



SCENES OF STORYTELLING



CHARLES PERRAULT,
Tales of Mother Goose
(*Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*), 1695

The frontispiece to the manuscript of Perrault's collection takes us to the fireside. As the warmest spot in the house, it was the perfect site for carrying out household chores (in this case, spinning) and telling tales. The cat, the door with the keyhole, and the spindle all prefigure what is to come in the volume: "Puss in Boots," "Bluebeard," and "Sleeping Beauty." The three children appear to be of a higher social class than this Mother Goose, who is both spinner and raconteur.



CHARLES PERRAULT,
Tales of Mother Goose
(*Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*), 1697

The frontispiece for the first printed edition of Perrault's fairy tales.



JOSEPH HIGHMORE,
Pamela Tells a Nursery Tale, 1744

The famous protagonist of Samuel Richardson's novel recites a story to her attentive charges. Gathered near the fireside, the young women sew and amuse themselves and the children with nursery tales.



GEORGE CRUIKSHANK,
"The Droll Story," 1823

For *German Popular Stories*, the first British translation of the Grimms' fairy tales, George Cruikshank produced a fireside scene in which an audience varied in age finds amusement in the stories read from a volume of tales.

GEORGE CRUIKSHANK,
"Vignette to the second series of
German Popular Stories," 1823

A hearth, a spinning wheel, a contented cat, and a granny telling stories to attentive children come to serve as the standard features of storytelling scenes. Note that Cruikshank's old woman is still telling the stories rather than reading them out loud from a book.





LOUIS-LÉOPOLD BOILLY,
And the Ogre Ate Him
(*Et l'ogre l'a mangé*), 1824

With book on her lap, a somber granny tells about the triumph of evil. Her story, a cautionary tale that takes a disciplinary turn, is unusual in suggesting that the ogre triumphs over the protagonist. Her listeners are stunned, dismayed, and silenced.



DANIEL MACLISE,
A Winter Night's Tale, 1867

A crone imparts her wisdom through storytelling. The shadow cast on the screen and the thoughtful expressions on the faces of her listeners suggest a dark, admonitory side to the story. The entire family seems to take part in this evening activity. The spinning wheel is present, but this is clearly not a peasant family.



LUDWIG RICHTER,
"Die Spinnstube," 1857

Adults and children listen to this male storyteller spin his yarns while they work. The frontispiece for a collection of German fairy tales, this illustration suggests that there was a gendered division of labor in the spinning room.



LUDWIG RICHTER,
"Fairy Tales," 1857

A benevolent granny tells stories in an outdoor setting. The sentimental turn is revealed in the decorative flourishes and idealized natural setting, which suggests that fairy tales represent the poetry of nature.



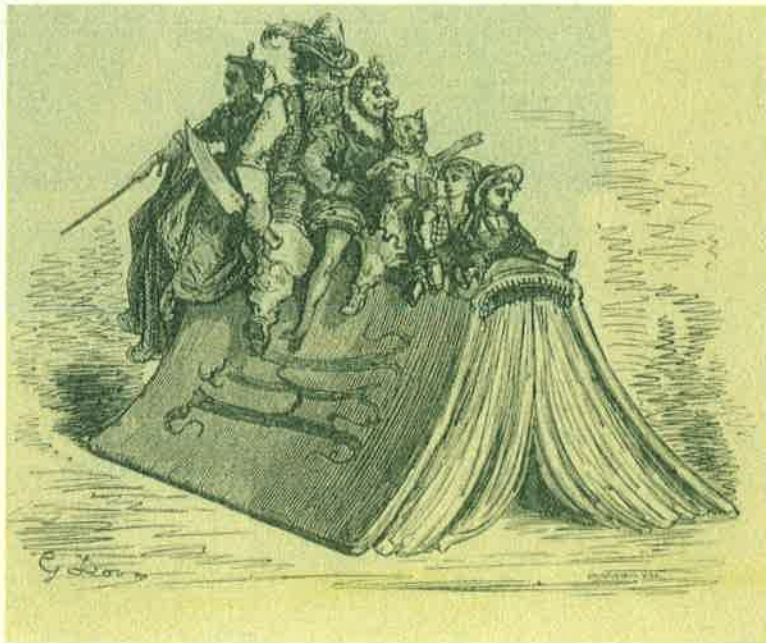
HENRY F. DARBY,
The Reverend John Atwood and His Family, 1845

This family of eight, immersed in the reading of bibles, is reminiscent of the Smallweed family, described by Dickens in *Bleak House*: “The house of Smallweed . . . has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy tales, fictions, and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever. Hence the gratifying fact, that it has had no child born to it, and that the complete little men and women whom it has produced, have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds.”



ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Andersen's Fairy Tales," 1932

In this frontispiece to a collection of Andersen's tales, Rackham suggests that the Danish author had a personal charm and playful appeal that he lacked in real life. Andersen cuts silhouettes of characters from his fairy tales for a youthful admirer.



GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1861

Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding Hood, and other fairy-tale characters sit on the spine of a book containing their adventures.



SEYMOUR JOSEPH GUY,
The Story of Golden Locks, 1870

The terrified children tucked in bed have just heard about the arrival of the bears.



JESSIE WILLCOX SMITH,
Rainy Day with Dream Blocks, 1908

Mother and daughter enjoy a quiet moment, reading together in a scene that captures our contemporary notion of parent-child bonding through stories.