

# AN UNIVERSAL GIANNI

A pedagogy of playing and laughing to set children free from the present situation.

In Rodari's works there is a thread which connects linguistic games and stories with democracy.

Games endeavors situations where everyone is in the same initial conditions.

Stories circulate, spread, change.

They are available for every one.

His pedagogy can be considered a pedagogy which releases from absurd rules, obligations, fear to make mistakes, indoctrination, passive acceptance of common sense.

Rodari exploits the power of metaphors, inventions, analogies and metamorphosis.

As regards citizenship training, public ethics, democracy, domestic partnership, his fairy tales, nursery rhymes, the 'fantastic', his 'pedagogy of stimulus' (in opposition to the conveying of models), they act as sources of creativity, change and meditation on reality.

Rodari aims at the democratization of expression.

He invites readers to be citizens who are 'alerted' of the complexity of social life, human relationships, of their life context related to the worldwide situation.

## Different Gianni Rodaris

His literary production is not only a series of proposals for children, but also a complete innovative literature.

In his works we can notice anticipations about social analysis enhancing democracy and desire of a better life for everyone.

He endeavors an optimistic view of life, operating to create a better future. 'Otherwise, what the point of going to the dentist?'

We are going to analyze some aspects of his 'fantastic' production connected with tiring human reality.

## Politics, justice

In 'Universal history':

*'there were only men with two arms to work;/  
Roll up your sleeves, there is much work to do'*

It is an invitation to responsibility and to build a better society; what kind of freedom from tradition and injustices are possible today?

In one of his fairy tales the pied piper sets the city free from...cars.

## Linguistic education

Providing everyone with all linguistic uses not to create poets but to allow everyone to express oneself'-

## Praising the truth and condemning political power

'Crystal James': 'the truth is stronger than anything else, brighter than the daylight, more frightening than a hurricane'; when reading this text everyone can understand and desire freedom and justice.

## Authoritarianism isn't a myth anymore

'Touching the king's nose': 'As little John had done, the other citizens were catching the king's nose'; 'The War of the Bells': ridiculing boastful military authorities.

## Peace achieved through equality

‘Who knows if the shining moon in Beijing is as beautiful as the one in Rome, who knows if the sun beams warm all the Earth, who knows if men are the same in the north and in the south’)

### **Social thinking**

Nursery rhymes about jobs (the colors and the smell of jobs) in order to give importance to unpretentious jobs.

### **Differences**

‘The comics mouse’; ‘the Indian Man in the Nativity scene’; ‘The spender proletarian cicada and the saver capitalist ant’

### **Giving importance to children thinking**

- Imagination as a source of knowledge: a happy encounter between oral, popular literature and the magic world of children.

### **Creativity**

Not the one belonging to American tests to select excellent people, but a tool to educate people to be creators, not consumers.

### **Children, the school and the world**

Adults are invited to widen their perspective making the city and the world the real school

### **Listening**

‘The man with a young listening ear’: *‘This is the child’s ear, I need to understand the voices which adults never listen to’*

Even the environment must be listened to: *‘I listen to what trees, birds, clouds, rocks, rivers say’*

### **Making fun of hypocrisy and conformism**

‘The little woman who counted sneezes’: in a small village the gossips spy the most important people.

### **Criticizing the idea of following habits**

‘The travelling monkeys’

### **The courage of being nonconformist**

The young shrimp moving onward instead of backward.

### **Trusting progress and new technologies**

The radio, the telephone, astronomy, typing machine, robots, transistor dolls.

### **The themes of fantastic analysis**

Rodari is inspired by the most important trends of European culture: Surrealism (Bréton), the Dadà movement, Futurism (Apollinaire), Art (Klee, Ernst), Developmental psychology (Vygotskji), Narratology, Russian Formalism, Folklore, Anthropology. He elaborates techniques which applied to the repertoire of previous fantastic materials (fairy tales, myths, popular culture, imagination, magic fairy tales).

However, he doesn’t reproduce imitating but varying, mixing separating and combining the narrative structures.

Besides he discovers fantastic aspects in everyday life not to trivialize it.

Perhaps his association of fantasy and reality represents his the most productive fantastic binomial.

Thanks to the narrative game children and kids can understand the fundamental structures of the stories, times, the functions of characters and *objects*, the plot (see 'Morfology of fairy tales' Propp).

Rodari's linguistic research can be compared to the one on modern linguistic carried out by Saussure, Chomsky, Jakobson.

Their researches are based on the two fundamental linguistic mechanisms: selection and association.

Rodari's 'Fantastica' is focused on transformations and fantastic hypothesis.

The narrated events develop according to an absurd logic which reminds us of Bachelard's '*rêverie*': flying away noses, little man made of nothing, mice and cats coming out of comics, streets leading nowhere, cakes in the sky, lifts leading to the sky, crystal characters, cosmic chicks,

...

**The characters.** There aren't witches, bad wolves. If so, they are positive characters.

There are antagonists but the solutions are not so terrible as in traditional fairy tales.

Little Red Hoods, wolves, witches, cats with boots are replaced with workers, postmen, shop assistants, migrants, builders, employees.

People who face the struggles of everyday life instead of magic trials.

**The places.** There isn't the wood, the castle, but there is the city, the building where you can play in the courtyard, the traffic jam in a street, the school, the post office, the town hall, the means of transport.

However, there are also fantastic worlds, the planet of Christmas trees, the flying house, as well as Stockholm, Piombino, Cesenatico, the North Pole,...

**The objects.** There aren't magic wands, pumpkins transformed into carriages, flying carpets or poisoned apples.

There is the soldier's cover, the notebook, comics, carousel, scarecrows, the dustman's broom, rosemary, sweets, a club which plays different roles in children games,...

### **Times**

Children stories and novels by Rodari range as regards time and space, from Venician characters to Roman working class suburbs, from king Mida times to southern migration after the war, from the past to the future as well as the return from the war, the year cycle as conceived by children.

Fairy tales often start with 'Once upon a time', but more often the story deals with the content immediately.

'Wasting time Little John was a great traveller...'

'Mr. Gogol told the story of a nose...'

### **The value of words**

Recognizing the importance of words is an essential step in an age of verbal violence, discriminations, spreading of fears and prejudices.

However, Gianni's pedagogic aim is focused on free expression and creation.

Storytelling involves the whole mind of children. Not only their fantasy.

Children who listen to a lot of stories, learn maths and logics more easily.

He considers subjects as a whole ('*What is the mind? Even the eyes and the hands are the mind*').

In his works there are stories, nursery rhymes, novels created by the association of two words (the fantastic binomial), by orthographic mistakes, by word games. They are also examples of the creative game described by Rodari in 'The Grammar of Fantasy-the art of story invention' (his theoretic manifesto).

They are metaphors of life, which elicit ethic and civic reflections.

As you can see in the following example:

'How heavy is a child's tear?'  
'A hungry child's tear is heavier than the Earth'.  
We still need Gianni Rodari today.

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