

**WOMAN STORYTELLING  
CASE STUDIES OF *PHILOMENE* AND  
*SCHECHEREZADE***



**Comparative Literature**

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**Abstract**

In the 1999 monograph *The Classic Fairy Tales* (edited by Maria Tatar), Karen E. Rowe in the chapter “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tales” lists two metaphors for women storytellers, namely, as the first model - women writers - she cites the antique example of Philomela (Ovid: *Metamorphoses*), who was victimized on the basis of a myth and was literally and metaphorically without language, therefore she metaphorically weaved her story into a tapestry and sent it to her sister to read. The motive of the female weaver is also found in the Bible.

**THE BEGINNINGS**

**Philomene ATU 405D<sup>1</sup>**

The woman storytelling originates in antique literature, in Ovid’s myth of Philomela (or Philomene), who after the trauma (she was raped and her tongue was cut off – so that she could not talk about it) redefines her story in texture or visual text.

In *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, in the famous myth about Eros and Psyche, next to the golden donkey Lucius as the main narrator, also a storyteller appears – *an old woman (old wives tale)* (Ziolkowski 2002: 92).

Thus, a wacky and tipsy old woman told stories to the kidnapped girl (Psyche) and I [Lucius], who stood beside her, was truly sorry for not having a table or a pen with me and could not write down such a fascinating fairy tale. (Apulej 1981: 178).

***Schecherezade* ATU 875\***

In the collection of Arabic fairy tales entitled *One Thousand and One Nights*, which came to Europe by way of a translation into French (1702–17), the central narrator is Scheherazade who became the fairy tale type in Uther’s index, under ATU 875B\*.

875B\* *Storytelling Saves a Wife from Death* (Scheherazade). A king who discovers that his wife is unfaithful has her executed. Then, each night, he takes a new wife and has her killed the following day (after she gives birth) (cf. Type 1426). After three years (one year) the vizier is unable to find a suitable woman, so the king condemns him to death.

<sup>1</sup>AaTh D150 Transformation: man to bird. AaTh: A912.2 Creation of Nightingale (Philomela); A1912.3 Creation of swallow (Procne), S163. Mutilation: cutting (tearing) out tongue. Often to prevent revelation of secret (Philomela). (Thompson, 193, 515, 2221)

The vizier's daughter volunteers to marry the king (although her father objects). She tells stories to the king (with the help of her sister, or a courtier tells the stories) (J1185.1]. The king postpones the execution. After a year of storytelling (after the wife gives birth), the king realizes that it would be wrong to kill this woman. (Uther 2004: 499)

### **Trobaritz, 12th-13th centuries**

The beginnings of woman authorship are found in the songs of medieval women troubadours or trobaritz (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries) and in the theme of the *finamor* [courtly love] in Occitan. The texts of the trobaritz of the intertextual, dominated by emotional motifs (love, trust, loyalty), supported by actions (Love test) reflect the symbols (garden fountain, wall). Central motif is love the emotion that has similar symptoms as anxiety (expectation, call and meeting). The trobaritz express themselves with metaphors, often as literary parallelism - externalization of the inner landscape - literal and emotional winter. The trobaritz are suggestible translate visuals into verbal world - songs (Azalais de Porcairagues, Comtessa de Dia, and Maria de Ventadorn).

### **Decameron, 1348-1353**

Women storytellers are also found in Boccacci's *Decameron*, where among ten narrators there are seven women storytellers (Elissa, Emilia, Fiammetta, Filomena, Lauretta, Neifile and Pampinea).

### **The Canterbury Tales, 1483**

In *The Canterbury Tales* by G. Chaucer (1483), two women storytellers (a housewife from Bath and a mother superior) can be found amongst 16 narrators (beggar, priest, gentleman, miller, seller of indulgences, keeper, sailor, landowner, lawyer, merchant, scholar, caretaker, knight, and doctor). The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is motivated and thematically related to the motive of an animal groom/bride, i.e. Cupid and Psyche.

### **The Facetious Nights, 1550-1553**

The first collection of fairy tales by Giovanni Francesco Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti* (*The Facetious Nights*, 1550-1553), was intended for adult readers. The story is situated in a high socio-cultural background on the island of Murano near Venice. Women are also addressed in the dedication. The main person or the Venetian Madonna is the *noble Signora Lucretia*, who represents the narrative frame of the ten narrators (*Arianna, Cateruzza, Brunetta, Eritrea, Fiordiana, Isabella, Lauretta, Lionora, Lodovica, and Vicenza*), two ladies (Mrs. Chiara and Mrs. Veronica) and narrators. The most famous fairy tale is the *Pussin Boots*.

### **The Pleasant Nights, 1634, 1636**

In the second collection of fairy tales for adults entitled *Il pentamerone* (*The Pleasant Nights*, 1634, 1636), by Giambattista Basile, now known as the first collection of fairy tales for

adults and “young people” (*The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*), all narrators are women, with the central one being Zoza (beside her also Antonia, Diana, Domenica, Francesca, Giacomina, Girolama, Giulia, Lucrezia, Vittoria, Pozia, and Paola).

### **Précieuses, 1690-1715**

A characteristic of French women fairy tale writers, called *preciosas*, is that in literary salons, they narrated “text intended for children, and the context intended for adults” (Seifert 2006). Socio-culturally, *preciosas* were of noble, aristocratic descent and told stories in mansions. Nevertheless, the fairy tales of the French *preciosas* influenced the development of the fairy tale writing around the world, precisely because they redefined the troubadour theme of the *finamore* into fairy tale themes (e.g. *Beauty and the Beast*), as their storytelling in the palaces was a “salon game” (Seifertxx:).

### **Tales of My Mother Goose, 1697**

The first collection of fairy tales for children was Charles Perrault’s *Les Contes de ma mère l’oie* (*Tales of My Mother Goose*) (1697). The coverpage also depicts a woman narrator who tells children fairy tales.

The most famous children’s collection of fairy tales is the *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, which was first published in 1812 (Volume 1) and in 1815 (Volume 2) and then saw further supplemented editions.

The model of oral creation or narration of fairy tales includes another form of “women’s fairy tale creation”, represented by the story tellers, i.e. 1) narrators and recorders of fairy tales, since they were engaged in telling and writing fairy tales, and 2) women fairy tale writers.

### **Dorothea Viehmann (1755-1815)**

Dorothea Viehman (née Katharina Dorothea Pierson) (1755-1815) is one of the most important storyteller of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. She contributed about 36 (out of 210) fairy tales which were published in the second volume of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (KHM, 1815). In 1813, she met Brothers Grimm and told them fairy tales every week. Due to her socio-cultural environment - peasant life and work in the inn her fairy tales include French elements. Brothers Grimm were glad that they met the Niederzwehn’s storyteller who told them fairy tales in almost the same words even when she had to repeat them.

In September 2012, the University Library in Kassel identified the hitherto unknown image as a portrait of Dorothea Viehmann, created by Ludwig Emil Grimm, Jacob’s and Wilhelm’s younger brother. One of the fairy tales Dorothea told the Grimm brothers was KHM 106 *The Poor Miller’s Boy and the Kitten* (*Der arme Müllerbursch und das Kätzchen*). In this fairy tale, it is conspicuous that the fairytale is based on the French fairy tale *The White Cat* (*La chatte blanche*) by Madame d’Aulnoy (Marie-Catherine, Baronne d’Aulnoy, 1650-1705), as well as the *La*

Fontaine's (1621- 1695) fable *The Cat and an Old Rat* 5 (1694) which is thematically associated with Aesop. Dorothea Viehmann was not the only storyteller of Brothers Grimm, as fairy tales were also told by other storytellers, including the Hassenpflugsisters (Amalie, Johanna, Marie) and Wild (especially Dorothea, later Wilhelm's wife).

### **Laura Gonzenbach (1842-1878)**

Jack Zipes professor of German at the University of Minnesota in the United States, translated a collection of Sicilian fairy tales by Luisa Rubini entitled "Fiabe siciliane" (1999) from Italian into English. He first translated Volume 1 (*Beautiful Angiola*, 2003), followed by Volume 2 (*The Robber with a Witch's Head*), then both volumes appeared in an integral version (*Beautiful Angiola: The Lost Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales of Laura Gonzebach*, 2005).

Sicilian fairy tales were also told to children, not just adults, but they were not cleansed of violent scenes and bullies. Their purpose was, as Laura wrote, to preserve the authenticity of narration, rather than changing and adapting the written record. It is interesting that she did not write them in the Sicilian dialect, but rather translated them simultaneously into German, assisted by her sister Magdalen. In the second issue of *Beautiul Angiola*, Zipes added ATU numbers to all 94 stories and a brief explanation of the types/motifs. In the accompanying text, he placed Laura Gonzebach's life and work, as well as her fairy tales, into a socio-cultural context. He also listed certain narrators (informers): Gua Lucia, Gua Cicca Crialesi, Gua Nunzia Giuffridi, Bastiana, Elisaabetta and Concetta Martinotti, Francesca Rusullo, Peppina Guglielmo, and Caterina Certo.

### **Makalonca and One Thousand and One Nights, 1944**

Fran Saleški Finžgar extracted the material for the authorial fairy tale *Makalonca* (1944, design by Jože Plečnik) from what the shepherds told him and wrote it down during his student years, in 1881.<sup>2</sup>

*Makalonca* is the title of the collection consisting of four fairy tales or tales, namely: *Makalonca*, *Hudobin Potepin* [*Malicious Tramp*], *Kvartopirčev sin* [*Son of a Gambler*] and *Kačja dolina* [*Serpent Valley*]. On creating *Makalonca*, he mentions that while browsing through memories he found papers containing the draft of the tale.

<sup>2</sup> Finžgar's record of *Makalonca* or keywords found in his manuscript legacy.

MAKALONCA 3 ritters – one of the moon, one of the stars, one of the sun. King of one son, Petrus. He founds out – and goes around the world – ring mother – rides to the empire – and there they say that – for Makalonca – a duel is waiting – the first of the stars. The first of the stars won over everyone: You, I'll joke with you – but neither could Peter – but the second time Petrus defeats him. Makalonca – glad. I'll wait for the other fights. Bara, where will you go to church, so we can meet? At the end of the month, she escapes and Makalonca wants to get away – she buys a horse. Evening at 11 PM Mak in the garden – so far away that they were across the border. At 7. Makal is nowhere to be found. The emperor realizes immediately that they escaped. The horses pursue them. Makalonca fell asleep, he looked at the ring and then fell asleep, while an eagle took the ring – it flew away and the ring fell into the sea – the storm brought him – to the island – Makalonca wakes up, Petrus is gone. Mak. meets a shepherdess and swaps clothes with her and she runs into the queen mother. The mother accepted her as if she was her one. Petrus sees the boat and lights a fire for them to paddle there – they take him back to the boat he visited a buyer in France – but the emperor had no children and took him for his own. If anyone declares war, I'll shake him off, and really all. But Petrus thought of home – and asked and went to watch – just come back. He comes home – and there was a wedding. Mother looks at the ring – says our Petrus – and she still has it if she didn't die (Finžgar 1987: 299).

Grafenauer cited Provençal and, above all, German influences (1945: 137), while Kotnik mentioned the connection to the collection of Arabian fairy tales, *A Thousand and One Nights*, and the *Story of Kamaralsam of Kaledan* and *Princess Badur of China* (1953: 73). The baseline text has a thousand-year tradition and it took about five hundred years of its evolutionary path from the Oriental-Islamic variant before it became Europeanized in Italian, French (Provençal), Dutch, Danish, Catalan, German, and Czech variants, and it still lives today. In Slovene, the fairytale motif of a separated and reunited love couple has established itself in the Christianized and Slovenized version of *Makalonca* (1944).

### **Tina Wajtawa or Valentina Pielich Negro, 1900-1984**

Valentina Pielich Negro, with the domestic name Tina Wajtawa (1900-1984), was born in Ladina, Solvizzia (Resia, Italy). After 1960, Milko Matičetov (1919-2014) recorded 404 of Tina's fairy tales, but only 22 were published (including translations, 27); the recordings are kept at the ZRC SAZU. These fairy tales have the characteristics of spoken language in the literary context of storytelling. Her tales are stylistically marked by the linguistic characteristic of storytelling, the Resian language, and folk tales that are part of the European cultural context.

### **Conclusion**

All storytellers – the narrator had a multilingual and multicultural socio-cultural background. The historical and geographical similarity between their fairytales is the European space; the difference is in the subjectivization of the authors. Typical of the *Scheherazade*<sup>3</sup> model of storytelling (ATU 875B\* Storytelling Saves a Wife from Death) from the first half of the 19th century (a clear dichotomy between good and bad); for the model of writing (*Philomene*)<sup>4</sup> in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (a more equal position of female and male fairy-tale characters) is typical; and for contemporaries, the model of modern storytelling is typical, the introduction of social empathy for the main and secondary literary persons (both brothers), for men and women.

*Makalonca* is related in substance to the text from the Arabic fairytale collection *Thousand and One Nights*, entitled *The Story of Kamar al-Zaman*. In 1985, the manuscript was lost containing the translation of *Die schöne Magelone, 1527: Ena liepa historia od te liepe Magdalone in pa od ta Edelpetra v ani provinciji v Švajci* [*The Fair Magelone: A Beautiful Story of the Fair Magdalene and the Edelpeter in a Province of Switzerland*], with printed initials and the title of Andrej Šušter-Drabosnjak (1768-1818).<sup>5</sup> The study of sources and literature showed that the basic motif of (Fair) Magelona is a very popular medieval and modern motif of love

<sup>3</sup> ATU 875B\* Storytelling Saves a Wife from Death (Scheherazade). A king who discovers that his wife is unfaithful has her executed. Then, each night, he takes a new wife and has her killed the following day (after she gives birth) (cf. Type 1426). After three years (one year) the vizier is unable to find a suitable woman, so the king condemns him to death. The vizier's daughter volunteers to marry the king (although her father objects). She tells stories to the king (with the help of her sister, or a courtier tells the stories) (J1185.1). The king postpones the execution. After a year of realizing that it would be wrong to kill this woman. (Uther 2004: 499)

<sup>4</sup> ATU 405D The Vanished Husband (AT 150 Transformation: man to bird (Thompson, 515); S163 Mutilation: cutting (tearing) out tongue (Thompson, 2221); A 1912.s Creation of nightingale, A1917 Creation of swallow (Thompson, 193).

<sup>5</sup> Hladnik, Miran (1985). "Svobodno po nemškem poslovenjeno" (Popularni prevedeni žanri 19. stoletja). France Prešeren v prevodih: Zbornik društva slovenskih književnih prevajalcev 8/9. Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih književnih prevajalcev, pp. 191–199. Available at <http://lit.ijs.si/prevedeni.html#6>.

(separated lovers meet again). Makalonca from 1944 was graphically designed by the famous Slovenian architect relevant to Europe. Klementina Možina wrote about *Mikrotipografija arhitekta Jožeta Plečnika* [*Microtypography of the Architect Jože Plečnik*].<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup><http://revija-knjiznica.zbds-zveza.si/Izvodi/K1104/Mozina.pdf>

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### **Abbreviations**

AT or Aa/Th is an international designation or acronym based on the surnames of two folklorists, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (1928, 1961), who published an internationally classified index of fairy tale types.

ATU is an international designation or acronym based on the surnames of three folklorists, Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, Hans-Jörg Uther, who published an internationally classified index of fairy tale types (Uther 2004, reprint 2011).

<https://edition.fi/kalevalaseura/catalog/series/FFC>