

## Teaching, Children's Literature and Transtextuality. *Die Unedliche Geschichte* (The Neverending Story)

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### 1. Children's Literature

Access to Literature becomes a good way to get knowledge, history, and to shape people's thoughts. Because of this, to develop linguistic and communicative skills, we can't forget the kind of Literature which brings people a good knowledge of these skills. Children's Literature allows us to acquire communicative competence, to study all the areas of the curriculum and to understand many aspects of life. We can define it as a group of productions which have artistic qualities and share aspects with other literary texts. Children access these productions during the early years of their Education.

The aim of Education using Children's Literature is related to creativity, play and to the development of literary language (May, 1995). How do we access this kind of language? We can find three main genres: *Poetry, Narrative, and Theatre*. Of course, we have to explain this, because we have to talk about Children's poetry for and by children. In narrative, we will refer to stories and in Theatre, to drama.

We can find many characters in Children's Literature, and all of them have interesting values (Hunt, 1994). We can remember, *The Brothers Grimm* or *Charles Perrault* tales: *Cinderella, Little Tom Thumb, Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarfs*, etc. After his second centenary, we have to talk about *Andersen* and his tales: *The Tin Soldier or the Ugly Duckling*. In them we find much wisdom and humour for children. More titles have helped us to grow up such as *Gulliver's travels* (Swift), *Peter Pan* (Barrie), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum), *Momo* (Ende), *Matilda, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Dahl), *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll), and of course, *The Neverending story* (Ende). This is not a classical fairy tale, but is a well known text in Children's Literature. Let's see in this text what the importance of this book is and how it could help us to improve education and the promotion of Children's Literature.

### 2. *Fantastica in danger*. The reality of Children's Literature in the XXI century

If we think about the title of this section, we can see the word "danger". This is more important than we can imagine. This is because *Fantastica* is becoming orphaned or in other words, her parents do like other things (Technology or for instance, the instant gratification given by television). Thus, *Bastian* loses his mother, and becomes a part of all characters from Children's Literature such as *Frodo Baggins*, who must live with his uncle *Bilbo*. *Harry Potter*, in the same way, suffers the loss of his parents; *Dorothy* lives together with her uncle *Henry* and her aunt *Em*; *Pippi Longstocking* does not live with her parents either. There are cases –such as *Holden Caulfield*– in which, although the parents are at home, they are not able to establish a real relationship with

their teenage son. We can see that Children's Literature gets orphaned, and to avoid this we must try to become the parents of this kind of Literature.

There is no doubt that in this attempt a fundamental text is *The Neverending Story*. In this work we can find things related to transtextuality. This means a text related to another text. There are well known texts in which we can see this. Books such as Roald Dahl's *Matilda* or Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *La sombra del viento*. The introduction of stories within other stories is something interesting but it is also important to think of how imagination could be suggested to the reader. In the XXI Century, we cannot deny children's and teenager's knowledge of *the Sindars, the Noldors and the Silvanos* (a kind of elves, defined by Tolkien). These characters could share space along with *The Rock Chewer* and other characters that are the inhabitants of *Fantastica*. These fictional characters help people to widen reality and open their minds. This is one of the missions of Literature. Because of this, we cannot be surprised by the presence of these characters in the texts and we must know how to understand their actions.

Thus, the *ananke* –necessity of life- is given by the fact of the existence of *Fantastica*. It is not something capricious that in Children's Literature we talk about places the main characters desire to be. Thus, *The Ivory tower* where *Atreyu* must return to free the *Childlike Empress* from the *Nothing*, has a correspondence to the *Emerald city*, where the *Wizard of Oz* lives, to *Minas Tirith*, or the white city, in which the kings used to live, or to *Neverland*, which is shown to *Wendy* by *Peter Pan*. As we indicate here, all these places are important to human beings, they are places that we want to be. Unfortunately, there is a dichotomy created between Fantasy and the Nothing –if we understand nothing as the loss of imagination-. It is the same as the opposition between *Neverland* and *Reality*. Maybe we have to search for a balance between both dimensions in trying to help people. This will be a concrete objective.

Could *Atreyu* riding *Artax* be the balance? Or the *swamps of sadness* make us believe we are not serious people? This wink to the *business man* who the *Little Prince* found on his travels, allows us to reflect. We are living in times in which we do not have time to imagine, because it is seen as something which is a waste of time. It is not an exaggeration when in *Peter Pan* the fairies disappear because they are not believed in; something similar is happening with Children's Literature. We are in trouble because we can fall into the swamps of sadness, because when people grow up this kind of Literature is forgotten.

However, remember this text:

«- If you know so much –he said-, you must know what the Childlike Empress's illness is and whether there is a cure for it.

- We do, we do!, Don't we, old woman? Morla wheezed, but it is all the same to us whether she is saved or not. So why should we tell you?

- If it is really all the same to you –Atreyu argued -, you might just as well tell me.

- We could, we could! Couldn't we, old woman? –Morla grunted -. But we do not feel like it.

- Then it is *not* all the same to you. Then you yourself do not believe what you are saying» (Page 55)

Because of the bipolar disorder suffered by the *aged one Morla*, we without doubt think of *Stevenson* and his *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde*. We can test the power of the use of the language and how this could motivate change –in a significant way- in situations of life. We can forget about establishing a direct bridge between these changes which is related to language. We are referring to

Lewis Carroll's text, *Alice's adventures in wonderland*, including the second part *Through the looking-glass and what Alice found there*.

We need the use of our skills to put language and thought together, and a collective action from people to escape from danger. Because of this, secondary characters in literary texts have the same importance as in life. Thus, *Falkor* or the *gnomics* become essential for *Atreyu* to discover the way of solving his problems. We can think of connections to other texts and thus we can find similar functions in both the *gnomics* and *Mister Badger* in *The Wind in the Willows*. This character gives suitable advice and helps find solutions (in this case, saving *Mister Toad*). We have a problem because Children's Literature is in danger. We have found different characters that remind us of its importance, but we are trying to find an answer to the problem. Let's enter *Fantastica* ...

### 3. Where are the borders of *Fantastica*?

In *Fantastica* it is always important to have a *luckdragon*, although before this we must have confidence to know our potential as exemplified in the search for the magic gates. But, always, the most difficult door of all is the door that does not have a key, because *anything essential is invisible to the eyes*. The question related to who am I asked by such Children's characters as *The Little Prince*, *Holden Caulfield*, or the *Caterpillar* when he talks to *Alice*, is the most difficult to answer. Because of this the gate does not have a key. Applying this situation to our problem, - what is the place of Children's Literature in our society? This question sends us to a door without key. We need to search for the meaning we want to give this type of Literature from a social point of view.

Play is natural to people and this element is included in Children's Literature. Because of this, it seems difficult to eliminate Children's Literature from people's lives. Let's think of *Uyulala*. Paradoxically the voice of silence needs of the use of a song or rhymes to establish a conversation with *Atreyu*. We cannot forget about games in Children's Literature such as *I love my love with an H*, a popular Victorian game which is referred to in the second part of the *Alice* story. In the same way, we can find texts that play with altered reality, such as *Revolting Rhymes* or *Dirty Beasts* written by *Road Dahl*. Because of this, sometimes we are not aware of the importance of playing and the importance of games in Children's Literature.

«He hadn't known how very large *Fantastica* was» (Page 111)

We think he hadn't. It is absurd to think about fixing borders to *Fantastica* or even to search for those borders. In our Century, imagination is forgotten and because of this it is possible that such borders exist. The distinguishing of reality and illusion has become blindness. Therefore, we associate the idea of lying with capitalism, while the truth is associated with idealism. With idealism we can live. The world of ideas and good intentions does have everything necessary for a complete life. We can establish a comparison between the story of *Bastian* and *Don Quixote*. They are examples of spiritual life and idealism. On the other hand, there is *Sancho Panza*, who is an example of materialism. We are beginning to see possible answers to the problems laid out at the beginning of this paper.

#### 4. Only the right name gives beings and things their reality

«Only the right name gives beings and things their reality» (Page 159)

What is the real name of Children's Literature? Can we rename it, as Bastian did with the *Moon child*? In our opinion it is more important to try to change the social perception of Literature than give it a new name. It is important to change the stereotype related to Children's Literature, because is dangerous to associate the expression "Do what you wish" with this kind of Literature. This libertinism is bad, because there is no real understanding of the will of the people who read this Literature. When somebody is in contact to Children's Literature they must be guided by the advice given by the *king* to the *little prince*: "If you succeed in judging yourself, it is because you are truly a wise man". When applied to our theory this means: "if you are able to use Children's Literature with this criteria, you will realizing an important objective". You will be helping to establish the importance of this kind of Literature.

«I brought you to Fantastica –said Atreyu-. I think you ought to help you find the way back to your own world. You mean to go back sooner or later, don't you?» (Page 250)

*Atreyu's* words cause us to search for the balance between reality and illusion, while *Bastian*, many times throughout the text refuses to remember things about his daily action. It is difficult for him to realize that, step by step, he is losing his identity, because of his immersion in fantasy and imagination. To view Children's Literature from this makes us be only stereotypes and make a terrible mistake in understanding Children's Literature. This kind of Literature has a great richness of thought and values.

It is clear that having the *Auryn* is a trap. It is the same as the prolonged use of the ring made by *Sauron*, because it both provokes a slow loss of awareness and the appearance of different behaviour. Let's look at *Xayide*, the mistress of Horok Castle, who is the antagonist and told *Bastian* to make up his mind. Even the *Auryn* can cause confusion appears; Once again affection for a piece of jewellery can cause unrest. *Atreyu* in trying to save *Bastian*, is afraid of what *The Childlike Empress* could do in finding a solution. A reference to Universal Literature appears when *Bastian* listens to something that he shouldn't have heard. It is a similar situation to the handkerchief confusion in *Othello*.

The unbalanced and capitalism interesting made that *Bastian*. *Bastian* is not the first who tried to become the *Childlike Emperor of Fantastica* but not the last; in human beings it is normal to lose common sense due to the longing for power. It is not strange to think about social unbalance and therefore this is a wrong understanding of Children's Literature. We need suitable theoretical and practical frameworks which give us suggestions about how to use this kind of Literature, to teach, and above all to enjoy.

#### 5. The Picture Mine: revelations in the field of Education

Many times, it is necessary to return your own thoughts and search for revelations which can guide us in life. This means that in difficult situations, we can always reflect on them and search for solutions which help restore the balance. In the case of *Bastian*, as we well know, it is necessary that he recover the forgotten dreams which belong to mankind; this means it is not necessary to become the *Childlike Emperor of Fantastica* to obtain a good life; There is an

abstract place in which reality and illusion come together. We must focus our dreams on this place.

Through the metaphor referred of the water of life, shared with the *Little Prince*, the necessity of searching for new ways to enjoy the different aspects of life is shown to us. Of course, Children's Literature is included in these new ways and we, the educators must argue for a formative consideration of this kind of Literature. Without doubt, as *Atreyu* does, we must become the best friends of *Bastian*. We are his friends, and of course we have kept all his stories and, above all, his essence.

The loss of identity being part of a materialist world is *Nothing* and sadness. As happened to *Girolamo*, *Momo*'s friend, it is possible for our stories to lose their magic and fantasy, this means, the loss of the stories real identity, and as happened to *Bastian* and not remembering who we were in past times.

However there is always hope, and it is the union between characters which help us. Thus, *Atreyu* helps *Bastian* to find himself, and more importantly he can see reality from a different view. What is *Atreyu*? Is it a part of the collective unconscious? Is it a part of *Bastian*'s world? Is it *Bastian*'s projection? The answer must left open to the reader's interpretation. The meeting between *Bastian* and his father is emotive and if the story lived by him has improved his life; it is possible that Children's Literature has helped us and it there is great wisdom and hope.

As we can see, a global view of the *Neverending story* could include the contents of a university course related to Children's Literature. In this literary work we can find challenging topics. Thus, we have fantasy, imagination, child characters, fantastic objects, the non human characters, and so on. Because of this we want to state this book is the fundamental work which generates these topics, because as we can see its use as a source material is extensive, and there are a lot of relations with other works of Children's Literature.

Children's Literature becomes a *Neverending story* and we, the readers must ensure that the magic and the richness of these texts keeps pure and hides itself from the *Nothing*.

## 6. Suggestions for teaching with the book

Teaching Language and Literature from a communicative model involves an important change of mentality with respect to educational structures, because it gives more importance to development of linguistic skills rather than testing academic knowledge (Widdowson 1978). The workshops are designed to focus on communicative action. We have to create activities that involve a functional use of language, and during workshops we would have discussions, mass-media analyses and so on.

Each workshop will be different, depending on the individual students. One must adapt to the situation, which is an important concept according the critical model (López Valero, Coyle and Encabo, 2005).

The next suggestions can be used with this book but can be used with other books too:

- **Differences between the book and the film.** The students will see the film and read the book. Then they must explain what the differences are and the resemblances between the two formats.
- **The book-forum.** This activity includes reading the book, making a summary of it, having a discussion and above all searching for life learning.

- **The story.** In this activity as with the beginning of any book we can read one sentence or paragraph and then ask for the students to continue the story with their own ideas.
- **Create stories with a picture.** With one or various stills from the film, we will ask the students to tell a new story or simply to describe what they see in the image.
- **Drama.** We will try to read a chapter and to find within it aspects that can be dramatized. We can search for clothes, masks and so on to make a performance, and then establish a discussion about what things have appeared in the drama.
- **Analysing the characters.** We will read this book, and then on the blackboard or on a piece of paper, the students will explain which characters they like and which they do not like.

## 7. Returning to *Fantastica*

To finish this paper, we want to talk about the key aspects of this text. First of all, we want to mention the transtextuality that is present in the book, which enables us to establish a relationship between the characters of this book and other characters from other books. On the other hand, the dynamic spirit of the text and its relation to some aspects of life allow us to make a rich and diverting journey through the book.

There is no doubt that the Language and Literature teacher cannot ignore this book and must give it life, causing his students to read the text in a rich and rewarding manner, because using this book could recover the spirit of reading and the motivation to read and understand other books. It is much more difficult to judge oneself than to judge others. If Children's Literature is to be judged truly, then it is indeed a source of true wisdom. Thank you *Atreyu!*

We conclude this contribution with the principal ideas in this text:

- This Book is an excellent resource to approach reading and to discover Children's Literature.
- The contents of the book are useful for in any subject related to Children's Literature.
- We can think about using the characters from this chapter to develop imagination and creativity (through their movements, drawing them, and so on) (Encabo and Jerez, 2004).
- We have to consider establishing relations between the *Neverending story* and other books from Children's Literature.
- Finally, we have to conclude that *Bastian's* story has universal values and in Children's Literature it is important to use it as a resource for teaching.

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