Fashion through History

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Costumes, Symbols, Communication (Volume II)

Edited by

Giovanna Motta and Antonello Biagini

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CHAPTER TEN

FASHION AND ECONOMY

SUITS OF CARDS, STATUETTES AND FAIRY TALES

GIOVANNA MOTTA

Chess, tarot cards, and other games

In historiography, the topic of games, which has previously been dealt with by great thinkers such as Kant and Schiller, found in Huizinga (1872–1945) in the first decades of the twentieth century, an exponent of a complex analysis with interesting points of reflection on expressed and/or implied concepts. Huizinga—a great scholar of European history, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, the symbolism of the Middle Ages, humanism and the Renaissance, located within the German tradition of *kulturgeshichte*—questioned the nature and significance of games as a cultural phenomenon. He is probably the first author to consider games a fundamental element of life and social organization; a pre-cultural factor that brought into being an "action libre, limitée dans le temps et dans l'espace, et qui obéit à des regles" (Belmas 2006). This was a new attitude, brought along with the movement from rural to city life where the salaried worker employed in the manufacturing sector followed a different rhythm to that of the farmer (who worked on the farmland according to the changing hours of daylight and darkness) and during his free time looked for a moment of escape that could be filled with games. Games, Huizinga affirms, were governed by rules that became laws to follow and were characterized by diverse styles that changed over time and by the tension felt by every player who wished to win, often to attain money as a prize (Huizinga 1973). In the transition from feudal life to life at the court in the Middle Ages, anniversaries that marked religious holidays were celebrated; during the Renaissance new festivities, understood as laic celebrations, were introduced, such as the settlement of a sovereign or the arrival of a queen back from a trip, and included music, dance, and stage-plays. On these occasions playfulness was the norm and playing cards, especially, became a great moment of escape and transgression. If, for some games like chess, of ancient Arabic, Persian, then Iberian origin, primary sources are abundant, it is more difficult to delve into the history of card games because a historian, who is required is to track down original sources,

is not always able to find those that offer answers to all questions. A card game is more transversal (compared to chess, which was primarily known among the ruling classes), played by the rich as well as the common people, and became the object of study of philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, lawyers, and economists, who researched its economic and social values. This was especially so when it came to gambling where the uncertainty of the result was likely to attract special interest. The analysis of games induces social and ethical reflections on: the consequences of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; as indispensable moments of transgression; or, conversely, as grave violations of the moral and social order. In short, games are relevant, in both theory and in practice—they often entail serious consequences for public order and individual psychology and highlight important legal and fiscal aspects (Belmas 2006).

The text of an anonymous writer from the twelfth century introduces us to the dimension of everyday life. It suggests that these games were not exceptional and were often perceived to have a strong and terrible attraction: "Quando siamo alla taberna, non ci curiamo più del mondo, ma al giuoco ci affrettiamo, al quale ogni ora ci accaniamo."

Games, therefore, belonged to everyday life and were not only widespread, but also ended up becoming obsessions giving rise to real social problems. Significant consequences could arise from them: the loss of large sums of money, brawling and criminal acts of varying severity that seriously endangered the common peace. To curb this trend—with notable differences between regions—both religious and civic authorities intervened, the first condemning the vice of gambling on moral grounds, the second promulgating a set of rules aimed at regulating games in an attempt to control their social dynamics for the purposes of public order. Card games, in particular, spread transversally into all environments—they triumphed at court, but also reached the lower classes who, through games, attempted to escape the harsh realities of daily life. This was so much so that some authors have defined their function as *consolatoria*, transforming them into a collective mode of sociation and becoming "un importante ammortizzatore sociale" (Imbucci).

Festivities celebrating religious and civil holidays were held in every city—the city authorities, commercial companies, and arts and crafts guilds gathered, while sellers of goods, artisans and innkeepers, and a diverse and multifaceted crowd circulated. A large part of them wanted to go into the taverns, have a drink, and play cards: "spazi segretati, cinti, consacrati, sui quali valgono proprie e speciali regole … mondi provvisori entro il mondo ordinario" (Huizinga 1973). The 'place' of the tavern, limited in time and in space, welcomed players by offering them the possibility of a card game. But this was not a painless process—the voices of preachers rose among them, in

addition to the promulgation of ordinances and decrees of civil authorities. Usually, men of the church limited games to holidays; the most stringent, however, wished to ban them outright. The chronicles tell of San Bernardino of the Order of Minor Friars—known for his tireless preaching on the renewal of the Church—speaking to a crowd of the faithful gathered in the church square of the Piazza del Campo in Siena and railing against all types of games. The effectiveness of his warning was such that the faithful, immediately went to their homes, looking for chessboards and cards to burn in the streets. Administrators entrusted the regulation of games to citizens' statutes that usually only prohibited gambling for profit and allowed 'games at the tables'—arranged in the streets and managed by so-called *barattieri*. Prohibitions, however, did not prevent the rapid spread of card games and the stimulation of the playing card industry, which fostered the phenomenon of counterfeiting. This is demonstrated by the birth, in Venice, of the large Association of Maîtres Cartiers (1441), which went to the authorities to report cases of counterfeiting and obtained from the Senate a prohibition against the large number of "de cartes peintes e imprimées qui se font hors de Venice" (Belmas 2006). For their part, the authorities did not succeed in stopping these games in any way, and decided to obtain an advantage for the treasury through taxation, applied indirectly by means of contracts. The law, however, maintained the prohibition of gambling in the legislation and distinguished legal games from illegal ones—a boundary that was extremely plastic and regularly ignored. Despite repeated complaints, the spread of cards did not stop; in Italy, thanks to the invention of the *gravure en bois* allowing for an increase in production, cards were manufactured in almost every city and exported to other countries, including France, Germany, and Holland. Attention was great; manufacturers knew that card games were highly profitable because bans were not effective and they were played by the upper classes as well as ordinary people. Card games were common in the many taverns of towns and villages, and during social evenings organized at court and in salons, which, especially from the eighteenth century onwards, became important meeting places for the social elite. While chess, with its rigorous system of strict rules that were considered on a par with moral laws, seemed less shallow and futile and was allowed even for churchmen, card games were basically condemned. Kings and noblemen with conspicuous assets could take an immense fortune in a single night at the great European courts, while the poor attended the taverns where a thousand quarrels arose from misconduct or the outcome of a game. To solve problems connected to the playing of chess, treaties were made; these encoded rules based on the tactics and strategies, of clear military design, and to which were added illuminated and handwritten regulations that preserved a wide variety of images. For card

games, this topic was covered by the *Tractatus de morbus et disciplina humanae conversationis* (1377) by Friar Ioannes di Rheinfelden. He dealt with the origins of the games and with the priority of the tarot over the *naibi* following the *iter*, tracing out how cards became differentiated between countries over time. The Biblioteca di Castiglion Fiorentino contains the manuscript *Regole del nobile gioco delle Minchiate*, by Niccolò Onesti, and defines the particular game that came from the tarot as: "onesto e dilettevole trattenimento… atteso che è un vivo esercizio di buon genio, di spirito et ingegno, non meno che di attenzione e memoria," downplaying the bad reputation of players.

But whatever twists and turns the story of card games took in the society of the *Ancien Régime*, here we have chosen to follow the path of the development of the images on cards, with various characters coming to be dressed in significant outfits in order to emphasize their role and the power they held. The goal is to better understand the characters that were deemed relevant to Beatrice Lascaris on the occasion of her wedding (1412) to Ventimiglia (Motta 1983)—the images on the cards presented a prototypical social hierarchy. From this perspective, playing cards open up interesting and, perhaps, unexpected scenarios that introduce us to the symbolically expressed codes of different ages and their transition, confirming the connotation of games as a social phenomenon.

The oldest cards in Italy come from Lombardy and were commissioned by Filippo Maria Visconti as a present, suggesting that these cards were something valuable; they were produced by a famous painter, Michelino da Besozzo, who adopted the same technique used for painting miniatures. The cards refer directly to the years 1442–47—the cards of the denari (coins) suit, portray golden florins minted by Visconti in those years. Precious and refined, these tarot cards—the tarot of Visconti—present a series of images related to the period of the Middle Ages, influenced by court society, heraldry, astrology, and mythology. The figures—kings, queens, soldiers, knights, spades and shields—wear clothes that reference the finest materials of the day—silk, brocade, and velvet—and highlight the 'military style' of the tarot, and of playing cards more generally. The subjects portrayed, however, differ from country to country and place to place—Germany, France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Bologna, Ferrara, Milan—at one moment following a fixed pattern, at another, on the contrary, presenting a variety of subjects whose characteristics are dependent on the era. In this context, the dress of the characters is important: it helps to delineate their role and function. In the major *arcana* of the Visconti tarot, clothes celebrate the importance and the role of the chosen characters and express dichotomous contrasts: between the sacred and the profane; and between political power

and religious belief. The *Emperor* wears a sumptuous dress all in gold, with wide blue-lined sleeves and carries a scepter, the sign of power, in one hand and the globus cruciger in the other.

Figures 1 and 2. The Emperor and Empress.

The *Empress*, in the same dress as that of the emperor, bears a crown on her head and a shield with the imperial eagle in her left hand; the *Pope* is dressed in a green overcoat lined with gold, in his left hand he holds a long cross and on his head he wears a tiara or *Triregno* (father of the king, rector of the world, the Vicar of Christ) on which the insignia of the Holy Roman Empire is imprinted; the *Popessa* wears a more humble monastic dress and in her left hand she carries a long cross; the *Hermit* is an old man dressed in blue, with a large hat, leaning on a cane like a pilgrim and carrying an hourglass as a metaphor for the rapid passing of time and 'death'; The *Lovers* are a young girl and a knight with a blindfolded cupid standing between them. They are dressed according to the sumptuary canons of attendees at court: she wears a large dress embroidered in gold and he wears a short blue jacket embroidered in gold.

Justice is clothed in a rich dress with wide sleeves lined with blue, embroidered with a large golden roseaux and holding a scale in one hand, a symbol of impartiality, and a sword in the other to punish those who are stained with the dishonor of their crimes; the *Moon* is a young girl in a blue

dress and a cloak in pink and gold; the *Star* is depicted as a beautiful girl in a blue dress and a two-tone cape embroidered in gold.

On each card the background is golden—a reminder of the expensive manufacturing technique for miniatures that was used for the decoration of religious, legal, and literary books destined for a rich and demanding clientele. The subjects of these cards point to the collective imagination at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning ot the Modern Age and refer to the metaphysical dimension of the medieval era. The clothes worn by the characters and the colors chosen by the artists communicate encoded signs that speak to spiritual and secular life. More generally, the tarot, which was probably derived from the ancient *naibi* (from *naipes*—Persian origin) and early Spanish cards, offers numerous suggestions on the subject of clothing, showing a wide range of figures drawn from military history and representing social classes—warriors, clerics, merchants, workers—with a diverse iconography according to region. Dress was an essential part of an immediate, visual language that everyone could easily grasp, assisted by individual elements that underlined its symbolic value.

In France, on cards associated with Charles VI (1368–1422), who was married to Isabella of Bavaria, some of the figures are not so different from the Visconti ones, while others are represented quite differently, with symbols, images, and details relating to the French dynasty and the history of the country. The emperor is depicted seated on the throne with a crown on his head and in his hands, as a sign of power, there is a scepter with the lily of France. Other characters are dressed according to the fashion prescribed at the time by the etiquette of the court.

His successor, Charles VII (1403–61), secured the French territories at the end of the Hundred Years' War (1453), leading to France's victory over the British. While heir apparent he had married Maria of Anjou (1422); but he preferred courtesans and had many lovers, including Agnes Sorel. She was known not only because she would be the first to enjoy the official status of the favorite of the king, but also for her extraordinary toilettes. In choosing her clothes, she preferred the most luxurious fabrics and wore very low-cut dresses, which left her shoulders bare, with long trains and trimmed with fur. She loved jewelry and was the best customer of the court jeweler, Jacques Coeur, an international merchant of precious stones from whom the king bought the first cut diamond. Although relations between Charles VII and Anjou were extremely sour, for reasons of state and for a long period Queen Mary remained a model and even appeared on cards in authoritative dress—her clothes lined with ermine fur, a rich headdress trimmed with gold, and sumptuous jewels. Other images show characters from court, also portrayed in elegant clothes, which were often of velvet and fur-lined, in hats topped

with feathers and tight trousers. *Valets* are dressed as pages: "les sergents d'armes de ce temps-la, l'un portant le toque á plumail et la casaque longue, l'autre vêtu de comte" (Belmas 2006).

Figures 3 and 4. Justice and the Moon.

Over time, the characters as well as their costumes changed—the kings still held the scepter and the queens held flowers—and the images, which in any case aligned with different periods, often refer to back to heraldry and chivalry. The military-inspired character of the images remained constant enough to make necessary the expertise of specialists in the sector in order to remove any suggestion that these were games of the East by replacing the vizier with images of Western sovereigns.

During the sixteenth century, the characters presented on French cards followed the fashion of the age of Louis XII (1462–1515), with kings and queens in rich velvet robes, trimmed with fur, and crowns with lilies. In the same century, with Henry III (1551–89), a different climate prevailed. The king had a complex personality and was involved in religious wars between the Catholics and the Protestants following the policy of his mother, Caterina de' Medici (aftwerwards represented as the queen of hearts by the cardmaker Claude Valentin).

The king was extravagant and considered a weak character in his opposition to violence, war, and hunting; he was also known for his

extraordinary elegance and his fine looks. He is represented on playing cards—a specific type of satirical cards—in excessively sumptuous clothing—almost as a caricature. The clothing with which artists chose to depict their subjects reproduced the features of prevailing fashion, but also represented vices and virtues, projecting through images real political messages: respect for one leader who triumphed over his enemies; criticism of another who was not liked by the people. Henry III of France is depicted with a fan in his hand while his queen, Louise Lorraine-Vaudémont, is represented with a scepter—these images indicate the lack of love between them, his effeminacy as a leader, and also emphasize his alleged homosexuality (which has never been seriously documented).

Cards often hinted at life at court, which was considered secular, frivolous and corrupt. It was a place of constant parties and masquerades, absorbed with intrigues, and ruled by the strongest, while the poor were devastated by fatigue, hard work, hunger, and pestilence and could only make their voices heard through social unrest. Cards were a symbolic representation of the courtly ways of life and death—physical and moral—and say much of that world. Because they had to be liked by the common people, whose daily lives were beset by harshness and difficulty—from which they tried to escape through the fortunate conclusion of a game—the master-makers of the cards appealed to the breadth of their imaginations in drawing, painting, and coloring simple sketches that would help ease the worries of the day—food in short supply, heavy taxes, and epidemics rampaging through the population. In this sense, a game of cards looks almost like nourishment for the soul, but with many negative consequence due to poverty and greed; a small event like a game of cards could interrupt their anonymous lives and they could become the protagonists of their own stories in an evening at the tavern.

In the modern age the signs, subjects, and colors of playing cards change; there is a greater diversity in images—fruits, flowers, mythological and fantastical animals, famous people, emblematic figures that tell of changing times and political thought—right up until the French Revolution when, more than ever, symbols were used to communicate new ideas to the masses. No wonder, then, that the royal crown was replaced by the Phrygian cap—a cap with the top pulled forward, of distant Persian origin (from Phrygia in Asia Minor), and adopted in ancient Rome as a symbol of freedom as it was given to a slave on the occasion of his manumission. As the revolutionaries were marking a momentous event by erasing the society of the *Ancien Régime*, this headgear found new life. In the post-revolutionary period, another change relates to the sign of devotion (towards a sovereign) that was customarily added to the cards—honoring of the powerful was replaced by phrases glorifying human rights. Then it was the turn of Napoleon, and artists, who

painted figures on cards inspired by history, depicted him in his prime with a laurel wreath suggestive of imperial greatness.

With the spread of cards throughout Europe, their use stimulated production, leading not only the production of valuable items, but also less expensive types that could allow even the poorest to access this very peculiar type of market. Cards remained a special product; on the one hand they conquered consumers, while on the other they fell under the prohibitions of the Church and city authorities that almost everywhere prohibited or limited games. To avoid attracting too much attention producers often concealed them as generic *papeteries* (packages for stationery). In France, during the reign of Henry III—the final two decades of the sixteenth century—a primary regulation establishing the status of the *maître faiseurs de cartes* was made; it remained in force until the revolution. It was particularly the case with this sovereign—who was more preoccupied with creating and following fashion than with governing the state—that card games became a real mirror of the time: a testimony to the extravagant fashions of a period in which the ephemeral triumphed. In this climate of great attention to aesthetics, kings had trimmed beards and wore hats with feathers—"les trousses bouffant, le pourpoint tailladé, les chausses collantes"; queens wore their hair *retroussée* and ruffled—"la robe a justaucorps e a vertugarde"—and the much criticized crinoline that, with different materials, lasted through at least two centuries (Motta 2015). In France, from the regency of Caterina de' Medici to the reigns of Louis XII and Louis XIV, cards marked out the fashions and whims of the court as seen through the imagination of master card-makers and there, as in other countries, they presented the dominant characters of each era.

The statuettes of Meissen and the style of the model masters

Until the eighteenth century, true porcelain was only manufactured in the Far East—China and Japan. The Western world produced a variety of tiles and ceramics that were also greatly appreciated, but Oriental porcelain, which for its beauty and rarity was an unattainable goal for many, arrived in Europe along the Silk Road as part of the spice trade; after the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, who opened up the sea route to the Far East (1497–99), it was loaded onto ships for safer transportation.

In this way an important commercial traffic grew that made possible the arrival of an exceptional product in Europe; the doges and dignitaries of Venice—first in conflict and then in trading relations with the Ottomans—discovered it on the occasion of their visits to the sultans of Egypt who gave porcelain pieces as gifts to several European sovereigns (Charles VII and

Lorenzo de' Medici). Having become a symbol of wealth and artistic perfection, thousands of pieces were shipped from Macau to Lisbon and then, via the East India Company, to the Dutch ports and out across the Old Continent.

To learn more about the history of European porcelain it is enough to read the excellent book by Janet Gleeson, *The Arcanum: The Extraordinary True Story*, which analyzes the complexity of the issue and looks at an eighteenth-century world still fascinated with esoteric research; stimulated by curious and greedy rulers searching for the recipe to immortality and the alchemical secret of transforming base metal into gold. Going deeper into that world, one can find issues related to political, military, economic and social history: at the time to purchase and own porcelain was a sign of power. Occasionally, the desire to obtain the most beautiful, rare and precious pieces became a real obsession, as was the case with the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, Augustus II Wettin (1670–1733). Augustus the Strong—as he is known to history—spent appalling amounts of money in acquiring for himself the most beautiful Oriental porcelain that arrived in Amsterdam from Canton; as other sovereigns sought to find the philosopher's stone, he kept the alchemist Böttger as a prisoner in his fortified castle, not far from the Saxon capital, in search of porcelain's secret. After a long and complex series of events and years of advanced study in the mining sector, Böttger arrived at the discovery of the formula—hard paste—thanks to the identification of the main ingredient—kaolin. Production began in Saxony of an asset that, apart from its aesthetic value, took on political significance.

The refined court of Dresden announced to the world the invention of porcelain in four languages—Latin, French, German, and Dutch—and located its manufacture in the Albrechtsburg castle—the home of the elector. Through years of harsh, militaristic policies (Northern wars, 1700–12) with the aim of establishing himself in the German region as absolute ruler, Augustus II received even further notoriety. On his travels he had visited Versailles and intended to make Dresden an equally grand and elegant capital. He enriched it with magnificent palaces realized by one of the best Baroque architects of the time, Daniel Pöppelmann, and spent large sums on huge festivities (with theater and fairytale performances) and his wardrobe; but he devoted himself mainly to his passion—porcelain. If previously he had bought Eastern products—"the Roix de Saxe devint a acquéreur compulsif des Porcelaines les plus Elégantes et les plus coùteuses" (Gleeson 2006)—after the discoveries of Böttger, he was most concerned with the promotion of this new production process that gave him leadership in the field.

Figures 5 and 6. The statuettes of Meissen

From then on, he devoted himself carefully to the development of his factory in Meissen, which was soon imitated by others across Europe over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Valuable manufactories flourished: in France at Limoges and Sevres; in England—Wedgwood; in Italy—Ginori; in Russia—the Lomonosov (commissioned by Empress Elizabeth, a great collector of ceramics and porcelain); in Denmark—the Royal Copenhagen; in Portugal—Vistalegre; in Hungary—Herend. The market was swamped. The diffusion of these products was especially great during the Reformation—the artistic patronage of the Catholic Church, which had dominated European arts, was replaced by the bourgeois patronage of great merchants and private citizens who preferred genre scenes representing the realism of everyday life.

Pieces of great beauty were produced in the Saxon workshop, with precious decoration and splendid colors; they adorned the most important tables of Europe, satisfying the taste and ambitions of sovereigns, and producing jobs requiring skilled labor—a large number of artists, craftsmen, painters, sculptors, modelers, and decorators owed their livelihoods to this new trend. Porcelain came south from central and northern Europe when Charles III, the first king of Naples, founded a factory in Capodimonte similar to the one in Saxony—part of a policy of reform and inspired by his wife Maria Amalia Wettin, who came from the dynasty that had introduced this new invention to the world.

At Meissen, after the first fine tableware, production was switched to porcelain figurines, which replaced the triumphs of sugar that in previous centuries had decorated the tables of the nobility; this fostered an intense traffic between Sicily and the countries of central and northern Europe (Motta

2013). These new table centerpieces stimulated the creativity of artists who offered a wide range of subjects to celebrate or impress guests attending a banquet, such as a rendition of the incomparable fountain of Piazza Navona in Rome from which water of roses dripped—made for an important dinner at the Saxon court in honor of Prime Minister von Brùhl (Gleeson 2006).

The model-masters left their creative mark on the porcelain: in the early period, under the guidance of Johann Joachim Kandler (1731–74), the style developed in a Baroque spirit with highly decorated figures and vivid colors. Later, Camillo Marcolini (1774–1813) followed the neoclassical style, characterized—in the eighteenth century— by its simplicity. Neoclassicism took the motifs of formal classical art and combined them in a number of ways in different European countries, influencing both architecture and painting; the prevailing trend was one of pure lines, often with decoration. Meissen figurines represent the different types of social classes throughout history. In the great halls of bourgeois mansions, *stucco* ceilings, furniture, and ornaments demonstrate the attention given to the materials and workmanship.

This new trend allows one to grasp the historical shift from sentiment to reason advocated by the Enlightenment, which welcomed delicate colors, harmonious shapes, and light strokes. In the transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, the feeling of the age passed from the decorative style of the Baroque (and Rococo)—symbolic of happiness and life at court—to reason: an artistic reaction to excessive artifice and an affirmation of simpler lines. Over time, proceeding from a one-dimensional to a three-dimensional design, artists of porcelain made human figures depicting: the members of court; the characters of the *commedia dell'arte*; knights and ladies; young people in traditional costumes; pastoral scenes; genre scenes set in living rooms; characters that referenced the fabrics and colors of Eastern models; grotesque figures; hawkers on foot or horseback; and traditional masks. A multiplicity of forms tell of the reality of the time and the imagination of people and artists.

Let us imagine that we are watching one of the showcases of the Dresden Royal Palace—everyone at court wished to attend these—and examine some of the statuettes, striking in the harmony of their size and shape and the splendor of their clothes: the *marquis*, in a full evening dress and lilac redingote, a gilet with floral decoration, and a white jabot; a *knight* with a tricorn hat and striped pants, kneeling at the foot of a lady dressed in an aquamarine dress highlighted with gold; *la bonne mère*, a group in which a lady of high society with an eighteenth-century hairstyle is surrounded by her three children, dressed, as usual, in clothes mimicking those of adults (there was not yet a specific fashion for children, it would appear in the middle of

the nineteenth century—the fully bourgeois epoch); *a couple of musicans*—the man plays a wind instrument and wears a frock coat with small flowers and blue pants while the woman plays a chordophone and wears a light-colored dress lined with fabric in a contrasting color, a pink petticoat, and red orange shoes; *Count von Bruhl*, a dignitary in rich and elegant clothes rides a goat and is wearing a sash on which is pinned a bright decoration. It is said that the he had demanded to visit the factory and the model-master, in revenge, decided to represent him, ironically, on this strange ride. A *lady with a coffee table and black servant*, with a shirt *a ramages* and feathers, a big yellow overcoat with wide blue borders—she has a fan in one hand and a little dog on her lap; *a knight in a bright-red frock coat*, holding a cocked hat, bows to a lady wearing a flowered dress with a large skirt; *a group representing a gallant scene* dominated by a tree around which there are several figures in colorful clothes; *Cris de Paris* and cries of London (the cries of small merchants selling their wares) present a number of different types—a female figure carrying a basket full of lemons dressed in the simple clothes of a peasant woman, a modest, young man leading a goose, and a female figure with a basket of flowers; *three figurines* that represent the common people—two women dressed in long skirts with flowers to which aprons are tied are taking their baskets to sell their wares at market; *a man*, also in a peasant costume, has both a basket and a pair of scales in his hands; *a pair of players*, in Oriental clothes of many colors.

In short, craftsmen/artists offered an almost endless series of suggestions in which the dress of the subjects depicted has a role and manages to evoke a particular atmosphere—a military context, a rural reality, a city environment—and represents an evolving society. Meissen figurines show how in a Europe bewitched by china—known as white gold—exclusive products had become a sign, a cultural index, an economic resource, and a way of combining meanings and symbols of historical relevance.

A fairytale dress and the destiny of a princess

Even if historians are more accustomed to seeking information in archival documents, they can also be fascinated by the dimension of the imaginary. Fairy tales, legends, and myths propose alternative narratives of history that are able to testify to the stated or implied codes and values of ancestral memory. Even if tales are timeless, they are not without reference to some specific reality or particular historical moment—to a turreted castle, a medieval tournament, a Baroque palace—which enters presumptuously into the narrative and displays a model of society and the character traits that animate it. In this context, the style of clothes becomes a language for

presenting an immediately accessible reading of the role of each character. In the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, the ideal of the chivalrous hero was replaced by the commercial ideology of the mercantile middle class and the rural dimension gave way to the urban—the place of the political power of the new bourgeoisie—and popular stories changed accordingly, becoming adventures of merchants to distant lands, the conquests of unknown peoples, the knowledge of different objects and customs, the desire to bring special gifts, often from the Orient, to impress the powerful, or to honor a beloved. In these stories, precise social and physical prototypes alternate with sovereigns of ancient origin, and novel characters, of newly acquired power emerge. In the sixteenth century, the emerging classes became part of the political and economic fabric in the transition to modernity and embodied a new cultural representation. The modes of dress changed, both for the different functions of the subjects and for the symbolic content attributed to their clothes. The clothes, the attitude, the objects that surrounded the upper classes—in a living room, in a painting, in a fairy tale—tell both individual and collective stories. Read well, such a tale is a treasure trove that contains many meanings, sometimes explicit and sometimes expertly encrypted, and the events of history unfold in the collective memory, combining them into a fantasia and preserving the unresolved issues of a lost war, a disputed territory, or a never completely erased fear. Recurring themes include ethnic conflicts, the fear of being invaded by stronger nations, being separated from one's faith (as happened during the Reformation and the harsh reaction of the Counter-Reformation), or being robbed of one's belongings—even the anguish of losing one's children, abducted by enemies who intend to dispossess a conquered people of their future. Across time and space, remote fears emerge in stories that preserve memories and even didactically present values drawn from the original culture of a people in order to shield them from the processes of homogenization imposed from above and with force—as in the case of the those incorporated into the supranational structures of the great tsarist, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires—that endangered national identities based on language, religion, food, and anthropological characteristics. From fairy tales a cultural heritage emerges that draws on the rich folklore formed through oral storytelling and was collected, in the late nineteenth century, by different schools that argued with each other on methods and objectives—the anthropological, Finnish method; the historical-geographical analysis of Aarne and Thompson; the formalist-structuralist of Popp and his Marxist historicizition; and the contribution of Freudianists and their interpretation of dreams (Motta 2011).

Suggestions coming from fairy tales are many and lead in many directions, drawing on popular culture as well as on literary traditions, applying homogeneous cultural boundaries for historical or military reasons. In fairy tales, then, history is hidden, marked in time and handed down through a popular culture that expresses the essence of an ethnic or lingual group from a particular territory and preserves customs and traditions in legends, proverbs, and song. A story is brought out that comes from the ground up and is capable of offering an infinite number of details of a collective past and where the path outlined by an imaginary fairy-tale intertwines with historical facts alluding to events or places of significance to a given historical memory, especially in terms of national histories. In an ample list of authors, we should perhaps remember one of the most significant, Giambattista Basile, with his *Lo cunto de li cunti*. He reached the heights of Baroque poetry and through the material of fairy tale he provides food for thought in an analysis of the society of his time. The three fairies in *Lo cunto* tell the story of Cicella, who is abused by her stepmother. As with Cinderella, the poor girl is to be rewarded by the fairies who accompany her to an enchanted palace where they place her in front of a big wardrobe full of magnificent clothes.

Figure 8. Edmund Dulac, *Cinderella.*

Sumptuous dresses of velvet, taffeta, and Venetian brocade; skirts of Spanish linen; large cloaks; short jackets with wide sleeves; rich coats; ruffs, hairstyles, and jewelry of all kinds, none of which raises the greed of the girl who chooses a skirt of little value for herself, confirming her shy and modest personality. Faced with this, the fairies make her wear a dress of gold and wish her to find a good husband—something that will happen after a series of difficulties that finlly entail a happy ending. Here, as in other cases in complex fairy tales, historical data are intertwined with fantastic imagery, and clothes acquire great significance, becoming the center of the story itself—these clothes have the purpose of making up for class differences and helping those, who until then, had only known misery and injustice. In the development of European societies, ways of dressing arose to distinguish new human and social typologies; even more so in popular and fantastical tales, the mode of dress has the task of specifying the character and status of the protagonist. Dress can help shape the aesthetic detail of a scene where the social role of the actors is defined by their clothing—king, prince, traveler, merchant, farmer—and each has a well-defined profile that places them within the usual dynamics of the unending struggle between Good and Evil. In the cultural context of the Middle Ages, the great breadth of the Renaissance, and the multifarious facets of the Baroque period, fairy tales used dress to make a character immediately available and to add the artifice of transformation—a metamorphosis that changes the scene with the intervention of a supernatural element, such as a wizard or a witch. Fairy tales draw images that represent and describe past worlds from heraldic legends and family genealogies. Mutation through clothes leads to the change of status of a character to (from a man to a woman; from an animal to a man); but it can also have a punitive meaning (the companions of Ulysses are transformed into swine by the magician Circe), or a liberating one (the kiss given to the frog turns it into a prince). Dress is part of this metamorphosis of characters and stresses the importance of that passage, becoming a language in some political way in its assignation of each subject to a social or economic class, which is highlighted and emphasized by clothing. Another obvious example is that of Cinderella! In this fairy tale, in which a humble servant girl abused by her stepmother and stepsisters changes into a fascinating protagonist who meets a happy ending, there are two dresses: the first made by an army of mice and birds who want to help her and another created for her by her fairy godmother. Receiving the invitation to the dance during which the prince must choose his bride, the girl asks the stepmother if she can participate and Lady Tremaine imposes impossible conditions—she must finish all the housework (made more difficult by the demands of the bad sisters)—and then find a suitable dress to wear. Skillful and zealous animal

friends work together to modernize an old dress that belonged to Cinderella's mother, adding ruffles made from a scarf thrown away by one sister and a pearl necklace abandoned by the other. The dress is a masterpiece—immortalized by Walt Disney—and is one of the finest elements of the story—one that every little girl keeps in mind. But the two evil sisters recognize these objects, even though they had rejected them, and having become angry, they destroy the clothes. Cinderella is about to give up on that special evening when the godmother intervenes, who, after a clumsy attempt to remember the right magic formula, manages to provide for her goddaughter a wonderful silver dress and beautiful glass slippers, then turns a pumpkin into a carriage, mice into horses, and two dogs into a coachman and a valet. Cinderella can go to the ball! But the godmother warns her that the spell will break at the stroke of midnight—the spell will end and everything will be as before. Cinderella's metamorphosis emphasizes the beauty and attractiveness of the protagonist, her aspiration to a better life marked by love becomes the highlight of the story, and the disappearance of the spell also brings the return of the girl to the inferior role to which she is condemned by her antagonist—her stepmother. This transformation has the basic aim of a fairy tale as good triumphs of over evil; the victory of the good over the evil and transformation also serve to mark time in the narrative, setting out a before and after, as a point that marks a new status, and a different function. Clothes are part of an emotional investment implied in the narrative, which follows a particular path where one can become a princess thanks to a fabulous dress, and, at the end of the tale, in some cases can be cruel, but this time is happy. The dress has brought the fulfillment of Cinderella's dreams, the frivolity of a dance, in the Viennese style, at the court appropriately concludes a story in which high and low culture are fused, and where history, apparently joyous, fails to embrace the restless darkness of the tale, such as the evil stepmother and her daughters. On clothes, perhaps not only in fairy tales, sometimes one's fate hangs.

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