



Janusz Christa's *Kajko and Kokosz* and the 'Asterix Controversy' in the Lens of Gérard Genette's Transtextuality

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This paper revisits the long-standing 'Asterix controversy' in Poland surrounding Janusz Christa's *Kajko and Kokosz*, often accused of plagiarizing René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's *Asterix*. Using Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality, the study considers plagiarism as one among several possible intertextual relationships and tests the applicability of Genette's taxonomy to comics. Through comparative analysis of two cases – the gagged troubadour and the Pain-Powered Leap motif – the article demonstrates that although Christa's panels bear clear similarities to specific *Asterix* scenes, they involve substantial processes of transstylization, transformation, and imitation rather than plagiarism in Genettian terms. Methodologically, the paper employs an experimental approach inspired by experimental archaeology: by re-creating selected *Asterix* panels, it attempts to measure the degree of proximity between the original and Christa's reworkings. This highlights both the usefulness of Genette's taxonomy in analyzing comics and the potential of this method, while noting that it still requires further verification. The study concludes that, while Christa reworks shared visual and narrative tropes found in *Asterix*, he infuses them with his own style so that his work can be seen as part of a broader transtextual dialogue with global popular culture, demonstrating the circulation of cultural texts across political and linguistic borders.



Introduction

Janusz Christa (1934–2008), the Polish cartoonist and writer, is one of the most revered and iconic figures in the history of Polish comics. This reputation persists despite the ongoing debate, known in Poland as the ‘*Asterix* controversy’, regarding the influence of Uderzo’s and Goscinny’s work on Christa’s years-long series *Kajko and Kokosz* ([‘kaj.kɔ] and [‘kɔ.kɔʂ]).¹ The similarities between *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* are hard to ignore, and some of the most striking parallels have been variously labelled by Polish comic fans and critics as plagiarism, quotation, or recycled material. In this article, I examine *Kajko and Kokosz* through Gérard Genette’s model of transtextuality, reframing plagiarism as one of several possible relationships between texts and testing the model’s applicability to comics. A comprehensive exploration of the ‘*Asterix* controversy’ is beyond the scope of this paper; here, I limit my analysis to two mirror samples from both series. Yet, even in this limited sample, we can reconsider Christa’s work, which some have called an imitation of *Asterix* (Lefèvre 2014) or a mere ‘knockoff (sic) of *Asterix*’ (Stańczyk 2022: ‘Conclusion’).

Gérard Genette (1997) was skeptical about the possibility of applying his concepts to arts other than literature (384) and, to my knowledge, did not apply his transtextual model to the ninth muse. It is therefore all the more interesting to test the applicability of his theory to comics. It should be stressed that, to date, different aspects of Genette’s work have been applied to comics. The concept of the paratext, for example, has been extensively used by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (2015), and, more recently, by various contributors to *The Cambridge Companion to Comics*, edited by Maaheen Ahmed (2023). Genette’s typology of narrative techniques forms the foundation of studies by Kai Mikkonen (2017) and Thierry Groensteen (2007, 2013). The latter engages critically with Genette’s work, using it as the basis for determining “the unique ontological foundation of comics” (Groensteen 2007: 17). The concept of the architext is employed, for instance, by Nicolas Labarre (2023) to explore problems of genre in transmedial contexts. Closer to this paper’s focus, Genette’s model of transtextuality serves Anita Nell Bech Albetsen (2019) to examine character figures across different media. My approach differs from those mentioned above in that it closely follows Genette’s criteria and nomenclature within the concept of transtextuality, focusing on relations within the same medium and on the level of individual panels or sequences thereof,

¹ In this paper, I follow Ewa Stańczyk’s practice of retaining original names and titles, providing anglicized versions in brackets. One reason for this is the absence of widely available official English translations of Christa’s series. To date, two albums of *Kajko and Kokosz* have been rendered into English by Michael Kandel: *Szkoła latania* (‘The Flying School’) (Christa 1988) and *Wielki turniej* (‘The Big Tournament’). English versions of names and titles are taken from Kandel’s translations and a small number of English-language online sources, including the Wikipedia entry, unless specified otherwise.

rather than on broader relationships across entire pages, individual albums, or their paratextual packaging.

While other approaches, such as Michael Riffaterre's or Harold Bloom's, could also be considered in the context of the inter-comic relationships, they seem less suited to the goals of this article. Riffaterre's concept of the necessity of the reader's presupposed knowledge of 'the sociolect' (Allen 2011: 115) may be used in a more reader-oriented analysis of Polish readers' reactions to the alleged plagiarism. In the pre-1989 Poland (and for a much later period), readers were less likely to be able to decode the comics' 'hypograms' – the pre-existent 'product of past semiotic and literary practice' (Culler, qtd. in Allen 2007: 120), such as the Pain-Powered Leap or Dreadful Musician tropes ('Pain-Powered Leap', 'Dreadful Musician'), and thus more likely to perceive them not as 'a variant of the text's matrix' (Culler, qtd. in Allen 2007: 120) but as a singular, original invention. This might have been the cause of the 'controversy' once the similarities with *Asterix* were noticed. It is my contention that, while this approach offers potentially useful frameworks, a more text-oriented analysis should first be undertaken to establish the specific character of the relationships between the comic series. In this context, it is Genette's model, offering a systematic and taxonomical approach and neutral nomenclature, that seems particularly useful.

Theoretical Framework: Genette's Transtextuality and Comics

Being a hybrid medium, comics are, as Charles Hatfield (2005: 36) notes, 'always characterized by a plurality of messages [and] are heterogeneous in form, involving the co-presence and interaction of various codes'. As Daniel Pinti (2020) has shown, this inherent characteristic of comics can be fruitfully explored through the application of Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony, which enable the identification of underlying voices and perspectives coexisting within the text. As has been already mentioned, rather than examining the interaction of multiple perspectives and worldviews in Christa's series, in this paper I focus on formal aspects of selected *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* panels using Genette's theory of transtextuality. Considering that, despite an otherwise rigorous framework, plagiarism in Genette's work remains an underdiscussed category, my approach uses an additional method with the aim of double-checking the conclusions based on the transtextual analysis. This method is inspired by experimental archeology which, by replicating and imitating artefacts, 'seeks to test, evaluate, and explicate method, technique, assumptions, hypotheses, and theories at any and all levels of archeological research' (Ingersoll and Macdonald 1977: xii). I adopt this idea by presenting my own renderings of *Asterix* panels or characters, executed with the intention of producing the closest possible versions of

the original, short of literal replication. The purpose of the ‘test panels’ is twofold: to verify the degree of proximity between the source panel and the panel alleged to be in a plagiaristic relationship with it by comparing them with Christa’s work, and to confront them with the analysis according to Genette’s model of transtextuality.

In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997), within transtextuality, Genette distinguishes metatext, paratext, architext, intertextuality, and hypertext, the last two being central here. Intertextuality refers to the explicit presence of one text in another, via quotation, allusion, or plagiarism; plagiarism is a ‘literal’ but ‘undeclared’ borrowing (Genette 1997: 2). Hypertextuality involves transformation of a hypotext (e.g. *The Odyssey*) by a hypertext (e.g. Joyce’s *Ulysses*) without direct citation, through playful, satirical, or serious modes of transformation or imitation (Genette 1997: 2). In the case of transformation, the secondary text does not involve direct citing or referencing but is ‘unable to exist’ without the hypotext (Genette 1997: 5). The source text is relatively perceptible but not necessarily explicitly quoted or spoken of (Genette 1997: 5). Simple (direct) transformation may involve merely changing time and setting, while imitation, also a type of transformation (e.g. the *Aeneid*), requires competence that allows the reader to generate ‘an indefinite number of mimetic performances’ – a mastery ‘of that specific quality which one has chosen to imitate’ (Genette 1997: 6). Transformation and imitation are further divided into playful, satirical, and serious, with the transformative processes for each category being parody, travesty, and transposition respectively, and imitative processes being pastiche, caricature, and forgery. More specific manners in which transformation and imitation may work will be introduced in the analysis of Christa’s panels. It is important to stress that the two frequently overlap depending on different aspects of the text. In this paper, the subject of analysis is the visual aspect and the narrative/thematic aspect, and, as we will see, different types of transformation or imitation can apply to different aspects at the same time.

Genette’s remarks on visual arts concern the flexible use of imitation and transformation; in comics, these can involve stylistic shifts or pastiche ‘in the manner of’ another artist (1997: 386). At first glance, many *Kajko and Kokosz* panels resemble *Asterix* but differ in style, context, and composition, suggesting imitation or transformation rather than plagiarism. Before analyzing them, it is necessary to sketch the historical context in which Christa worked, as this helps in explaining – to some extent – the transtextual relationships between the two series.

‘The Asterix Controversy’ – Historical Context

Janusz Christa was born in the Polish city of Vilnius in 1934 and, after WWII, settled in Sopot – part of the Tricity metropolitan area (together with Gdańsk and Gdynia),

Poland's major port and shipbuilding hub – where he lived until his death in 2008. He began working with paired characters in 1958, in *Kajtek-Majtek* ('Kaytek the Knicker') (Obremski 2005: 74). In 1961 Koko joined, and in 1972 the pair were reimagined as their medieval ancestors – Kajko and Kokosz (Janicz 2022a: 158). The *de facto* prequel of *Kajtek and Koko* debuted with *Złote prosię* ('The Golden Piglet'),² 13 years after the first *Asterix* (Florek 2013: 3).

Similarities between *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* were noted in Poland from at least 1974 (Janicz 2022b: 180). *Asterix* was not unknown in socialist Poland: fragments appeared in newspapers from the mid-1960s; two animated films reached Polish TV and cinemas by 1979. Fragments of *Asterix* likewise appeared in print: in 1976, the archeological quarterly *Z otchłani wieków* ('From Depths of Time') published a short article accompanied by a four-page sepia fold-out from *Asterix and the Banquet*, awkwardly fitted with Polish translation (mhk 1976). Sopot, with its port connections, had more exposure to foreign culture, and Christa likely knew at least some *Asterix* episodes before launching his medieval series. It cannot be said that *Asterix* was available to any wider public, but it may be safely assumed that its existence, and at least the general idea of the story and artistic style, was well known in the journalistic circles of which Christa was a part. Thus, one can equally safely assume Christa's awareness, if not familiarity with selected episodes, of *Asterix* prior to the launch of *Kajko and Kokosz* in 1972.

Christa's early medieval setting appeared in *Kajtek i Koko w kosmosie* ('Kajtek and Koko in Space') (first published 1968–72, Christa 2001), in which a planet mimics the Middle Ages. Interviewed, Christa denied direct influence, though he admitted seeing *Asterix* films and liking them. Early criticism ranged from light comparisons to outright accusations of plagiarism, such as the dissident poet Stanisław Barańczak's 1978 remark in *Zapis* that "the original idea and the artistic formula are plagiarised from the famous French 'Asterix'" (129, my translation).³ Christa's editor, Henryk Kurta,⁴ allegedly feared Dargaud's reaction and blocked *Kajko and Kokosz* from the Polish comics magazine *Relax*.⁵ Later criticism often acknowledged similarities but nevertheless did

² Published in 1985 as a standalone volume titled *Złoty Puchar* (*Golden Chalice*).

³ "zarówno wyjściowy pomysł jak i formuła plastyczna są plagiatem ze słynnego francuskiego 'Asterixa'" (Barańczak 1978: 129).

⁴ Henryk Kurta (1935–1993) was a Paris-born Polish-Spanish journalist, editor, translator, and science-fiction writer ('Henryk Kurta' 1986).

⁵ *Relax* (1976–1981) was one of the most significant magazines in twentieth-century Polish comics culture (Chosiński 2012). Established during the political thaw under Edward Gierek and controlled by the Polish United Workers' Party, it reflected a shift in the cultural perception of comics, previously associated with bad taste and Western imperialism (Rusek 75). The magazine featured leading Polish artists, including Grzegorz Rosiński, Tadeusz Baranowski and Jerzy Wróblewski, and ceased publication in 1981 due to political pressure and paper shortages (Rusek 86).

not dismiss Christa's originality (Szyłak 2009; Lorek 2000; Holcman, qtd. in Tomczyk 2024). The word 'plagiarism' is, however, avoided in favor of, for example, 'quoting', as used by Krzysztof Janicz, who extensively discusses the influences in volume 5 of the collected episodes of *Kajko and Kokosz (Golden Collection)* (2022b: 185). When questioned about his inspirations, Christa cited Disney animations, Polish picture books, and duos such as *Wicek and Wacek* or *Laurel and Hardy* (Szyłak 1989). He claimed the medieval shift came from running out of space-themed ideas (Obremski 2005: 79).

As mentioned above, medieval setting appeared for the first time in the *Kajtek and Koko* series. In one of the episodes, the protagonists travel to a planet whose civilization resembles the Middle Ages. The examples, provided by Arkadiusz Florek (2005: 4–5), demonstrate that the idea of the character tandem in a medieval setting is used for the first time in *Kajtek and Koko w kosmosie*, and at least one panel, featuring Koko emptying the pool upon jumping into it, closely mirrors the ones from *Asterix the Gladiator* (first published in 1964, Goscinny and Uderzo 2008) and *Asterix the Chieftain's Shield* (first published in 1967, Goscinny and Uderzo 2014).

Christa appears to have regarded *Kajko and Kokosz* as an analeptic hypertextual continuation of *Kajtek and Koko*, relocated to a medieval setting rather than conceived as a new, independent series. It is not possible to determine if the very idea of the new series was inspired by *Asterix*, but even if it was, it does not discredit the Polish author, as it would not discredit any comic, literary, or cinematic work set in a period in which other works are also set. The traceable similarities, as we will see, are limited to individual panels or sequences of panels. It seems that Christa considered the concept of inspiration in very general terms, and it is possible that he deemed individual 'calques' informal, camouflaged 'shoutouts', understood as informal acknowledgments of other artists' work.

Turning to *Kajko and Kokosz*, the most notable parallels with *Asterix* include a duo of heroes, a chieftain and his wife, a sorcerer, and recurring enemies in a fortified base; Mirmił and Lubawa resemble Vitalstatix and Impedimenta, Jaga mirrors Getafix, the Zbójcerze (Bandit Knights) parallel the Romans, and Łamignat (Bonebreaker) partly recalls Obelix alongside Kokosz himself. The dragon Miluś (Sweety) echoes Dogmatix.⁶ These could be read as direct modelling of the *Asterix* universe.

If we assume that Christa directly modelled his character constellation on *Asterix*, then, within Genette's framework, *Kajko and Kokosz* would fall under the category of thematic and heterodiegetic transposition, as the series involves distinct plots and is set in a markedly different geographical context and historical period. However, one

⁶ Pronounced [ˈmil.uɕ], it also suggests an onomastic transformation of the name Milou, Tintin's dog.

might argue that the aforementioned similarities do not unambiguously point to *Asterix* as the hypotext, since these elements are part of the broader narrative repertoire of fairy-tale and fantasy conventions. From this perspective, the similarities might not indicate a direct, linear descent, but rather a common narrative ‘sub-stratum’, i.e. the shared fairy-tale/fantasy tradition. The first hypothesis (direct modelling on *Asterix*) is difficult – if not impossible – to falsify, while the second (shared ancestry) would require a sizeable comparative architextual study of generic motifs in both popular culture and folkloric traditions. What one *can* do, however, is bracket the thematic dimension and begin with the visual analysis of the panels’ component elements.

Case study 1: The Pain-Powered Leap

In this section of the paper, I focus on three panels or sequences of panels that Polish comic critics have identified as some of the most representative examples of outright plagiarism in the popular (i.e. vague) sense of the term. The panels are analyzed using Genette’s terminology on two levels: visual-compositional and semantic-narrative. The examples from *Asterix* and *Kajko and Kokosz* are then confronted with my own renderings of panel elements, in which I aimed to achieve the closest possible similarity to *Asterix*, short of exact copying of individual figures. The purpose of these ‘test versions’ is to produce a version of the *Asterix* image that, in Genette’s taxonomy, would approach plagiarism or quotation and, as such, could be compared with Christa’s version. This, in turn, will hopefully facilitate confirming or excluding *Kajko and Kokosz* as plagiarism (in the analytic sense) and, if confirmed, possibly determine the degree of the transtextual distance and, consequently, the type of hypertextuality. The essential assumption in the analysis is that the *Asterix* equivalents of Christa’s work are indeed the fragments that served as the source – a reasonable, though ultimately unprovable, assumption.

The first example comes from Christa’s first *Kajko and Kokosz* album, *Złoty puchar* (‘The Golden Chalice’) (Christa 2020). In this two-volume narrative, Prince Mirmił is blackmailed by the Knights of the Black Triangle who orchestrate the theft of his favorite chalice.

The parallel with *Asterix* concerns the episode of Mirmił’s aching head and his Pain-Powered Leaps, which bear a striking resemblance to Vitalstatistix’s aching stomach in *Asterix and the Chieftain’s Shield* (Goscinny and Uderzo 2014). The *Asterix* sequence, however, is considerably longer, comprising five ‘leaps’ as opposed to Mirmił’s two. In order to demonstrate the similarity, I have selected two *Asterix* panels (**Figure 1**) that most closely correspond to Christa’s depiction (**Figure 2**). They are followed by my version of *Asterix* second panel (**Figure 3**):

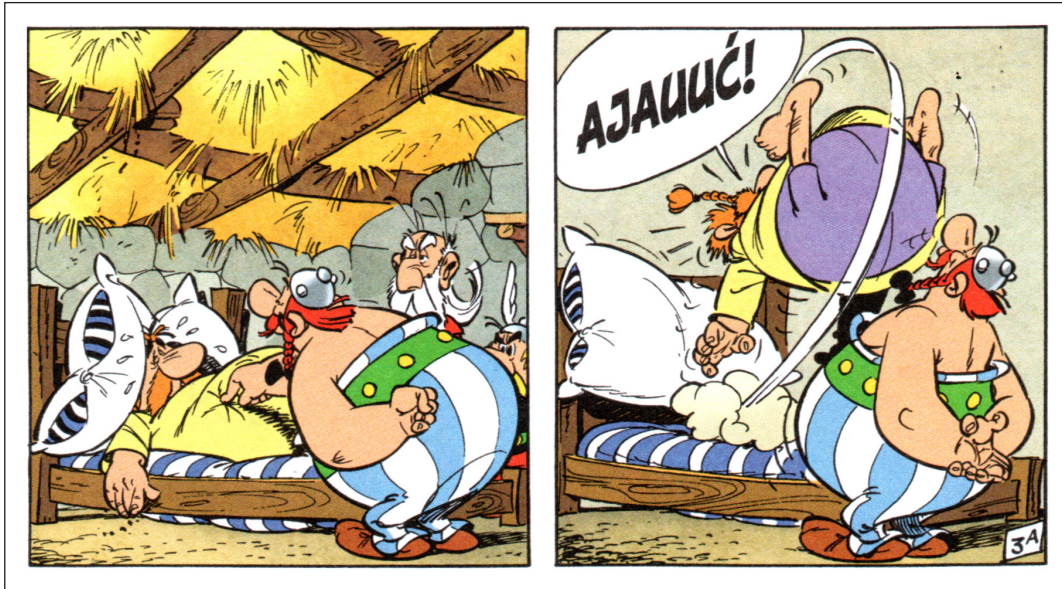


Figure 1: Goscinny R. and Uderzo A. (2011) *Tarcza Arvernów* (*Asterix and the Chieftain's Shield*, first published 1967). Warszawa: Egmont, (7/5-6). © Les Éditions Albert René, Hachette Livre.

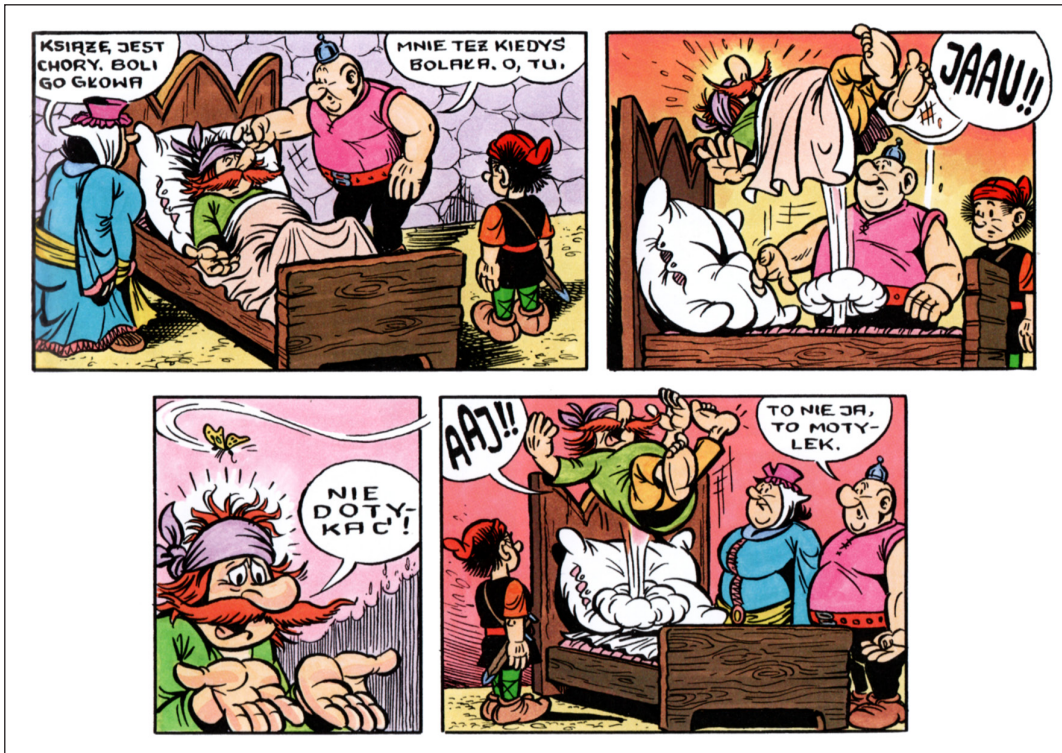


Figure 2: Christa, J (2020) *Złoty puchar*. vol I. Warszawa: Egmont (colored by Tomasz Piorunowski), (9/2). © Fundacja Kreska im. Janusza Christy.

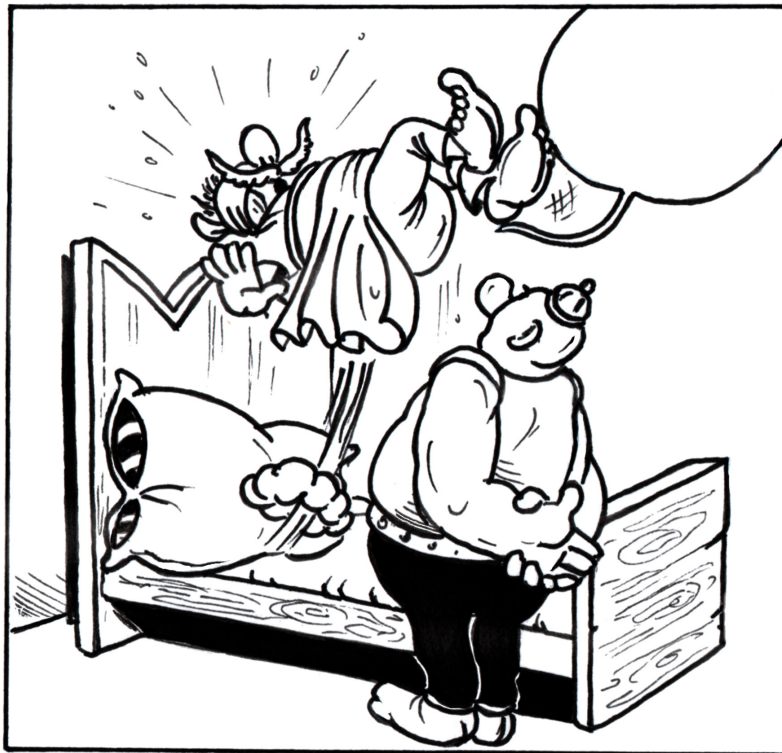


Figure 3: A reworking of panel 6 from *Asterix and the Chieftain's Shield* (Goscinny and Uderzo 2014), p. 11. Created by the author.

Apart from the absence of any literal visual presence of *Asterix* characters, Christa's scene differs in several details: Mirmił is covered with a blanket, the bed has a 'medievalized' headboard, and the interior is presented more schematically. Thus, in Genette's terms, the heterodiegetic shift and transstylization that clearly occur in this case are sufficient to exclude intertextuality (quote or plagiarism). We should also exclude allusion, as Christa's sequence does not rely on the *Asterix* episode to be understood.

Compositionally, both panels also differ from *Asterix* in both perspective and figure positioning. The difference is demonstrated further by my version of the leap panel. I attempted – while not modifying Christa's character design – to approximate the composition of Uderzo's first 'leap panel'. Closer imitation of the original was more problematic than in the troubadour's case, since it required decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of characters and speech balloons in order to maintain the '180-degree' rule in relation to the previous panel. I decided to stay as close to *Asterix* as possible, which meant radically modifying Christa's composition, leaving only Mirmił and Kokosz. This, at the same time, demonstrates the degree to which the Polish artist

modified Uderzo's panel, rearranging the scenes by adding characters with dialogue. This clearly must have involved the mastery of the comic 'language' and a distinctive visual idiom, which fulfills Genette's understanding of imitation quoted above.

In this case, however, the hypertextual relationship concerns neither a single character nor even one panel, but a sequence of panels, extending the relationship to the sequential-narrative plane. It seems that parallels between the two sequences are considerably stronger. Christa's sequence clearly underwent 'concision' (Genette 1997: 260) and transformation of pace, but the *Asterix* post-revelry touch-induced Pain-Powered Leap is already highly concretized. The analogies between the *Asterix* concretization of the leap go further, as it is followed by another one caused by a leaf two pages later. In *Kajko and Kokosz*, the role of the leaf is played by a butterfly, a creature less likely to find its way into a prince's chamber compared to the leaf falling from the tree under which Vitalstatistix is sleeping.

Conceptually, the sequence appears to be literally taken from *The Chieftain's Shield* and could be classified as plagiarism were it not for several details (independent of the stylistic and compositional plane). As has been mentioned, the two types of leaps (touch and leaf) in *Asterix* are compressed into one scene in *Kajko and Kokosz*, which demonstrates a degree of comic storytelling craft that adapts and modifies the hypotext for specific purposes. When one thinks of it, the butterfly in lieu of the leaf introduces a slightly illogical element as, as has been noticed, it appears inside the chamber. A leaf, however, would be even more improbable, so Christa's choice shows a way of finding an equivalent whose lesser probability is nonetheless easily overlooked by the reader.

In Christa's case, one can notice Mirmil's foot and hand, as well as the balloon, violating the panel frame – a device extremely rare in Christa's series. As pointed out by Groensteen, in the case of the conventional, least remarkable page layout, any local deviation may produce a remarkable effect by the sheer disruption of the regularity (2007: 95). This is precisely the case with the treatment of the panel frame in Christa's Pain-Powered Leap scene – the violation of the frame emphasizes the height, the pain, and power of the leap. This device is absent in *Asterix* as none of Vitalstatistix's body parts violates the panel frame. Likewise, speech balloons in the bed-leaps are somewhat unnaturally cut off by the frames, except for the single balloon in the leaf-leap. Thus, this formal augmentation on Christa's part is one of several small elements that, put together, significantly modify the *Asterix* sequence.

On the narrative and thematic levels, Christa's sequence has different functions to its probable hypotext. Vitalstatistix's prolonged ailment is plot-relevant: it is the direct reason for the journey that ultimately leads to the (re)discovery of the titular shield.

Mirmił's hangover, as opposed to the troubadour sequence discussed below, is not a propulsive element in its own right – it rather emphasizes the prince's attachment to his chalice. The hangover is another (minor) element that distinguishes the two sequences. It is naturally linked to the chalice, but it might also be interpreted in cultural terms: the culture of eating associated more with the French culture and the more Slavic inclination to drink, food being *hors d'oeuvre* rather than an end in itself.

Another difference is the transmotivation or transvaluation in Lubawa's attitude. In contrast to the self-confident Impedimenta, Mirmił's wife is more forbearing (she applies the cold compress to his head) and relegated to the silent witness of male conversation. Unlike Vitalstatistix's wife, she does not condemn Mirmił for having drunk too much the previous night. One may be tempted to interpret Lubawa's suppressed position as yet another cultural variance in Christa's alleged transposition of the *Asterix* character constellation, by making Mirmił's household more patriarchal. Yet, in most other scenes involving his wife, it is Lubawa who is the dominant (and domineering) side.⁷ Thus, her background role in the pain-powered leap sequence seems to be dictated by the quantitative transformation (concision).

In the case of the Pain-Powered Leap, what seems to be taking place is imitation on two levels: visual (stylistic and compositional) as well as narrative. Christa's Pain-Powered Leap, apart from being playful in its own right, does not seem to ridicule nor mock the *Asterix* concretization of the leap motif, so in this case we may speak of visual and thematic pastiche – a serious (neutral) imitation as defined by Genette (1997: 28). This time, the mood can be classified as playful and/or humorous, unless an allusion to alcoholism and alcohol consumption by the power apparatus is seen here, which would add a layer of political-satirical mood.

Case study 2: Bard vs Troubadour

The second example comes from *Szranki i konkury* (*Tournaments and Wooings*, my translation) (first published 1973–74, Christa 2020), in which Christa's gagged troubadour (Figure 5) recalls Cacofonix from *Asterix and the Golden Sickle* (first published 1962, Goscinny and Uderzo 1995). The gagged bard appears in panel 9 on page 46 (Figure 4) and serves a purely humorous function, appearing earlier only briefly on page 7. Again, they are followed by my version of Asterix's second panel (Figure 6):

⁷ In subsequent albums, Lubawa is a more matriarchal figure who both supports and controls her husband. Mirmił's attempts to outwit her form serve as the driving force behind entire plots (e.g. *Szranki i konkury*). Mirmił's inclination toward depression and melancholy further deepens this character, making him far more complex than his *Asterix* equivalent.

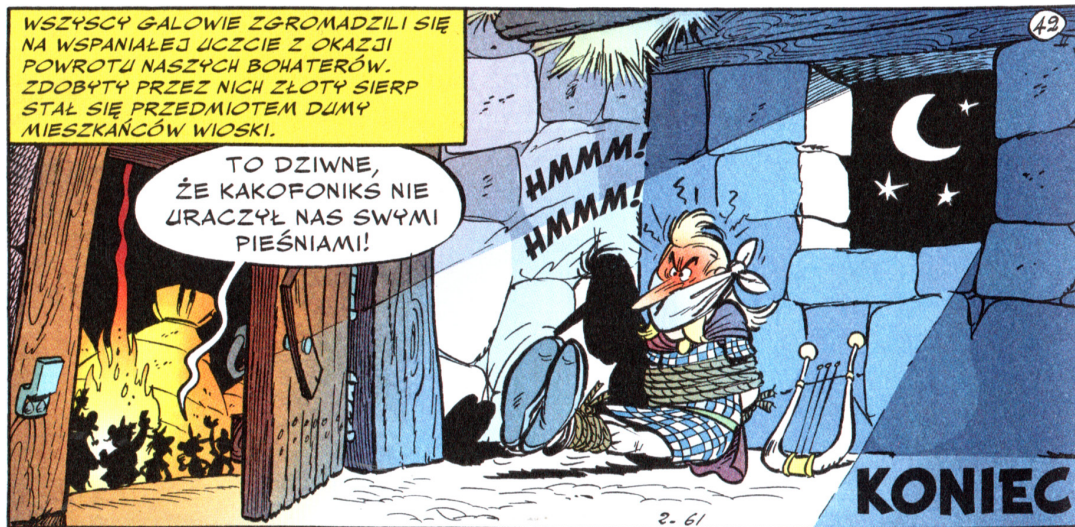


Figure 4: Goscinny R. and Uderzo A. (2011) *Złoty sierp* (*Asterix and the Golden Sickle*, first published 1962). Egmont, (46/9). © Les Éditions Albert René, Hachette Livre.

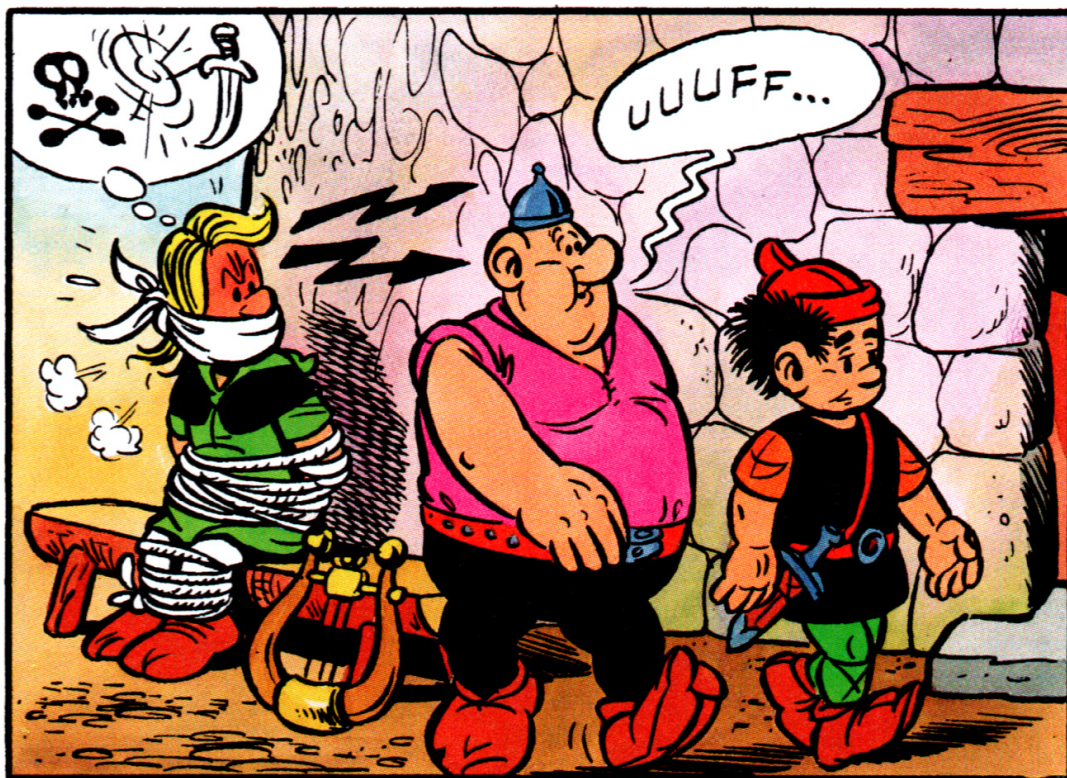


Figure 5: Christa J (2020) *Szranki i konkury*, vol. I. Warszawa: Egmont (colored by Jacek Skrzydlewski), (7/4). © Fundacja Kreska im. Janusza Christy.



Figure 6: A reworking of Cacophonix from panel 9 from *Asterix and the Golden Sickle* (Goscinny and Uderzo 1995), p. 46. Created by the author.

From a visual standpoint, Christa's bard can be excluded from the category of intertextuality (quotation, allusion and plagiarism), as Cacophonix is not faithfully reproduced. What remains is transformation – though not a simple one, since it does not involve a straightforward transposition of Cacophonix into a different, medieval/Slavic setting. Christa's troubadour rather bears clear hallmarks of what Genette terms transstylization. He lacks a mustache and, in keeping with Christa's style, appears 'plumpish' and rounded – a quality especially notable in the rendering of the hands. This feature, amusing as it may sound, I propose to call 'plumpification'.

The troubadour also has characteristic dot eyes instead of Uderzo's usual white eyeballs. Christa also uses a wider variety of emanata: iconic signs in the thought bubble, the gaze-emphasizing lightning bolts, and motion lines. The change from onomatopoeia in favor of the bard's thoughts, even if un verbalized, offers more insight into the character's personality and, at the same time, emphasizes his enforced silence. Another difference is that Cacophonix clearly appears to be moving, while Christa's troubadour remains relatively static. In his case, however, the paucity of physical movement is compensated by his inner emotions conveyed through more profuse

and dynamic iconic emanata. The only element that could arguably be classified as plagiarism occurs on the micro level: the troubadour's lyre is virtually identical to Uderzo's. Yet even in this case it has undergone transstylization, as the troubadour's instrument has also been affected by the 'plumpification'.

Turning to the panel as a larger unit, it is, apart from the obvious heterodiegetic shift (note the terminological shift from the bard to the medievalized 'troubadour'), Christa adds a degree of tension between the characters. Kajko and Kokosz turn their backs to the poet, who is giving them an angry look, which visually emphasizes his enforced silence. This is further reinforced by Kokosz's 'uff' ('phew'), to which the gagged musician is unable to respond. This arrangement introduces dialogism expressed in the comic language par excellence: a blend of verbal and visual communication, including the emanata and onomatopoeia. It should be noted that this degree of verbo-visual interaction between the gagged and tied Cacofonix is rare in *Asterix*. In the majority of cases, once gagged and tied, the bard is removed beyond the perimeter of the final feast, which makes him a stable yet rather ornamental visual punchline.⁸ In Christa's panel, however, one can observe a degree of augmentation in relation to Uderzo's Cacofonix.

As far as my version is concerned, it covers only the figure of the troubadour, as it is he – not the composition of the whole panel – who bears resemblance to Cacofonix from *The Golden Sickle*. The transformation has been deliberately limited to a minimum, except for the direction of the head and the bench, while the physiognomy and body build remain similar, except for the lack of a mustache. The emanata likewise remain copied from Uderzo's panel. Christa-like stylistic intervention is restricted to the eyes, although I decided to retain the cloak, as it does not interfere significantly with the medieval setting.

Compared to the *Kajko and Kokosz* poet, mine is clearly much more similar to Uderzo's and, even though it does not copy Cacofonix wholesale, it would be more likely to be classified as plagiarism in a non-Genettian (e.g. legal) sense. It is still unlikely, however, to be classified as plagiarism in Genette's terms: despite the fact that it is unattributed, it is not a 'literal borrowing' (Genette 1997: 2). The differences – in the eyes, the source of light, the positioning on the bench, and the direction of the head – are enough to mark it as transformed.

This contrast clearly demonstrates the gap between Christa's troubadour and Uderzo's bard, suggesting that the degree of visual transformation that potentially took place between the two is considerable. Perhaps the most important aspect, however, is that Christa does not use Cacofonix to *merely* tell a different story of the original bard.

⁸ Cacofonix does, however, occasionally play an important supporting role, e.g. in *Asterix the Gladiator* (Goscinnny and Uderzo 2008).

Rather, with a considerable difference in style (while still within the same unrealistic comic convention), he creatively repurposes the Dreadful Musician trope, producing a new context, situation, and compositional arrangement for the panel. Considering this, it could be argued that, visually, the troubadour is an example of imitation rather than simple transposition.

Considered on the broader, narrative-sequential level, Christa's troubadour episode bears all the hallmarks of 'semantic transformation' (Genette 1997: 324). His poet comes to the foreground as a propulsive agent who, through his malicious intriguing, generates a conflict between Kajko and Kokosz and Mirmił. The troubadour incites the castellan and his wife against the two heroes and eventually contributes to their being locked in a dungeon. This, in turn, generates another intrigue involving Mirmił and his wife, which provides the reason for the beginning of the quest, as Mirmił 'rents' his warriors out to his brother. Thus, the troubadour is far from playing the purely ornamental role of a recurring gag. The portion of the story devoted to his intrigue takes up two pages (20 panels), so in relation to any scene with the gagged or knocked-out Cacofonix, we can speak of a quantitative transformation, i.e. translongation.

Compared with the innocuous and innocent Cacofonix, Christa's troubadour is clearly a negative figure, juxtaposed with the main characters with whom the reader naturally identifies. The troubadour's malicious and irritable character augments the Dreadful Musician figure and makes him a *real* nuisance. Unlike Cacofonix, he is granted the position to 'put his foot in the narrative door' and channel the flow of the plot in a particular direction. In this sense, Christa foregrounds the Dreadful Musician trope and demonstrates that it can be used for purposes other than purely humorous ones.

The augmentation of the troubadour figure in relation to Cacofonix can also be seen on the psychological and semantic level. Christa's troubadour, unlike the fundamentally kindhearted Cacofonix, is a vindictive figure whose behavior resembles that of a spoiled child. The malice of Christa's troubadour is at the same time an example of transvaluation – or, more precisely, devaluation (Genette 1997: 354). In *Asterix*, it is usually Fulliautomatix (the smith) who brutally silences Cacofonix. In *Tournaments and Wooings*, this dynamic is reversed: it is Kajko and Kokosz who silence the poet-musician, who is himself an unequivocally negative figure. Thus, we can see a semantic amplification of the Cacofonix figure from *The Golden Sickle*.

As has been shown, the transtextuality of the figure can be considered on two parallel planes of transformation. On the micro level (the visual rendering of the troubadour isolated from the rest of the panel), Genette's classification suggests the process of formal imitation – and of a single occurrence at that. On the macro plane (thematic and narrative), however, the troubadour figure may be considered a thematic transposition,

involving a variety of mechanisms that augment and transform the figure, thereby producing a different text. Considered in its entirety, the troubadour, although evidently modelled (but not plagiarized) visually and conceptually on Cacofonix – especially in the panel analyzed above – is at the same time a creative reworking of the Dreadful Musician trope. Thus, regardless of whether its provenance comes via *Asterix* or not, the figure is a transtextual element *par excellence*, illustrating the productive mechanisms involved in transtextuality and, especially, hypertextuality.

It is also tempting to explore the architextual level of the troubadour figure. In this case, both *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* draw from a common comedic trope of the Dreadful Musician, and the imitative character of the troubadour in one specific panel does not change the fact that Christa's take on the trope is considerably different from Goscinny's and Uderzo's. As in the analysis of the hypertextual relationships, architextuality must be considered in a multifaceted manner: the imitative nature of a single panel does not allow us to determine whether the Dreadful Musician trope came to Christa via *Asterix* or not. The only certain observation is that the process here is one of trope transposition – a practice that can hardly be classified as Genettian intertextuality. Applying Genette's more refined classification (1997: 28), the troubadour (both in the analyzed panel and in the whole sequence) can be classified as pastiche. Moving further to the moods of transformation and imitation offered by the French scholar – playful, humorous, serious, polemical, satiric and ironic (Genette 1997: 28–9) – it arguably leans more toward the serious and even polemical: Christa does not seem to playfully reference or mock Cacofonix as a character. It should be clarified that what is meant here is not the playfulness and humor of the Dreadful Musician motif *per se*, but its relation to its *Asterix* concretization.

On the other hand, one facet of the troubadour sequence that may serve as a hypertextual anchorage in *Asterix* is the very use of the term 'troubadour'. Christa could have opted for at least three other terms – 'poet' (Polish 'poeta'), 'bard' (Polish 'bard'), or 'minstrel' (Polish 'minstrel') – all consistent with the medieval setting. These terms are generally considered relatively universal and not necessarily nation-specific. The term 'troubadour' situates the character in the strictly medieval tradition of courtly love, inviting associations with genres such as the *canso d'amor*, the *pastorela*, and the *alba* ('Troubadour'). But, more importantly, it points to what is arguably the most characteristically 'French' layer of *Asterix*. This generates a Genettian 'tinkering' of hypertextual layers: Christa transforms the Dreadful Musician trope by disposing of the surface/ancient Celtic-Gaulish context from which the term bard itself originates (Irish Gaelic 'bard' and Welsh 'bardd') but inadvertently retains *Asterix*'s modern French subtext, although filtered by the medievalized context. One could therefore

speak of a kind of ‘leakage’ between the architextual and the hypertextual levels and see it as testimony to transtextual processes that are endless and multi-vectorial.

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated the variegated aspects of hypertextuality in comics, which include a spectrum of visual, narrative, cultural, as well as political aspects. It has revealed how *Kajko and Kokosz* – both visually and conceptually – is a site of tension between originality and imitation of one of its partial hypotexts, *Asterix*. The mechanism operating in Christa’s work seems to be akin to Virgil’s imitation of Homer: rather than merely adapting the language of Western comics, he internalizes its generic conventions (pop-cultural tropes, metaphors, etc.) to create his own distinctive comic idiom. The analysis of the samples from *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix*, confronted with the test versions, has ruled out plagiarism in a Genettian sense. It has also highlighted the multi-tiered nature of transtextuality in Christa’s panels.

Thus, the application of Genette’s model has demonstrated at least a preliminary applicability in the context of comics. Considered in the light of the other sources of Christa’s inspiration, it may be concluded that *Asterix* was an important, although not the only, element in the rich transtextual fabric of *Kajko and Kokosz*, whose hypotext is the global popular visual culture.

This study has also signaled several areas whose exploration must be reserved for another discussion. It has not been this paper’s purpose to engage in an in-depth analysis of *Kajko and Kokosz* in terms of its publishing history, yet it is worth at least signaling one aspect of this problem that may add to our understanding of its relationship with *Asterix*. Janicz rightly points out that the ‘*Asterix* controversy’ in Poland would likely not have arisen had readers been more familiar with Western comics (2022b: 183). Indeed, many of the parallels were only noticed in the 1990s and 2000s, after wider exposure to foreign culture. Comparable European series existed, such as the Italian *Tribunzio*, Serbian *Dikan*, or Portuguese *Tónius o Lusitano*, but these were unknown in Poland under the Iron Curtain (Janicz 2022b: 184). In a more open cultural environment, Christa’s borrowings might have been seen as allusions rather than plagiarism. *Asterix* itself contains clear shout-outs, such as the Thomson and Thompson cameo in *Asterix in Belgium*, which directly copies Hergé’s detectives (Gosciny and Uderzo 1980: 31). At the same time, as Stańczyk demonstrates, the stereotype of an impermeable Iron Curtain was far from reality; its porousness enabled the penetration of “a variety of foreign influences” (2022: ‘Introduction’). Isolated comic strips were reprinted in newspapers between 1966 and 1972 (Janicz 2022b: 181), and travellers – particularly to francophone countries – brought albums into Poland (Stańczyk 2022: ‘Chapter 3’).

Access to foreign comics was also incidentally possible in larger cities through second-hand book shops as recalled by the comic artist Jacek Widor (n.d.), who found Hugo Pratt's *Wheeling* in Cracow in 1981. The exhibition *Zainspirowani. Polski komiks i jego źródła (Inspired: Polish Comics and Their Sources)*, held in Lublin in 2025, demonstrated the degree of Western inspiration in the work of classic Polish comics artists such as Szarlota Pawel and Jerzy Wróblewski. This 'peeking beyond the Iron Curtain' is evidenced by Christa's inspirations that go beyond *Asterix*. As noted by Wabik in the catalogue of the *Inspired* exhibition, Christa's personal library included four substantial volumes of the French communist comic magazine *Vaillant* from 1958–1960 (2024: 5). Similarly, Ramon Monzon has been identified as the direct inspiration for Christa's character Prof. Kosmosik in *Kajtek i Koko* (Birek 2024: 22). In the same vein, Janicz notes the similarity between Professor Stokrotek, the inventor whose time-travel device transports Kajko and Kokosz to modern times, and the Dutch *Tom Poes en de wonderdokter* by Marten Toonder (2022b: 194). This aspect of the problem, however, could perhaps be better explored using the framework or reception theory.

Yet another significant aspect of Kajko and Kokosz that deserves further attention is the double-coding of many scenes and even entire albums. What constitutes only a surface similarity – and difference – between *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* are allusions to contemporary reality. Although far less frequent in Christa's work, they subtly ridicule the harsh and often absurd conditions of socialist Poland (Janicz 2022b: 205), for instance through parodies of party newspeak or bureaucratic formulae elevated to quasi-sacred status, such as the inscription "Closed. Inventory" in *Mirmił w opałach* ('Mirmił in Trouble') (Christa 2003). This engagement with the realities of the Polish People's Republic is also explicit in *Na wczasach* ('On Vacation') (Christa 2021), which revolves around a holiday voucher, a document emblematic of the system of state-organized leisure. Unlike *Asterix*, Christa's series lacks dense historical and cultural allusions; on the other hand, its veiled political allusions are more intricate, as they had to be if they were to pass censorship. This issue could be explored further from a historical perspective.

A comparative study of *Asterix* and its alleged European imitations mentioned above might add to our understanding of the trends and directions in transtextual relationships between different regional comic scenes. An interesting problem for the Genettian analysis and the understanding of plagiarism in comics is also posed by the analogies between *Kajko and Kokosz* and Western comics that *postdate* Christa's conceptual ideas and sequences of panels or individual visual solutions.⁹ The comparative metatextual,

⁹ These include, for instance, the flying coffer in Christa's *Szkoła latania* ('The Flying School') (first published 1975; Christa 1988) and the landing of the flying carpet in *Asterix and the Magic Carpet* (first published 1987; Goscinny and Uderzo 2014) or the sequence in *Dzień śmiechały* ('The Day of Laughter') (Christa 1988), in which Łamignat repeatedly gets a pot stuck on his head, paralleled by the bear Biscoto from the 1990 episode *La Perle Bleue* ('The Blue Pearl') of Bédou's series *Hugo* (first published 1990; Bédou 2016), who repeatedly gets a helmet stuck on his head.

architextual, and paratextual analysis of both *Kajko and Kokosz* and *Asterix* could also be attempted. Another uncharted territory is the degree of influence on Christa (and other Central-European artists) of pre-WWII editions of American comics, as well as the impact of Walt Disney productions or *Looney Tunes* cartoons on them.

While Genette's model has proven useful within the frames it has been used in this study, other avenues of analysis could include Michel Riffaterre's concept of intertextuality, or Harold Bloom's more reader-oriented approach. From the perspective of comic theory, a fuller picture could be achieved by incorporating Groensteen's theory of arthrology and spatio-topia (2007) or Mikkonen's narratological model of comics storytelling (2017), and applying them to a broader sample. Similarly, the experimental method used in this study also requires further verification of its methodology and broader applicability.

Ultimately, a close reading of *Kajko and Kokosz* not only withstands accusations of plagiarism in an artistic sense, but also opens up interesting avenues of investigation, both in Polish and global comics, and reveals a complex dialogue with global popular culture, considerably mediated as it is by *Asterix*. Thus, it confirms Genette's final words in *Palimpsests*, that hypertextuality is "only one name for that ceaseless circulation of texts within which literature [comics too] would not be worth one hour of exertion" (1997: 400). It is worth remembering that this circulation kept operating across the Iron Curtain, thereby testifying to the different ways in which texts of culture seep across political boundaries and the ways in which they mediate and bridge those boundaries.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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