


Lives of objects in children's & young adult literature and it-fiction

Ana Peñas-Ruiz 

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain
apenas@flog.uned.es

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Abstract


In this work, a corpus of lives of objects in recent Children's & Young adult literature is compared with *it-fiction*, a narrative subgenre from the 18th and 19th centuries initially intended for adults, but which experienced a displacement of its audience. Based on the analysis of their thematic and formal connections, the philosophical, aesthetic and cultural links between these productions are evidenced, especially in terms of symptoms and narratives of the bond that societies establish with the objects that surround and configure them. As we will see, the unique characters of these works transcend their materiality and question readers about the link between human beings and artifacts, about globalization and about the consequences of capitalism in post-industrial societies. Finally, the research carried out allows us to compare two literary systems and the convergence between their reading audiences, a fact of interest in the field of the history of reading and reading practices.

Keywords: Children's & young adult literature; literary criticism; literary genres; literary character; content analysis; reader response.

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Vidas de objetos en la literatura infantojuvenil y la *it-fiction*

Ana Peñas-Ruiz 

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain
apenas@flog.uned.es

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Resumen

En este trabajo se compara un corpus de vidas de objetos en la literatura infantojuvenil reciente con la *it-fiction*, un subgénero narrativo de los siglos XVIII y XIX destinado inicialmente a adultos, pero que experimentó un desplazamiento de sus destinatarios. A la luz de las conexiones temáticas y formales entre estas producciones modernas y contemporáneas se concluyen sus vínculos filosóficos, estéticos y culturales, especialmente en cuanto síntomas y relatos de la relación que establecen las sociedades con los objetos que las rodean y configuran. Como se comprobará, los singulares protagonistas de estas narraciones trascienden su materialidad e interpelan a los lectores sobre la relación del ser humano con los artefactos, sobre la globalización y sobre las consecuencias del capitalismo en las sociedades postindustriales. Por último, la investigación efectuada permite comparar dos sistemas literarios y la convergencia entre sus públicos lectores, hecho de interés en el campo de la historia de la lectura y de las prácticas lectoras.

Palabras clave: Literatura infantil y juvenil; crítica literaria; géneros literarios; personajes literarios; análisis de contenido; respuesta lectora.

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Introduction¹

Talking animals and animated objects appear in universal literature of all times, in works for all audiences and in all kinds of genres, although with a greater presence in some such as the fable or the marvellous tale. There are countless examples provided by literary history in the form of prosopopoeia, from clouds that give advice to desperate parents to roosters that talk to cobblers, mirrors that question evil queens or dogs that talk about their vital vicissitudes at the doors of a hospital in Valladolid. In the field of children's and young adult literature (hereinafter, CYAL), as Nikolajeva and Scott argue, fictions featuring objects are more unique than talking animal stories (2006), with animation and anthropomorphisation being a human cognitive and mental habit. It is a practice rooted in religious experience and connected to cognitive bias towards social information (Vermeule, 2010).

Within the object narrative, "object lives" are a specific literary manifestation: narratives starring animated objects whose life story is the central theme of the story and which have a circular structure, as the object in question moves (often against its will), travelling through different scenarios. This paper analyses a corpus of literary works published since the second half of the 20th century for children and young people that respond to this narrative approach, which is novel only in appearance. As we will see, this is a fictional device present in 18th and 19th century literature, specifically in it-fiction, a literary current aimed at adult readers, but with similar assumptions in terms of the characterisation and typology of the non-human main character (object, animal, vegetable or mineral), the bio/autobiographical approach, as well as the circular or itinerant structure (Peñas-Ruiz, 2017; Brown, 2015; Peñas-Ruiz, 2012; Blackwell, 2007)².

The contemporary works analysed are contrasted with it-fiction, which allows us to reflect on the possible connections between these ancient and modern narrative fictions, comparing the concomitances and divergences between the two literary systems and their readerships, as well as their aesthetic, literary and sociological interest. This approach can broaden the much-needed knowledge of the history of reading and reading practices, since, according to Parada, "despite the vast literature on psychology, phenomenology, sociology and the texts themselves, reading remains a mystery" (2019, p. 200). It is also of interest in the field of the representation of characters and their development in children's narrative, a field that has been insufficiently explored (Nicolopoulou, 2008) despite recent contributions such as the distinction between ontology and epistemology of the character as presented by Nikolajeva (2014).

In this context, the aim of this study is twofold: on the one hand, to observe the values conveyed by this type of object narratives in their respective socio-historical and cultural frameworks; on the other, to investigate the shift in the reading profile addressed by the writers who cultivated it-fiction, from an initial adult audience to an audience of children and young people. Secondly, given their thematic and structural coincidences, we will explore the possible literary link - whether by way of influence, intertextuality, shared imaginary or "pollen of ideas" (Villanueva, 1991) - between the object lives of contemporary CYAL and the narrative tradition of it-fiction developed during the 18th and 19th centuries, originally conceived for adult readers. In both cases we find stories built around the same theme and a common narrative scheme: the life adventures of an object that is the main character of the story and the circular or itinerant disposition that results from the journey of this singular character.

Based on this definition on the horizon, we searched for current stories that present such a thematic and structural combination, for which we resorted to collections of children's books such as those offered by the National Library of Spain and the Miguel de Cervantes

Virtual Library; search engines for children's and young adult books such as Canal Lector and editorial catalogues. We then have elected those works that constitute the variant known as "object lives", embedded in a narrative scheme of circulation³. As for the selection criteria applied, from the point of view of the character, we approached works starring objects and left aside other types of characters present in it-fiction such as natural phenomena (because they are not very representative) and animals (because of their enormous popularity and performance in the field of CYAL, which generates a wide range of casuistry, from animal stories to fables, which cannot be included in this work). In the light of story and narrative voice, we examined works about the life of an object, regardless of the discursive choice (homodiegesis or heterodiegesis), although the norm in it-fiction is auto-diegesis, i.e., the object tells its own story. In terms of narrative structure, works with a circular or itinerant configuration were chosen: the object travels to different places and passes through different hands and/or owners. From the point of view of literary history, the selected texts are confined to written CYAL and European literary traditions in order to continue the path traced by the canonical works of it-fiction. Other literatures, folklore and stories of oral folk literature (also rich in animal characters and objects, often magical) are left to one side, as this would lead to other anthropological-literary territories. Finally, as far as the reception of these texts is concerned, those initially aimed at children and adolescents have been selected, in contrast to it-fiction, which was initially aimed at adults.

The selected corpus analysed below, resulting from the application of these criteria, includes one picture story and five picture books (three of which are wordless) published between 1975 and 2017:

- *Das kleine Lumpenkasperle (The Little Rag Puppet)* (Ende, 1975),
- *La maquina de coser* (Capdevila, 1982),
- *Clown* (Blake, 1995),
- *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Müller, 1992),
- *Otto. The autobiography of a Teddy Bear* (Ungerer, 1999) y
- *Ado-ka-frè* (Victor, 2003).

The methodology applied corresponds to qualitative and documentary research based on a cultural, historical and narratological approach. The procedure consisted of an analytical and comparative reading of this current corpus that is contrasted with it-fiction, as well as its interpretation based on the theoretical axes that support the dialogue that is intended to be established between it-fiction and CYAL. Combining literary history with cultural history, the objects presented in each picture book analysed (once the coexistence of the two elements inherent to it-fiction has been verified): autobiography or biography of an object and itinerant structure), have been analysed through the concepts of materiality, commodification, ecology and globalisation.

Object Lives in Literary History: From Andersen to it-fiction

Stories for children and young people in which objects come to life and become protagonists are not unique to today's youth literature, as Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) point out, this tradition dates back to Andersen, an important feature of the Danish author's literary production (Nobile, 2007). However, before Andersen's birth, and independently of the fable, the adult narrative

known today as it-fiction had spread throughout Europe, which, whether in novels, short stories or serialised stories in the press, had non-human beings as its protagonists⁴.

It-fiction narratives have a new form of fiction with everyday objects and animals that are either the narrative mechanism around which the stories of other characters revolve, or they are the main characters of the story and tell their own stories in the form of autobiography, adventures, memoirs, etc. In its most common form, the character tells its adventures and shares its reflections as it travels and passes through different places and people by being sold, given, exchanged or discarded; in this process, it experiences different states and passes through different social strata, thus coming into contact with many other characters (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012).

As for the satirical and critical component of these fictions, it is no coincidence that the narrators of these atypical lives were coins or objects, i.e., commodities circulating within the commercial system. Thanks to the particular point of view of these characters, this artifice made it possible for writers to dissect modern society and economy through an exercise in perspectivism and contrast. As Blackwell argues, these were characters endowed with human attributes in contrast, often, to humans who had been reified:

It-narratives typically endow objects with characteristics usually reserved for people, including a biography, self-consciousness, complex emotions, and relationships with others, while also presenting us with humans who have been reduced to the status of things (2004, p. 52).

A certain provocative component was added to this satire and criticism of customs was added, as in its early days it-fiction gave readers access to private scenes through the eyes of these peculiar observers. In this sense, they are linked to that genealogy of snooping and pilgrim characters (the rogue, the prostitute, the servant) typical of one of the oldest models of novels, the *costumbrista* adventure novel, which begins with *The Golden Ass* (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012).

The success of it-fiction in nineteenth-century Spain is attested to by the many narratives of objects that proliferated in the press, still aimed at an adult audience, such as *Biografía de un duro* (1843), *Historia de un álbum* (1847) and *Biografía de una novela contemporánea* (1846) (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012). At the same time, however, in didactic magazines aimed specifically at women, these object lives explicitly appealed to the child reader, as in Joaquina Balmaseda's *Memorias de una muñeca* (1863), with an obvious moral lesson for girls: "Leed, pues, con cuidado sus memorias, niñas queridas, y aprovechad sus oportunas advertencias" (p. 158). The same happens with *Aventuras de una silla contadas por ella misma* (1868) by José Sánchez Biedma, translator or adaptor of this "English arrangement", where the autobiography of the chair is the excuse to address the opposition between tradition and progress.

Most of these short stories are adapted from French and English texts, although it is not always easy to identify the original. What is interesting is to appreciate that the Spanish authors were familiar with it-fiction and the storytelling tradition of Andersen and the Grimms, influenced by the folk tale. For example, Balmaseda published in the same magazine other texts such as *Cendrillon* or *La manirrota de Grimm*, and his *Memorias de una muñeca* seems to be based on *Mémoires d'une poupée* by Louise d'Aulnay (Julie Gouraud), a popular author who wrote other works along these lines. The adventures of the chair may similarly be inspired by the anonymous *The transformation of a beech tree*, or the History of a favourite black chair related by itself, published by John Harris in 1828, but they are also reminiscent of Andersen's *The Fir Tree*. Harris was precisely a prominent publisher of children's and young adult literature who succeeded the Newbery family and who, together with his son and from his bookshop The Original Juvenile Library, promoted in the first decades of the 1800s collections of chapbooks,

novels, poems, charades, nursery rhymes, etc.; among them, he recovered many titles of juvenile it-fiction published years earlier, such as *Memoirs of a Peg-top*; *The perambulations of a mouse* or *The adventures of a pincushion*.

In short, it-fiction, with its set of formal, thematic and stylistic features, is a combination of literary heritage and innovation, of traditional and original schemes, whose ideal reader was transformed according to the needs of the literary market: from the adult public of the first decades and narratives to the children's public that it began to address around 1780-1790, in parallel to the emergence of didactic literature for children and young adults.

The leap from it-fiction to children's and young adult literature

From the first research on it-fiction it was clear that this narrative current underwent a clear change of reader: from the adult for whom the first works were written in the first half of the 18th century, whose content was markedly satirical and philosophical, to the children and young adults for whom the later works, more markedly didactic-moral, were composed in the last decades of the century. But how did this displacement come about?

In *The Secret Life of Things*, the first monograph dedicated to it-fiction, several authors connect the two worlds, albeit superficially. Liz Bellamy mentions that this stream began to enter the realm of literature aimed at young readers from 1780 onwards, stripped of its satire and focused on entertaining and educating children intellectually and morally (Blackwell, 2007, pp. 131-132). Blackwell notes that by 1790 the writers of these narratives, already aimed at a children's audience, appeal to parents and claim to have appropriated the it-fiction schema to convey moral instruction and "home truths" to children (2007, p. 210); although he gives a couple of examples, he also does not delve into the transition from it-fiction to CYAL, which Lynn Festa, for her part, summarises loosely as the evolution from a world of disenchanting satire to the magical territory of childhood: "the world of satiric disenchantment described in earlier object narratives is transformed into the enchanted province of childhood" (Blackwell, 2007, p. 309).

Leah Price or Scott Nowka also refer to the change of reader without going into the process in depth. Price's (2013) study does not focus on it-fiction in particular, but devotes a chapter to it when addressing the phenomenon of narratives starring books, in which he mentions that in the late 18th century "instead of addressing middle-class adults, it-narratives now went down-market to those too young, or too poor, to choose the books they owned" (p. 124), i.e., it became children's and popular, and that after 1800 it spread to all audiences: "the genre became G-rated" (2013, pp. 124). Nowka reduces it to a mere shift in focus from the moral to the didactic: "Unlike nineteenth-century and later children's literature that would employ anthropomorphism to bring everyday objects to life for didactic purposes, eighteenth-century object narratives allowed readers access to immoral and at times obscene goings-on hidden from public view" (2015, p. 848). For his part, Moja (2016) links it-to and CYAL without delving into the transition from one to the other.

Thus, on the one hand, it-fiction theorists have barely explored the history of the CYAL, with few exceptions, such as Lynn Festa (Blackwell, 2007), while, on the other hand, CYAL specialists seem to be unaware of the existence of it-fiction when they allude to object narrative; At most, they point to Andersen as the pioneer of this technique, ignoring the fact that it-fiction may well have inspired him (along with other influences, such as the magical objects of fairy tales⁵ or the talking animals of Western fabulistics), given its popularity in England and its spread between the 18th and 19th centuries throughout various European countries.

There is thus a gap in the literature on this episode of modern cultural and literary history. The issue is well worth an independent study that delves into the shifts that took place between the adult literary system and the children's literary system at that precise historical moment when CYAL was defining and constructing itself as an autonomous field. To maintain that the transformation that these works underwent was limited to replacing the immoral and sometimes obscene component with the didactic component, as has been claimed to date by those who have looked into this phenomenon, is insufficient, since it-fiction was never alien to the didactic and moralising will. It is true that the world reflected in the first works for adults was murkier than that shown in the works intended for children, which were much kinder, but it is no less true that these "children's" stories were not free of cruelty, misery and pain, as the objects themselves show.

The mutation from it-fiction to CYAL was as much ethical as aesthetic and lies in the very ontological consideration of the protagonist of these fictions, the object, which is a metaphor and reflection of social concerns and - in short - a thermometer of the cultural system that gave birth to these works. As the ultimate recipient of these stories changed, writers no longer appealed to adults with narratives of object circulation that mirrored the debates between private morality and institutional and public codes (as a literary device to question the economic system and to portray an alienated and atomised society), but to children and young people whom they wanted to instruct and entertain. Readership displacement was already evident in the titles, which appealed to young readers and showed their exemplary and moralising character⁶.

This transformation affected the conception of the character, as objects were no longer understood as commodities in an economic or political sense, nor were they mechanisms of social satire. In contrast, the first works of it-fiction for children and young people used their protagonists for their purely material dimension, as objects that appealed to the sentimental link between the child and his or her possessions, i.e., mere vessels to channel didacticism. In this sense, today's CYAL works analysed here connect with that line of the original it-fiction for adults concerned with the economic-political dimension of objects that, by circulating, shape societies, although they also implicitly evidence an ethic of care applied to toys, clothes and belongings, in short, of children.

Other lives of objects in contemporary children's literature

The object categories are as diverse as these elements of material culture are infinite, so that the typology of characters and the casuistry offered by these literary narratives in modern and contemporary literary history is endless. However, objects linked to everyday life and to the family and sentimental sphere of the recipients are particularly abundant. In the corpus analysed, toys stand out (a puppet, a clown, a tin soldier and a teddy bear), as well as home and everyday objects: a T-shirt (a basic consumer object) and a sewing machine (a work tool with a high symbolic-emotional charge, very present in homes at the time the book was published). The titles studied coincide in presenting an object whose vital vicissitudes arise from a journey and which, after being rejected by their respective owners, pass through different hands, thus undergoing a series of transformations.

The main objects are objects with a life of their own, with thoughts and feelings, as seen in the stories by Ende, Capdevila and Ungerer, or they are the device that mobilises the plot, without volitional or agentive capacity, in the picture books by Müller and Victor; Blake's case is different, as he expresses the actions and emotions of the clown with great expressivity. Nevertheless, the object clearly lies at the core, as is the lack of context: the names of the places where the stories

take place (always urban settings) are not made explicit, nor are the names of the characters, except in one case, Otto, and in the case of the secondary characters in the works with text (Capdevila, Ende, Ungerer).

In terms of narrative structure, they present - like it-fiction - the itinerant or circular scheme in which the object moves through different spaces and interacts with a series of characters. The plot is made up of a succession of scenes or episodes linked in a sequence of events without time jumps, except in the autobiographical stories of the sewing machine and the bear, where a flashback gives access to the story of its past life. On the other hand, they always go back to the origin of these objects, to the moment of their birth or production; only the stories of the puppet and the little soldier begin *in medias res*, without us knowing their provenance (although in the former there is an allusion to their original manufacture and in the latter the reader can get to know the Andersen's hypotext and, therefore, the genesis of the character). They also coincide in their criticism of the mistreatment of objects, accentuated in Capdevila on a visual level in the malevolent gaze of the little stalker with the sewing machine.

With regard to the themes addressed by these works, at least one common element can be identified which, depending on the work, reaches a greater or lesser degree of social criticism: the use and value that human beings give to objects. The idea of their sentimental value and the criticism of the substitution of the old for the new is present in all the works analysed. In the most frequent scheme, the object is exhibited in a shop window, as merchandise, where it is discovered and bought (often on the whim of a child), then abandoned, broken or forgotten by the passage of time, the whim of its owner or substitution (with the conflict between the old and the new, tradition and progress, in the background). We see this with the sewing machine, the T-shirt and the puppet; only the teddy bear is separated from its first owners against their will.

There is also an emotional contrast between the harshness of the story of abandonment and the positivity of the abandoned character, as the toys are often smiling despite their sad fate, as we see in Ende's little puppet and Blake's clown. It often underlies the idea that these rejected objects only acquire value and meaning when they fulfil the function for which they were born, their "mission in life". This teleological sense has been expressed in some of these fictions and even helped to drive one of them: Quentin Blake (n.d.) acknowledges that, originally, he thought he had started *Clown* with this idea ("Toys really only come to life when they have children to talk to them and make a fuss of them"), but then he thought he did not need to verbalise it, and so he turned the clown's story into an album without words.

In all these works, the life of the objects undergoes different phases, which depend directly on their owners, the uses they put them to and the attachment or detachment they feel towards them. They are thus a clear reflection of today's post-industrial societies and their economic, social and ethical concerns. They are evidence of consumerism and throwaway culture, as all six objects have been rejected, mistreated, thrown away and become waste at some point in their existence. Phenomena such as waste, acriticism, object capitalism, programmed obsolescence and, in short, the mass production and consumption of goods and services in the so-called "society of waste", marked by the permanent squandering of resources based on the belief that nature is an inexhaustible resource (Escámez-Sánchez, 1998), also appear. Economist Serge Latouche defines it as "addiction à la croissance": "Notre société a lié son destin à une organisation fondée sur l'accumulation illimitée. Que notre seul destin est de produire et de consommer toujours plus" (2014, p. 13).

One aspect of this continued wastefulness is the inequalities between developed and impoverished countries. In Müller's and Victor's works, the social critique becomes sharper

and this unequal clash takes shape, showing the inconsistency generated by exacerbated consumerism: in both cases, the objects despised by the developed countries, after arriving in Africa (where they are given a new life and acquire a new use; therefore, a new meaning), are subsequently recovered by the developed countries (personified in the figure of the tourist whose money can do anything) to end up in their place of origin. The readings that can be derived from these works are diverse, as are their ethical implications: on an economic level, these works allow us to reflect on the buying and selling and exchange of goods; on an ecological level, they invite us to think about the impact and environmental footprint that the circulation of objects causes, as nature is incapable of taking up and recycling the waste that mankind generates; on an emotional level, they activate the close bond that can be established between human beings and the objects they live with (a connection that is accentuated in childhood, where attachment to objects acts on a deeper level). In Victor's works, there is also an original element, because at a certain point it shows that consumerism is not exclusive to developed societies. We see it clearly in those parallel scenes in which a Western and an African child replicate the same attitudes and behaviours to end up rejecting the T-shirt equally.

In Müller's and Victor's books, the two titles with the richest readings and the most critical scope, there is an important economic component: the objects (the toys, the T-shirt) are turned into commodities forcibly taken away from African children on a whim and for the recreation of developed societies. In both cases there is also a round trip: from the developed country where the object has been manufactured to the developing country that "picks it up" and gives it new uses when the former discards it, until the return of the object to its country of origin, transformed by virtue of this cycle. Thus, the unwanted objects of the developed world, their "waste", end up in the impoverished world, which gives them new life through different uses, but the object's existence does not end there: its cycle continues when foreign tourists buy the same object they had previously thrown away.

The implicit critique is clear in the contrast between the developed country as the universal generator of waste and the impoverished country as the passive recipient of that waste, although Sylvain Victor's album pushes a deeper sociological exploration by showing that these supposedly opposing worlds act in the same way: the story of the T-shirt is repeated almost identically in the case of the white child and the black child; only the context and the uses they both give to the garment change, but in both cases it ends up being discarded and recycled. Victor's work is also original because it is not based on a pre-existing story, because of its aesthetic proposal and its richness of nuances. The title itself is striking and sets itself apart from the rest of the works in the selected corpus by not being constructed with the name of the main object, but with a highly symbolic concept, *ado-ka-frè*, a word used in the Ivorian markets to refer to second-hand clothes and which means "try to see" in the Bambara language, as the opening quotation reveals: "Ado-ka-frè veut dire 'essaie-voir' en bambara. C'est le nom donné à la fripe vendue sur les marchés de Côte d'Ivoire. Voici son histoire" (Victor, 2017, s. p.). Thus, the real subject of this story is not the life of the T-shirt, but the second life of the clothes and, from this, the reflection on textile production and globalisation.

In this global economy and exchange in which objects participate, reflection on how we produce them and how we relate to them is imposed by the need to understand certain basic mechanisms of our material culture. Objects are presented as images and symbols, as ways of culturally representing experiences of production, consumption and exchange. In this sense, the works of the selected corpus connect with that narrative of objects that makes up it-fiction, with a similar approach (type of protagonist character and circular or itinerant narrative scheme), although with different aesthetic proposals. However, there is no intertextual trace of

this narrative tradition in these contemporary works, except in the case of Müller's wordless album, whose link to *The Tin Soldier* is obvious. However, the spirit of it-fiction does appear in the storytelling of Hans Christian Andersen, the modern father of the object narrative and Walt Disney's direct precedent in the use of animated objects.

Although objects with a voice and a life of their own are part of the collective imagination, it is worth remembering that prior to it-fiction it is difficult to find examples of talking objects in stories with a *costumbrista* chronotope. There are cases of human beings transmuted into animals, such as Apuleius' Lucius, as well as animals that act as transcripts of human beings, as in the case of the traditional fable, but not of objects that speak and act as such. This seems to be a true innovation of it-fiction, a literature that Andersen could have known and incorporated in his stories, and these, in turn, could have contributed to popularising this tradition of animated objects, expanding it later through different spaces of narrative, literary and audiovisual fiction for children.

In any case, the concomitances between it-fiction and CYAL analysed here show that in the territories of the misnamed "general literature" and CYAL there are more continuities and displacements than ruptures. On the one hand, we have the evolution of it-fiction between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which went from being aimed at an adult audience to focusing on a juvenile readership, precisely at a time when a new market was being built with this specific group to which publishers and booksellers as well as writers were directing their gaze and interest (García-Padrino, 2003); On the other hand, we can appreciate in contemporary works of juvenile fiction an apparently childish scheme such as that of an object that narrates its life, a scheme that turns out to be a fictional device that originally arose in fiction for adults.

As Zohar Shavit (2009) argues, although the systems of adult and children's and young adult literature were originally watertight and completely opposed categories in terms of audience (adults versus children or adolescents) and status (canonical versus non-canonical texts), in the poetics of modern CYAL their relations are dynamic, as the systems are heterogeneous and their boundaries are blurred. Thus, in its application to CYAL, we could consider modern and contemporary it-fiction as ambivalent within the literary system. On the one hand, it-fiction can be read by different audiences: "these texts belong simultaneously to more than one system and consequently are read differently (though concurrently), by at least two groups of readers" (Shavit, 2009, p. 66). On the other hand, ambivalent texts tend to manipulate models that have already been rejected by the adult system, but have not yet been embraced by the child system; once it gains access to the child system, it expands through imitations, often of inferior quality. The narrative scheme of it-fiction entered children's when adult literature began to exhaust the initial model, which did not prevent it from continuing to be productive in the 19th and 20th centuries (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012).

Conclusions

This analysis is a contribution to the study of modern and contemporary works for children and young people that will have to be completed with a larger corpus of works in order to deepen the connections between it-fiction and CYAL⁷.

Although there does not seem to be a direct influence of it-fiction in the contemporary object lives analysed, it is possible to argue that the current CYAL drinks indirectly from it through the collective imaginary common to the stories that, like *The Tin Soldier*, received that cultural heritage of animated objects present in different literary traditions.

This study allows us to expand the current state of knowledge about contemporary CYAL by comparing it with it-fiction, whose historical trajectory was usually explained in terms of its birth in adult literature and death in CYAL, i.e., without considering that the basic assumptions that shaped it (talking animals and objects and the motif of travel or circulation as a framework for narration) survive in current works and that, ultimately, they are linked to the oldest roots of narration as a human activity. Animated objects belong to a sphere of the collective imagination linked to magical thinking, with the projections of human beings onto the elements of nature, so that these ancient and modern stories are a kind of “anthropological mirror” through which societies and their cultures are represented. Thus, the comparative analysis between literary narratives ascribed to it-fiction and certain CYAL works has allowed us to address how the same narrative scheme (the lives of objects) can address different reader profiles equally; how, within it-fiction itself, this reader displacement took place and how, ultimately, the categories with which we classify reading are nothing more than an artifice that readers can sometimes circumvent, rescuing “el libro de la categoría a la que ha sido condenado” (Manguel, 2023, p. 373). 373).

As we have seen, these ancient and modern object lives, with their thematic and structural links and their aesthetic-cultural concomitances, generate narratives about the relationship that societies establish with the objects that surround and shape them. In this sense, the stories analysed transcend the vital anecdote of the object, and can be interpreted as discourses and symptoms of the social concerns that human beings have shown for material culture at different moments in history. From the Enlightenment concerns about the exchange of goods and objects (and subjects, in the case of slavery), to the throwaway culture and the exacerbated consumerism of today’s society, these singular characters transcend their materiality and, as the corpus analysed reveals, challenge readers about man’s relationship with artefacts, globalisation and the consequences of capitalism in post-industrial societies.

Notes

¹ A first version of this research was presented in the Master's Degree in Books and Literature for Children and Young Adults (class of 2018/2019) at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the form of a Master’s Final Project, under the supervision of PhD. Ana María Díaz-Plaja Taboada. These pages are in her loving memory. I thank Ana Luisa Baquero Escudero and Ana Garralón for their reading and comments on the text, as well as Ellen Duthie, Mar Benegas, Pep Bruno and Carlos Lapeña Morón for their suggestions of works for the corpus.

² Following the first studies of it-fiction in Spanish literature (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012; 2017), Cuvardic-García (2019; 2020) and, more recently, Nogueroles-Jiménez (2023) have addressed this issue.

³ Therefore, works with an itinerant structure have been left out of the corpus, but which do not focus on narrating the life of the object, although this is the axis or motor of the story (such as *La maleta*, Babulinka Books, 2018; *Cepillo*, Kalandraka, 2016; *El globito rojo*, Lumen, 1998...), as well as works with objects as main characters, but which do not have the life of the object or an itinerant structure as their axis (*El lápiz fantástico*, SM, 1996; *Limoncito*, Océano, 2010; *Pequeño Botón*, Narval, 2019, among many others).

⁴ Also called it-narrative or object narrative, it dates back to the 18th century (with surviving elements in the 19th century), although its origin, from the point of view of the autobiographical voice and the spy character, goes back to Greco-Latin literature and the Lucianic tale (Peñas-Ruiz, 2012).

⁵ In any case, in fairy tales the object is not a protagonist character: it is either a tool at the service of the character, as a magical object (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 67), or a background element (Ferreira-Boo, 2017).

⁶ By way of example, two novels dating from around 1780: *The Adventures of a Pincushion. Designed chiefly for the use of young ladies*, by Mary Ann Kilner or the anonymous *The Adventures of a Whipping-Top. Illustrated with Stories of many Bad Boys, who themselves deserve Whipping, and of some Good Boys, who deserve Plum-Cakes. Written by Itself*.

⁷ Among other possibilities, given that the scheme is not exhausted in narrative, it would be of interest to look at the lives of objects articulated in poetry and theatre. Think of works such as *Trastario*, by Pedro Mañas and *Blondinette*, by Oswaldo Díaz.

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