JAMES JOYCE’S FAIRY TALE
CAT AND THE DEVIL AS A PICTURE BOOK FOR CHILDREN

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In a letter of the world-renowned Irish writer James Joyce to his grandson Stephen handwritten fairy tales were found with the implicit title The Cat of Beaugency, later renamed The Cat and the Devil and The Cats of Copenhagen, with illustrations by Casey Sorrow. The fairy tales were published posthumously, e.g. The Cat and the Devil in Letters of James Joyce, 1957. International interest in Joyce’s children’s literature is high, as both short contemporary fairy tales have been published several times in the picture book edition and have been translated into many languages. James Joyce is interesting for Slovenia too, first because he and his girlfriend and later wife Nora Barnacle, on their way to Trieste, accidentally left the train at the Ljubljana train station, where a memorial was also erected (sculptor Jakov Brdar, 2003). Secondly, his literary fairy tale The Cat and the Devil is also intertextually linked with Slovenian folk tradition, notably the Bohinj fairy tale, and also with the tradition of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, since in Cividale stands a large stone-made Devil’s Bridge across the Natisone River, and there are also bridges bearing the same name elsewhere.

Keywords: James Joyce, Devil’s Bridge, The Cat and the Devil, ATU 1191, children picture book.

Introduction

The famous Irish writer for adults James Joyce (1882–1941) wrote a story in a letter to his four-year-old grandson Stephen under the implicit title The Cat of Beaugency (10 August 1936). On a trip from France to Denmark, Joyce heard the story about the town of
Beaugency and reportedly saw a *Devil’s bridge* on the Loire River. There is no evidence that Joyce would visit the city, but in the letters there is a photo of Nora Joyce and two friends in the town of Beaugency. The fairy tale, posthumously published in picture book form, was given the modified title *The Cat and the Devil* (1964, illustrations by Richard Erdoes; 1965, illustrations by Gerald Rose; and 1980, illustrations by Roger Blachon). In Slovenian, it was published under the title *Maček in vrag* (translated by Anja Štefan, illustrations by Tomislav Torjanec, 2007, Velike slikanice Collection). In Joyce’s correspondence with his grandson Stephen, they found another very short modernist fairy tale entitled *The Cats of Copenhagen* (18 August 1936), from a voyage through Denmark (in English 2012; in Slovene 2014, *Mačke iz Kopenhagna*).

The fairy tale *The Cat and the Devil* is relevant for comparative young adult literature, as it is linked intertextually with myths, legends, ballads and, above all, the folk tale type ATU 1191 (*Sacrifice on the Bridge*), as well as Slovenian culture as such. In the Classification of Folk Tales (ATU Index), H.J. Uther lists many cultures in which the mentioned fairy-tale type occurs (e.g., the motive of Jephthah’s Promise from the *Bible*). In his monograph entitled *Walled-up Wife*, A. Dundes [1] comparatively analyzed variants in different cultures, from Indo-European to Mediterranean, in which the motif appears mainly in ballads. The fairy tale type was also discussed by M. Kropej Telban [2].

J. Joyce fairy tale *The Cat and the Devil* is also linked intertextually with the Slovenian folk legend *Hudičev most* (*The Devil’s Bridge*) and similar variants, also monumentalized in architecture (e.g., the Devil’s Bridge in Cividale), etc. According to the sources found so far, this is the first picture book edition of a literary ballad intended for adults – published for children. J. Joyce transformed the folk ballad into a literary fairy tale with a subversive ending for young addressees. In this regard, it is useful to use comparative analysis of the comics by Matjaž Schmidt, the Slovenian fairy tale by Marija Cvetek, with the subject matter deriving from the region of Bohinj, and Joyce’s fairy tale for children. Although Joyce’s fairy tale is written in a private context, the comparative analysis reveals that Joyce constructively imitated a (folk) ballad and added new meanings and synonyms, allusions, quotations, motifs, stylizations
and themes in a subversive literary fairy tale, with particular awareness that the story/fairy tale is aimed at children.

Joyce’s text is a short modern fairy tale – short because it only contains a few pages\(^1\), contemporary because it contains elements of modern life («a strong Dublin accent»), and a fairy tale because it features magical events.

Due to the context – a letter to his grandson Stephen, the text contains a tale or address in a private context that became part of the text, with the title added at a later date in the picture book from 1964, with illustrations by Richard Erdoes, illustrating the Devil in the image much resembling Joyce, since the text contains autobiographical elements: the devil reads a newspaper – Joyce also loved to read newspapers – the Irish Times; the mayor of the French town of Beaugancy on the Loire River is named after the actual nine-time mayor of Dublin (1930–1939), elected mayor for the tenth time in 1954 – Alfred Byrne (1882–1956); biographers believe that Joyce spoke French (with a Dublin accent) – the Devil speaks Belle-sybabble. The fairy-tale character – the Devil – in Joyce’s fairy tale is a polyglot.

\[\text{Fig. 1. J. Joyce: The Cat and the Devil, 1981; illustrated by Gerald Rose}\]

\(^1\) In Slovenian, the text contains 618 words or 3695 characters with spaces.
Joyce wrote to his grandson:
My dear Stevie: I sent you a little cat filled with sweets a few days ago but perhaps you do not know the story about the cat of Beaugency [3, s. 7].

I hope you will like this story.

Nonno

P. S.

The Devil mostly speaks a language of his own called Bell-sybabble which he makes up himself as he goes along but when he is very angry he can speak quite bad French very well though some who have heard him say that he has a strong Dublin accent [3, s. 23–24].

The quote shows that Joyce signed himself privately as «nonno», that he had in mind an explicit (his grandson) and an implicit imaginary addressee (e.g. the allusion to the Dublin accent). The letters show that Joyce also told his grandson fairy tales when he lived in Zurich, Switzerland.

**Folk-tale type ATU 1191**

In the ATU Index, this folk-tale type/motif is labelled Sacrifice on the Bridge – ATU 1191, formerly The Dog on the Bridge. In a short description of the fairy tale type/motif, it is stated that a master bricklayer cannot (in the agreed time) build a bridge or church and asks the Devil (giant) for help. The Devil demands the soul of the first person to cross the bridge as reimbursement. The master bricklayer releases an animal (e.g. a goat, cat, cock, dog, pig) across the bridge (or into the church) so that the devil does not get possession over a living soul. At this point, the fairy tale type is linked to the motif (S241.1), wherein Uther mentions S. Thompson as a reference, and the motif called the Unwitting bargain with devil evaded by driving dog over bridge first, or The child has been unwittingly promised (the first thing that goes over the bridge). The central motif also contains variants, e.g. the king promises to sacrifice the first creature he meets, and it turns out to be a miller on a donkey. As it happens, the donkey is in front of him, so the donkey is beheaded. The fairy type/motif in this work can also be associated with other motifs (J1169.4 The Ass Beheaded) [4].

Uther also mentions cultures in which the folk-tale type ATU 1191 Sacrifice on the Bridge occurs, such as: American, English,
Austrian, Estonian, Finnish, Flemish, French, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Catalan, Lithuanian, Hungarian, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Slovenian, Sorbian, Spanish, Swedish, Swiss, Welsh, etc.

The Brothers Grimm mention the motif of sacrifice (ATU 1191) in *Deutsche Sagen* [*German Tales*] (1816, 1818), *Der verzauberte König zu Schildheiß* [*The Enchanted King*] (No. 25), in connection with the German saga about a king who cannot finish building his castle in a remote forest on a mountain. Builders find hallways, dungeons and cellars under the castle. There, a mighty king sits on the throne, all decorated with precious stones, and beside him a beautiful bride who turns into a snake and throws fire. The builders tell their king what they saw underground. The king and his dog go to the underground castle, where he hears a girl sigh. The young girl is turned into a snake and when she sees the dog, she burns him with fire. The king thinks his dog is dead, but sees the bride holding his dog in her lap as she writes on the wall that she intends to destroy the castle. At the end of the saga, the fire destroys the king.

The common resemblance is that the king goes to an underground castle with a dog who is the first person to be burned by fire. At the same time, the difference is also because the ending is tragic (death of the king) and it is exactly the tragic end which is similar to a ballad (death of a young mother) and a saga (death of a king).

**Polygenetic issue**

H.J. Uther [5, s. 299] links the motif to the biblical motif of Jephthah’s Promise. Jephthah made this vow to the Lord: «If indeed You will deliver the Ammonites into my hands, 31 then whatever comes out of the door of my house to greet me on my triumphant return from the Ammonites will belong to the LORD, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering... 34 And when Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him with tambourines and dancing! She was his only child; he had no son or daughter besides her» [6, Ch. 11:30–40].

H.J. Uther also cites an example from the book *De factis dictisque memorabilibus* [*Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings*] by Valerius Maximus (1st c. AD), from Book 7, Part 3, Paragraph 1, *On Sacrifice*. Uther associates the motif with Alexander the Great who cannot be defeated because he offers a sacrifice to each city [5,
s. 624]. Uther also associates ATU type/motive of walled-up women with the motif of contract with the Devil which episodically appears in many types/motifs in the group of types/motifs about tales of the stupid ogre (giant, devil) (from 1000–1199). He also associates sacrifices from ancient literature with fairy tales or episodes [5, s. 299] or motifs.

M. Kropej [7, p. 62] cites the first written sources that can be found in the poem Zidanje Skadra (1366–71), from northeastern Macedonia, later also in a collection by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1814). M. Kropej names this type/motif a legend and places it in the context of sacrifice, also because beside important objects (church, castle, bridge, residence and water) numerous remains have been found in Europe and around the world. Later, the sacrifice of persons, animals was transformed into the sacrifice of objects (money, shrines, etc.). M. Kropej, similarly as A. Dundes, mentions J. Grimm’s interest in this motif (J. Grimm, Deutsche Mythologie [Teutonic Mythology]) [7, p. 62].

Alan Dundes Walled-Up Wife (1996)

In his monograph Walled-Up Wife published in 1996 and dedicated to the motif, Alan Dundes lists many Indo-European connections with the basic type/motif, in different cultures with different variants and variant titles (e.g., Greece, The Bridge over Arta; Romania, Master Manole, etc. [1, xi]. The motif of Walled-up Wife is considered by Dundes to be one of the most sublime examples of popular creativity, also because of its symbolic meaning.

Dundes published eighteen articles in his book exploring this folklore type/motif in different cultures, as it travelled along the Indo-European path, and found about 700 Indian variants of the motif which were later assimilated in southeastern Europe (Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, etc.). As a starting point, he considered two versions of the ballad by Serbian folklorist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) from 1814. The monograph includes an interesting feminist interpretation by the author (woman walled-up into law (India, Balkans), woman walled-up into male chauvinism) [1, p. 198]. A. Dundes claims that the Indian variants were written mostly from the point of view of the female victim, while the Balkan variants are written from the point of view of the
male, the builder. In all of these cultures, the basic type/motif or meme, as Jack Zipes calls it, has preserved and at the same time changed certain elements, episodes.

D.L. Ashliman also cites *The Devil’s Bridge* motif, citing the English, Austrian, German, Swiss and Welsh variants. He also cites the motif of Faust and tales of people who contracted with the Devil, as well as variants in literature: *Doctor Faustus*, 1587; C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1604; G. Lessing, *Faust*, 1784; the most famous variant of JW Goethe, *Faust*, 1808–31; H. Heine, *Der Doktor Faust [Doctor Faust]*, 1851; P. Valery, *Mon Faust [My Faust]*, 1945; T. Mann, *Doktor Faustus [Doctor Faustus]*, 1950. Interestingly, the motif of Faust was most commonly written by male authors, but when it comes to the motif variant of sacrifice on the bridge, victims were mostly women and/or children, even twins.

M. Kropej also cites the case of I. Andrić, *Na Drini ćuprija [The Bridge on the Drina]*, 1945, in which the motif of sacrificing children on the bridge over the Drina River appears.

**The Devil’s Bridge in Slovenian (young adult) fiction**

The *Bohinjske pravljice [Bohinj Fairy Tales]* collection also contains the fairy tale *Hudičev most (The Devil’s Bridge)* in dialect and literary Slovene.

Once they used to tell how they built the Devil’s Bridge. They worked until evening, but in the morning, everything was torn down. And someone said, «Let the Devil build this bridge, I won’t anymore». Then the devil really started working. So, they asked him what he wanted as compensation. He answered, «The first soul that will pass over the bridge, you will give me that soul». In the evening, they pondered who would be the wretched one. And he remembered a farmer who had a dog. He said, «I’ll take one big calf bone and bring the dog with me». He threw the bone across the bridge and the dog ran after it. Thus, the Devil obtained the dog’s soul. He was so angry that he wagged his tail and tore down the entire fence.

The short explanatory fairy tale shows both similarities and differences with the basic motifs of Walled-up Wife or Sacrifice on the Bridge.
The Devil’s Bridge in comics

In the collection Slovenske pravljice v stripu [Slovenian Fairytale in Comics], Matjaž Schmidt authored and edited the fairy tale Hudičev most (The Devil’s Bridge) on two pages.

The Mostnica River flows through a deep gorge. There, the villagers built a bridge. But at night, someone demolished everything they had built during the day.

«The evil one wants a soul – Now what?»
«Men, hey, I have an idea!»
«Good boy, Šturmi. Here you are Šturmi!»
«Seek, Šturmi, seek!»
(Dog’s soul)
«Fraud!»
«The Devil take them. They planted dog’s soul on me!»
The Devil was so mad that he demolished the fence on the bridge!
«That’s how we got the bridge from the Devil!»
«But we had to send Šturmi to the dog school – he was unbearable without his soul!» [8, p. 36–37].

Based on a comparative analysis, it is evident that Schmidt has preserved the basic parts of the motif, the time and space (bridge, Mostnica River, deep gorge), the fairy tale characters (villagers, Šturmi the dog, and the Devil). In comics, verbal and visual text are complementary, visual text is complemented by (a very short) verbal text. The comic book, aimed at young addressees, also contains elements of humor, e.g. the dog’s name – Šturmi, and besides the term hudič also uses euphemisms vrag and zlomek for the Devil. Schmidt introduces a novelty – the idiom dog soul, meaning a wicked, evil man, which is also an allusion to the Devil. At the same time, it is a humorous curse and a pejorative name that functions as derision in the context. Humor is a feature of all fairy tales in the comic, because the latter is intended for young addressees.
James Joyce, *The Cat and the Devil*

Literary analysis of the fairy tale for children *The Cat and the Devil* found two levels of writing, one intended for children («*But the bridge is there still and there are boys walking and riding and playing upon it*».) and one addressed to adults («*It is also a very wide river, for France, at least*»).

- Associations atypical of a folk-tale model but typical of a literary fairy tale:
  «*All the people whispered to one another and the cat looked up at the Lord Mayor because in the town of Beaugency it was allowed that a cat should look at a Lord Mayor. However, when he got tired of watching the Lord Mayor (because even a cat grows tired of looking at a Lord Mayor) he began playing with the Lord Mayor’s golden chain*» (Joyce 2005).

- Internal monologue (associations, thoughts, impressions):
  «*So what were they to do?*» […]
  «*The cat who was now between the Devil and the bucket of water made up his mind quite as quickly and ran with his ears back across the bridge and into the Devil’s arms*».

- Stream of consciousness – a means of narrative technique; the action is reduced, replaced by the reflection of the literary figure (and/or the narrator) as composed of illogical and subconscious associations and simultaneous representational fragments. At the end of the fairy tale, Joyce added a mentioned P.S. (*post scriptum*), which is also a modernist ending of the fairy tale [3, p. 23–24].

Joyce wrote the tale for a double addressee, and in addition to addressing his grandson directly, he also translated an internal monologue of a literary character – the Devil talking with a cat in French. Interestingly, in the English original, the internal monologue was not translated from French into English – this part remained in French and was later translated into Slovene in Slovenian version.

There are some adult associations in the literary fairy tale, including stereotypes («*...the Lord Mayor came to the head of the bridge – every man held his breath and every woman held her tongue*».), and throughout the fairy tale the following is present:
humor («The Devil was as angry as the Devil himself»);  
irony («the Lord Mayor M. Alfred Byrne appeared in his great scarlet robe and wearing his heavy golden chain round his neck»); and  
criticism (e.g. «he can speak quite bad French»; «he has a strong Dublin accent»).

Seifert claims in the monograph *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender*, 1996, that the characteristic of fairy tales is «text for children, context for adults» [9, p. 45], and we can see that Joyce writes in the same way too. Seifert states that fairy tales are not synonyms for children’s literature but represent «salon literature» in which the narrator intervenes as needed. This is explicit in Joyce’s annotation of «P.S.» Unlike folk variants, e.g. the ballads of V.S. Karadzic, *Zidanje Skadra* ([*The Building of Skadar*] (1814), and the tragic end – the sacrifice of a young woman, a young mother of a one-month-old baby – Joyce’s version emphasizes humorous elements and has no tragic end.

All the other folk variants, even ballads, are tragic, and the Slovene folk (Bohinj) version is also tragic, although the tragic ending is expressed with the language of the symbols: «Thus, the Devil obtained the dog’s soul» [10, s. 56].

The question remains whether Joyce knew the folk ballad or fairy tale in writing, but he probably heard it in 1938. Based on Juvan’s theory of intertextuality, J. Joyce’s literary fairy tale is found to be intertextual. His fairy tale is literary, even though it is intertextually related to folk tradition.

1. At the level of transfer, he borrowed persons (a cat, the Devil) and the motif of building a bridge and transposed it into the textual world of his fairy tale, while he concretized it by placing it on the Loire River and in the town of Beaugancy. Joyce parodied the basic type of ATU 1191, introduced elements of humor, a comical conclusion, and thus made a witty variant and varied the ATU 1191 type.

2. He introduced a motif/topical reminiscence into the textual world at the level of copying, whereby the structure of the event remained similar, while at the same time adding a
framed story (an address to his grandson Stephen and a post scriptum). Joyce also stylized the folk ballad/folk tale genre and created a motif/story analogy (building a bridge, sacrifice of the first person to the Devil), but added new features: concretized time, space; the character of Lord Mayor named after a real person and portrayed in a slightly comical manner, but as a resourceful person, which is simultaneously also a criticism.

3. Joyce also summarized the story at the level of description and wrote, «I hope you will like this story. Nonno».

Based on the literary analysis from the point of view of young adult literature, it can be seen that Joyce only wrote two fairy tales for children – the first, The Cat and the Devil, is based on and parodies the model of the folk fairy tale ATU 1191; the second, The Cats of Copenhagen, is even shorter and more modernist. Perhaps Joyce found the inspiration for the fairy tale The Cat and the Devil in Irish Limerick².

It is a well-known fact in the literary science dealing with young adult fiction that authors writing for adults occasionally (J. Joyce) or in the initial literary phase, in some case also later (e.g., Tomaž Šalamun, M. Vargas Llosa), write certain texts intended for children and/or young adults. This kind of writing is different from the writing for adults or the canonical works that become part of young adult fiction in the process of literary reception, especially in the picture book form, e.g. F. Prešeren, Povodni mož [The Merman], F. Levstik, Martin Krpan, etc.

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² "There once were two cats of Kilkenny,  
Each thought there was one cat too many,  
So they fought and they fit,  
And they scratched and they bit,  
Till, excepting their nails,  
And the tips of their tails,  
Instead of two cats, there weren't any!"
Conclusion

On the basis of a comparative analysis, Joyce was found to be writing for a dual addressee, the external – his grandson Stephen, and the internal – an adult, because the text contains many intertextual elements that are readily understandable to adult readers from the point of view of literary reception. Interestingly, Joyce redefined the motif of sacrifice, which is fundamentally tragic, for the young and turned it into a comic motif because the literary character of the Devil obtained the «first soul» that crossed the bridge, i.e., a cat which expressively means a man who is clever, because when he decides between water and the Devil he jumps into the Devil’s lap. Illustrator Tomislav Torjanec emphasized the dramatic nature of the action in the visual text (the cat in the lap of the Devil and both waging the inhabitants of the town of Beaugency), identified by the devil as «The cats of Beaugency». In the article The Cat and the Devil and Finnegans Wake, Janet E. Lewis (1992) [11] noticed that motifs of cats, devils, bridges and mayors are also common in Joyce’s novel Finnegans Wake.
References


СКАЗКА ДЖЕЙМСА ДЖОЙСА «КОШКА И ДЬЯВОЛ» В КАЧЕСТВЕ КНИГИ С КАРТИНКАМИ ДЛЯ ДЕТЕЙ

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В письме всемирно известного ирландского писателя Джеймса Джойса к своему внуку Стивену были найдены рукописные сказки с подразумеваемым названием «Кошка Божанси», позднее переименованная в «Кошка и Дьявол» и «Копенгагенские кошки» с иллюстрациями Кейси Сорроу. Эти сказки были опубликованы посмертно, например, «Кошка и дьявол» в «Письмах Джеймса Джойса». Международный интерес к детской литературе Джойса высок – обе
короткие модернистские сказки были опубликованы несколько раз в формате книг с картинками и переведены на многие языки. Джеймс Джойс интересен и для Словении. В 1904 г. он и его подруга, а затем жена Нора Барнакл, по пути в Триест, случайно покинули поезд на железнодорожной станции Любляны, где позже был установлен памятник. Кроме того, его литературная сказка «Кошка и дьявол» также тесно связана со словенской народной традицией, в частности со сказкой о Бохине, а также с традицией Фриули-Венеции-Джулии: в Чивидале находится большой каменный Чертов мост через р. Натисон; также есть мосты с таким названием в других местах.

Ключевые слова: Джеймс Джойс, Чертов мост, «Кошка и дьявол», ATU 1191, детская книга с картинками.