



ACTA HISTRIAE
30, 2022, 3



UDK/UDC 94(05)

ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767



Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper
Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria

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KOPER 2022

ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767

UDK/UDC 94(05)

Letnik 30, leto 2022, številka 3

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Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper / Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria[®] / Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja / Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment / Istituto IRRIS di ricerca, sviluppo e strategie della società, cultura e ambiente[®]

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Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, SI-6000, Koper-Capodistria, Garibaldijeva 18 / Via Garibaldi 18, e-mail: actahistriae@gmail.com; https://zdjip.si/

Tisk/Stampa/Print:

Založništvo PADRE d.o.o.

Naklada/Tiratura/Copies:

300 izvodov/copie/copies

**Finančna podpora/
Supporto finanziario/
Financially supported by:**

Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije / Slovenian Research Agency, Mestna občina Koper

**Slika na naslovnici/
Foto di copertina/
Picture on the cover:**

Ilustracija Zvonka Čoha k pravljici Ad lintverna, izrez / Illustration by Zvonko Čoh for the fairy tale Ad lintverna [About the Dragon], cutout / Illustrazione di Zvonko Čoh per la fiaba Ad lintverna [Del drago], ritaglio. Tratar, Lojze (2007): Tista od lintverna: slovenska ljudska pravljica. Zapisal Matičetov, Milko, priredila Štefan, Anja. Ciciban, 8, 6–7.

Redakcija te številke je bila zaključena 30. septembra 2022.

Revija Acta Histriae je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze / Gli articoli pubblicati in questa rivista sono inclusi nei seguenti indici di citazione / Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in: CLARIVATE ANALYTICS (USA): Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Social Scisearch, Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Journal Citation Reports / Social Sciences Edition (USA); IBZ, Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur (GER); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (UK); Referativnyi Zhurnal Viniti (RUS); European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS); Elsevier B. V.: SCOPUS (NL); DOAJ.

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VSEBINA / INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS

- Polona Tratnik:** Formation of the Fairy Tale Matrix of a Dragon Slayer 565
Formazione della matrice fiabesca dell'uccisore di draghi
Oblikovanje pravljicne matrike ubijalca zmaja
- Paul Crowther:** The Zlatorog Tale and Slovenian National Identity 591
Il racconto dello Zlatorog e l'identità nazionale slovena
Pripovedka o Zlatorogu in slovenska nacionalna identiteta
- Marjan Horvat:** Cognitive Matrices in Folktales and Contemporary Practices of Deliberation: From the Utilitarian Mindset of Mojca Pokrajculja to the Incomprehensible Laughter of the Bean 603
Le matrici cognitive nei racconti popolari e nelle pratiche contemporanee di deliberazione: dalla logica della ragione utilitaristica di Mojca Pokrajculja al riso incomprensibile del fagiolo
Kognitivne matrice v slovenskih ljudskih pravljicah in sodobne prakse deliberacije: od utilitaristične misli Mojce Pokrajculje do nedoumljivega fižolčkovega smeha
- Cirila Toplak:** Tales in Social Practices of Nature Worshippers of Western Slovenia 627
I racconti nelle pratiche sociali dei naturalisti religiosi della Slovenia occidentale
»Pravce« v družbenih praksah naravovercev zahodne Slovenije
- Mojca Ramšak:** Medicine and Fairy Tales: Pohorje Fairy Tales as a Source about Diseases and Health 655
La medicina e le fiabe: le fiabe del Pohorje come fonte di dati sulle malattie
Medicina in pravljice: pohorske pravljice kot vir o boleznih in zdravju
- Anja Mlakar:** Valuable Ancient Remnants and Superstitious Foolishness: Religiosity, Nationalism, and Enchantment in Slovenian Folklore of the 19th Century 681
Resti preziosi del passato e sciocchezze superstiziose: religiosità, nazionalismo e incanto nel folklore sloveno dell'Ottocento
Dragoceni ostanki preteklosti in vraževerne neumnosti: religioznost, nacionalizem in očaranost v slovenski folklori iz 19. stoletja.

Dubravka Zima: Social Functions of the Fairy Tale Collection
Croatian Tales of Long Ago by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić 709
Funzioni sociali della collezione di fiabe Racconti croati
 di un tempo lontano di *Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić*
Družbene funkcije zbirke pravljic Pripovedke iz davnine
 avtorice *Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić*

Cristina Fossaluzza: A Romantic Fairy Tale and Its Social Purpose in
 Times of War: *The Woman without a Shadow* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal 727
Una fiaba romantica e il suo intento sociale in tempi di guerra:
 La donna senz'ombra di *Hugo von Hofmannsthal*
Romantična pravljica in njen družbeni namen v času vojne:
 Ženska brez sence *Huga von Hofmannsthala*

OCENE

RECENSIONI

REVIEWS

Jakob Norberg: The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German
 Nationalism (**Marjan Horvat**) 743

Panos Sophoulis: Banditry in the Medieval Balkans, 800–1500, New
 Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture (**Marijan Premovič**) 747

Federico Tenca Montini: La Jugoslavia e la questione di Trieste, 1945–1954
Federico Tenca Montini: Trst ne damo! Jugoslavija i trščansko
 pitanje 1945–1954 (**Urška Lampe**) 750

Zoltán Kövecses: Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory
 (**Lihua Zhu & Qiu Yan**) 754



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Članki, objavljeni v tej številki Acta Histriae, so nastali v okviru raziskovalnega projekta *Družbene funkcije pravljic*. Raziskavo je finančno podprla Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARRS, J6-1807).



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SLOVENIAN RESEARCH AGENCY

The articles published in this issue of Acta Histriae were arised from the research project: *Social functions of fairy tales*. This research was supported by Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS, J6-1807).

A ROMANTIC FAIRY TALE AND ITS SOCIAL PURPOSE IN TIMES
OF WAR: *THE WOMAN WITHOUT A SHADOW* BY HUGO VON
HOFMANNSTHAL

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ABSTRACT

The Woman without a Shadow is both the title of an opera resulting from the collaboration between Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the composer Richard Strauss in the three years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War, and that of a fairy tale in which the writer, from 1912 to 1919, reworked the subject of the libretto. With a specific focus on the second version, this essay sets out to describe how, beyond the complex symbolism of the formal structure (which initially makes one think of an artistic product finely crafted, but completely unrelated to historical reality), Hofmannsthal's fairy tale is actually intimately connected to the cultural and 'social' project developed by the author during the years of the First World War. It was this project that gave rise to the veritable 'mythology of the social' that lies at the heart of this fairy tale, in which Hofmannsthal revisits the very cornerstones of Romantic aesthetics and gives them a modern twist.

Keywords: Fairy tale, Hofmannsthal, First World War, Romanticism, Metapoetics, Aesthetics, Social Project, Cultural Renaissance, Myth

UNA FIABA ROMANTICA E IL SUO INTENTO SOCIALE IN TEMPI DI
GUERRA: *LA DONNA SENZ'OMBRA* DI HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

SINTESI

La donna senz'ombra è sia il titolo di un'opera lirica nata dalla collaborazione fra Hugo von Hofmannsthal e il compositore Richard Strauss nei tre anni immediatamente precedenti allo scoppio della Prima Guerra Mondiale, sia quello di una fiaba in cui lo scrittore, dal 1912 al 1919, rielabora l'argomento del libretto. Concentrandosi sulla specificità di questa seconda versione, il contributo intende delineare come, al di là della complessa simbologia della struttura formale (che inizialmente farebbe pensare a un prodotto artistico finemente elaborato ma del tutto astratto dalla realtà storica), la fiaba di Hofmannsthal riveli uno strettissi-

mo legame con il progetto culturale e ‘sociale’ sviluppato dall’autore negli anni della Prima Guerra Mondiale. Da tale progetto si origina a una vera e propria ‘mitologia del sociale’ che costituisce il nucleo di questa fiaba e nella quale Hofmannsthal riprende e riattualizza i cardini dell’estetica del Romanticismo.

Parole chiave: fiaba, Hofmannsthal, Prima Guerra Mondiale, romanticismo, meta poetica, estetica, progetto sociale, rinascimento culturale, mito

THE WOMAN WITHOUT A SHADOW: A FAIRY TALE BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH

The Woman without a Shadow is actually the title of two works of art: an opera in three acts by the composer Richard Strauss with a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, which was written in the three years preceding the outbreak of the First World War, and premiered at the Vienna State Opera on 10 October 1919, and a prose work by Hofmannsthal written between 1912 al 1919, in which the subject of the libretto was reworked as a fairytale (on the genesis of *The Woman without a Shadow*, cf. Hofmannsthal, 1975, 270–282). As Hofmannsthal said himself in a letter to the German philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz, the two versions of *The Woman without a Shadow* should be seen as two completely separate chapters in his artistic production. In fact, he believed that compared to the libretto, the prose version had “inexhaustible significance, leading into the deepest depth”, and that despite the greater difficulty involved in its creation, it was a much more refined work from the aesthetic point of view (cf. Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 127). In his opinion, then, the fundamental difference between the two versions regarded not so much the variations in the storyline, but specific differences in form and style. Indeed, while the opera presents a Baroque scenario based on illusion and *trompe-l’oeil*, the prose version has to do without the elaborate facade of an operatic production which takes inspiration from seventeenth century stage scenarios: it takes on the “more severe” compact form of the myth (Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 127). This is all the more significant if we consider that the choice of using the form of the fairytale combined with the myth was made in 1917, at the height of the First World War, when the questions being posed by history were of impelling urgency, and at a time central to the development of Hofmannsthal’s ‘cultural politics’ (in fact, just a few years later, he would oversee the first edition of the great Salzburg Festival) (cf. Wolf, 2014).

It is no coincidence that in the very same letter to Pannwitz mentioned above, Hofmannsthal makes the connection between his own fairytale and the Romantic prose tradition, and in particular the fairytale *Undine* (1811) by the novelist

and playwright Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (cf. Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 127)¹. Inspired by the work of the Renaissance physician and occultist, Paracelsus, Fouqué's tale tells the story of a water nymph, a creature neither divine nor human, able to take on human form but unable to gain a soul except by marrying a human being. Through her marriage to the knight Huldbrand von Ringstetten, Fouqué's Undine succeeds in gaining a soul, but along with this comes all the suffering connected to a mortal existence: the tribulations of a hostile world and the pain caused by her husband's infidelity, which eventually leads her to drown him in her own tears and return to the water, her primary element. Although it does not have the same tragic ending as Fouqué's tale², Hofmannsthal's story has much in common with Fouqué's: in fact, his woman without a shadow, the daughter of Keikobad, king of the spirit realm, is also a hybrid creature, both elemental and supernatural, a fairy who can change shape and take on animal form. She, too, falls in love with a mortal, the emperor of the south-eastern isles, and becomes his wife, whereupon she leaves the enchanted kingdom of her birth; like Undine, she too is attracted by the world of mortals. However, while the symbol at the heart of the romantic novella is the soul, it is the shadow which is central to the twentieth century fairytale. This motif is not unknown to German Romanticism (think of Chamisso's *Peter Schlehmil*, for example), but in Hofmannsthal it symbolizes a new theme, rich in meaning, namely motherhood. In fact, Hofmannsthal's empress must give birth within twelve months of her marriage to the emperor in order to avoid her husband being turned to stone and in order for herself to become truly human. This change from Fouqué's material, as we shall see in more detail in the second part of this article, is anything but marginal in Hofmannsthal's reworking, also because it has significant implications from the poetological point of view. Indeed, in the wake of the Romantic tradition, Hofmannsthal's tale can also be seen as a metareflection on the structure and function of poetry. This helps to explain the complexity of its form, which the writer himself pointed out in a letter to Rudolf Borchardt dated 7 July 1917. In it, he described the fairytale as the most difficult work he had ever written (cf. Hofmannsthal, 1975, 418). But apart from the enormous complexity of its symbolic structure, the difficulty involved in

-
- 1 Hofmannsthal was familiar with Fouqué's fairytale and greatly admired it: in 1912, he included it in the anthology of German storytellers (*Deutsche Erzähler*) which he had edited for the publishers Insel Verlag. On the other sources he made use of, cf. Hofmannsthal, 1975, 273-282. Among those most often mentioned are Mozart's *Magic Flute* and Goethe's *Faust*. Pannwitz was just as interested as Hofmannsthal in Fouqué's story: he had already begun to write an epic poem based on the Undine theme years earlier. Indeed, before a meeting with Pannwitz which took place in the October of 1917, Hofmannsthal asked him to bring a transcription of his *Undine*, from which he could then take notes for *The Woman without a Shadow*, cf. Hofmannsthal, Pannwitz, 1994, 127 and Hofmannsthal, 1975, 437 sq. On Pannwitz's *Undine*, cf. also the critical edition (Pannwitz, 1999).
 - 2 It is worth pointing out, for instance, that in Fouqué's *Undine* the marriage ends in tragedy, whereas in Hofmannsthal's fairytale, as we shall see, marriage is given a positive connotation.

writing *The Woman without a Shadow* also arose from the connection with its social function, in that moment of crisis that was the First World War. Though at first glance its elaborate, encrypted ‘wrappings’ might make one think that the author was trying to escape the present by means of literature, it is undeniable that *The Woman without a Shadow* is actually closely connected to the time it was written in. It is an expression of the “social” project which had been maturing in Hofmannsthal’s mind throughout the war years. In that sense, and paradoxically, the fairytale is a committed piece of writing precisely because it was conceived of as a conscious stand *against* the culture and society of the time. In a letter dated 23 August 1919, to the Austrian journalist and intellectual, Berta Zuckerkandl, written immediately after a stay in Ferleiten (an Alpine village close to the peak of the Großglockner in Austria, during which time he wrote the last three chapters of the fairytale), Hofmannsthal stressed the element of social criticism implicit in *The Woman without a Shadow*:

In Ferleiten I spent fifteen hours a day on my own, it’s twenty-five days since I even saw a newspaper. You’ll understand that I rediscovered myself, that the “fairytale” is finished, that true reality has emerged triumphant over futility, over so-called reality (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 424).

The contrast between “true reality” and “futility” described here makes it clear that the author is convinced that the ‘primary’ world of poetry is superior to the ‘secondary’ one of reality, and that, particularly in a time of crisis, the former can make its presence felt in the latter in order to bring about social and cultural change. This assertion of the dominance of poetry over the other spheres of reality can be traced back to positions of cultural criticism sustained by that generation of Romantics who came to the fore between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during that time of great political instability which was the French Revolution (cfr. among others Behler, 1989). By preaching the exclusive dominance of poetry, Hofmannsthal not only echoes the radical aesthetics of the romantics, but also their ‘Kulturkritik’.

In that sense, *The Woman without a Shadow* is inextricable linked to the First World War, a moment in history when its author began to believe that it would finally be possible to bring about that “revaluation of all values” described by Nietzsche, in order to arrive at a new cultural renaissance. That explains why, in a letter to Raoul Auernheimer dated 22 October 1919, Hofmannsthal describes his fairytale as “a poetic fragment difficult to interpret, deeply rooted in the individual, intimately hostile to our own era” (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 424). With these words, the writer is emphasizing the complexity of his tale, in its formal structure and symbology its fragmentary nature and psychological dimension (characteristics typical of Romantic literature) and at the same time, the extent to which its intention was to make a statement against the spirit of the times.

METAPOETICS AND THE ‘MYTHOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL’

Organized symbolically into seven chapters, *The Woman without a Shadow* is constructed on two levels, which reproduce the two classic conceptual dimensions to be found in Romanticism, namely ‘spirit’ and ‘life’ (on the links between the fairytale and Romantic *Kunstreligion*, cf. Fossaluzza, 2012). In the narrative language adopted here, the supernatural realm of Keikobad represents the spirit, while the dyers’ humble village symbolizes life. Between these two symbolic extremes we find the kingdom in the middle, the place of synthesis: the emperor’s blue palace, or in other words, the sphere of poetry and art³. To show the fundamental symbolic importance of this ‘third place’, the fairytale begins right here, in the emperor’s palace, where the empress is also in residence. By now, she has left her father’s spirit realm and has been married for nearly twelve months. Nothing spoils her happiness; only her nurse is aware of the threat hanging over her if she does not succeed in obtaining a shadow, and with it, motherhood. For the twelfth time in a year, a messenger from the realm of the ‘spirit’ comes to the blue palace to ask the nurse whether the empress is with child and for the twelfth time, the nurse says she is not. The emperor has gone looking for his favourite falcon, which he himself chased away in a moment of anger, and he plans to stay away for three days. Everything leads us to think that the empress will lose her last chance to gain a human shadow and that she is doomed. But the emperor’s falcon returns to save the situation, bringing the empress her long-lost talisman. There she reads the inscribed message which reveals the terrible fate that threatens her own happiness and that of her husband: “I myself shall be his death, because I walk on earth and cast no shadow!” (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 7). Her “deadly fear” and the unspeakable “desire to save her beloved” (cit.) lead the young woman to attempt a desperate remedy, and try to find a shadow in the world of mortals. This marks the beginning of the empress’s adventures in the ‘inferior sphere’ of ‘life’, a place until that moment completely alien to her:

“Lead to the man whose shadow is for sale, that I may buy it. I shall kiss his feet.”

“Mad child,” cried the nurse, “do you know what you are saying? Do you not shudder at them even in your dreams, though you barely know them? And know – you want to live among them! To deal with them – speech for speech, breath for breath? To return their glances? To cringe to their malice? To fawn on their baseness? To serve them? For that’s what it amounts to. Don’t you dread it?”

“I want a shadow!” cried the empress. “Let us go down that I may serve one of them to gain a shadow. Where is the house, bring me to it! I wish it!” (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 9).

3 As regards the literary tradition concerning the symbolic relationship between the aesthetic sphere and the colour blue (or sky blue) which recurs throughout Hofmannsthal’s fairytale, we should recall the blue flower image in Novalis’s mythical romance, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. On the connections between Novalis’s romance and Hofmannsthal’s fairytale, cf. Endres, 2000, 332 sq.

Obviously, the place where the empress must go in search of motherhood is the village of the dyers, amid ‘life’. But for the inhabitants of the kingdom of Keikobad, this means demeaning oneself to the level of a horrid, vulgar world, which, as emerges in the quotation above, appears to be dominated by a grim materiality⁴.

Unravelling the story’s complex symbolic network, what the reader is faced with is an allegory of its author’s poetics: the village of the dyers is a metaphor of ‘life’ but also a metaphor of a warped⁵, corruptible society, which either out of greed or vanity, is willing to bow down before the alienating principles of money. Whereas the empress represents aesthetics, having been born in the ‘spirit’ realm and now residing in a beautiful palace in the ‘kingdom in the middle’. She is the personification of art, which, so as not to disappear into the sterile hardness of stone, must achieve fertility by making a painful pact with ‘life’.

Through the use of this symbology, in *The Woman without a Shadow* Hofmannsthal proposes an allegory which is at the same time poetic and social (cf. also Mayer, 1993). In fact, the writer presents two levels of interpretation which are interconnected and interdependent: at the poetic level, he uses allegory to express the philosophical basis of his aesthetics focusing on three categories of Romantic origin: ‘spirit’, ‘art’ and ‘life’; at the social level, on the other hand, he conjures up an ideal society based on two symbolic poles, namely ‘aristocracy’ and ‘people’. While the philosophical dimension of ‘aesthetics’ equates in social terms with ‘aristocracy’ and that of ‘life’ with ‘the people’, the transcendental level of the ‘spirit’ is only indirectly social, because it can only become visible in a fragmentary, symbolic form, and namely through art. It is no coincidence that the kingdom of Keikobad is always kept in the background and only becomes a place of action in the most intensely symbolic moment of the fairytale: the seventh and final chapter.

The second and third chapters of the fairytale are set in the humble village of the dyers, where the empress is trying to find the way to obtain the “water of life”⁶ (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 110), and are focused on the seduction and corruption of the dyer’s wife by the wily nurse, while the fourth chapter (particularly significant and totally absent in the libretto of the opera), takes us back to the ‘kingdom in the middle’ to show us the encounter between the emperor and his seven “unborn children” (*die Ungeborenen*). As we know, the final version of this

4 By way of example, see how ill at ease the empress felt as soon as she arrived in the dyers’ village: “Bravely she wanted to pass near them, but her legs were paralyzed by the terror in her heart. Every hand that moved seemed to reach for her; abhorrent were so many mouths so close. The pitiless, covetous and yet, it seemed to her, terrified glances from so many faces gathered in her breast. She saw the nurse looking around for her. She wanted to follow but almost went under in a tangle of men.” (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 11).

5 The three brothers of Barak the dyer are the clearest metaphor for the deformed nature of this society: the one-eyed man, the one-armed man, and the hunchback.

6 The *leitmotiv* of water (or golden water) as a symbol of life recurs throughout Hofmannsthal’s tale, as well as in the various versions of *Undine* (including those of Paracelsus, Fouqué and Pannwitz).

chapter was completed between November 1917 and January 1918. It was greatly influenced by the conversations Hofmannsthal had with Pannwitz between 11 and 13 October 1917 in Baroness Gabriele von Oppenheimer's villa Ramgut, not far from Bad Aussee in the Austrian region of Styria. There, the two writers met to have intense discussions about various aspects of *The Woman without a Shadow*⁷. Hofmannsthal considered Pannwitz (together with Eberhard von Bodenhausen) one of the people who gave him the greatest motivation to write his fairytale⁸, particularly because of Pannwitz's assistance in the difficult drafting of the fourth chapter⁹, a role that Pannwitz himself described in his essay of December 1919, *Hofmannsthal's Erzählung 'Die Frau ohne Schatten'*¹⁰.

Located symbolically exactly at the centre of the fairytale, the fourth chapter represents an eloquent allegory of the sphere lying mid-way between 'spirit' and 'life', namely the world of art. Bringing together 'life', 'spirit' and 'aesthetics', the fourth chapter is thus the first point in the story in which the author provides a true metapoetic reflection based on these three conceptual pillars. In this sense, the "unborn children" who do not yet know the temporal dimension¹¹, represent "Platonic ideas" (Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 592), but at the same time are allegories of potential works of art still waiting to be created. In the fourth chapter, then, the allegory of procreation within marriage presented in the first three chapters becomes an allegory of artistic production, in a parallel most fittingly expressed in the beautiful metapoetic carpet woven by the "unborn" maiden:

The girl had knelt down at the head of the table. She spread the carpet and invited him to sit down on it. The tapestry was beneath his feet; flowers fused into animals, from the beautiful vines hunters and lovers emerged, falcons floated above like drifting flowers, all embraced one another, all were entangled with each other. The entire work was immeasurably magnificent. But a coolness, which reached to his hips, seemed to raise from the weave.

7 Cf. Hofmannsthal's letter to Pannwitz dated 21 October 1917 (Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 136) and Hofmannsthal, 1975, 271 sq. In October 1917, Hofmannsthal read some excerpts from his fourth chapter to Pannwitz, cf. the letter of 28 January, 1918 (Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 199).

8 Cf. the letter of 31 October 1919 to Dora von Bodenhausen (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 425).

9 Another crucial issue about which Hofmannsthal turned to Pannwitz for help was the figure of Efruit, the hybrid creature used by the nurse to seduce the dyer's wife in the fourth chapter. In July 1918, the depiction of Efruit was causing the author so many problems that he asked Pannwitz for advice and then actually stopped writing the fairytale until the June of 1919. Cf. Hofmannsthal's letters of 3 and 4 August 1918, Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 253 sq.

10 *Hofmannsthal's Fairytale, The Woman without a Shadow*, cf. Hofmannsthal, Pannwitz, 1994, 588–594. The essay was published in the Munich journal, *Der neue Merkur*. It was Hofmannsthal himself, who was enthusiastic about Pannwitz writing an essay about his fairytale, who suggested it should be published in that journal (which he thought had a readership suited to his cultural aims) and contacted the editor Ephraim Frisch (cf. the letter of 6 November 1919, Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 418 sq.).

11 "Time?" said the girl and looked at him with a confused expression. "We do not understand time, but it is our whole desire to get to know time and to become subject to it!" (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 44).

*“How did you succeed in conceiving this work with such perfection?”
 He turned to the girl, who had humbly retreated a few steps.
 The girl immediately lowered her gaze, but she answered without hesitation.
 “When I weave I separate beauty from matter; all which entices the senses and
 lures them to madness and decay I leave out.”
 The emperor gazed at her. “How do you go about it?” [...] [
 [...] I do not see what is, nor what is not, but that which is eternal, and weave
 accordingly” (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 41).*

This passage constitutes an extraordinary piece of aesthetic theory and literature about literature and it is difficult to find a clearer expression of Hofmannsthal’s poetics¹². In fact, it is a narrative version of Hofmannsthal’s neoromantic aesthetics, in which the “unborn” maiden’s weaving is an allegory for an aesthetic paradigm built on a precious, intricate network of signs which becomes a kind of poetics that has abandoned the principle of *imitatio*, and lost all direct contact with the world of ‘phenomena’. Just like the maiden’s weaving in Hofmannsthal’s fairytale, in the author’s aesthetics, every one of the knots that make up the network of signs becomes a signifier freed from its meaning. It creates infinite new meanings with other signifiers, and transforms itself into a sign abstracted from its object, in order to become part of a symbolic tapestry with a parallel meaning to the one informing phenomenological reality. This aesthetics is an expression (though still fragmentary) of a transcendence no longer totally accessible rationally, and becomes the exclusive dimension of a world completely transformed into poetry, which no longer recognizes any difference between ‘art’ and ‘life’.

There is no doubt that the fourth chapter of the tale is inspired by the aesthetic theories of Romanticism: is an allegory of Romantic poetics and of a world completely turned into poetry on the basis of these theories (cf. Baioni, 1999; Lavagetto, 2002 for the premises of these poetics). The fact is, however, that at this point, the aesthetic experiment illustrated in the central chapter of Hofmannsthal’s fairytale ends in failure, with the emperor turning to stone. The attempted fusion of ‘life’ and ‘spirit’ in art is unsuccessful, the “unborn children” are unable to find a way into life and remain in that sphere which precedes existence. The temporary failure of the aesthetic experiment represented in the middle of the fairytale (a failure underscored by the empress’s absence) is no mere coincidence. Indeed, the unsuccessful fusion can be ascribed to the emperor’s inability to respond to his children’s needs: on three occasions, he fails to hear their calls (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 145, 149, 157), on three more occasions, he ignores their desperate pleas (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 156 sq.) and in the end, having lost all these opportunities, all that remains to him is to lock himself up in an egoism whose aridness is magnificently represented by the solitary stone statue with which the chapter

12 On Hofmannsthal’s poetics since the early work cf. Streim, 1996.

concludes. This frigid image of death leaves no doubt as to the ‘moral’ of this episode: narcissism is not enough to create art, just as individualism is not enough to save marriage as the basic unit of the community. For the author, in a completely romanticized world, poetic synthesis must also be social synthesis, and can only take place in presence of a real ethical choice that goes beyond the personal needs and wishes of the individual and thus even of the artist himself.

After this failure, the fifth and sixth chapters take leave of the emperor’s realm and take us back to the world of ordinary people, in which the dyer’s wife, bewitched by supernatural forces, performs an action which is just as selfish as that of the emperor: she gives up her shadow to the nurse for good, sacrificing her marriage and her “unborn children” to her own vanity and greed. Only at the very end, in the seventh chapter, do we finally see the miracle that will bring about the fusion between ‘spirit’ and ‘life’, and this will happen thanks to the altruistic choice of the empress. Indeed, while the nurse represents some kind of “demonic animal” (Hofmannsthal, Pannwitz, 1994, 591), impervious to any kind of humanity and able to forget the dyers very quickly¹³, the character of the empress has enough ethical substance to feel a sense of guilt and compassion for them:

“Let us go, you before me,” called the empress, “and find them again, even if they have been dragged away by spirits and are a thousand miles from their house. For we have become thieves and murderers to them, and all the blood from our veins is not enough to make good what we have done to them.”

The nurse cowered to the side and could not sustain the gaze of her mistress. She was afraid that the empress would swoop down upon her like a bird and step on her with the soles of her gleaming feet, so dreadful was the anger on her face (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 77).

The sole desire of the repentant empress is to repair the damage caused to the dyer and his family. But in line with the classic structure of fairytales, the test that the young woman has to overcome in order to make up for the consequences of her actions in the sphere of ordinary mortals requires a level of goodness that is almost superhuman: she must choose whether to drink the golden water from a goblet, thereby obtaining motherhood and bringing her beloved emperor back to life, or let the dyer’s wife keep her shadow (thereby enabling her to become a mother) but having herself to sacrifice any idea of children and love:

Their chill penetrated her inmost being and paralyzed her. She could not take a single step, neither forwards nor backwards. She could do nothing but drink and win the shadow, or spill the cup. She felt herself destroyed and withdrew into

13 In a letter to Pannwitz dated 4 August 1918, Hofmannsthal describes the nurse thus: “[...] nothing which is human can touch her, in this sphere she is chemically invulnerable [...]”, cf. Hofmannsthal & Pannwitz, 1994, 254.

herself. From her own diamond depths words rose clearly, as if sung at a great distance – she had only to repeat them. Without hesitation, she spoke. “I am beholden to you, Barak!” she said, and stretching the arm with the cup straight before her, she emptied the cup at the feet of the cloaked figure (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 90).



Fig. 1: Alfred Roller Kostümfigurine: Die Frau ohne Schatten. Blatt 12. Die Amme (The nurse, costume figurine by Alfred Roller for the opera „Die Frau ohne Schatten“, 1919). KHM-Museumsverband, Theatermuseum Wien¹⁴.

14 Other figurines by Alfred Roller depicting, among others, the emperor, the empress, the dyers and the messenger can be found in the digital database of the Vienna Theatermuseum at the following links: <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681706/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681716/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681722/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681723/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681724/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681736/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681737/>, <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/681739/> (last access: 2022-09-03).

By making the altruistic choice to sacrifice her marriage and her children in order to repair the damage done to the dyer's family, the empress passes the test and is rewarded by unexpectedly obtaining what she thought was lost. It is only by making this agonizing ethical choice that the young woman succeeds in turning around the situation and working a miracle. She obtains motherhood, brings her husband back to life and achieves that synthesis which seemed imminent but did not materialize in the fourth chapter: that fusion between the vital impulse which the empress had encountered in the sphere of ordinary mortals (without which her world would be frozen into a motionless, lifeless image), and the nobility of spirit typical of the superior sphere from which she comes, without which life would be no more than blind animal instinct. With this act of 'renunciation', Hofmannsthal's empress provides the perfect allegorical representation of the process of artistic creation, which, in the author's opinion, must take place between the two conceptual poles of 'life' and 'spirit' and must always entail an ethical choice.

Indeed, we should recall that the fusion which comes about in the seventh chapter, significantly sealed by the "symbols and verses which praised the eternal mystery of the chain of being that links all things on earth" (Hofmannsthal, 1993, 94) that appear on the empress's talisman at the end of the fairytale, is not just a *poetical* allegory: it is a *social* allegory too, as the author himself pointed out in his collection of notes *Ad me ipsum*: "The Woman without a Shadow": Triumph of the allomatic. Allegory of the social"¹⁵. For him, in fact, the completion of the process of artistic creation coincides with social fulfilment through marriage, which for Hofmannsthal is not primarily a bourgeois institution, but a religious sacrament and poetical allegory.

In conclusion, then, apart from the complex symbology in the formal structure of *The Woman without a Shadow*, which might make us think initially of an artistic creation finely wrought but completely removed from its historical context – a beautiful arabesque produced in the enchanted solitude of an ivory tower, Hofmannsthal's fairytale is actually closely connected to the social and cultural project developed by its author during the years of the First World War. In his letter of 14 november 1919 to Marie Luise Voigt (the future wife of Rudolf Borchardt), Hofmannsthal once again uses the image of the tapestry to be found in the fourth chapter in order to give a clear explanation of the connection between his fairytale and the war: "Together with today's letter, I am sending you the 'fairytale', the story of the woman without a shadow which I wove like a craftsman in the course of all those dark years of the war, embroidering or sewing into it many intuitions, hopes and fantasies" (Hofmannsthal, 1975, 427).

15 Hofmannsthal, 1980, 603. As used by Hofmannsthal, the neologism "allomatic" (from the Greek "ἄλλος": other) is synonymous with "social", or "ethical".

The war too, then, is interwoven with the numerous symbolic knots that make up the warp and weft of Hofmannsthal's fairytale. He himself appears to have been well aware of the role played by history in his work, when he added a note in 1921 to the *Ad me ipsum* collection: "Without the actions and the suffering of individuals, no myth can be born. And so it was necessary that the events of 1914 onwards should take place, in order for those struggles to be reshaped into myth" (Hofmannsthal, 1980, 617)¹⁶. In the interconnection between history and myth described in these lines¹⁷, it was the war that provided the background for the neoromantic fairytale *The Woman without a Shadow*. As we have tried to show here, this was how Hofmannsthal came to create a specific cultural project which produced a fully-fledged 'mythology of the social'.

16 Where not otherwise indicated, English translations of quoted passages are by Judy Moss, whom I would like to thank for translating this article into English.

17 On Hofmannsthal's understanding of myth in his early work, cf. for example Eder, 2013, 9–54. On his later concept of the mythical and of the super-historical (*das Überhistorische*), starting with the First World War up to the later *Turn*-Dramas, cf. the detailed introduction and the first chapter in Mionskowski, 2015, 13–152.

ROMANTIČNA PRAVLJICA IN NJEN DRUŽBENI NAMEN V ČASU VOJNE:
ŽENSKA BREZ SENCE HUGA VON HOFMANNSTHALA

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POVZETEK

Ženska brez sence je naslov opere, ki je nastala kot plod sodelovanja med književnikom Hugom von Hofmannsthalom in skladateljem Richardom Straussom v treh letih neposredno pred izbruhom prve svetovne vojne, in hkrati tudi naslov pravljice, ki jo je Hofmannsthal med letoma 1912 in 1919 priredil za libreto. V prispevku, ki se posebej osredotoča na poznejšo različico pravljice, skuša avtorica prikazati, kako je ta, če odmislimo kompleksno simboliko njene formalne strukture (ki sprva sugerira skrbno oblikovan, a od zgodovinske stvarnosti povsem ločen umetniški izdelek), v resnici tesno povezana s kulturnim in »družbenim« projektom, ki ga je Hofmannsthal razvijal v času prve svetovne vojne. Iz tega projekta je izšla prava »mitologija družbenega«, ki tvori jedro omenjene pravljice, v kateri se Hofmannsthal vrača k osnovam romantične estetike in jih reinterpreterira v modernejšem duhu.

Ključne besede: pravljica, Hofmannsthal, 1. svetovna vojna, romantika, metapoetika, estetika, družbeni projekt, kulturna renesansa, mit

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