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Section Code: C025

Intro:

Liliana Truță¹

The Story of a Dream Named Literature

Literature ...What is literature? Could it be a mysterious seventh sense, or is it some sort of sensor-laden skin, a bizarre tentacle through which we can feel out the indomitable monster called Reality? Could it be the sling by which we aim at an invisible Goliath that challenges us in the dark only, without us ever being able to confront it in reality? Could it be the pause between two heartbeats, the death before the next intake of air? And if so, where does its heart lie? Does it have one? Can it carry Life within?

Or perhaps it's just a huge coat displaying a lot of pockets where we can stock a lot of juicy trifles, moldy pieces of memory, nut-tasting dreams and other crumbs off the royal feast? Or could it be just a bin where we go fly-tipping nightmares, cold sweats, frissons, amputated souls, indeed crumbs kept in the fridge that are already non-edible leftovers, wounds wherefrom all the blood of our unanswerable questions flows? Or is it a mega-soup on the backburner, where destinies, be they real or imaginary boil, until the mere carcass is left? Where we place starshine and sinful darkness, in the hopes of obtaining Life in the athanor where the amorphous lead of our dreams lies? For the alchemy-driven gold of this amalgam is Life itself, and the reality effect it creates, no matter how hard we tried to lie to ourselves by coming up with yet another definition.

Literature is definitely one of the most ravishing illusions ... And everything we do is in order for us to obtain the unattainable taste for life. Life: we have no clue what it is, where does it come from and whereto is it going? We can only guess ...But its taste we know for sure. No one can fool us. We know it and it's recognizable to us anytime. It's something that we cannot ever confuse with something else: it's not fluid, nor is it sticky and yet it flows, it's in flux. Life is by no means

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sturdy, we cannot even see it and yet we can break our head when there's an encounter. Life is dissimilar to the air we breathe; however, it can elevate us, it can make us fly, although we have no wings for that.

As regards its taste, Life is neither entirely bitter, although we can feel its bitterness at times, nor is it entirely sweet, a delight to the taste buds, it's neither sour, although it makes our mouth cringe when we least expect it. And indeed, it can be hot as well ...it sets us on fire, as it were, at times ...It's all of this at the same time, and beyond all this, something else: and that something else is the mysterious taste, the ingredient that holds them all together, and that is meant to make us dizzy, all the while leaving us speechless. We can guard ourselves of this paralysis, using the very words.

This mysterious ingredient, latent in all our cells and in our blood is recognizable in our very dreams, as Life does not cease to bother us either. Perhaps neither in death, as Life is not spoken, but lived, but we have come up with a sort of language, a tool by which we try to distill it, to turn it into some sort of essence ...Yes, indeed literature is a dream of ours, a dream where Life seeks to haunt us, luring us, breathing us in, biting us, as it needs perpetual renewal, recreation.

Literature is a toothed form, as it bites off content, it's like an oil-padded jar where we pour the water of life and it does not adhere at all. We at times have a sip, and for a while we really do get the impression that we have nailed it, as it were, that we have succeeded to capture its sacred nature, only to have its paradise-informed taste vanish a minute later, and therefore the taste of life recedes into the void wherefrom it had sprung. And we thus feel outsmarted again. Hmm, it was clearly a fake. We have come, yet again, across a fake, perhaps more credible than the rest. All the ingredients were there, indeed, but the one mysterious ingredient was missing.

There are, however, some fakes that can really capture the mysterious ingredient in their fabric of flavors, and they give the impression of 'the total perfume'. Those, we call masterpieces. A masterpiece in fact means: one cannot do better than that. Literature is all about day-dreaming, it's a beautiful illusion, but still an illusion. We have invented a plethora of words, but never enough words for us to build that folly, that crazy architecture that defies the senses and our capacity for comprehension and creation. And that is called Life. That overwhelmingly beautiful folly does not even have a name, it is us that

calls it Life, but how else could you name totality?

And in the meantime, while we were using words, that enabled us to tell a story, we equally understood that what we can merely do with words is to express our awe. It's as if you had the ambition of recreating the ocean and its grandeur by using colored paper, as if you wished to render the brightness of the sky by using tinsel. If we were gifted enough, we could obtain a rare perfume, but if not, then only some common broth. But it is what is! Nobody can say we haven't tried ...

And the books? Some of us have thus become book-eaters, we devour books. Some of them are just edible and easily digested. Some others are not. You had better leave in on the plate, as you run the risk of indigestion and that's hardly desirable. And then you can only regret the time and money wasted. Other books are good, nice, you devour them, but you're not entirely convinced that all the ingredients were top quality. You'll never order that dish again. Enough is enough, you'll never tick that on the menu again. The experience has not been repelling, nor has it been exceedingly appetizing. In other words, it's been lukewarm. It gave off some smoke, but no fire, it's been moving, but not quite cathartic. It's nothing like the madness that you, as a reader, have dreamed of, as it's not only the writers who dream, but it's also the readers as well. It's time, therefore, you tried another restaurant, with a more promising menu and you already envisage yourself sniffing the enthralling flavors of royal gastronomy ... You are a fast-food and beer consumer, but keep on trying ... You are influenced by advertising (you'd better not be), you're searching for blue ribbon products having exotic names, but unfortunately you could come across some more fast food in disguise, covered in sauce. It looks like the marketing strategy has been way better than the one at the food stalls ... But you're not so easily fooled. You try again, and then you could miraculously come across something that you cannot put your finger on. It's no longer food, it's but a flavor yielding the taste of heaven, the total perfume that you savor with all your senses, body and soul and you then know that you don't even have all the senses to capture its entire beauty, that indeed you should dilate your senses somehow, in order to be able to experience all this overwhelming waterfall of fragrance.

You have thus stepped over the threshold: you have stepped into the immaterial dimension of perfumes. You can immediately realize that this kind of perfume is out of this world, albeit reconstructing it. It

molds that sacred folly that is Life; however, it is otherworldly. You cannot distill Life therefrom. You have felt its aerial taste, you have savored its magnificent drunkenness and it has become your own. You want to have some more of it, you sip its perfume and you know for sure that you're never going to get indigestion. You suddenly realize that you have come across the food of angels and that it was only possible for a madman to mold folly.

You now think about its author, as Salieri would think about Mozart. You curse him in all love and respect and admiration. It has made you drunk by one sip only. You now know that he's a skillful thief, a great mystery hunter and that he has stolen some crumbs off the table of the gods. You also know that it's not for everybody to be a peeping Tom, and moreover to be able to see something in that blinding light. He has brought to the table something that he himself cannot comprehend, but he has succeeded to do so. How could he comprehend? He's only human, after all.

There are but a few of these people, and we call them gifted writers or otherwise, geniuses. We call the otherworldly perfumes masterpieces and that's the end of this classifying endeavor. We can always find a word for everything. Each perfume is unique in its own way, but we cast them all aside in the same category. And the author? We hail him as the greatest author of such and such an age. So, we have solved that as well. Using three or four words, we have succeeded in naming the divine perfume that has made us go crazy. That's some performance! And so is analyzing the masterpiece, by dissecting it, in order for us to be able to describe its components and the ingredients it's made of. Those types of dissection, that is meant to measure the ineffable with the appropriate finesse are equally rare.

In the long run, all books are stories; any book is a word-based kind of architecture that attempts the impossible: more specifically, to capture reality, failing at times, and only succeeding to create its own reality. That's nice, but that won't do. Life is to be lived, not spoken about. Life has a language of its own: it's called living. Literature, on the other hand, has another type of language; the written word. You cannot vanquish the monster unless you are one of those wizards who can teach words how to breathe, how to dance and speak, as they are skillful alchemists and gifted tamers.

We, humans have so many books because started narrating life,

retelling reality when we realized that it was totally impossible for us to fully comprehend it, when we became aware of its monstrous force. When we felt overwhelmed, we became beauty hunters. We got obsessed with chimeras. Any narrative thus became a desperate chase of the present moment in the tumble that leads to death. Any textualization is some type of folly that endeavors to speak about a bubbling grand madness called reality.

And thus began the great hunt ... Catching a dinosaur by using a butterfly net. Or to make the dragon fit into a tiny jewelry casket. To freeze motion by keeping the life within. To enclose the ocean in a jam jar. To gather fragrances into a basket and then to distill it all into some perfume. What is literature, after all? It's a gift of some kind, that a joy peddler sells you. And all this made of some raw material, some amorphous matter, barbaric as the mud, hammered into form. And infinitely recycled: that is the written word.

And in the process, lo! and behold! We have populated the world with words, whilst entertaining the illusion that perhaps they'll outlive us. All this because, at some point we have remarked that objects tend to outlive us: buildings do outlive us, even drawings of images do, as well as rocks and trees do. All that does not breathe outlives us and we are the frailest of beings, we are mere stardust. However, we can leave words behind, we can flood the world with words. They fail to breathe, but they can create the effect of breathing. If you are a good enough hunter, you can make them mimic the very turmoil of life, even though they are but soulless matter. You can grab the minotaur by its horns and fling it down to the ground. You can challenge the dragon to dueling and chop off all of its heads, one at a time. You can aim at Goliath with the proverbial sling and make him fall. This kind of paradox is what we call literature.

All this because we, humans, have understood a crucial fact: we cannot entirely comprehend all, however, we can tell a story; we fail to see the meaning of it all, but we can strive to create meaning. Words are but raw material, as rocks are, but they can become an extension of self. They thus become that mysterious boundary between two heartbeats, that sacred space between life and death, without ever being one or the other.

Literary Paradigms

**Coping with Reality through Storytelling
as a Performative Act in Literature**

Paradigmes littéraires

**Faire face à la réalité à travers le récit en
tant qu'acte performatif dans la
littérature**

Literarische Paradigmen

**Realitätsbewältigung durch
Geschichtenerzählen als performativen
Akt in der Literatur**

Portnoy's Complaint. Lust, trust, and the English language

Ioana Beteg PhD¹

Abstract: Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* is more than an intricate and complex soliloquy on relationships, sexuality, fantasies and human nature; the novel plays with language, with misshapen forms of speech, with misused words, with fragmented or out-of-balance discourses while, at the same time, conveying the sometimes chaotic, sometimes frightening existential narrative of the egotistic and intelligent Alex. Talking to his doctor, he enters an abyssal spiral of shame, guilt, Oedipal compulsions and alienations that require no solutions, no answers – his therapy is not cathartic, it is merely explanatory.

Key words: complex, language, relationships, sexuality

'A man has got to have an umbrella for a rainy day' (2016: 9) is what Alexander's father (Philip Roth's character from *Portnoy's complaint*) used to tell him, and, intricately enough, Alex chose to carry one of the most compelling yet odd umbrellas in American literature: religion, innate promiscuity, intelligence. Alex Portnoy's therapeutic monologue reveals not only the puzzled, hectic but intriguing approach to his sexuality or carnal fantasies or failures, but, more importantly, it uncovers his confused and blurred view on love, trust and faith. Whether we refer to his ephemeral sexual liaisons or to his relationship with the Jewish religion, we meet the same angry, dissatisfied, arrogant and disillusioned Alex. In his own carefully-constructed narrative, he subjects himself to painful recollections, to reliving the guilt, the anger, the mockery, the glacial submission to his parents – but is this cathartic or potentially dangerous? In Jonathan K. Foster's *Memory. A Very Short Introduction* we read that individuals are less likely to accurately remember familiar objects, faces or events than they are to remember in great detail events or people that seem out of the ordinary, that stand

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out one way or another. The way Alex approaches *language* and the way he connects patterns of speech, accents or even misused words to flashbacks from his past could only lead us to the assumption that language is the red string between his *self* and his *desired self*, the one he is destined to meet someday.

Alex Portnoy's Postmodern condition forces him to aimlessly bounce from excitement to disgust, from moral imprisonment to a false sense of freedom, from apparent sanity to a sometimes-inescapable psychological instability; he is the product of numerous troubled relationships. The novel is a labyrinth of emotions, despair and decay where neither rebellion, nor compliance, wealth or fidelity can save you. The Postmodern crisis of man and the fragmented identity of the individual in the Postmodern context have an intimate, almost carnal relationship to the psychological burdens and mental nakedness of the alienated individual, allowing him the space and time to fight against them, but not the weapons to win. – Lyotard argues that words are of great importance in the postmodern world, for everything is founded and rooted in language games, and rules are imposed on language as such. He states that "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences; but that progress in turn presupposes it" (2004: 73).

Alex seems to live in a simulacrum that he is desperately trying to escape; his therapy session with the doctor might be his last attempt at grasping reality, at transcending his fantasies and imagination and setting foot in the real world. He forces us to join him in his journey towards the real world, but is there a *truth* he is so ardently trying to unravel, or is he trying to justify his existence? He might be looking for solutions to his distorted narrative of life, or he might just be completing the work? Roger Horrocks, in *Freud Revisited: Psychoanalytic Themes in the Postmodern Age*, emphasizes the concept of the unbalanced condition of man in the Postmodern life, underlying the relativity and ambiguity of the man in relation to the world and to himself. He says that

Postmodernist thought can certainly be seen as antithetical to psychoanalysis, since it offers a resistance to notions of 'truth', 'depth' or any kind of discourse being privileged (...) Postmodernism offers us a kind of relativism – there are no absolute truths, there are no 'grand narratives', but rather a number of 'little stories' (2001: 16)

Given the fact that we imagine him sitting nervously in his doctor's office, we might be inclined to argue that Alex is ready to find answers

and face consequences; on the other hand, since the doctor he is confiding in is a silent observer of Alex's zigzags through his own existence, we dare say that Alex's neurotic confession is his means of trying to cope with both the real world and the simulacrum that has become tightly twisted around his identity.

Philip Roth's Alexander Portnoy, the Jewish embodiment of the Oedipal complex, the vaguely psychotic genius, the unmarried 33-year-old, follows a well-structured pattern in creating his tragic misery: the turbulent and violent liaison with anything that could imply even the slightest form of commitment on his part is at the core of his eerie and discontent nature. Thus, he resorts to arrogantly mocking and satirizing everything and anything that might hold power over him – the rabbis, his transient girlfriends, even his psychotherapist. He views both love and religion – even though at times he seems to deflect and, dare we say, long for a superficial purity and integrity that could be attained through marriage and religion – as the society's way of subjugating him, as an imprisonment, both physical and mental, that would only halt, but not stop, his true nature, his exquisitely-constructed idea of *self*.

Alex Portnoy is aware of his limitations, but he cannot grasp his flaws; throughout his monologue he persistently asks questions and raises concerns, but they are all for his ego – for he does not allow the doctor to answer. He is both the therapist and the patient – he accounts his story uninterruptedly, he cares not for any insights from the doctor, and his questions to the silent (or silenced?) therapist are mere markers of discourse for our educated, cultivated Alex: 'Doctor, why, why oh why oh why oh why does a mother pull a knife on her own son?' (2016: 14), 'Doctor, what should I rid myself of, tell me, the hatred ... or the love?' (2016: 19), 'Doctor, what do you call this sickness I have?' (2016: 24).

Why can't we hear the doctor? Why isn't he allowed to speak during the session? Why is he silent and why can't – or wouldn't – he interrupt Alex's constant leaps through time, emotion and memory? Umberto Eco discusses 'noise' and 'silence' as possible threats of and towards mankind, as possible weapons against ignorance and as possible means to escape reality, saying that

This great need for noise is like a drug; it is a way to avoid focusing on what is really important (...) one of the ethical problems we face today is how to return to silence (...) – in other words, the long pause, silence as creation of suspense, silence as a threat, silence as agreement, silence as denial, silence in music (2013: 132-133)

One possible answer could be that Alex thrives in the silence of his peers: he prefers them not to speak, he would rather have them silent rather than speaking improperly. Among his more-than-obvious obsessions and shortcomings – his Oedipal complex, his doomed status as the submissive Jewish son, his tragic compliance and obedience to his parents, his meaningless sexual encounters, his ritualic fascination with himself – we find that he fosters a powerful and compulsive relationship with *language*. Language is capable of drawing him closer to love, trust and faith, and, at the same time, it is powerful enough to irrevocably shatter any possible emotion. Alex is as fascinated with sexuality as he is with language – language can be an aphrodisiac, it can astound and bewilder, but it can also disgust, vex and repel. Whenever something comes dangerously close to him, he takes his father's advice and opens up another umbrella: the English language. He turns *the others* and their improper use of the English language into enemies for, as Umberto Eco discusses in *Inventing the enemy*,

'having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against to which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our worth. So, when there is no enemy, we have to invent one. (...) and so we are concerned here not so much with the almost natural phenomenon of identifying an enemy who is threatening to us, but with the process of creating and demonizing the enemy' (2013: 2)

Why the English language? Because his tormented state, his chaotic existence started with confusion over the English language. He links the misfortunate use of language to embarrassment, to shame, to humiliation; moreover, he naturally links it to his mother and his childhood. The misemployment of language stirs up nauseating emotions for Alex, and one might say that his mother is to blame – his first recollection of agony and suffering – emotional and intellectual – goes back to first grade, when, he says,

'I was asked by the teacher one day to identify a picture of what I know perfectly well my mother referred to as a 'spatula'. But for the life of me I could not think of the word in English. Stammering and flushing, I sank defeated into my seat (...) and that's how far back my fate goes, how early in the game it was 'normal' for me to be in a state resembling torment' (2016: 53)

He has thus made language his best friend and one of the most vicious enemies of his own reality. Language is both the disease and the antidote, just as he is both the patient and the doctor; language is

means of satire, mockery, it is one of the pillars of his alienated existence. He needs to justify his emotional withdrawal, his spiritual discontent, his self-proclaimed intellectual superiority, thus he needs a weapon – what better weapon could there be? Language is both harmless and harmful, and, as he is to discover, ‘conversation isn’t just crossfire where you shoot and get shot at! Where you’ve got to duck for your life and aim to kill! Words aren’t only bombs and bullets – no, they’re little gifts, containing meanings!’ (2016: 114). Words are little gifts, indeed, provided that they are used properly and carefully, they are wonderful if caressed, cherished and gently threaded one after another; in Alex’s reality, words are defining, they are crucial in the making of any relationship: even though, as an adolescent, he dwells in the grey zone when it comes to religion, transgressing the questioning-the-existence-of-God phase, we realize that it is not God that he has issues with, but the rabbis. Even so, there are references to the importance of the proper use of language during one of his spiritual crises: ‘there is no such thing as God, and there never was, and I’m sorry, but in my vocabulary that’s a lie’ (2016: 36). His rant about God and religion is not only teenage rage, but also a revolt against his father; he is told to change clothes in order to go with his father to the Synagogue, and the implied uncleanliness of his shirt, and of himself, is what sends Alex into this aggravated, hectic and somewhat pointless wrath. He is desperately, but most of the time silently, trying to escape the psychological chains that his parents restrain him in, wondering when and if his submission would end, and, at the same time, he rebels against everything else that might have the power to control him emotionally. His parents’ restrictions are all he allows – or all he can bear. He, the Jewish son, yields only to his parents, for

‘inhibition doesn’t grow on trees, you know – takes patience, takes concentration, takes a dedicated and self-sacrificing parent and a hard-working attentive little child to create in only a few years’ time a really constrained and tight-ass human being’ (2016: 45).

It is not God that upsets him, it is not God that he despises, but the rabbis – due to the way they use language. His fourteen-year-old self despises rabbis for the work they do, for the money they earn, for their superficiality and moral superiority, but, more importantly, he loathes hearing them speak; referring to a rabbi, he describes him as *‘a man who somewhere along the line got the idea that the basic unit of meaning in the English language is the syllable. So no word he pronounces has less than three of them, not even the word God’* (2016: 42). Alex does pick a fight with religion and spirituality, a battle that

would lose intensity over the years but that does not seem to cease, however, but he goes to war with rabbis. Paradoxically enough, he asks God to spare the world of His spiritual leaders:

‘I-a wan-tt to-a wel-come-a you-ew too thee sy-no-gawg-a.’ Oh God, oh Gud-ah-duh, if you’re up there shining down your countenance, why not spare us from here on out the enunciation of the rabbis! Why not spare us the rabbis themselves! (2016: 42).

Similarly, one of his long-term girlfriends who ardently longs to marry Portnoy one day, and whom he nicknames The Monkey, suffers from the same incorrect-use-of-language disease, a disease that would gradually become unbearable and incurable for Alex. She does correspond to his sexual fantasies and desires, she is as troubled and fascinated with the possibilities that their imagination can offer, but she is found unfit for him due to her handwriting. Once she gets too close, once she crosses the boundaries of an ephemeral relationship and tries connecting with Alex on a deeper, more intimate level, he uses her untidy spelling and calligraphy not only against her, but against any further emotional connection:

‘I don’t think I’ve spoken of the disproportionate effect The Monkey’s handwriting used to have upon my psychic equilibrium. What hopeless calligraphy! It looked like the work of an eight-year-old – it nearly drove me crazy! Nothing capitalized, nothing punctuated – only those oversized irregular letters of hers slanting downward along the page, then dribbling off (...) And the spelling! (...) dear as in the salutation of a letter: d-e-r-e. Or d-e-i-r’ (2016: 96)

Another ‘*gentile heart broken*’ by Alex was Sarah Abbott Maulsby, a tall, educated and beautiful young woman whose argot was used as a shield between her and our main character; her choice of vocabulary was unbearable for Alex, it was more than he could handle. Hadn’t it been for her argot, would he have married her? We dare guess no, for he would have found another instance of improper English, a word she pronounces wrongly, a letter she shapes oddly, a sound she aspirates too roughly when she speaks. Leaving our assumptions aside, he does justify not marrying her:

Why didn’t I marry the girl? Well, there was her cutesy-wootsy boarding school argot, for one. Couldn’t bear it. ‘Barf’ for vomit, ‘ticked off’ for angry, ‘a howl’ for funny, ‘crackers’ for crazy, ‘teeny’ for tiny. Oh, and ‘divine’. (What Mary Jane Reed means by ‘groovy’ – I’m always telling these girls how to talk right, me with my five-hundred-

word New Jersey vocabulary)' (2016: 119)

We have already mentioned that Alex accepts and embraces his limitations; he knows he uses foul language, he knows he uses argot that might be troublesome for others, but his being aware of his words and using them in a proper, adequate manner, disqualifies him from being as ignorant and oblivious as *the others*. He is superior, morally and intellectually, because he uses the right word at the right time – he does not stutter, he does not elongate the vowels, he does not emphasize syllables, he does not have a peculiar accent. He has integrated perfectly into the American society (he is discovering it in his own sexual, carnal, promiscuous way, he says, one girl at a time); in his troubled, alienated way, he sometimes feels like he does fit in. Even so, he fits in from a distance – denying any form of real human connection, shielding himself behind language, he remains the alien Jew with an Oedipal complex.

One could argue that there is nothing more intimate, personal, and complex than one's relation to his spiritual leader, to his partner, to his doctor. But one's relation to the language he speaks is, dare we say, even more miscellaneous, frightening and deep, for it fosters the very idea of *identity* – and Alex's identity is, undoubtedly, shaped and altered by the language he identifies through.

These relationships should harbour no shame, no boundaries, no limits, for they imply an almost empowering sense of secrecy, openness, confidentiality, trust. It is this type of intimacy that frightens and freezes Alex, and that forces him to raise icy walls around himself. He despises rabbis due to the way they lengthen every word, he dislikes The Monkey due to her calligraphy, he hates Sarah's argot, thus they are not to be trusted, they are not to be loved, they are to be discarded of. They are a means to an end: enraging your parents, fulfilling sexual fantasies, allowing your freedoms to know no limits. Will he trust Doctor Spielvogel? We have asked ourselves in the beginning whether his therapy session would be cathartic or potentially dangerous, whether Alex is trying to find answers or justify, under specialized supervision, his behaviour, his fantasies, his compulsions. Doctor Spielvogel's broken English unravels the answer: 'Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?' (2016: 140).

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Leserorientiertes Erzählen am Beispiel des Jephthah-Stoffes

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Abstract: The cyclical structure of the „Book of Judges“ highlights the main theme of God’s interference with the history of Israel. The particular episode of Jephthah’s story has inspired numerous adaptations in literature, picture, sculpture and music. This article describes the historical and literary dimensions of the biblical source and analyses Lion Feuchtwanger’s novel „Jefta und seine Tochter“ in relation to the original text, in order to outline the importance of storytelling in ancient and modern times.

Key-words: Bible, „Book of Judges“, Jephthah, historical novel, biblical novel

Einleitung

Zahlreiche Episoden aus der Bibel sind aufgrund ihres moralischen und ästhetischen Erfahrungswerts literarisch bearbeitet worden. Auch die Richterzeit des Jephthah² erfreut sich eines andauernden Interesses und erlebt eine „literary vogue“ (Liptzin 126), wobei vor allem die Opferung seiner Tochter einen in Musik, Literatur und bildender Kunst häufig aufgegriffenen Stoff darstellt (vgl. Frenzel 357-360; Liptzin 126-136; Jespersen 246-248).

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht die Bearbeitung der

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² Der Beitrag übernimmt die unterschiedlichen Schreibweisen dieses Namens aus der verwendeten Primär- und Sekundärliteratur: Jephthah (Luther-Bibel), Jephthah (im Engl., mit Ausnahme von Jespersen), Jefta (Feuchtwanger). S. dazu auch die folgende Erklärung Jespersens: „There is some confusion concerning the spelling of the name of the Ancient Hebrew Judge. The usual English Biblical spelling is Jephthah. The translators of the novel, however, have chosen the simplified form Jephtha.“ (Jespersen 262, Endnote 6).

Jephthah-Erzählung aus dem „Buch der Richter“ in Lion Feuchtwangers Roman „Jefta und seine Tochter“. Im ersten Teil werden die historischen und literarischen Dimensionen des alttestamentarischen Buchs sowie die narrativen Hauptrichtungen der Jephthah-Erzählung erläutert. Der zweite Teil hebt spezifische Schwerpunkte in Feuchtwangers Roman in Bezug zur biblischen Textvorlage hervor. Zum Schluss wird zusammenfassend auf die Bedeutung der Vorlage und des Romans für Leser verschiedener Epochen verwiesen.

Das „Buch der Richter“ - Einleitende Bemerkungen

Das „Buch der Richter“ sei laut Martin eines der geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments, das “theological interpretations of history” (Martin 1) liefere und demzufolge das Grundprinzip befolge: “all history is controlled and guided by God” (ebd.). Des Weiteren führt Marin aus: “What we have, in this book and in the other historical books as well, is not history as such, but theological history. What we have is the word of God made living in the events of Israel’s past.” (Martin 14). Dies kennzeichne das gesamte Buch und sei durch ein strukturelles Wiederholungsmuster abgebildet, das Martin als “framework of a cyclical scheme of history” (Martin 2) bezeichnet.

In Zusammenhang damit hebt Amit erklärend hervor, dass menschliches Fehlverhalten zu periodisch einsetzenden Krisen führe, wobei diese Wiederholbarkeit menschlicher Verfehlungen auf eine Kausalität verweise, die gleichermaßen als historisches und narratives Ordnungsprinzip fungiere. Dieses Erzähl- und Deutungsmuster behalte seine Zeichenhaftigkeit auch für spätere Generationen von Zuhörern und Lesern bei (vgl. Amit 36). Die „regelmäßige Wiederkehr des Wechsels von Abfall, Not, Umkehr und Rettung“ (Rendtorff 179) bestimme das gesamte „Buch der Richter“. Dieses Strukturprinzip ersetze „eine zeitliche Abfolge von Ereignissen“ (ebd.), weil das Erzählkonzept des durch die überragende Gestalt Josuas einheitlich organisierten Vorgängertextes zur Zeit der Richter nicht mehr verwendbar gewesen sei (vgl. Rendtorff 177).

Während des Übergangs vom Nomadentum zur Sesshaftigkeit wurde mithilfe der Richter ein demokratisches Organisationssystem begründet, das für alle zwölf Stämme Gültigkeit hatte, aber keine zentralisierte Form der Machtausübung zuließ (vgl. Dimont 52-55). Rendtorff spricht in diesem Zusammenhang über das „unerfüllte Postulat der Einheit“ (Rendtorff 28), das im gesamten „Buch der Richter“ evoziert werde, aber der historischen Wirklichkeit nicht entspreche, weil Israels Geschichte zur Zeit der Richter „regional

begrenzte Auseinandersetzungen“ (Rendtorff 27) einzelner Stämme beschreibe und „die einigende Kraft des Königtums“ (ebd.) zu diesem Zeitpunkt nicht bestanden habe. Auch Martin umschreibt den Status der Richter durch deren doppelte soziale Rolle in der Kriegsführung und Rechtsprechung:

So the “judges” of the pre-monarchic period in Israel were local leaders and rulers functioning against the changing social and political background of the times. In the early settlement period their functions were more of a military nature with regard to the nomadic or semi-nomadic unit from which they came. But in the on-going process of urbanization they became figures of considerable, though local, prestige whose functions may have been less military and more of a judicial kind. (Martin 13).

In dieser Zeitspanne agieren Richter als von Gott gesegnete und auserwählte Persönlichkeiten, wie Amit feststellt: „the delivering judges are conceived as the messengers and performers of God’s will“ (Amit 47), und ihr Einsatz sichert eine zeitweilige Rettung ihrer Stämme und hält den drohenden Niedergang auf: “These judges were not judges in the legal sense, but heroes upon whom ‘rested the spirit of God’ and who led single tribes or groups of tribes in military campaigns to free Israel from periodic foreign oppression.” (Encyclopaedia Judaica 561).

Diese Bedrohung von außen wird jedoch durch die innere Schwäche Israels begünstigt, denn das „Buch der Richter“ weist schon zu Beginn auf die Götzenverehrung, die als Hauptursache der selbstverschuldeten Episoden des Niedergangs zu betrachten ist. Die Verfehlungen der nach Josua folgenden Generationen werden im Buch detailliert beschrieben (vgl. Ri. 2.10-15). Derartige Schwierigkeiten können durch den Einsatz der Richter vorübergehend gelöst werden, denn diese werden durch Gott angeleitet und dienen ihm durch ihr Handeln. Die von Gott gefundene Lösung wirkt jedoch nur über eine begrenzte Zeit, weil das Volk den Richtern nicht folgt (vgl. Ri. 2.18-19). Die Bezeichnung „Richter“ ist vermutlich zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt als jenem der eigentlichen Ereignisse eingesetzt worden, um den einzelnen Erzählungen durch dominierende Figuren Kohärenz zu verleihen und deren komplexe Typologie durch einen Sammelbegriff zusammenzufassen: “We may therefore conclude that the use of the term ‘judges’ in reference to the period is late, reflecting an overall perception which sought a single term for the various leaders of the period preceding that of the kings.” (Amit 65). Diese Gestalten haben jedoch nur eine zeitlich begrenzte Veränderung der Zustände, innerhalb

des erwähnten zyklischen Musters, erwirken können.

Das Buch der Richter als geschichtliche und literarische Vorlage

In seiner Untersuchung über das „Buch der Richter“ geht Brettler der Frage nach, inwieweit dieses Bibel-Kapitel eine historische Quelle darstellt. Ausgehend von der Voraussetzung, dass die Darstellung vergangener Ereignisse eine allgemeine Zielsetzung historischer Texte sei (Brettler 1f.), stellt der Autor jedoch fest, dass diese biblische Vorlage keine näheren Angaben über ihre geschichtlich belegbare Glaubwürdigkeit enthalte, weswegen auch die Einschätzung durch Historiker unterschiedlich ausgefallen sei:

The fact that there is no fundamental marker for accurate historical texts explains much of the debate that has raged in recent years concerning the historicity of particular biblical texts. The texts themselves are not “marked” in terms of their reliability. In addition, the dating of the texts, and thus their distance from the events they describe, is often uncertain; we have little sense of who wrote the biblical texts, and therefore what the authors’ goals or interests might have been. (Brettler 3)

Brettler gibt eine ausführliche Übersicht über die widersprüchlich ausfallenden Meinungen der Fachleute über die Historizität des „Buchs der Richter“ (vgl. Brettler 1-8) und schließt sich jener Interpretationsrichtung an, die die biblische Vorlage in Zusammenhang mit den Absichten der damaligen Verfasser und deren Zielsetzungen betrachtet, denn “its main objective was not recreating the past” (Brettler 8).

Auf diese Aspekte geht Amit detailliert ein und belegt, dass im „Buch der Richter“ verschiedene Formen der Überarbeitung zu erkennen seien, die das mehrfache Redigieren (“editing”) des Textes einem Ordnungsprinzip unterstellt haben, das nicht die historisch akkurate Beschreibung und Darstellung der Ereignisse, sondern deren Deutung verfolgt habe. Dies sei auch für andere Bücher der Bibel nachweisbar und ein Beweis dafür, dass derartige Überarbeitungen den biblischen Verfassern geläufig gewesen seien (vgl. Amit 25-119).

Aus dem Ablauf einzelner, chronologisch nicht unmittelbar aufeinanderfolgenden Erzählungen, die um zentrale Figuren und deren Handlungen aufgebaut worden seien, haben biblische Verfasser ein Muster entworfen, das sich auf die Ebene des Erzählens und auf jene der historischen Deutung gleichermaßen auswirke, behauptet Amit. Das zu Beginn des Beitrags beschriebene Wiederholungsprinzip, das

die gesamte Zeitspanne der Richter als eine kohärente Haupterzählung gliedert, diene demzufolge auch dazu, kollektive Geschichte als sinnstiftende Abfolge von einzelnen Geschichten zu erkennen:

The desire to bring out the divine signs, which show that history is a comprehensive process having its own innate laws and not a mere random sequence of events, would therefore seem to be the reason for the setting of the majority of events included within the book in cyclical frameworks. (Amit 27)

Ein weiteres Ordnungsprinzip, das für das „Buch der Richter“ charakteristisch sei, bestehe laut Amit darin, den Sinn der dargestellten Geschichte (und somit auch die Historizität der zu einem zusammenhängenden Ganzen verknüpften Ereignisse) auf eine theologische Deutungsebene zu verlegen. Dadurch werde eine Geschichte entworfen, die als göttlicher Entwurf zu interpretieren sei und erst durch die wiederholte Anwesenheit und Einwirkung Gottes ihre eigentliche Bedeutung für die Menschen erhalte: „Examination of the various aspects of the emergence of the judge and his activity indicate that the concern of the Book of Judges, as a chapter in biblical historiography, is to elaborate the acts of God and to present his central place in the fashioning of history.“ (Amit 53) Als Teil der Geschichte Israels nimmt das „Buch der Richter“ eine Übergangsposition als Vorgeschichte für jene Zeit ein, in der Israel von Königen regiert wird, und dient ebenfalls, durch die Darstellung einer von Chaos und Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den jüdischen Stämmen bestimmten Epoche der verschiedenen Richter, als Argumentation zugunsten einer einheitlichen Geschichte (vgl. Amit 69-72).

Abschließend kann festgestellt werden, dass die dargestellten Belege auf den historischen Charakter des Buchs verweisen, der jedoch nicht auf der unmittelbar faktualen Ebene erkennbar ist, sondern in der Erstellung einer ziel- und leserorientierten Interpretation von Geschichte besteht.

Ein weiterer Aspekt, der in der Fachliteratur über das „Buch der Richter“ angesprochen wird, ist der potenzielle literarische Charakter dieses Bibeltextes. Ausgangspunkt dafür sind die oben zusammengefassten Kritikpunkte zu dessen historischen Dimension. Brettler macht in diesem Zusammenhang auf die Unterscheidung zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit aufmerksam und hebt ebenfalls hervor, dass dieser Bibeltext durchaus literarische Qualitäten habe:

There is a certain irony here – the Bible, which is not Literature, has

literary devices, and deserves to be read with literary competence. [...] Perhaps we should shun the noun literature and even the adjective literary, so that this confusion is avoided, and we should speak of rhetorical or stylistic devices, which exist in all types of texts, even those which we do not characterize as literary. Alternatively, we must be careful to state that by literature, we only mean something written. (Brettler 19f.)

Frye interpretiert die zyklische Struktur des „Buchs der Richter“ als Beleg für den Vorrang des Mythos gegenüber der historischen Wirklichkeit aufgrund dieser spezifischen narrativen Struktur:

Here there is a series of different contents, along with a repeating mythical or narrative form which contains them. The heavy emphasis on the structure, where because of the moral interest we are in effect being told the same kind of story over and over again, indicates that the individual stories are being made to fit that pattern. (Frye 41)

Bal liefert eine polemisch intendierte Gegenposition („counterreading“, Bal 10) zu den bibelhistorischen Deutungen, indem sie davon ausgeht, dass die kulturell bedingten Leerstellen des Textes identifiziert werden müssen, um einen alternativen Entwurf zur androzentrisch dargestellten Geschichte als „narrative of war and political leadership“ (Bal 13) möglich zu machen: “The countercoherence starts where the traditional readings try to exclude or reduce the impact of women on the history of the people.” (Bal 17). Aufgrund dieser kritischen Positionierung bezüglich traditioneller Interpretationen und ihrer Fokussierung auf Jephthahs Tochter anstelle von Jephthah selbst kommt Bal zu einer nuancierten Schlussfolgerung bezüglich der mehrfachen Überlieferungsformen und Bedeutungen von Geschichte, auf die im letzten Teil des Beitrags verwiesen wird.

Die Jephthah-Erzählung in der Bibel

Das alttestamentarische „Buch der Richter“ erzählt Jephthahs Geschichte (Ri. 10.17-12.7) anhand einschneidender Ereignisse im Leben der Hauptgestalt und des Stammes Gilead. Der umfangreichere erste Teil dieser Binnenerzählung, „Der Richter Jephthah“, berichtet über die Wahl des ursprünglich von der Familie ausgestoßenen Protagonisten zum Richter: „So ging Jephthah mit den Ältesten von Gilead, und das Volk setzte ihn zum Haupt und Obersten über sich“ (Ri. 11.11), seine vielfachen Erfolge im Kampf gegen andere Stämme (vgl. Ri. 11.12-33) und die im Zusammenhang damit durchgeführte Opferung seiner einzigen Tochter aufgrund eines Gelübdes (vgl. Ri.

11.34-40). Als Nachtrag werden im kürzeren zweiten Teil, „Jephthahs Kampf mit Ephraim“, ein weiterer Beleg für die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen israelitischen Stämmen (vgl. Ri. 12.1-6) sowie die Zusammenfassung dieser Erzählung geboten: „Jephthah aber richtete Israel sechs Jahre. Und Jephthah, der Gileaditer, starb und wurde begraben in seiner Stadt in Gilead.“ (Ri. 12.7).

Die Binnenerzählung über Jephthahs Zeitspanne als Richter enthält etliche inhaltliche Widersprüche, die laut Simpson auf verschiedene Textvorlagen und Entstehungsetappen verweisen, denn “the story of Jephthah is from more than one hand” (Simpson 45). Auch die Darstellung in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* verweist auf derartige Vortexte: “The account exhibits clear evidence of a conflation of parallel traditional material” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 122).

Auf den ersten Blick entwickelt sich die komplexe Struktur der Jephthah-Erzählung im „Buch der Richter“ ab der Einführung des Helden (Ri. 11.1) bis zu seinem Tod und Begräbnis (Ri. 12.7), sodass alle entscheidenden Ereignisse in diesem Auszug enthalten sind: “This segment of text contains within itself all the information which is necessary to make it comprehensible as a complete story.” (Webb 41). Webb verweist jedoch darauf, dass dazu auch eine Vorgeschichte mitberücksichtigt werden müsse, die zwar formell nicht unmittelbar zu Jephthahs Richterzeit gehöre, aber als narrativer Vorspann für die folgenden Ereignisse zu verstehen sei: “The literary structure of the central section of Judges leaves us in no doubt, however, that the story of Jephthah in its finished form begins not at 11.1 but at 10.6” (Webb 41). Aufgrund der Struktur des „Buchs der Richter“ und der Überlieferungsversionen spricht Rendtorff vom „Komplex der Erzählungen von Jiftach“ (Rendtorff 179) und erklärt dessen Einführung nach der „Liste der ‚Kleinen Richter‘“ (ebd.) durch die Ambiguität in der Zuordnung und Beurteilung dieser Gestalt: „weil von ihm in beiden Überlieferungsformen berichtet wurde, so daß man ihn sowohl zu den ‚Großen‘ als auch zu den ‚Kleinen Richtern‘ rechnen konnte“ (ebd.).

Webb macht ebenfalls deutlich, dass der Bezug der Jephthah-Erzählung zum „Buch der Richter“ durch kausale Erklärungsmuster hergestellt werde, und fasst die beiden Hauptstränge der Erzählung folgendermaßen zusammen:

A network of causation, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, links persons and events within this larger narrative. Thus Israel’s apostasy (10.6) leads, via Yahweh’s intervention (10.7), to its subjugation by Ammon (10.8-9). This has two consequences, the first religious (Israel returns to Yahweh, 10.10-16) and the second political (Jephthah is

elevated in Gilead, 11.4-11). Israel's relationship with Ammon moves from complication, through increasing tension, to climax (11.32a) and, again via Yahweh's intervention (11.32b) to resolution (11.33). But this resolution gives rise to two further complications and crises, the first domestic (Jephthah and his daughter, 11.34-39) and the second political (Jephthah and the Ephraimites, 12.1-6). The successive resolution of these two crises brings the narrative to its conclusion. That is, the subject matter (what happened to Israel in the lifetime of Jephthah) is conceptualized as plot, and the basic plot structure of the narrative in its finished form is clearly recognizable. (Webb 42)

Des Weiteren unterteilt Webb die Erzählung in fünf Episoden, die allesamt von Dialog bestimmt werden und dadurch Jephthahs geschickten und kalkulierten Umgang mit Worten zum Ausdruck bringen, und betont in seiner Analyse den literarischen Charakter dieser Erzählung:

This then, I propose, is the major theme of the narrative in its finished form. It is about the tendency to accommodate religion to political norms. It shows this happening at both the national and the personal level. It shows us Yahweh's reaction to it, and how (in one particular case at least) it brought tragedy in its wake. (Webb 74f.)

In seiner ausführlichen Analyse zeichnet Webb nach, dass aufgrund dieser strukturellen (formalen und inhaltlichen) Aufteilung des Textes der entscheidende Handlungsmoment der Erzählung in dem Schwur bestehe, den Jephthah vor dem Kampf mit den Ammonitern formuliert (vgl. Webb 41-78). Demzufolge liefere diese Episode den möglichen Deutungsschlüssel zum gesamten Text: "Yet, as we have seen, the victory over the Ammonites is not the climax of this episode. The centre of dramatic interest is displaced, by the vow, to the dialogue between Jephthah and his daughter which *follows* the victory." (Webb 73; Hervorhebung im Original).

Die biblische Erzählung bietet ebenfalls einen Einblick in die Komplexität der Hauptgestalt und zeigt dessen Unfähigkeit, sich zu einem der „Großen Richter“ zu entwickeln, denn der biblische Jephthah ist eine problematische Figur:

In its penetrating study of the man, Jephthah, the story has something to say about the human condition, and this also is part of its meaning. Jephthah is a capable man — capable with words, capable in battle, a strong decisive personality, and a leader of men. He has potential for true greatness. But he has a background, a personal history, which helps us to understand his limitations even if we cannot condone

them. He is insecure, and he is self-centred. He can never fully engage with anyone's interests but his own. This is the hardness in the man and the reason why he can never be great. (Webb 75)

Des Weiteren sei die Jephthah-Erzählung ein Musterbeispiel dafür, wie sich das Gottesbild in der Zeit der Richter verwandelt und die Erklärung der geschichtlichen Ereignisse durch ein theologisches Deutungsraaster stattfindet: "The story also has something to say about the nature of Yahweh's involvement with Israel, and this also is part of its meaning." (Webb 75).

Lion Feuchtwanger - Jefta und seine Tochter

Lion Feuchtwangers Roman „Jefta und seine Tochter“ ist 1957 im Berliner Aufbau-Verlag und im Hamburger Rowohlt-Verlag erschienen (vgl. „Nachbemerkung“ des Verlags 735). Aufgrund der eingehenden Dokumentation des Schriftstellers bleibt der Roman der biblischen Vorlage nahe und passt die alttestamentarische Jephthah-Erzählung den Erwartungen eines gegenwärtigen Publikums an.

Feuchtwangers letzter Roman sei, laut der ambivalenten kritischen Begutachtung Hilschers, weder ein „Prosaepos der Vollendung“ (Hilscher 263) noch ein dokumentarisch angelegter historischer Roman, da er – trotz der Verwendung von ausführlich belegter Fachliteratur (vgl. Hilscher 264-268) – in großem Umfang auf literarischer Fiktionalisierung beruhe. Diese negative Meinung des Kritikers wird vor allem durch den Vergleich mit Thomas Manns Joseph-Romanen untermauert, der zu Feuchtwangers Nachteil ausgelegt wird (vgl. Hilscher 265). Einen Aspekt hebt Hilscher befürwortend hervor: Durch „die Entwicklung einer folgerichtigen, kunstvoll komponierten Handlung“ (Hilscher 266), die jene des Originals befolge, habe Feuchtwanger versucht, die Widersprüche der verschiedenen Quellentexte, die der Jephthah-Erzählung zugrunde liegen, für gegenwärtige Leser aufzulösen.

In der positiven Begutachtung des Romans durch Jespersen sei genau daran die Herausforderung zu ermesen, der sich Feuchtwanger durch die Übernahme dieses biblischen Stoffes gestellt habe. Laut Jespersen müsse ebenfalls festgestellt werden, dass die literarische Bearbeitung der Jephthah-Erzählung bis zur Veröffentlichung dieses Romans keine beeindruckenden Werke hervorgebracht habe. Die Erklärung dafür liege sowohl in der Komplexität des Originalstoffes als auch in der Veränderung des Erwartungshorizontes der Leser: „Something about the story, or perhaps about the attitude of readers towards the story, makes it difficult to adapt successfully to imaginative literature.“ (Jespersen 248). Trotz zahlreicher Bearbeitungen des

Jefta-Stoffes in der bildenden Kunst, Musik und Literatur (vgl. Jespersen 246-248) sei dieser nicht in seiner Gesamtheit, sondern nur fragmentarisch genutzt worden (vgl. Jespersen 250).

Im Gegensatz zu dieser selektiven Traditionslinie hat Lion Feuchtwanger die gesamte Jephthah-Erzählung in Form eines historischen Romans überarbeitet. Laut Jespersen sei deswegen Feuchtwangers Neubearbeitung des Stoffes an dem Begriff der „Glaubwürdigkeit“ zu ermesen:

Feuchtwanger saw the problem of writing a successful Jephtha novel as essentially one of credibility: how to tell an incredible story to an incredulous audience. The problem, as he perceived it, was twofold: First, the story was Biblical, a challenging problem in its own right; second, the story was unbelievable, a most complicating factor in the case of a Biblical story. The solution Feuchtwanger sought, the only one he thought possible, was a delicate balance between preserving the identity and integrity of the Bible story on the one hand and expansion and alteration of this story into a convincing, coherent novel on the other. (Jespersen 249)

Feuchtwangers Überarbeitung des Stoffes zeichne sich durch „significant reorganization and shift of emphasis“ (Jespersen 250) sowie „a unified, balanced plot“ (ebd.) aus. Der Roman widmet die ersten zwei Kapitel den Auseinandersetzungen zwischen der Familie des verstorbenen Richters Gilead und Jefta bzw. dem darauffolgenden Entschluss der Hauptgestalt, sich in die Wildnis zu begeben, um seine Frau und sein Kind nicht aufgeben zu müssen. Diese zwei Kapitel betonen die Entwicklung des Protagonisten zur kampfbewährten Heldenfigur sowie seine Fähigkeit, nicht nur durch kriegerische Überlegenheit Feinde zu besiegen, sondern auch durch kluge und oftmals listige Verhandlungen Bündnisse und zeitweilige Friedensabkommen zu schließen. Im dritten Kapitel wird Jefta vom Stamm Gilead zurückgeholt und als Retter im Krieg gegen Ammon gefeiert, doch durch seine Rückkehr wird der Konflikt mit der Familie, von der er als unehelicher Sohn ausgestoßen worden war, wieder aufgenommen. Das vierte Kapitel führt sämtliche Handlungsstränge der biblischen Vorlage zusammen und setzt diese in kausalem Verhältnis zueinander, sodass der Schwur, den Jefta im Kampf ablegt, eine rationale Erklärung erhält und die Auseinandersetzung mit Efraim, trotz der zugesicherten Unterstützung gegen Ammon, in das durch die Überlieferung bekannte Gemetzel ausufert. Im letzten Kapitel wird die Haupthandlung durch die antiklimatische Opferung der Tochter fortgeführt, die durch ihren Symbolwert friedensstiftende

Auswirkungen sowohl für die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den östlichen und den westlichen Stämmen Israels als auch für deren gemeinsamen Kämpfe gegen Ammon hat. Diese Erfolge führen dazu, dass Jefta als Richter in Israel eingesetzt wird.

Die fünf Kapitel des Romans übernehmen die Handlung des Originals in unveränderter Form, aber durch die Verlagerung der inhaltlichen Schwerpunkte werden nicht die Ereignisse, sondern der Protagonist in den Mittelpunkt gestellt. Wie das „Buch der Richter“, das die Chronologie an ausgewählten Richterfiguren ausrichtet, stellt auch der Roman „die Jahre des Jefta“ (Feuchtwanger 614) dar, aber diese beinhalten den Werdegang einer komplexen Gestalt auf dem Hintergrund einer Epoche, die durch zahlreiche Veränderungen gekennzeichnet ist. Feuchtwanger stattet seinen Helden mit der Fähigkeit aus, über sich und seine Zeit reflektieren zu können und die Komplexität seines eigenen Lebens und der Zeitgeschichte zu verstehen:

Er spürte das Zweierlei seines Wesens und den Widerspruch seiner Welt. Er war Richter in Gilead, eingesetzt und bereit, Gilead zu verteidigen – und Sohn der Lewana, nicht gewillt, gegen Ammon zu kämpfen. Er war Feldhauptmann Jahwes, begierig, die Feinde des Gottes zu zerschmettern – und Führer einer Schar Leerer Leute, ein Held und Dreinschläger, ein Gideon, ein Abenteurer, heiß bestrebt, sich ein großes Reich zu erraffen von wem immer und wie immer, wägend sogar, ob er nicht zu solchem Zweck dem Feinde Jahwes seine Tochter geben sollte. (Feuchtwanger 615)

Trotz aller Voraussetzungen – Jefta ist ein charismatischer Mann, mit zahlreichen Anhängern, ein bewährter Streiter mit Worten und Waffen – scheitert der Held an seinen eigenen Unzulänglichkeiten, denn seine Entscheidungen werden von Überheblichkeit bestimmt. Dies führt dazu, dass er nach dem Tod Gileads seine marginale soziale Position als unehelicher Sohn des verstorbenen Richters nicht akzeptiert und stattdessen samt seiner Familie und einer Schar von Anhängern in die Wildnis zieht: „Ich aber bin Jefta. Mich hat Jahwe mit Kraft gesegnet, sogar dieser gibt es zu, und der Stiergott der Mutter hat mir die Kraft gemehrt. Ich verzichte nicht, nicht auf mein Haus und nicht auf meine liebe Frau“ (Feuchtwanger 508).

Auch den religiösen Verpflichtungen, die ihm der Erzpriester Abijam auferlegt (vgl. Feuchtwanger 503-508), entzieht sich Jefta: „Du bist zu Großem ausersehen, doch nur, wenn du in Wahrheit ein Glied des Bundes bist. Du mußt dich fester ketten, damit Jahwe sein Blut mit dir teile.“ (Feuchtwanger 505). Dies setzt jedoch die Loslösung von

seiner Familie (Frau und Kind) voraus, und diesen Kompromiss geht Jefta nicht ein, bloß um sich den sozialen Status innerhalb des Stammes Gilead zu sichern. Diese Verweigerung liefert den Ansatz zum Klimax des Romans (Jeftas Schwur Jahwe gegenüber), den Feuchtwanger durch derartige Vorausdeutungen vorbereitet und erzähltechnisch geschickt ausarbeitet.

Als pragmatischer Krieger neigt Jefta dazu, den Polytheismus seiner eigenen Familie und seiner Anhänger zu tolerieren. Glaubensangelegenheiten legt Jefta zu seinem Gunsten aus, wobei seine Gedanken und Worte oftmals blasphemisch ausfallen: „Er [Jahwe] sei ein launischer, unberechenbarer Gott, und es sei sehr fraglich, ob er ihm, Jefta, zu Hilfe kommen werde, wenn König Abir gegen ihm ziehe.“ (Feuchtwanger 534). Nachdem er ein Feldzeichen anfertigen lässt, betrachtet er dieses als Zeichen einer gegenseitigen Inbesitznahme: „Nun war in Wahrheit Jahwe *sein* Gott, und wie er selber dem Gott gehörte, so gehörte der Gott jetzt ihm. Er hatte ihn in nächster Nähe, er hatte ihn erworben durch Opfer, durch gutes Geld.“ (Feuchtwanger 579; Hervorhebung im Original).

Jefta entwickelt sich zum mythischen Helden, der in Zeiten der Not und Bedrohung durch andere Stämme als Retter begrüßt wird: „Das ganze Land jetzt, vom Gebirge Gilead bis zum Berge Nebo, vom Flusse Jarmuk bis zum Flusse Arnon, schrie nach Jefta. Aus allen Städten kamen die Ältesten nach Mizpeh und verlangten, daß die Silpa-Söhne ihn zurückriefen.“ (Feuchtwanger 578) Jefta beherrscht sowohl die Kunst der Waffen als auch jene der Verhandlung und kann dadurch langfristig Frieden schaffen, doch dies wird von religiösen Eiferern als Verrat an seinem Gott ausgelegt (vgl. Feuchtwanger 591-604). Weil Konflikte zwischen den Stämmen im Grunde auch von ihren Göttern ausgetragen werden, werden friedliche Lösungen und Verhandlungen nur übergangsmäßig angenommen. Auch Jefta verfolgt seine eigenen Gedankengänge voller Misstrauen: „Aber diese Eingebung war ihm schwerlich von Jahwe gekommen. Es war Milkom, der ihn gewarnt hatte, Krieg zu führen gegen das Volk seiner Frau und seiner Mutter, und es ist Milkom, der ihm jetzt die Verschwägerung mit König Nachasch anbietet.“ (Feuchtwanger 599).

Trotz seines oftmals bewiesenen Pragmatismus weigert sich Jefta, die Unterstützung Efraims im Kampf gegen Ammon einzuholen und überlässt die Verhandlungen dem Erzpriester Abijam, dessen Überlegungen folgendermaßen lauten:

Der Krieg mußte geführt werden, und wenn Ammon mächtige Bundesgenossen fand, mußte eben auch Jefta Hilfe suchen. Wirkliche Hilfe leisten konnte freilich nur das westliche Israel, der

Stamm Efraim, und Efraim anzurufen, mußte jedem Sohne Gileads widerstreben. Als Efraim in Not war, hatte der Bruderstamm Gilead es in Stich gelassen, die Efraimter hatten ihren größten Sieg ohne Gilead ersiegt, und sie hatten nicht vergessen. Aber Jefta durfte Ammon nicht noch mehr Gebiet abtreten. Er mußte seinen Stolz überwinden und sich zu einem Bittgang über den Jordan bequemen. (Feuchtwanger 623)

Anstelle des strategisch naheliegenden Bündnisses mit Efraim, dessen Bedeutung Jefta durchaus einsieht, sucht dieser anderweitig nach Optionen: „Er mußte etwas finden, irgend etwas, das es ihm ermöglichte, allein zu siegen, ohne Efraim. Jahwe mußte ihm die Eingebung schicken.“ (Feuchtwanger 646). Diese Einstellung führt Jefta zwingendermaßen zu dem Schwur, den er während der Schlacht ablegt, um Gott durch eine zukünftige Opfergabe zum Beistand im Kampf zu überzeugen. Auch in dieser aussichtslosen Lage zeichnet sich Jefta durch seine doppelte strategische Begabung, als Feldherr und als Verhandlungsmeister, aus; der entscheidende Moment der Schlacht wird im Roman ausführlich beschrieben, sodass Jeftas Verzweiflungstat durch ein graduell ausgerichtetes Erklärungsmuster begründet wird (vgl. Feuchtwanger 645-659). Doch der weitere Ablauf der Romanhandlung zeichnet sein Scheitern auf, denn er lehnt es ab, den Beistand Efraims und dessen Beitrag zum Sieg anzuerkennen und besteht auf die Opferung seiner Tochter, um dadurch seine Version der Ereignisse durchzusetzen.

Verstocktheit und unbändiger Stolz führen zum Scheitern des Protagonisten, dessen Tragik darin besteht, sich seiner eigenen Beschränkung bewusst zu sein:

Er hat seiner Gier nachgegeben nach immer mehr Macht und immer mehr Ehre. Es hat ihm nicht genügt, Feldhauptmann zu sein und Richter, er hat Herr eines großen Reiches sein wollen, er hat sogar daran gedacht, dafür seine Tochter den Ammonitern hinzugeben und ihrem Gotte Milkom. In Wahrheit ist weder Jahwe sein Gott gewesen noch Milkom, sein Gott war immer nur Jefta. (Feuchtwanger 655f.)

Diese narrativ wirksame Selbsthinterfragung des an sich und seinen Entscheidungen zweifelnden Protagonisten wird durch dessen inneren Monolog mit einer Dynamik versehen, die zum Klimax des Romans führt. Der Sieg über Ammon verstärkt Jeftas Ruhm, denn die Opferung seiner Tochter als Bedingung des Sieges erhält eine politische Bedeutung, wie der Erzpriester Abijam feststellt:

Vielleicht wird Heil sprießen aus dem schauerlichen Gelübde. Die

Söhne Efraims werden nachdenken über das Schicksal des Mannes, den Jahwe so hoch in den Sieg hinaufriß, nur um ihn so tiefer zu stürzen. Wird dem beeidigten Efraim nicht Genüge geschehen sein, wenn der Gott selber die Rache von Jefta einfordert? Abijam sah den Weg zur Versöhnung und zum Frieden. (Feuchtwanger 686)

Es ist jedoch nicht Jefthas Gelübde, das das Bündnis zwischen Gott und dem Stamm Gilead stärkt, sondern es sind die kollektiven Handlungen und die gemeinsame Geschichte der vereinten Stämme, in denen sich Gott manifestiert. Diese Erkenntnis erlangt Jefta durch die Erklärungen des efraimitischen Erzpriesters Elead: „Siehst du, es ist so: Jahwe wurde geboren mit Israel. Die Kämpfe Israels sind seine Kämpfe. Er lebt stärker, wenn Israel stärker ist, er verdämmert, wenn Israel schwach ist. Er stirbt, wenn Israel stirbt. Er ist, was wir waren und sind und sein werden.“ (Feuchtwanger 715) Der Protagonist des Romans erkennt im Gespräch mit Elead, dass die Opferung seiner Tochter, die er selbst vollbracht hat, Beleg für seine eigene „Eitelkeit und Narretei“ (Feuchtwanger 716) ist. Dieses Gespräch betont die Tragik Jefthas, denn dieser fasst die logische Erklärung der Ereignisse selbst zusammen:

[...] er, Jefta, hatte sein furchtbares Gelöbde getan, um sich den Beistand eines Gottes zu erkaufen, der nicht war. Er hatte sein bestes, eigenstes Blut für einen Gott vergossen, der nicht war. Jefta der Held, Jefta der Narr. Kein Gott hatte ihm geholfen, Efraim hatte ihm geholfen. (Feuchtwanger 717)

Der Augenblick seines Triumphes – seine Einsetzung und Salbung zum Richter Israels – ist deswegen auch jener seiner tiefsten Niederlage. Die soziale Anerkennung, nach der Jefta immer wieder gesucht hat, geht einher mit dem Verlust seiner eigenen Familie (nach der Opferung seiner Tochter verlässt ihn auch seine Frau) und einer von Furcht geprägten Distanz der Anderen ihm gegenüber. Während der Salbungszeremonie wirkt er auf die Anwesenden wie „ein todwunder Mann“ (Feuchtwanger 723), der seinen Teil des Rituals ohne innere Anteilnahme vollzieht: „Sein Gesicht war starr, als sei es ein Teil des steinernen Hochsitzes. Er war nicht glücklich, Jefta, der Sohn der Lewana“. (ebd.) Jefta selbst erkennt „die Eitelkeit dieses Ruhmes“ (Feuchtwanger 724) und nimmt seine innere Verwandlung zum symbolischen Träger der Richterrolle wahr:

Der Mann Jefta ist nicht mehr da. Was der Priester salbt, ist nicht mehr der Mann Jefta. Der Hauch ist verweht, das Leben ist verweht, kein Öl, Wein und Gewürz kann es neu in ihn einströmen lassen. Es

ist nicht der Mann Jefta, es ist der Ruhm des Jefta, der hier auf dem steinernen Stuhle sitzt. (Feuchtwanger 727)

Laut Jespersen sei es Feuchtwanger gelungen, nicht nur die biblischen Ereignisse kohärent und schlüssig umzudeuten und für ein gegenwärtiges Publikum glaubwürdig zu verfassen, sondern vor allem “the successful, convincing portrayal of the main character” (Jespersen 261) zu erschaffen. In Bezug auf die Figur des Protagonisten und dessen Scheitern fasst die folgende Aussage Jespersens die wichtigsten Aspekte zusammen: “Jephta is, as Feuchtwanger portrays him, a man whose insatiable vanity is transformed in the face of social rejection and the temptation of power into an inordinate lust for fame which destroys everything it touches, including Jephta himself.” (Jespersen 255).

Im Gegensatz zu Jespersen ist Hilscher der Meinung, dass der Roman, der vor allem auf den „schelmischen Glaubensstreiter Jefta“ (Hilscher 263) ausgerichtet sei, an literarischem Wert wegen der „flächigen Personencharakteristiken und erfindungsarmen Figurenkonstellationen“ (Hilscher 273) verliere und ebenfalls eine „ästhetisch reizarme, herkömmliche, einsträngige Erzählweise“ (ebd.) zum Ausdruck bringe. Dieser Position ist mit Bezug auf Jespersen zu widersprechen, der Feuchtwangers literarische Leistungen – “a credible story and a convincing hero” (Jespersen 261) – auch mit Bezug auf die sekundären Romangestalten überzeugend erfasst (vgl. Jespersen 253f.).

Zu den letzteren gehört auch die titelgebende Figur der Tochter, die in der Bibel namenlos bleibt und im Roman Ja’ala (in Anlehnung an die alttestamentarische Jael) genannt wird. Wie im Romantitel angemerkt, ist das primäre Identifikationsmerkmal dieser Figur ihre Familienbeziehung zu Jefta, und dies prägt sowohl ihr Verhalten als auch ihr späteres Schicksal als Opfer der väterlichen Fehlentscheidungen. Die abgöttische Verehrung des Vaters durch die Tochter entspricht einer Beziehung, die Jespersen als “abnormal, bordering as it were on the incestuous” (Jespersen 254) beschreibt und von Bal in Zusammenhang mit den Jungfräulichkeitsvorstellungen des Alten Testaments gebracht wird:

The absolute property of the father, the virgin daughter does not only belong to him, as a metonymical extension of him; she is part of him, as a synecdochical integration, which causes her loss to be the loss of himself. His wholeness rather than hers is threatened with loss. (Bal 61)

Doch im Roman bietet das dramatische Schicksal der Tochter auch ein

narratives Erklärungsmuster für die Einführung bestimmter Bräuche, die aus ihren Vorbereitungen für die Opferung abgeleitet werden und dadurch ein spezifisches Überlieferungsmuster der mündlichen Geschichte begründen.

Schlussfolgerung

Der Beitrag erfasst zunächst die historischen und literarischen Aspekte des alttestamentarischen „Buchs der Richter“ und geht anschließend auf die Jephthah-Erzählung ein, um danach Lion Feuchtwangers historischen Roman „Jefta und seine Tochter“ zu analysieren. Die Untersuchung hebt hervor, dass Feuchtwanger die narrative Struktur der biblischen Vorlage überarbeitet und daraus eine kohärente Romanhandlung für zeitgenössische Leser entwirft, um die mythische Dimension des Originals auf der Ebene des Erzählens beizubehalten.

Im Zusammenhang mit der Bedeutung der Bibel als literarische Vorlage ist an dieser Stelle auf Frye zu verweisen, der sich folgendermaßen dazu äußert: “There are and remain two aspects of myth: one is its story-structure, which attaches it to literature, the other is its social function as concerned knowledge, what it is important for a society to know.” (Frye 47). Diese kulturellen Funktionen des Jephthah-Mythos werden von den Verfassern des „Buchs der Richter“ und von Feuchtwanger mitberücksichtigt. Laut Amit bestehe eine wichtige Zielsetzung des biblischen Textes darin, den Lesern ein Deutungsmuster für aktuelle Ereignisse zu liefern, das anhand von Geschehnissen aus der Vergangenheit erkennbar gemacht wird:

But however different may be the rhetoric in the book of Judges, its purpose is similar: to reveal the historical order underlying the events and thereby provide the reader with a tool to understand the events of his time. Towards this end, history is described as a series of cycles, in which the progress from one cycle to another has a didactic effect. (Amit 59)

Dadurch erfülle das „Buch der Richter“ mehrfache Aufgaben gegenüber seiner (zeitgenössischen und späteren) Leserschaft, stellt Amit schlussfolgernd fest, denn es stelle ebenfalls eine Kritik an inkonsequenten Leitfiguren (bzw. an einem Grundmuster von “leadership”) sowie eine Anleitung dar, Gottes Manifestation durch Zeichen zu erkennen.

Im Nachwort zur ersten Ausgabe von 1957 fasst Feuchtwanger seine Absicht zusammen, in einem biblischen Roman die Figur Jefta und seine Zeit darzustellen: „Inzwischen aber hatte ich den Mann Jefta gesichtet, wie er groß, allein und rebellisch unter einem blassen, leeren

Himmel steht, allen Streit und Widerspruch der Zeit in sich selber auskämpfend.“ („Nachwort“ 730). Obwohl Feuchtwanger das selbstgesetzte Ziel verfolgt, einen biblischen Roman aufgrund “a rather strict adherence to the source” (Jespersen 249) zu verfassen, weicht er von der Vorlage insofern ab, als er Jefta eine zentrale Rolle einräumt, die dieser in der biblischen Erzählung nicht innehatte, denn “Jephthah himself is not a full subject“ (Bal 44). Dadurch stellt der Roman den Protagonisten und dessen Charakter und nicht bloß seine Heldentaten aufgrund des spezifischen Wiederholungsmuster aus dem „Buch der Richter“ dar.

Im Hinblick auf die performative Ebene der Erzählung ist die Gegenüberstellung einer männlichen und einer weiblichen Darstellungsform von Geschichte zu nennen, die Bal folgendermaßen beschreibt: “If writing history has become a male property, oral history can still be a female prerogative.” (Bal 67). In ihrer Begründung dieser zwei Erzählformen erwähnt Bal, dass die biblische Erzählung, die um Jefta aufgebaut sei, der schriftlichen Überlieferungstradition angehöre, während die Klagelieder, die der Opferung der Tochter vorangestellt werden, in die Tradition der mündlichen Überlieferung eingegangen seien. In Feuchtwangers Romans sind diese Erzählungen einander nicht gegenübergestellt, sondern komplementär zueinander aufgebaut, denn sie werden als bedeutende Traditionsformen der biblischen Erzählung und der sozialen Praxis (letztere durch die Rituale der sozialen Isolation und der Klage, die von jungen Frauen vor ihrer Hochzeit begangen werden) dargestellt (vgl. Feuchtwanger 725). Somit weisen beide Erzähl- und Überlieferungsformen über ihre Entstehungszeit hinaus und gliedern sich dadurch in eine komplexe literarische Überlieferungstradition der Bibeltex-te ein, zu der auch Feuchtwangers historischer Roman einen bedeutenden Beitrag liefert.

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Voix entrelacées, mondes révélés : La polyphonie narrative face aux crises personnelles et sociales dans *L'Élégance du hérisson*

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Abstract

“The Elegance of the Hedgehog” is a major novel that exemplifies Muriel Barbery's exploration of identity through a polyphonic narrative structure. Through the intertwined stories of Renée Michel, a self-taught and discreet concierge with "the elegance of a hedgehog," and Paloma, an exceptionally gifted teenager, the novel delves into the tensions between appearance and essence. Centered on the dual voices of Renée, a concierge, and Paloma, a precocious teenager, the study explores how their intimate journals become spaces of resistance and introspection amidst personal and societal crises. Key concepts such as polyphony, journal-writing, and the dialectic between concealment and revelation are foregrounded to illustrate the novel's intricate interplay between narrative voices and existential reflection.

Keywords : polyphony, journal, dissimulation, appearance, essence

Introduction

Dans le vaste paysage de la littérature, un thème intemporel se dessine, semblable à un fil conducteur qui traverse les récits depuis des siècles : la quête de soi. Il s'agit d'une exploration intérieure, un voyage au cœur de l'âme humaine où les personnages s'efforcent de percer le mystère de leur essence profonde. Plus qu'une simple recherche, elle exige une confrontation avec les questions fondamentales de l'existence. Héritée du stoïcisme, cette réflexion sur la connaissance de soi transcende les époques et les cultures, s'étendant sur des millénaires.

En littérature, ce chemin introspectif est jalonné de conflits intérieurs, de dilemmes moraux profonds et de tourments émotionnels qui mettent les personnages à rude épreuve. Pourtant, c'est dans ces épreuves qu'ils trouvent leur force, leur capacité à évoluer et à se

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réinventer. Chaque pas dans ce parcours ardu symbolise un changement, un développement qui les rapproche d'une compréhension plus profonde d'eux-mêmes. Cette quête n'est toutefois pas uniquement individuelle ; elle est profondément ancrée dans les contextes sociaux et culturels qui façonnent les personnages. Leurs luttes reflètent les tensions du monde réel, offrant ainsi un miroir dans lequel nous pouvons reconnaître nos propres combats et victoires. À travers une diversité de genres – du roman contemporain, de la poésie, des récits philosophiques, contes ou science-fiction –, la littérature propose des perspectives variées, témoins de la richesse et de la complexité de l'expérience humaine.

Dans *L'Élegance du hérisson*, œuvre phare de Muriel Barbery, l'exploration de l'identité prend une profondeur singulière à travers les parcours de Renée Michel et Paloma Josse. Ces deux personnages, en apparence ordinaires, dissimulent une richesse intérieure insoupçonnée, nourrie par des questionnements profonds sur leur place dans le monde. Renée, concierge autodidacte passionnée par la littérature et la philosophie, masque son érudition derrière une façade modeste, tandis que Paloma, adolescente surdouée, rejette les conventions sociales dans sa quête de sens. Leur rencontre, aussi improbable que salvatrice, agit comme un catalyseur révélant les facettes multiples de l'identité humaine.

La polyphonie narrative dans *L'Élegance du hérisson* joue un rôle central dans la manière dont Muriel Barbery construit un récit riche et nuancé, capable de représenter à la fois les complexités du monde et les voix intérieures des personnages. À travers les deux narratrices, Renée Michel et Paloma Josse, Barbery juxtapose des perspectives radicalement différentes : celle d'une concierge autodidacte et discrète, et celle d'une adolescente brillante et cynique. Cette dualité narrative ne se limite pas à offrir deux points de vue sur une même réalité ; elle enrichit la profondeur du roman en confrontant des expériences de vie distinctes, des sensibilités philosophiques variées et des styles d'expression contrastés.

Les récits de Renée et Paloma ne sont pas de simples journaux personnels, mais des constructions rhétoriques soigneusement élaborées, où le choix du contenu, de la structure et du style vise à produire des effets spécifiques sur le lecteur. Par exemple, le ton érudit et introspectif de Renée est marqué par des références à la philosophie, à la littérature et à l'art, invitant à une contemplation plus large sur les apparences, la marginalité et la quête de l'essence. En revanche, le regard de Paloma, souvent ironique et marqué par une lucidité cinglante, met en lumière les absurdités de la société bourgeoise, tout

en dévoilant son propre désarroi existentiel. Ces contrastes narratifs permettent non seulement d'explorer des thèmes universels, mais aussi de capturer les tensions entre différentes générations, classes sociales et façons d'interpréter le monde.

Cette polyphonie narrative est particulièrement puissante dans le contexte des crises personnelles et sociales auxquelles les personnages sont confrontés. Renée porte en elle un traumatisme lié à son passé, une souffrance qu'elle dissimule derrière une façade banale, tandis que Paloma, déçue par l'hypocrisie de son milieu familial, contemple des idées de mort pour échapper à un monde qu'elle trouve dépourvu de sens. Leurs récits, bien qu'intimement introspectifs, se connectent inévitablement à des enjeux plus vastes : les attentes oppressantes de la société, la stratification sociale et le besoin humain universel de se sentir compris et valorisé.

Cette dualité entre les deux voix agit comme un miroir où se reflètent les fractures de notre réalité contemporaine. La polyphonie devient ainsi un outil pour confronter le lecteur aux tensions entre apparence et vérité, entre individualité et collectivité. De plus, les choix narratifs de Barbery, qu'il s'agisse des moments où les récits se croisent ou des ruptures stylistiques entre les deux narratrices, sont conçus pour susciter des réponses émotionnelles et intellectuelles précises chez le lecteur. Ces choix invitent à une réflexion sur les mécanismes de survie face aux traumatismes personnels, aux défis sociétaux et aux crises mondiales, tout en incitant à questionner notre propre regard sur ces réalités.

Enfin, en orchestrant cette double voix, Barbery démontre que les récits personnels, bien qu'ils semblent isolés, sont toujours en dialogue avec des réalités plus vastes. Renée et Paloma, à travers leurs journaux, ne se contentent pas d'affronter leur propre condition : elles offrent également une lecture critique et poétique de notre monde, un monde où l'essence, souvent dissimulée, ne demande que d'être révélée.

1. Polyphonie narrative et construction des voix : une dualité entre apparence et essence

L'Élégance du hérisson est un roman fascinant qui déploie une structure narrative complexe et captivante. Situé principalement dans un immeuble de luxe parisien, le récit se concentre sur les vies entrelacées de deux protagonistes : Renée Michel, une concierge apparemment ordinaire mais secrètement cultivée, et Paloma Josse, une jeune fille surdouée désillusionnée par la superficialité de sa

famille bourgeoise. Ce qui rend la structure du roman si intéressante, c'est la manière dont il alterne entre les perspectives de Renée, Paloma et parfois d'autres résidents. Chaque chapitre offre une plongée profonde dans les pensées intimes et les observations acérées des personnages, révélant leurs luttes intérieures, leurs passions cachées et leurs quêtes de sens dans un monde en apparence indifférent.

De plus, le roman présente une juxtaposition habile entre des passages philosophiques profonds et des moments de comédie légère : « Il fait beau reprocher aux phénoménologues leur autisme sans chat ; j'ai voué ma vie à la quête de l'intemporel. Mais qui chasse l'éternité récolte la solitude » (Barbery 264), ou « J'étais partie dans l'idée de découvrir l'harmonie du mouvement du monde et j'en arrive à des dames très bien qui se battent pour une culotte en dentelle. » (Barbery 270) Ainsi, les deux narratrices créent un équilibre subtil entre réflexion intellectuelle et divertissement.

La polyphonie, un concept littéraire bien connu, se réfère à la présence de multiples voix narratives au sein d'un même récit, offrant ainsi une diversité de perspectives et d'expériences. Dans son roman *L'Élegance du hérisson*, Muriel Barbery exploite habilement cette technique narrative pour enrichir son récit et offrir aux lecteurs une vision complexe et nuancée du monde qu'elle dépeint. Dans ce roman, nous avons deux voix principales : celle de Renée Michel, la concierge, et celle de Paloma Josse, la jeune surdouée. À travers les voix distinctes de ses deux protagonistes, ainsi que d'autres personnages, Barbery crée une polyphonie narrative captivante, incitant ses lecteurs à s'immerger dans un univers riche en perspectives et en nuances et leur offrant une expérience littéraire enrichissante.

Le roman est structuré en cinq parties inégales, chacune portant un titre énigmatique, caractéristique intrigante de *L'Élegance du hérisson*. Les cinq parties sont : *Marx (préambule)* ; *Camélias* ; *De la grammaire* ; *Pluie d'été* et *Paloma*. Ces titres, en apparence anodins, dissimulent en réalité des significations profondes qui se révèlent au fur et à mesure que le lecteur progresse dans le roman. Chaque partie est composée de plusieurs chapitres narrés par les deux narratrices, Renée et Paloma, et qui se distinguent les uns des autres à travers la structure, le ton et les préoccupations des protagonistes. Les chapitres de Renée sont intitulés par un concept-clé mis en lumière, par exemple : *Riabinin*, *Douce insomnie*, *Petite vessie*, *Un nouveau cœur*, *Wabi* ou *Infinitésimale*.

Les chapitres de Paloma sont bien différents, car elle s'adonne à créer deux types d'écriture : les pensées profondes et le journal du mouvement du monde, le deux étant numérotés : *Pensée profonde n°7*,

Journal du mouvement du monde n°3. Leur structure et leur thématique sont également distinctes : « Le journal du mouvement du monde sera donc consacré au mouvement des gens, des corps, voire, si vraiment il n'y a rien à dire, des choses, et à y trouver quelque chose qui soit suffisamment esthétique pour donner un prix à la vie. » (Barbery 38), tandis que « dans mes pensées profondes, je joue à ce que je suis, hein, finalement, une intello (qui se moque des autres intellos) ». (Barbery 37)

Ainsi, Muriel Barbery structure *L'Élégance du hérisson* autour de deux narratrices aux voix distinctes, Renée Michel et Paloma Josse, qui dévoilent chacune à leur manière la tension entre apparence et essence. À travers leurs récits, le roman explore non seulement la complexité des identités humaines, mais également la manière dont le récit lui-même est construit et perçu. Comme l'a noté Hanna Meretoja, « This role-switching contributes to the novel's polyphony and encourages the reader to take up an active, critical role in reinterpreting culturally mediated narratives (see Spiller 302–7) », cité par (Meretoja 173-174). Dans ce contexte, le « changement de rôle » se manifeste dans la manière dont Renée et Paloma jouent avec les attentes associées à leur position sociale respective. Renée, concierge effacée et perçue comme insignifiante, s'approprie les codes de l'érudition pour dévoiler une richesse intérieure insoupçonnée, tandis que Paloma, adolescente surdouée issue d'un milieu privilégié, déconstruit les normes de son propre environnement social. Ce retournement des rôles typiques invite le lecteur à reconsidérer les stéréotypes sociaux et les récits culturels imposés, en adoptant une posture critique face à ces constructions.

En mobilisant les notions de mimésis et de diégèse, Barbery offre une réflexion sur la manière dont la réalité est représentée et racontée, amplifiant ainsi la richesse de la polyphonie narrative. La mimésis, ou l'imitation de la réalité, se manifeste principalement dans les descriptions des vies quotidiennes des narratrices et des habitants de l'immeuble. Les interactions banales, les dialogues échangés et les descriptions précises de l'environnement ancrent le récit dans un cadre social reconnaissable, où les dynamiques de classe et de pouvoir sont subtilement mises en scène. Par exemple, Renée observe avec une précision quasi ethnographique les comportements des résidents bourgeois, tandis que Paloma capte les absurdités et les contradictions de son entourage avec un regard acéré. Ces éléments mimétiques permettent au lecteur de s'immerger dans une réalité sociale tangible, tout en soulignant les barrières invisibles qui cloisonnent les personnages.

Cependant, cette mimésis est enrichie par la diégèse, c'est-à-dire par la subjectivité des récits narrés. Ni Renée ni Paloma ne se contentent de décrire leur réalité : elles l'interprètent, la commentent et la reconstruisent à travers leur propre regard. Par exemple, Renée, dans ses réflexions philosophiques et littéraires, dépasse les événements pour les relier à des idées plus vastes sur la beauté, la vérité et l'identité. Paloma, de son côté, organise son journal en fragments thématiques, utilisant son récit et sa caméra pour exprimer ses frustrations face au vide existentiel et aux attentes imposées par la société. Ces deux approches, mimétique et diégétique, créent une tension narrative riche. Tandis que la mimésis ancre le récit dans une réalité familière, la diégèse offre un filtre subjectif qui transforme cette réalité en une méditation sur les apparences et l'essence. Cette dynamique est particulièrement évidente dans la manière dont Renée et Paloma utilisent leurs journaux : l'un comme un espace pour révéler des vérités intérieures que personne ne suspecte, et l'autre comme un refuge pour résister à la superficialité et à l'hypocrisie qui l'entourent.

Ainsi, Barbery ne se contente pas de juxtaposer deux perspectives distinctes ; elle construit également un dialogue complexe entre l'imitation de la réalité et la narration subjective, qui sert à illustrer la dualité des personnages : Renée et Paloma évoluent dans un monde d'apparences tout en cherchant à préserver leur essence. Par leur récit, elles révèlent les mécanismes par lesquels la réalité est à la fois perçue et reconfigurée, invitant le lecteur à réfléchir non seulement à leur quête identitaire, mais aussi à sa propre manière de lire et d'interpréter la réalité.

2. Journaux intimes et résilience : narration comme refuge face aux crises personnelles et sociales

Dans son travail de recherche, Alan Palmer considère que : « Generally, events in the storyworld are of little importance unless they become the experiences of characters. Events can occur independently of characters, but they will, on the whole, have a significance for the narrative only because of their effect on those characters' minds. » (Palmer 9)

Dans *L'Élegance du hérisson*, Muriel Barbery utilise les journaux intimes de Renée Michel et Paloma Josse comme des refuges narratifs, offrant ainsi un espace de résistance face aux crises personnelles et sociales auxquelles ces deux personnages sont confrontés :

Et moi, je suis peut-être la plus grande victime de cette contradiction parce que, pour une raison inconnue, je suis hypersensible à tout ce qui est dissonant, comme si j'avais un genre d'oreille absolue pour les couacs, pour les contradictions. Cette contradiction-là et toutes les autres... Et du coup, je ne me reconnais dans aucune croyance, dans aucune de ces cultures familiales incohérentes. Peut-être que je suis le symptôme de la contradiction familiale et donc celle qui doit disparaître pour que la famille aille bien. (Barbery 326)

À travers ces récits, les personnages se dévoilent de manière intime et philosophique, l'écriture devenant un outil de résilience qui leur permet de questionner leur identité et leur place dans un monde souvent dénué de sens : « Comme je ne pouvais non plus cesser d'être ce que j'étais, il m'apparut que ma voie était celle du secret : je devais taire ce que j'étais et de l'autre monde ne jamais mêler ». (Barbery 363) Paloma révèle à travers ses réflexions intimes un profond attachement à des valeurs telles que l'honnêteté et l'affection. Sa recherche constante de sens dans un monde qu'elle perçoit comme étant dépourvu de valeur authentique reflète son désir intrinsèque de comprendre et d'embrasser les aspects les plus essentiels de la condition humaine : « Malgré toute cette chance et toute cette richesse, je sais que la destination finale, c'est le bocal à poissons ». (Barbery 21) Par ailleurs, elle ressent une profonde aliénation par rapport à sa famille et à la société en général : « Mais ce qui est certain, c'est que dans le bocal, je n'irai pas ». (Barbery 22)

Paloma a déjà planifié son acte : elle a décidé de mettre fin à ses jours le jour de son treizième anniversaire, croyant que ce serait une manière de mettre un terme à une vie qu'elle juge insupportablement vide et absurde : « Quand j'entrerai dans la course des adultes, est-ce que je serai encore capable de faire face au sentiment de l'absurdité ? Je ne crois pas. ». (Barbery 22) Elle croit que, par cette disparition, elle pourra enfin échapper à l'absurdité de la vie bourgeoise et à la superficialité de son entourage, tout en délivrant un message silencieux mais puissant sur les failles de la société qui l'entoure : « Sans appartement et sans fille, ils penseront peut-être à tous les Africains morts, non ? » (Barbery 26). Sa décision de se suicider le jour de son treizième anniversaire constitue un acte de rébellion contre une existence qu'elle perçoit comme vide de sens. Cette décision évoque les mots de Chateaubriand qui, avant de se convertir, écrivait à vingt-neuf ans : « Mourons tout entiers de peur de souffrir ailleurs. Cette vie doit corriger de la manie d'être. La vieillesse est un temps où l'on meurt à

moitié, elle est la mort sans le néant. » (Barthes 107). Chateaubriand, tout comme Paloma, ressentait un profond désespoir face à la vie et envisageait la mort comme une délivrance de la souffrance et des désillusions de l'existence.

La fille partage cette vision pessimiste, percevant la vie comme une succession de souffrances et de contradictions insurmontables, et considère le suicide comme une manière d'échapper à cette réalité insupportable. Toutefois, elle reconnaît que la mort est irréversible et qu'une fois cette décision prise, il n'y a plus de retour en arrière : « Alors s'il y a quelque chose dans ce monde qui vaut la peine de vivre, je ne dois pas le louper parce qu'une fois qu'on est mort, il est trop tard pour avoir des regrets et parce que mourir parce qu'on s'est trompé, c'est vraiment trop bête. » (Barbery 37).

Sous l'apparence d'une jeune fille trop souvent jugée à tort en raison de son âge, Paloma révèle une lucidité et une maturité précoces qui la poussent à réfléchir intensément sur le sens de la vie, la mort et les contradictions de l'existence humaine. La rencontre entre Paloma et Renée marque un tournant décisif dans le roman. Paloma, isolée et incomprise, découvre en Renée une âme sœur. En écoutant Mme Renée se confier et en constatant combien cela lui apporte du réconfort, Paloma identifie la source de sa propre souffrance : « j'ai compris quelque chose : j'ai compris que je souffrais parce que je ne pouvais faire de bien à personne autour de moi. » (Barbery 366).

Elle réalise que son sentiment de désespoir et de frustration provient de son incapacité à aider ceux qu'elle aime, notamment sa famille. Elle ressent une profonde colère envers son père, sa mère et surtout sa sœur Colombe, non pas à cause de leurs actions en elles-mêmes, mais en raison de son propre sentiment d'impuissance face à leurs « maladies » émotionnelles et psychologiques. Cette prise de conscience l'encourage à reconsidérer ses pensées suicidaires et à envisager la possibilité d'une vie pleine de sens.

Paloma, qui avait longtemps érigé des barrières émotionnelles pour se protéger des blessures potentielles infligées par les autres, découvre finalement des personnes capables de franchir ces barrières et de lui offrir une connexion authentique. Renée, Kakuro et Yoko incarnent des relations authentiques qui permettent à Paloma de sortir de sa solitude et de percevoir la beauté et le sens de la vie. Leur présence et leur compréhension lui offrent un nouveau regard sur le monde, où l'amour, l'amitié et l'art deviennent des raisons suffisantes pour continuer à vivre : « À part l'amour, l'amitié et la beauté de l'Art, je ne vois pas grand-chose d'autre qui puisse nourrir la vie humaine. » (Barbery 38). Cependant, l'adaptation cinématographique du roman,

Le Hérisson (2009), modifie ce mode de narration en introduisant une nouvelle forme de communication visuelle.

Dans le film, Paloma n'écrit pas dans son journal, mais filme le monde qui l'entoure avec la caméra offerte par son père, transformant ainsi la manière dont elle exprime ses pensées et observations. Cette transition du journal écrit à l'image filmée propose au spectateur une expérience différente, où l'histoire est perçue à travers l'objectif de la caméra de Paloma. Comme dans le roman, cette narration visuelle permet au spectateur d'entrer dans l'univers intérieur du personnage, mais avec une distance différente : au lieu de lire ses pensées, on découvre ce qu'elle choisit de montrer à travers ses prises de vue.

En outre, cette approche narrative est renforcée par l'idée exprimée par Cecilia Majava : « Les effets sont que nous, les lecteurs, nous mêlons également dans le récit à un niveau personnel, comme si nous étions là ou comme si le personnage était ici avec nous. Selon Genette, il s'agit d'une "fonction de communication : Le narrateur s'adresse directement au narrataire, c'est-à-dire au lecteur potentiel du texte, afin d'établir ou de maintenir le contact avec lui." » (Majava 13). Cette citation illustre parfaitement le mécanisme de proximité créé par Barbery à travers les voix de ses narratrices. Dans le roman, comme dans le film, une forme de communication directe et intime s'établit entre les personnages et leurs interlocuteurs — qu'il s'agisse du lecteur ou du spectateur. Pour Renée et Paloma, cette fonction de communication se manifeste par la manière dont elles partagent leurs réflexions personnelles.

Pour Renée, son journal intime devient une sorte de conversation silencieuse, dans laquelle elle s'adresse à ses pensées tout en étant consciente de l'éventuelle présence d'un lecteur. Ce dialogue intérieur lui permet de maintenir un lien avec le monde extérieur, tout en se protégeant derrière l'écran de l'anonymat. Paloma, quant à elle, utilise sa caméra non seulement pour capturer son environnement, mais aussi pour établir une forme de contact avec ceux qu'elle observe, comme si elle les invitait à entrer dans son univers, tout en maintenant une certaine distance grâce au filtre du cadre.

Cette proximité ressentie à travers le texte ou les images filmées dans le film fait de nous, lecteurs ou spectateurs, des partenaires actifs du récit. Nous ne sommes pas de simples observateurs passifs, mais sommes invités à ressentir et à réfléchir aux expériences intimes de ces personnages, comme s'ils étaient présents à nos côtés. Cela favorise une immersion totale dans leur monde, où chaque réflexion et chaque observation deviennent une invitation à pénétrer dans leur conscience. Ainsi, que ce soit par l'écriture ou par l'image, Barbery instaure un lien

direct et personnel entre le personnage et le récepteur du récit, transformant cette expérience narrative en un acte de communication intime et mutuellement affectif. Par ailleurs, le roman met en lumière une autre dynamique essentielle dans la construction des identités des personnages.

Comme le souligne la citation suivante : « a plethora of French novels from the 1970s to the present thematize the way in which identity is constituted through 'identifications-with' and through a process of choosing a circle of interlocutors from the literary and larger cultural tradition » (Meretoja 174). Renée et Paloma ne se contentent pas de s'observer mutuellement ou de se confier à leurs journaux ; elles se définissent également en relation avec des figures culturelles et littéraires. Dans ses écrits, Renée, par exemple, s'identifie à travers ses lectures à des auteurs qui l'aident à donner un sens à sa vie tout en affirmant son refus des stéréotypes. Tolstoï, Husserl et Ozu ne sont pas simplement des références intellectuelles ; ils représentent les interlocuteurs qu'elle choisit pour échapper au vide culturel et émotionnel de son quotidien. Paloma, de son côté, s'exprime à travers ses observations, cherchant à se connecter à un univers de beauté et de philosophie qu'elle découvre dans des instants fugitifs de son quotidien, comme sa fascination pour la simplicité du geste de servir un thé. Ces figures culturelles et littéraires, véritables interlocuteurs de leur réflexion, nourrissent leur processus d'identification et renforcent leur résistance à l'absurdité du monde qui les entoure.

Leurs journaux, à la fois personnels et culturels, deviennent des espaces où elles construisent et déconstruisent leur identité en interaction avec les grandes figures de la culture et de la philosophie. Le choix de leurs interlocuteurs ne se limite pas à une simple quête de définition personnelle ; il constitue également une forme de résistance aux attentes et aux normes imposées par la société.

Ces processus d'identification et de déconstruction trouvent un écho dans les idées développées par Lisa Zunshine, selon lesquelles les lecteurs et spectateurs possèdent une capacité innée à attribuer aux personnages une infinité de pensées et d'états mentaux : « Our Theory of Mind allows us to make sense of fictional characters by investing them with an inexhaustible repertoire of states of mind, but the price that this arrangement may extract from us is that we begin to feel that fictional people do indeed have an inexhaustible repertoire of states of mind » (Zunshine 20). Dans *L'Élégance du hérisson*, la richesse des états mentaux de Renée et Paloma, qu'ils soient exprimés par l'écrit ou par l'image, plonge le lecteur ou le spectateur dans une perception de ces personnages comme étant dotés de pensées et d'émotions infinies.

Cela renforce l'intensité de notre immersion dans leur univers intérieur et notre capacité à nous connecter à leur humanité.

Conclusion

En conclusion, *L'Élégance du hérisson* de Muriel Barbery offre une démonstration magistrale de la manière dont la polyphonie narrative enrichit la compréhension des tensions humaines, sociales et existentielles. Les journaux intimes des deux protagonistes ne sont pas de simples exutoires ; ils constituent des refuges narratifs où s'élabore une résistance silencieuse contre la superficialité, l'isolement et l'absurdité. Ces récits deviennent des espaces où l'écriture, loin d'être une activité strictement solitaire, prend la forme d'un dialogue intérieur chargé de sens et de réflexion. En s'appuyant sur des références philosophiques, littéraires et artistiques, Renée construit une identité qui défie les stéréotypes, affirmant que l'apparence sociale ne détermine en rien la richesse intérieure. Paloma, quant à elle, utilise ses observations et réflexions pour critiquer l'hypocrisie du monde qui l'entoure, tout en cherchant des îlots de beauté et d'authenticité pour échapper à la vacuité qu'elle perçoit dans son quotidien.

Le roman démontre également que ces récits personnels s'inscrivent dans un cadre plus large, mettant en lumière la manière dont les dynamiques sociales, les fractures générationnelles et les attentes oppressantes façonnent les existences individuelles. Renée et Paloma, bien que séparées par leur âge, leur statut et leurs expériences, trouvent un terrain commun dans leur rejet des normes et leur quête d'une vie pleine de sens. Enfin, leur rencontre avec Kakuro Ozu, un voisin cultivé et bienveillant, agit comme un catalyseur qui les pousse à reconnaître la possibilité d'une transformation personnelle à travers l'amitié, l'art et l'amour. Ce lien révèle que, malgré les barrières sociales et personnelles, des connexions authentiques peuvent émerger, apportant une lueur d'espoir dans un monde souvent perçu comme absurde et cloisonné.

L'importance de cette polyphonie ne réside pas seulement dans les perspectives qu'elle offre, mais dans le dialogue qu'elle instaure entre mimésis et diégèse. Les descriptions réalistes de l'immeuble, des interactions sociales et des détails du quotidien ancrent le récit dans une réalité tangible, tandis que la subjectivité des narratrices transforme cette réalité en une méditation sur les apparences, les vérités cachées et les valeurs essentielles de la vie.

L'exploration des personnages, notamment à travers leur interaction avec l'art et la culture, révèle comment ils transcendent leurs apparences et les stéréotypes sociaux pour dévoiler leur véritable

essence. Ce processus d'auto-découverte et de révélation réciproque s'inscrit dans une quête universelle de compréhension et de reconnaissance : « C'est dans le thème de la clandestinité... comment un être en apparence fade est en fait autre chose que ce que l'on croit. Il s'adresse à cette part narcissique en nous tous, à cette sensation de ne pas être compris à sa juste valeur, pas reconnu pour ce qu'on est vraiment. » (Kapriélian 70-71) Cette citation de Nelly Kapriélian saisit parfaitement l'essence du roman, l'idée clé selon laquelle les apparences peuvent souvent masquer la véritable richesse intérieure des individus. Dans *L'Élégance du hérisson*, Muriel Barbery explore comment des personnages tels que Renée Michel et Paloma Josse dissimulent leur intelligence et leur sensibilité derrière des façades modestes et des rôles sociaux convenus. La clandestinité des identités, les barrières érigées contre les jugements extérieurs, et la quête de sens et de beauté se combinent pour créer une œuvre qui parle autant à l'intellect qu'à l'âme, confirmant que la vraie compréhension de soi et des autres est une démarche aussi artistique que philosophique. Cette clandestinité révèle une lutte intérieure entre l'authenticité de soi et la nécessité de se conformer aux attentes extérieures.

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Hidden Children: A Short Study on Theatrical Absence

Natascha Siouzouli¹

Abstract: In 2012, I attended the performance *Max und Moritz. Eine Winterreise* performed by young inmates of the Youth Detention Centre, Berlin. The performance was based on the theatre play *The Stones* by T. Lycos and S. Nanstou (premiered in 1996) enriched with various text fragments (from W. Busch's *Max und Moritz*, published in 1865; E. Jelinek's *Winterreise*, 2011, amongst others) and rap songs (written by the participants with the assistance of J. Hedtke using samples of F. Schubert's *Winterreise*).

In 2015, I attended the performance *Evros Walk Water – A Cage Re-enactment* devised and realized by Rimini Protokoll. This performance was based on the stories of young asylum seekers and/or unaccompanied minors stranded in Athens, Greece. These youngsters participated in the play in a rather peculiar way: the audience could hear their voices through headphones telling their stories or whatever they wanted to say and follow their instructions in order for the performance to take place through the actions of the spectators. Their presence and absence were marked by their voices.

The two performances demonstrate similarities, the most important and troubling of which is the fact that the protagonists are children/ young adults. The paper seeks to examine in detail the ways in which the performances display the presence/ the absence of (vulnerable) minors and/ or their stories, as well as the dilemmas resulting from these particular representations for the participating audiences.

Keywords: presence, absence, minors on stage, aesthetics and ethics

1. Introduction: Children on Stage

Performances, in which children appear, are challenging in many ways: they render the spectacle charming since children are, more often than not, cute and likeable and can attract the focus on them (which means

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that the spectator neglects other parts of the spectacle); they also stimulate a sort of anticipation for a surprising moment, a moment which denies the staging directions, a moment that introduces chaos in the plan; they can lastly inflame reflections by the perceiving audience on the ethical ramifications of utilizing children on stage.² Performances, in which children appear, exceed the situation of a performance in that they immediately engage their audience in feelings, thoughts and reactions which emanate from their sheer presence, denoting every action and every appearance in the performance. My claim, in this sense, is that children on stage initiate a perception decisively shaped by elements that are (radically) different from those that play a role in a performance carried out by professional artists.

In what follows, I will describe and analyze two productions, in which children and/or young adults are the protagonists. With this I mean that there are no adults on stage – the performances are carried out only by children. The productions I am discussing manifest a crucial difference, which, when interpreted, turns out to be a disturbing similarity: The older one (2012) takes place in a prison and the young inmates present a play in front of an audience coming from outside. The newer one (2015) takes place in a typical theatre but lacks all their protagonists. The prison-performance turns the attention of the audience onto the present bodies of the children, the theatre-performance disperses the attention of the audience, who permanently seek the (absent) young protagonists. Both presence and absence of the children send the audience into a journey of unearthing lives, histories, biographies, configurations etc. of individuals that are, in a sense, not in the power of the adults to unearth. We, as audience, oscillate between the desire to expose and find out more, and a resisting space – this resisting space is the space of the children that present themselves in front of us in a theatrical setting, which we want to enter but at the same time are not allowed to (and we know it). The positioning of the spectator is the most interesting part in these performances and this positioning I am going to explore further. In this context, I will combine the notion of “presence” as explored mainly by theatre theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte with the notion of “absence” as coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida. From this approach, I expect hidden dimensions of both relevant notions to come to light.

² I am referring here to public performances that are presented before a wider, paying audience.

2. Children in Prison and Adults Trapped ***Max und Moritz. Eine Winterreise, JSA Berlin, 2012***

Entering the premises of the Youth Detention Centre of Berlin suggests a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. In radical opposition to the men jail in Berlin-Tegel, where I was also able to attend performances and where the entry resembled a kind of lengthy and complex ‘ritual’, here, everyone is engaged to make the audience feel welcome and as if we were *at home*: No annoyed looks, no harsh rules, no standing in lines, no examination and above all a cheerful, pleasant and very proud director who introduces the performance emphasizing the kindness of the prison authorities which allow such important events.³

We are going to watch *Max und Moritz. Eine Winterreise*, a performance resulting from a long project, which *aufBruch* initiated and carried out in the youth detention centre. *aufBruch* is an initiative by artists and cultural workers in Berlin, which has been working in various Berlin and Brandenburg prisons for a very long time and with sincere interest.⁴ Here, the team worked with a professional musician, Jörn Hedtke, and eleven (11) performers, all of them younger inmates of this particular prison. They used the text *The Stones* by Tom Lycos and Stefo Nanstou as a canvas which the participants complemented with original rap songs and other text fragments. The play is based on a true incident, in which two teenage boys killed a motorcycle driver by throwing stones from a bridge over a road in Australia. Alongside, the performance uses extensive excerpts from Wilhelm Busch’ *Max und Moritz*, short stories for children, in which two very naughty boys, Max and Moritz, engage in all kinds of terrible acts and have a cruel and somewhat absurd ending. The songs are loosely based on Franz Schubert’s *Winterreise*, other texts like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Elfriede Jelinek’s *Winterreise* are also in parts included in the dramaturgy of the performance, which is mainly centered around the *Stones*-text, the *Max and Moritz*-stories and the songs, though.⁵

I enter the theatre space as a routinier since I have watched many performances in prisons. “What can go wrong here?”, I am asking myself. I can tell you right now, many things went “wrong” in a very

³ I have no intention to criticize the effort made by the authorities in order to facilitate such projects and events, nor reduce their importance for the inmates. I very much criticize though the delusional situation constructed around the public performance for the *ignorant* audience coming from outside.

⁴ Find more information here: https://www.gefaengnistheater.de/home_en.html (retrieved on 2024-07-24).

⁵ I already have written about the performance in another context: Warstat et al. (108-112).

interesting, awful, and wonderful way. Some thoughts in advance: The spectator, who is used to go to the theatre, surely awaits exceptional moments in a performance, which are able to shake them to the core; which unsettle them in the sense that seems impossible to return to a familiar normality; which leave them clueless and wondering about their feelings and thoughts; which makes answers sheer impossible. No performance is able to plan those kinds of moments. The spectator experiences such moments without really knowing if they were initiated by the performance or not.⁶ As an analyzing spectator, though, one has to justify why and how they felt this or that way, why they thought this or that. I want to do exactly this: I want to describe how I felt and why I think this happened; I want to explore why this performance still haunts me more than ten years later. My hypothesis is that the haunting derives from the fact that this particular performance managed to radically question the place and power of the adult spectator. It denied answering any question posed by the spectator generating a painful void for them to fill somehow. The *prevailing absence* of this performance imposed itself gradually and almost quietly without allowing the spectator to fully grasp and rationalize what happened and why.

Dramaturgy of the performance (I): The team constructed the spectacle and arranged their materials as a sort of puzzle offered to the spectator to play. It was not obvious when a part of the *Stones*-text – the canvas-text – was performed. Not only because the theatre play was shed to pieces and spread throughout the show, but also because there were no discernible actors that played this or that role. The performers played roles interchangeably and it was impossible to identify a specific role with a specific performer. The songs and the *Max und Moritz*-stories were mostly performed by more than one performer. The performance utilized in a very consistent manner choirs by dividing the performers into two groups and assigning specific texts to the one and/or the other.

What we know (I): Basically, we – and by we, I mean the spectators – know nothing. We know that the youth detention centres in Germany accommodate delinquents from 14 to 18/ 21 years, so we can probably guess the ages of the performers. We do not know their names – they appear in the programme with their or a chosen first name, as a group. We do not know who is who. The performers lack individuality – they present themselves as an ensemble, that, nevertheless, does not eradicate their particular characteristics. The specific bodies, the specific voices and enunciations, the specific

⁶ On the emergence of experiences in theatre see for example: Fischer-Lichte (138ff).

movements and gestures are emphatically there, but we cannot associate them with a name, an individuality, a subject.

What we perceive (I): The spectators discern the performers through their bodily appearance and expression: There is, for example, one performer with a broken arm, and I am focusing on the way they play and on the way the others help them act. There are (few) performers who seem to speak German fluently and others who seem to have difficulties with it. The spectator watches all of them engage with rather difficult texts and cannot but feel moved.⁷ A very particular element affects me in a profound way: There is one performer, who seems to know every single line of the texts/ songs, even if they are not theirs to voice – the performer moves their lips whispering the words of all the others. This deep engagement in the common task by a child – simply identified as a delinquent otherwise –, the sheer antithesis between what is and what is acted out introduces a chasm of great impact into the perception.

Dramaturgy of the performance (II): The puzzle the performance presented the audience with developed in a way that it increased gradually tension and affects, while it enabled – if not, forced – associations, thoughts, and connotations. The *Stones*-text was interrupted in crucial moments in order for a *Max und Moritz*-story to be presented. It was not possible to make out a textual coherence, instead, the audience was served with short pieces of the text, which only manifested the cruelty of the story at the very end. The associations between the *Stones*-text, which was based on a true incident, and the absurd stories of *Max und Moritz* twisted the situation in that it opposed a *true story*, ending with the very real imprisonment of the two children, with the naughtiness of kids in fairytales – who end up transformed into corn and eaten by ducks. The playful cruelty of the old stories juxtaposed the cruel reality of the *naughty kids* of today. In both cases, adults rule their world. The performance makes a case by suggesting that the absurdity of the punishment of Max and Moritz corresponds to the irrationality of the punishment *in a rational world*. This happens because the children perceive of the world in ways that are radically different from adult logic.

What we know (II): As the performance/ puzzle develops, the audience realizes that there are many more things that they do not

⁷ Stereotypical assumptions play certainly some role here and I am not denying it. I would like to focus on the engagement, though: the children are utterly concerned with being an essential part of the performance which can only function if everyone is utterly engaged!

know: they do not know the names and ages of the performers and they cannot match a presence to a name, nor a presence to a role; they also do not know why and for how long the children/ performers do time. We are not even sure if the names in the programme correspond to the performers, if they are random names and/ or if someone was replaced etc. Essentially, we know nothing about the persons playing, speaking, singing, dancing for us. We are asked to participate in a performance without having the clues.

What we perceive (II): And here is where this particular event becomes genius – because the audience does not know and it cannot find out, it is forced to mobilize other apparatuses of perception. Every rational process bumps into missing parts which are replaced by affects, feelings and imagination: What if the performers play their own story? What if they also committed murder? What if they are innocently accused? These questions may seem naïve, but I would suggest that the performance plays with this kind of somewhat stereotypic questions which mobilize the imagination of the *innocent spectator*. And then the child-factor enters the stage: The spectator realizes – also in process, I would claim – that they have children before them; they watch them make efforts, play, speak, sing, and dance for the adult audience and ask themselves: What if they were our children? What if they made a mistake and/ or just wanted to be naughty for a while? Someone else judged and put them in prison, but I want to hug and forgive them, I want to reassure them that *Max und Moritz* is the way to look at the world, but I am not allowed, I do not have the power to do that.

Gradually the dead-end situation manifests itself in a painful manner. The children we have before us are practically invisible – they present themselves in a play we are watching but that does not serve their visibility, it rather enhances their absence: these no-name children are enclosed in a *non-place* and this life phase must vanish. The children/ performers are going to disappear – for the public gaze – after four performances (they are only allowed to four shows because of the complex logistics); the essential characteristic of the performance being ephemeral and in a process of vanishing doubles here through the absolute vanishing of its participants. But this disappearance is going to haunt the spectator, because it managed to trap them in a condition that questions their place/ subjectivity to the core.

The spectator is trapped in an aporia which forces them to give up their power in order for them to act *as* spectator – which is a rather unfamiliar and paradox position for them. In order to engage with this specific spectacle, they have to abandon familiar patterns and dive into

a performance that demands other perception patterns and guarantees nothing. The simplicity of the finished puzzle – in the sense that it is not rocket science to realize what has been presented, in the end –, instead of introducing a sort of sublation, makes the inner ambivalences even more prominent: I myself felt an increasing physical reaction which started as an overall unease and ended up in a severe headache and hot flashes. I am not suggesting that this was the general outcome of the performance, it is not in my power to claim that. I am claiming however that the performance offered the conditions for such an experience to occur.

3. Vanished Children and Wandering Adults

Evros Walk Water – A Cage Re-enactment, Deutsches Theater, Berlin, 2015

A Journey in the Winter (Eine Winterreise) was the title of the performance referred to above; another journey – as subject but also as form of the performance – is displayed in the second production I am going to discuss, leading the actors to disappearance and the spectators to action. I am quoting Rimini Protokoll/ Daniel Wetzl here, who initiated the show and very accurately describe the situation:

In 1960 John Cage stood on the set of the television show *I've Got a Secret* in the middle of an obstacle course that featured items all somehow connected to the theme of water and waves, and all familiar to an American household back then – from a rubber duck to a piano. Its title: WATER WALK. Duration: Three Minutes.

In a small house in the centre of Athens live fifteen boys who have survived journeys on foot from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, the journey by boat to Greece, and the brutal conditions of Greek detention camps. They currently attend school and are busy with their first girlfriends and computer games. They do not speak to each other about the traumas they have experienced. In EVROS WALK WATER Daniel Wetzl (Rimini Protokoll) has collaborated with the boys in Athens to develop a stage set and audio drama in which a three-minute version of WATER WALK is performed six times. The original instruments and sounds have been replaced by the boys' stories as they talk about their reasons for fleeing their home countries, their journey to Europe, and their daily life in Athens. In between, they play the three-minute concert six times – or rather, they have it played: because the boys are prevented by travel regulations from being present on stage, the audience takes their place, listens to their stories at individual audio stations where the instruments are also positioned, and then, following the boys' instructions, performs the concert. Special

headphones allow to clearly hear all sounds that are produced in the space as well. (<https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/evros-walk-water>)

I watched the performance in Berlin, in 2015, in a rather small sort of Black-Box-space. Every show accommodated a small number of spectators who were assigned tasks in order for the performance to happen. Essentially, there were no spectators in the performance since all of the audience had to act: we moved around, took specific positions, and performed actions according to the instructions coming from the headphones we wore. Other than that, we were asked mainly to listen and hear and much less to engage our gazes. It was difficult if not impossible to refuse to participate because if so, one would ruin the performance for everyone else and who wants to be this person?

On stage we encounter several tools and instruments for us to handle in order to reproduce the Cage-performance as reenacted by the boys and as indicated: plastic ducks and fish, a xylophone, a hair dryer, a plastic gun toy, one or more whistles, a vase with flowers, a watering can etc. In the middle of the stage dominates a lifeboat filled with water, which replaces the bathtub in Cage's performance and refers to the lifeboats used by migrants in order to pass the Evros river leading from Turkey to Greece. The dramaturgy of the performance demands from its audience to stand or sit still and listen to the voices of the absent protagonists telling parts of their story, describing their present, how they feel left alone missing their parents and families, how they built new relationships, how they manage to live their lives as minors in a foreign and sometimes hostile environment. When it is time to change places, the concert intervenes: the spectators follow the instructions in their ears and have to play a part of the concert. As all of the spectators perform their part simultaneously and somehow in accordance with the others, albeit not hearing the same instructions, the result is a very interesting soundscape which replaces one author(ity) (John Cage) through many (voices) (the protagonists, the spectators).

The performance is, thus, a reenactment of a reenactment of lost originals: There exists a recording of the performance by John Cage which is disturbing because the image is bad, and the sound does not really correspond to what is performed. There has been, allegedly, a first reenactment by the boys in Athens, which we, in Berlin, never get to experience. And there is the somewhat awkward second reenactment by us, the spectators in Berlin, in which we are also partly involved.⁸

⁸ The spectators do not listen to all of the stories and only perform parts of the concert.

Authorship of the performance is dismantled and distributed to many subjects – surely, a democratic gesture, but a gesture which came with a price for the spectators to pay.

Something sinister happens in this performance, which emphasizes the absence of the ‘sender’ – the boys who are supposed to be the protagonists of the performance – but also results in the disappearance of the ‘addressee’, since, strictly speaking, there is no audience at the performance. All the spectators have to participate; no one escapes their duty to perform. Jacques Derrida, who has extensively written on the circumstances of representation,⁹ reflects upon his status as an author or, more generally, as an ‘absent sender’:

To write [i.e., create, my addition] is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read [i.e., received, my addition] and to be rewritten [i.e., reenacted, my addition]. (Derrida, 8)

What I would like to emphasize with this quote and in relation to the performance is the radical, gaping absence that emerges and prevails through its specific dramaturgy and practice. The more the audience engaged in performing, the more drastically, painfully, and all-encompassing the absence appeared – and this had much to do with the actual protagonists of the performance, the young refugees with their very real and at the same time very *surreal* stories. As the audience stepped into the act of tracing the ‘original’ performance, its members were increasingly made aware of the impotence and the impossibility of reenactment – but, as a matter of fact, of what exactly? The presence of the boys could not be any remoter, in all possible senses,¹⁰ and the audience, functioning as actors, performed through their reenactment in the most spectacular way what Derrida (9) calls ‘the force of rupture’. This means that every action and every gesture continued to deepen the gap between the audience’s engagement with the reenactment and the point of reference that it was supposed to be approaching.

⁹ On the intricacies of representation in performance see also Siouzouli (29-46).

¹⁰ With this I mean that the paying audience in Berlin had most probably very little to do with the specific situation of the protagonists they had to ‘represent’. Sure we can squeeze some ducks and produce sound, but how is this act related to the acts of the absent boys and their creating process? Let alone realizing their exceptional biographies.

This force of rupture is tied to the spacing (*espacement*) that constitutes the written sign [the repeating act/ the iteration, my addition]: spacing that separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain, but also from all forms of present reference, objective or subjective. This spacing is not the simple negativity of a lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark. (Derrida, 9-10)

The spectators, by wandering around in the space of the performance and in the stories of its protagonists, produced distance from what they hoped to approach. The remoteness of the hidden children and their lives became increasingly clear and painful because the spectators came to realize that the replacement of the actual actors was not a joyful game to play but the formation of the conscience of what is all about: It is not about ‘walking in their shoes’ and compensating their absence; it is about acknowledging the impossibility of closing the gap between them and us and permitting the abyss to take over.

4. *Journey at a Standstill* – An Anti-Epilogue

The performance *Max und Moritz. Eine Winterreise* ended in a memorable way: The performers, split into two groups, spoke unisono and interchangeably the first part of the first chapter of Elfriede Jelinek’s *Winterreise*. The text is difficult in many ways and it was painfully moving to watch the imprisoned youngsters enunciating brilliantly; the text is deeply moving itself since it is written in first person singular – there is an “I” speaking, which is not unusual in Jelinek’s texts – utilizing images and words from Müller’s/ Schubert’s *Winterreise* to reflect on the ephemerality of the world, within which the “I” is always out of time, *untimely*. The deep pain that results from the collision between the world flying by and the “I” that is never in-sync is what the text brings forth.

The “I” is voiced by multiple subjects on stage, it is a collective “I”. It reflects upon the collective “I” of the spectators whose subjectivity and their status as spectators is radically undermined and fragmented. In that the spectators have to come to terms with all these multiple and centrifugal impulses, which provoke an unruly movement of their imagination, they get displaced spatially and temporarily: the enclosed space of the prison becomes an unlimited territory to explore encompassing all kinds of temporalities. Imagination and affects resulting from the specific situation of the performance force an experience that is not rational. Instead, it takes the form of an

adventure, or a struggle, carried out by the spectators whose ‘natural place’ is to control the situation. The constant confrontation with the prevailing absence makes this struggle painful – but at the same time enticing and desirable.

The situation deepens and becomes even more challenging in the second performance. Here, the absence of the ‘senders’ (Derrida) is literal, and the ‘addressees’ assume the responsibility to ‘represent’ them. As we saw, this representation is aesthetically impossible and ethically questionable – this of course is the tool of the performance to dismantle the power of the adult spectator and leave them wondering and helpless. Obviously, this would be then the proper way to experience the absence of the powerless, by ‘re-enacting’ and experiencing the own powerlessness.

In 2011, Elfriede Jelinek was awarded the renowned Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis (Mülheim Playwriting Prize) for her piece *Winterreise* (*A Journey in the Winter*). On this occasion and because she was not able to attend the ceremony in person, she wrote a text expressing her gratitude for the prize that was read out during the event. In this amazing text, Jelinek draws upon her inability to attend the ceremony in order to address a ‘journey at a standstill’ (‘Reise im Stillstand’), a phrase she uses to describe her writing. She wonders if this standstill is a homecoming or the (im)possibility of leaving the place one calls home. She contends that, although movement exists in many forms (the world, the wind, the movement of smoke), the human condition is this standstill.

[...] In my winter journey the landscape passes by the woman speaking here. A woman is speaking in a standstill. [...] What do you experience in the standstill? That which you can see all around from where you are standing? That which you already know? [...] Is the standstill already a homecoming? [...] I think, especially in this standstill from which I am writing, that there are perhaps roots that keep me on the spot, the same ones that everyone notices when they try to flee from a place that they call home. [...] Somebody is standing there, yes, I am standing there, too, and the world passes by, fate passes by someone maladroit [...]. [Y]ou have to turn the fact that you cannot go away into your own fate, and you have to stretch out that moment, doesn’t matter, you have plenty of time, because where others walk, you stand still, and in the passive movement, in this doing-nothing, the water works and melts everything under you away. Everything goes, but not you. You live close by, and this closeness is just you, who is being moved around like wind or smoke, without being able to move. [...] I am describing the journey in standstill. But everything is standstill, even when people seem to be moving. Behind them looms the

darkness, like stage scenery that they cannot escape. I have tried to put my own standstill into words of wandering [...]. (Trnsl. Natascha Siouzouli and Lydia J. White)

“...in this doing-nothing, the water works and melts everything under you away.”: One stands on ‘thin ice’ which eventually threatens to pull one under and make them disappear. This fragment can be read in various ways: it could be understood as a metaphor for theatre in general when taking into consideration that a theatrical performance is a situation where actors and spectators engage in journeys while literally not going anywhere; it could be read as an articulation of the ‘hidden children’ of these specific performances who are caught in places and spaces which they try to escape – by performing, for example – but where no actual exits exist; it could be finally read as the painful experience of the spectators as co-creators of the performances who have to acknowledge that, even if they enter the situation in a clear role – as spectators –, they have to experience all kinds of traumas to their subjectivity. The performances seem to be in fact the ‘thin ice’ that eventually swallows everyone. Since the performance disappears and the hidden children have immense trouble to appear, it is only fair and just for the spectator to finally accept their intrinsic deficiency too.

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Cultural Paradigms

**Coping with Reality through Storytelling
as a Performative Act in Literature**

Paradigmes culturels

**Faire face à la réalité à travers le récit en
tant qu'acte performatif dans la
littérature**

Kulturelle Paradigmen

**Realitätsbewältigung durch
Geschichtenerzählen als performativen
Akt in der Literatur**

Narrativizing Everydayness

Magda Danciu¹, Delia-Maria Radu²

Abstract. Our paper focuses on identifying instances of everyday life that are relevant for the narrative evolution of the characters by the attitudes and beliefs they can generate, so that, ultimately they re/shape the entire picture of protagonists' personality/nature/dimensions. Everyday experiences cast a light on how authors absorb reality within their fictional works in order to inspire possible models of facing and coping with it. Food consumption as a cultural marker opens new lines of inquiry and study on one's individual, group, respectively, national identity, and as an everyday practice, it successfully renders the expressiveness of this act, as demonstrated in the texts we selected to foreground connections between daily life and commodities.

Key words: everydayness, narrative, characters, life experiences, identity

Facilitating characters to disclose their daily routines, authors create an extended environment for the formers' narrative evolution in a way in which this intentionally constructed space both moves away from and gets closer to the real life, thus legitimizing the fact that fiction can give meaning to the world in its particular way. Rendering reality through everyday experiences might be seen as a tactic, an operational procedure in the process of their narrativization aimed at foregrounding individual creativity, or even subcultural resistance in certain examples (see Moran, 2005: 11) so that the category they belong to becomes a site that brings together "lived culture and representation in a way that makes sense of and also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference (13).

Juxtaposing fiction and reality

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Everyday practices and the objects employed in their performance may “offer guidance for charting the breadth of cultural change and the minutiae of its working” (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999:44) as they represent a successful instrument for juxtaposing fiction and reality in a constant attempt to equate the individual’s daily life with their consumption of commodities (see Moran, 2005: 10), a life that is organized “by space and time”, and is structured around “daily itineraries with rhythms imposed by patterns of work, leisure, week or weekend, or by the repetitive gestures of commuting or consumption” (Crawford, 2011: 45).

Since the everyday is a map of the interrelations between practices and their representations, the stories they activate emphasize the way in which it stands for “the real space in which we lead our actual lives” (Moran, 2005: 169) and how by the novelists’ art of saying things, it becomes the textualized valorization of the quotidian rituals, among which eating habits and food itself are of major importance as they are “the first of the essentials of life” (Belasco et al., 2001: 2), as the cardinals see them when having their meals in the Conclave, served by the nuns:

They had finished their soup and had moved on to antipasti. Loneli sat down opposite the Patriarch of Venice and accepted half a glass of wine. For the sake of politeness, he also took a little ham and mozzarella, even though he had no appetite [...]. The main course was of veal scallopini. (Harris, 2016: 94)

Even when foods are selected by tradition, they imply creativity and diversity, as they are objects of a “considerable concern and dread” (Belasco et al., 2001: 2), since what we eat and how we eat becomes “a highly condensed social fact and a marvelously plastic kind of collective representation”, significantly indicating “who we are, where we came from, what we want to be”; it reveals “our soul [and] the connection between identity and consumption”. Thus food reaches to a central role in the creation of community we end up belonging to acknowledging the fact that “We are what we eat or don’t eat. Our diet conveys images of public identity (...). To eat is to distinguish, incriminate, include, exclude” (Belasco et al., 2001: 2).

Detective Lottie Parker chooses to have her meal at Cafferty’s pub on Gaol Street, situated “two hundred metres from the council offices, a simple repast consisting of a “thick soup, with lumps of chicken and potato soaking in it, warming her from her toes up” (Gibmey, 2017: 28), whereas Hemingway celebrates his birthday enjoying an extravagant meal, artfully prepared by Fuentes, his cook,

consisting of the following:

The appetizer was a spaghetti dish (...); a chicken (...) cooked it in a special broth made with beef and pork bones (...). Fuentes then took some Galician ham and chorizo – a type of Spanish sausage - and ground that as well. He mixed that with the ground chicken and simmering broth, added paprika, and cooked everything over the low flame of a tiny stove [...]; the main course [consisted of the] swordfish (...) large slices [for which] Fuentes melted half a pound of butter and [fried them] over a low flame (...). He would squeeze lemon of the slices and turn them to keep them evenly brown. The aroma was amazing, better than steak cooking. The he set each slice on a plate, added a pinch of salt, and served each plate with fresh salad and vegetables he had been simmering. For Hemingway, he had made a side sauce made with peppers, parsley, black pepper, raisins and capers, cooked next to the swordfish in a frying pan with very finely chopped asparagus. (Simmons, 1999: 207-8)

At a full reading, one may discover the placement of the food on the table, the size of dishes, silverware, drinking glasses, or the size of the serving bowls, an entire tablescape which impact the characters' behaviour and attitude as any “tablescape of a meal seems like a meaningful detail in the daily drama of our lives” (Wansink, 2006: 56).

Local food experiences

It is acknowledged that every personal story is, in fact, “a travel story, a spatial practice” as space is “a practiced place” (De Certeau, 1984:115). And a place is regarded as being “the order in accordance with which elements are distributed in relationship of coexistence”(117); consequently, stories of the quotidian are such “treatments of space”(122), as rendered by Peter Mayle's consumer experiences during his first year in Provence:

Living in France had turned us into bakery addicts, and the business of choosing and buying our daily bread was a recurring pleasure (...). At Chez Auzet, so they said, the baking and eating of breads and pastries had been elevated to the status of a minor religion. When the weather is warm, tables and chairs are placed on the pavement outside the bakery so that the matrons of Cavaillon can sit with their hot chocolate and almond biscuits or strawberry tarts while they give proper, leisurely consideration to the bread they will buy for lunch and dinner. To help them, Auzet has printed a comprehensive bread menu, the *Carte des Pains*. I took a copy from the counter, ordered coffee, sat in the sun, and started to read. (Mayle, 1990: 53)

Behaviours, as noticed above, are related to places of daily experiences - work or leisure - and can be located in public or private spaces, thus delimiting a place as being one's own or of the Other's: they can generate specific practices depending on "an ensemble of procedures" (De Certeau, 1984: 43), as identified in the same protagonist's advancement in his French education:

Not only did it introduce me to breads I had never heard of before, it told me with great firmness and precision what I should be eating with them. With my *aperitif*, I could choose between the tiny squares called *toasts*, a *pain surprise* which might be flavored with finely chopped bacon, or the savory *feuilletés sales*. That was simple. The decisions became more complicated when the meal itself was being chosen. Supposing, for example, I wanted to start with *crudites*. There were four possible accompaniments: onion bread, garlic bread, olive bread, or roquefort bread. Too difficult. (Mayle, 1990: 54)

There is no doubt that "food is a great pleasure of our life" (Wansink, 2006: 10), engendering "much human behaviour: kinship, language, technology, morality, politics" (323) and turning eating into an "act of self-identification, into a significant part of the differential definition of social groups and individuals" (Friedman, 1994: 104), and food habits, into cultural curiosities as recorded by the British observer of one of French families' special events:

Enjoyment is contagious, and this is perhaps best experienced during one particular meal of the week. Here you will see children, parents, grandparents, and occasionally the family dog; young couples giving themselves a treat; elderly ladies and gentlemen poring over the menu as if the pages held the secret of life; local families dressed to kill, and visiting Parisians decked out in full rural chic—a mixture of generations and social backgrounds, gathered together to observe another tradition that shows no sign of dying out: Sunday lunch. (Mayle, 2002:19)

The everyday practices of food consumers display the particular tradition dictating their careful that the latter can successfully complete the process of self-identification, so significant in the "differential definition of social groups and individuals" (Wansink, 2006: 104), as recorded during a rich Sunday lunch with a French family:

Aperitifs have been served—pastis or kir or white wine or, on red-letter days, champagne—and menus are being read with the concentration of a lawyer going through a page of fine print. Suggestions and

countersuggestions go back and forth across the tables. The carpaccio of fresh tuna? The *soupe au pistou*? The asparagus flan? And then what? The cod in a herb crust? The stew of veal and peppers? Or *pieds et paquets*, the Provençal recipe that elevates humble mutton tripe to new heights? (...). For five or ten minutes, conversations are muted, gossip and family matters are put aside, and everyone in the restaurant is mentally tasting the dishes on offer. You can almost hear the flutter of taste buds. (Mayle, 2002: 19)

The culinary habits, as some of the most deeply ingrained forms of human behaviour, can be seen as a fundamental distinction for one's cultural identity, generated by a specific lifestyle configuration, mostly when contrasted with Others' traditional ways, as seen below:

When we lived in England, olive oil had been a luxury, to be saved for the making of fresh mayonnaise and the dressing of salads. In Provence, it was an abundant daily treat which we bought in five-liter *bidons* and used for cooking, for marinating goats' cheeses and red peppers, and for storing truffles. We dipped our bread in it, bathed our lettuce in it, and even used it as a hangover preventative. (One tablespoon of oil, taken neat before drinking, was supposed to coat the stomach and protect it against the effects of too much young pink wine.) We soaked up olive oil like sponges, and gradually learned to distinguish between different grades and flavors. We became fussy and no doubt insufferable about our oil, never buying it from shops or supermarkets, but always from a mill or a producer, and I looked forward to oil-buying expeditions almost as much as trips to the vineyards. (Mayle, 1990: 61)

The valorization of one's/characters' way of life through the everyday, that is, "the real space in which they lead their actual lives" (Moran, 2005: 169), grants an "implicit identification between daily routines and cultural values that conceals the intimate relationship between most mundane aspects of lives" (167), such as food consumption and eating habits, so relevant for their roles in the individuals' sustenance and pleasure, being one of "the most taken-for-granted aspects of life" (Atkins, Bowler, 2001: VII).

In their attempts to explore and re/create social identities, authors employ the everyday space as an adequate "connective tissue that binds daily lives together" (Crawford, 2011: 345) into a screen on which society can "project its light and shadow, hollows and planes, power and weaknesses" (345); when narrativizing the quotidian, they activate specific stories that prove that "the 'real' is what, in a given place, reference to another place makes people believe in" (De Certeau,

1984:188), obtaining a simulacrum from the relationship of the visible to the real, as many theorists have consented to the observation that “today fiction claims to make the real present, to speak in the name of facts, to cause the semblance it produces to be taken as referential reality” (187). Writing and reading of the everyday can be sometimes problematic but it is most often rewarding because daily life and practices constantly invent themselves on both levels, real and textualized, apparently seeming “to exist outside historical change” (Moran, 2005:163).

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Ontological Instabilities and Spatial Transgressions in Jack Hodgins's *The Invention of the World* (1977) and Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978)

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Abstract: Jack Hodgins's *The Invention of the World* (1977) explores the extraordinary history of Vancouver Island in a complex story that includes transhistorical and transcultural elements, as well as biblical and mythological allusions. A milestone in the history of Canadian literature, *What the Crow Said* (1978) is one of Robert Kroetsch's most cryptic and challenging stories. The novel has been hailed as a postmodern reimagining of prairie life, full of literary references, transgressions, and ironies. More specifically, both narratives reconstruct two crucial places in the Canadian context—the prairie and the island. Furthermore, *The Invention of the World* and *What the Crow Said* are relevant to a better understanding of how fictional texts innovated the art of novel writing in the twentieth century and the different strategies they employed to do so.

Through close-reading of both novels, this article aims to analyse what Brian McHale describes as ontological instability in his seminal *Postmodernist Fiction*. The paper will also explore the various ways in which the two novels can be seen as complementary in terms of their narrative treatment of space. Both authors reimagine a quintessentially Canadian setting, ultimately reconfiguring our understanding of these spaces and challenging how we make sense of reality through storytelling.

Keywords: ontology, Canadian literature, space, postmodernism, prairie, island

Space, both literally and symbolically, has always been a significant thematic concern in Canadian literature. A land of dramatic and harsh natural beauty, Canada is reconstructed in literary texts both as a means to address issues of cultural identity and to signal a metafictional preoccupation with the act of writing. Jack Hodgins and Robert Kroetsch fictionalize two quintessential symbols of space in the Canadian context: the island and the prairie. These fictional reconstructions involve tapping into the mythical side of Canada, thus reconfiguring the understanding of space.

Robert T. Tally Jr. considers fantastic literature “useful for

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thinking about the real spaces of the world” (147). By the inclusion of apparently fantastic elements these authors weave “together a world that is both strangely familiar and utterly novel [. . .] to create a world that is also our own world” (Tally 150). Indeed, literature that uses fantastic topoi is useful for exploring real spaces in a new light. As valuable tools for reconfiguring real topographies, such fictional texts are relevant for shaping the reader's perception of existing places.

Jack Hodgins and Robert Kroetsch move away from conventional writing practices and create fictional spaces that rework spatial tropes and embrace what Brian McHale calls “ontological instability” (McHale 102) or Gomel “a *flickering* topology” (62) in which “two or more epistemic frameworks are superimposed upon a single textual space, resulting in ontological indecipherability” (Gomel 62). In other words, the ontological dimension entails the coexistence of paradoxical ontological levels within the diegesis in both *The Invention of the World* and *What the Crow Said* and the amalgam of the fantastic elements invading the fictional space leads to a double-coded ontological geography. To further complicate matters, including references from the actual world muddies the already complex ontological structure. This ontological indeterminacy extends beyond its relevance for the understanding of textual worldbuilding, it is also linked to metafiction and the subversion of realist convention.

The ontological indeterminacy of Jack Hodgins' fiction is evident, especially in *The Invention of the World* (1977). The novel explores the extra-ordinary history of Vancouver Island in a complex story that includes transhistorical and transcultural elements, as well as biblical and mythological allusions. The norms governing the world of *The Invention of the World* are rooted in the accepted rules from the actual world, and Hodgins masterfully transgresses these norms by including seemingly fantastic historical facts, so the text becomes a medium for exploring not only island life but also raising ontological and metafictional issues.

The novel “mythologizes and de-mythologizes, illuminates and probes, the sometimes beautiful and sometimes threatening landscapes or seascapes of his favourite setting, his native region” (Struthers 68). His text constructs an alternative space that offers his readers a glimpse into what it feels like to live on an island. As New explains,

Just as his work does not define a region, region does not define his work. Setting is important in his stories, but as *setting* and as *metaphor*, not as the main subject; his aim in writing is not to record what it looks like to live in a place, but what it feels like. The emphasis

shifts from the place to the people whose lives are partly shaped by place (12).

Hodgins shows “an impressive ability to convey a sense of place—that Island which is both a vivid geographical place and an island of the spirit” (Laurence 26). The island is modelled on an existing place; similarly, Vancouver Island is taken out of this world's geography and transposed into fiction as Hodgins sees it: eccentric and miraculous. In other words, Hodgins' version of Vancouver Island projects the island as a place of apparent paradoxes - miraculous and ordinary at the same time. The geographical space is subordinated to the imagination and the island becomes what McHale calls “a playground for ontological improvisation” (54).

In spatial terms, the island is a marginal setting that exists on the fringes of society—both geographically and culturally—imagined as “the place of possibility” (Hutcheon 3). In *A Passion for Narrative*, Hodgins explains how “As a fiction writer, you are obliged to pay attention to place, I think, and to its effect upon its inhabitants, and to the metaphors it offers” (76). Hodgins “makes a microcosm from the local world and so translates it to the world at large” (Jeffrey 27). Thus, he shows new ways of understanding the island life and also shines a light on the meanings and realities hiding behind the ordinary. This is explicitly referenced in the novel: “Though the world looked nearly the same as it had before the mist, there was a sense that all of it was a fiction, an imitation world that hid a multitude of unsuspected unfamiliar things” (107).

Vancouver Island is rooted in objective geographical reality, but Hodgins looks beyond the visible and attempts to dig deeper into the collective psyche of the island. He urges us to rethink geographical space and by extension, the space his own readers inhabit. Through the process of fictionalizing, Vancouver Island is a reminder of the possibilities that marginal places can open up. At the same time, the spatial setting of the novel can be described as heterotopic. Foucault coined the term to refer to physical spaces such as ships, cemeteries, or asylums, which, unlike utopias, are “sites of crisis or of deviation within the social order” which “stimulate fundamental re-ordering” (Dennis 169). Starting from Bertrand Westphal's ideas, Dennis interprets Foucauldian heterotopias “a crossing that enables exploration and experimentation” (171).

The island is a heterotopia *par excellence*, a microcosm situated at the fringes of civilization, populated by eccentrics and loners pushed to the margins of the socio-cultural space. Not coincidentally, the island is depicted as a space that cannot be determined in cartographic terms:

“As if any man could draw proper lines on this ungovernable landscape” (221) or “Even the island itself was that way (...) defying geometry. Straight lines looked ridiculous here” (227). It is a space which prompts for imaginative improvisations and ontological plays. Maps cannot contain such a fluid terrain, so the island stays a place of mystery: “This blasted island is enough to drive you bats (...) Every time you turn a corner there’s some place else you never heard of before” (18).

From a narratological perspective, Vancouver Island is the site for metafictional experimentation that seemingly does not obey real-world logic. Hodgins embeds a postmodern scepticism towards mimetic representations and opts instead to sketch the Canadian space as a multifaceted symbol. Hodgins weaves myths, local legends, tall tales, tape recordings, newspaper fragments, testimonies, and gossip into the fabric of the novel to explore the carnivalesque world of Vancouver Island and its eccentric inhabitants. The novel incorporates this search for historical truth to better understand the past. Becker, one of the characters, embodies this epistemological quest. He is obsessed with controlling history by collecting scraps and newspaper clippings, cassette tapes to find the tale that “exists somewhere at the centre of his gathered hoard, in the confusion of tales and lies and protests and legends and exaggerations” (xi), suggestive of the postmodern interest in reconstructing the past. At the same time, it reflects the idea that the island is governed by the made-up rules of its people, suggesting the impossibility of containment by official records or authorities: “Island people think they can make their own rules” (227).

Reminiscent of the Bakhtinian polyphony as a narrative strategy, using a polyphonic approach becomes a driving force behind the story and a vehicle to recreate Vancouver Island’s history. Hodgins’ reinvention of the island through fiction and the inclusion of different accounts on the history of the island can also be interpreted as reflective of the postmodern preference for “contingency, multiplicity, fragmentation, discontinuity” (Hutcheon 19) that would grant ampler freedom of expression to the novel. Hodgins seems to imply that crackpot voices and other versions of history are superior to official records, so, in a sense, these accounts are closer to historical truths than any documented and rationalized version.

History “always remains grounded in the real world of known and familiar space” (Slemon 412), but Hodgins defamiliarizes these spaces by mythologizing historical facts and presenting reality as miraculous. Displacing myths and legends are “vehicles for insinuating

the supernatural or paranormal into ‘normal’ reality” (McHale 174), and a means to look beneath the surface. At the same time, Hodgins insists that as hard as one might try, there is no plausible way to reconstruct the past: Julius Champney from the novel comments on such a feat while also hinting at the colonial past of Vancouver Island: “You can’t pretend there is any history on this island, this is still the frontier” (54). Or, “The best he [Becker] can dig up will be little more than gossip. You can’t turn that into history, no matter how hard you try. Not in a place like this. You are inheritors of a failed paradise” (54). The spatial setting is a canvas of failed dreams and utopias, the point that links the past and present, onto which the writer projects fragments from the past and snippets from the present.

The integration of the mythical past into the present moment serves as a means “to reconcile the factual history and the exaggerated legend of one Donal Keneally, founder of the (fictional) Revelations Colony of Truth on Vancouver Island” (Hutcheon 56). As Becker from the novel observes, “Myth (...) like all the past, real or imaginary, must be acknowledged” (314). This process of acknowledging the mythical past is most aptly embodied in the figure of Donal Keneally. Donal Keneally, “fathered by a black bull from the sky” (x), is an apparent incarnation of myth with magical powers, but soon turns into a source of parody:

In case they doubted his ability to create this paradise, he continued to astonish them with more and more incredible acts of magic, causing demons to appear and disappear, voices of the dead to speak from the mouths of the living, logs to raise themselves and shift their position and lie down in new and more convenient places (117).

Donal impersonating the saviour is an essentially fantastic deed as he appears at the beginning of the story as a quasi-mythological hero. Through hyperbole and parody, Hodgins effectively constructs Donal as a paradoxical embodiment of the ontological hesitancy that the novel projects.

Themes of illusion and reality abound in the novel. Things are not always what they seem, Hodgins insists. One strategy that Hodgins frequently uses in the novel to suggest that reality is illusory or flickering is to create descriptive passages from an upper position. For instance, during his trip to Ireland, Wade notices how different the world seems below: “From here, the farm below seemed less than real, the village a cluster of toy buildings” (311). Or the pilot’s words on what he sees as the true reality also mirror the same idea: “It is a shock to me every day (...) when I walk on the streets or drive on the pavement I see

only the lies and things that people have tried to put there, but when I get up here, in my plane, I see the real island. (...) That's what's real is, that's what true is, it can be hid but it can't be changed (323)

Wade's fort, an artificially created space which juxtaposes the replica with the idea of a real fort, is a key symbol for the illusion-reality conundrum. Wade's apparent contempt for the tourists' ignorance while visiting the place is another strategy to dwell on the real-unreal paradox:

They came into the place looking as if there was a real treat in store for them, and went out again looking as if something had just been added to their lives. (...) It probably wouldn't even bother them to be told what they'd paid for was only a rough counterfeit of the real thing (156).

The fort also has a metafictional function, namely to be a metaphor for literature as a whole. As Struthers explains, Hodgins contributed immensely "the way we imagine and therefore see and finally comprehend the world of British Columbia" (67). This is especially relevant in the context of imagining or understanding literature as something that imitates the real thing and mirrors a replica version of what exists, which can be helpful for shaping the way we understand it. This idea is echoed in the novel and the text might suggest that invention can give as much insight into history as official records or validated data can:

If you've offered it to them with love, if you're giving them this because it's a closest you can come to the real thing, and if the real thing is something you want them to have, then you're not really cheating them at all. They spend their lives being satisfied with reasonable facsimiles (160).

As seen, the text evokes a hybrid ontological landscape and is constructed on dichotomies such as past and present, myth and factuality, real and replica, history and story. In *The Invention of the World*, "the power of imagination and legend, of fiction and myth, confronted the stubborn tenacity of fact and document" (Hutcheon 216), and this confrontation results in a rich tapestry of contrasting elements and becomes a celebration of the *island* and island life. History as story and story as history appear as central pillars in the exploration of the past and the quirky everyday realities of Vancouver Island.

A similar interest in ontological transgressions is embedded in

the fiction of Robert Kroetsch. Dubbed “Mr. Canadian Postmodern” (Hutcheon 160), Kroetsch is one of the most idiosyncratic writers of twentieth-century Canada. His background in literary criticism lends his work a theoretical aspect which makes his literary texts even more challenging to decipher. His fiction is characterized by paradoxes and ambivalence (see Hutcheon, page 162), as well as a penchant for linguistic experimentation.

His preference for parody, fragmentariness, and discontinuity, as textual strategies, is deeply embedded in *What the Crow Said*. As Bertacco explains, “From the start, the reader is immersed in a world that is hybrid in that it blends reality and magic, and follows the natural and the supernatural world orders at one and the same time” (191). More precisely, the opening paragraphs detail the miraculous birth of Vera Lang’s child, who later turns out to have singular speaking abilities and the power to predict the future. This fictional universe “describes a world run out of order where events border almost constantly on the super-natural, while its inhabitants try, nonetheless, to find meaning and establish cause and effect links for the various phenomena” (Bertacco 161). Paradoxically, it is a topsy-turvy world ordered by chaos in which nothing is what it appears to be, almost like an impossible world—or anti-world—that is constantly undermined by its governing laws.

Kroetsch masterfully estranges the Canadian space of the prairie by stretching and even erasing the boundaries between real and fantastic ordinary and extra-ordinary: “Realistic elements are still present, but they stretch toward the fantastic, the larger-than-real, blending the two dimensions with such natural ease that ends up underlying the improbability of what is being described” (Bertacco 163). The combination of real-life elements and the intrusion of the fantastic results in ontological strangeness and unpredictability. The reimagining “of a rural Alberta in mythic terms and out of an oral tradition of story-telling” (Edwards 192) has a twofold purpose: it functions as a metafictional tool while also deconstructing and reconstructing the familiar.

The hybrid or flickering ontology that *What the Crow Said* embeds reflects Kroetsch’s “deep suspicion of all referential frames, myth, fictions, the sensory world” (Thomas 14-15) and becomes a narrative tool to canvass his distrust of fixing and stable frameworks. “Instead of realist fiction, Kroetsch finds for himself a form of magic realism or pseudo-historic fantasy characterized by intertextuality, carnival scenes, linguistic and thematic playfulness expressly meant to unsettle the reader’s expectations” (Bertacco 24). Kroetsch achieves

such subversion of expectation by embracing ambiguity and chaos, as well as experimental storytelling strategies.

His preference for semantic plurality, logical fallacies, hallucinatory instances, mythical reenactments, and absurd twists are trademarks of his fiction and reflect his ardent desire to reinvent both the novel and the way reality is understood. He abandons conventions and slips into a narrative mode that is grounded in a juxtaposition of material reality and the wondrous, all on the same ontological level, complicated by absurd events. He also integrates references to myths, legends, and biblical episodes to challenge the writing process and the fictional representation of reality.

What the Crow Said is governed by ontological incongruities and anti-logical ideas, leaning towards a mode of narration that is both unreliable and paradoxical in essence. The novel is set in “an immensely vital and unmappable world” (Davey 155), yet the spatial setting is recognizably Canadian. More precisely, Kroetsch fictionalizes the small prairie town that is the locus of strange occurrences, such as Vera Lang’s seduction and impregnation by bees, Martin Lang’s frozen corpse haunts Big Indian, a mute boy talks to a crow and communicates through farting or Liebhaver remembers the future, a card game lasts for 151 days and the list could continue. To such bizarre, even miraculous, situations, the characters can only react in a typically playful, but inherently ironic, manner: “Mich O’Holleran, in violent reluctance to believe his own ears, stamped his missing foot. Andy Wolbeck, accidentally, twisted off one of his artificial toes” (132). This is symptomatic of the topsy-curvy ontology, governed by anti-logic and ambiguity.

Spatial symbols like the bees, the tower, the crow, or the snow, are visual markers of ontological instability. For instance, the tower becomes a metaphor for the men’s search for coherence and logic. Or the crow, always voicing obscenities, expands the limits of linguistic expression while undermining it simultaneously. Even time becomes paradigmatic of the ontological instability and self-deception, as summarized in Isador Heck’s ideas: “He had a lingering suspicion that time might be one thing that didn’t exist; time might be an agent of self-deception, the means whereby man explains to himself his own ignorance of the existence of everything else” (Kroetsch 181). Seasons are also suspended in Big Indian. No wonder the characters appear astonished at what real-world normality is: “The simplest matter, unexplainable: the innocence of a man who dressed in June clothing because it was June” (Kroetsch 16).

Another important symbol is the schmier game that lasts for 151

days. The game has a revelatory function: “They knew, those men, studying their cards (...), they knew there was no meaning anywhere in the world” (94). Soon the game turns into a grotesque carnival:

They looked like a pack of scarecrows. (...) they farted, and their farts almost warmed them. Their assholes were bleeding from the combination of diarrhoea and prairie hay that was full of thistle and buckbrush. They tried once or twice to sing, but then Alphonse Martz cursed instead, pointing to a magpie that hopped off the road, away from a dead rabbit. The magpie began to follow the sleigh: it was joined by another magpie, then another (101).

This almost carnivalesque scene allows for play and renewal and gives the readers an insight into the prairie reality.

The opening sentence, “People, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything (7), sets the tone for the whole novel and Vera becomes a symbol for Kroetsch’s postmodernist poetics that entails paradoxes, ambiguities and anti-logic. As such, she is both divine and mortal, dead and alive, the beginning and the end. More than that, Vera is also the prairie—and by extension Canadian—variation on the biblical story of the immaculate conception and Leda’s rape by Zeus in Greek mythology. In this context, Vera can only become an ambiguous and paradoxical representation of myth. She thus both mystifies and demystifies the story and is symptomatic of the double-coded symbolism that the novel embraces. Including mythical references is reflective of Kroetsch’s distrust of coherent narratives and realistic fiction.

At the same time, all the characters are “exiles, outsiders, outrageously eccentric” (Hutcheon 175), and Kroetsch might be hinting at a specifically Canadian stereotype, namely, imagining Canada as the outsider, both geographically and culturally. They also embody the paradoxes that Kroetsch is so fond of, so they also serve a metafictional role within the novel. Kroetsch offers a distorted, yet distinctively Canadian, mirror of the small town, by creating heterotopic representations of it. In *Postmodernism and Experiment*, McHale explains that heterotopias act like “sites where fragments of worlds are arranged experimentally in assemblages” (McHale 146), so these in-between places are fundamentally ambiguous and ambivalent.

Similarly to the island, the spatial setting of the novel is deliberately marginal: “The Municipality of Bigknife lay ambiguously on the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan; no one, due to a surveyor’s error, had ever been able to locate conclusively

where the boundaries were supposed to be” (Kroetsch 36). Canada is repositioned as the land of the miraculous, a frontier place full of possibilities and wonder, a canvass on which the writer can project existential and metafictional conundrums. Kroetsch “offers a compound but deformed image of ordinary Alberta, or even of an ordinary small North American prairie town” (Bertacco 163) and uses transformational metaphors to establish a new site from the ruins of the existing one. At the same time, “The prairie world is depicted in phantasmagoric shapes, as a giant creature dozing, half sleeping and willing both to go on in that self-preserving condition and to be absorbed and assimilated into the world at large, where human experience turns into history, where identity and foreignness meet (Bertacco 163-164).

Nothing in the novel is ever fixed or fixable. Instead, Kroetsch opts for multiple and fluid frameworks, challenging his readers to rethink the deconstruction of binary modes of thinking, often pushing the boundaries of meaning. At the same time, readers become active participants in the narrative process by having to speculate about the hidden layers of meaning embedded in the text. Moreover, the different voices that proliferate in the novel suggest narrative unreliability, which further reinforces the need to decipher the text on a subjective level, which also means that the ideas will be different with each reading. A symbolic episode in the novel concerns a corpse that is recovered from the water and cut into four pieces to be pulled from the icy environment. Then, the others rearrange the body into a whole, but the result is grotesque and different, suggesting that any reconstruction leads to different outcomes and nothing stays the same. Suspending disbelief and embracing absurdity reflects the ludic side of the text, and, as “One thing is certain; to read *Crow* we must enter into its spirit of play and realize that it is possible to read without an end or message in mind” (Lecker 105).

Thus, Kroetsch’s Big Indian is a site of revelation and a carnivalesque setting that allows for experimentation and renewal. It is a liminal site, located at the edge of Canada, that becomes a hybrid space both unfixed and liberating: Kroetsch uses this cartography to break free from the literary tradition and its conventionality. He not only challenges our understanding of the familiar but also reinvents how reality can be perceived. A chameleonic and non-conformist storyteller, Kroetsch writes a provocative novel built on paradox and ambiguity, even on an ontological level. His blending of the mythic with the mundane offers a new way to project a flickering ontological landscape more radically than Hodgins does. Irony, hyperbole, and

parody are some of the strategies Kroetsch uses to destabilize meaning and coherence while also problematizing the complicated relationship between fiction and reality in a chaotic and irrational setting, yet meaningful, environment.

Both Jack Hodgins and Robert Kroetsch create alternate spaces envisioned as ever-changing, fluid sites and the spatial metaphors are fundamental for laying bare the complex ontological ramifications of the fictionalizing process. Both novels mirror complex articulations of Canadian spaces—the island and the prairie—and both explore the myriad possibilities that marginal places open up, so, in this sense, they are complementary. Reading these texts offers a valuable insight into the ontological poetics of twentieth-century Canadian novel. More importantly, both master storytellers urge their readers to rethink the familiar and see the world with a renewed sense of wonder and awe.

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Miscellaneous

Varia

Sonstiges

Performing Femininity in Ellen Wood's *Parkwater*

Elisabetta Marino¹

Abstract: Ellen Wood (or Mrs. Henry Wood, as she became widely known to the reading public) was the acclaimed author of more than thirty novels, over one hundred short-stories, and countless articles, as well as the owner and editor of a lucrative and popular periodical: *The Argosy*. Nonetheless, until recently, her multifaceted output has been largely overlooked by critics and researchers: despite her widespread popularity across social classes (which turned her into Wilkie Collins's main literary competitor), most her works have been dismissed as too sentimental, melodramatic, and sensational. By following in the steps of the few scholars who have undertaken a reassessment of Wood's oeuvre, this paper sets out to analyze a truly controversial story divided into two parts, whose plot revolves around a governess who, driven by passion and sexual desire, turns into a murderess: "The Mystery at Number Seven" (1877). As will be shown, on the one hand, Wood delved into the customary connection between violence and insanity (a recurring theme in Victorian sensation novels), focusing on her female protagonist. On the other hand, however, she also succeeded in uncovering the mechanisms of patriarchy and gender inequality.

Keywords: femininity, violence, insanity, Victorian, Ellen Wood, *Parkwater*

This essay will focus on the performance of ideal femininity in Ellen Wood's *Parkwater*, a short novel originally serialized in *The New Monthly Magazine*, in 1857, and later republished with substantial changes in 1875 and 1876. Before delving into the characterization of Sophia May, the controversial leading character of the narrative, whose impeccable appearance and refined manners disturbingly clash with her ethical principles and moral standards, some information on the author herself will be provided. This is intended to underscore her acute awareness of both the social norms regulating Victorian womanhood, and the strategic measures she employed to deftly circumvent and even criticize them. Indeed, as will be shown, Ellen Wood's female protagonist is infused with her own, chameleonic

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ability² to adapt to changing circumstances and external pressures.

In the two existing biographical profiles of Ellen Wood penned by her son Charles – namely “Mrs. Henry Wood. In Memoriam”, published immediately after her death, in 1887, and *Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood* (1894) –, the author is at pains to highlight his mother’s propriety, unearthly beauty, and untainted modesty. In Charles Wood’s words, Ellen “had the rare gift of perpetual youth”; besides, “she delighted in everything that was pure and lovely” (Wood 1894: 2), thus shunning other, more frivolous forms of entertainment. Her charms were ethereal and ineffable; any attempt to describe them would be “almost as impossible and hopeless as it would be [...] to embody the perfume of the rose, or to give form and expression to the scent of the violet” (Wood 1887: 251). As Mariaconcetta Costantini (2020: 4) has elucidated, the two “hagiographic works” actually succeeded in turning Wood into “a paragon of Victorian matronly virtues”. Pious, respectful, and physically delicate³, she fulfilled her biological duty, by getting married and giving birth to five children. Apparently, even her career as a writer originated in a painful personal experience, i.e. the loss of her little daughter Ellen. As Charles Wood clarifies – thus downplaying her actual ambition –, she began to sketch her first stories to distract her mind from brooding on gloomy thoughts. When she became a widow, in 1866, she devoted more time to professional writing; yet, according to her biographer, she never neglected her feminine responsibilities: order, cleanliness, and harmony reigned in her house, and she was always cheerful and jolly whenever a guest paid a visit. Unlike “non domesticated” (Wood 1894: 227) literary people, in fact,

No one ever looked more earnestly to “the ways of her household”. The happiness of those about her was ever her first thought and consideration. Her house was carefully ruled, and order and system reigned. Nothing ever jarred; the domestic atmosphere was never disturbed. [...] No home duty was ever neglected or put aside for literary labours. (Wood 1894: 227-228).

In truth, Ellen Wood longed to affirm her leading role in the literary arena: she worked at a feverish pace to produce marketable texts (in her life, she published thirty novels, over one hundred short stories, and countless articles), she invested in the purchase of a popular monthly magazine, *The Argosy* (the perfect venue for her own

² Andrew Mangham (2011: 245) wrote about the “chameleonic quality” of her works.

³ She had a problem with her spine, a “weakness which eventually produced a serious curvature” (Wood 1894: 33).

narratives)⁴, and she skillfully negotiated with publishers for the remuneration she was to receive, as her correspondence with Richard and George Benteley testifies (Maunder 2000: 28). In order to garner the favour of an increasingly large reading public, in her works she simultaneously drew on the gothic tradition, took inspiration from conduct manuals, and blended the defining features of the sensation genre with the typical characteristics of the domestic novel. Nonetheless, as a strategy to shield herself from potential criticism, she assumed the respectable identity of Mrs. Henry Wood, in accordance with the legal doctrine of *coverture*, whereby a married woman's lawful existence became subsumed under her husband's. However, Wood's ambiguity did not pass unnoticed, even in her own times. Ten years after her demise, Adeline Sergeant composed a biographical sketch in which, on the one hand, she depicted the writer as "the Scheherazade of our quiet evenings and holiday afternoons" (Sergeant 1897: 174), whose volumes were "purely domestic" (187) and "concerned chiefly with the great middle class of England" (187). On the other hand, Sergeant regretted her making full use of the devices and the mechanisms of questionable (if not infamous) sensation novels⁵: "Mrs. Wood would possibly have taken a higher place amongst English novelists if she had avoided mere sensation, and confined herself to what she could do well – namely, the faithful and realistic rendering of English middle class life" (190-191).

In *Parkwater*, Wood managed to concoct a story that would captivate and amuse her readership; at the same time, the narrative set out to appease the anxieties of those who viewed societal changes with growing alarm, while posing thought-provoking questions about women's genuine aspirations, and men's agency and undisputed authority. The plot revolves around Sophia May, the young and attractive daughter of two servants. Educated beyond her social station, she deviously lures Frederick Lyvett (a promising lawyer and one of the best catches in London) into marrying her, against his parents' will. What Frederick ignores is that, when she was employed as a governess at Parkwater (a lavish mansion in Ireland), Sophia had had a romantic liaison with another man (Captain Devereux), with whom she had possibly conceived a son. Readers also gather that little Randy (that is

⁴ *The Argosy* had a circulation of approximately 20,000 copies; its primary competitor for readers' sympathy was *Belgravia Magazine* (owned by Mary Elizabeth Braddon), which had a circulation of 16,000 copies (Phegley 2005: 186).

⁵ *Sensation novels* appealed to the readers' senses with lurid and transgressive plots featuring cherub-like ladies who, in open defiance of the *Angel in the house* paradigm, turned into cold-hearted offenders. These novels were regarded vulgar, "extravagant and unnatural" (*The Christian Remembrancer* 1863: 210).

the boy's name) had been immediately entrusted to the care of a peasant woman. At the climactic moment of the narrative, the callous adventuress does not hesitate to brutally murder the child to conceal her scandalous past, thus securing her newly-acquired social and financial position. This tragic turn of events adds a frightening and breathtaking layer to the text, which also functions as a cautionary tale, warning against the dangers of senseless and unscrupulous ambition.

In both versions of *Parkwater*, Wood places a strong emphasis on Sophia's misguided upbringing, highlighting her parents' unwise intention to elevate her above her sphere. In the Victorian period, given what Deborah Gorham (2013: 65) has termed "modernization of motherhood", manuals offering advice to inexperienced women on child rearing multiplied: arguably, Wood's text may be viewed as an anti-handbook, illustrating how young wives should *not* behave. Throughout the novel, therefore, the omniscient narrator often intrudes into the story, to express reproach and contempt.⁶ An elucidatory example is placed at the end of the first chapter, concluding with the following lamentation: "Poor Sophia May! Events that really did happen in after life were not so much her fault as the fault of her most foolish parents" (Wood 1876: 11). The very final sentence of the volume, uttered by Sophia May's mother and added to the later (and more pedagogical) editions of *Parkwater*, explicitly attributes the responsibility for Sophia's downfall to her *pernicious*⁷ education:

"I am afraid it was a frightful mistake".

"What was a mistake?" asked [her husband]

"Her bringing up. If we'd not made her into a lady and educated [*sic*] her accordingly, she'd not have despised us, and all this might never have happened. We stuck her up into the wrong spere [*sic*], don't you see [...]" (222)

Corrupted by ill-considered goals, as a child, Sophia already acts like an incipient actress, showcasing feigned manners and second-hand, extravagant clothes aimed at mimicking the attire and demeanors of the upper class: "dressed as she was, in all the colours of the rainbow, flaunty, dirty, and with a profusion of glass beads glittering about her as necklaces and bracelets, she looked like a little itinerant actress at a country fair" (4). As an adult, after finishing school in France, her

⁶ In the 1857 version of the narrative, the narrator's intrusions are scant, while they increase in number in the subsequent versions.

⁷ The adjective "pernicious" is used several times in the text (Wood 1876: 3, 9), particularly in reference to sensation novels, avidly consumed by Sophia and her mother.

innocent masquerade rapidly turns into a dangerous fraud. In characterizing her protagonist, Wood appears to pursue diverse and contradictory purposes. Undeniably, she harshly criticizes the blurring of social boundaries, assuming a conservative stance to forge bonds of sympathy with the most traditional portion of her audience. On the other hand, she clearly demonstrates that the ostensibly *natural* and *inborn* qualities of the *Angel in the house* (i.e. propriety, candour, compliance, and passivity) may be easily parroted and simulated. Just like the author herself, who played several parts in her life, refusing to be bracketed under any single rubric, her heroine is willing to reinvent her persona to suit her ends. Furthermore, the chosen title for the novel – the name of an ancient mansion – proves revealing: the house, which for the Victorians served as the cornerstone of society and was envisioned as an inviolable shelter or a safe haven (Nead 1988:33; Bizzotto 2012: 32-33), becomes the site of Sophia's first major transgression.

As a savvy entrepreneur, Wood carefully adjusted her plot to align with the changing tastes and expectations of her readers, which varied depending on the different outlets for publication. In the 1857 version of her story, issued in a *men's* magazine (*The New Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1814 by Henry Colburn), Sophia was featured as an indisputably cruel and vicious schemer. The first draft of *Parkwater*, in fact, was meant to caution young and naïve gentlemen against the snares of unprincipled – albeit irresistibly seductive – social climbers. Consequently, Sophia's violent character and her gruesome crime (all the more aberrant because a woman, *a mother*, was the perpetrator) were delved into and portrayed in full details, to stir the readers' scorn and indignation. When the girl mistakenly believes she has been deserted by Lyvett, for example, she is depicted akin to a "rabid dog" (Wood 1857a: 406). Moreover, she wards off the advances of an unwanted suitor by brandishing a large knife, an appalling act which causes her mother to pronounce a prophetic sentence: "you'll murder somebody some day" (408). The killing of Little Randy is graphically (or *sensationally*, one would be tempted to say) described and becomes even more revolting and monstrous because Sophia is unambiguously identified as his mother. The woman's utmost fierceness in tossing and turning the child to stop him from crying – she acts "like a tigress" (Wood 1857b: 272) –, and the rope she coiled around his fragile neck to strangle him are notably expunged from later, bowdlerized versions of the novel (Allan 2011: 14).

When, eighteen years later, Wood republished *Parkwater* in *The Argosy*, a magazine especially designed for women, she extended the

plot and transformed Sophia May into a much more complex and nuanced character. Unquestionably, the writer continued to condemn the protagonist's threatening performance of iconic femininity, her destabilizing trespassing of invisible social boundaries. Nevertheless, she also introduced extenuating circumstances to her crime, suggesting the possibility that Randy's death was a mere accident or that the perpetrator could claim temporary insanity. Incidentally, this narrative device had already been exploited by Mary Elizabeth Braddon in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), an extremely lucrative and popular sensation novel. As an explanation for Sophia's ruthless infanticide, in fact, Mrs. Cooke (the landlady) insinuates that the boy might have fatally entangled himself with the luggage ropes lying around the room. Alternatively, considering that "Mrs. Lyvett was evidently very ill that evening" (Wood 1876: 177), "it is possible that in a moment of temptation – of embarrassment – having a child, she perhaps knew not how to account [to her husband] for, thus thrown upon her hands –" (177); readers are expected to draw their own conclusions, as Sophia's offence is never openly mentioned. It should be observed that, to avoid upsetting her female readers, in the final version of Wood's narrative (unlike in the 1857 publication), the charge of murder is only hinted at – whispered by the policeman to Frederick Lyvett. Besides, since Randy might not be Sophia's son (their real connection is left unexplained), the woman's violation is perceived as (slightly) less shocking and perverse. Sophia's alleged madness might also be connected with her *pernicious* upbringing. Henry Maudsley (1872: 208), a renowned physician and pioneering psychiatrist, believed that the "foolish training" of children would lead to lack of self-control in adulthood. What is more, according to the medical theories of the period, the transition between phases in a woman's life (from puberty to menopause, passing through miscarriage or pregnancy) could be the source of mental instability, which might be temporary or lasting.

The final version of *Parkwater* also allows Ellen Wood to cast serious doubts on Victorian stereotypical masculinity. Indeed, Frederick Lyvett – a fragile and emasculated representative of the upper class – is introduced as a volatile dandy, too fond of cigars and fashionable vehicles.⁸ His immature attitude towards life is reflected in his boyish facial features: his moustache "would have been fair had there been enough of it to be seen" (16). As the plot unfolds and the ghastly particulars of the infanticide are uncovered, Frederick feels so powerless and overwhelmed by guilt for his own hasty and thoughtless

⁸ A parallel may be established between Frederick and Robert in *Lady Audley's Secret*.

decisions that he bursts into tears before his mother, who is ready to console him: “the strain upon his feeling of what he had that evening been obliged to undergo, had now reached its extreme tension, and unmanned him” (185). The pillars of Victorian masculinity are visibly shaken by a woman’s transgression, thus revealing their artificiality and vulnerability.

Ellen Wood’s *Parkwater* also challenges the institution of marriage as the ultimate and most desirable achievement for a Victorian lady. The novel abounds in dysfunctional couples who, although physically close, are emotionally apart. An insightful example is provided by Captain Devereux and his wife Harriet, whom he used to ridicule for her looks, before tying the knot with her solely for financial reasons. In his view, in fact, she was far too old (Harriet was only two years his senior) and hideous, due to her “Chinese eyes and African mouth” (62). However, despite such criticism (which is also grossly marred by racism), he had decided to marry her to pay off his numerous debts. In her work, Wood also included a surprising reflection on the joys of celibacy. In a long monologue (absent from the 1857 version of the text), Frederick’s middle-aged mother unexpectedly re-evaluates the status of unmarried women, free from the burdens of married life and motherhood⁹. In an imaginary speech addressed to one of her friends, she thus observes:

Lots are more equally balanced in this world than we suspect [...]. You, I know, have envied me my married life – the great blessings, as you have looked upon it, arising from the companionship of my husband and children. [...] But which fate is the happier, think you, when children bring these dreadful sorrows upon their parents? Ok, Fanny, believe me! many a poor wife, smarting under her sea of trouble, would be thankful to the same Heaven never to have had a husband, to have borne children. She envies you single women then, and wishes with her whole heart that she could be as you are.

To conclude, as this essay has tried to demonstrate, even though Ellen Wood has been largely overlooked by many scholars for being too conservative, melodramatic, or even sensational, her oeuvre deserves to be reassessed. Narratives such as *Parkwater*, in fact, forcefully contribute to shedding light on some of the anxieties that lie behind the impeccable façade of Victorian society, namely the performative nature of gender and class distinction, the construction of femininity and

⁹ In another passage, she quotes a saying that clearly unveils her mixed feelings towards motherhood: “when our children are young they tread upon our toes, but when they get older they tread upon our hearts” (Wood 1867: 180).

masculinity, and women's higher education as a possible threat to social stability.

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Buchbesprechungen

Play and Interplay of Paradigms

(Calin Teutisan, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonisti, metode, interpretari*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Scoala ardeleana, 2021; on Calin Teutisan's *Scenarios of Criticism. Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*, Cluj-Napoca: Scoala ardeleana Publishing House, 2021)

Anemona Alb¹

It is with remarkable acumen that Calin Teutisan (2021) delves into the nooks and crannies of the literary criticism scene of Cluj, now and then, as it were. His is a study in the various manifestations of the recent and not-so-recent trends in literary critique perpetuated by critics-*cum*-academics whose epistemic allegiance is that of 'the Cluj school of thought'.

Teutisan's endeavor is for his texts published in this book to yield both a panoramic view of the Cluj scene, with the ideological and methodological filiations thereof, and of the intricacies of the paradigms touted by well-established literary critics as Popovici, Petrescu, Pop, Muthu, Braga, Goldis, Modoc, Baghiu, Gardan, Olaru, to name but a few of the Romanian lot, but also critics like Moretti, Glenny, Hazard, Said etc.

Chapters such as Criticism Between Metaphysics and Rationalism. The Organic Utopia, or as The Temptations of The Method. Between 'Pure Criticism' and The Science of Literature shed light on the staples of critical thought of the last decades in Romania and elsewhere. The analysis thereof speaks for Teutisan's subtle lens. The following extract is a case in point:

In al doilea rand, descoperim, in 1973, la inca tanarul critic Liviu Petrescu, o pledoarie pentru impresionism, chiar daca drapata in faldurile tezei despre necesitatea imprumuturilor conceptuale. Desigur, nu despre impresionismul de tip calinescian e vorba aici. Iar, pe de alta parte, aceasta teza a asumarii influentelor critice este deopotriva expresia unei pulsuni teoretice, deja vizibile in paginile universitarului clujean (...). Teoria anti-originalitatii conceptuale nu-l impiedica, insa, pe Liviu Petrescu sa deschida o discutie asupra lui

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Tudor Vianu, de pilda, prin acumularea masiva(!) ale unor opinii ale criticii contemporane care-i imputa lui Vianu tocmai lipsa acestei originalitati, prin formule de tipul “Tudor Vianu nu este niciodata cel dintai” (citatul vine de la Nicolae Manolescu, dintr-un articol publicat in revista “Contemporanul”, din 1966) (Teutisan 2021: 55)

Secondly, we discover, in 1973, with the still young critic Liviu Petrescu, a plea for impressionism, albeit draped in the folds of the thesis on the necessity of conceptual borrowings. It goes without saying that it’s not about the Calinescu-like impressionism that we are talking about here. And, all the more, this very thesis of owning up to critical influencing is equally the expression of some theoretical impulse, already visible in the writings of the Cluj academic. (...) The theory of conceptual anti-originality does not, however, prevent Liviu Petrescu from initiating a talk on Tudor Vianu, for instance, by the ‘massive’ (!) accretion of some opinions of contemporary criticism that call out Vianu for this very lack of originality, through such wording as “Tudor Vianu is never the first one” (a quote from one of Nicolae Manolescu’s columns in “Contemporanul”, 1966) (Teutisan 2021: 55; translation mine, A. Alb)

Not only does Teutisan unveil the arcane meanderings of concepts such as ‘originality’ with Vianu, as critiqued by Manolescu, but he does so in all salience and subtlety. His is hardly a harsh voice, but one that begets space for skepticism, indeed food for thought.

Convergences and divergences in point of episteme get tackled forcefully, with a plethora of salient references and insightful analysis. For instance, in Chapter IV, Convergent Poetics and Stylistics. Literary History as Critical Mediation, issues such as extensions of the monographic, synthesis and mediation, the Equinox community of Cluj, poetical logic and metaphor-driven lucidity are laid out and Teutisan’s point thereof is one replete with theoretical prowess.

All in all, *Scenarios of Criticism. Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations* (2021) is a valuable read for the expert and the novice alike.

Looking for Ourselves while Dreaming of the West.

(On Mircea Mihăieș's *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic*
(Editura Universitatii de Vest, Timisoara, 2023)

Ioana Cistelecan¹

Mircea Mihăieș's *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic* is both a reflective and insightful collection of essays. Initially published in 2002, in a reduced version, the present and extended book delves into the cultural, political, and literary landscapes of post-communist Romania, offering a critique of its aspirations, on one hand, and a philosophical examination of the country's place in the world, on the other hand.

The title itself, *Atlantical imaginar/ The Imaginary Atlantic*, denotes rather a symbolic "Atlantic" that embodies Romania's aspirations to integrate into the broader European and Western cultural and political spheres. This imaginary Atlantic thus represents the ideals of modernity, democracy, and prosperity - values usually associated with the Western world; yet, for Romania, this particular ideal seems to obstinately remain elusive and difficult to fully attain. Mircea Mihăieș would consequently use the metaphor of the "imaginary" to highlight the distance between Romania's post-communist realities and the often idealized vision of the West.

The essays included in the volume cover a wide array of topics, from literature and culture to politics and national identity, all framed by the context of Romania's transition after the fall of communism. They explore a diverse thematic, such as: the search for a Western Ideal (At the heart of Mircea Mihăieș's work one can identify the quest for a cultural and political identity that is closely linked to Western Europe. This desire to belong to this promised land of the "Atlantic" world is to be found in Romania's very attempts to align itself with European standards and values, both politically and culturally. However, Mircea Mihăieș chooses to present this pursuit with a sense of skepticism,

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noting the challenges Romania faces in reconciling its rich historical traditions with the demands of modernization and integration into the European Union); cultural and literary reflections (As a literary critic, Mircea Mihăieș explores Romania's cultural production and its place in the broader European context. He scrutinizes the nation's literary canon and the possibilities for Romanian literature to gain international recognition. In this respect, the essays function as a reflection on how Romanian writers and intellectuals actually engage with both the legacies of the communist past and the uncertainties of the post-communist future. There's also a persistent tension between a desire for cultural autonomy and the pressure to conform to Western intellectual trends.); national identity in transition (Another major theme of this book hints to the evolution of Romanian national identity. Mircea Mihăieș mirrors the profound shifts in national consciousness following the fall of the Iron Curtain, as Romanians attempted to redefine themselves in a world that was increasingly interconnected. The volume raises important questions about the complexity of forging a national identity that is modern, open to European values, yet respectful of tradition.); critique of post-communist Romania (Mircea Mihăieș suggests a critical perspective on the post-1989 political and social transformations in Romania. He describes the transition as one marked by both optimism and disillusionment, with the country struggling to balance its hopes for a prosperous future with the harsh realities of economic hardship, political corruption, and social fragmentation. The transition to democracy and the pursuit of European integration are presented as complex, often contradictory processes, revealing the difficulty of overcoming the legacies of authoritarianism.).

Mircea Mihăieș's writing is an erudite, deeply analytical one, and often tinged with irony. He draws upon a wide range of cultural references, both Romanian and international, to illustrate his points. His approach is at once intellectual and accessible, with a mix of literary critique, historical analysis, and personal reflection. His tone is both critical and self-reflective, often probing the gaps between idealism and reality, particularly in the context of Romania's post-communist journey.

Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic has been well-received in Romanian literary and intellectual circles for its depth of insight and its honest portrayal of the country's struggles with its identity and its place in the world. Mircea Mihăieș's essays are thought-provoking, raising important issues not just for Romania but for Eastern Europe as a whole. His work resonates particularly with

readers interested in post-communist transitions, European integration, and the complexities of cultural identity.

In all these respects, *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic* proves to be a compelling exploration of Romania's on-going transformation in the post-communist era. Mircea Mihăieș masterfully weaves together literary analysis, cultural criticism, and personal reflection to offer a nuanced and critical perspective on the aspirations and challenges of a nation seeking its place in a globalized world. For readers interested in Romanian culture, European politics, or post-communist studies, *Atlantical imaginar* provides an intellectually stimulating and richly layered perspective on the search for national identity, the allure of Western ideals, and the difficulties of reconciling tradition with modernity.

Christel Baltes-Löhr: *Geschlecht als Kontinuum. Über das Aufbrechen binärer Ordnungen und über gelebte Pluralitäten*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2023 (ISBN 978-3-8376-3947-6)

Cornelia Eșianu¹

Schon von Anfang an ist hervorzuheben, dass für Christel Baltes-Löhr die Welt keineswegs eine Welt des Binären, sondern des Vielfältigen und Komplexen ist. So reduziert sich diese nicht auf weibliche und männliche Personen, sondern umfasst gleichermaßen trans*-, inter*-, nicht-binär*- und a*-geschlechtliche Personen.

Der Mensch darf so sein, wie er will, und ich kann erwarten, dass mich die / der Andere in meinem Sosein akzeptiert, vorausgesetzt – gemäß der Goldenen Regel, die allerdings noch nicht Kants kategorischer Imperativ ist* –, dass ich das tue, was ich auch erwarte, dass die anderen für mich tun, nämlich mich in meinem Sosein zu akzeptieren und zu respektieren. Es kann sogar gesagt werden, dass ich ein Anrecht auf diese Andersartigkeit, auf mein Sosein habe und mich in diesem Zusammenhang auf Menschenrechte – jedoch nicht immer bindend – berufen darf, oder aber auch darauf, dass im Sinne äußerer Freiheit eine gewisse Legalität hergestellt werden soll, um von den anderen in meinem z.B. auch geschlechtlichem Sosein angenommen und respektiert zu werden. Wenn sich diese Akzeptanz jedoch nicht der Zusicherung erfreut**, bleibt weiterhin zu fragen, wie ein soziales Miteinander angesichts der vielen existierenden Andersartigkeiten zu funktionieren habe. Um die Hervorhebung dieser Problematik, ihr globales Bewusstmachen und um mögliche Antwort(en) auf diese Frage kreist das umfangreiche Buch von Christel Baltes-Löhr mit dem Titel *Geschlecht als Kontinuum. Über das Aufbrechen binärer Ordnungen und über gelebte Pluralitäten* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023).

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* Was hier so viel bedeutet, dass sich dadurch niemand irgendwie verpflichtet fühlen kann, meine Maxime als allgemeines Gesetz anzunehmen.

** Siehe allerdings für Deutschland das ab dem 01.11.2024 in Kraft tretende Selbstbestimmungsgesetz (SBGG).

Wie ist, so fragt Christel Baltes-Löhr, „ein Leben in größtmöglicher Freiheit für alle Menschen“ (S. 431) „zu konturieren, zu gestalten, zu garantieren.“ (S. 433)? Die Autorin geht in ihren Überlegungen in Hinblick auf die gestellte Frage von der Annahme aus, dass „jedes Geschlecht als das ei(ge)ne und erste betrachtet werden kann“ (S. 431). Ihre Hypothese speist sich nicht zuletzt aus dem konkreten Faktum der in den letzten Dekaden sich immer deutlicher zeigenden Ausprägungen der Geschlechter (s. Kap. 18: „Geschlechtervielfalt: Viel mehr als zwei“), was die Wissenschaftlerin Baltes-Löhr nur noch stärker zu ihrer entscheidenden Frage nach einem „Leben in größtmöglicher Freiheit für alle Menschen“ (s.o.) berechtigt. Die Antwort darauf stellt ihre im Buch erarbeitete sogenannte *Figur* (nicht Begriff) *des Kontinuums* dar, das „keinen Anfang und kein Ende kennt“, und wo „Raum für alle vorhanden“ ist (ebd.).

Das Buch ist in neunzehn Kapitel gegliedert und enthält 28 Tabellen und 82 Abbildungen. Auf die Figur des Kontinuums – das, um es philosophisch auszudrücken, in der Ökonomie des Denkens von Baltes-Löhr wie das Wasser bei Thales oder das Feuer bei Heraklit funktioniert, also Prinzipienstatus hat – wird im zweiten Kapitel „Vielfältige, konglomerierende theoretische Annäherungen an die Figur des Kontinuums“ (S. 45-71) näher eingegangen. Interessant ist hier – was erneut ein Orientierungspunkt für die Autorin zu sein scheint, wenn auch nicht unbedingt positiv konnotiert – die Figur des Dritten (S. 62-66). „Lange Zeit galt das Dritte, das Dazwischen, das Hybride hier als Lösung [von Binaritäten und Dualismen, C.E.], die jedoch nun mit der vorliegenden Abhandlung durch die Figur des Kontinuums ersetzt wird.“ (S. 62), so Baltes-Löhr. Es lässt sich nun fragen, was für eine Relevanz die Figur des Kontinuums hier aufzuweisen hat und was es genau darstellt.

Die Figur des Kontinuums ist das Entstehungsprodukt der kulturkritischen Auseinandersetzung der Autorin mit Gedanken von Platon (die Realität der Ideen), Nietzsche (ewige Wiederkehr), Althusser (das Theorem der Anrufung), Deleuze (der Begriff der Wiederholung), Derrida (*différance*) und *last but not least* dem Werk von Judith Butler (z.B. die Idee der Konstruktionen von Wirklichkeit durch performative Handlungen, S. 66f). Die Figur des Kontinuums ist als Erklärungsmodell intendiert, mit dessen Hilfe gesellschaftliche Phänomene wie z.B. *Geschlecht, Kultur, Raum, Migration, Gewalt* (ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit) analysiert und kommentiert werden sollen. Zur Erforschung und Erfassung dieser Erkenntnisgegenstände „als Kontinuum“ schlägt die Wissenschaftlerin

vier Gesichtspunkte oder Dimensionen vor: 1) des Physischen oder Materiellen, 2) des Psychischen oder Gefühlten, 3) des sozialen Verhaltens und 4) des Begehrens (vgl. hierzu Kap. 3: „Geschlecht als Kontinuum: vier Dimensionen und ein Abschied“, S. 73-144). Von methodischer, aber auch pädagogischer Bedeutung für die Leserschaft sind die sich wiederholenden „Zusammensichten“ und systematisierenden Schlüsse am Ende der jeweiligen Kapitel.

Im Grunde ist die Figur des Kontinuums auf zwei Ebenen angelegt: Auf einer horizontalen Ebene liegt der Akzent auf intrakategoriale Bestimmungen, die als Variabilitäten (z.B. im Bereich des Geschlechts, als Non-Binarität oder Transgender, in einem Wort: Geschlechtervielfalt), also als plurale Strukturen sichtbar werden. Die vertikale Achse stellt eine zeitlich-geschichtliche zu einer weiteren Bestimmung der erforschten Erkenntnisgegenstände dar. So widmet sich Baltes-Löhr der Untersuchung „Frau“ innerhalb der Geschlechterverhältnisse aus der Perspektive des Kontinuums in der Zeit *vor*, *während* und *nach* der Reformation von Martin Luther (vgl. Kap. 15), später dem 19. Jahrhundert (s. Kap. 16: „Starke Frauen um Karl Marx – ausgeleuchtet mit der Figur des Kontinuums“), um sich dann im Kap. 17 („Da war ganz schön was los. Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Weimarer Republik, dargestellt und analysiert anhand der Figur des Kontinuums“) insbesondere auf das frühe 20. Jahrhundert zu konzentrieren. Hervorzuheben ist hier die „Neue Frau“, mit der es, wie die Autorin behauptet, „eher um die kulturelle und individuelle Selbstbestimmung der Frau und weniger um die Gleichberechtigung im politischen Feld“ (S. 376) ging.

Appliziert auf den Bereich der Literatur (vgl. Kap. 9: „Literarische und reale Begegnungen – betrachtet mit der Brille des Kontinuums für Geschlecht und Migration/Flucht/Heimaten/Erinnerungen“) und Kultur (vgl. Kap. 12: „Kultur als Kontinuum“) – was hier insbesondere aus kultur- und literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive zu interessieren vermag – eröffnet das Kontinuum mögliche Wege der Interpretation und lädt dazu ein, diese zu beschreiten und zu experimentieren. „Wenn es *die* Heimat, *die* Zugehörigkeit, *das* Geschlecht, *die* Migration, *die* Flucht, *die* Zugehörigkeit alles nicht in einer homogenen Ausprägung gibt“, so die Autorin, „dann ist die Frage umso spannender, wie in der Literatur all das aufscheint und auch, wie reale Begegnungen in literarische Texte münden“ (S. 234). Davon ausgehend, dass es „keine eindeutige Definition“ für die Kategorie Kultur gibt (S. 309), fragt die Autorin, nachdem sie auf die Unterschiede der Begriffe Multi-, Inter- und Transkulturalität eingegangen ist, wo „die Figur des Kontinuums mit

den vier Dimensionen für die Kategorie Kultur fruchtbar gemacht werden“ (S. 309) kann. Byung-Chul Han, der von „Annäherung und Vernetzung der einzelnen Kulturen“ spricht, kommt, so Baltes-Löhr, „den Vorstellungen von Kultur als Kontinuum nahe“ (S. 316). Überlegenswert wäre in diesem Kontext allerdings die Frage nach der Notwendigkeit der Aufhebung oder gar Verflüssigung des Gegensatzes zwischen Natur und Kultur (S. 314) und den möglichen Konsequenzen, z.B. die Auswirkungen im Bereich von Erziehung und Bildung, zu stellen. In ihrer diesbezüglichen Zusammensicht (S. 316f) hält die Autorin fest: „Für literaturwissenschaftliche Analysen kann die Figur des Kontinuums mit der bislang dargestellten Anwendung auf die Kategorien Geschlecht, Migration, Raum und Kultur insofern Anwendung finden, als literarische Werke in ihrer Spiegelfunktion gesellschaftlicher Realitäten, aber auch hinsichtlich der ihnen naheliegenden innovativen Strahlkraft untersucht wird. Konkret heißt das, den literarischen Text danach zu befragen, wie Geschlecht, Migration, Raum und Kultur verhandelt werden und wie sich die jeweiligen Dimensionen des Kontinuums im Text zueinander verhalten, welche Polypolaritäten und Variabilitäten sich ausfindig machen lassen.“ (S. 317). So sind beispielsweise zum literarischen Thema „Erinnerungen als Kontinuum“ in der Zusammenstellung der Autorin folgende Fragen bedeutsam: In der Dimension der Materialität: „Worauf beziehen sich Erinnerungen hinsichtlich der physischen, materiellen, stofflichen Ebene?“, auf der Ebene der Psyche: „Welche Gefühle sind mit Erinnerungen verbunden?“, in der Dimension des Verhaltens: „Welche Verhaltensweisen werden mit Erinnerungen konnotiert?“, und auf der Ebene des Begehrens: „Was wird mit/durch/in Erinnerungen erstrebt? Welches Begehren/welche Wünsche werden durch Erinnerungen evoziert?“ (S. 234)

Das durchaus bemerkenswerte Literaturverzeichnis des Buches mit rezenten Titeln und zahlreichen digitalen Verweisen auf Aufsätze machen die Lektüre zu einem Erlebnis besonderer Art. Ebenfalls ist die Aufnahme von eigenen Gedichten in das Buch (vgl. „Platz“, S. 41; „Mittelmäßigkeit“, S. 48f; „Das Jetzt ist nun vorbei“, S. 67 und S. 319; „Kreis-Lauf-Kreis“, S. 68, und „So hat im Vielen auch das Eine“, S. 102) als ein originelles Verfahren zu verstehen, dessen Funktionalität – über den Selbstwert der Gedichte an sich hinausgehend – neugierig macht und nach Antworten suchen lässt.

Einige Fragen stellen sich beim Lesen auf: Inwiefern kann das Projekt des Kontinuums heute als ein postpostmodernes Projekt bezeichnet werden? Das Thema der Selbstbestimmung der Einzelnen, wofür im Buch zurecht plädiert wird, ist zwar gut repräsentiert, aber

die Frage nach einem moralischen Prinzip für alle in der Gegenüberstellung zur Figur des Kontinuums bleibt erhalten. Was würde beispielsweise Tugend, die Kant als moralische Stärke (*fortitudo moralis*) versteht, aus der Perspektive des Kontinuums bedeuten, wenn ich jeden Tag etwas anderes sein beziehungsweise fühlen kann und darf? Mit anderen Worten: Wie setze ich mir selbst Grenzen? Oder muss ich darauf warten, dass der / die Andere mir diese Grenzen setzt? Das Kontinuum wäre in jedermanns Sprache die Unbegrenztheit, eben die Grenzenlosigkeit. Warum tun sich dann aber andere Menschen schwer mit den Grenzen, die ich mir setze oder auch nicht setze? Wie soll Kommunikation zwischen den Andersartigkeiten funktionieren? Ist es womöglich das Proteushafte des Menschen (auch in der Mythologie und in der Kunst ganz hervorragend vertreten), das als furchteinflößend und destabilisierend wahrgenommen wird?

Zusammenfassend kann festgehalten werden, dass die literaturaffine und gedichteschreibende Autorin und Wissenschaftlerin Christel Balthes-Löhr in ihrem Buch eine inkludierend-humanistische Sichtweise auf die Gesellschaft proponiert, in der alle Menschen wertgeschätzt und anerkannt werden. Der Mensch, das Subjekt, das Individuum – um im Duktus der Autorin zu bleiben – sind einzigartig. Das ist eine Tatsache, die von der Gesellschaft zelebriert und anerkannt werden müsste.

Ihr Schlüsselwort – *das Kontinuum* – ist als ein wissenschaftliches Instrument gedacht, das die Möglichkeit eröffnen soll, die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit besser und klarer, aber auch friedvoller zu sehen, zu betrachten, zu denken, zu fassen. *Das Kontinuum* erweist sich somit als ein erforderliches, gleichzeitig anregendes und nicht zu ignorierendes kulturwissenschaftliches Projekt, das mit dem Instrumentarium der Soziologie, d.h. mit empirisch-statistischen Methoden, durchzogen von einem philosophisch-synthetischen Blick auf das durchforschte, möglichst viele Bereiche des Lebens – vom Geschlecht über Migration und Raum bis hin zu Literatur und Kultur – umfassende Material, durchgeführt wird.

Die Figur des Kontinuums ist ein *work in progress*, das die Leserschaft dazu einlädt, mitzudenken und auch es weiterzudenken.

Medieval Echoes: The Enduring Influence of Gender Constructs in Eleanor Janega's *The Once and Future Sex*

Janega, Eleanor. *The Once and Future Sex. Going Medieval on Women's Role in Society*. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023. Ebook

Éva Székely¹

Eleanor Janega's *The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Role in Society* offers a meticulous and thought-provoking exploration of the medieval roots of contemporary gender norms. By examining how medieval conceptions of gender, labor, and sexuality continue to influence modern societal structures, Janega provides a critical historical framework that situates gender inequality within a continuum extending from the Middle Ages to the present day. Her interdisciplinary approach, drawing on philosophy, theology, medicine, and economics, reflects a sophisticated understanding of the interplay between historical ideologies and their enduring societal impact.

Janega organizes her study thematically, with each chapter addressing a distinct facet of medieval life and thought. This structure allows her to provide a comprehensive examination of medieval ideologies while maintaining clarity and accessibility. The book begins with an overview of how medieval thought, shaped by classical philosophers like Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, constructed women as biologically inferior to men. Subsequent chapters explore the practical realities of women's labor, the influence of religion on gender norms, and the pervasive regulation of women's sexuality. The study culminates in an analysis of how these medieval ideologies resonate in contemporary gender constructs, making the book particularly relevant for understanding present-day inequalities.

Janega's thematic organization is highly effective, as it enables her to address the historical foundations of various aspects of women's lives in a manner that is both nuanced and cohesive. Her integration of

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well-chosen examples—ranging from the philosophical musings of medieval intellectuals to the labor practices of peasant women—enriches the analysis and underscores the diversity of women’s experiences in medieval society.

A key strength of Janega’s work lies in her ability to contextualize medieval attitudes toward women within a broader intellectual tradition. She highlights the enduring influence of classical thought, noting that the writings of Aristotle and Galen framed women as biologically and morally deficient. Aristotle’s description of women as “inside-out men,” and Galen’s assertion that women were governed by their “cold and wet” humors, are presented as pivotal to the medieval understanding of gender. These ideas were further reinforced by theological interpretations that positioned women as spiritually inferior, with Augustine famously declaring that “a woman is merely man’s helpmate.”

Janega situates her study within the broader historiography of medieval gender studies, building on foundational works such as Joan Cadden’s *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages* (1993) and Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1988). While these earlier studies focused on the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of gender, Janega expands the scope by emphasizing the practical implications of these ideologies in women’s daily lives. Her discussion of how medieval thinkers reconciled classical medical theories with Christian theology highlights the interplay between intellectual and societal structures.

Janega’s analysis of women’s labor is particularly illuminating, as it challenges the notion that medieval women were confined to the domestic sphere. She demonstrates that women across all social classes were integral to the economy, whether as peasants performing agricultural labor, artisans engaged in trades such as weaving and brewing, or noblewomen managing estates and participating in diplomacy. “To be a medieval woman was to be a worker,” she writes, “even if that work was not necessarily valued in the same way that men’s labor was.”

This emphasis on women’s economic contributions aligns with the scholarship of Judith M. Bennett (*Women in the Medieval English Countryside*, published in 1989), who similarly highlighted the ubiquity of women’s labor in rural contexts. Janega, however, broadens this analysis to include urban and noblewomen, providing a more comprehensive picture of women’s roles in medieval society. Her discussion of the embroidery industry is particularly compelling, as it illustrates how profitable trades dominated by women were often co-

opted by men, a dynamic that underscores the systemic devaluation of women's labor.

Janega's examination of the intersection of religion and gender reveals the central role of the Church in shaping medieval conceptions of women. The theological framework that positioned Eve as the originator of sin and the Virgin Mary as the epitome of purity created a dichotomy that defined women's roles and behavior. Janega argues that these religious constructs were instrumental in reinforcing societal expectations of women's subservience and obedience. She notes, for instance, that Augustine's assertion that women were spiritually inferior justified their exclusion from ecclesiastical and educational institutions.

The regulation of women's sexuality is another significant theme in Janega's analysis. She highlights the pervasive fear of women's sexual agency, exemplified by the concept of the wandering uterus, which medieval thinkers believed could cause irrational behavior if not "pacified" through pregnancy. Janega observes that women were often described as insatiably lustful, with their desires framed as both dangerous and disruptive. These attitudes, she argues, were not only used to justify the subjugation of women but also to regulate their behavior through laws and societal norms.

Janega's inclusion of exceptional women, such as Hildegard von Bingen and Christine de Pizan, provides a counterpoint to the dominant narratives of male authority. Hildegard's reinterpretation of Eve's creation as a sign of intellectual superiority and Christine's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, which celebrated women's virtues, are presented as examples of how women challenged the misogynistic ideologies of their time. However, Janega is careful to note that these figures were anomalies, operating within a broader system that severely restricted women's opportunities for agency and self-expression.

One of the most significant contributions of *The Once and Future Sex* is its emphasis on the continuity between medieval and modern gender constructs. Janega draws explicit connections between medieval attitudes toward women's labor, beauty, and sexuality and their modern manifestations. For example, her discussion of the undervaluation of women's work provides a historical context for understanding the gender pay gap, while her analysis of medieval beauty standards, with their emphasis on unattainable ideals, resonates with contemporary issues surrounding body image and societal expectations.

By highlighting these continuities, Janega positions her work as

a critical intervention in both historical and contemporary gender studies. Her assertion that “the past is always with us, whether we recognize it or not” serves as a reminder of the enduring impact of historical ideologies on present-day inequalities. This focus on relevance makes the book particularly valuable for readers seeking to understand the historical roots of contemporary gender issues.

While Janega’s work is a significant contribution to medieval studies, it is not without its limitations. Her reliance on well-documented figures and themes, such as Hildegard von Bingen and Christine de Pizan, risks overshadowing the experiences of less-documented women. Additionally, Janega’s focus on Western Europe leaves room for comparative studies with Byzantine, Islamic, or Eastern traditions. Such comparisons could have enriched her analysis by highlighting alternative frameworks for understanding gender and society in the medieval period. This omission, however, does not diminish the value of her study, which remains a compelling and insightful contribution to the field.

Eleanor Janega’s *The Once and Future Sex* is a masterful exploration of the medieval roots of modern gender norms. Through incisive analysis and engaging prose, Janega illuminates the historical origins of persistent inequalities, providing a critical framework for understanding how the past continues to shape the present. Her thematic structure, interdisciplinary approach, and focus on contemporary relevance make the book a significant contribution to both medieval studies and gender history. By uncovering the intellectual, economic, and theological foundations of medieval gender constructs, Janega not only enriches our understanding of the Middle Ages but also challenges readers to confront the enduring legacies of these constructs in modern society. As she eloquently concludes, “The past is always with us, whether we recognize it or not.” This work ensures that we do, offering a valuable lens through which to examine both history and its ongoing impact.

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Sur le chemin de l'éveil : Une quête spirituelle contemporaine

Linda Deroy, *Sur le chemin du maître*, Europa Edizioni, Rome, 2022.

Simona Şuta¹

Sur le chemin du maître de Linda Deroy se présente comme un captivant récit autobiographique, où l'auteure nous dévoile, avec une sensibilité rare, son parcours initiatique à la recherche de la vérité spirituelle. Ce voyage, jalonné de rencontres mystiques et d'expériences hors du commun, transcende les cadres habituels de la réalité pour explorer des dimensions plus profondes de l'existence. Ancré dans un contexte contemporain, le livre aborde, à travers une plume sincère et audacieuse, les thèmes universels de la quête de soi et de l'éveil intérieur.

Linda Deroy, connue pour ses préoccupations d'explorer les arcanes de la spiritualité et de l'introspection, continue ici à se distinguer par sa capacité à faire dialoguer le visible et l'invisible. Son œuvre s'inscrit dans la tradition des auteurs qui invitent à l'éveil de la conscience et à la remise en question des certitudes établies. Dans *Sur le chemin du maître*, Deroy livre une réflexion profondément personnelle, mais universellement accessible, sur l'expérience humaine, l'identité spirituelle et les mystères de l'univers. À travers cette œuvre, elle poursuit un travail littéraire marqué par l'introspection et la recherche du sens, dans la lignée de ses explorations spirituelles.

Le thème central du livre est, sans conteste, la quête de la vérité, à la fois intime et collective. Deroy nous invite à une plongée introspective dans l'âme humaine, où l'éveil spirituel devient l'objectif ultime. Par l'entremise de ses expériences, elle questionne les dogmes de la réalité tangible et propose une ouverture à l'inconnu. La vérité, dans sa conception, n'est pas absolue, mais plutôt un voyage continuels vers l'illumination, un thème qui s'harmonise parfaitement avec les grandes œuvres de littérature spirituelle et philosophique.

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L'auteure elle-même est le personnage central de cette odyssee spirituelle. Son évolution, tant intérieure que symbolique, constitue la trame essentielle du récit. À travers ses pérégrinations, elle croise la route de personnages énigmatiques, des figures d'accompagnement spirituel qui éclairent son chemin de vérité. Ces rencontres, souvent imprégnées de mystère, incarnent des aspects de la sagesse universelle et contribuent à la transformation intérieure de l'écrivaine, tout en offrant aux lecteurs des perspectives nouvelles et profondément méditatives.

L'intrigue repose sur l'exploration intérieure et les conflits existentiels auxquels Deroy se confronte. Elle lutte pour concilier la réalité perceptible avec les vérités profondes qu'elle découvre tout au long de son cheminement. Ce conflit, non pas entre le bien et le mal, mais entre l'ignorance et la connaissance, donne à l'ouvrage une résonance spirituelle singulière. Chaque révélation ébranle l'ordre établi, invitant le lecteur à remettre en question ses propres croyances et à explorer les frontières floues entre la réalité et l'imaginaire.

Le style de Linda Deroy est d'une élégance épurée, où chaque mot semble pesé, réfléchi, en vue d'éveiller une certaine résonance chez le lecteur. Sa prose, à la fois fluide et chargée de profondeur, rend hommage à la tradition des écrits spirituels tout en restant accessible à un large public. Loin d'une surenchère littéraire, son écriture demeure sobre et poétique, favorisant une immersion immédiate dans le cœur des réflexions qu'elle propose. Ce style, délicatement introspectif, exige une lecture attentive, invitant à la méditation plus qu'à la consommation rapide de l'histoire.

L'une des phrases les plus marquantes du livre résume à elle seule l'essence de l'œuvre : « Parfois, la réalité dépasse la fiction. Gardez votre esprit bien ouvert ! » Ce passage incarne la philosophie de Deroy, une invitation à dépasser les limites du monde visible et à embrasser l'inconnu avec une curiosité inlassable. Le lecteur est ainsi poussé à envisager la réalité comme un champ d'exploration infini, où chaque révélation ouvre la porte à de nouvelles vérités.

La grande force de ce livre réside dans l'authenticité et la profondeur de la démarche de l'auteure. Linda Deroy partage ses expériences personnelles avec une vulnérabilité désarmante, permettant au lecteur de se sentir proche de son parcours, tout en éveillant chez lui des réflexions sur sa propre quête de sens. L'équilibre entre récit personnel et réflexion philosophique fait de ce livre une lecture aussi inspirante qu'instructive, propice à la contemplation et à l'introspection.

Alina Bruckner et al.: Integrarea istoriei lumii în cultura românească. Traduceri de texte istorice din limba germană la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea și începutul secolului al XIX-lea

[Die Integration der Weltgeschichte in die rumänische Kultur. Übersetzung historischer Texte aus dem Deutschen am Ende des 18. und Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts]

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Dr. Mădălina Tvarochlib

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Viel ist über die mittelalterliche Historiographie bekannt, die in oder über die rumänischen Fürstentümer geschrieben wurde, und die Chroniken des 17. Jahrhunderts stellen eine ständige Beschäftigung der gegenwärtigen Historiographie dar. Ebenso wurde die Entstehung der modernen Geschichtsschreibung seit 1850 umfassend von der Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte untersucht. Was jedoch von den meisten Forschern typischerweise übersehen wird, ist die Schwelle zwischen der mittelalterlichen und modernen Art der Geschichtsschreibung, das heißt die vormoderne Zeit, die gewöhnlich mit der rumänischen Aufklärung (1770-1830) assoziiert wird – eine Übergangsperiode von rivalisierenden Diskursen, die auf einzigartige Weise verschmelzen und sich vermischen, um den Weg zur „nationalen“ Moderne des 19. Jahrhunderts zu ermöglichen.

Diese „einsame Ära“ des „Weder-Nochs und Als-Auchs“ (S. 17) ist genau der Zeitraum, den eine interdisziplinäre Gruppe junger Forscher aus Iași untersucht hat. Sie haben die Ergebnisse eines zweijährigen nationalen Projekts, das vom Ministerium für Forschung, Innovation und Digitalisierung, CNCS-UEFISCDI: PP-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0721, finanziert wurde, gesammelt und in einem umfangreichen Band von fast 600 Seiten veröffentlicht. Dieser behandelt die historischen Texte, die am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts aus dem Deutschen ins Rumänische übersetzt

¹Die „Alexandru Ioan Cuza“ Universität, Iași, Romania

wurden. Dieses Unterfangen ist ein begrüßenswertes Unternehmen, da es ein thematisch homogenes, aber in der Intention heterogenes Textkorpus zusammenbringt und diese aus einer interdisziplinären Perspektive analysiert. Es ist eine der wenigen Studien, die in einem kohärenten Diskurs unterschiedliche Interpretationsebene vereinen, von der historischen Analyse des Kontextes, Textentstehung und Buchzirkulation sowie einer Geschichte der medialen Kommunikation bis hin zur linguistischen und philologischen Analyse eines Textes und einem Überblick über die von den rumänischen Intellektuellen der Zeit angewandten Übersetzungsmethoden.

Der Band wurde Ende 2022 beim renommierten Verlag der „Alexandru Ioan Cuza“-Universität veröffentlicht und ist von fünf Autoren unterzeichnet: Alina Bruckner, Alexandra Chiriac, Ioan-Augustin Guriță, Ana Catană-Spenchiu und Iulia Elena Zup, unter der Koordination von Alexandra Chiriac. Das Team selbst veranschaulicht die interdisziplinäre Natur des Bandes und vereint drei Spezialisten der Germanistik mit umfangreicher Forschung in den Bereichen Übersetzungspraxis, Fachsprachen (wissenschaftlich, wirtschaftlich und juristisch) und Kulturwissenschaft, nämlich Dr. Alexandra Chiriac, Dr. Alina Bruckner und Dr. Iulia Elena Zup. Ergänzt wurde das Team durch den Historiker, Dr. Ioan-Augustin Guriță, mit zahlreichen wertvollen Forschungen zur Kirchengeschichte und Historiographie sowie zur Kulturgeschichte Mitteleuropas und Südosteuropas im 18. Jahrhundert, und Dr. Ana Catană-Spenchiu, die Expertise in Linguistik und der Entwicklung der rumänischen Sprache mit Schwerpunkt auf dem 18. Jahrhundert hat. Verschiedene Interpretationsmodelle zusammenzubringen war ein riskantes und ambitioniertes Unterfangen der Koordinatorin, da keine etablierte Methodologie vorlag und sehr wenige ähnliche Studien als Modelle dienen konnten. Ziel war es, den Leserinnen und Lesern einen Überblick über die kulturelle Landschaft in ihrer Komplexität zu bieten, in der diese Texte veröffentlicht, übersetzt und verbreitet wurden, und die kulturellen und politischen Motivationen dieser „verwobenen Geschichten“ (S. 25) hervorzuheben.

Der Band ist in zwei separate Teile gegliedert: einen theoretischen Rahmen und acht Fallstudien. Der erste Teil umfasst fünf Kapitel, die sich mit der allgemeinen Definition und den verschiedenen Interpretationsmodellen von Kultur, interkultureller Kommunikation, kulturellem Transfer, Aufklärung und kultureller Übersetzung befassen (S. 17-84). Diese Kapitel bieten einen Überblick über die neuesten Forschungen im Bereich der Kulturwissenschaften und Kulturanthropologie und behandeln eine komplexe und aktuelle

Interpretation des kulturellen Kontakts und des kulturellen Transfers, die als ein „Verflechten“ von Menschen, Diskursen, Kulturgütern, Interessen, externen und internen Kontexten usw. betrachtet wird. Interessant an diesem Kapitel ist die Tatsache, dass die historischen Werke und ihre Übersetzungen, die als Kulturgüter angesehen werden, in den größeren Kontext des internationalen Handels und des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Austauschs eingeordnet werden. Der Prozess des kulturellen Transfers wird dabei nicht nur aus einer akademischen, sondern auch aus einer wirtschaftlichen, handelsmäßigen Perspektive des Buches als Handelsware auf internationalen Routen interpretiert. So kann die Theorie der „verwobenen Geschichte“ der interkulturellen Kommunikation zur Zeit des Kolonialzeitalters auch durch Bruno Latours „Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie“ ergänzt werden, eine Verbindung, die von den Autoren hergestellt, aber nicht vollständig in ihrem Potenzial ausgeschöpft wird.

Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt dieses Kapitels liegt auf der Verwendung der neuesten Interpretationsmodelle bei der Analyse der historischen, linguistischen und kulturellen Landschaft der rumänischen Fürstentümer und ihrer Verbindung zur deutschsprachigen Welt im Bereich der Historiographie. In den letzten Jahrzehnten wurde viel über das „[Wieder-]Erfinden Mitteleuropas und Südosteuropas“ geschrieben, doch diese Studie bietet eine umfassende Analyse eines einzelnen Typs wissenschaftlicher Texte (Übersetzungen historischer Schriften) und einer einzigen Verbindung (Deutsch-Rumänisch). Sie zeigt, dass der kulturelle Transfer nicht nur bidirektional, sondern vielmehr ein verflochtenes sprachliches, diskursives und politisches Netzwerk ist: vom Deutschen über Griechisch ins Rumänische; vom Französischen über das Deutsche und Italienische ins Rumänische, vom Lateinischen über das Deutsche und Russische ins Rumänische usw. (siehe S. 162). Dieses theoretische Kapitel bringt keine neuen Informationen und neuartigen Interpretationsmodelle, sondern nutzt die neuesten Forschungen in der Kulturanthropologie und interkulturellen Kommunikation, um in kleinen Einheiten ein komplexes Netzwerk von Verbindungen zu zerlegen, das repräsentativ für die gesamte kulturelle Landschaft der West-Ost-Beziehungen am Ende des 18. und Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts sein könnte.

Auch im theoretischen Teil des Bandes (S. 145-160) definieren die Autoren die „historischen Texte“ als proto-wissenschaftliche Texte, die sich mit antiker Geschichte, Welt- und Universalgeschichte, Geschichte ferner und exotischer Länder, Biografien wichtiger

historischer Persönlichkeiten und Monarchen sowie historischen Beschreibungen wichtiger Momente in der Geschichte (Fall von Konstantinopel, die Feldzüge von Napoleon Bonaparte usw.) befassen. Aus dieser Kategorie ausgeschlossen sind die Kirchengeschichte und das Leben der Heiligen, die Geschichte eines bestimmten wissenschaftlichen Bereichs, Reisebücher, historische Fiktion sowie politische Pamphlete, Proklamationen und Anordnungen, obwohl in vielen Fällen die Grenzen zwischen den Genres verschwommen sind. Im Buch ist auch ein Korpus von etwa 60 Texten zu finden, die in die Kategorie Übersetzung historischer Werke aus verschiedenen europäischen Sprachen ins Rumänische im Zeitraum 1770-1840 fallen (S. 147-148), eine Liste, die als nützlicher Leitfaden für weitere Forschungen dient. Aus diesem Korpus wählen die Autoren nur die Übersetzungen aus oder durch das Deutsche ins Rumänische aus, die ungefähr ein Drittel des gesamten bekannten Übersetzungsvolumens sind. Unter diesen hat die Koordinatorin acht wichtigste Fallstudien ausgewählt, die den Forschungsschwerpunkt hervorheben.

Die ausgewählten Fallstudien veranschaulichen, wie heterogen und vielfältig das frühmoderne Interesse an Geschichte sein kann. Die Koordinatorin gruppiert die Fallstudien geschickt in drei Kategorien, entsprechend der textuellen Intentionalität und Funktion in der Zielkultur. In der ersten Kategorie finden wir Übersetzungen mit einem Bildungs- und Erziehungszweck, vertreten durch Schulbücher oder Bücher zur Massenaufklärung. Während Alexandras Analyse des *Manual de istorie universală* [*Schulbuch für Universalgeschichte*] einen kurzen Überblick über Johann Matthias Schröckhs pädagogisches Werk und dessen Übersetzung ins Rumänische zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bietet, ist Iulia Elena Zups Studie zu Nicola Nicolaus Übersetzungen *Descoperirea Americii* [*Die Entdeckung Amerikas*] (1816) und *Plutarh Nou* [*Neuer Plutarch*] (1819) eine umfassende Analyse der Person des Übersetzers, seiner Motivation und Praktiken sowie eine ausführliche Untersuchung des sozial-politischen Kontextes, in dem die deutschen / französischen Texte und deren Übersetzungen produziert wurden. Die Analyse wird durch einen großen Abschnitt der vergleichenden Textanalyse unterstützt, der die Übersetzungspraxis und stilistischen Merkmale des Siebenbürgischen Gelehrten hervorhebt.

Die zweite Kategorie der Fallstudien umfasst Übersetzungen historischer Werke mit einem politischen und propagandistischen Ziel. Zu dieser Kategorie gehören die Übersetzung einer Biografie von Katharina II. aus dem Deutschen ins Rumänische (1799) und die Übersetzungen der sogenannten „Buda-Texte“ (1814-1815), eine

Sammlung von „Flugblättern“, die historiographische Darstellungen der Schlachten Napoleons Bonaparte und der mutigen Gegenangriffe des russischen Kaisers Alexander II. enthalten. Ioan Augustin Guriță und Ana Catană-Spenchiu liefern eine überzeugende Analyse der Intentionalität und Auswirkungen dieser Übersetzungen sowie der anti-napoleonischen und pro-russischen Propaganda in den rumänischen Fürstentümern. Obwohl die „Buda-Texte“ in der rumänischen Historiographie bekannt sind, wurden sie nie in ihrem Verhältnis zum Quelltext untersucht, sodass Ioan Augustin Guriță zum ersten Mal die deutschen Originale identifiziert, auf denen die rumänische Übersetzung basiert, und die beiden Textgruppen erstmals direkt miteinander vergleicht.

In der dritten Kategorie der Fallstudien finden sich rumänische Übersetzungen von Geschichtstexten, die in deutscher Sprache verfasst wurden, sich jedoch mit der Geschichte der rumänischen Fürstentümer befassen. Diese „Wieder-Domestizierung“ (S. 370) der nationalen Geschichte ist in der Tat ein besonderer Fall der Übersetzung, da sie terminologisch und sprachlich die Anpassung eines fremden Textes an die einheimische Kultur und Sprache ermöglicht. J.A. Gebhardi's Text *Istoria Dachiei [Geschichte Dakiens]* in der rumänischen Übersetzung von Ioan Nemișescu, Dimitrie Cantemirs deutsches *Descriptio Moldaviae* in Rumänisch und Damaschin Bojincas Adaptionen in der Zeitschrift *Biblioteca românească [Rumänische Bibliothek]* verschiedener deutscher Quellen über drei „einheimischen Helden“ stellen interessante Beispiele für Textquellen dar, die, wenn auch teilweise, von der modernen Historiographie des späten 19. Jahrhunderts verwendet wurden und auf denen die nationale kulturelle Identität des modernen Rumäniens aufgebaut wurde. Besonders Alina Bruckners Analyse hebt die freien und adaptiven Übersetzungsstrategien hervor, die verwendet wurden, um ein bestimmtes Gefühl nationaler Stolz innerhalb der Zielleserschaft der Übersetzung einzupassen und zu vermitteln.

Alle Fallstudien ergänzen die bestehende Bibliographie und erweitern die Interpretationsmodelle, indem sie neue Informationen zum Kontext und Text der Quelle, zur Zirkulation des Buches und Manuskripts sowie zum Kontext der Übersetzungsproduktion und -verbreitung hinzufügen. In jeder Fallstudie haben die Autoren neuartige Aspekte ihrer Texte eingebracht, transliterierte Fragmente der rumänischen Übersetzungen (alle in kyrillischer Schrift in gedruckter oder handschriftlicher Form) eingefügt und eine umfangreiche vergleichende Analyse zwischen den Ausgangs- und Zieltexten angeboten, um die Übersetzungspraxis der damaligen Zeit

hervorzuheben. In einigen Fällen fehlt den Fallstudien eine gewisse Tiefe (zum Beispiel Alexandras Chiriacs Analyse des Schröckhs *Handbuch der Universalgeschichte*) und es fehlen bestimmte bibliographische Informationen (zum Beispiel wird in Bruckners Studie zu Bojincăs *Biblioteca Românească* nicht ausreichend auf die von Nicolae Bocşan durchgeführten Studien eingegangen), aber insgesamt bietet der Band einen guten Überblick über die kulturelle Landschaft der Zeit und die verschiedenen Übersetzungsstrategien der rumänischsprachigen Gelehrten.

Der Band bietet eine überwältigende Menge an Daten und neuen Informationen zu Texten und den Akteuren, die an deren Zirkulation beteiligt sind, sowie in den meisten Fällen eine solide qualitative Analyse des Buchproduktions-, Verteilungs- und Übersetzungsprozesses. Es fehlen jedoch eine gewisse Kohärenz und Einheitlichkeit, da die Fallstudien in Länge und Schwerpunkt erheblich voneinander abweichen. Nicht alle theoretischen Aspekte, die im ersten Teil des Bandes behandelt werden, erwiesen sich als nützlich für die Textanalyse, und mehrere Aspekte bleiben weiterhin unklar, trotz einiger guter Versuche, die Urheberschaft und die Buchzirkulation zu klären. Insgesamt stellt der Band *Integrarea istoriei lumii în cultura românească. Traduceri de texte istorice din limba germană la sfârşitul secolului al XVIII-lea și începutul secolului al XIX-lea* jedoch eine wertvolle Informationsquelle sowie einen Referenz- und Ausgangspunkt für alle dar, die die kulturelle und wissenschaftliche Produktion von Texten und Übersetzungen im Zeitraum 1770-1840 weiter untersuchen möchten. Die „einsame Ära“ der Aufklärung wird als facettenreicher und komplexer Diskurs dargestellt, während viele der Fallstudien interessante Geschichten über das Schicksal von Büchern und Menschen bieten. Abgesehen von der detaillierten vergleichenden Übersetzungsanalyse, die aufgrund ihrer Natur technisch und trocken ist, ist der Band so geschrieben, dass er weder zu akademisch noch zu präventiös wirkt und auch einem nicht spezialisierten Publikum eine interessante Lektüre bieten könnte.

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***Thématique du prochain
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**Autofictions et mutations : crises du
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***Thematik der nächsten
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Krisen des Selbst, Krisen der Welt

“

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En 2012, la revue est classée dans la catégorie C par le Conseil National

de la Recherche Scientifique de Roumanie (CNCS). Depuis 2018, **Confluente** est indexée dans les bases de données EBSCO et Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL).

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Als wissenschaftliche Fachzeitschrift gehen ihre Anfänge auf das akademische Jahr 1966-1967 zurück, als die Abteilung für akademische Forschung der Universität Oradea unter dem Namen *Lucrări științifice* gegründet wurde. Im Jahr 1991 änderte die wissenschaftliche Fachzeitschrift ihren Namen und ihr Template und konzentrierte sich auf Themen von unmittelbarer Relevanz und auf gründliche Studien, auf Kulturstudien, Forschungsartikel über rumänische und vergleichende Literatur. Im Jahr 2006 erschien *Confluente*, eine Zeitschrift für moderne Literatur, die akademische Literaturstudien auf Englisch, Französisch, Deutsch und Italienisch enthält. 2012 ordnete das Ministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Rumänien) unsere Zeitschrift in die Kategorie C ein. Seit 2018 ist *Confluente* in den Datenbanken EBSCO und Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL) indexiert.

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