



Camilla Storskog, *Afterlives: Scandinavian Classics as Comic Art Adaptation*

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by Giovanni Za

Camilla Storskog's new book focuses on adaptations of Scandinavian classics, ranging, among others, from Ingmar Bergman to Jon Fosse, Henrik Ibsen and Karen Blixen.

Storskog aims to explore the dense relationship between the original and the adapted text, highlighting the revitalizing process that defines the newer production. The intermedial translation, it is asserted, in conjunction with the decontextualisation, engenders novel, fertile interpretations of both adapted and original works. Adaptations, intended as productive mutations, help, however, to give new life to literary classics, ignite new semantic readings, and stress the timelessness of artistic works.

The author chooses to analyze comic book transpositions because they appear to be particularly interesting due to the wide inventiveness of the art of drawing and its inter-iconicity, i.e. the reference to other visual sources.

Primary material is divided into three sections; "Medium" collects adaptations that enhance the medium-specific potential of comic art; "Fabula" assembles examples of intermedial transpositions that distance themselves from the original plots; finally, "Discourse" gathers works that appear to be productively translated into other cultural



contexts. In all three sections, Storskog seeks to underline the “dominant” feature—a conceptual device first introduced by Roman Jakobson. Storskog merges this theoretical frame with two further notions: the “icon”, i.e. the impression left by subjective interpretative acts used by André Gaudreault and Thierry Groensteen in their take on adaptations, or “transécriture”, as they call the intermedial translation; the “intentio”, originally from Walter Benjamin’s reasoning on translation, which aims at grasping the core meaning of source material.

Within this composite and truly effective methodological frame, Storskog provides an interesting reading of adapted material while giving valuable insights about transmedial connections between art, literature, comic books, and cinema. In the “Medium” section, Storskog analyzes two transpositions of Hans Christian Andersen’s 1848 novel *Historien om en Moder* (The Story of a Mother): Peter Madsen’s *Historien om en Mor* (2004, The History of a Mother) and the wordless comic by AKAB (pennname of Gabriele di Benedetto, 1979-2019) *Storia di una madre*.

Storskog highlights the intermedial reference between Madsen and Edvard Munch, referring to the Norwegian artist’s painting *Det syke barn* (The Sick Child) as a key feature in the comic transposition. Madsen uses Munch to fully grasp Andersen’s text, while still expressing a personal and meaningful *intentio*. This intericonic reference can be considered evidence of the adaptation’s depth and complexity. In her analysis of AKAB’s *Storia di una madre*, Storskog underscores the artist’s adeptness in conveying the mother’s desolation through a somber and harrowing medium. By employing diverse perspectives and viewpoints, she accentuates the poignant separation of the child from his mother, thereby illustrating the depth and nuance of the artist’s expression.

More intermedial interplay comes into consideration when Storskog analyzes the adaptation of Karin Blixen’s *Den udødelige Historie* by Guido Crepax, which first appeared in English in 1953. Orson Welles adapted the novel into a film in 1968. Crepax draws inspiration from both sources for his 1987 transposition, as Storskog notes. Names used in the novel are changed so as to bear a more evident reference to Welles’s cinematographic universe. The merchant, originally named Clay in Blixen’s work, becomes here Kane, as the newspaper tycoon in Welles’s debut film *Citizen Kane*. Crepax also cites the famous opening scene of the film, in which the protagonist perishes and drops the snow globe he was holding in his hand (the well-known “Rosebud”): his drawing can thus be interpreted as a direct homage to the movie. As Storskog pertinently observes, the graphic design of the adaptation made by Crepax is replete with other references the interior design of the space features the Le Corbusier Bauhaus LC2 chair and a De Stijl painting, among other notable elements). These contribute to a productive reshaping of the novel’s contents, with the agency of the female character being accentuated. To the “Fabula” section belongs another Crepax’ adaptation, the 1991 transposition of Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona*, here titled *Bianca in persona*. The character of Bianca was created by Crepax in the late 1960s. Bianca is a symbol of unyielding freedom and independence; in this work, she is used with further reference to Fellini’s masterwork *8½*, appearing as a nurse and a muse. This double feature addresses the dependency of the artist on their artistic expression, weaving together



the themes of pain and creation to offer fresh interpretations of the original works by Bergman and to provide nuanced and reflective insights into the oeuvre of Crepax.

Although these are just a few of Camilla Storskog's many and insightful intuitions, they provide relevant examples of her thorough analysis and methodological exactness. It is evident that *Afterlives* introduces a novel and invigorating perspective within the domain of literary adaptations, and it is poised to become a watershed moment for Scandinavian studies in this field.

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