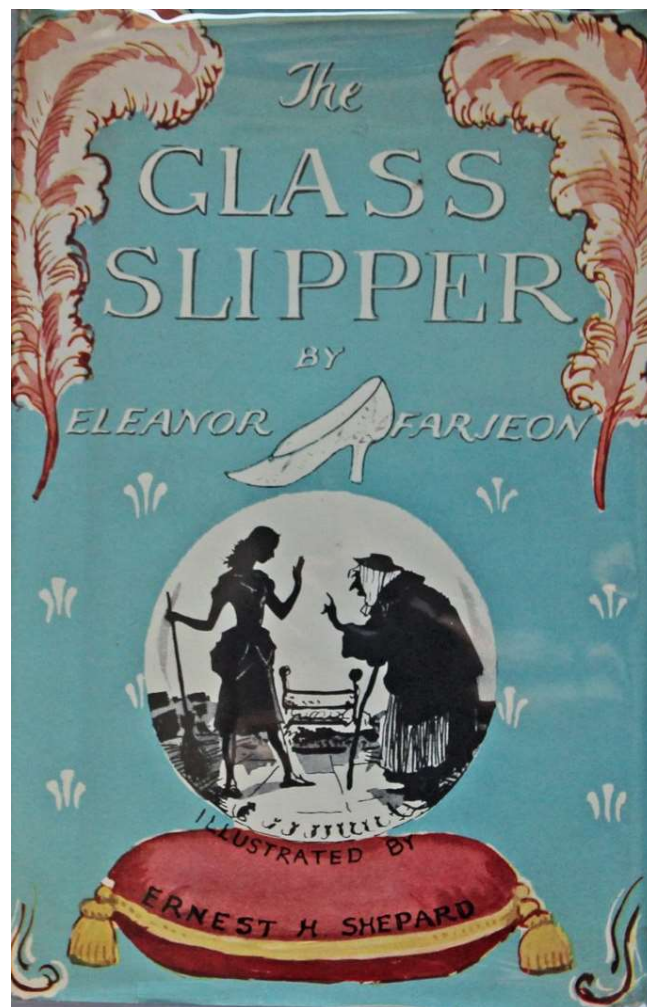


Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965): *The Glass Slipper* (1955)



I first encountered Farjeon's *The Glass Slipper* in elementary school (1970's) and checked it out many times from our little library. It may be the first novel-length retelling of a fairy tale I had ever encountered. I didn't realize that one could do this to a well-known story: zoom in on it, as it were, and live more closely within it. Shepard's illustrations add to the charm of the story.

There is a reading moment I remember very well. The Prince and Ella are getting to know each other while looking at portraits in the palace. Here is a snippet (from The Viking Press hardback edition of 1955, pictured, p. 111):

"We have many fine pictures." The Prince took her hand and led her round the room, pointing out the priceless paintings on the walls. "That is a picture of my great-great-grandmother."

“What lovely green hair!” said Ella admiringly.

“She was a water-nymph,” remarked the Prince. “In one of the best rivers, of course. And this is my grand-grand-great-uncle.”

Ella considered the picture, and then she considered the Prince. “You aren’t very like him.”

“No,” he agreed.

“I’m glad,” said Ella.

“He couldn’t help having two noses,” said the Prince. “He offended a witch.”

“Poor man,” sighed Ella.

“Poor man,” sighed the Prince. He pressed her hand to comfort her as they gazed at the grand-grand-great-uncle’s two noses.

“What did he do to offend the witch?” asked Ella.

“He cut off her nose,” said the Prince.

“Poor witch,” sighed Ella.

“Poor witch,” sighed the Prince.

They came a little closer to each other in their sorrow for the witch.

There. That last sentence. I stared. Was it possible that the author (I did not yet know the difference between author and narrator) had just made fun of the Heroine and Hero? While they were falling in love? Surely that was a serious moment. I re-read it. Yes, the author was definitely, although gently, making fun of the Heroine and Hero. I did not realize before then that characters could be made fun of and still remain the Heroine and the Hero. It gave me to think. I seemed to have stepped back for a moment with the author, and looked on—or been invited to look on—the Prince and Ella with fondness, tenderness, and humor. Falling in love held a little foolishness. And the foolishness itself could be endearing.