Comparative Children's Literature: What is There to Compare?

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Literary texts do not appear in a vacuum. Literature in Western society has been written for several thousand years, and literature written specifically for children has existed for at least two hundred years. Thousands of children's books are published every year. Writers have usually read books by other writers or are at least aware of them. In the case of children's writers, they are most likely to have read the major children's classics, but they have probably also read mainstream literature. Whether conscious about this or not, writers are affected by what they read and even by what they have not read, but only heard about. Not all people today have actually read Shakespeare, but many know the plots and characters of at least the most famous plays. Literature is also disseminated through other channels, such as film, television, comics and computer games. When we read a book, we are often struck by its similarities to others we know. For instance, if we compare *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* we will observe many similarities: events, happenings, settings, characters, symbols, and messages. At the same time, we will most likely note that in many ways the two novels are different and perhaps contemplate the nature of the difference.

The word 'comparative' originates from the Latin *comparare* and is defined in *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'involving comparison between two or more subjects or branches of science'. Comparative literature is a field of literary scholarship focused on comparing aspects of various literary phenomena, such as texts from different cultures and historical periods, texts by different writers, texts from different genres or different texts from the same genre, or two versions of the same text, for instance, in translation, retelling, or adaptation. The purpose of comparison can be a deeper understanding of literary texts in a broader historical, social and literary context; it can also be an examination of influences and intertexts.

In comparing two or several literary works, we pursue the goal of identifying their similarities and dissimilarities as well as providing possible reasons for those. Some straightforward reasons for similarity can be that the two texts are written by the same author; that they are written within the same genre; or that they are written more or less at the same time and within the same culture. A further reason, frequently employed in comparative studies, is the assumption that a writer has been influenced by another, earlier writer. Since the first *Pippi Longstocking* book, by Astrid Lindgren, appeared forty years later than *Anne of Green Gables*, it is natural to see the influence of the older book on the later one (although if you read *Pippi Longstocking* first you may believe that L. M. Montgomery was inspired by Pippi in giving her heroine red hair and rebellious temper). The question of literary influence has, however, been under serious debate during the last twenty years. Harold Bloom discusses in his widely known study *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) a pattern of literary evolution in which every writer has a model, The Great Literary Father, from whose influence he (writers are by definition male in Bloom's theory) must liberate himself. A true writer will, according to Bloom, achieve at least some degree of freedom from the model, both by absorbing and transforming his strength. Thus, for Bloom, literary activity basically implies a rewriting – or in Bloom's terms, creative misreading – of a previously existing text. Yet the anxiety of not being able to compete with the Master is an inevitable part of the creative process. The indisputable Literary Father for Bloom is Shakespeare; thus the task of a literary critic is, on the most primitive level, to compare the writer under scrutiny with Shakespeare and state the degree to which he achieves the statute of the Master: knee high or waist high.

Some critics of children's literature take Bloom as a starting point, suggesting that in the case of children's literature, the 'anxiety of influence' is not an issue. Some dismiss the whole idea by stating that authors of children's books seem to be less anxious than mainstream writers. It is true, they say, that children's novels are sometimes so similar that you may wonder whether you are confronted with imitation. Still we should stop feeling the need to make excuses for children's books because similarity and repetitiveness are part of children's literature aesthetics. While in contemporary mainstream novels we look for fresh and innovative themes and narrative devices, children's literature is by definition marked by 'sameness'; it is all variations of the same theme (Nodelman 2006, pp.98-115). While the call to stop being anxious on behalf of children's

writers is appealing, I still find that the question of origin and influence needs clarification.

Children's literature lacks an unequivocal Great Master, as Shakespeare is (at least in the English-language) for general literature. Many North American scholars choose E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* as a yardstick for their discussion of children's literature; however, this novel is not used for comparison with all other children's novels. It may be considered a typical children's novel or a typical American children's novel, but it is not the ultimate masterpiece that all subsequent children's writers are trying to surpass. On the other hand, it is not completely erroneous to view *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a model for subsequent fantasy writers. Not only is it a widely popular book, read and enjoyed by many generations of young readers; it is a book pointed out in many textbooks in children's literature as a typical fantasy novel. But it is precarious if not wrong to ascribe this novel an influence on the *Harry Potter* books, which it may or may not have exercised. From the interviews with J. K. Rowling, it is apparent that she is a well-read individual, well acquainted with children's literature classics. The question of influence and inspiration sources is in this case justified.

Obviously, the issue of The Great Father – or Mother as it might be – is also culturally dependent. In Italy, Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* will be a self-evident standard; in Germany perhaps E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker*; in Sweden Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi*, in Finland Tove Jansson's Moomin books. Yet, if we find similarities between these texts and some later children's novels, how can we evaluate the degree of imitation or originality, of influence or independence?

Many critics worldwide have been appalled by the cavalier attitude with which Michael Ende in *The Neverending Story* uses patterns, symbols and characters from previous stories. My counterargument is that the scholars have failed to recognize the author's intentional use of patterns and clichés to parody well-known fantasies (see Nikolajeva, 1996, pp.164-167). *The Neverending Story* is indeed abundant in different literary patterns and motifs; yet it is not the mere fact that they occur, but the way the author makes use of them that is of interest. Ende deliberately provides his readers with recognizable patterns and images, in order to stimulate reflection around them. His use of cliché is conscious and skilful and ultimately serves the message of the story.

It is here that the concept of intertextuality can help us to unveil the dimensions of children's texts that traditional comparison cannot. In intertextual analysis, we do not any longer simply state that two or more texts are similar, or that one text originates from another, but try to examine the ways in which the later text develops motifs, patterns or ideas from its predecessors. Intertextual studies show that children's literature is more complex than earlier believed; they also suggest a new look at genres and individual authorships (see Wilkie, 1999, pp. 130-137).

The intertextual method has its origins in the works of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), who, however, does not use the term 'intertextuality'; instead he speaks of 'dialogics'. It means that literature and art are created in a continuous conversation, dialogue, between creators, where every new piece of art or literature is a new line in the conversation. The meaning of the text is thus revealed only against the background of previous texts, in a clash between them and the present text. Obviously it is not a question of literary influence, as in the more traditional comparatism (see Franson, 1995, pp. 91-114). Two texts juxtaposed in a comparative analysis appear in a causal relation to each other, and the assumption is that one author has been influenced by reading another author. Two texts in an intertextual analysis are equal and are not necessarily supposed to have any direct connection. Unlike comparatism, intertextuality is dynamic since every line in the dialogue of texts does not only look back at previous texts (retrospective intertextuality) but forward towards new, yet unwritten texts (prospective intertextuality). Intertextuality does not view literature as a static system of completed texts, but as a movement, where the creation of a text is the crucial moment.

While comparatists are bound by evidence and proof, that is, literary or non-literary sources, intertextual scholars build their argumentation on the codes present within the text. If we should engage ourselves in a serious comparative analysis of the *Pippi* books and the books by

the contemporary Swedish writer Ulf Stark, we would not only be obliged to find proof that Stark had read Lindgren (which he apparently has done), but also investigate exactly how he has been influenced. We would then compare plots, settings, themes, characters, narration, style, and perhaps state that in many respects Ulf Stark follows his model Astrid Lindgren while in other he does not. With conventional comparative methods, we cannot go much further.

In an intertextual analysis we would not simply state that some patterns in two texts are similar, but try to see what the later writer makes of the pattern from the previous text, what transformation the pattern has undergone and possibly why. J. K. Rowling is without doubt one of the worst thieving magpies in the history of literature, yet she has developed and transformed all the borrowed ideas, images, settings, plots and characters in a most creative way. We must give up the idea of one author 'borrowing' from another, but instead become intent on hidden echoes and latent links, as I have done in my defense of Michael Ende.

The notion of dialogics emphasizes the intention of writers and their active role in the act of writing (yet without 'the anxiety of influence'), their active responses to previous texts, as well as readers making connections beyond authors' intentions. Intertextuality thus also presupposes the reader's active participation in the decoding of text. Unlike traditional comparative studies, intertextuality has proceeded from the examination of individual loans to more subtle levels of connections. Naturally, this is more demanding than the traditional comparatist's; many of the hidden echoes in texts are inaccessible, but on the other hand, intertextual studies can yield much more exciting results. We can often reach dimensions of texts overseen by other approaches. For instance, studies of children's books with adult fiction as intertexts can reveal the nature of children's literature and give a better insight into writers' intentions. Studies of particular authors, who have sometimes been accused of epigonism, help to reevaluate them and see the creative treatment of other authors' ideas. Intertextual studies of separate motifs can help us understand the writers' intentions and messages, their individual style. Intertextual studies within an authorship can lead to more adequate interpretations of difficult, many-dimensional texts.

Furthermore, intertextual links are often more evident in children's texts than in mainstream literature. John Stephens suggests that 'literature written for children is also radically intertextual because it has no special discourse of its own' but rather 'exists at the intersection of a number of other discourses' (1992, p.86). I would perhaps protest against the assertion that children's literature lacks a discourse of its own, but I certainly agree that contemporary children's literature has found inspiration in various discourses, literary as well as extra-literary. Intertextuality is very much a question of play and even playfulness, which makes children's literature a natural playground. Stephens discusses some interesting cases of intertextuality in poetry, fractured fairy tales, fantasy, and other literary texts (see Stephens & McCallum 1998). In our striving to free children's literature research from purely educational applications, such approaches seem both exciting and fruitful. It is also gratifying to view children's literature in a broader context – for instance, within the context of childhood, popular literature, general literary experience, myth, or culture – precisely at the crossroads of different discourses.

Intertextual connections appear in a variety of forms. The most basic distinction is between anagram and contamination. In intertextual analysis, the concept of anagram is used for texts in which we can easily identify the intertext by rearranging the constituent elements or merely by connecting each element to a similar element in another text. In a contaminated text, elements of many other texts appear throughout, and it is not always possible to determine exactly where they come from.

In considering a text as an anagram we an also employ Gérard Genette's (1997) concepts hypotext and hypertext. For Genette, two criteria are necessary to make a connection. First, the connection should be extensive: not just a number of coincidences, but a whole pattern of correspondence in plot, character gallery and imagery. Second, it should be somewhat explicit: there must be some indication in the hypertext that points to the hypotext. Neither criterion permits mere speculation on the part of the reader or critic. Genette's example, that also appears in many other studies on intertextuality, is James Joyce's *Ulysses* with Homer's *Odyssey* as hypotext.

Children's literature abounds in hypotexts. For instance, Michel Tournier's *Friday and Robinson* is a modern version of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (see Beckett 2006, pp.157-190). Tournier's book is a deliberate and conscious reply to Defoe, in which Tournier interrogates the ideology of the classic novel. In examining the intertextual links between these two, we go beyond the surface of the hypertext to see how the later writer has used the hypotext to express his own ideas, in this case interrogating the colonial attitude of the original and offering a radical re-writing of the story. We can even say that Tournier's text is a parody or pastiche based on Defoe; to enjoy the book fully we need to know what is being parodied. Parody is a form of intertextuality, although by no means are all anagrams are parodies.

Turning to a discussion of contamination, we can start with the simplest and most obvious cases: the appearance of direct quotations, allusions and references to other texts. In Tove Jansson's novel *Finn Family Moomintroll*, the characters play Tarzan, and one of the illustrations shows that the pessimist philosopher Muskrat is reading Spengler. In Astrid Lindgren's *Mio, My Son* the young protagonist has read The Arabian Nights and thus has no problems recognizing a genie, even though it is imprisoned in a beer bottle. Similarly, in Guus Kuijer's *The Book of Everything*, three other children's books are mentioned – and one non-children's book. The latter is the Bible, which the father in the story states is the only true book, while all other books, including those children's are assigned to read at school, are false. The children's books, that a neighbor gives the protagonist Thomas to read, are *Emil and the Detectives*, by Erich Kästner, and *The Foundling*, by Hector Malot. Neither the author nor the adult character comment on the choice, but the protagonist contemplates why he has been given the books. He realizes that both books are about lonely children, children that have to cope on their own; book that encourage him not to be afraid. The third book is a collection of nonsense verses by the Grand Old Lady of Dutch children's literature, Annie M G Schmidt. Apart from the verses' role in the narrative itself, Kuijer places himself in a particular literary tradition.

Children's novels can thus allude to other children's books as well as to adult novels (see Smedman 1989). Allusions can also be implicit rather than explicit. As already pointed out, *Pippi Longstocking* contains implicit allusions to *Anne of Green Gables*. Like Anne, Pippi has red hair, but, unlike Anne, Pippi does not suffer from her red hair or her freckles. Pippi is everything that Anne is not allowed to be; that is, *Pippi Longstocking* is a direct intertextual reply to *Anne of Green Gables*, in which the author makes mock of the educational views expressed by Anne's surroundings. In particular the phrase 'Children should be seen but not heard' is brilliantly parodied by Pippi. It is therefore reasonable to call *Anne of Green Gable* a hypotext to *Pippi* books (Åhmansson 1994).

Yet *Pippi* is also excessively contaminated with allusions to children's books and specific genres, all of which are used in a playful manner. There is the poor-orphan story in which the child's mother is referred to as an angel in heaven, although in Pippi's case she is no worse for it. Robinsonnade is played with when Pippi deliberately stages a shipwreck. Treasure-seeking adventures are parodied in the chapter in which Pippi is a Thing-Finder. There are also burglars, pirates, and joyful gluttony comparable with the Land of Cocayne. Pippi's abortive attempts to go to school are reminiscent of Tom Sawyer's classroom tortures.

Pippi, in her turn, appears as an important intertextual element in Peter Pohl's *Johnny My Friend*. Pippi is indeed mentioned explicitly as soon as Chris, the protagonist and narrator in the novel, sees Johnny. But there is more than the superficial similarities; in the first place, it is Johnny's function as a catalyst in Chris's life just as Pippi is in Tommy's and Annika's. Like Pippi, Johnny comes 'from nowhere', has no relatives, obeys no rules, wears unusual clothes, has some remarkable abilities, and Pippi's horse has in Johnny's case been transformed into a bicycle. Just like Pippi, Johnny is a marginal, androgynous figure, a mixture of boy and girl. The overt allusion to Pippi offers a reading strategy, since Johnny's fate turns out to be radically different from Pippi's (Nikolajeva, 2000, pp. 207-215).

However, as already mentioned, a hypotext does not have to be explicitly mentioned for the reader to be able to see an intertextual connection. Guus Kuljer's *The Book of Everything* does not mention *Pippi Longstocking*; yet I would venture to see the *Pippi* books as a hypotext in its

open revolt against adult authority. The protagonist's father is a horrible tyrant who not only imposes strict rules in his wife and children, but does not stop at hitting them. The nine-year-old Thomas is mortally scared of his father, but gradually learns to interrogate his authority, and with some help from both adults and other children finally causes his total defeat. Thomas is, unlike Pippi, not the strongest boy in the world, but his special gift is seeing things that aren't there, that is, having powerful imagination. Kuijer here follows Astrid Lindgren in her depiction of a competent child, whose moral and intellectual strength wins over the adult's physical superiority. When asked what he wants to be when he grows up, Thomas says that he wants to be happy. In some way, this is a proper dialogical reply to the affirmative ending of *Pippi*.

A more subtle form of contamination is the appearance of titles, subtitles and chapter titles alluding to other texts. Since these elements are called paratexts, this type of links is referred to as paratextuality. For instance, the title of Ulf Stark's *Can You Whistle, Johanna* alludes to a Swedish nursery song. Unless you know this, it may be confusing since there is no character in the book called Johanna. The translator of *Can You Whistle, Johanna* has for some reason decided not to replace the title with a line from an English song or verse that would create associations with the target readers similar to those evoked in Swedish. Thus the paratextual connection is gone. The title of Jostein Gaarder's *Through a Glass, Darkly* is a Bible quotation, from First Epistle to Corinthians: 13:12: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face'. In what way does it guide us toward understanding and interpreting the novel? The plot involves a young girl who is dying a cancer and trying to reconcile herself with the inevitability of death. Every night she is visited by an angel, and through conversations with him she gets closer and closer to accepting her own death and even starts looking forward to it. The passage from viewing life 'through a glass, darkly' to the delights of seeing it 'face to face' is obviously the central message of the novel. The title thus offers a clear interpretative strategy.

Aldabra, or the Tortoise who loved Shakespeare, by the Italian writer Silvana Gandolfi, has a literary allusion in the title, and it is used in the novel as a means of characterization. The title created ambivalent expectations in the reader, since we do not normally associate tortoises with sophisticated reading habits. At the least, the title sounds comical. More important, however, is how the plot connects to the archetypal pattern of shape-shifting. The first intertext one is reminded of is Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, but the motif itself is much older than that. Elisa, the protagonist and narrator of *Aldabra*, another of those emotionally abandoned children of contemporary children's literature, gradually discovers that her grandmother is changing. First her daily habits are affected; then her body starts transforming, she goes on all fours, eats raw cabbage, grows a shell on her back; finally she loses the ability of speech. One day Elisa realizes that Granny is turning into a giant tortoise. When she tries to collect as much information about the species she learns that tortoises live for many hundred years. Metaphorically, then, Granny's transformation can be interpreted as the girl's reconciliation with Granny's imminent death. Yet, there is more to this. Granny is the wise old woman of the myth, and these were often known to have the skills of shape-shifting and transgressing the limits of human existence. The figure of Granny acquires much grander proportions and offers interpretations that would perhaps escape us at a more superficial reading.

Yet another form of intertextuality may be the appearance of the narrator's or a character's comments about the narrative. Also such comments prompt a certain interpretation. Since the comments are of a metafictive nature this type is referred to as metatextuality. Metafiction implies the indication of fiction being a literary construct. Thus is Kuijer's *The Book of Everything* we encounter one of the foremost metafictional devices in literature: a fictive preface stating that the narrative is an authentic manuscript. *The Book of Everything* is supposed to be written by a nine-year-old boy and edited by the writer Guus Kuijer. The device has double and ambivalent purpose. It may seem to give the story authenticity, but in fact it draws our attention to its fictionality. Thomas, the alleged author of the narrative, does not refer to himself in the first-person; through the story it is repeatedly told how he writes the story we are reading. The metaphysical nature of the narrative situation, combined with several supernatural details of the story itself, make the reader aware of the book being a work of

art. This device, going back to Don Quixote and beyond, has become quite frequent in recent children's literature.

Further, we can consider a text's relationship to a broader category, for instance to a genre. It is different from an anagram, because we cannot definitely say which hypotext our text is alluding to, but we are certain that the text is playing with, say, fairytale pattern. The title of Gaarder's *Solitaire Mystery* in itself suggests a particular genre. The underlying story is called archetext, and the allusion is thus archetextual.

Archetextuality can also be regarded as a particular text's relationship to an archetype, a more or less universal pattern, usually going back to myths. In his study *Myths of Modern Individualism* (1996), Ian Watt discusses four major archetypal characters that have inspired Western writers during the last five hundred years: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Robinson Crusoe. Robinson is one of the most prolific sources of children's literature, since this figure propagates liberation from parents, independence, individual development, and the spirit of enterprise. The novel is based on the same basic plot many scholars have observed in children's literature: home (safe, but boring) – away (exciting, but dangerous) – return home. It empowers the character in an extraordinary situation, allowing degrees of growth and maturation more tangible and more profound than would be possible under normal conditions. Unlike the other three figures, Robinson Crusoe has not only been subject to numerous adaptations for young readers, but provided inspiration for a whole genre of Robinsonnade, focused on survival and resulting in children's novels as different as *Ronja, the Robber's Daughter*, *Julie of the Wolves*, *Hatchet* and *Slake's Limbo*. Watt views the four archetypes in his study as expressions of modern society's attitudes toward individual freedom and integrity as opposed to the ancient and medieval focus on man as part of a community. Childhood is supposed to be a collective experience. It is then not surprising that children's fiction draws extensively on the myths of antiquity, the childhood of Western humanity, in the first place, the quest figure of Odysseus. Does this mean that children's fiction has not yet reached the phase of 'modern individualism' that Ian Watt discusses in his book? Rather, as I see it, Odysseus and Robinson Crusoe are much more universal for the psychological and ethical issues of humanity and therefore pertinent to children's as well as adult literature.

By contrast, the Faust character is seemingly as far away from children's fiction as possible. The various versions of the Faust legend present the character from a slightly different moral angle, but in any case Faust fails because of the choice he makes. As adult readers, we can regard Faust as a victim or as a villain in his own drama; young readers, who have not yet established clear moral values, may have problems relating to this character. One would assume that the Faust figure is incompatible with the basic conventions of children's literature (didactic, optimistic, with happy endings). It is therefore especially gratifying to examine how these figures have been employed by children's writers. The most basic and essential element of the Faust myth is the pact with the devil. The various versions present a number of motivations behind the character's actions: lust for wealth or power, sexual desire, or thirst for knowledge. Irrespective of the reason, the character is defiant enough to trade his soul for the object of his desires. Psychologically, then, Faust is in fact acting exactly like a very young child, who seeks immediate gratification without considering the consequences. Although this is a rather oversimplified portrait of the 'four-dimensional man', as Faust has sometimes been called, it might help us to discern the elements of the Faust myth in some children's stories.

Ottfrid Preussler's *The Satanic Mill* is perhaps the closest direct variation on the Faust theme in children's literature. The poor orphan Krabat seeks neither power nor riches; all he wants is food and shelter. He does not know that his master the miller is in league with the devil, and that on every New Year's Eve one of the twelve apprentices must be sacrificed. Through the secret rituals Krabat has unknowingly submitted his body and soul to the master. Krabat becomes an eager learner of black magic, as he realizes that magic gives power: in this respect, he is a true representation of Faust. When the master offers him the option of taking over the mill, promising power and wealth, it is especially hard for Krabat to resist the temptation, since the victory over the master also means that he and all the other apprentices will forever lose magical powers. The young protagonist is thus enticed to take over the contract

with the devil, setting the master free. Not surprisingly, a girl's love finally breaks the curse. Naturally, we can simply say that Preussler follows the pattern of a folktale with its compulsory happy ending. Yet, at least on a more sophisticated level, the Faust archetext must be intentional. The difference between Preussler's protagonist and the various representations of Faust is that the children's literature character is allowed to triumph over evil powers. He finds a way to escape the contract with the devil, mainly thanks to his childlike innocence, in accordance with the traditional Romantic view of childhood.

While in *The Satanic Mill*, the Faust myth is a clear-cut hypotext (in Genette's terms), it is more of a challenge to identify the pact with the devil in a book like *Pippi Longstocking*, and surely the readers who only know the slapstick side of the Pippi stories preserved in the English translation may strongly interrogate such a claim. In the third Pippi book, *Pippi in South Seas*, Pippi, the generous donor and the source of an endless string of adventures and joys, has taken her friends Tommy and Annika to a paradise island with eternal summer and an infinite access to delicious food. In the final chapter they are back to snow, cold and dark in Sweden, and to compensate for the missed delights of Christmas, Pippi throws one of her munificent parties. Thrilled by the richness of their experience, the children wish they never had to grow up. It is here Pippi suddenly shows her true nature. Or perhaps not so suddenly after all. She has in fact been preparing her cunning seduction throughout the three volumes, meticulously demonstrating the superiority of childhood over adulthood and thus paving the path for her perfidious offer to her friends: there is a way never to grow up. Just take a little magical pill and enjoy carefree childhood in all eternity.

For a less sophisticated reader, this may seem a most attractive option, and there is a strong tendency among scholars to interpret the ending of the *Pippi* stories as the ultimate affirmation of childhood. The question is, however, substantially more complicated. In this episode, Pippi plays the role of Mephistopheles, offering her friends the opportunity of joining her in the eternal non-being, an existence without growth, change or maturation. The fact that the author allows the children to accept the offer without hesitation is alarming. Yet I firmly believe that the author's intention is to let the reader realize the fatal danger of such a choice and decide that the alleged magical pills are after all merely dried peas (see Nikolajeva 2006, pp.49-74).

Pippi also recalls an archetype widely employed in European children's literature, but less known in the English-language world, 'the alien child'. The concept itself goes back to a book title by E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Das fremde Kind*. The idea of the alien, or strange, or unfamiliar child, depending on how you choose to translate the German word 'fremde', implies a figure that suddenly appears from nowhere, possesses some supernatural qualities, affects the lives of people around him or her, and disappears without further explanation.

European children's literature abounds in such figures, and I will mention just a few examples: Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Little Prince*, Maurice Druon's *Tistou of the Green Thumbs*, Christine Nöstlinger's *Konrad*, and Michael Ende's *Momo*. The common denominator is the central figure. The little prince appears in the middle of a desert, but he does not experience hunger or thirst; he can see invisible, imaginary things; and he has come in a mysterious way from an asteroid. In him, the adult protagonist and narrator, a pilot stranded in the desert, meets his own inner child. Tistou of the Green Thumbs is, as the epithet suggests, extraordinarily skillful with plants and flowers; he can make flowers miraculously overnight grow all over tanks and canons, thus preventing an inevitable war. In the end of the book, Tistou disappears, and it is explicitly and somewhat didactically stated, in the very last sentence: 'Tistou was an angel'. Nöstliger's *Konrad* grows out of a tin can, ordered by mistake by a Bohemian lady. He is in a way an early forerunner of the character in the movie *A. I.*, a prefabricated perfect robot-child, programmed to be well-behaved, obedient and emotionless. As Konrad gradually grows more human, in the sense of childlike, interrogative and affectionate, he also changes his foster mother and his whole surrounding. The idea of a puppet or robot turning human may also go back to *Pinocchio*. Finally, Momo in Michael Ende's novel, a more mysterious figure than any of those already presented, has an amazing gift of listening, and she is also more sensitive to the imminent threat that any of the adults around her. Typically,

her closest friends are not children. The common trait of all these characters is that they reform adults, which can be interpreted in several ways. I prefer to view Pippi and Konrad as affirmation of childhood; while little prince is more of a nostalgic memory of something lost forever and as such rather an adult author's self-indulgence.

Although allegory does not quite lie within the frames of intertextuality, it also involves putting a literary text into a broader context which is primarily extraliterary, yet on a different level evokes earlier reading experiences. Eugene Trivizas's *The Last Black Cat*, one of the relatively rare animal stories employing first-person perspective, is an allegory of the Holocaust. On an unnamed island, a secret society decides to exterminate all black cats. The reasons are conventional: superstitions about black cats bringing bad luck; yet the significance is transparent and may, naturally, even be applied to other genocides and racial discrimination. When all black cats are murdered, the next step is to decimate all grey cats, then all cats with black spots, and finally every single cat on the island. Miraculously survived, the feline narrator tells his story as a warning to the coming generations. The ideological intentions of the novel are obvious and demand at least some knowledge of history and perhaps making intertextual connections with other Holocaust narratives. Yet the novel can also be read as plain adventure, about love and friendship, loyalty and betrayal; it will then fall into the category of young adult novel, which serves as an archetext. Further, a reader familiar with stories about cats will probably recognize the main character as being a skilful hybrid of animal and human, retaining feline behaviour and habits, but endowed with human intelligence.

A greater challenge would be viewing the very concept of children's literature as an archetext. In Bart Moeyart's *Bare Hands,* the first observation might be that the title does not fit into the tradition in which the main character's name appears in the title, such as *Anne of Green Gables, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* or *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The title is instead programmatic or symbolic, it give us a clue to the theme and interpretation of the novel. Such titles are much more frequent in contemporary psychological children's literature. From the very first page it becomes clear that the novel employs first-person narration, which is also a token of contemporary children's literature. It is for many reason believed that impersonal narration is more suitable for young readers; contemporary authors most often abandon this convention, for the better and for the worse. Personal narration in a children's novel demands breaching the gap between the adult implied author and the child narrator. Few authors are successful with this device; *Bare Hands* is a rare exception, where the narrative voice never sounds false. The description of external events alternates with the character's mental discourse in a perfect blend. In this argument, I do not compare the book with any particular earlier text, but rather with an abstract idea of a conventional children's book (see Nodelman 2006, pp.384-395).

The novel starts *in medias res*, without giving us any background to the characters or any description of the setting or situation. The time of action is the New Year's Eve, a magical day in myth and folklore, the day when anything can happen. The story take just a few hours; in fact, it takes perhaps as long time as it takes to tall it. Such utter concentration of time is characteristic of contemporary children's literature, unlike the iterative of the eternal childhood in some classics, or the traditional biographical plot stretched into several years in others. Instead, the novel depicts a single poignant moment, a bifurcation point after which the child is no longer a child. Through the personal narration, the text conveys an extremely intense experience, a mixture of fear, shame, and hate. The most minute details, such as the hissing of a stove, emphasizes the character's focused perception.

On the surface, and up till a certain point in the novel, it reads like a conventional naughty-boy story. Like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Ward the narrator and his friend Bernie venture into an enemy's territory. We can view them as fairy-tale heroes breaking into an ogre's house to steal a magical object. Ward and Bernie are, however not fairy-tale characters, and what starts like an innocent prank develops into something more serious. The ogre, the neighbour Mr Betjeman, a monster with a plastic hand, kills Ward's dog. He is presented through the narrator's eyes as an evil and dangerous man. Yet suddenly, almost halfway through the novel, a flash of memory reveals to the reader that only six days ago, at Christmas, Mr Betjeman

was sitting at dinner table in Ward's home. Apparently, the narrator is not telling us the whole story, most likely because his present state of mind makes him suppress the memories. What is not said suddenly becomes more significant than what is said. Slowly, sentence by sentence with many pages between, we learn the background for Ward's hatred for the monster, and, for an informed reader, the Hamlet intertext appears, a drama of a fatherless boy, his mother and the mother's new boyfriend, just about to invade the boy's secure home. Even without the intertext, the implication of the story is obvious, and the tension between the boy and the man, their mutual aversion is conveyed most effectively. The complexity of the story, the precision of its narrative structure, and the absence of resolution mark the novel's complete deviation from conventions of children's literature. Yet to state this, we need to use a set of conventions as an intertext, or rather an archetext.

Gérard Genette (1997) also includes in the concept of intertextuality all kinds of textual transformations, such as translation, versification, abridgement, and so on. All these are highly relevant for children's literature research, not least in various studies of the crossover phenomenon, for instance when an adult book is for some reason adapted for young readers. Many such examinations have been done recently, involving not only the favorite crossover texts such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, but also barbaric maims performed on *Jane Eyre*, *Frankenstein*, *Oliver Twist, The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Don Quixote*, and *Moby Dick*, not to mention a motley of Shakespeare for toddlers. In comparing these monstrosities to the originals, many useful tools from comparative methods can be employed.

Some of the problems in connection with intertextual approach to literature arise from the demands put on the reader. Do we have to recognize every single allusion in order to appreciate the text? What if we are not familiar with Pippi – can we still appreciate *Johnny My Friend*? Apparently we can, even though assessing intertextuality will amplify our understanding of the text and perhaps even our aesthetical appreciation. Few readers today, especially young readers, are familiar with the Faust legend, which does not prevent *The Satanic Mill* from being read and enjoyed. The intentional intertextuality in some children's classics addressed to the writer's contemporaries is lost on today's readers and has instead become a confusing element. Another problem lies in the complexity of intertextual links and the obvious difference in the reference frames of young and adult readers. Will children and adults make the same intertextual connections? I have already pointed out several intertexts that would be transparent for an educated adult reader, but beyond the grasp of a child. On the other hand, some intertexts directly connected with childhood culture may be lost on adult readers.

Finally, like many other aspects of children's fiction, intertextuality should be regarded as a means of reader manipulation. By using myths, fairy tales and literary works as hypotexts and by alluding to other literary pieces, authors exercise control over readers' interpretation. For instance, Peter Pohl prompts a particular reading by employing the Pippi hypotext in *Johnny My Friend*. Even though the readers may not recognize the intertexts, they are still affected by the intertextual links appearing in the books they are reading. Whether we view such manipulation as desirable or not is another question.

By way of conclusion: does all the above argument imply that as soon as we work with more than one text we are automatically engaged in comparative studies? Basically, the answer is yes. In most cases, we do not pay much attention to this, yet when we have two or more texts to analyse, some form of relating them to each other is inevitable. Moreover, as I have shown, putting a work of literature in a historical, social or literary context also involves comparison. Discussing mythical origins or archetypes in one single work is comparison. In this case, why do we need a special field of knowledge called comparative studies? Perhaps we do not. On the other hand, we seldom apply merely one theory or method in our research, and usually one of these is more prominent than the rest. I have tried to show what pure comparative and intertextual studies may imply and in which situations the method can yield interesting results.

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