"The Fairytales of the Three Sisters"

written and illustrated by Martina Rosazza

REVIEW

by: Giulia Abbate (Studio83)

In the last few days I have had the privilege to read some fairytales.

What this "privilege"consists in is: they are not available for purchase just yet, they have been awarded for their quality and they were written and illustrated splendidly by a young artist who already has a solid career. Moreover, they are not traditional, but fresh and original, and yet suggestive and valid.

We have dealt with fairytales in the past here at Stuido83.

As for what concerns the second aspect of the books (the illustrations), we have seen material from many artists who have published picture books. One of them, Simon Sword, has been a best selling author on Amazon and we have reviewed many of his works. That gave us the possibility to deepen our knowledge in the "structure" of picture books and better understand what makes a book of this kind a good product.

Let's talk about fairytales.

In my manual "Manuale di scrittura di fantascienza" (written by Giulia Abbate with Franco Ricciardiello) I have definitely talked about Russian author Vladmir Propp, who by studying folkloristic fairytales has structured the functions of this genre in his book "Morfologia della Fiaba".

There is a variety in characters, events and solutions, which is however possible to group in a series of functions. The plot of fairytales can be structured according to this thirty-one functions (...). Naturally, not all thirty-one have to be present in one single tale at the same time. However, it is possible to structure every fairytale in these categories.

On our website (Studio83) we have, in the past, considered how allegorical, and sometimes fierce and yet functional, a fairytale can be. It evokes values and morals, some of which are difficult to understand today because we do not believe in them anymore in our current times. But one thing is certain, a fairytale usually goes way beyond its apparent and obvious events of the plot.

The best fairytales are those whose structure sticks in our brain, because it follows a natural path of events, and ends up coming up over and over again, being told multiple times, maybe with slightly different readings.

From author Clarissa Pinkola Estes we have learned how those fairytales in which female characters seem to receive the worst luck and ending could be teaching tales, which were meant to warn and empower women.

We have also learned just how powerful a fairytale can be when it is used correctly to communicate a moral: the controversy on The Little Mermaid being black shows just how much fairytales are fixated in our brains a certain way.

The best fairytales are the ones in which the meaning isn't obvious, in which different people can read different meanings, a bit like religious books. The genre is clearly very different, but there is a commonality in the use of symbols, which answer the very human need for communication, meaning and metaphysics.

Moreover fairytales, the real ones, the ones that stay in time, are not specifically for kids nor for adults. They can come back with different meanings at different ages because we humans tend to apply what we read to our current circumstances and perception of the world. We can do that by being brave and artistic when interpreting symbols.

The fairytales I have read in the past few days, quoting the author of these stories herself, are for believers, not pretenders. *(Martina Rosazza in the text of her stories uses the Italian phrase "non erano creduloni, erano credenti", which is a play of*

words as the words sound similar but have the opposite meaning. The reviewer is using the same play of words, quoting the author, in the review.)

Let's get to the point: *"The Fairytales of the Three Sisters*" by Martina Rosazza is a dense and yet light reading (which is, itself, the potential behind a well written fairytale). Combined in a collection box, the three stories, that have received multiple awards, were sent to me for a technical review. I decided to post my review on our website because I enjoyed and feel confident enough to recommend them to our readers.

"The Origin of Elephants", "Death's Three Daughters" and "The Seven Wives" are different stories, not linked with each other, relatively short and rhymed. The text is accompanied by illustrations, which describe the scenarios while at the same time being evocative.

Something very interesting is that these stories are all original material that comes straight from the mind of the author, they are not "retellings" of old fairytales. And yet they stick to traditional fairytale models, with characters and sceneries which exist in the general mind of the audience. The final effect is bizarre: after reading them it feels like you just had a conversation with a seemingly harmless and reckless grandma, even though Rosazza is actually fairly young (even though I think her intense work and life experiences may have spiritually and mentally "aged" her slightly).

The stories are introduced by a preface, rhymed as well. In this preface we learn that the fairytales are all told by the three Fates, spooky and wise at the same time, who ask us to keep and open mind when reading their tales and to not suffocate our imagination. I find the introduction very helpful as it helps us get in the mood and become familiar with the language: rhymed verses following, for the most part, the structure AA/BB, with alternate metrics (always coupled) of eleven-syllable lines and seven/eight-syllable lines. To make this easier to understand, the structure resembles that of a nursery rhymed story but it's made more complicated and varied.

"*The Origin of Elephants"* uses the classical fairytale element of transformation: a certain creature behaves a certain way and as a result is transformed into a different creature, which didn't exist before, which has certain characteristics based on what happened in the story.

The sceneries are very evocative: the author lived in Thailand, where she maybe saw the river described in her story: *"in a deep jungle, a long time ago, there flowed a big river, lazy and slow."* Interesting also the figure of the King of Mice, who with his subjects helps the protagonists' treasure hunt, also a classic element of fairytales.

"Death's Three Daughters" is based on another classic element of fairytales: the prediction of the future. Death's three daughters want its place and to obtain its power they have to win a challenge, which revolves around a very unstable queen (but who wouldn't be if they had Death's three daughters come tell them how they will die).

In this story of queens, castles and predictions I especially appreciated another "character", less popular in fairytales : the farmers. Tired of being the victims, they take charge and make changes. Ah, the beautiful world of *commons pre-enclosures, la jacquerie, the rivers of blood...* jokes aside, in this fairytale we move from the Eastern imaginary (from the first fairytale) to a more European one. In this case I really had the impression of reading an old classic fairytale, also because of the final twist in this story... that is until I read the final "Mhuaha", which definitely brought me back to a modern, almost "manga-like", world.

"The Seven Wives" is the third, and most complicated, fairytale of this collection box, even though it is the same length of the other two. This one also incorporates some traditional elements of classic fairytales and I would say even some symbols from Christianity, but I don't want to say too much to avoid "spoilers" for the readers. Very unusual characters in this story, such as a matchmaker with an impossible task and a never happy client. The last phrase of the fairytale closes the magical world and atmosphere which I was brought into starting with the first rhymed line of the preface, because the final notes of the stories - which talk more about the inspiration behind the story - are not rhymed and take you back to a very modern and mundane life: three sisters drinking tea in their home in a rainy day.

Let me elaborate more on this final "notes" from the author. Each fairytale ends with some notes from the author explaining the life experience she took from and was inspired by to write the fairytales. These notes are stories per se, as they tell us the tales of a young woman who learns from life and reflects and turns that into stories for us to read.

For what concerns the illustrations, they are quite impressive: I admit to not being a great artist myself but I can talk for the atmosphere they evoke in me as a reader.

To make that point I decided to let the illustrations "speak" for themselves. Here is a collection of some of the work from Rosazza's portfolio - who as a matter of fact does this for a job and for companies like Disney, not as easy as you think.

The illustrations are themselves stories, journeys into a journey, which fill the eyes with an explosion of colors, like the fairytales themselves, which again bring together classic and modern: fairytale sceneries and digital art.

I would also like to talk about the design look of the books. I appreciated how the pages are structured, which follows its logic and has some constant elements, such as the flowers and leaves which frame the text. I think this was wanted. Just like in fairytales the same phrases come back over and over again (think of *"Once upon a time...")* because they give us a sense of familiarity, then also these graphic elements are used in the same way. Finally, I appreciated the distinction on the look of the pages with the story and those with the notes of the author, as it helps organize the structure of the book well.

I can not end this review without recommending our readers to read these stories and follow Martina Rosazza's journey, an expert and promising artist. In these current times when we are asked to stay home a fairytale may just be the best way to travel, both in time and space, to our-childhood and to far away exotic lands. Just like Gianni Rodari said,

"Fairytales are the place where everything is possible".