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SOME ASPECTS OF THE MOOMINS BOOKS

Summary

In the given article the author makes an attempt to trace various influences presented in the Moomin series by Finnish writer of the children's fantasy books Tove Jansson. It is noted that intertextuality is no longer a new term in literary criticism, and is pointed out that there is a difference between intertextuality and influence concepts: intertextuality is a concept unconcerned with authors as individuals; it is interested in proving the existence of the connection between two or more texts and influence in its turn, tends to center on major authors and canonical works, identifying prior documents as sources or contexts for a given author. Along with that, it is stated in the article that the term genre of fantasy may sound as a brave statement, as far as fantasy should not be characterized as a genre, but rather as a characteristic of a text. While analyzing FSU scholars' works it gets clear that the Moomins series was analyzed mostly as a text that follows Anderson's literary tradition, however all the traces of the Golden Age tradition and modernism traits existing in the books were neglected.

Анотація

У даній статті автор робить спробу знайти репрезентації різних літературних традицій в серії дитячих фентезійних книг про Мумі-тролів фінської письменниці Туве Янсен. Відзначається, що інтертекстуальність більше не є новим терміном в літературній критиці, і підкреслюється, що існує різниця між поняттями інтертекстуальності та впливу літературної традиції:

концепція інтертекстуальності не передбачає розгляду автора, як особистості, вона ставить своїм завданням довести наявність зв'язку між двома або більше текстами. Літературна традиція, в свою чергу, впливає на автора і досліджує попередні тексти, як джерело, що вплинуло на сучасного письменника. У статті також говориться про те, що визначення поняття фентезі як жанру, може бути не зовсім коректним, оскільки першочергово фантазія є не жанром, а характеристикою тексту. При аналізі робіт вчених пострадянського простору, присвячених серії про Мумі-тролів стає ясним, що тексти Янсен аналізувалися з точки зору наслідування традиції Андерсена, проте більшість рис англійської літературної казки і модернізму, які можуть бути виявлені в текстах Янсен, не піддавалися аналізу.

Аннотация

В данной статье автор предпринимает попытку найти репрезентации различных литературных традиций в серии детских фэнтезийных книг о Муми-троллях финской писательницы Туве Янсен. Отмечается, что интертекстуальность больше не является новым термином в литературной критике, и подчеркивается, что существует разница между понятиями интертекстуальности и влияния литературной традиции: концепция интертекстуальности не предполагает рассмотрения автора, как личности, она ставит своей задачей доказать наличие связи между двумя или более текстами. Литературная традиция, в свою очередь, оказывает влияние на автора и исследует предшествующие тексты, как источник, оказавший влияние на современного писателя. При анализе работ ученых постсоветского пространства, посвященных серии о Муми-троллях становится ясным, что тексты Янсен анализировались с точки зрения наследования традиции Андерсена, однако большинство черт английской литературной сказки и модернизма, которые могут быть обнаружены в текстах Янсен, не подвергались анализу.

Key words: children's fantasy, intertextuality, influence, literary tradition, modernism.

Ключові слова: дитяча фентезі, інтертекстуальність, вплив, літературна традиція, модернізм.

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Everything is connected to everything else. As a great American poet and political activist Muriel Rukeyser said: "The universe is made of stories, not atoms." Her quote may have many different interpretations and is tended to be interpreted from a scientific point of view, however may as well have a broader 'humanitarian meaning'. As far as a story goes, one way or another it has already been told. In contemporary stories the names, settings and costumes are changed, preserving the meaning, a man has restricted abilities, and thus only a few variations of a story may be told. In general all we can do is to change place and time. Current literary works are greatly influenced by the works of the past. The aim of the article is an attempt to trace various influences represented in Tove Jansson's Moomins series.

In the 21st century "intertextuality" is not perceived as something new, rather as a much understandable and conventional notion. However, the understanding may be quite different. Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1967 and grounds on the thesis that a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-defined cultural object, and so does not function as a closed system. Later Charles Bazerman talks about different levels at which a text summons another text and uses it as a source. He points out the existence of six levels of intertextuality as it may be found in the text: "prior text as a source of meaning to be used at a face value", "explicit social dramas for prior texts engaged in discussion", "background, support and contrast", "beliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated", "recognizable kinds of language, phrasing and genre", and "resources of language". [2]

Category of intertext has been thoroughly explored by many scholars among them prominent ones such as Kristeva, Bakhtin, Barthes and others, and they

included almost everything in the category of the different sign systems. However quite often intertextual studies tend to focus on the connections existing between literary works and thus accentuating the problem of influence vs. intertextuality. Intertextuality is a concept unconcerned with authors as individuals; it is interested in proving the existence of connections between two or more texts. Whereas influence tends to center on major authors and canonical works, identifying prior documents as sources or contexts for a given author. However to prove a direct influence is almost always, unfortunately, impossible. Centuries, decades or even years later, while analyzing a text we cannot be sure whether an author was influenced by another author's work or not; we cannot even be sure if the author read that work. We cannot be absolutely sure what made the author make this or that allusion, what made him reminisce on the subject. In the introduction to "Intertextuality: Practices and Theories" Michael Worton says that all the writers are primarily readers. Thus, it is inevitable that intertextual references appear in literary works. Their writing is in fact an intertextual process: ideas, quotations and allusions of every sort travel easily, and even unconsciously, from one text to another. [3, p. 1] To continue the chain of influences, we can never be sure that the author read the text his text has connection with. The author could simply get influenced by other texts of that time. In the opinion of Mirva Saukkola this means literary traditions. She believes that each tradition or trend is a vast field, which is not necessarily known as a whole by the author. He or she may know only a limited number of texts, which may, in particular, have connections with others. [4, p. 10]

Fantasy and the fantastical is famously a very prominent factor in children's literature. Tove Jansson's Moomins are fictitious characters. They are white hippopotamus-looking trolls with tails. And despite the fact they do not resemble people, they are very much humane. The Moomins live in a place called Moominvalley, which is both strange and a little dangerous, while being pleasant and familiar at the same time. Even if the Moomins encounter many peculiar things, from great floods to comets, they live the most normal lives, troubling themselves with the same fundamental questions of life as ordinary people do.

Fantasy literature is such a simple term to understand and almost everyone can list the titles of the books which represent fantasy literature. However, not many can easily define the term itself. Some scholars, especially those from former Soviet states tend to focus their attention on trying to define fantasy as a genre (Berenkova, Gogoleva, etc.) contrasting it with a science fiction genre. However, according to Saukkola, it is worth mentioning that fantasy is an umbrella term and under that umbrella a reader can find everything – from sophisticated intellectual novels, belonging to elite literature, to adventure stories, which are considered to be mass literature. [4, p. 78] Fantasy is not strictly speaking a genre, which is a grouping of texts related within the system of literature by their sharing features of form and content [5], but rather a characteristic of a text.

In the former Soviet Union the productive researcher of Tove Jansson's work was Lyudmila Braudae, along with her other scholars (K. Muradyan, A. Isaeva, E. Ivanova, etc.) tried to understand the success of Moomin stories analyzing Scandinavian tradition of a literary tale genre. In the opinion of L. Braude Jansson follows Anderson's principles and uses his sources in her writing – nature, human heart and nature. [1] Moominvalley and Moomin family were perceived in former Soviet states as a magic corner, an island of childhood. Everything could happen in the Moominvalley, all dreams were to come true there. It was possible to “ride a cloud there”, invent the ship, which could be used both in the sea and on the surface, to meet a grasshopper playing a fiddle, etc. However, soviet scholars to some extent neglected other problems and issues mentioned in the Moomin series focusing their attention on the pleasant side of childhood fantasy. However, one should bear in mind that there is always a problem of distinguishing adults' and children's' texts. It simply happens because an adult writing for children is still an adult and therefore will never be able to enter a child's world entirely, will never be able to acquire a child's way of thinking. Regardless the fact that in FSU Tove Jansson's books are considered to belong to children's fantasy tradition, offer an escape from adults' world with its problems, in western literary criticism Moomin books are often criticized as too philosophical and complex for children.

In our opinion, to claim that Moomin books are “direct descendants” of Anderson’s fairy tales is a little bit too brave. The first book “The Moomins and the Great Flood” (Originally: *Småtrollen och den stora översvämningen*) was published in 1945. The Second World War has dramatically changed the intellectual atmosphere in the European countries, and Finland was not an exception. The literature in the whole Europe reflected despair, uncertainty of the destiny and great fear of future. In Britain after the war most writers chose to focus on aesthetic or social rather than political problems. The novelists Henry Green, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Joyce Cary, and Lawrence Durrell, and others tended to cultivate their own distinctive voices. Other novelists and playwrights of the 1950s, often called the angry young men, expressed a deep dissatisfaction with British society, combined with despair that anything could be done about it. German literature in the aftermath of World War II started from a new beginning, with many authors attempting to find a way of describing the shocking, nihilistic experience of war and devastation – often taking their cue from foreign models or existentialist and traditional Christian trains of thought. Wolfgang Borchert, Heinrich Böll, and Arno Schmidt, poetry by Paul Celan, Günter Eich and Peter Huchel are examples of the trend of not depicting political matters directly and realistically. The crisis has also occurred in the field of children’s literature. Pre-war literary tradition has been linked with older traditions, in the case of Finland we are talking about German tradition – *Kunstmärchen* (successor of *Volksmärchen*). [4, p. 42] In the 1940s because of the rise of realistic children’s stories throughout the world (“In My Mother’s House” by Ann Nolan Clark, “The Little House” by Virginia Lee Burton, “Johnny Tremain” by Esther Forbes, “The Hundred Dresses” by Eleanor Estes, “Bright April” by Marguerite de Angeli and many others) fairy tales start getting predictable and thus not thrilling and uninteresting. However the time for fantasy literature was ahead.

As it was mentioned before any author works within a literary tradition and his text becomes a part of intertext and is influenced by other literary works, regardless the will of the author. Riika Stewen thinks that the Moomin series could not have been written without Modernist experiments of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Picasso

and Russian Constructionism. [6] These books bear an attempt to produce several levels of interpretation. In the broader meaning modernism covered not only literary experiment but also the issues of class, gender, the struggle for knowledge, and the senselessness and alienation of the time. Heike Wrenn in his article Women in Modernism says that gender issues have always been a topic in society as well as in literature, so naturally gender became a major focus of the modernist movement. Women had been seen and treated more as complements to the men in their lives than as individuals or spiritual entities; they were depicted in literature as womanly, weak, dutiful, and stupid. Most authors continued to write with the misguided perception that women were always inferior to men. [8] However in Tove Jansson's books alongside with Moominmama who is a bright illustration of femininity in a conventional meaning, i.e. she is gentle and patient as a mother, wise and not demanding as a wife, appears a totally different character – Little My. In the past, during the Golden Age (runs from about the mid-1800s to the early twentieth century), being deductive literature children's stories had the task of teaching children their roles in society for them to be ready for their adulthood. The female characters in books were nice, well-behaving and obedient (Becky from "Adventures of Tom Sawyer", Mark Twain), while male characters were brave, active, decisive and adventurous (Tom from "Adventures of Tom Sawyer", Mark Twain). Returning to the Moomin series, the classical representation of a typical female character is Snork Maiden. The saddest moment of her life was when her hair was burnt by the Haffinaters and when Moomin fell in love with the figure head, her favorite color is pink, and she likes looking for shells on the beach and collecting flowers and can often be guided by her vanity.

"There's no need to imagine that you're a wondrous beauty, because that's what you are." [7, p 98]

"I don't know what to do," said the Snork Maiden, giving him an imploring look under her fringe.

She wore a wreath of violets around her ears and had felt bored since morning. Moomintroll made a friendly and slightly preoccupied sound.

“Let’s play,” said the Snork Maiden. “Let’s play that I’m a wondrous beauty who gets kidnapped by you.” [7, p 69]

The last quote clearly shows the attitude of Snork Maiden, she declares her position: all she is interested in is her beauty; she is of no control and this is her free choice. She is absolutely submissive to a male character.

In the books children find prescribed roles for their adult life. According to these models a girl should be soft, feminine and vulnerable, while a boy may be adventurous, courageous and outgoing. However, in a post-war time the situation begins to change. As it has been mentioned before Little My appeared in Tove Jansson’s book. She is a real rebel. Her behavior is very often outrages. She is not vulnerable, but fearless and always ready to fight for herself. Despite the fact of being very tiny, she never gives up and almost always wins in a fight or any other dangerous situation. She always has her opinion, which is very often logical and rational. She doesn’t pay attention to her looks, however is very proud of her courageous nature.

“Dear me,” said Moominmamma, “here’s your little sister in my work basket again! She’s going to hurt herself on the pins and needles one day.”

“My!” said the Mymble’s daughter menacingly and tried to pull her sister out of a skein of wool. “Come out at once!”

But Little My managed to crawl deeper into the wool, where she disappeared completely.

“Such a nuisance she turned out so very small,” complained the Mymble’s daughter. “I never know where to look for her. Couldn’t you make a bark boat for her, too? She could sail in the water barrel, and I’d always know where she is.” [7, p 11]

Moominmamma rose with a sigh.

“So very annoying, this volcano,” she remarked.

“Volcano?” asked Little My, and thrust an interested head out of the wool.

“Yes, it’s a mountain not so very far from here, and all of a sudden it’s begun spitting fire and smoke over the whole valley,” explained Moominmamma. “And

soot. It's always kept quiet and good ever since I married. And now, after all these years, exactly when I've finished my washing, it has to sneeze once again and blacken all the things I hung out."

"Everybody's burning up!" shouted Little My happily. "And everybody's houses and gardens and playthings and little sisters and their playthings!" [7, p 13]

Little My is Snork Maiden's complete opposite, she is rebellious, destructive and mischievous. She likes trying new things and experience adventures, while Snork Maiden represents the traditional idea of femininity – she needs to be saved by a male character, Moomintroll. In "Moomiland Midwinter" Moomintroll tries to save Little My from the breaking sea ice. However his exploit is not regarded as courageous, or even necessary by Little My, as far as she always has the situation under control and can perfectly take care of herself. In fact, she doesn't need anyone, because she hopes to experience this adventure herself. On the other hand, being a stereotype as Snork Maiden, Moomintroll has to rescue Little My, as far as it is a duty of a man to save a woman. It's worth noting, that Little My acts very differently from the traditional sex roles. Nevertheless both the characters, Little My and Snork Maiden are extremes. None of them can offer anything new to the reader. The combination of two, on the other hand, could give birth to a new kind of girl. If the author has in mind to build a new role model for the reader, combining the elements is a very important thing.

Except for modernism influences, another important thing about Tove Jansson's books is their connection with folklore. Ancient Nordic beliefs in trolls were revived in her books; she installed a connection between those beliefs and modern fantasy fiction for children. The appearance of the Moomin family is rather unusual, they do resemble hippopotamuses, and nevertheless they are trolls. In addition traditional troll may be found in Moominvalley as well.

All contemporary authors looked for inspiration in the older texts. Some of them plunged into old traditions of their countries. Others looked for ideas in the works of foreigners. Yet others combined both. Without any doubt Tove Jansson's works were influenced by modernism and English tradition. Features of modernism are represented and clearly visible in the Moomins series. However, many great

things still remain unsaid about the creativity of the Finnish author; so much must yet be analyzed and revealed about her Moomins. Tove Jansson undoubtedly resorted to her roots while writing the books about the Moomins, lovingly describing picturesque nature of Finland, its landscapes, its sea, which plays an important role in Finnish culture. Nature itself plays an important role in Finnish culture and thus, in literature. Regarding the Moomins series, still not much attention was paid to poetry in the books, to mental landscape, which is another strong connection with modernism. Through poetry in Jansson's books feelings like fear of new experience, frustration, worries, lack of safety and almost constant expecting of a distant summer are expressed. Summer or rather idyllic summer that represents Romantic ideas, especially important in the context of Scandinavian culture.

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