect! Those colors, so valuable! It is a magnificent outfit!'

him around the waist and seemed to be fastening something—that was his train—as the emperor turned round and round before the looking glass.

"How well Your Majesty's new clothes look. Aren't they becoming?" He looked on all sides. "That pattern, so perfect! Those colors, so valuable! It is a magnificent outfit!"

Then the minister of public processions announced: "Your Majesty's canopy is waiting outside."

"Well, I suppose to be ready," the emperor said, and turned again for one last look in the mirror. "It is a remarkable fit, isn't it?" He seemed to regard his costume with the greatest interest.

The noblemen who were to carry his train stepped low and reached for the floor as if they were picking up his mantle. Then they pretended to lift and hold it high. They didn't dare admit they had nothing to hold.

So off went the emperor in procession under his splendid canopy. Everyone in the

streets and the windows said, "Oh, how fine are the emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train! Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success."

"But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said.

"Did you ever hear such innocent pestle?" said its father. And one person whispered to another what the child had said. "He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on."

"But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last.

The emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.



1-103-1

Come editore e autrice di libri per ragazzi, a questo atteggiamento degli adulti nei confronti delle fiabe sono abituata, e non da oggi. Figlia di genitori illuminati, negli anni Sessanta crebbi con i personaggi della Lindgren, della Anguissola e di Marcello Argilli, oltre che con le *Favole al telefono* di Rodari e la divulgazione di Laura Conti. I miei ritenevano le fiabe classiche e popolari inadeguate ai tempi: troppo cariche di sciagure, superstizioni e pregiudizi per educare delle bambine libere. I miei erano colti, avevano sicuri gusti culturali e letterari. Ma di fiabe capivano poco. L'unico libro di fiabe che a quei tempi ho avuto per le mani, a parte il bellissimo volume n. 2, *Racconti e fiabe*, di *I quindici libri* (collana che mia madre acquistò per sbaglio, suscitando il disappunto di mio padre) e alcune delle *Fiabe sonore* di Fratelli Fabbri Editori, che ci facevano smaniare di delizia e terrore, fu un librone di fiabe nordiche che apparteneva a figli di amici ormai diventati grandi e che ci fu devoluto insieme a giocattoli e a qualche maglione. Era, per me, che pure vivevo in una casa piena di libri, di una bellezza inconcepibile. Una bellezza che lasciava interdetti e non trovava paragoni per formato, legatura, illustrazioni, storie. Non so che fine abbia fatto quel libro ed è strano che non lo sappia, perché gran parte dei libri che amavamo di più sono stati conservati e li ho tuttora con me. Per descrivere quel libro come mi apparve allora, riporto due brani. Il primo è tratto da *I cigni selvatici* (Topipittori 2008) di Andersen, questo:

TWELVE BY MAIL COACH

Lt was very frosty, starry, clear weather, quiet and calm. *Bump!* A pot was thrown against a door. *Bang!* Fireworks were shot off to welcome the new year, for it was New Year's Eve; and now the clock struck twelve!

Trutututu! There came the mail. The big mail coach stopped outside the gate to the town. It carried twelve people and couldn't hold more, for all the seats were taken.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" rang out in the houses, where people were celebrating New Year's Eve. They arose with full glasses and drank a toast to the new year.

"Health and good wishes for the new year!" they said. "A pretty little wife! Lots of money! An end to nonsense!"

Yes, these were their wishes for one another, and glasses were struck together, while the mail coach stopped in front of the town gate with the unknown guests, the twelve travelers.

What kind of people were they? They had passports and luggage with them; yes, even presents for you and me and for all the people in the town. Who were these strangers? What did they want, and what did they bring?

"Good morning!" they said to the sentry at the town gate.

Arrivante! The second guest, February, was a comedian, a theatrical director, the manager of masked balls, and all the amusements you could think of.

"Good morning!" said he, as the clock had struck twelve. "Your name? Your profession?" asked the sentry when the first of them stepped out of the carriage.

"Look in the passport!" said the man. "I am myself! And a splendid-looking fellow he was, too, dressed in a bearskin and fur boots. "I am the man on whom many people pin their hopes. Come to see me tomorrow, and I'll give you a real new year! I throw dollars and cents about, give presents, and, yes, I even give balls, thirty-one of them; that's all the nights I have to spare. My ships are frozen tight, but in my office it is warm. I am a merchant, and my name is January. I have only balls!"

Then came the second. He was a comedian, a theatrical director, the manager of masked balls, and all the amusements you could think of. His luggage consisted of a great barrel.

"We'll beat the cat out of the barrel at carnival time!" he said. "I'll amuse others, and myself, too, for I have the shortest time to live of the whole family; I get to be only twenty-eight days old. Yes, sometimes they throw in an extra day, but that doesn't make much difference. Hurrah!"

"You must not shout so loud!" said the sentry.

"Yes, I may!" said the man. "I am Prince Carnival, and traveling under the name of February!"

TWELVE BY MAIL COACH



La diligenza da dodici posti, illustrazione di Laura Barrett, 2013.



L'intrepido soldatino di stagno, illustrazione di Kay Nielsen, 1924

THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER

verso 1900. The door blew open. She flew like a sylph, straight into the fire with the soldier, blazed up in a flash, and was gone.

My! How dark it was inside that fish. It was darker than under the gutter-plank and it was so cramped, but the tin soldier still was staunch. He lay there full length, soldier fashion, with musket to his shoulder.

Then the fish flopped and floundered in a most unaccountable way. Finally it was perfectly still, and after a while something struck through him like a flash of lightning. The tin soldier saw daylight again, and he heard a voice say, "The tin soldier!" The fish had been caught, carried to market, bought, and brought to a kitchen where the cook cut him open with her big knife.

She picked the soldier up bodily between her two fingers, and carried him off upstairs. Everyone wanted to see this remarkable traveler who had traveled about in a fish's stomach, but the tin soldier took no pride in it. They put him on the table and—lo and behold, what curious things can happen in this world—there he was, back in the same room as before. He saw the same children, the same toys were on the table, and there was the same fine castle with the pretty little dancer. She still balanced on one leg, with the other raised high. She too was steadfast. That touched the

soldier so deeply that he would have cried tin tears, only soldiers never cry. He looked at her, and she looked at him, and never a word was said. Just as things were going so nicely for them, one of the little boys snatched up the tin soldier and threw him into the stove. He did it for no reason at all. That black bogey in the snuffbox must have put him up to it.

The tin soldier stood there dressed in flames. He felt a terrible heat, but whether it came from the flames or from his love he didn't know. He'd lost his splendid colors, maybe from his hard journey, maybe from grief, nobody can say.

He looked at the little lady, and she looked at him, and he felt himself melting. But still he stood steadfast, with his musket held trim on his shoulder.

Then the door blew open. A puff of wind struck the dancer. She flew like a sylph, straight into the fire with the soldier, blazed up in a flash, and was gone. The tin soldier melted, all in a lump. The next day, when a servant took up the ashes she found him in the shape of a little tin heart. But of the pretty dancer nothing was left except her spangle, and that was burned as black as a coal.



1 127 1

THE SNOW QUEEN

verso 1900. The bits of glass made the sword that the Snow Queen had told Kay he must find before he became his own master.

ing prayer. The wind was lulled to rest, and the little girl came on into the vast, cold, empty hall. Then she saw Kay. She recognized him at once, and ran to throw her arms around him. She held him close and cried, "Kay! Dearest little Kay! I've found you at last!"

But he sat still, and stiff, and cold. Gorda shed hot tears, and when they fell upon him they went straight to his heart. They melted the lump of ice and burned away the splinter of glass in it. He looked up at her, and she sang:

*"Where roses bloom so sweetly in the vale,
There shall you find the Christ Child,
Without fail."*

Kay burst into tears. He cried so freely that the little piece of glass in his eye was washed right out. "Gorda!" He knew her, and cried out in his happiness, "My sweet little Gorda, where have you been so long? And where have I been?" He looked around him and said, "How cold it is here! How enormous and empty!" He held fast to Gorda, who laughed until happy tears rolled down her cheeks. Their bliss was so heavenly that even the bits of glass danced about them and shared in their happiness. When the pieces grew tired, they dropped into a pattern that made the very word that the Snow Queen had told Kay he must find before he became his own master

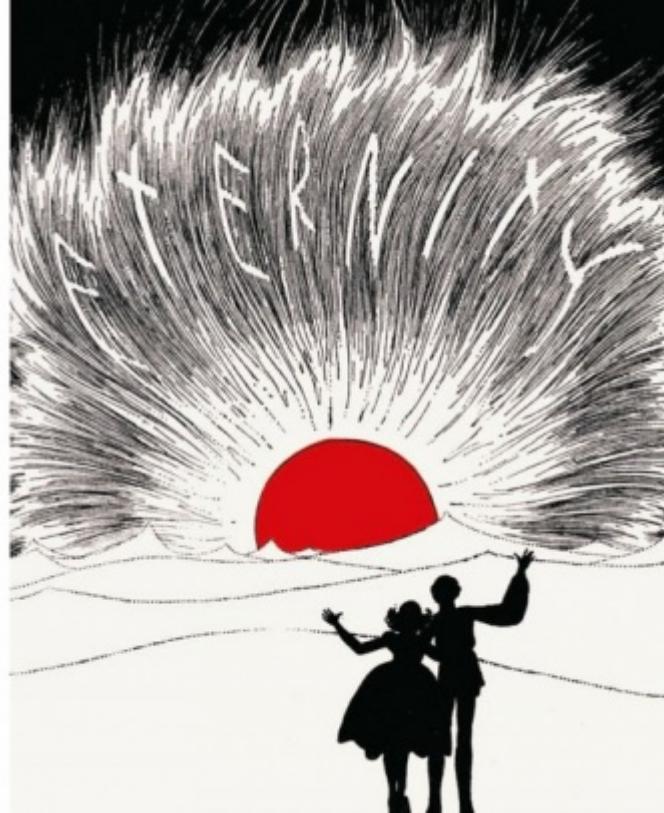
and received the whole world and a new pair of skates.

Gorda kissed his cheeks, and then turned pink again. She kissed his eyes, and they sparkled like hers. She kissed his hands and feet, and he became strong and well. The Snow Queen might come home now whenever she pleased, for there stood the order for Kay's release, written in letters of shining ice.

Hand in hand, Kay and Gorda strolled out of that enormous palace. They talked about Grandmother, and about the roses on their roof. Wherever they went, the wind died down and the sun shone out. When they came to the lush that was covered with red berries, the reindeer was waiting to meet them. He had brought along a young reindeer mate who had warm milk for the children to drink, and who kissed them on the mouth. Then these reindeer carried Gorda and Kay first to the Finn woman. They warmed themselves in her hot room, and when she had given them directions for their journey home they rode on to the Lapp woman. She had made them new clothes, and was ready to take them along in her sleigh.

Side by side, the reindeer ran with them to the limits of the north country, where the first green buds were to be seen. Here they said good-bye to the two reindeer and to the Lapp woman. "Farewell," they all said.

Now the first little birds began to chirp, and there were green buds all around them in the forest. Through the woods came riding



La regina della neve, illustrazione di Katharine Beverley ed Elizabeth Ellender, 1929

1 164 1

Poco dopo si fece buio, scese la notte, strada e sentieri scomparvero, Elisa si era smarrita. Ma non ebbe paura: si stese sul muschio morbido, appoggiò la testa a un tronco d'albero e prima d'addormentarsi recitò le preghiere della sera. C'era un grande silenzio, l'aria era tiepida e sull'erba e sul muschio attorno a lei splendevano come un fuoco verde centinaia di lucciole. Elisa sfiorò un ramo con la mano e ne cadde una pioggia di piccoli insetti, luminosa come una cometa.

Tutta la notte sognò i fratelli che, di nuovo bambini, giocavano e scrivevano con lo stilo di diamante sulla lavagna d'oro, mentre lei sfogliava il meraviglioso libro illustrato che era costato metà del reame. Sulla lavagna d'oro però i fratelli non tracciavano aste e zeri, come quando erano bambini, ma scrivevano le avventure eroiche che avevano vissuto e ciò che in quegli anni avevano fatto e visto. E anche le figure del libro erano vive: gli uccelli cantavano e le persone uscivano dal libro e parlavano con Elisa e i fratelli. Ma se voltava pagina tutti s'affrettavano a tornare al loro posto per non fare confusione.



Pollicina, silhouette di Kathë Reine

TIt was so beautiful out in the country. It was summer—the wheat fields were golden, the oats were green, and down among the green meadows the hay was stacked. There the stork minded about on his red legs, clucking away in Egyptina, which was the language his mother had taught him. Round about the field and meadowlands rose vast forests, in which deep lakes lay hidden. Yes, it was indeed lovely out there in the country.

In the midst of the sunshine there stood an old manor house that had a deep moat around it. From the walls of the manor right down to the water's edge great beech trees grew, and there were some so tall that little children could stand upright beneath the biggest of them. In this wilderness of leaves, which was no denser as the forest itself, a duck sat on her nest, hatching her ducklings. She was howering somewhat weary, because sitting is such a dull business and scarcely anyone came to see her. The other ducks would much rather swim in the moat than waddle out and squat under a beech leaf to gossip with her.

But at last the eggshells began to crack, one after another. "Peep, peep!" said the little things, as they came to life and poked out their heads.

"Quack, quack!" said the duck, and quick as quick can be they all waddled out to have

a look at the green world under the leaves. Their mother let them look as much as they pleased, because green is good for the eyes.

"How wide the world is," said all the young ducks, for they certainly had much more room now than they had when they were in their eggshells.

"Do you think this is the whole world?" their mother asked. "Why it extends on and on, clear across to the other side of the garden and right on into the person's field, though that is further than I have ever been. I do hope you are all hatched," she said as she got up. "No, not quite all. The biggest egg still lies here. How much longer is this going to take? I am really rather tired of it all," she



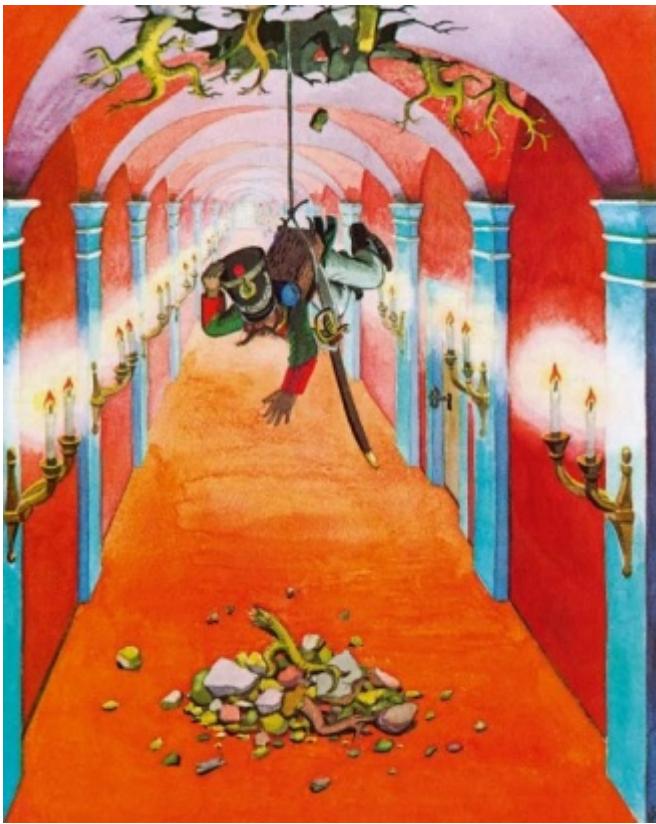
Il brutto anatroccolo, illustrazione di Theo van Hoytema, 1893

Il secondo è un passo di Walter Benjamin, appassionato collezionista di libri illustrati per bambini, tratto dal saggio *Sbirciando nel libro per bambini* (contenuto in *Orbis pictus*, Emme edizioni, 1981, oggi in [Figure dell'infanzia](#), Raffaello Cortina Editore 2012), che parla proprio del libro illustrato di cui scrive Andersen nel brano che avete appena letto:

In una fiaba di Andersen compare un libro illustrato di valore pari «alla metà del regno». In esso tutto aveva vita. «Gli uccelli cantavano, gli uomini uscivano dalle pagine» per parlare con la principessina, «salvo a tornar dentro in gran fretta non appena lei voltava il foglio, perché non nascesse confusione fra le figure.» Con la stessa dolcezza e indeterminatezza che animano tante pagine anderseniane, anche questa piccola trovata non fa che rovesciare completamente il meccanismo di cui trattiamo.

Infatti non sono tanto le cose a farsi incontro – fuoriuscendo dalle pagine – al bambino fantasticamente alle prese con le immagini, ma è piuttosto il bambino stesso che – guardando – penetra in esse come nube che si appaga dello splendore cromatico dell'universo figurativo. Di fronte al suo libro illustrato egli realizza la tecnica del perfetto taoista: domina la cortina illusoria della superficie, e tra tessuti colorati e quinte variopinte, calca la scena dove vive la fiaba.

Il mio libro di fiabe nordiche apparteneva a entrambe queste categorie: libri dai quali il dentro trabocca e nei quali si penetra come in una nube, per calcare la scena della fiaba.



THE TINDERBOX

verso 376-377 *The soldier slid through the hole in the tree, down into the great hall where hundreds of lamps were burning.*

verso 376-377 *He made for the second room. There sat the dog with eyes as big as mill wheels. "Don't you look at me like that," he said.*

"Here it is," said the witch, "and here's my blue checked apron."

The soldier climbed up to the hole in the nearest tree and let himself slide through it, feet foremost, down into the great hall where the hundreds of lamps were burning, just as the witch had said. Now he threw open the first door he came to. Ugh! There sat a dog glaring at him with eyes as big as saucers.

"You're a nice fellow," the soldier said, as he shifted him to the witch's apron and took all the copper coins that his pockets would hold. He shut up the chest, set the dog back on it, and made for the second room. Alas and alack! There sat the dog with eyes as big as mill wheels.

"Don't you look at me like that." The soldier set him on the witch's apron. "You're apt to strain your eyesight." When he saw the chest brimful of silver, he threw away all his copper and filled both his pockets and knapsack with silver alone. Then he went into the third room. Oh, what a horrible sight to see! The dog in there really did have eyes as big as the Round Tower, and when he rolled them they spun like wheels.

"Good evening," the soldier said, and saluted, for such a dog he had never seen before. But on second glance he thought to himself, "This won't do." So he lifted the dog down to the floor, and threw open the chest. What a sight! Here was gold and to spare. He could buy out all Copenhagen with it.

He could buy all the cake woman's sugar pigs, and all the tin soldiers, whips, and rocking horses there are in the world. Yes, there was really money!

In short order the soldier got rid of all the silver coins he had stuffed in his pockets and knapsack, to put gold in their place. Yes, sir, he crammed all his pockets, his knapsack, his cap, and his boots as full that he scarcely could walk. Now he was made of money. After putting the dog back on the chest, he banged out the door and called up through the tree:

"Pull me up now, you old witch."

"Have you got the tinderbox?" asked the witch.

"Confound the tinderbox," the soldier shouted. "I clean forgot it."

When he fetched it, the witch hauled him up. There he stood on the high road again, with his pockets, boots, knapsack, and cap full of gold.

"What do you want with the tinderbox?" he asked the old witch.

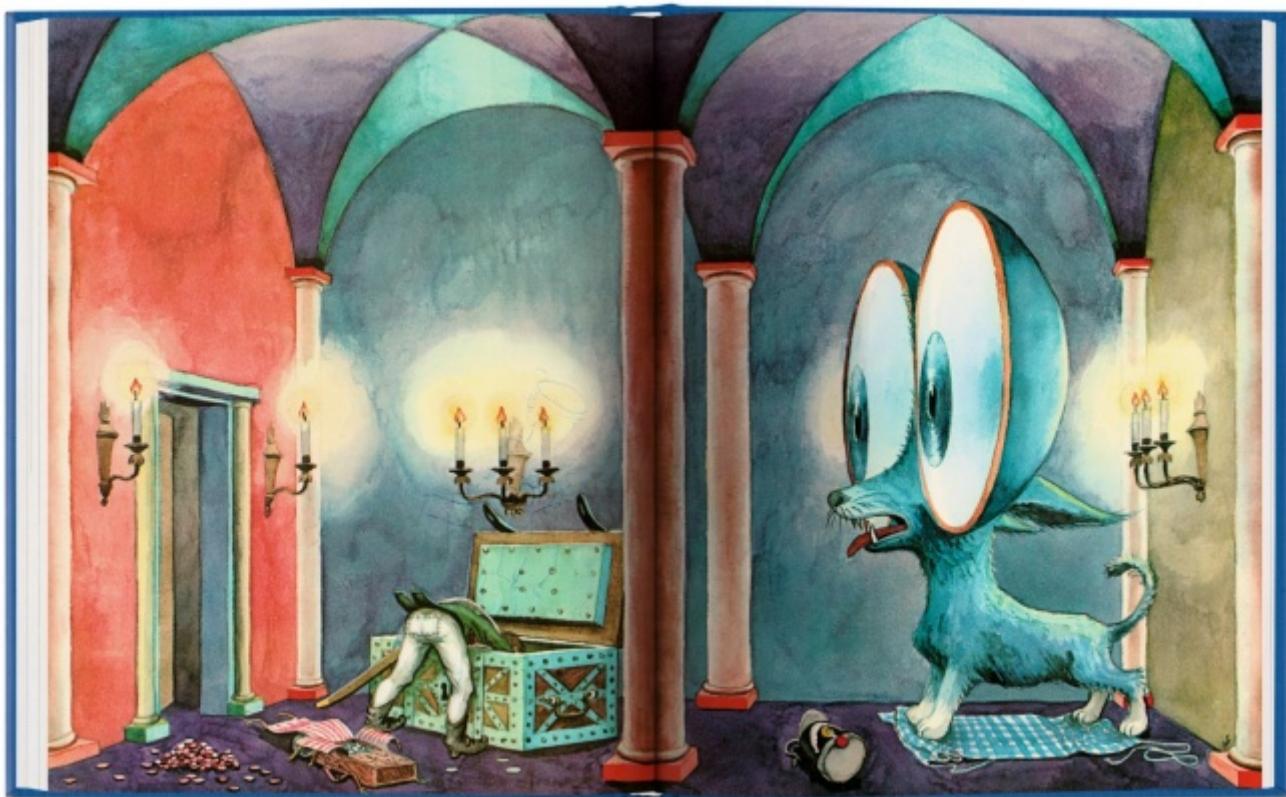
"None of your business," she told him. "You have had your money, so hand over my tinderbox."

"Nonsense," said the soldier. "I'll take out my sword and I'll cut your head off if you don't tell me at once what you want with it."

"I won't," the witch sneered at him.

So he cut her head off. There she lay! But he tied all his money in her apron, slung it.

273

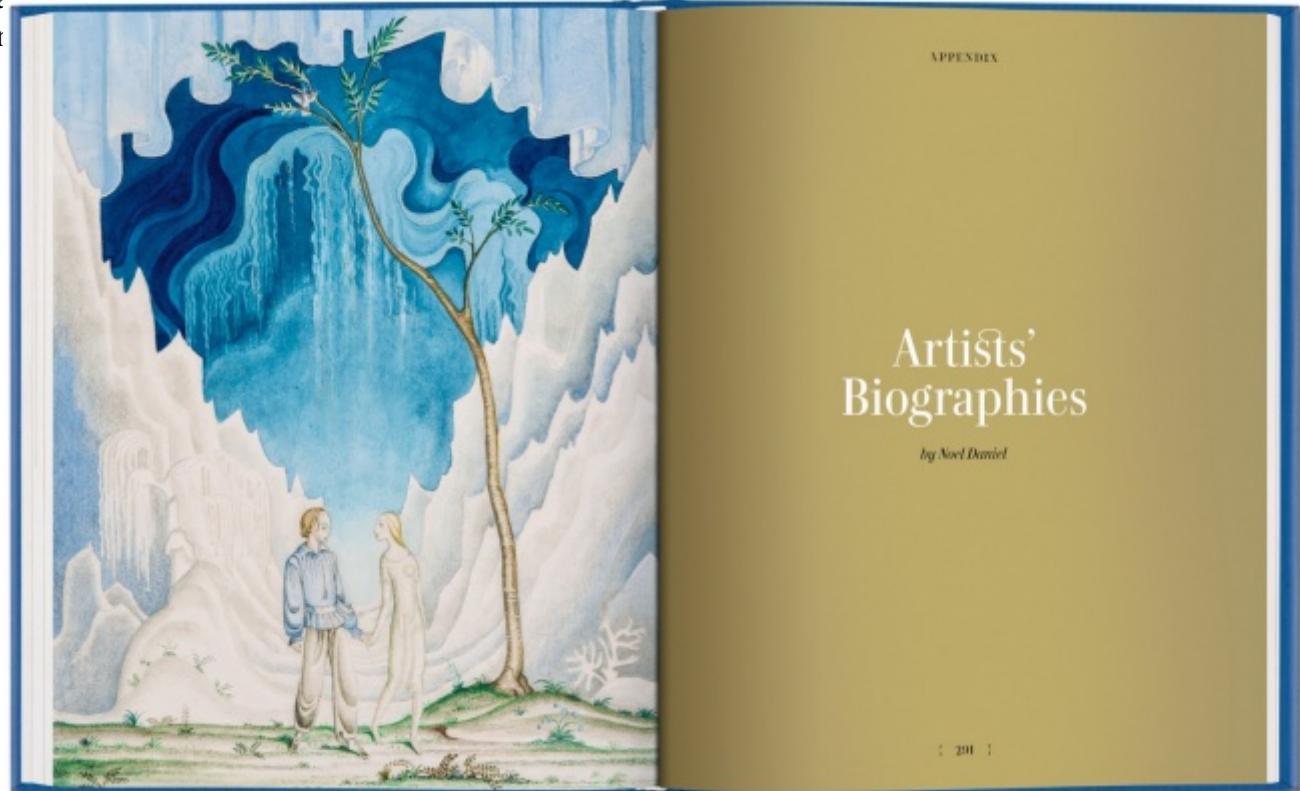


L'acciarino, illustrazioni di Heinrich Strub, 1956

Non credo esista periodo migliore dell'anno di questo, natalizio, per regalare un libro che possieda queste caratteristiche. Il perché lo spiega bene Selma Lagerlöf, astro della letteratura scandinava, in [Il libro del Natale](#) (Iperborea 2012), quando scrive:

Vedete, devo dire che c'è una tradizione a Mårbacka, che quando si va a dormire la Vigilia di Natale si ha il permesso di avvicinare un tavolino al letto, metterci sopra una candela, e poi leggere finché si vuole. Questa è la più grande di tutte le gioie di Natale. Non c'è niente di più bello che starsene lì sdraiati con un bel libro avuto in regalo, un libro nuovo che non si è ancora mai visto e che nessun altro in casa conosce, e sapere che si può leggere pagina dopo pagina finché si riesce a stare svegli. Ma cosa si fa la notte di Natale, se non si sono ricevuti libri?

Natale è il momento giusto perché bambini e fiabe si incontrino: perché in questa notte, ogni anno, uno di loro, nudo e poverissimo, diventa il re del mondo e re di immensa ricchezza gli si inchinano, portando doni preziosi; perché in questa notte gli animali parlano, esseri alati cantano, le stelle splendono sui tuguri e nel buio della vigilia i giocattoli si animano. Se questi fatti a qualcuno possono apparire sciocchezze, oppure se riesce a considerarli solo parte di un rituale religioso o di un'iconografia legata al folklore, provi a considerarli dal punto di vista del pensiero simbolico, che al contrario di quanto si crede, è uno strumento ad



La regina della neve, illustrazione di Kay Nielsen, 1924.

opposite: "The Little Mermaid" by British artist Jennie Harbour from Hans Andersen's Stories, 1932.



Georgii Ivanovich Narbut
(Ukrainian, 1886-1923)
The silhouettes with color details of
"The Nightingale" (pages 27-37) are from
the book *Cassette* (*The Nightingale*),
published by I. Knebel, Moscow, 1912.

Artist and graphic designer Georgii Ivanovich Narbut was born in 1886 on a farm near the town of Gubkiv in northeastern Ukraine. He came from poor parents, his father a founder and master of Ukraine's first Academy of Art; the designer of the country's first banknotes, stamps, and coins; and the artist of some of the era's most beautiful children's books.

His family descended from an ancient Ukrainian noble family but were poor and had no means to support Narbut's conspicuous artistic ability as a child except with paper, scissors, and flour glue to make paper cuttings. Only later, in grammar school, did Narbut learn to use pens, pencils, paints, and brushes. He was fascinated by the exuberance of these new instruments, and fell in love with them. The ornamental capital lettering in old books. This was Narbut's first introduction to the world of art. His first book illustration was for a children's book of poems and folktales. It was also his first introduction to historical artifacts, and his keen awareness of this past would help shape his interest in archaeology, genealogy, and heraldry, and his passion for fairy tales and folktales.

Narbut studied art in St. Petersburg, where his work was discovered by the renowned Russian illustrator Ivan Bilibin, who became an early supporter. Influenced by the work of Bilibin,

English Art Nouveau artist Aubrey Beardsley, and Swiss artist Félix Vallotton, Narbut was allegedly indoctrinated into a highly stylized decorative style. Drawn on these by hand, paper cuttings as a child, Narbut illustrated several books in the 1910s with arresting hand-drawn silhouettes, including *The Nightingale*, which he insinuately accented with color. Some historians consider this his most original work, with the finest silhouettes in Russian art history.

This time of prodigious output for Narbut cemented his reputation as a great artist. He published sixteen books in 1912, seventeen a year later, and nearly double that in 1914, all the while also illustrating for magazines, and making prints and posters. The era in which Narbut worked, the Nightingale, was a period of enormous output of children's books in Russia, albeit of varying aesthetic and literary quality, ranging from Alexander Pushkin and translations of world literature like the work of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Mark Twain, to Russian folktales, and finally to a slew of cheap detective novels and pulp fiction. I. Knebel, the publishing house that published Narbut's *The Nightingale*, is considered the most important children's publishing house in Russia at the time, and Narbut's books are examples of the higher-quality books for children published during this time in Russia.

At the time the beginning of Narbut's prodigious output was a society in flux, however. After the start of the Russian Civil War in 1917, it would take ten years for the children's book market to recover the immense output it saw during the 1910s. Narbut's life and work represents a sliver of success at a time of uncertain fate for many Russians: one of his brothers died when the family farm was attacked during the Revolution of 1917, and his other brother, the

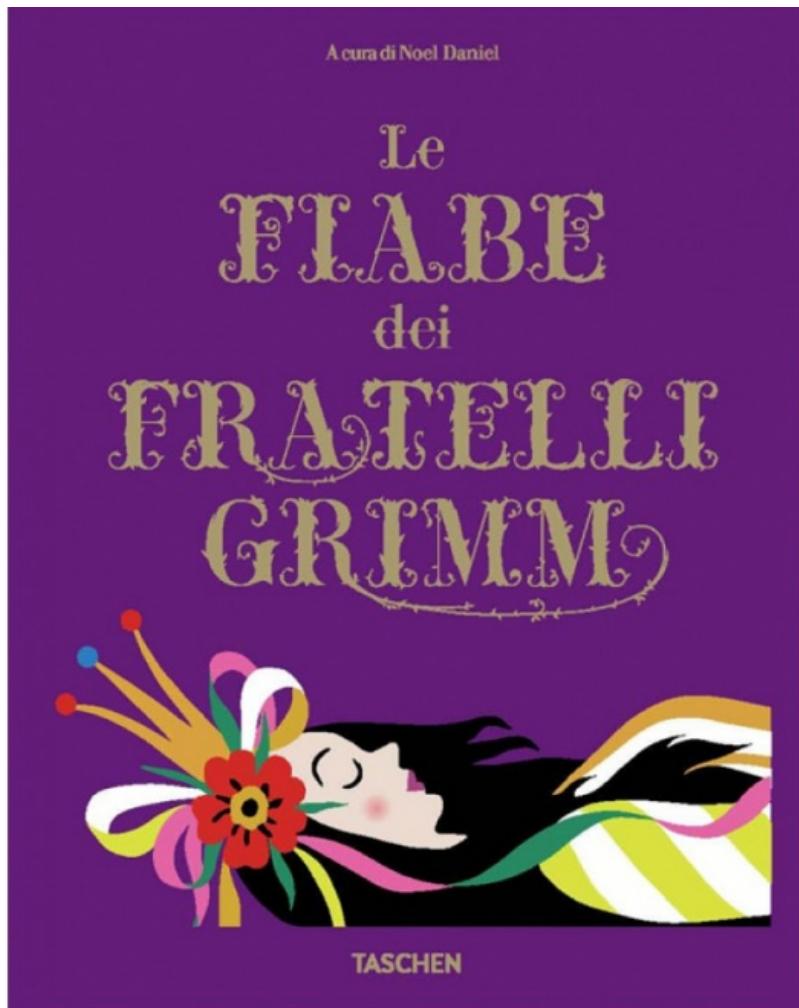
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La sirenetta, illustrazione di Jennie Harbour, 1932

Non credo che i bambini oggi siano diversi da quelli di cento anni fa. Certo, sono diversi i contesti e le abitudini familiari, culturali e sociali. La ragione per cui spesso i bambini preferiscono altro ai libri (oltre al fatto che è legittimo avere gusti personali) è che hanno avuto a che fare con libri orrendi, messaggeri di forme di avvilente stupidità e bruttezza. Entrambe caratteristiche che, come si legge in tutte le fiabe, i bambini detestano. Dunque abbiate fiducia in loro e, soprattutto, se volete che amino i libri, regalategli libri che li stordiscano di emozioni e scoperte inattese e profonde.

Se perciò a Natale decidete di regalare fiabe, come consiglio a tutti, fate sì che queste siano contenute in volumi folgoranti. Così smaccatamente belli, scintillanti e generosi di splendore, in tutte le loro parti, così diversi da tutti gli altri libri, da inscriversi nel loro esperienza con lo stigma dell'eccezionalità. Avrete licenza di parlare di fallimento educativo solo dopo aver fatto questo esperimento. Oltretutto quand'anche falliste, vi troverete in biblioteca libri bellissimi che vi dletteranno più di tante novità editoriali prevedibili e noiose.



Rosaspina, illustrazioni di Harbert Leupin, 1948

I due libri di fiabe più belli usciti negli ultimi anni sono quelli che si devono al genio editoriale di Taschen, editore tedesco specializzato, come è noto, in magnifiche edizioni sull'immagine, che alla qualità, produttiva ed editoriale, associa prezzi contenuti: immagini di ogni genere, dall'arte, alla fotografia, all'illustrazione naturalistica e scientifica, alla moda, al design, all'architettura. Non poteva mancare in questa variegata produzione, l'illustrazione per l'infanzia. Realizzati da una curatrice d'eccezione, Noel Daniel, i volumi sono [Le fiabe dei Fratelli Grimm](#) (2012) e [Le fiabe di Hans Christian Andersen](#) (2013). Nel 2014 è uscito anche *Fiabe d'inverno* che propone una collettanea di albi illustrati vintage, e che ho recensito nel febbraio 2015 per Doppiozero e trovate [qui](#).

Entrambi i volumi nascono con l'intento di offrire una selezione di fiabe accompagnata dalle immagini più belle tratte da edizioni del passato. Nel caso dei Grimm si tratta di quelle che vanno dagli anni Venti dell'Ottocento, attraverso l'epoca d'oro dell'illustrazione novecentesca, fino alla fine degli anni Quaranta. Una galleria di illustrazioni incredibili, selezionate dalla Daniel con finezza e competenza, esplorando la produzione internazionale. Le ventisette fiabe proposte, tratte dall'ultima edizione pubblicata dai Grimm nel 1857, mescolano titoli famosissimi, come *Cenerentola* o *Biancaneve*, a storie incantevoli, ma meno frequentate.

Little Red Riding Hood



No other fairy tale is as inextricably linked to a piece of clothing as is "Little Red Riding Hood." Wearing a red bonnet like a beacon of innocence, Little Red Riding Hood ventures into the forest with much to learn about talking to strangers before she arrives at her grandmother's house. This cautionary coming-of-age tale about an innocent girl and a scheming wolf has had a long, colorful, and varied oral tradition. Versions have been found from Italy to Japan, and scholars have noted that a story about a girl wearing red who encounters wolves existed as far back as the eleventh century in what is now Belgium. The tale was first written down in France in 1697 by Charles Perrault, who, according to historians, added the iconic cap. The Grimm's based their tale on a version they heard from a woman of French Huguenot heritage in Hesse, Germany, and added the life-saving hunter. They continuously revised the story through the seventh and final edition of their collection in 1857, and this last version has become the most widely known. Historians identify the story as an example of the widespread genre of folk and fairy tales about children and lessons they learn.

Color images by Divica Landrová, Czech, 1959

— 423 —

Cappuccetto rosso, silhouette di Kathé Reine

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Her grandmother gave her a little red velvet bonnet, which suited the girl so well that she never wanted to wear anything else.

There once was a sweet young maiden who was adored by everyone who laid eyes on her. Most of all, though, her grandmother loved her, and didn't know what she might possibly give to the child next. One time she gave her a little red-velvet bonnet as a gift, which suited the girl so well that she never wanted to wear anything else. So everyone took to calling her Little Red Riding Hood. One day her mother told her, "Now, Little Red Riding Hood, take this slice of cake and this bottle of wine to Grandmother. Ill and weak as she is, she'll be delighted to take strength from them. Hurry along now before it gets hot, and as you go, tread very carefully and keep to the path. For if you wander off, you could trip and break the bottle, and then Grandmother will have to go without. When you reach her place, don't forget to wish her good morning, and don't go poking around in everything." "I'll do everything just as you say," said Little Red Riding Hood to her mother, and squeezed her hand as a promise.



— 120 —

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

"Good day, Little Red Riding Hood," said the wolf. "Where are you off to so early this morning?"

But her grandmother lived deep in the woods, a good half hour from the village. And just as the girl entered the woods, a wolf approached her. Little Red Riding Hood had no idea how treacherous an animal this was, and was not in the least afraid. "Good day, Little Red Riding Hood," he said. "Oh, thank you kindly, Mr. Wolf." "Where are you off to so early this morning?" "To my grandmother's house." "And what do you have there beneath your apron?" "Cake and wine. We baked yesterday for my poor, sick grandmother who needs something to enjoy and make herself strong again." "And where does your grandmother live, Little Red Riding Hood?" "She's about a quarter hour from here in the woods, under the trees.

"This tiny young thing will make a juicy mouthful. She'll go down much better than the old woman. I've got to be very cunning to get these both!" And so after he had padded alongside Little Red Riding Hood for a while, he said, "My dear, take a good look at these lovely flowers all around us. Why not look around a little? I don't think

"you're hearing the sweet birdsong either. You're just walking along as if you had to go to school. But out here in the woods it's so magical!" So Little Red Riding Hood widened her eyes, and as she saw the sunlight streaming and dancing through the trees, and how thick the ground was with flowers, she thought, "I bet a fresh bouquet would make Grandmother happy too. It's still early enough that I'm sure to arrive on time."

And so she stepped off the path into the woods to pick some flowers. Whenever



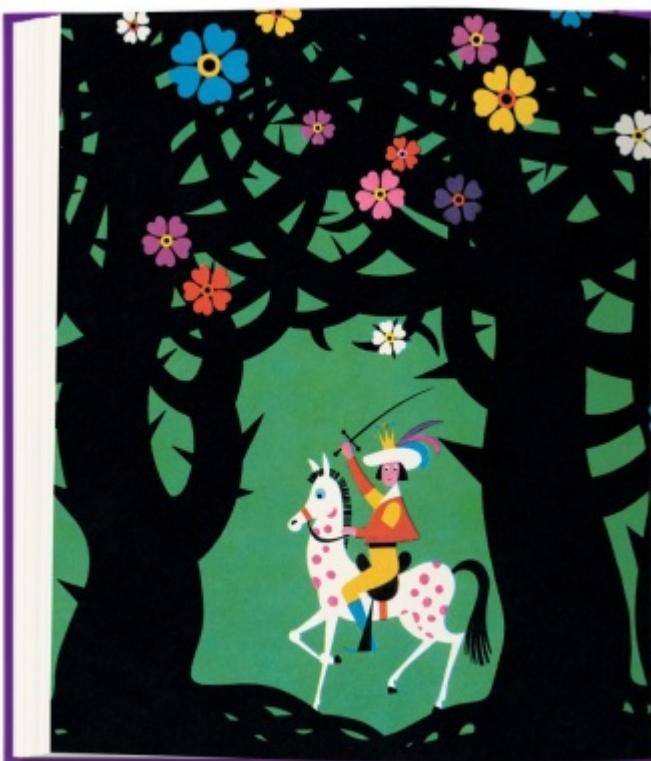
— 127 —

Cappuccetto rosso, illustrazioni di Divica Landrová, 1959

Il libro apre con una concisa, ma informata prefazione, che oltre a introdurre all'opera dei Grimm, spiega le ragioni e i criteri di questa edizione, dalla quale si apprende che i Grimm si resero conto del grande potenziale delle illustrazioni nella comprensione delle fiabe vedendo la prima traduzione in inglese della loro opera, edita fra il 1823 e il 1826, in due volumi, illustrata da George Cruikshank. Da quel momento decisero di editare le fiabe accompagnate da immagini. Le fiabe dei Grimm furono illustrate dai più importanti illustratori del mondo. Il miglioramento delle tecniche di stampa, nel corso del tempo, fece sì che queste edizioni diventassero visivamente sempre più ricche e smaglianti, acquisendo un'influenza determinante nel cambiamento che interessò la letteratura per ragazzi e la produzione di libri a loro destinati, nella quale le figure divennero fondamentali.

La cura grafica delle raccolte si deve all'art direction di Noel Daniel e Andy Disl che, pur sfoggiando spavalmente tutte le caratteristiche delle edizioni di lusso – oro a bizzette, copertina in tela con impressioni in oro e immagine applicata, segnalibro a nastro – non cedono alla tentazione del kitsch, senza rinunciare a quella dell'incanto. Ogni fiaba è introdotta da una stringata e documentata introduzione. Tutte le immagini sono corredate da indicazioni iconografiche accurate, e alla fine del volume si trovano brevi, ma esaurienti biografie degli illustratori. Non pensate che questi apparati tolgano alcunché alla godibilità del libro, facendone un ingombrante contenitore di informazioni inadeguate a lettori piccoli. Non è così. Le parti critiche, sapientemente distribuite fra indici, aperture di capitoli e appendici, si offrono come spazi supplementari per figure bellissime, dissimulando la loro dotta presenza, o, meglio, mostrandola solo a un lettore adulto. I bambini penseranno solo ad abbandonarsi a tanta sontuosa bellezza.





SLEEPING BEAUTY

opposite As the prince approached the wall of thorns, it burst into beautiful flowers, and parted to let him pass through unharmed.

throne. And on he went, and the prince was so hushed that he could hear his every breath. Finally he reached the staircase to the old tower, climbed up, and opened the door to the little room where Sleeping Beauty lay. She slept peacefully, and was so lovely, that he could not take his eyes off her. He bent to kiss her. Just as his lips touched hers, she opened her eyes and awoke, and gazed at him tenderly.

Down they went together, and the king and queen rejoiced, as did their court, and they all looked at one another in wide-eyed astonishment. The horses in the courtyard

below The prince bent to kiss Sleeping Beauty. Just as his lips touched hers, she opened her eyes and awoke.

stood and shook themselves; the hunting dogs leapt and barked and wagged their tails; the roosters crowed and took flight into the fields; the flies on the wall began their buzzing anew; the hearth's fire flared up again and cooked the food, the roast sizzling away once more; the apprentice squealed as the cook finally heated him on the coals; and the maiden began to pluck the black hen. And the prince and Sleeping Beauty were married in a dazzling celebration, and they lived in contentment all the days of their lives.



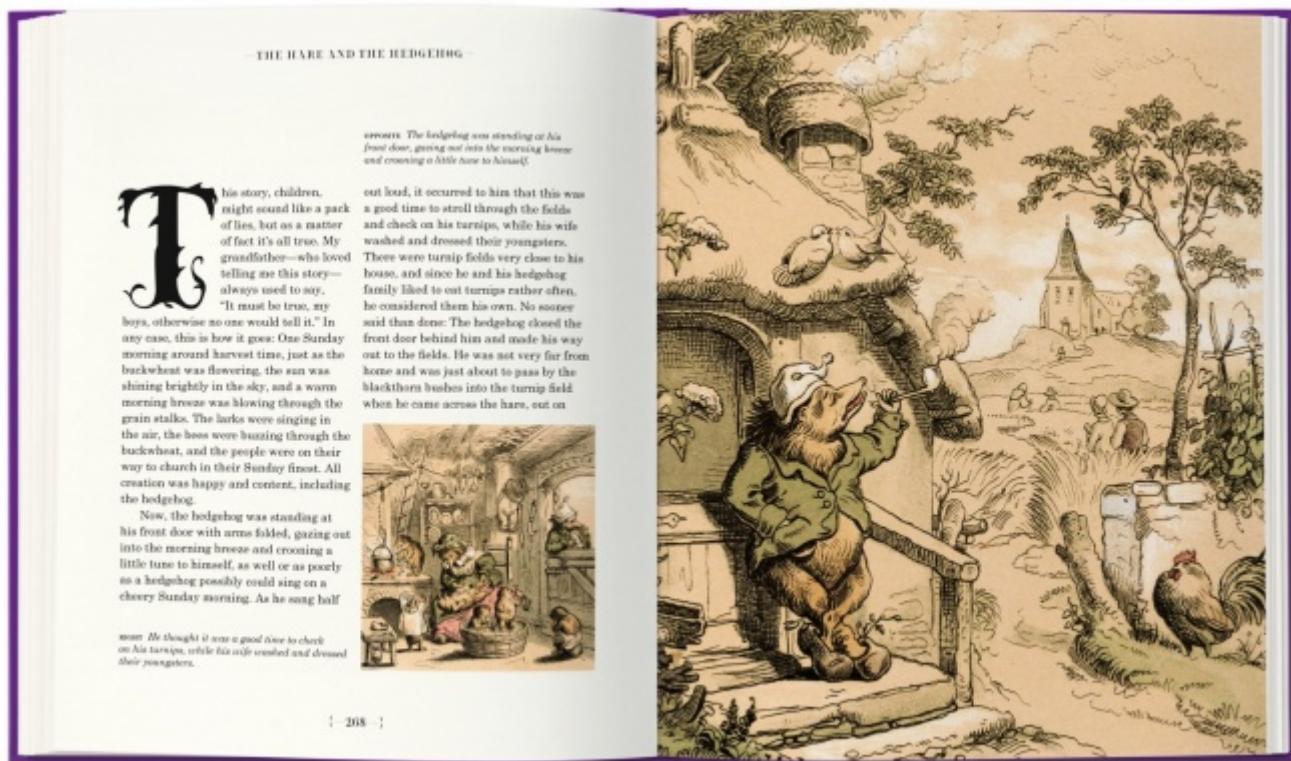
—181—

Rosaspina, illustrazioni di Harbert Leupin, 1948

Il volume dedicato ad Andersen presenta la medesima struttura e grafica, lo stesso formato e gli stessi apparati critici di quello dei Grimm. In una prefazione agile, ma esaurente e approfondita, oltre che di esemplare chiarezza ed eleganza, la Daniel traccia un ritratto dello scrittore danese, portando alla luce le ragioni che ne hanno fatto quello che probabilmente si può considerare il più grande narratore di fiabe di tutti i tempi. La biografia è ripercorsa intrecciando gli eventi della vita ai tratti salienti di quella poetica che dal

patrimonio orale delle narrazioni popolari seppe distillare racconti di perfetta modernità dove le ombre dell'inconscio cominciano a tralucere. Le fiabe di Andersen, infatti, ambientate in mondi fantastici e narrate dal punto di vista di bambini e oggetti sono le antesignane dei moderni racconti per l'infanzia, da *Alice in Wonderland* a *The Wizard of Oz* fino ad arrivare a Gianni Rodari e a Roal Dahl. Anche nella vicenda letteraria ed editoriale di Andersen, come in quella dei Grimm, l'illustrazione ha un peso consistente, anche in considerazione del fatto che lo stesso scrittore fu un prolifico creatore di splendide silhouette, di cui realizzò centinaia di esemplari. Per i dettagli immaginifici di cui le sue storie erano intessute, Vincent van Gogh lo ritenne un talento rubato alle arti visive. Le edizioni da cui sono tratte le immagini proposte nel volume, frutto di una selezione impeccabile da parte della curatrice, sono in prevalenza datate ai primi vent'anni del Novecento, considerati l'età d'oro dell'illustrazione per ragazzi, ma vi sono anche illustrazioni ottocentesche e della seconda metà del Novecento, fino ad arrivare agli anni Ottanta.

Se è vero che le fiabe sono uno dei pochi generi letterari che possono attrarre contemporaneamente adulti e bambini, le raccolte di Taschen mettono insieme i due pubblici in modo magistrale, con grazia, sapienza e senza forzature. Potrebbe, dunque, essere questa un'occasione imperdibile per leggere insieme, pratica che i bambini, e si spera anche gli adulti, amano: a voce alta, con su un ginocchio un lettore piccolo, e sull'altro un libro grande. Un libro così ammaliante da far considerare l'ipotesi di cedere la metà del proprio reame per averlo.





THE HARE AND THE HEDGEHOG—

ONCE UPON A TIME

The hedgehog met the hare a friendly "good morning." But the hare, who was horribly stuck-up, did not return the greeting.

The hedgehog's wife cried, "Hare you but your wits? Why could you possibly want to run a race against the hare?"

similar business; that is, he was looking after his cabbages. As he caught sight of the hare, he had him a friendly "good morning." But the hare, who in his own way was a rather fine gentleman but, frankly, horribly stuck-up about it, did not return the hedgehog's greeting. Instead, making his face into a haughty sneer, he said, "How is it that you're out in the fields so early in the morning?" "I'm taking a walk," said the hedgehog. "A walk?" the hare scoffed. "I was under the impression you had better things to do with those legs of yours."

This wisecrack annoyed the hedgehog terribly. He could take just about anything, but he drew the line at a jab about his legs, which had been crooked since birth. "I think you're imagining things," the hedgehog replied, "if you're implying that you can do more with your legs than I." "Of course I can," claimed the hare. "We just might have to put that to the test," said the hedgehog. "I'll bet that if we had a race, I'd run right by you."

"That's ridiculous. You with your crooked legs!" jeered the hare. "As far as I'm concerned, go right ahead if you're so set on it. What will you wager?" "One French gold coin and a bottle of brandy," replied

the hedgehog. "I accept!" said the hare. "Let's shake on it, and then we can get started right away." "There's no hurry," said the hedgehog. "I still haven't eaten yet. Let me first go home and have some breakfast, and I'll meet you back at this very spot in half an hour."

The hare agreed, and with that the hedgehog left. On his way home he thought, "The hare is going to rely on his long legs, but I'll still get him at his own game. He may be a fine fellow, but he's a fool! And he's going to pay." Once he was back home, he said to his wife, "Wife, get



— 271 —

Se continuiamo a tenere vivo questo spazio è grazie a te. Anche un solo euro per noi significa molto. Torna presto a leggerci e [SOSTIENI DOPPIOZERO](#)



Mr. Hedgehog took his prize, and they went home together in good cheer. Since then no hare has dared to race against the hedgehog.

hare ran the race seventy-three times. And each time the hedgehogs, in their own way, kept up with him. Whenever the hare reached the top or the bottom of the field, the hedgehog or his wife would shout, "Here I am already!"

But on the seventy-fourth go-round, the hare didn't make it to the end of the course. In the middle of the field he fell to the ground, blood flowing from his mouth, and he stayed right there. Mr. Hedgehog took his prize, the gold French coin and bottle of brandy, and called for his wife to come out from the furrow. They went home together in good cheer, and if they have not died by now, then they must

