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Dalila Forni

Children's Literature across Media

*Film and Theatre Adaptations of Roald Dahl's
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

anteprima

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Introduction

Children's literature and transmedia storytelling. New methodological approaches

Children's narrations are a complex and wide field that has been growing and changing over the centuries¹. Children's literature has been transforming in different arts that go beyond the written page to reach crossmediality² and transmedia

¹ To further explore main international studies on children's literature, see: S. BAR-SOTTI, L. CANTATORE (eds.), *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme, temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, Carocci, Milan 2019; S. ULIVIERI, "La letteratura per l'infanzia e per ragazzi ieri e oggi. Bilanci e prospettive", in A. ANTONIAZZI (ed.), *Scrivere, leggere, raccontare. La letteratura per l'infanzia tra passato e futuro. Studi in onore di Pino Boero*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2019; S. CALABRESE, *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Fiaba, romanzo di formazione, crossover*, Mondadori, Milan 2013; F. BACCHETTI (ed.), *Percorsi della letteratura per l'infanzia. Tra leggere e interpretare*, Clueb, Bologna 2013; J. ZIPES (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011; P. BOERO, C. DE LUCA, *La letteratura per l'infanzia*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2009; E. BESEGI (ed.), *Infanzia e racconto. Il libro, le figure, la voce, lo sguardo*, Bononia University Press, Bologna 2008; F. ORESTANO (ed.), *Tempi moderni nella 'children's literature': storie, personaggi, strumenti critici*, CUEM, Milan 2007; P. HUNT (ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Routledge, London 2004; F. ORESTANO, C. PAGETTI, (eds.) *Le guide del mattino: alle origini della children's literature*, CUEM, Milan 2004; G. GRILLI, *Libri nella giungla. Orientarsi nell'editoria per ragazzi*, Carocci, Rome 2002; A. ASCENZI, *La letteratura per l'infanzia oggi. Questioni epistemologiche, metodologie d'indagine e prospettive di ricerca*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2002; J. ZIPES, *Oltre il giardino. L'inquietante successo della letteratura per l'infanzia da Pinocchio a Harry Potter*, Mondadori, Milan 2002; P. HUNT (ed.), *Children's Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford 2001; P. HUNT (ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature*, Routledge, New York 1999.

² R. MARAGLIANO, *Esseri multimediali. Immagini del bambino di fine millennio*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1996; R. CESERANI, *Convergenze. Gli strumenti letterari e le altre discipline*, Mondadori, Milan 2010; A. ANTONIAZZI, *Contaminazioni. Letteratura per ragazzi e crossmedialità*, Apogeo, Milan 2012; I. FILOGRASSO, "La letteratura per l'infanzia nel contesto della crossmedialità. Tra opportunità e criticità", in F. BACCHETTI (ed.) *Percorsi di letteratura per l'infanzia. Tra leggere e interpretare*, Clueb, Bologna 2013; A. ANTONIAZZI, "Never alone. Narrazione e contaminazioni narrative", in A. ANTONIAZZI (ed.), *Scrivere, leggere, raccontare. La letteratura per l'infanzia tra passato e futuro. Studi in onore di Pino Boero*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2019; M. RYAN, K. THON (eds.), *Storyworlds*

storytelling³: cinema, theatre, musicals, videogames, apps, and many other forms of narration clearly refer to the canon of children's tradition, but re-shape it to address contemporary audiences and make the most out of technological, cultural, and artistic opportunities. Stories for young readers cross the borders of literature to reach new media, transforming their literary sources for new expectations, new listeners, new aesthetic and social sensibilities. Therefore, today children's literature does not stand on its own but is characterized by continuous overlaps, references, interactions, quotations, recurrent archetypes through different codes: its influence on other media keeps growing as narrations for young readers/viewers are becoming more and more transmedial. In this broad, evolving context, adaptations – and mainly transmedia adaptations, from a code to another – may be considered one of the most significant forms of art since they pervade and outline children's contemporary production⁴.

Remediation⁵ – intended as the re-shaping of media – is now a key concept that should be carefully considered when approaching children's studies: different codes constantly interrelate, incorporate each other and create new hybrid codes that directly communicate in the construction of storytelling. The result is a multilayered, hybridized collective imaginary⁶ that does not simply commit to an original literary source, but constantly refers to other cross/trans-medial representations. For instance, thinking about the well-known figure of Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*, readers/viewers will probably visualize not simply Lewis Carroll's novels and illustrations, but also the most popular filmic, theatrical or interactive adaptations (from Walt Disney's production to Tim Burton's interpretation, to videogames

across media. Toward a media-conscious narratology, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 2014.

³ Henry Jenkins defines it as: “[...] a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story”, H. JENKINS, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York 2006, or: http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html

⁴ M.T. TRISCIUZZI, “Classici del futuro. Da book a media”, in *LiBeR*, n. 123, 2019.

⁵ J.D. BOLTER, R.A. GRUSIN, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000. See also: M. FREEMAN, R. RAMPAZZO GAMBARATO, *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, Taylor&Francis, New York 2018.

⁶ E. BESEGGI, “La letteratura per l’infanzia come serbatoio dell’immaginario”, in G. BERTAGNA, S. ULIVIERI (eds.), *La ricerca pedagogica nell’Italia contemporanea*, Studium, Rome 2017, pp. 244-248.

inspired by the novel)⁷. The collective image of Alice is constantly reshaped by new transmedia adaptations that build the popular perception of who Alice is, how she looks like, how she would act and react in specific situations. In a few words, they create a transmedia character⁸. Therefore, children's literature should be contextualized and investigated in relation to other narrative arts, so to understand how different media merge and contaminate each other, narrating in some cases the same story through different written or visual techniques.

In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to consider a methodological approach that addresses the relativity of children's textual fiction in our elaborate and renovating society and in our modern communication system. As a consequence, although children's literature studies are grounded on a discernible and well-structured epistemological status⁹, a comparative and transmedia approach is required to relate and define different forms of narration for young readers (from literary texts to visual narrations, from films to theatrical experiences, from videogames to musicals): these arts are constantly interacting and communicating and cannot be approached individually. Contemporary children's fiction lies at the junction between different codes and, for this reason, it cannot be investigated without taking into account the intricate panorama of transmedia storytelling: its examination entails connecting it to other forms of art that directly draw from children's canon to create new artistic expressions. Indeed, children's literature conceals a multimodal approach in its roots: from the very beginning of its production, books for children have been narrating stories using different codes at the same time, such as words and images¹⁰. Consequently, chil-

⁷ M. BITTANTI, *Intermedialità. Videogiochi, cinema, televisione, fumetti*, Unicopli, Milan 2008.

⁸ P. BERTETTI, "Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters", in *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 8, 2014; P. BERTETTI, "Transmedia Storytelling: archeologia, mondi, personaggi", in *DigitCult, Scientific Journal on Digital Cultures*, vol. 4, n. 1, 2019.

⁹ A. ASCENZI, *cit.*, 2002; ASCENZI A., PIRONI T., "La ricerca in storia della pedagogia e in letteratura per l'infanzia dinanzi alle sfide dei processi di internazionalizzazione", in M. CORSI (eds.) *La ricerca pedagogica in Italia. Tra innovazione e internazionalizzazione*, PensaMultimedia, Lecce-Brescia 2014, pp. 39-46; S. FAVA, "Orizzonti metodologici della ricerca sulla letteratura per l'infanzia in Italia", in *Pedagogia Oggi*, vol. XVIII, n. 1, 2020, pp. 99-111.

¹⁰ C. LEPRI, *Le immagini raccontano. L'iconografia nella formazione dell'immaginario infantile*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2016; R. FARNÈ, *Iconologia didattica. Le immagini per l'educazione: dall'Orbis Pictus a Sesame Street*, Zanichelli, Bologna 2002.

dren's fiction developed a privileged connection to multimodality and transmedia storytelling, a connection which is now strengthening with the expansion of new technologies and arts.

Additionally, a widespread approach to the analysis of children's fiction is crucial from an educational perspective as well¹¹. Firstly, children's fiction or storytelling – regardless of the medium it is based on – should be considered as an influent art form in educating young readers or viewers from various points of view (literary, artistic, co-operative, and social skills). Secondly, Education Sciences should wisely consider children's new narrative formats and the literary, aesthetic and interactive competencies and needs they require with the advancement of those media that are constantly consumed by children, teenagers, and young adults¹². Thus, as argued by Edgar Morin, it is necessary to overcome the disjunction of different disciplinary subjects to associate them and to create a general knowledge that unites and models fixed perspectives, so as to reach a complex, aggregate and rich context of analysis¹³.

The popularity of cross-media adaptation of children's works is now striking: many books for children were adapted into films, plays or other artistic forms, reaching worldwide success and winning children's and adults' love¹⁴. The most famous example is Walt Disney – which turned into animated films traditional fairy tales – but also classic books of different periods and coming from different nations were conspicuously adapted across media. An account would be infinite and would include books addressed to audiences of various ages and social backgrounds: *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, *Little Women* (1880) by Louisa May Alcott, *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Pinocchio* (1883) by Carlo Collodi, *The Wonderful*

¹¹ A. ANTONIAZZI, "Storytelling and Videogames. An interdisciplinary approach to interactive multimedia models for children", in *Studi sulla Formazione*, n. 1, 2013.

¹² U. ECO, *Apocalittici e integrati. Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (1964), Bompiani, Milan 1984; F. CAMBI (ed.), *Media education tra formazione e scuola. Principi, modelli, esperienze*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2010; C. COVATO., S. ULIVIERI (eds.), *Itinerari nella storia dell'infanzia. Bambine e bambini, modelli pedagogici e stili educativi*, Unicopli, Milan 2011; C. DI BARI, *Dopo gli apocalittici: Per una Media Education "integrata"*, Florence University Press, Florence 2013.

¹³ E. MORIN, *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, Unesco Publishing, Paris 1999.

¹⁴ P. BOERO, D. BOERO, *Letteratura per l'infanzia in cento film*, Le Mani, Genova 2008.

Wizard of Oz (1899) by Frank Baum, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* (1907) by Vamba, *Mary Poppins* (1934) by P.L. Travers, *The Never-ending Story* (1979) by Michael Ende, popular sagas such as *Harry Potter* (1997) by J.K. Rowling or *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins, and many, many others¹⁵. Literature and cinema are two strictly connected arts that affect each other in the portrayal of long-lasting themes related to children's fiction¹⁶. Thus, throughout an in-depth examination of popular texts – as children's literature best classics – and their power on children's collective imagination and education, it is necessary to carefully take into account also their transmedia counterparts and their contribution to the construction of children's canons.

The present study aims to explore a specific case study, Roald Dahl's novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, so as to make the basis of the transmedia process clear and to analyze discrepancies and contaminations in the procedure of adapting from a medium to another. In addition, the volume wishes to underline children's literature's potential to transcend the written word and to reach different art forms that comprehend visual, musical, theatrical experiences, and other artistic expressions.

Roald Dahl's production was chosen for different reasons. Firstly, Dahl's novels are a popular phenomenon and both his books and the films or plays inspired by his books are well-known and appreciated worldwide: his popularity helps to outline the influence of different adaptations on our contemporary collective imagination. Secondly, his works were adapted in different periods of time and for different media: this fact gave the opportunity to study different kinds of adaptation and to relate them both to the specific medium and to the period of time in which they were produced. Five of Dahl's books were turned into a film: two adaptations of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* analyzed in this volume; *The Witches* (1990) directed by Nicolas Roeg; *James and the Giant Peach* (1996) directed by Henry Selick; *Matilda* (1996) directed by Danny DeVito; and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), by Wes Anderson. To list all the plays put on stage following Dahl's stories would be impossible as many of them were created by schools or less known theatrical companies. However, only in the West End of London two major theatrical adaptations

¹⁵ M.T. TRISCIUZZI, *cit.*, 2019, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶ A. FAETI, *La "camera" dei bambini: cinema, mass media, fumetti, educazione*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1983.

of Dahl's books were put on stage in the last years: *Matilda*, written by Dennis Kelly, with music and lyrics by Tim Minchin, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, directed by Sam Mendes: we can easily assume that Dahl's works are widely appreciated for theatrical adaptations too. Furthermore, the novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was selected as a specific case study because it was one of the most known works by the author and one of the most adapted, with two filmic versions, a musical for theatre and a dramatization for schools. Therefore, it could offer a direct, long-familiar example of transmedia adaptations for children.

Thus, the purpose of the volume is to investigate the phenomenon of adapting children's books for cinema and theatre starting from Roald Dahl's novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. To do it, it is essential to notice that adaptations – both for cinema and for theatre – do not follow precise rules, but they can be easily influenced by many factors: the social context in which they are created; the audience they address; the idea they want to convey; the budget they have; the director and the team's artistic ideas and interpretation. For example, Tim Burton and Mel Stuart's versions of the novel are quite different even if they are presenting the same story: Burton's idea of the book was very dark – a feature typical of his personal style – while Stuart preferred a more colorful atmosphere. As a consequence, it is not possible to choose objectively the 'best' adaptation, but only to explore them one by one, highlighting how different artists, writers, and directors made diverse choices in order to fulfill their audience's expectations and their personal tastes.

Starting from Dahl's life, this work examines *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as the original source of the following adaptations. The novel is analyzed in order to understand which are the main themes and characters presented by the writer. The book is mainly a modern fairy tale¹⁷ that mixes traditional elements to Dahl's particular and grotesque sense of humor, often manifested through an

¹⁷ B. BETTELHEIM, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Knopf, New York 1976; J. ZIPES, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, Routledge, London 1985; F. CAMBI (ed.), *Itinerari nella fiaba. Autori, testi, figure*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 1999; S. ULIVIERI, "Modelli e messaggi educativi al femminile nella fiaba", in F. CAMBI (ed.), *Itinerari nella fiaba*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 1999; F. CAMBI, G. ROSSI (eds.), *Paesaggi della fiaba. Luoghi, scenari, percorsi*, Armando, Rome 2005; S. BARSOTTI, *E cammina, cammina, cammina... Fiaba, viaggio e metafora formativa*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2004; A. ARTICONI, A. CAGNOLATI (eds.), *La fiaba nel Terzo Millennio. Metafore, intrecci, dinamiche*, FahrenHouse, Salamanca 2019.

uncommon use of the language. Successively, the present work offers an overview of Adaptation Studies and children's cinema. Even if film adaptations are common, it is not easy to describe the techniques which are preferred during this process. Indeed, it is mainly a matter of choosing between fidelity and creativity: on one hand, some adaptations are very faithful to the original work, so that the audience will not be disappointed, but are not well structured from a filmic point of view; on the other hand, other adaptations could be considered masterpiece of the cinema, but do not follow with attention their source. Thus, every work is different from the other and two films inspired by the same book can be completely dissimilar. This is just partially the case of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory's* films since they both try to be faithful to the book, even if the two directors made very different choices and showed personal styles. As a result, this book analyzes how main themes and characters were presented in the two film versions – and then in the two theatrical adaptations – explaining the various decisions taken by directors and their teams from a social and artistic perspective.

The work closes with a chapter on theatre for children, whose roots are obviously older than cinema for children. Even if the techniques of cinema and theatre adaptation are similar, it should be emphasized that plays are generally more complex if we consider their production's possibilities: space is limited to the stage and to the set design chosen by the team; time is less flexible than in a film; some special effects are not possible at the theatre; and a play cannot take advantage of particular framings, which can evoke specific feelings in a film. The show directed by Sam Mendes is a good example of a commercial but at the same time artistic musical which can fascinate both adults and children being faithful to the original work. George Richard's adaptation, on the contrary, represents another kind of theatre: his script was written for children, who have to play each role of the story, also the adult ones. The result is a very simple work whose aim is to make children work together at an artistic project and learn how theatre and storytelling work.

To conclude, this volume shows as a single literary work – in this case, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl – can be adapted across media, for different audiences, and following different styles. The study aims to put Dahl's novel in the contemporary, wide context of children's narrations and to underline the strong relation between literary arts and transmedia storytelling. The book

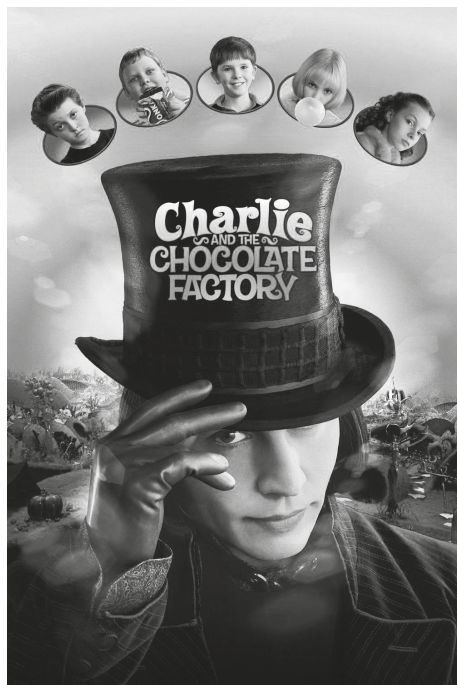
wishes to stimulate reflections on the interrelation of different codes and on the importance of considering different arts when approaching children's narrations and cultures.

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