

How Did Fairytales Become a Genre of Croatian Children's Literature? Book History without Books

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This article compares the communication circuits of the oldest fairytales in Croatian children's literature, focusing on their production and distribution, and on the historically specific social and cultural aspects of books as material objects.

Keywords: book history / Croatian literature / children's literature / 19th cent. / fairytales / publishing / book market

The history of adoption of fairytales in Croatian children's literature is a history without books. At a very mundane level, it is a history without books because the first fairytales for children in Croatian were published in magazines, and not in books. At a more analytical level, but still a commonsense one, it is a history without books because the first Croatian books of fairytales have been almost completely lost. Nevertheless, this article argues that all these fairytales may be approached from the perspective of book history. Moreover, I demonstrate that the book-history perspective and its focus on the circulation of books as material objects is crucial for understanding the process and mechanisms of fairytale adoption in Croatian children's literature.

The term *adoption* is used in line with the argument that fairytales were not an (exclusively) children's genre in preindustrial oral societies (Bošković-Stulli 191; Holbek 230; Lüthi 81–82), nor were they recognized as such in children's literature (seen as a distinct form of non-functional texts). For example, prior to the mid-nineteenth century in Croatia, functional or nonfunctional Croatian children's books did not contain fairytales. In other words, none of the many Croatian schools or children's religious publications, or Croatian children's literature publications in a contemporary sense, published a single fairytale until the 1860s and the appearance of the first Croatian children's magazine, *Bosiljak* (Basil; 1864–68). During the following decade, fairytales continued to be sporadically published in Croatian children's magazines (which appeared later), and it

was not until the end of the same decade that they were included in books for children or published as separate books.

Significantly, the magazines that published fairytales for children in Croatia differed from one another with regard to their respective view on the relationship between fairytales and children (Hameršak, “Die Gestaltung der Kindheit”). Thus, *Bosiljak* favored fairytales among other folk genres, which was in line with Herderian notions on folk literature. In *Bosiljak*, fairytales were primarily conceived as the embodiment of the national spirit. In contrast, in 1870s, Croatian children’s magazines such as *Smilje* (Everlasting; 1873–1945) and *Bršljan* (Ivy; 1873–76; 1889–1903) favored fairytales primarily because they were in line with the educational imperatives of learning with pleasure and using examples. To put it briefly: in the 1860s fairytales were primarily understood as a means of ethnic integration and mobilization, whereas in the 1870s they were considered a means of moral education.¹ In 1879, with the publication of the first Croatian folktale collection for children (see Stojanović), fairytales entered the realm of children’s books. The publication of these fairytales was driven by the idea of folk literature as an effective source of ethnic integration as well as moral education. Finally, around 1880 (from 1879 to 1881), fairytales started to be published as separate volumes, based on the notion of literature as amusement and children as consumers. It was only when these book series appeared that fairytales were established as a representative genre of popular Croatian children’s literature.

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This brief review shows that, when discussing the adoption of fairytales in Croatian children’s literature, one is in fact not dealing with one distinct “entrance” but with multiple “entrances.” Rather than a single event, this addresses a complex process: entering. In order to accommodate at least a part of this complexity, it is worth concentrating on the differences between the communication circuits (see Darnton, “What Is the History” 12) of Croatian children’s magazines from the 1860s and 1870s on the one hand, and fairytale books published around 1880 on the other.

As opposed to the communication circuit of fairytale books published around 1880, which is discussed in detail below, in the 1860s and 1870s the communication circuits of Croatian children’s magazines and children’s literature generally functioned as expanded classroom circuits. As Milan Crnković (160) argued some time ago, nineteenth-century Croatian children’s books were predominantly produced (edited, written, translated, etc.) by teachers or catechists. Furthermore, in line with the profession of

their authors and editors, these books were aimed at schoolchildren and distributed through schools, primarily as books for school libraries or as reward books for gifted pupils. At that time, teachers had a prominent role in defining which book would be purchased for the school library or given to pupils at the end of a school year, for Christmas, or for Easter (Majhut, "Knjižnica za mladež"). The government periodically approved a list of books that could be given as gifts to pupils, but, as Sanja Lovrić points out, these lists were most often seen by the teachers as broad guidelines. Thus, in the nineteenth century, teachers were the main factor in the distribution of the children's books that they produced as editors or writers.

Due to the class, professional, and educational structure of the population, in the second half of the nineteenth century the production and distribution of Croatian children's books to school children was in fact oriented towards lower-class children mostly coming from rural and illiterate communities.² Teachers were an integral part in the production process because, after the adoption of Educational Acts (1845, 1874), which introduced universal compulsory four-year school education, lower-class children dominated the population they were in touch with.³ At the ideological level, teachers' focus on lower-class children was based on the notion of education and literature as an enlightenment project crucial for modernizing society. Here is the argument as put forward by Ivan Filipović, one of the most prominent children's authors of the period, in his programmatic article "Pravac naše književnosti" (The Direction of Our Literature, 1858) about the role and the further development of Croatian literature in general:

The goal of our literary works is above all to raise the moral and social consciousness among the common folk. This is the central aim, and all others stem from it. Education and the educated are thus a goal, and literature is a tool to reach that goal. (Filipović, "Pravac naše književnosti" 59)

For Filipović (60) and other teachers, children's literature is particularly suitable for accomplishing this goal because it is easier to introduce new concepts to children than to adults, who are already formed. Filipović and others directed their work towards children not only because they were in constant everyday contact with children, but also because they believed that their literary efforts would have a longer-lasting effect on them than on adults.⁴

At the beginning of the systematic use of children's literature in the project modernizing the country and educating its population (i.e., in the 1850s and 1860s), the focus on children's literature was also advocated because of the argument that children would read their books aloud to adults (Filipović, "Knjižnice za mladež" 10). In a country in which nearly 85% of the popu-

lation was still illiterate at the end of the 1870s (Cuvaj 12), and in a period when reading aloud was still the norm (Darnton, "History of Reading"), the practice of children reading aloud was conceived of not only as a cultural investment in the future, but also as a bridge to the uneducated adults.

Hence, the fairytales published in the children's magazine *Bosiljak* (i.e., the first fairytales in Croatian children's literature) were in fact aimed at adults as well as children. In fact, the introduction to the first volume of *Bosiljak* and its subsequent advertisements explicitly state that the magazine is intended for pupils in the upper grades of primary schools and lower grades of secondary schools, as well as for "all friends of youth" (i.e., teachers, catechists, and other educators) and for the "folk in general" (i.e., uneducated adults; Filipović, "Poziv na predplatu" 2; Hartmán and Filipović). *Bosiljak* and numerous other publications, articles, and practices from the time suggest (see Hameršak, "Višestruki") that in the second half of the nineteenth century many Croatian children's publications were supposed to be read by children to parents, neighbors, and other adults. This argument was put forward to promote the production and distribution of children's books, which shows that the difference between children and adult readers at the time lay in quantitative rather than qualitative factors. In sum, the same publications were seen as suitable for both children and uneducated adults. The only difference was that they were supposed to have a stronger effect (both general and personal; i.e., both historical and biographical) on children than on adults. From this perspective, it does not seem much of a mystery that many contributions to *Bosiljak*, including the fairytales discussed, appeared un-childlike (i.e., more suitable as literature for adults than children) to researchers of Croatian children's literature (Crnković 101).

In the 1870s, the idea of children's literature as literature for both children and uneducated adults was no longer universally accepted, but education still remained the predominant goal of children's literature, and lower-class children remained its recipients. Although periodicals from the 1870s, unlike their 1860s counterparts, were aimed exclusively at children, they remained highly didactic and thus included realistic genres such as children's stories with morals. Thus, as in the 1860s, fairytales remained a marginal genre in children's magazines of the 1870s, despite their different ideas of childhood and different implied audiences.

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As opposed to children's periodicals and especially children's books published before 1879, several book series that were launched around 1880

privileged fantastic literature in general and fairytales in particular. The oldest of these book series, *Priče ...* (Tales ...), appeared in 1879, and the publication of two more, *Tisuć i jedna noć: arabske noći* (A Thousand and One Nights: The Arabian Nights) and *Pričalice* (Taletellors), started in 1881.

As already mentioned in the introduction, almost all the books from these series have been lost. The books from two of these series (*Priče ...* and *Tisuć i jedna noć*) are completely lost, and we know of them only from information in publishers' bookshop catalogues and, in the case of *Tisuć i jedna noć* (see Lopašić), subsequent editions. The books from the third series, *Pričalice*, are only partially available today. The history of these three book series is thus a book history without books. This is nothing new. There are many such histories, especially in popular or children's literature, the famous "Pamphleteer on the run" (see Darnton, *The Literary Underground* 71–121) being just one of many cases. As already stated in the introduction, having a history without books does not mean giving up writing the history of these books. It just compels one to redirect the interpretation from the objects towards their descriptions; from the form towards its representation; from texts and peritexts towards epitexts (Genette); from books' prefaces, indexes, and texts towards advertisements, subscription lists, reviews, catalogues, and so on.

As the sources mentioned above suggest, fairytales had the status of a prominent children's genre in all three book series. In addition to fairytales from the *Arabian Nights*, "Little Red Riding Hood," "Puss in Boots," "Little Briar-Rose," "Snow White and Rose Red," and "Cinderella" were published. Publishers' and booksellers' catalogues indicate that all these books were extensively illustrated for the period. Books published in the series *Tisuć i jedna noć* probably had some seventy "ordinary pictures" and four "beautifully colored pictures" (see Lopašić). Furthermore, today *Priče ...* is recognized as the first Croatian picture-book series (Batinić and Majhut 33), and *Pričalice* could be labeled the oldest (although partially) preserved Croatian picture-book series. Books published in this series also had an impressive design. *Pričalice* had a color frontispiece, and all of them, including one picture book published in the *Priče ...* series, were published in large quarto format, while Croatian children's books of the period were usually printed in smaller formats (octavo, duodecimo, etc.). The fact that most of these book features were emphasized in publishers' or bookshop catalogues (see "Popis hrvatskih"; *Najveći*) suggests that they were regarded as significant for the publications at issue.

In sum, books published in all three series had a distinctive yet recognizable subject (fairytales), design (illustrations), format (quarto), and/or cover (illustrated): distinctive compared to other books, but recognizable

and unified at the level of the book series. They had material characteristics on the basis of which, as suggested by Joseph Turow's (94) research on children's book publishing, popular buyers such as parents selected books for their children. According to Turow, for this segment of buyers, exterior characteristics (belonging to a group of titles with a similar design, format, cover, etc.) as well as the general subject were of primary importance.

The orientation of these book series towards parents rather than teachers is additionally suggested by the fact that these series (as is evident from the remaining copies and peritextual and epitextual information on the authors and the origin of illustrations) were most likely localizations of German picture books. Publishing books with German illustrations and Croatian texts (probably translations) appears as the most effective (i.e., easiest and cheapest) way to produce books that could compete with the ones Croatian parents already used to purchase at the time. The parents that purchased books for their children in nineteenth-century Croatia were from an urban middle- and upper-class background and were oriented towards German and other literatures.

Although statistical data for the period shows that in 1880 as much as 72% of the urban population in northern Croatia listed Croatian as their native language (Gross and Szabo 68–69), German was still the language of everyday private communication in the urban areas. German was particularly common in the context of childrearing and the domestic education of middle- and upper-class children in northern parts of Croatia (see Šenoa 265; Tkalac 62; Vukelić 45). By the end of the nineteenth century, German and other foreign books were no longer predominant in Croatian bookshops and lending libraries (Stipčević 79–80 et passim), but they remained a part of the standard supply until the end of the Second World War. Works by Campe, Schmidt, Hauff, Bechstein, and Mäsaü are included in the catalogues of early and late nineteenth-century Croatian bookshops and libraries (see also *Katalog zur Leib-Bibliothek* and *Popis knjiga*).

The interpretation of the *Priče . . .*, *Pričalice*, and *Tisuc i jedna noć* book series as the Croatian equivalents of German picture books is additionally supported by the publishers' and reviewers' explicit insistence on this very argument. An anonymous reviewer of *Pričalice* wrote:

Until now [i.e. the appearance of *Pričalice*] our [Croatian] literature for the young was very poor, and nice and artistically well illustrated works were particularly omitted. Hence parents, especially in towns, purchased German and French books as gifts for their children. ("Pričalice" 607)

Quite similarly, the publisher of *Priče . . .* emphasized the adjective *Croatian* in the following announcement:

By publishing these nice books, which we will continue to do in the future, we are trying to fill a void in Croatian literature in response to complaints that such books are not available to our youth in their mother tongue. Henceforth, there is no need for anyone to buy pictures with a German description for their children because these very pictures are now available from our bookstore with a *Croatian* description. ("Popis hrvatskih" 162)

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Thus, the three series of books published around 1880 launched a new literary genre of fairytale book in Croatian children's literature. They also introduced a new publishing genre of picture (illustrated)-books series, and addressed a new stratum of middle- and upper-class child readers. The relevant question is why this happened around the 1880s and what this had to do with the prevailing communication circuit of children's books at the time. This question leads to the year 1878, when a major Croatian teachers' association, the *Hrvatski književno-pedagoški sbor* (Croatian Literary-Educational Association), which was also implicitly gathering most Croatian children's writers and editors of the period, launched its own children's book series, *Knjižnica za mladež* (The Young People's Library). By starting their own children's book series, teachers gained even greater control over the communication circuits of children's books. Namely, their books were almost by default distributed to school libraries and to pupils as prizes, as teachers (school directors, librarians, members of library committees, reward book committees, etc.), who were involved in deciding which books would be purchased for libraries or as prizes, were also their producers (editors, writers, etc.) or at least members of the association that produced them. This line of argumentation, along with the number of copies of books published by the teachers' association, suggests that the books published by the Croatian teachers' association had privileged and exclusive access to the only relevant stratum of Croatian children's-book readers at the time—schoolchildren (see Majhut, "Knjižnica za mladež").

The Croatian teachers' association's focus on publishing Croatian children's books put other Croatian publishers of children's books in a significantly less favorable position. In order to compensate for their loss in the segment of school purchasers (school libraries and schoolbooks), publishers turned to younger and middle- and upper-class children and their parents by publishing the three fairytale book series discussed above. With the appearance of these books, in a manner quite analogous to what was happening elsewhere at the time (see Turow 92), Croatian children's literature was divided into the mass-market segment and the library-market segment. As Joseph Turow explains:

The “library market” segment contains publishers who sell the overwhelming majority of their ... children’s books to school and public ... libraries. In contrast, the mass market segment contains publishers who market their ... children’s books to a large variety of nonlibrary outlets—particularly discount, department and book stores. (91)

This was not the first time that the target audience of this market segment (i.e., middle- and upper-class child readers) were addressed by Croatian publishers. Still, it was the first time that this targeting was simultaneous and had the same intensity as the targeting of lower-class children. As Berislav Majhut argued, a prompt Croatian translation of Joachim Heinrich Campe’s famous book *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger, 1779–80; for the Croatian translation, see Vranich) “appeared on the market in two volumes of approximately 300 pages, and was one of the most expensive books published by *Novosjelska sčlovotizka* [Novoselska Press]” (Majhut, *Pustolov* 315). It was, writes Majhut, “indeed a strange publishing venture: the fact that the publication of the first [Croatian] book for children was the most expensive one reveals that they were convinced of its success” (Majhut, *Pustolov* 315) and, I should add, that at least middle-class readers were addressed. However, the translation of *Robinson* was almost an aberration because until the fairytale book series were published around 1880 Croatian children’s books were only sporadically aimed at middle- and upper-class children. This was so for several reasons, all of which have already been mentioned. Middle- and upper-class children, unlike lower-class children, were out of the focus of teachers’ production of children’s literature because they were not recognized as a link to the broadest strata of population and as potential bearers and distributors of values and skills necessary for modernization processes. On the other hand, before the teachers’ association launched its own book series, middle- and upper-class children were out of the publishers’ scope because publishers were able to accomplish their main objective (selling as many books as possible to the broadest possible audience) through various institutions, which included books as school prizes and for school libraries. Until the teachers’ association’s book series took over this segment, publishers (most of whom were still also booksellers at the time) were satisfied with the income from the distribution of Croatian books to lower-class children, and German books to middle- and upper-class children. However, after they lost the school-market segment, they reoriented sales towards the mass-market segment and started publishing Croatian books that could compete with the predominantly German books that had dominated the segment.

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I have already mentioned that fairytales were only sporadically published in Croatian children's magazines in the 1860s and 1870s. Moreover, until 1884 and the Croatian translation of Julius Klaiber's (see Buzina) influential study of fairytales, these were rarely, and always critically, discussed by Croatian teachers and critics of children's literature. Therefore, the three popular book series discussed above and published around 1880 introduced fairytales in the core of Croatian children's literature production. In sum, the Croatian publishing industry had a crucial and pioneering role in creating the still enduring fairytale canon and the commonly accepted view of fairytales as a privileged children's genre.

Thus it was publishers—and not teachers, education specialists, or children's writers—that established fairytales as a children's genre in Croatia. In the process, the material aspect of the book took on primary importance. In order to attract the middle- and upper-class audience, publishers turned to the production of books that their target audience was already accustomed to purchasing. This line of argumentation is, paradoxically, further corroborated by the fact that these books have been lost. As already mentioned, most of them cannot be found in any of Croatia's many public, school, or specialized libraries and archives. Even the Croatian National Library, the central library institution in Croatia, which has been entitled to a free copy of every book published in Croatia (central Croatia and Slavonia) since an act of 1837, does not hold them. Paradoxically, it seems that the books from these three series were omitted from the material heritage collections primarily because of their pronounced materiality (luxury book design, quarto format, number and type of illustrations, etc.), the quality that made them appealing to mass-market consumers, distancing them at the same time from the utilitarian concept of a children's book that was dominant in the late nineteenth century. It seems that the guardians of the literary field and library collections did not consider the oldest Croatian picture books series to be books. These people—such as Marija Jambrišak (97), a Croatian teacher, pointed out at the end of the nineteenth century—thought of picture books in general mostly as material objects; more specifically, toys. According to Ségolène Le Men, this concept of the picture book as a toy came about when “the traditional duodecimo format of the children's book evolved into an album to be placed on a corner of the drawing room table and flipped through by mother and child” (36).

Therefore, it seems that these books are lost today because of their emphasized materiality and visual appeal, the very same qualities that had introduced fairytales into Croatian children's literature in the first place. This diametrically opposite assessment of the same books and their mate-

rial characteristics very vividly illustrates the fact that books are material objects, which, as Arjun Appadurai (5) stated about material objects in general, “have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with.” Moreover, “even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (ibid.). By examining some of the first Croatian fairytales-in-motion (from magazines to books), this article has hopefully shown that their human and social context was infused with different ideas about folk and children’s literature, rigid class stratification, and diverse practices of book production and consumption.⁵

NOTES

¹ In 1877 Ljudevit Tomšić, a Croatian schoolteacher, published a collection for children, which included “Priča o kozličih” (The Story of the Kids), probably a chain translation of the Grimms’ tale of the wolf and the seven kids. This tale, as Vladimir Propp (100–01) has shown, has a fairytale structure, but it still cannot be defined as the oldest fairytale published in a Croatian book. Formal characteristics (the format, title, etc.) and the educational bias of Tomšić’s collection, as well as the status of the wolf in popular and children’s literature imagery, suggest that at the time when it was published Tomšić’s tale of the wolf and the seven kids was decoded as an allegory, characteristic of the reception of fables and animal tales, and, according to Bengt Holbek (202–03), atypical of the traditional reception of fairytales. Therefore, in this article I approach the fairytales published in Mijat Stojanović’s 1879 collection of folktales as the oldest fairytales published in book form in Croatia.

² According to the relevant sources and reconstructions, in 1869, almost 86% of the Croatian population was living from agricultural production (Stipetić 19). Almost the same percent of the population was illiterate at the time (Cuvaj 12).

³ According to the Educational Act *Systema scholarum elementarium* of 16 August 1845, primary school was compulsory for children living in those districts that had a primary school (Cuvaj 145). This regulation did foster a significant but still insufficient increase in the number of schools and pupils. Therefore, according to the statistics, in the 1880s only 68.31% of children living in Civil Croatia and Slavonia actually attended school (Gross and Szabo 414).

⁴ According to interpretations such as James Schultz’s, the idea of childhood as a formative age was unknown in the Middle Ages (see Cunningham 1197–98). This idea was not generally accepted in nineteenth-century Croatia, but the flourishing children’s literature in that period as well as the significant number of explicit claims (Bock 2; Hajdenjak 307; Tomić; Tomšić 14) suggest that it was broadly appropriated among those that were involved in the production of children’s literature.

⁵ I am grateful to Mateusz-Milan Stanojević for copyediting the English version of this article.

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