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INTRO

The Author:

Mircea Pricăjan¹:

A COOL PURPOSEFUL RIDE

Sometimes it so happens that you have to write upon request. I, for one, got the commission for my novel for children from the only person in the world whose wishes I must very cleverly balance and filter before I fulfill them. That is because at the age of seven a child is prone to have the most bizarre requests. Most of them downright unhealthy. And some completely unrealistic. But when a child asks his parent to write him a book, and when he knows that the parent has done that before, you can only take on the challenge. After all, if that parent would be a welder and his child would ask him for a swing, he'd surely get the best welded swing that parent is capable to manufacture. That commission is not only doable, but it's also a fatherly duty. Therefore, I, too, acknowledged my duty (a moment that I knew deep down would come, and also one that in some way I paved the road to), and left aside everything I was working on in order to start writing the story of the boy with an iron fist.

First came the title. "Daddy, I want you to write me a book and I want for us to name it *Iron Fist*." These are his exact words and more than anything I was happy for that plural. *For us.* It meant that my boy wanted to be a part of this effort. "Then that's the name for it, Mihai", I told him. "But first let's see what this boy needs to be doing for him to have such a power."

We were lying in his bed together. Sleep was soon to come. We'd

¹ Editor of *Familia* Literary Magazine, Oradea, Romania.

just finished reading the daily bedtime quota, the lights were off and it was now time for our small talk in the dark, those whispered words that usually lull him to sleep.

"Here's an idea, Mihai. I suggest that the boy in the story would first have a concrete hand. Like you had when you broke for arm and had to be in a cast for so many weeks. Do you remember that?"

"Yeah!" he said enthusiastically. "I still have that cast!"

"Good. So let us have him in a cast, let's give him a concrete hand, and when he'll finally be out of it, only then should he find his iron hand."

"An iron fist!" he corrected me without a beat.

"Iron fist, you're right. Do you remember how aware you were of that hand after it came out of the cast? How sensitive it was? You let nobody touch it, you kept it close to your chest for many days."

I knew that feeling from my own experience. Like my son, when I was little I managed to fracture not only my arm, but also my collar bone. Consecutively.

"Yes, I know, daddy. And the doctor told me that if I will ever fall on that same arm again, my bone will stick out through the skin."

"Well, all he wanted was to scare you a little, so that you'll be more careful in the future..."

"He succeeded at that."

That evening, because sleep was already near, I remember we drafted a completely unrealistic plot for our story. Of course, I didn't tell him that—he was too enthusiastic about it. But the following evening I know how to suggest to him, step by step, more believable, more logical events, adventures that would build into a solid story, one that would stand its ground beyond the mere actions it described.

That is because, you see, children books are some very hard to steer vehicles. Those who get on board are all eyes for the wonders along the way, they want to be impressed at every turn of the road. After all, that is why they keep their nose stuck to the window. But the experience is worthless if, once the destination is reached, all those wondrous sights are missing a purpose. If their parade does not track a course back to themselves, in fact.

The story of Iron Fist needed to follow this purpose. I knew that. Mihai, on the other hand, knew other things. So we compromised and decided that I, as the one who would actually write the story, will have the liberty to choose from all his suggestions only those I thought would help us turn this into... a book.

"I have faith in you, daddy, please know that I'm confident you'll make it a very cool book."

"As cool as you?" I stroke a joke.

"All kids will love it", he cut me short with great gravity. "I have faith in you."

And I felt his gaze in the dark.

I wrote *Iron Fist* with these words always ringing in my mind. The writing was easy from the very beginning, I wrote like I was reading the story from someplace else (maybe from that miraculous space that exists right after the portal of sleep?), I wrote the book as if I was reading it to my son.

From our conjugated effort there came out a book which I, too, am confident the kids will love, a most sincere book about the way a child copes with change and the uncertainty it brings, about how one can lose the friendship of others, and also about how one can regain it, a book about the force that keeps us all together.

INTRO

The Teacher:

Liliana Truță¹:

JILL TOMLINSON'S BOOKS ON THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Whether a child or an adult, whether you have just opened your eyes onto the world or you deem to have seen it all, Jill Tomlinson's books will fascinate you if you are a kid or enthrall you if you are an adult. Displaying adorable characters that you fall for on reading the first lines, the books for children by this author will be definitely enjoyed by the little readers who are just getting an initiation in the world of reading - and in reading the world.

The Owl that was Afraid of the Dark, The Penguin who Wished to Learn More, The Gorilla who Wanted to Grow Up are among the books by this author, who can address kids in an unmistakable voice. All these books - as their titles also reveal - share and focus on typical attitudes, representative of children's psychology: curiosity, restlessness, impatience, the wish to become an adult, and last but not least, the classical fear of the dark.

All the cubs that are the protagonists of these books share the specific curiosity of the kids and swallow the adults' answers as greedily as they eat in order to grow up. The kids will get attached to the little beings that they can relate to, with whom they will empathize and through the latter's experiences they will be able to learn about the world and the universe of little creatures.

Throughout all these books, the following idea emerges, bearing no didactic or authoritarian overtone: that all changes, experiences, the

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unpredictable, or challenges of all sorts are by no means negative experiences, but just a means towards transformation, evolution, growth; all the cubs thus learn how to conquer their fears by learning about themselves and moreover about adaptation, one of the ruling laws of existence.

Before getting down to text analysis, let us also mention that the educational value of these books, albeit emphatic, is never forced upon or imposed on the reader and the conclusions melt so naturally into the spontaneity of the narrative so that they are easily assimilated and made visible in playful ways.

We so love Buf, the fluffy Owl that rolls over off its perch that we avidly remember everything we learn about its life-style, we empathize so well with the penguin that lives under harsh circumstances so much so, that we wish to learn more about him, in other words the cognitive or informative component of the text is so well embedded in the story, that the little reader will learn more about penguins or gorillas than if he were to leaf through encyclopedias or scientific treatises. And he will thus learn much more naturally this information, as he has accompanied all these creatures into their specific habitat, discovering their way of life; he will hence realize what owls eat, or, following Otto's curiosity, he will learn what the difference is between mammals and birds etc.

The author is a subtle creator of character and can capture behavioral types and primary links in the world of the child: family ties, friendship, socializing and hierarchies in a simple manner. All the cubs here find out about understanding otherness, about ways of supporting the others as you discover the world and the ways you need to find solutions by turning into account your parents' educational input.

In *The Owl who Was Afraid of the Dark*, the author chooses as setting a confined space that the owl can discover and can venture into. Paradoxically, the little owl is afraid of the dark. This paradox is not merely meant to stir the reader's interest, as we might be tempted to think at first, therefore it is not that beneficial manipulation for *captatio benevolentiae*, but, as we progress, it all becomes the trigger to the whole adventure of discovery, of learning what the protagonist undergoes in order to regain its identity that is not a given.

Buf, for that is the little owl's name, is like all other barn owls, but only apparently, except for the fact that he is afraid of the dark, which is quite unusual. On reading a dialogue between Buf and his mother, we realize that all this is not about some mood or childish whim, and that Buf's fear is genuine, as he always refuses to go hunting with his dad at night; however, the food, he likes a lot. Nevertheless,

Buf will gradually find out positive things about the night, and this path to knowledge will not be a traumatic one, as in the classical books for children, where the heroes should necessarily know the word via erratic ways, running away from home, and bear the occasional mishap in the process, and this constitutes the price they need to pay in order to be able to return home safe and sound.

Buf will stay within a secure perimeter, in a universe that is close to his home that he will get away from only in order to learn something about the dark he fears.

Along the way, Buf will interact with several characters and he will thus learn something new about the dark, about people and animals and, more importantly, about himself. His fear will only be conquered when he will truly know the dark and when his identity will be thoroughly shaped, and the little owl will learn to live with it, for, as his mother tells him, "you are what you are." Mother knows best, she knows that Buf fears the dark because he does not know himself. She therefore sends him out there, to explore his tiny universe outside his nest, as Buf has never gone out before and is not adept at landing, at shrieking like owls do, which shows that all can be learned, and that, in order to become adults, we need to learn it all.

The cognitive coordinate of the text is encapsulated in the information that Buf receives from the others, and which the little readers can access unwittingly: in the young lady's drawing book he can see a lot of information on night prowlers, on the man with the telescope, who shares interesting information with him about stars and cosmic distances.

Quite the same road to discovery is taken by the hero of another book, *The Penguin who Wished to Learn More*. Alongside Otto, the little penguin, kids can discover the fascinating world of the Arctic, of the glaciers, this text containing abundant information on nature and the animal kingdom. The educational value of the text is evident, aiming at acknowledging responsibility, the constant effort to get adjusted to the harsh circumstances of life and the development of a social conscience. Alongside little Otto, kids can not only satisfy their curiosity regarding the fascinating, cute little birds, but they can equally empathize with the birds' huge effort to survive under extremely harsh circumstances.

The text proposes, through the world of penguins, a new family concept. Through the curious eyes of the little penguin, the reader can learn about a totally new way of life: Claudius, the "father" tells him he has adopted him when he was just an egg and he happened to roll to his legs, then he gradually learns that he will be cared for by various

aunts, all very maternal beings; the little penguin has several siblings that he looks after, as he is their elderly brother. The penguin colony thus becomes quite the utopia, where all take care of everyone else, irrespective of the fact whether they are relatives or not. The community functions like a big family, like an organism where all parts have their own well-established role.

The message here is crystal-clear: in the big family that society is, anyone who takes care of you becomes your mom or dad, you should look after the young ones as if they were your own siblings, and everything that you have been taught, you need to pass on to others.

The circle of knowledge - that little Otto is the centre of - gets bigger and bigger every single day, through everyone else that he gradually meets: at first, the ones close to him, later through other, more remote colonies.

All the experiences are concatenated, making him go through efforts such as: adaptation, the first storm, the realization that, although he is a bird, he cannot fly, he gets to know the most dangerous predators, and he becomes friends with a baby seal, thus learning the difference between birds and mammals.

In *The Gorilla who Wanted to Grow Up*, the experiences of the little gorilla fall into the typical child-like urge to go through what the grown-ups go through, and do what they do. Pongo is the little gorilla, the son of the Big Chief of the group.

The first exciting event for Pongo is the encounter with the biggest and worst enemy, Man. The educational value of the excerpt is exceptional, as the reader can understand the destructive power of Man as regards nature and the animal kingdom. The excerpt is also significant as roles get reversed constantly: the man who has arrived in their midst to study them is also, in his turn, being studied by the gorillas.

Pongo's experiences become ever more serious as he grows up: he gets his first mission, of guarding the rear of the group on one of their ventures, he then takes care of his younger sister and helps out in her rescue by a hunter. The gorillas are rescued by the very hunter that always accompanies them and that they have already accepted as part of their close-knit group.

The text is relevant in terms of laying out important nuances, moreover when Pongo realizes that not all people become their enemies: some will observe them, some will try to shoot them. The little gorillas should learn, like all kids for that matter, that one should be cautious of strangers, trust no-one unless you really know them, and that not all people are nice.

For their own safety, the gorillas will eventually climb the mountains, in order to get away from people, be they good or evil...

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*Children & Childhood
Literary-Forms*

*L'enfant / L'enfance
Études littéraires*

“Children are the Most Ridiculous Things Ever Invented:” Jeanette Winterson’s *Tanglewreck*

Papatya Alkan-Genca ¹

Abstract: *Tanglewreck* (2006) is Jeanette Winterson’s second book for children, the first being *King of Capri* (2004). It is a rich blend of fact and fiction, different writing modes such as the realistic and the fantastic, different genres such as detective fiction and fairy tale, and different epistemological domains such as literature and science. It follows various familiar tropes of children’s literature: an orphaned kid suffering at the hands of a terrible adult until one day he/she, through a series of adventures, reaches a happy resolution. Although *Tanglewreck* employs these tropes, it also departs from conventional children’s literature in several respects. Therefore, this article looks into the ways Winterson installs and deviates from tropes and motifs of children’s literature, and it argues that this deviation is most evident in two aspects: the novel’s incorporation of scientific knowledge through which the text becomes a host of themes that are traditionally associated with adult literature, and its abundant intertextual references which situate *Tanglewreck* within a postmodern mode of writing.

Key words: Children’s literature, Jeanette Winterson, *Tanglewreck*, intertextuality, science.

Jeanette Winterson is one of the most prolific and well-known contemporary British novelists. Beginning her literary career with the publication of the semi-autobiographical novel *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* in 1985, Winterson has become a critically-acclaimed and widely-read author whose works unite realistic elements and fantastic imaginings with aplomb. In *Boating for Beginners* (1985), for example, she rewrites the Biblical Flood story within a contemporary setting where Noah is an entrepreneur who accidentally “creates” God. *Sexing*

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the Cherry (1989), on the other hand, contains concurrent narrations of two distinct time frames – one 17th century and the late 20th century – although they collide into each other. *The Passion* (1987) recounts two separate yet interconnected storylines – of Henri and Villanelle – with Napoleon in the background. *Written on the Body* (1992) is “at once a love story and a philosophical meditation on the body” (Shepard “Loss”). *Gut Symmetries* (1997) focuses on a triangular love affair by using science and time travel as its narrative motifs. *The Powerbook* (2000) has multiple realities interlocked into one another. Winterson calls *The Powerbook* the end of a cycle – a cycle consisting of the novels she has written until the beginning of the new millennium all of which lay bare Winterson’s preoccupation with the concept of time and with story-telling. In a way, these formal characteristics of fiction writing become part of the thematic interest in the novels of this so-called cycle.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Winterson steers her focus towards a new audience: children and young adults. It should be noted that children as characters have always already been pivotal to Winterson’s writing. Her inaugural novel concentrates, for the most part, on the tension-ridden relationship between the protagonist Jeanette and her mother; *Sexing the Cherry* likewise depicts the parallel narratives of a son and his mother; *Lighthousekeeping* is the story of an orphaned girl, to name but a few. This interest in childhood, children, and the relationship between the child and the parent is maintained in her later writing; yet now the focus is on a younger demographic with story lines targeting specifically this age group. Her first children’s book is *The King of Capri* (2004), which she wrote after her visit to the island of Capri with her god daughter. Winterson describes it in her webpage as “a story about not being greedy and about finding love” (n.pag.). Her other books for children are *The Battle of the Sun* (2009) which recounts the adventures of a boy called Jack in the 17th-century England. *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me* (2009) is a picture-book that re-imagines the Nativity through a narrative that centers around a donkey.

Tanglewreck (2006) is Jeanette Winterson’s second book for children. In her website, Winterson indicates that *Tanglewreck* is “a big book for kids about Time” (n.pag), and that she has decided to write it because her “godchildren were always asking [her] why grown-ups never had enough time” (n.pag.). Preoccupation with time is not a new topic for Winterson. Indeed, many of her novels engage with the idea of time, one way or another. Reflections on the nature of time, the idea of the past, the present, and the future, and how human beings situate themselves within and without this conception of time are discernible

in her earlier works such as *Sexing the Cherry*, *Gut Symmetries*, and *Powerbook*, just to name a few. *Tanglewreck*, however, differentiates from these earlier examples because its engagement with time is given within the framework of children's literature. The text makes use of various familiar tropes of children's literature: an orphaned kid suffering at the hands of a terrible adult until one day he/she, through a series of adventures, reaches a happy resolution. Although *Tanglewreck* employs tropes and themes of children's literature, it also deviates from conventional children's literature in various ways. In this respect, this article looks into the ways Winterson installs and deviates from tropes and motifs of children's literature, and argues that her deviation is evident in two distinct characteristics of *Tanglewreck*: its incorporation of scientific knowledge through which the text becomes a host of themes that are traditionally associated with adult literature, and its abundant intertextual references which situate *Tanglewreck* within a postmodern mode of writing.

Tanglewreck tells the story of 11 year-old girl called Silver who lives in a house called Tanglewreck – a word play on “rectangle” – with Mrs. Rokabye, “[her] *father's sister and [her] legal guardian*” (22) (italics in the original) after the death of Silver's parents and sister. Mrs. Rokabye is not a loving, caring guardian. On the contrary, she treats Silver poorly, disregards her needs – both physical and psychological – practically demands Silver to be her personal servant. Silver's life gets more complicated with the arrival of a man called Abel Darkwater, who is in search of a device called the Timekeeper, of which he believes Silver is in possession. Mrs. Rokabye accepts Darkwater's invitation to London, realizing that she will be rewarded both an all-expenses-covered trip and a hefty sum of money. Darkwater's invitation is a calculated move on his part; he believes he can get hold of the Timekeeper so that he has full control over time. As far as Silver is concerned, leaving for London means leaving the safety of Tanglewreck, which proves, throughout the narrative, that it has magical properties to protect her. Nevertheless, it also means Silver can embark upon a long and adventurous journey that stretches even to the end of the Milky Way. During this journey, she meets both friends and foes, faces many adventures ranging from exploring London to travelling in time. Not only Silver but also the text itself travels in time and space, alluding to multiple time-spaces and multiple texts, providing a rich reading experience: “I don't think we're in London anymore” (204) says Silver, reminding the reader of *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy has left Kansas and was about to experience the Emerald City. The text explores the notions of time, friendship, and how love

conquers all, even a black hole. It concludes with order being restored; Silver goes back to Tanglewreck without the odious Mrs. Rokabye.

Fusion of Different Narrative Modes in *Tanglewreck*

One striking quality of *Tanglewreck* is its fusion of various narrative modes. Starting from the very first page, the text mixes the realist with the fantastic. It starts realistically, giving an accurately detailed depiction of the movement of a bus: “At six forty-five one summer morning, a red London bus was crossing Waterloo Bridge” (13). Before the page is complete, however, the narrative takes a decisive turn towards the fantastic:

Riding the river as though it were a road was a phalanx of chariots and horsemen.

The white horses were pulled up on their haunches; the nodding ostrich plumes on their head-collars rose and fell; the fan bearers came forward, the troops stood at ease, and above the kneeling priest was the Pharaoh himself, inspecting his new monument from a burnished car. (20)

As such, the text juxtaposes the highly realistic depiction of a bus with the highly fantastic vision of the Pharaoh in the middle of contemporary London; and this sets the tone for the rest of the narrative.

Egyptian mythology converges into Christian theology, which incorporates itself into a fantastic narration. Through the middle of the story, Regalia Mason is revealed to be a woman called Maria Prophetessa who is an ageless woman with prophetic powers. She gives a detailed account of how the Egyptian belief system has come up with the idea of Time, and how this Egyptian conceptualization has been transferred into Christianity: “The great dynasties of Egypt passed into the Sands of Time [...] Moses, the Israelite, brought a new god out of Egypt, made not of gold, nor in the image of an animal, but in the image of Man” (231). She prophesizes that “[t]wenty-four centuries will pass until the End of Time [and then] the god will be reborn and Time will belong to him” (231). True to its fantastic nature, *Tanglewreck* presents this narration in a completely unconventional time-space: Maria Prophetessa (or Regalia Mason) talks to the Pope in the Vatican at the Einstein Line, which is light-years away from the Earth. In other words, Christian theology becomes etched into a fantastic backdrop for the prophecy that fuels the narrative. All of these are deviations from conventional children’s books. A more obvious deviation presents itself in the text’s employ of scientific knowledge. In other words, all this

mythical-religious account fuses into a science fictional narrative as a whole.

The Use of Science in *Tanglewreck*

In “The Solace of Quantum Physics,” David Nel contends that Winterson’s engagement with scientific matters on a full scale started with *Written on the Body*. This engagement is combined with writing children’s books of which *Tanglewreck* is an obvious example. It is already noted that “[c]hildren’s books have a long history around the world, and they have absorbed into themselves elements of folk, fairy tale, and the oral tradition” (Hunt, Introduction 4). Winterson takes this one step further, and she incorporates actual historical events and personages as well as complex scientific issues.

One very obvious deviation from conventional children’s literature is *Tanglewreck*’s use of science and science fiction as an indispensable part of the narrative. It should not be assumed that science has never been part of children’s literature, but the extent with which Winterson employs scientific matters sets *Tanglewreck* apart from other examples. Science is depicted as grown-up people’s magic. Indeed, how to separate science from magic is one of the underlined issues in the text. Regalia Mason exclaims that “[s]cience has won the day, not magic, though for an advanced civilization such as Quanta will make possible, science is indistinguishable from magic” (394), thereby underlining how science and magic are not easily distinguishable from one another. Likewise, science fiction functions as a fantastic depiction of a world, similar in many ways yet completely different in many others. The use of such experimental and complex scientific theories such as the Theory of Relativity and String Theory creates an effect similar to that of fantastic make-believe.

One of the most obvious and recognizable scientific reference is the reference to Erwin Schrödinger. Schrödinger’s cat has already been part of Winterson’s texts before. In *Gut Symmetries*, for example, there is a brief explanation of the experiment as follows:

The Schrödinger Cat experiment. The new physics belch at the politely seated dinner table of common sense. An imaginary cat is put in a box with a gun at its head. The gun is connected to a Geiger counter. The Geiger counter is triggered to a piece of uranium. Uranium molecule are unstable. If the uranium decays, the process will alert the Geiger counter, which in turn will cause the gun to fire. So much for the precarious fate of the Virtual cat. To observe the cats’ fate we will have to open the box, but what is the state of the cat before we open the box? According to the mathematics of its wave function, it is neither

alive or dead. The wave function describes the sum of all possible states of the cat. Until the measurement, we can't actually know the state of the particle. The cat, like it or not, is a series of particles. It shares the potentiality of the entire universe. It is finite and infinite, dead and alive. It is a quantum cat. (GS 207)

In *Tanglewreck*, it is explained again, though this time it is appropriated for a different audience; it becomes part of children's literature. Silver finds a box called "CAT BOX" and opens the box only to see a dead ginger cat. When she informs Ora, the adult in the room, she is told that "[t]hat's just Dinger [a word play on Shrodinger]. The most famous animal experiment in history [...] He's dead now, he'll be alive again later" (281). When Silver is befuddled as to how a cat can be dead and alive at the same time, Ora sets out to explain the experiment in detail.

It should be kept in mind that although *Tanglewreck* is heavily dosed with scientific matters, Winterson makes necessary reappropriations to scientific facts to fit them into the narrative, which is first and foremost is a narrative aimed at children. Contrary to the fact that no one and nothing can escape a black hole due to its highly strong gravitational force, for example, Micah manages to save himself from the black hole that Regalia Mason has thrown him into: "[b]ut he was escaping [the Black Hole]. He was travelling faster than light, because he was travelling at the speed of love" (305). In other words, the text underlines its message: love conquers all, evil cannot triumph when good people come together and help each other.

Winterson's fascination with science does not stem from merely wishing to insert interesting or flashy theories into the narrative. Indeed, as Costa contends, "Winterson's enthusiasm for the most recent scientific theories is not only a personal hobby [...] but is also a means of resolving her literary and aesthetic concerns' (30-1). Quantum concepts and theories provide the backdrop for her narratives in terms of explaining how multiple realities and multiple states of being can co-exist. They underscore how to avoid monolithic and singular forms of existence and how to delve into the possibilities offered by plurality.

Intertextuality in *Tanglewreck*

Tanglewreck's rich fabric of topics is weaved together within a highly referential narrative. Indeed, just like her previous novels, *Tanglewreck* is in an open dialogue with other literary texts; intertextual references are indispensable to Winterson's writing. In an intertextual text, discourses proliferate, meaning becomes

multilayered, and a network of multiple texts is established. Likewise, as Christine Wilkie-Stibbs contends, the literary text becomes one of the many sites where “several different discourses converge, are absorbed, are transformed and assume a meaning because they are situated in this circular network of interdependence which is called the intertextual space” (168). She also maintains that there are three distinct categories of intertextuality:

At the level of literary texts (the intertext), it is possible to identify three main categories of intertextuality: (1) *texts of quotation* which quote or allude to other literary and non-literary works; (2) *texts of imitation* which seek to parody, pastiche, paraphrase, ‘translate’ or supplant the original, which seek to liberate their readers from an over-invested admiration in great writers of the past, and which often function as the pre-text of the original for later readers (Worton and Still 1990:7); and (3) *genre texts* where identifiable shared cluster of codes and literary conventions are grouped together in recognizable patterns which allow readers to expect and locate them, and to cause them to seek out similar texts. (170) (emphasis mine)

Tanglewreck fits into all of these three categories of intertextuality. As a “*text of quotation*” it contains references to famous examples of children’s literature such as *Peter Pan* (26), *Cinderella* (36), *Treasure Island* (46) as well as famous literary works such as Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” (63, 70). Moreover, it refers to actual/real people such as Sir Martin Rees, famous cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, renowned astrophysicist, Roger Penrose, mathematical physicist and philosopher of science, Susan Greenfield, British scientist and writer, Isaac Newton, founder of modern physics, Pope Gregory XIII, known for commissioning the Gregorian calendar, John Harrison, who found longitude, and John Dee, who was a famous alchemist and advisor to Elizabeth I, just to name a few. Indeed, none of these people would be normally known to children since they are either famous scientists or famous literary figures whose areas of interest do not necessarily overlap with those of children’s. However, Winterson inscribed them into the narrative with such skill that they do not hinder the readers’ comprehension or the appreciation of the text.

As a “*text of imitation*” *Tanglewreck* makes use of various techniques from various source materials. It is a rich blend of fact and fiction; different writing modes such as the realistic and the fantastic. Moreover, it pays homage to and is nurtured by different narrative modes such as fantasy, science fiction, detective story, fairy tale, and

romance. It does follow, for example, the heroic tradition as it contains a journey to the “Underworld;” Silver follows Gabriel to the Chamber where the Throwbacks live, separate from the Updwellers, in other words, people who live above on the ground. Instead of visiting Hades, though, Silver goes through the tunnels of London underground: “Silver had never seen anything like the underground world of the Throwbacks [...] Silver was beginning to realize that Gabriel’s world was not like her own world one bit” (109, 111). She realizes that there is a completely different world that she has not been aware of before, and this visit transforms her, just like the visit to the Underworld would transform a hero and guide him in his quest.

As a “*genre text*,” on the other hand, Winterson’s *Tanglewreck* finds itself a place within the domain of children’s literature. The fact that Silver is an orphan is significant on a couple of levels. First of all, the orphan is a frequently used figure in children’s literature from *Anne of Green Gables* to the *Harry Potter* series. They are pertinently present because, as John Mullan contends, the stories of orphans commence “because [these orphans] find themselves without parents, unleashed to the world” (“Orphans”). Mullan maintains that “the orphan is above all a character out of place, forced to make his or her own home in the world” (“Orphans”). The always already dislocated status of the orphan makes him/her the perfect candidate for a character embarking upon an adventure. Secondly, the orphan kid comes with a readily available conflict: a child without a proper safety net to fall back to, a child having to find his/her own way. The lack of such a safety also makes it possible to introduce several villains who provide obstacles and trouble for Silver in various ways. In other words, the text introduces characters who function as the foil of the orphan protagonist: they are Mrs. Rokabye, Abel Darkwater, and Regalia Mason. Mrs. Rokabye is a variation of the conventional evil step-mother who treats an otherwise well-behaved and good-willed child horribly:

The cellar is black and filthy and lit by a dusty electric 25-watt bulb. We’re on an economy drive here at Tanglewreck – at least the house is, and I am. Mrs. Rokabye eats fish and chips and puddings and chocolate bars, and then she keeps her 100-watts bulb on all night watching television. She sleeps until eleven o’clock, and then she takes a taxi to go shopping. She comes back laden with ready-chopped carrots and fresh washed lettuce for Bigamist, and Fast Fish ‘n’ Chips Ahoy! for herself. And slabs of chocolate the size of rafts. Family size, it says. But as we’re not a family, I don’t get any of this. (23) (italics in the original)

Silver's diegetic narrative sheds light onto her mistreatment at the hands of Mrs. Rokabye, who cares more about her evil-eyed rabbit Bigamist than she does about Silver. As such, Silver is in the same league of the neglected, underfed, and under-cared for child hero(ine)s such as Jane Eyre, Pip, Oliver Twist, Harry Potter, and Sara Crewe. Mrs. Rokabye is, in fact, not even her real aunt but an opportunist who "read in the paper of the mysterious disappearance of [Silver's] poor parents, and [her] obvious difficulties" (412), and she poses as a true relative to take care of Silver. Her character is presented as one whose only interest is financial gain and one who is incapable of giving love and care to another human being. Her lack of love and interest in kids is evident in her exclamation "Children are the most ridiculous things ever invented [...] houses do not have ears" (43). Her expression indicates both her contempt for children and her lack of understanding of anything magical or extraordinary. In other words, she is far removed from the depths of imagination kids possess.

Abel Darkwater is the ultimate villainous character in the text – a bizarre and sinister alchemist/inventor obsessed with controlling Time who is in pursuit of the Timekeeper. He is similar to Count Olaf of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* or to the unreformed Gru of *Despicable Me* in many respects such as his single-minded greediness for gaining control and worldly goods. Abel Darkwater is known for his use of alchemy and magic as well as scary experimentations to get what he wants. While Silver is wary of him, the Throwbacks are openly fearful of Darkwater because they have suffered in his hands when he ran experiments on them in Bedlam Hospital. In this respect, his evil nature is presented to be overarching, reaching beyond the limits of time and space.

Regalia Mason is first introduced into the text as the representative of a company called Quanta, which buys and sells time. She is presented as clinically orderly; no non-sense character that is highly efficient yet lacks human empathy. In a way, she resembles the Snow Queen in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale. She is depicted to wear white all the time, and she is cold. Different from the fairy tale version, however, she is turned into a contemporary figure by Winterson: she is a scientist who "analyzed, quantified, measured, and experimented" (138). She is also known by the Throwbacks; indeed Micah – their leader – warns Silver against her as follows: "If Abel Darkwater be the devil, then she be the serpent. Her true name is Maria Prophetessa – One becomes Two, Two becomes Three, and out of the Three comes the Four that is One [...] If you fear him [Abel], fear her

more” (166-7). Indeed, Silver and Gabriel walk through the Sands of Time just as Jesus walked in the desert for forty days. Abel Darkwater tries to get answers out of her, just like Satan tries to tempt Jesus; and when Regalia Mason shows Silver “a version of reality” where her family is still alive, Gabriel warns Silver that “She is tempting you like the serpent” (405). Abel Darkwater and Regalia Mason represent variations of the same character: greedy and power-hungry individuals who would stop at nothing to achieve their goals. It is manifested in Darkwater as dark magic, and it is manifested in Mason first as alchemy and as science. In the novel, Winterson weaves all these distinct aspects – science, magic, and religion – together into a neat narrative.

While Silver has these powerful adversaries, she also has people who help her in her journey, who make it possible for her to succeed in her quest; and they are the Throwbacks. The Throwbacks are the inhabitants of the “underworld” with whom Silver meets after she escapes from Mrs. Rokabye and Abel Darkwater. The Throwbacks experience time differently, “for [them] Time moves more slow [... and they] live long lives” (117). They decide to help Silver both because they are aware of what Darkwater is capable of and because they are aware of a prophecy about a child whom they take to be Silver. Although unknown to her at the beginning of the story, the prophecy: “only the Child with the Golden Face can bring the Clock to its Rightful Place” (125) marks Silver as the key figure in the power game between Abel Darkwater and Regalia Mason for controlling time. Thus, *Tanglewreck* employs another frequently used trope, which then ties into the quest trope: When Silver is with the Throwbacks, they decide to ask the Oracle what her future holds. Eden, the Oracle, reads the runes and tells Silver that she “must find the Timekeeper, whether [she] will or no” (189).

Silver is also “gifted” with things that will prove to be handy in her quest of the Timekeeper. Micah gives her “the map, this medallion [he wore around his neck with his name on it] and the jeweled faces of the clock” (193). Again, this is similar to classical stories (*Aeneid*, *the Odyssey*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and “The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes,” just to name a few) where the heroes are provided with help to succeed in their journey.

Christine Wilkie-Stibbs argues that children’s literature needs to be careful in terms of preserving a balance between “being sufficiently overreferential in its intertextual gap-filling so as not to lose its readers” and leaving “enough intertextual space and to be sufficiently stylistically challenging to allow readers free intertextual play” (177). One may accuse Winterson of going too far with her intertextual

referencing as well as her insertion of elaborate scientific concepts into a children's text. However, *Tanglewreck* remains comprehensible even though it contains multilayered allusions and references, and even when it deviates from conventional storylines for children.

Conclusion

Despite her popularity both within the reading public and the academia, Winterson's novels for children have not really received much critical attention. However, her books for children maintain Winterson's technical and thematic concerns both by employing and subverting the conventions of children's literature.

In an interview with Philip Womack, who considers Winterson's children books as "high concept," Winterson indicates that "You don't have to talk down to children" ("Interview"). Jeanette Winterson contends that she is not really interested in the difference between fantasy, reality, science or magic. She maintains that children have the ability to comprehend how make-believe can coexist next to the real: "kids can hold on to a life lived on many levels, that does not altogether follow the calendar and the clock, or the straight line of events [...] the purpose of imaginative books and films for kids isn't simple escapism but permission to keep the Peter Pan part that never should grow up" (Winterson "Why"). Margaret Sonmez and Mine Özyurt Kılıç argue that "Winterson fashions ideal times and spaces with a strong sense of mission and responsibility this mission is to encourage humankind to be free from oppressive boundaries and to love each other" (Introduction x). This mission is clearly evident in *Tanglewreck* in particular. In conclusion, without drawing clear-cut lines between fantasy, reality, science, or magic, the text draws from a number of literary and non-literary sources to build a narrative which emphasizes the power of love, and scientific theories that are usually seen outside of the realm of children's literature blend perfectly into its storyline.

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Enfance, gémellité et déshumanisation dans *Le Grand Cahier* d'Agota Kristof

Andreea Bugiac¹

Résumé: Dans des phrases laconiques et brèves, fondées sur une syntaxe simple qui imite les exercices des écoliers, Agota Kristof raconte dans *Le Grand Cahier*, le premier tome de sa célèbre « trilogie des jumeaux », l'expérience indicible du totalitarisme et du deuil telle qu'elle est vécue par deux enfants, jumeaux de surcroît. Le choix de ce double protagoniste est un défi que l'écrivain lance à la fois à son lecteur, le forçant à prendre un point de vue étranger vis-à-vis duquel il ne pourrait avoir que des préjugés, et à soi-même, en tant que mise en abyme exemplaire du dédoublement que tout écrivain vit en se projetant dans les figures fictionnelles qu'il invente. Il conviendra donc d'interroger les rapports qui se créent entre la réalité et la fiction dans *Le Grand Cahier*, entre la figure du double gémellaire qui prend la plume pour raconter la « vérité » et celle de l'écrivain qui se fictionnalise dans son récit, afin de voir dans quelle mesure la dualité est inscrite dans le code génétique de l'humain et l'humanité même comprend une part de bestialité qui lui est inhérente.

Mots-clés: enfant, gémellité, totalitarisme, écriture, Agota Kristof

Hantée par l'image du double, cette notion sœur de la gémellité comme l'appelle Wladimir Troubetzkoy (Godeau et Troubetzkoy 13), Agota Kristof l'est depuis son exil forcé en Suisse. Née en 1935 à Csikvánd, en Hongrie, Agota Kristof, dont on ne regrette que trop la disparition prématurée en 2011, est obligée d'immigrer en Suisse à cause des conditions politiques difficiles en Hongrie (on est en 1956 lors de la Révolution, elle a alors 21 ans). Le choix du pays d'accueil n'est pas le résultat d'une réflexion méthodique préalable mais s'impose plutôt par lui-même, Kristof suivant ainsi son mari, contraint de s'y réfugier pour des raisons politiques. Très engagé politiquement, le mari d'Agota

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dérange le régime communiste alors en place dont il fait son ennemi, et profitera du chaos créé par l'insurrection populaire de Budapest pour quitter la Hongrie et se réfugier, avec d'autres opposants au régime, tout d'abord en Autriche puis en Suisse. Le futur écrivain arrivera à Neuchâtel avec une petite fille âgée de 4 mois, sans connaître le français et sans possibilité de s'exprimer sur les humiliations subies dans l'usine d'horlogerie où elle trouvera du travail. Forcée d'entreprendre un travail physique épuisant et mécanique qui lui apporte peu de satisfactions, cette jeune intellectuelle hongroise vivra l'expérience de l'exil avec angoisse et malaise, l'associant tout d'abord avec l'aphasie et le mutisme, puis avec un français qu'elle ressentira toujours comme un corps étranger à sa personnalité. Avec l'expérience du dépaysement, Kristof découvre en fait celle, schizoïde, du Double.

Cette dualité sera éprouvée tout d'abord à l'intérieur de soi-même, comme une fracture entre deux identités, celle hongroise dont elle n'a jamais pu se débarrasser complètement et celle suisse qu'elle n'a jamais réussi à assumer de manière plénière. Cette double identité va de pair avec un bilinguisme face auquel Agota Kristof se positionne de manière ambiguë : loin de célébrer la langue française comme une langue de la liberté nouvellement acquise, Kristof la voit comme une « langue ennemie » (Kristof³ 24) selon l'expression qu'elle emploie dans son récit autobiographique, *L'Alphabète*. Cherchant insidieusement à se substituer au hongrois et terrorisant le sujet exilé par sa toute-puissance symbolique, le français deviendra cette langue qu'il faudra incessamment combattre en soi-même. Associé à l'écriture, cet acte presque suicidaire qui l'« empêche de vivre » mais dont elle ne saurait se passer, comme elle l'affirme dans un entretien (Savary 1996), le combat avec la langue française représente, en fin de compte, une affaire de survie. Son enjeu est de préserver une mémoire qui donne sens à l'identité d'un être. Pour Kristof, exil et écriture sont donc intimement entremêlés au point de se confondre, l'exil constituant, comme Valérie Petitpierre l'affirme, un « principe d'écriture » : « Exilée de son pays, exilée de sa langue maternelle, exilée de son sexe (elle s'est transformée en garçon pour écrire), elle s'exilerait encore de ses textes » (Petitpierre 11). La dualité linguistique est la source pour Kristof d'une crise conflictuelle d'où elle essayera de sortir par l'invention d'un style qui deviendra aussitôt sa marque : minimaliste, sobre, sec et dépouillé, sans métaphores ni épithètes inutiles, limitant jusqu'à la bannir l'expression des émotions et des sentiments.

Déstabilisatrice et fragilisante, la dualité serait-elle pourtant inhérente à l'esprit humain ? Qu'est-ce qu'on comprend d'ailleurs par ce terme, « humanité » ? Et dans quelle mesure l'humanité est un

exercice qui s'apprend ? Ce sont les trois axes autour desquels nous voudrions orienter notre propos, en l'appliquant à un cas à la fois particulier et extrême, celui de la prétendue monstruosité d'un double jumeau, protagoniste du premier tome de la « trilogie des jumeaux » écrite par Agota Kristof.

1. Gémellités littéraires

Intériorisé par la biographie sans pourtant emprunter les traits inquiétants du *Doppelgänger* romantique, le Double s'inscrit aussi au cœur de l'œuvre d'Agota Kristof, jusqu'à devenir l'échafaudage de la trilogie romanesque qui l'a rendue célèbre. Réunissant par ordre chronologique *Le Grand Cahier* (1986), *La Preuve* (1988) et *Le Troisième Mensonge* (1991), les trois romans qui composent ce que la critique désigne généralement par la « trilogie des jumeaux » ont au centre deux enfants, jumeaux de surcroît, que leur mère est contrainte pour des raisons de guerre d'abandonner chez la grand-mère. Loin de bénéficier de la chaleur d'un abri, les deux jumeaux seront vite exposés aux insultes et aux supplices incessants d'une grand-mère inhumaine de même qu'aux injures des villageois. Âgés de dix ans, les deux jumeaux devront faire face à l'abandon maternel et à la cruauté des adultes avec des moyens qu'ils découvriront et fabriqueront eux seuls au fur et à mesure qu'ils grandissent. Supposé être une restitution « vraie » de leur quotidien, *Le Grand Cahier* est à la fois un récit d'enfance, un récit d'apprentissage, un récit de guerre et le cas singulier d'un roman familial. Il ouvre en même temps une brèche pour des thèmes universels comme la solitude de l'être humain, l'aliénation, la déshumanisation, la vie ou la mort. La trilogie de Kristof a, à part ses nombreux mérites, celui de transgresser beaucoup de frontières, tout d'abord génériques. Dans son cas, nous avons affaire à un récit d'enfance plutôt particulier, à double protagoniste, illustrant bien « que le héros d'un 'roman d'apprentissage' n'est pas toujours l'enfant unique d'une famille que l'on qualifierait aujourd'hui de 'monoparentale' » (Godeau et Troubetzkoy 11).

Les jumeaux restent en effet les grands « méconnus » du roman familial. Si l'imaginaire littéraire des frères ou des sœurs connaît une longue histoire remontant même à l'Antiquité, la gémellité reste pourtant un thème plutôt marginal dans le champ de la littérature et des études littéraires – et cela, malgré les ouvertures anthropologiques, psychologiques ou psychanalytiques auxquelles elle pourrait donner cours. S'il y a des cas de gémellité biblique, avec la rivalité légendaire entre Jacob et Ésaü, si la question a été abordée aussi par la psychanalyse intéressée par la manière dont les jumeaux pouvaient

communiquer, si elle séduit de nos jours un milieu scientifique tourmenté par la problématique éthique du clonage, la gémellité reste pourtant un thème littéraire plutôt curieux, cantonné le plus souvent dans la sphère du fantastique. Elle est encore de nos jours un territoire à exploiter comme à défricher, fascinant surtout grâce à la richesse des schémas narratifs et psychologiques à laquelle elle peut prêter : symétrie / dissymétrie ; unité allant jusqu'à l'identification ou, par contre, différenciation et schizoïdie ; projection, externalisation ou dépossession de soi ; peur d'absorption du Moi par l'Autre ou par contre, persécution du Moi par un Autre qui est toujours Moi². Ce qui représente pourtant une constante dans le traitement du Double gémellaire, c'est l'existence d'une « étrangeté inquiétante », au sens freudien du terme, qui accompagne l'apparition du Double, perçu plutôt comme une figure monstrueuse ou effrayante³.

À un autre niveau, le protagoniste gémellaire peut tout aussi bien servir à une entreprise de mise en abyme, renvoyant à la figure même de l'écrivain, « l'homme double par excellence » (Fernandez-Bravo 510). Lui aussi, l'écrivain est un praticien d'un exercice de dédoublement à travers sa projection plus ou moins consciente dans les figures fictionnelles qu'il imagine.

Exploités avec satiété par la littérature romantique et gothique⁴, certains tropes du *Doppelgänger* se trouvent transplantés et retravaillés de nos jours sous la forme de l'enfant diabolique, personnage d'élection de bon nombre de romans d'horreur contemporains – il suffit de penser à l'insistance avec laquelle il revient dans les romans populaires d'un John Saul, par exemple. Mais si l'imaginaire de l'enfant diabolique place la figure de l'enfant sous le signe du *contre*, celui de la révolte ou de la première rébellion

² Comme dans le cas, par exemple, de la fillette persécutée par sa sœur jumelle, incorporée au stade embryonnaire dans le ventre de sa sœur, dans la nouvelle *Poupée d'amour* de Wayne Allen Sallee.

³ Dans son article « Double », Nicole Fernandez-Bravo voit dans le jumeau « la première forme du double » (Fernandez-Bravo 496). C'est toujours elle qui associe le Double en particulier au genre de la science-fiction (529). Mais, avant d'être une figure privilégiée de la science-fiction, nous considérons que l'indécidabilité et l'ambiguïté qui lui sont caractéristiques le rapprochent de manière privilégiée de la catégorie du fantastique.

⁴ Et, plus récemment encore, par celle de la science-fiction, à travers les figures plus anciennes du robot et celles, plus proches de nous, du cyborg ou du clone.

angélique⁵, il ne réussit pourtant pas à en annuler un certain effet de lisibilité, voire d'intelligibilité. Au-delà de sa présence inquiétante, l'enfant diabolique a des desseins qu'il met en œuvre et se sert d'une intelligence de nature presque inhumaine pour projeter, encercler, terroriser et finalement détruire sa proie : en général, un adulte terrifié. Sa diabolisation est en partie liée à l'extrême rationalité avec laquelle il calcule ses actions, et en partie au plaisir qu'il goûte à la destruction, et qui sont tous les deux à l'encontre de ce qu'on associe normalement avec le comportement naturel d'un enfant prétendument innocent.

Dans cette histoire de doubles littéraires, les jumeaux de Kristof articulent une catégorie particulière. Kristof évite à la fois l'imagerie édulcorée de l'enfant angélique, celle subjective du *Doppelgänger* romantique ou celle terrifiante des enfants diaboliques. La monstruosité des jumeaux telle qu'on la découvre dans *Le Grand Cahier* est d'une autre nature. Si elle est inquiétante, elle aussi, les raisons de cette inquiétude sont différentes dans son cas de la terreur suscitée par le Double diabolique.

Dans le récit de Kristof, ce que les villageois perçoivent comme de la monstruosité chez les jumeaux concerne tout d'abord l'incongruité entre leur âge et leur façon cultivée, trop artificielle, de s'exprimer : « Je n'aime pas du tout votre façon de parler ! Votre façon de me regarder non plus ! Sortez d'ici ! » (Kristof¹ 31), s'écrie le libraire consterné par la manière dont les enfants formulent leur demande pour un cahier et des crayons. Le caractère soigné de leur discours (« Nous parlons correctement. »), la méticulosité de leurs actes (« Nous ramassons les objets soigneusement [...] ») et leur refus généralisé de ne pas céder le pas à l'émotion traduisent un contrôle de soi qui peut sembler en effet monstrueux. À de telles scènes s'ajoute une cascade d'épisodes terribles, racontant soit des « exercices d'endurcissement », comme les enfants appellent les blessures volontaires qu'ils s'infligent eux-mêmes, soit des scènes de violence et de déviation sexuelle (voyeurisme, zoophilie, pédophilie, viols, meurtres, explosions ou découvertes de cadavres). Toutes ces scènes sont racontées dans le style austère qui, selon les enfants, garantirait l'objectivité du récit, et qu'Agota Kristof confesse dans un entretien avoir choisi comme une règle pour sa propre écriture. Or, parmi ces mots, ceux qui traduisent les sentiments sont les plus vagues, les plus polysémiques, les plus ambigus, donc les plus traîtres :

⁵ Il serait intéressant d'interroger de possibles hypertextes pour le mythe du jumeau diabolique dans le mythe de Lilith ou celui de la révolte des anges déchus.

Nous écrirons : « Nous mangeons beaucoup de noix », et non pas : « Nous aimons les noix », car le mot « aimer » n'est pas un mot sûr, il manque de précision et d'objectivité. « Aimer les noix » et « aimer notre Mère », cela ne peut pas vouloir dire la même chose. La première formule désigne un goût agréable dans la bouche, et la deuxième un sentiment.

Les mots qui définissent les sentiments sont très vagues ; il vaut mieux éviter leur emploi et s'en tenir à la description des objets [...] (Kristof¹ 33).

2. Filiation et gémellité

Cette apparente insensibilité expressive trahit en fait un blocage traumatique. Le double trauma de l'abandon et de la guerre enferme d'abord les enfants dans la position de victimes passives d'une dépossession qui menace de les désintégrer. Les exercices qu'ils inventent seront précisément destinés à les aider à reprendre possession d'un corps qui leur échappe et leur donner, ainsi, le sentiment de s'emparer d'un destin sur lequel ils n'ont plus de contrôle. Les mots que les enfants répètent jusqu'à vider de sens sont tous des mots qui expriment des sentiments et traduisent des attitudes, bref des mots qui ont le pouvoir de blesser. Une fois désémantisés par la répétition, leur efficacité pragmatique se perd et c'est à l'expression crue, objective et dépassionnée que revient désormais le rôle d'exprimer l'indicible : « À force d'être répétés, les mots perdent peu à peu leur signification et la douleur qu'ils portent en eux s'atténue. » (Kristof¹ 25).

Le caractère monstrueux des enfants semble donc provenir de l'apparente apathie qui accompagne leurs actions. Pourtant, contrairement à leurs doubles diaboliques, les jumeaux ne tirent du plaisir ni de leur souffrance – les blessures qu'ils s'infligent ne sont pas le produit d'un plaisir masochiste –, ni de celle des autres. Aucune *libido vivendi* ou *libido sciendi* n'intervient pour en faire des êtres diaboliques, assoiffés de pouvoir ou de savoir. Même condamnable, la *libido* serait en effet compréhensible, car foncièrement humaine. L'absence du désir des jumeaux est ce qui rend la lecture du *Grand Cahier* difficile et soulève des interrogations sur la nature des enfants. Sont-ils ou non des monstres ? L'altérité inquiétante du double gémellaire est en partie liée à une indifférence ou à une apathie qu'on juge inhumaine, et qui rend leur cruauté incompréhensible.

Leurs rapports avec les parents s'inscrivent dans la même logique de l'indécidable. La condition gémellaire a ceci de particulier

que les relations qu'elle engage⁶ peuvent se passer, théoriquement parlant, de la question d'une filiation parentale : c'est comme si les jumeaux existaient par eux-mêmes et qu'ils ne se rapportaient que l'un à l'autre. Si les parents interviennent souvent dans les récits mettant en scène des jumeaux, leurs apparitions restent souvent épisodiques. Toute l'action se concentrera sur les comportements et les relations affectives qui affermissent ou par contre dissolvent l'unité gémellaire.

Cette filiation par la verticale intervient pourtant dans la trilogie de Kristof, surtout dans *Le Grand Cahier*, et elle donne cours à des questionnements anthropologiques intéressants. La première remarque à laquelle le lecteur se confronte dans l'univers du récit concerne l'anonymat des figures parentales, qui correspond d'ailleurs à l'anonymat généralisé des personnages imaginés. Désignée tout simplement par l'appellation « Mère » et non par le diminutif affectif « maman », la mère des enfants est celle qui ouvre et ferme *Le Grand Cahier*. Elle apparaît au début pour laisser ses enfants, malgré son déchirement, à la maison de sa mère où elle les croit à l'abri, pour revenir à la fin avec un bébé afin de reprendre ses enfants qui refusent de partir avec elle. Dans cet univers de guerre, la mère semble le seul personnage qui ait encore des réactions humaines : elle pleure, elle supplie, elle se fâche, elle donne des gestes d'affection. Sa figure reste pourtant assez conventionnelle au sens où elle correspond entièrement à une imagerie traditionnelle, associant féminité et sensibilité. Le contraste avec les enfants se fait ainsi d'autant plus frappant. Au début, elle semble faire partie de l'unité gémellaire ou du moins l'accepter et l'intégrer. Elle est la seule qui comprenne les jumeaux et les défende face à un père qui les accuse de vivre « dans un monde à part ». Le contraste avec la scène finale, où la mère revient pour récupérer ses enfants, est une autre variation sur le thème de la solitude des êtres humains. Cette fois-ci, la mère est accompagnée par un homme qui n'est pas le père des enfants et de qui elle a une petite fille. La mort absurde qu'elle trouvera et sur laquelle le récit avance plusieurs hypothèses, jusqu'à laisser soupçonner même un possible meurtre commis par les jumeaux, est une conséquence de son geste de violenter l'unité gémellaire ; conséquence de la communion impossible, elle est aussi l'image la plus déchirante de la communication tout aussi impossible.

Avatar moderne de l'ogresse des contes (elle est appelée par les villageois par le terme nullement appréciatif de « sorcière »), Grand-

⁶ Ressemblance, indifférenciation ou, par contre, individuation allant jusqu'au désir de tuer cet Autre qui est le Même.

Mère se situe aux antipodes de la mère. Cynique et avare, elle ne cesse d'accabler ses petits-fils des injures les plus insupportables et de leur faire subir les travaux les plus durs. Dans la cruauté des jumeaux, elle se réjouit de voir un effet d'une filiation émanant directement d'elle et ne passant plus par la mère. Leur manque d'émotion semble en effet répondre à la dureté de la grand-mère comme dans un jeu de miroirs où les doubles se multiplient à l'infini. Ce jeu est tout aussi trompeur comme le reste des jeux narratifs pratiqués par Kristof dans son récit. Contrairement à celle de la grand-mère, la cruauté des enfants n'est jamais gratuite : sans que le récit donne des explications sur ses raisons, nous pouvons deviner qu'elle provient souvent d'un désir de justice dans un monde où la définition des notions élémentaires comme le bien et le mal n'est plus évidente.

De leur côté, les figures masculines de la filiation sont les grandes absentes du récit. Le grand-père est mort, probablement empoisonné par la grand-mère, tandis que le père qu'on ignore tout au long du récit n'apparaît qu'à la fin pour devenir la victime de ses propres enfants. Le cordonnier, qui semble jouer à un moment donné le rôle de la figure électorale d'un parent d'emprunt, est chassé par l'armée étrangère. Son identité, restée énigmatique jusqu'à la fin, semble celle d'un Juif, l'exilé et le persécuté par excellence. L'officier étranger qui prend sous sa protection les deux enfants est homosexuel et son affection pour eux est parfois troublante. Le curé, lui, ne peut pas réprimer ses envies sexuelles pour Bec-de-Lièvre, encore une fillette. Les jumeaux semblent vivre dans un monde à filiation incertaine ou fracturée, où les mutilations identitaires sont toujours une affaire de violence subie ou infligée et où les figures paternelles sont soit impuissantes, soit dominées ou écrasées par des figures féminines terrifiantes.

Consignées dans un cahier d'écolier, ce cahier qui va donner le titre du premier tome de la trilogie, les aventures des enfants dans ce monde orphelin de figures individualisées sont racontées dans un style journalistique resté cantonné dans le régime du factuel. L'évacuation du pathos devient même un programme de vie et d'écriture :

Pour décider si c'est « Bien » ou « Pas bien », nous avons une règle très simple : la composition doit être vraie. Nous devons décrire ce qui est, ce que nous voyons, ce que nous entendons, ce que nous faisons. [...]

Les mots qui définissent les sentiments sont très vagues ; il vaut mieux éviter leur emploi et s'en tenir à la description des objets, des êtres humains et de soi-même, c'est-à-dire à la description fidèle des faits. (Kristof¹ 33)

Comme le lecteur n'a accès à la conscience des enfants que par l'intermédiaire de leur récit, la raison de leurs actes peut lui sembler parfois énigmatique ; d'ailleurs, le dialogue, quand il intervient dans le texte, engage toujours les enfants et un tiers, jamais les deux jumeaux ensemble. Ce manque de réciprocité langagière, auquel s'ajoutent des réactions racontées toujours comme étant ressenties ensemble (il est peu probable que les enfants, fussent-ils des jumeaux, ressentent exactement la même chose au même moment) semble contredire l'existence de deux enfants et laisse transparaître l'idée d'un seul enfant qui se projette sous la forme d'un double par un mécanisme de protection intérieure. Cette supposition est renforcée par les noms très proches des jumeaux : Lucas, le nom du protagoniste du deuxième volume de la trilogie, est l'anagramme du nom de son frère, Claus.

En outre, ce même Nous qui est censé cautionner la crédibilité du récit mine celle-ci de l'intérieur. Respectant la contrainte de la vérité factuelle qu'ils s'imposent comme gage d'un devoir bien fait, les enfants mettent à l'écrit leurs aventures « sans rien mettre, sans rien omettre ». Le pacte de sincérité garantit l'authenticité de ces récits, d'autant plus que les jumeaux se dédoublent à tour de rôles en écrivain, respectivement lecteur et critique, censé rejeter toute marque d'intervention personnelle ou d'interprétation subjective dans la restitution des faits. L'attention du lecteur est pourtant attirée par quelques récits au moins curieux, dont les enjeux semblent converger avec ceux des autres « exercices d'endurcissement ». Il s'agit des exercices de mendicité inventés par les jumeaux pour observer la réaction des gens. De tels exercices, doublés par les spectacles théâtraux qu'ils improviseront un peu plus tard, font des jumeaux les protagonistes de leurs propres fictions. Pour surmonter le traumatisme de la réalité, ils semblent inventer une fiction d'eux-mêmes, qui joue avec la bonne conscience du lecteur. Ils sont à la fois les créateurs d'une fiction et leurs propres personnages. Les deux morts qui ont lieu à la fin du récit (celles de la mère et du père) sont symboliques au sens où, pour de tels personnages obsédés par la question de la création, la mort des parents ne constitue que la dernière étape d'un meurtre progressif des géniteurs pour parvenir enfin à la création de soi-même, c'est-à-dire à l'individuation. Commencé depuis l'apprentissage de la langue à travers des lectures puisées dans la Bible et le dictionnaire du Père, les deux métonymies de l'autorité parentale, cette double mort coïncide avec la séparation des jumeaux et l'avènement, dans les deux volumes suivants, du Moi narrateur.

Kristof mise justement sur la multiplication labyrinthique des

dédoublings et des carrefours interprétatifs pour nous proposer une leçon de lecture, nous obliger à formuler nos propres hypothèses sur la signification du récit et prendre nos propres décisions interprétatives. C'est d'ailleurs ce que les autres personnages du récit doivent faire lorsqu'ils sont confrontés au personnage jumeau. Le plus souvent, c'est à un type d'« anti-lecture » que Kristof nous invite en rapportant leurs réactions. Évacuant vite le problème humain auquel la confrontation avec les jumeaux les expose, les villageois sont un exemple de « comment-on-ne-doit-pas-lire ». Ils refusent d'aller en profondeur et d'investiguer les raisons du comportement aberrant des enfants : pour eux, les enfants sont soit des « voyous », soit des « morveux » ou des « clowns ». Même individualisés à travers des personnages typiques (le curé, la servante, le vendeur, etc.), les villageois semblent parfois schématisés et réduits jusqu'au stade d'un seul personnage collectif dont les réactions sont à la fois mécaniques et répétitives. Ils sont soit horrifiés, soit amusés par les enfants, mais les véritables contacts avec ceux-ci sont rares, presque inexistantes. Ce qui importe, c'est de trouver une catégorie où ranger les enfants, maîtriser l'inquiétant et le domestiquant pour éviter un éventuel affrontement avec lui – en fin de compte, notion de Double oblige, avec soi-même.

3. La guerre et un monde à rebours

Sans les implications métaphysiques de l'entreprise hamletienne, les spectacles de théâtre que les deux enfants improvisent pour gagner de l'argent doublent le récit d'une dimension métafictionnelle. En fait, le théâtre sert de métaphore à la fois pour le récit en tant que fabrique d'illusions, pour l'identité des enfants qui se bâtit sur un jeu de masques et pour le carnaval d'un monde renversé dont on ne connaît plus les repères. Comme dans un tableau breughelien, l'humanité surprise par Kristof se trouve à la limite du chaos, de la folie, du désordre et de l'instinctuel. C'est un carnaval triste réitérant, comme dans un carrousel, des scènes de réactions animalières et de besoins physiologiques : boire, manger, déféquer, s'accoupler. Comme dans le carnaval, le temps du récit semble suspendu, dilaté ou aboli dans le présent perpétuel du Nous des enfants ; on peut toujours associer l'érotisme exacerbé et les scènes d'incendie avec la période du carnaval, que Mircea Eliade considère comme un rite marquant la « fin du monde » (Eliade 71-72).

Pourtant, de ce monde carnavalesque, Kristof ne retient plus que l'idée d'anarchie, de confusion, d'apocalypse et de culpabilité diffuse. Aucun espoir dans une rédemption éventuelle, aucun retour possible à l'imparfait des contes de fées merveilleux et à celui de l'ordre utopique

connu dans la Ville. La temporalité même devient une métaphore de la clôture carcérale, où à l'ordre et à l'harmonie du monde d'avant la guerre sont substitués les ordres donnés par la grand-mère, par les militaires ou, à la fin, par la Mère que les atrocités de la guerre semblent avoir changée. Pareil à un fléau, le Mal acquiert des dimensions hyperboliques ; contagieux, il s'insinue d'abord sournoisement, pour finalement contaminer et corrompre tout l'univers. La sortie de ce cercle maléfique devient par ailleurs problématique. La question de la traversée de la frontière s'impose en fait par elle-même. Ainsi la mention de la frontière traverse-t-elle tout le récit : dès le début, on apprend que la maison de la grand-mère est à l'orée du village, près d'une route poussiéreuse qui mène nulle part ou, du moins, à une frontière âprement surveillée par des gardiens désincarnés qu'on ne décrit jamais. D'une métaphore de la liberté, la frontière devient aussi une métaphore de l'individualité. Elle sert à briser l'unité gémellaire car un seul jumeau passera la frontière, matérialisée à la fin du récit sous la forme d'un espace miné. Espace de désir car convoité tant par la Mère que par le Père, la frontière est aussi un espace de la violence car, pour passer outre, il faut marcher littéralement sur des cadavres. Or il est tout à fait ironique que le jumeau qui traversera la frontière le fera sur le cadavre de son père, un geste qui accuse à la fois l'irréparable solitude à laquelle l'être humain est condamné et, au niveau du couple gémellaire, l'impossible utopie de la différence. L'acquisition symbolique de la liberté, comme de ce Moi nécessaire à l'individuation, semble condamnée d'avance puisqu'elle se fait par le meurtre, donc par la perpétuation d'une violence qui se disséminera aussi dans l'espace vierge, nouvellement conquis. En fin de compte, le récit de guerre d'Agota Kristof raconte sous un mode pessimiste un combat sans gagnants, où la survie, forme élémentaire et tragique de la vie, cède la place à la simple subsistance.

Allant dans le même sens que le carnaval qui ne célèbre rien, les spectacles improvisés par les enfants évoquent les spectacles de foire du théâtre médiéval. Dans ce cas aussi, nous observons un apprentissage progressif de la stylistique théâtrale, allant de l'interprétation pathétique des chansons populaires jusqu'aux tours de prestidigitation ou aux dialogues inventés et interprétés sur place, émergeant directement des farces médiévales.

L'abandon de l'interprétation musicale au profit de celle théâtrale s'explique par les effets divergents que les deux pratiques artistiques engendrent sur les villageois. Dans le premier cas, pour un bref moment, les spectateurs reviennent sur eux-mêmes et se voient dans toute leur difformité causée par la guerre. La musique invite donc

à un acte de lucidité réflexive : dans la mélancolie de la chanson, les mutilés de guerre voient leur propre mélancolie, sublimée. Aucune exaltation de l'héroïsme guerrier chez Kristof : par contre, la guerre est directement responsable de la mutilation intérieure de ces gens, reflet de leur infirmité physique. La thérapie musicale est en fait nulle, car elle retient les patients captifs dans un présent mélancoliquement tourné vers un passé perdu à jamais ; elle amorce le deuil de soi-même sans pourtant l'internaliser et guérir la victime de sa mélancolie. Le double gémellaire devient ainsi une image de la schizoidie de ces rescapés de guerre, qui cherchent en vain à récupérer l'unité de leur corps comme de leur esprit.

La distanciation créée par les spectacles théâtraux est une autre forme de thérapie. Cette fois-ci, la thérapie n'agit plus par la remémoration mais par contre par l'oubli. Elle est plus efficace car elle provoque le rire ; rire ou rictus, il reste suffisamment puissant pour problématiser dans quelle mesure le divertissement momentané apporté par l'oubli est préférable à l'exercice de la lucidité.

L'ambiguïté du personnage gémellaire chez Kristof est accrue par le fait que, malgré leurs exercices d'endurcissements, les jumeaux ne deviennent jamais de simples automates. Ils ont des réactions et prennent des initiatives même si le récit jette un doute sur la raison de leurs actes, comme dans l'épisode de l'explosion qui défigure la servante du curé. Fidèle à son esthétique minimaliste, Kristof n'offre aucune interprétation de cet épisode, mais elle insiste pourtant sur la cruauté montrée par la servante envers un prisonnier misérable. Cette insistance narrative et la dilatation temporelle qui va avec elle, même dans l'absence de tout vocabulaire affectif qui révélerait le positionnement des enfants face à ce spectacle de cruauté gratuite, sont déjà expressives dans la mesure où le lecteur peut soupçonner que l'explosion qui assurera à la servante une mort lente et pénible représente un projet de vengeance de la part des enfants.

Kristof laisserait-elle donc entendre que la véritable inhumanité, celle qui nous guette tous, consiste précisément dans le refus de désirer quelque chose, ne fût-ce que le Mal ? Son récit pourrait être qualifié de nihiliste si la leçon de liberté amoralisée était poussée à l'extrême, ce que Kristof semble précisément faire en imaginant, à la fin du récit, l'un des jumeaux traverser la frontière en marchant sur le corps du père. Le récit se termine par un climax de l'horreur, à travers le meurtre indirect mais conscient, volontaire et même intentionnel du Père, suivi par la pulvérisation du Nous dans le double Je.

Loin de constituer une garantie d'objectivité, le pluriel du Nous auctorial renvoie à un narrateur peu fiable, « incertain » dans le sens

de Booth. On verra le même jeu répété dans les tomes suivants, avec les rapprochements inquiétants entre les noms agrammatiques des personnages et les révélations déconcertantes faites dans *Le Troisième Mensonge*, mettant sous le signe du doute l'existence même des jumeaux (sans plus prendre en compte le titre même de ce tome, le troisième mensonge pouvant être le roman même). Il faudra donc sortir, dans la mesure du possible, de cette *vision avec* que le récit homodiégétique propose. Une fois vus du dehors, certains actes des jumeaux deviennent compréhensibles, dans les circonstances extraordinaires qui sont les leurs : l'indifférence est une forme de se rassurer qu'on détient encore le contrôle sur des événements qui nous dépassent.

Sans nécessairement vouloir être provocatrice, Kristof ne craint pas de déconstruire des images convenues sur l'enfance et de déranger la commodité intellectuelle du lecteur. Ce n'est pas seulement du ventre maternel, associé avec la Ville, que les jumeaux de Kristof se retrouvent expulsés, mais même de leur condition et de leur « position d'enfant » (Trevisan). Au premier abord, la cruauté dont ils font preuve semble gratuite si l'on ne gardait pas à l'esprit que l'action de la trilogie, surtout du *Grand Cahier*, est placée dans un temps incertain de la guerre, où les lois n'existent que pour être transgressées. Placées parfois à la limite du supportable, certaines scènes du récit font découvrir une bestialité qui est dans certains cas littérale, comme celle où Bec-de-Lièvre se livre à un acte de zoophilie par manque d'amour. Au premier regard, il semble que le temps de la guerre rend toute innocence nulle et non-avenue : il n'est donc pas un hasard si Kristof choisit comme protagonistes précisément des enfants, selon un stéréotype qui conjugue enfance, innocence et bonté naturelle, et qu'elle peuple sa trilogie d'autres figures d'enfants qui sont, elles aussi, ambiguës. D'une manière ou d'une autre, les enfants de la trilogie donnent à voir les dysfonctionnements, les difformités et l'aliénation d'une société bestialisée ; comme dans une caricature, les traits de ces dysfonctionnements sont grossis justement parce que les protagonistes sont des enfants qui, normalement, ne sont pas censés ou ne devraient pas être exposés à de telles horreurs.

Les enfants de Kristof sont donc les personnages sacrifiés sur la scène de l'Histoire, ceux que les manuels d'histoire oublient de mentionner ou ne mentionnent que rarement pour en faire une sorte de personnage sanctifié ou emblématique à la manière d'un Gavroche. Tous souffrent d'une infirmité, soit-elle physique, mentale ou affective, qui va de pair avec une absence d'amour. Les jumeaux choisissent de « s'endurcir » pour ne plus ressentir la souffrance d'avoir été

abandonnés par leur mère ou d'être les cibles des propos offensants des villageois, la petite Bec-de-Lièvre cherche dans la prostitution un peu de cette tendresse dont elle est cruellement dépourvue, élevée par une mère qui joue la comédie de l'aphasie. Entre le monde des adultes et celui des enfants se creuse un fossé qui n'est transgressé que dans les rares cas de déviation ou de pathologie sexuelle : les hommes ne voient dans la fillette qu'un corps à posséder, l'officier qui se lie d'amitié avec les enfants essaye de réprimer son homosexualité sinon sa pédophilie, etc. Pourtant, les différences ne sont pas aussi nettes qu'on pourrait le croire : en fait, le monde des enfants ne fait que répéter, à un autre niveau, celui des adultes. Ainsi peut-on lire la trilogie de jumeaux comme un acte de dénonciation de l'hypocrisie des adultes qui, sous le masque de la civilité, cachent les intentions les plus sordides et la bestialité la plus pure.

4. Une interrogation sur l'humanité

Les premières lignes du *Grand Cahier* placent le récit sous les auspices des temps fabuleux du conte des fées :

Nous arrivons de la Grande Ville. Nous avons voyagé toute la nuit. Notre Mère a les yeux rouges. Elle porte un grand carton et nous deux chacun une petite valise avec ses vêtements, plus le grand dictionnaire de notre Père que nous nous passons quand nous avons les bras fatigués.

Nous marchons longtemps. La maison de Grand-Mère est loin de la gare, à l'autre bout de la Petite Ville. Ici, il n'y a pas de tramway, ni d'autobus, ni de voitures. Seuls circulent quelques camions militaires. (Kristof^t 9)

Le choix des majuscules, l'anonymat des lieux, l'usage d'un présent qui semble absolu et la spatialité floue, non-référentielle, semblent tout autant de stéréotypes discursifs que le lecteur associe normalement avec la littérature pour les enfants, notamment avec les contes. Il y a pourtant certains indices inquiétants qui concourent à transformer l'apparence de la fable en dystopie : les yeux rouges de la mère, marque de sa souffrance de se voir obligée d'abandonner ses enfants, les bras fatigués des enfants, la marche interminable qui fait écho à une marche militaire, la maison de Grand-Mère, placée de l'autre côté de la gare, espace de l'évasion refusée, la position marginale de la même maison (une marginalité que le lecteur des contes associe souvent avec les monstres et le danger) et surtout le manque quasi-absolu de tout moyen de transport, qui désertifie l'espace et évacue toute possibilité de passage. La dernière phrase du paragraphe scelle la négativité en

excès. Les seuls objets qui donnent de la consistance à cet espace autrement dénudé sont les « camions militaires ». En quelques mots, pareille à un artiste minimaliste, Kristof dresse un tableau de la guerre, avec ses horreurs, ses ravages et la perte de tout repère et de toute valeur qu'elle apporte avec elle.

Pour parler de monstruosité et de déshumanisation, il faut interroger tout d'abord ce que signifie l'humanité. Au début du récit, Kristof insiste à plusieurs occasions sur l'écart creusé par les enfants, sur tout ce qui les sépare par rapport aux autres. Cet écart est d'abord de nature spatiale : placée « à cinq minutes de marche des dernières maisons de la Petite Ville » (Kristof¹ 12), la maison de la grand-mère construit ce qu'on pourrait appeler, en termes foucaaldiens, une « hétérotopie ». Loin d'être un espace d'enracinement filial et subjectif des enfants, elle devient tour à tour espace carcéral, lieu de torture et laboratoire d'expérimentation. Si, dans certains cas, cette initiation à la vie adulte peut décidément vue comme une initiation renversée, dans d'autres cas, sa nature devient plus énigmatique et plus ouverte aux interrogations. C'est là que les enfants sont confrontés aux coups et aux insultes de la grand-mère qui les traite de « fils de chienne », mais c'est toujours là que les enfants apprennent à se servir du langage pour se défendre contre la douleur et consigner leur vécu. Comme les protagonistes, le processus d'initiation est double et ouvre un carrefour à double direction possible, chacune de ces deux directions étant associée à un élément parental.

Tournant dans une dystopie, la fable de Kristof ne perd pas son caractère initial de fable. Elle devient ainsi un *exercice* d'imagination, une anticipation imagée de ce qui pourrait advenir dans certaines conditions si ces conditions sont remplies – et il suffit de peu qu'elles s'accomplissent. Si la trilogie des jumeaux est insupportable mais reste somme toute lisible, c'est qu'on pressent, derrière son caractère entièrement fictionnel, la possibilité que la réalité soit plus insupportable que la fiction. Dans le cas de Kristof, l'écriture n'est pas une thérapie, car elle ne permet pas d'exorciser les démons. Quoi qu'on fasse, les démons restent avec nous, semble dire Kristof, et ils ne font que sommeiller : l'important est de ne pas les éveiller. Comme son double fictionnel le dit au début du *Troisième mensonge*, la fiction intervient lorsque la réalité est trop insupportable pour être regardée en face : « [...] j'essaie d'écrire des histoires vraies mais, à un moment donné, l'histoire devient insupportable par sa vérité même, alors je suis obligé de la changer » (Kristof² 14). La fiction est donc un refuge et un subterfuge ; néanmoins, elle reste un autre visage de cette même réalité. La notion d'exercice semble donc être fondamentale et elle

intervient directement dans le texte, avec les exercices auxquels les deux jumeaux s'adonnent depuis le début du récit. Un récit qui reprend donc le modèle générique du récit d'apprentissage, ses codes et ses poncifs, mais pour les détourner et les faire glisser dans un type nouveau de récit : un récit du désapprentissage de l'humanité. Car la bestialité, tout comme l'humanité, sont des exercices qui s'apprennent. En vérité, rien n'est aussi simple qu'on pourrait le croire au début ; ni la bonté ni l'humanité ne sont naturelles, malgré les rêves rousseauistes. L'enfance n'est pas nécessairement innocente et l'humanité semble tout aussi peu naturelle à l'homme que l'animalité pure.

Pour conclure

Dans des phrases laconiques et brèves, fondées sur une syntaxe simple qui imite les exercices stylistiques des enfants, Agota Kristof raconte l'expérience indicible de la guerre et du totalitarisme, telle qu'elle est vue et vécue par deux enfants. Le choix de ce double protagoniste est en fait un défi que l'écrivain lance au lecteur surtout adulte, le forçant à prendre un point de vue étranger vis-à-vis duquel il ne pourrait avoir que le préjugé selon lequel un enfant est forcément ignorant. En fait, la maturité avec laquelle les enfants enregistrent tout ce qu'ils voient, se passant de commentaires, est troublante. Comment narrer l'inénarrable ? Cette question revient souvent chez les auteurs qui ont vécu des expériences traumatisantes, surtout depuis la Shoah, et la diversité des solutions narratives illustre en fait les différentes manières, forcément subjectives, que les écrivains trouvent pour les envisager. Pour les uns, l'écriture devient une forme de thérapie dans une entreprise lente et difficile de guérison personnelle, tandis que pour d'autres, elle est une affaire de témoignage, donc une réponse politique au besoin de ne pas laisser l'horreur s'échapper dans le silence et l'oubli. Maniant avec adresse l'intimité créée par un récit à la première personne et les effets de distanciation donnés par le choix du Nous, la formule narrative présente dans le *Grand Cahier* est une troisième solution que Kristof trouve pour dire ce qui se refuse à la diction.

Le va-et-vient incessant entre réalité et fiction, les complicités que l'écrivain crée avec son lecteur pour lui donner un sentiment de stabilité dans le monde narratif, complicités que Kristof brise aussitôt que le lecteur semble enfin trouver une logique à son récit, traduisent, au niveau formel, la complexité et l'anarchie d'un monde dont on ne connaît plus les repères. Si le monstrueux est ce qui est visible car différent, selon sa définition étymologique, alors le récit va jouer avec

cette idée de différence, la tissant incessamment sur des effets de ressemblance pour obliger le lecteur à la fois de se distancier de ce qui est dit et écrit, et de s'identifier dans le miroir que le double gémeilaire lui tend. Si la dystopie est une utopie qui tourne mal, la monstruosité du Double pourrait être vue comme une anomalie cachée du Même.

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L'enfance mythique d'Amélie Nothomb

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Résumé: Dans cet article, nous étudierons la préfiguration de la légende personnelle d'Amélie Nothomb à partir des autofictions *Métaphysique des tubes* (2000) et *Le Sabotage amoureux* (1993), en prenant en compte les éléments clés de sa réception extraordinaire auprès du public. Par la publication annuelle de bestsellers, l'écrivain belge est devenue un auteur-marque qui invite ses lecteurs déjà fidélisés à la lecture, à chaque rentrée littéraire. À partir de ces romans à caractère autobiographique, nous montrerons son empreinte artistique depuis l'enfance.

Mots-clés: *enfance, empreinte artistique, légende personnelle, autofiction, auteur marque.*

L'enfance comme un lieu de fabrication de soi

Dans l'ouvrage collectif *Récits et dispositifs d'enfance*, l'enfance acquiert une signification plus profonde que la simple dénomination de première période de la vie d'une personne, puisqu'elle est perçue comme un « processus d'invention » et même un « processus événementiel » (Lafont 8). D'où le fait que l'enfance apparaît comme un lieu de fabrication de soi et d'expériences revécues par le biais de l'écriture. Réfléchir aux formes et visages que peut prendre l'enfance en tant que « processus » s'avère être un exercice de repérage d'éléments de fiction et de mémoire.

Dans le cas d'Amélie Nothomb, le retour aux origines met en évidence l'importance de l'enfance dans la formation de l'identité. Écrire sur l'enfance s'avère être un moyen de se tourner vers cet état primordial de l'existence et de conférer à l'enfant, par le biais de la fiction, un caractère mythique. Dans une interview accordée à Frédéric Joignet, l'écrivain belge explique que la mémoire de son enfance est

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une des rares facultés qui fonctionne pour elle :

Je suis capable de me souvenir de l'état de virginité de mon cerveau d'alors. Il s'agit de retrouver les mots justes. C'est ça finalement le plus difficile, trouver le langage adéquat. (...) L'enfant pose un regard sans référence sur le monde. Voilà pourquoi il est décomplexant de prendre le point de vue de l'enfant pour parler des choses graves. Quand un adulte se met à parler, on va se dire : c'est le regard d'un socialiste, d'un bourgeois, etc. L'enfant n'est pas catégorisé, il n'a rien à défendre ou à prouver. Il pose un regard naïf et amusé sur toutes choses, ses réactions spontanées n'ont rien d'idiotes. J'essaye de restituer ce regard. (2008)

Ce leitmotiv du regard apparaît partout dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Amélie Nothomb. Il ne s'agit pas seulement du regard de la narratrice, mais du regard du lecteur qu'elle se propose de modifier par l'intermédiaire de la lecture et de la littérature. Sa stratégie de séduction du lecteur se fait toujours par un regard frais, choquant, brut sur la société contemporaine. Cette recherche à produire un effet prégnant sur l'autre, va au-delà de la fiction et se traduit par le besoin de l'écrivain de séduire ses lecteurs par la force du regard. – Cette obsession pour le regard de l'enfant apparaît au début du roman *Métaphysique des tubes* :

Les yeux des êtres vivants possèdent la plus étonnante des propriétés : le regard. Il n'y a pas plus singulier. (...) Qu'est-ce que le regard ? C'est inexprimable. Aucun mot ne peut approcher son essence étrange. Et pourtant, le regard existe. Il y a même peu de réalités qui existent à ce point.

Quelle est la différence entre les yeux qui ont un regard et les yeux qui n'en ont pas ? Cette différence a un nom : c'est la vie. La vie commence là où commence le regard. Dieu n'avait pas de regard. (2000:8)

La définition du regard comme équivalent de la vie suggère le fait que chez A. Nothomb, le sens prédominant par excellence est la vue, car c'est le moyen le plus facile pour séduire et/ou scandaliser les gens, par des images visuelles qui persistent longtemps sur la rétine des lecteurs.

La légende personnelle d'Amélie Nothomb

L'analyse que je propose dans cet article, vise la formation de la légende

personnelle d'Amélie Nothomb au fil de la progression chronologique de l'action – de la naissance à l'âge de huit ans. Ainsi, le type d'analyse choisie me permettra-t-il de mettre en évidence l'évolution de l'enfant-dieu, ses caractéristiques hors du commun et son évolution dans des espaces différents. C'est ainsi que l'action se construit autour de grands thèmes de la littérature universelle comme la mort, la nature, l'amour, le temps, le langage, le corps. On trouve également des réflexions sur le mythe de la Genèse, l'importance du plaisir, l'alimentation, le caractère élu et le destin exceptionnel des narratrices en parallèle avec celui d'Amélie Nothomb.

Dans le roman autofictionnel *Métaphysique des tubes* (2000), on peut facilement repérer le mythe de la création, car la protagoniste est perçue par sa gouvernante Nishio-san comme une divinité : « au pays du Soleil-Levant, de la naissance à l'école maternelle non comprise, on est un dieu »(55). L'idée du destin fabuleux de l'enfant surgit du début du roman : « Au commencement il n'y avait rien. Et ce rien n'était ni vide ni vague : il n'appelait rien d'autre que lui-même. Et Dieu vit que cela était bon. Pour rien au monde il n'eût créé quoi que ce fût. Le rien faisait mieux que lui convenir : il le comblait. » (7) Ce commencement annonce déjà le passage dans un espace magico-réaliste. Cet enfant-dieu passe de l'état de « tube » (9), à celui de « légume » (10) pour aboutir à celui de « plante » (12). Les deux premières années, le tube fut d'une immobilité effrayante : « les seules occupations de Dieu étaient la déglutition, la digestion et, conséquence directe, l'excrétion. Ces activités végétatives passaient par le corps de Dieu sans qu'il s'en aperçoive. » (9) Ce silence de deux ans fut interrompu un jour par une « scène mythologique » : « Dieu était assis dans son lit-cage et hurlait autant qu'un bébé de deux ans peut hurler » (22). Dans cet extrait, on retrouve les jeux des contraires : au silence absolu, succède un vacarme insupportable. Il s'agit en fait de la technique de la romancière d'employer les extrêmes dans sa démarche littéraire. Toujours placé entre deux pôles, l'horizon d'attente des lecteurs se trouve dans un équilibre précaire.

Dans les trois premières années de vie de la narratrice, le moi advient avec la première expérience de plaisir, celle du chocolat blanc qui lui donne accès à l'existence : « Ce fut alors que je naquis à l'âge de deux ans et demi, en février 1970, dans les montagnes du Kansai, au village de Shukugawa, sous les yeux de ma grand-mère paternelle, par la grâce du chocolat blanc. » (30) Le plaisir est un thème récurrent dans l'œuvre nothombienne et s'associe dans ce cas au logos. Une fois consciente d'elle-même et de son statut, la narratrice exprime sa voix intérieure et se délimite du monde extérieur : « C'est moi ! C'est moi

qui vis! C'est moi qui parle ! Je ne suis pas 'il' ni 'lui', je suis moi !» (2000: 30) L'enfant-dieu est le centre du monde et se regarde dans ce qui l'entoure. À partir de ce moment-là, la narration change du pronom « il » de la troisième personne du singulier au pronom personnel « je » de la première personne. Cette impression d'être Dieu peut être interprétée comme une arrogance des auteurs qui s'auto-considèrent des demiurges dans leurs démarches créatrices.

Par la suite, le récit nous raconte entre autres choses, les premiers pas de la narratrice, sa découverte du langage, son identité japonaise, son dégoût pour les carpes, ses tentatives de suicide, et son éviction du paradis japonais. Il s'agit d'un récit d'aventures fondatrices du moi, qui mènera à la naissance de sa vocation d'écrivain. Pendant cette enfance paradisiaque, la petite Amélie se rend compte de la valeur exceptionnelle des mots : « Le langage a des pouvoirs immenses : à peine avais-je prononcé à haute voix ce nom que nous prîmes l'une pour l'autre d'une folle passion. »(41) Le moment où elle appelle par son nom sa sœur Juliette est comparé « au philtre d'amour de Tristan et Iseut » (41) qui les unit pour toujours. En effet, la narratrice se rend compte depuis sa plus tendre enfance de l'importance incontestable de la parole. En développant des réflexions sur ce sujet, elle arrive à comprendre très vite que c'est une arme à double tranchant : « parler était un acte aussi créateur que destructeur. Il valait mieux faire très attention avec cette invention. » (43-44) Cette caractéristique duale du langage sera un motif récurrent dans la plus grande majorité de ses romans, qui se construisent très souvent autour de dualités fortes. Pourtant, le caractère de l'écrivain, lui aussi se construit d'une manière dédoublée à l'intérieur.

La dernière phrase du roman, « Ensuite, il ne s'est plus rien passé. » (157), suggère le passage d'une enfance sacralisée pleine de bonheur à d'autres étapes qui ne sont pas si dignes à raconter en détail. Ce roman autofictionnel, bâti à partir des souvenirs de l'écrivain de zéro à trois ans nous révèle donc un nouvel éclairage sur les expériences de l'enfant. Par un pacte d'authenticité, le récit reconstruit le monde intérieur de la narratrice et nous fait témoigner de l'invention du moi.

Finalement, à partir du roman *Métaphysique des tubes*, on peut constater que chez Amélie Nothomb, il y a un ensemble de techniques d'écriture récurrentes et caractéristiques de l'écrivain : le regard, le plaisir, le langage, la dualité et le destin fabuleux de l'enfant-dieu. La voix créatrice de l'enfant préfigure l'apparition de la vocation pour écrire, pour méditer au pouvoir omnipotent des mots, pour bâtir des mondes déchirés entre deux extrêmes inconciliables.

L'invention du moi

Si le roman *Métaphysique des tubes* est consacré aux trois premières années de vie d'Amélie au Japon, *Le Sabotage amoureux* traite de son enfance en Chine entre cinq et huit ans. Un des points communs entre ces deux romans, c'est le fait que les sujets narrateurs se prennent pour Dieu. On retrouve le même égocentrisme (« L'univers existe pour que j'existe », 30) et narcissisme, qui caractérisent aussi l'écrivain :

Mes parents, le communisme, les robes en coton, les contes des *Mille et Une Nuits*, les yaourts nature, le corps diplomatique, les ennemis, l'odeur de la cuisson des briques, l'angle droit, les patins à glace, Chou Enlai, l'orthographe et le boulevard de la Laideur Habitable : aucune de ces énumérations n'était superflue, puisque toutes ces choses existaient en vue de mon existence.

Le monde entier aboutissait à moi. (SA, 30)

Cette énumération d'objets, gens, sensations et idées mélangés, renforce le caractère élu ressenti par la protagoniste. Pourtant de l'état de nombril du monde, Amélie passe à celui de satellite. Ce déplacement radical apparaît avec l'arrivée d'Elena à San Li Tun qui devient le centre du monde et des préoccupations de la narratrice.

Chassée de l'enfance paradisiaque et exilée dans la laide Chine, la petite Amélie vit sa première expérience amoureuse dans un décor chinois : « Dès le premier jour, j'avais compris l'axiome : dans la Cité des Ventilateurs, tout ce qui n'était pas splendide était hideux. Ce qui revient à dire que presque tout était hideux. Corollaire immédiat : la beauté du monde, c'était moi. » (SA, 5) Ce genre de syllogisme surgit très souvent dans l'œuvre nothombienne et renvoie à la même dualité, aux pôles extrêmes, de percevoir le monde comme nous avons remarqué dans le roman *Métaphysique des tubes*.

Au début du roman *Le Sabotage amoureux*, nous lisons : « Au grand galop de mon cheval, je paradais parmi les ventilateurs. J'avais sept ans. Rien n'était plus agréable que d'avoir trop d'air dans le cerveau... »(5). Après l'existence métaphysique, nous assistons à une enfance épique : Amélie fait du vélo, mais elle s'imagine qu'elle fait du cheval. En tant que chevalier selon le modèle de don Quichotte qui se bat contre des moulins à vent, la petite fille imagine la réalité du ghetto de San Li Tun avec toutes les idéologies des années 70 et avec l'impression qu'Elena est tirée de l'épopée d'Homer. Pour cesser de souffrir d'amour pour Elena, Amélie choisit d'aller le plus vite possible, elle et son cheval, suivie par les Ventilateurs qui la propulse. L'auteur raconte la guerre dans la Chine communiste, l'amour, l'humiliation et l'échec vécus pendant l'enfance. Elle jette un regard pénétrant sur un

spectacle où le récit de l'enfance est semblable à une épopée, ayant pour seul but, de survivre à la laideur de la vie et de contempler la beauté sublime d'Elena.

En ce qui concerne le chronotope du roman, le lecteur découvre très vite qu'il s'agit de la Chine de 1972 à 1975 et que le cadre spatial n'a aucune importance affective pour la protagoniste :

C'est une histoire de ghetto. C'est donc le récit d'un double exil : exil par rapport à nos pays d'origine (pour moi le Japon, car j'étais persuadée d'être japonaise), et exil par rapport à la Chine qui nous entourait mais dont nous étions coupés, en vertu de notre qualité d'hôtes profondément indésirables. Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, en fin de compte : la Chine tient dans ces pages la même place que la peste noire dans *Le Décaméron* de Boccace ; s'il n'en est presque pas fait mention, c'est parce qu'elle y sévit partout. (SA, 85)

Comparée à la peste noire, la Chine est toujours perçue en opposition avec le Japon adulé qui a représenté l'enfance paradisiaque. Après la chute, la fille ne trouve pas de points forts à ce pays adoptif et abandonne le projet de fabrication de soi pour se dédier à la connaissance de l'autre.

Les citations clés pour l'empreinte artistique de l'écrivain belge apparaissent dans le roman d'autofiction *Le Sabotage amoureux* : « Moi, j'avais des fonctions importantes. J'avais un cheval qui prenait les trois quarts de mon temps. J'avais des foules à éblouir. J'avais une image de marque à préserver. J'avais une légende à construire. » (13) En effet, ces affirmations définissent l'auteur en quatre points essentiels : la vocation, le désir exprimé de fasciner les lecteurs, la particularité d'auteur-marque et la construction de l'aura mythique qui l'entoure.

L'empreinte artistique

Plus tard dans le même roman *Le Sabotage amoureux*, elle avoue : « Aujourd'hui, je ne vis plus à Pékin et je n'ai plus de cheval. J'ai remplacé Pékin par du papier blanc et le cheval par de l'encre. Mon héroïsme est devenu souterrain. J'ai toujours su que l'âge adulte ne comptait pas : dès la puberté, l'existence n'est plus qu'un épilogue. » (SA, 25) Cette introspection établit le cadre de l'écriture et le moyen d'écrire son destin épique. Son empreinte artistique repose sur la singularité de l'écrivain qui se donne pour Dieu dans beaucoup de ses romans, sur sa logique de l'excès qui est un fil conducteur dans toute son œuvre et par la construction mythique de son enfance.

En ce qui concerne sa vocation d'écrivain, Amélie Nothomb affirme à chaque apparition dans les médias, une compulsion d'écrire tous les matins pendant quatre heures. Il s'agit d'une thérapie par l'écriture, mais aussi d'une graphomanie qui s'empare d'elle et que la pousse à écrire trois-quatre manuscrits par an. Deuxièmement, ce goût de la provocation est partagé par l'écrivain et ses personnages à égale mesure (voire Prétextat Tach, Epiphane Otos, Textor Texel, etc.). La clé du succès est de fabuler et de choquer pour nourrir sa visibilité. Amélie Nothomb donne souvent l'impression qu'elle n'est pas un auteur en chair et en os : elle compose un personnage à la geisha (maquillage noir, chapeaux surdimensionnés) et invente des histoires pour alimenter son mythe personnel (manger des fruits pourris). Le but de son écriture, qui se superpose à la vision de Prétextat Tach, est d'ébranler les lecteurs, de produire du plaisir, mais aussi de « modifier le regard » des lecteurs (*Hygiène de l'assassin*, 38).

En conclusion, Amélie Nothomb se remarque par sa maîtrise à transformer ses romans en bestsellers à chaque rentrée littéraire. En tant qu'auteur marque, elle « transforme ses lecteurs en fans » qui attendent avec impatience chacune de ses apparitions (Cernău 406). Par le spectacle qu'elle met en place dans les mass médias, elle nourrit sa mythologie personnelle. Considérée par la critique littéraire comme « l'éternelle affamée », l'écrivain belge montre un intérêt particulier pour la réception du texte et parle à maintes reprises de ses désirs de basculer l'horizon d'attente des lecteurs.

Le point de départ pour la création de cette aura légendaire se trouve dans l'enfance paradisiaque racontée dans *Métaphysique des tubes* et celle épique vécue à grande vitesse sur son cheval imaginaire. L'enfance ressemble ainsi à un palimpseste, surface où s'entremêlent toutes les écritures de soi-même et que seulement la mémoire peut retrouver. Retrouver l'enfance perdue est un procédé de repérage et dévoilement de tous les mots dispersés, toutes les images confuses, les expériences empiriques qu'elle a vécues à ses origines (Cernău 230). Cette enfance est le point zéro de la fabrication de soi de ce vrai phénomène de la littérature contemporaine.

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Enfants solitaires chez Le Clézio

Florica Mateoc¹

Résumé : La prédilection de Le Clézio pour le sujet de l'enfant et de l'enfance tient à ses expériences vécues. Un grand nombre de personnages enfants peuplent ses nouvelles et ses romans. Tout comme l'écrivain, ils détestent la ville et la civilisation industrielle. C'est pourquoi, ils sont presque toujours en marche, ils voyagent à la recherche de la liberté et du bonheur. Quoiqu'ils se ressemblent, ils apparaissent sous un grand nombre de figures. Nous nous proposons d'identifier quelques enfants solitaires dans le roman *Désert* et dans quelques nouvelles du recueil *Mondo et autres histoires*. Nous tenterons d'analyser leur solitude, les relations d'amitié et la communion avec la nature, tout en relevant leurs traits magiques.

Mots-clés : solitude, nature, désert, mer, lumière, enfant magique

L'enfant et l'enfance fascinent Le Clézio qui en fait un sujet favori. Sa propre enfance vécue sous la guerre, pendant une période de réclusion et de famine de même que l'absence du père ont dû le marquer. Sa nature rêveuse, pareille aux enfants, mais en même temps ancrée dans le réel l'a accompagné toute sa vie comme il déclare dans le discours donné lors de la remise du Prix Nobel en 2008 : « Faute de livres pour enfants, j'ai lu les dictionnaires de ma grand-mère. C'étaient de merveilleux portiques pour partir à la reconnaissance du monde, pour vagabonder et rêver devant les planches d'illustrations, les cartes, les listes de mots inconnus. »²

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² *Dans la forêt des paradoxes: le discours du Nobel J.M.G. Le Clézio*

Par L'EXPRESS.fr

https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/dans-la-foret-des-paradoxes-le-discours-du-nobel-j-m-g-le-clezio_720077.html [consulté le 8 novembre 2018]. Dans ce discours, l'écrivain rappelle aussi son voyage et son séjour en Afrique, au Nigéria, pour faire la

Un grand nombre de personnages enfants peuplent les romans et les nouvelles de l'écrivain. Il ne faut que rappeler Lalla, Hartani et Radicz dans le roman *Désert*, Fintan dans *Onitsa*, Esther et Nejma dans *Etoile errante*, Mondo et Lullaby dans les nouvelles éponymes du recueil *Mondo et autres histoires*, ceux de *La ronde et autres faits divers*. Et la liste pourrait continuer. Les enfants de Le Clézio sont innocents et purs, leur représentation étant une alternative au monde citadin, au système social, éducationnel et à la civilisation industrielle que l'écrivain critique et déteste. C'est pourquoi, ils sont presque toujours en marche, ils voyagent, errent dans la nature, contemplant et rêvent à la découverte de la liberté et du bonheur. Quoiqu'ils se ressemblent, ils apparaissent sous des figures différentes comme des orphelins, des sans-abri, des handicapés, des amis, des cancre révoltés contre le règlement scolaire, des errants et des magiciens. Il faut souligner qu'on ne peut pas les enfermer dans des catégories cloisonnées parce qu'on peut identifier chez le même enfant des traits appartenant à plusieurs. D'ailleurs, les chercheurs ont établi une typologie des enfants dans l'œuvre de Le Clézio, comme l'est, entre autres, celle de Thomas Jappert qui parle d'enfants « authentiques » et d'enfants « normes ».³

Vu cette diversité de figures, mon étude retiendra les enfants solitaires et tentera d'analyser leur représentation dans le roman *Désert* et dans quelques nouvelles du recueil *Mondo et autres histoires*. Dans l'immensité du désert, près de la mer ou en haute montagne, ils vivent comme des nomades, en liberté et en communion avec la nature. Ils deviennent de vrais magiciens. Qui sont-ils ? Comment vivent-ils ? Quelle est leur relation avec la nature ? Comment ressentent-ils la solitude ? Nous nous proposons de répondre à ces questions qui configurent la problématique de notre sujet.

Les enfants du désert

Lalla, l'héroïne du roman *Désert* est descendante des grands guerriers

connaissance de son père à l'âge de 7 ans. Il y révèle la singularité et l'importance de ces expériences dans son parcours d'homme et d'écrivain.

³ Thomas Jappert, *L'enfance chez J.M.G. Le Clézio*, Thèse de 3-e cycle, Université d'Aix en Provence, 1983.

Pour créer cette typologie, Thomas Jappert prend comme critère les concepts d'authenticité et de norme. Les enfants « authentiques » sont les vrais enfants associés aux adultes qui ont gardé en grande partie les caractéristiques de l'enfance. Quant aux enfants « normes », ils préfigurent les adultes et sont exclus de l'enfance avant de l'avoir vécue.

bleus qui ont lutté vaillamment contre les colonisateurs dans les années 1909-1912, comme le montre avec précision les chiffres et les noms propres géographiques du roman : Saguïet el Hamra hiver, 1909-1910, Oued Tadla, 18 juin 1910-21 juin 1910, Tiznit, 23 octobre 1910 et Agadir, 30 mars 1912. Le Clézio accorde beaucoup d'attention à la présentation de la filiation de Lalla. Il remonte dans le passé berbère de la jeune fille, plein d'histoires sur ses ancêtres qui ont acquis une valeur de saints par leurs traits hors commun et par leur force magique. Le roman suit de près toutes les épreuves de l'héroïne dans son trajet vers la France et dans l'espace d'exil de même que le cheminement des guerriers bleus à travers le désert pour repousser les soldats chrétiens. D'ailleurs, il faut mentionner que les deux récits ne sont pas distincts mais se complètent puisque la défaite des guerriers par les soldats chrétiens dans la première partie, entraîne la colonisation et l'exil de Lalla, dépeint dans la deuxième. Deux chapitres de cette partie portent des titres suggestifs ; le premier s'appelle « Le bonheur » et présente Lalla au Maroc, heureuse, malgré sa pauvreté, et libre dans l'immensité du désert et au bord de la mer. On la voit aussi dans la Cité et aux alentours, où elle habitait avec la famille de sa tante Aamma. Le deuxième chapitre s'intitule « La vie chez les esclaves » et présente la vie dure de l'héroïne dans le labyrinthe marseillais.

La mosaïque maghrébine s'anime au fil des pages par tout un monde de nomades ou de sédentaires engendrés par le désert même, comme s'il était un être humain, « un père impassible » comme le souligne Simone Domange.⁴ Les éléments matériels qui dominent dans leur présentation sont ceux qui caractérisent le désert : le sable, le vent, la lumière, la solitude. « Ils étaient nés du désert... Ils étaient les hommes et les femmes du sable, du vent, de la lumière, de la nuit... Ils portaient en eux... le silence dur où luit le soleil »⁵ Un autre enfant du désert est l'ami de Lalla, Le Hartani. C'est un pauvre berger, descendant d'esclaves comme le suggère son nom qui signifie « métis de noir ».

Comparé aux ancêtres de Lalla il n'est le disciple de personne, c'est un enfant abandonné. « Lui, le Hartani est celui qui n'a pas de père ni de mère, celui qui est venu de nulle part, celui qu'un guerrier du désert a déposé un jour, près du puits sans dire un mot. Il est celui qui

⁴ Simone Domange, *Le Clézio ou la quête du désert*, Paris, Ed. Imago, 1993, p. 9.

⁵ Le Clézio, *Désert*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Folio », 1980, p. 9. Dorénavant, les références à ce livre seront désignées dans le texte à l'aide du sigle « D » suivi de la page, et placées entre parenthèses dans le corps du texte.

n'a pas de nom » (D, 131). L'ami de Lalla souffre d'une infirmité, il est sourd-muet. C'est pourquoi les gens se moquent ou se méfient de lui, en le condamnant à la solitude. Nicolas Grimaldi montre d'ailleurs que le corps configure notre existence dans le monde. Tous les traits signalétiques comme être grand, petit, maigre, gros, brun, blond etc. sont perçus par les autres comme autant de caractères sémiologiques. Le corps parle de nous ou comme apprécie Grimaldi, « il me désigne, il évoque, il me raconte, il parle de moi, il m'exprime. »⁶ Mais le corps peut suggérer aussi une image qui insulte comme celle du petit Hartani. Peut-être est-ce l'une des raisons pour laquelle il n'aime pas la compagnie des autres gens, il leur fait peur parce qu'il serait habité par le mauvais esprit : « Les gens ont peur d'Hartani, ils disent qu'il est mejnoun, qu'il a des pouvoirs qui viennent des démons, qu'il est magicien, qu'il a le mauvais œil... Ils disent qu'il sait commander aux serpents et aux scorpions, qu'il peut les envoyer pour donner la mort aux bêtes des autres bergers. » (D, 122). Lalla est la seule personne qui le comprend et qui se plaît dans sa compagnie. On pourrait croire que les deux jeunes partagent leur solitude, formant un couple de solitaires même si cela ne dure que peu de temps.

Petite Croix, la protagoniste de la nouvelle *Peuple du ciel*, vit dans le désert, dans un pays aride et pauvre. Quoique l'auteur ne donne pas beaucoup de détails sur son identité et son origine, le mot « mesas » (MO, 221) renvoie au Nouveau Mexique. D'ailleurs, comparées au roman, les nouvelles comprennent peu d'éléments précis sur l'espace-temps où vivent les personnages. Ceux-ci ne sont pas trop individualisés ; on ne sait pas grand-chose sur leurs appartenances identitaires. Il semble que Petite Croix n'ait pas de famille car on ne dit mot sur ses parents. Elle souffre aussi d'un handicap ; elle est aveugle. Tout comme le Hartani, elle ne porte pas un nom habituel mais une sorte de surnom que l'écrivain lui donne selon la position qu'elle prend, en haut de la falaise, où le vieux Bahti, son ami, l'emmène tous les jours : « Son corps connaissait bien sa place, il était fait pour elle. Une petite place, juste à sa mesure, dans la terre dure, creusée pour la forme de ses fesses et de ses jambes. Alors, elle pouvait rester là longtemps, assise en angle bien droit avec la terre... » (MO, 222). Elle supporte la chaleur du soleil brûlant, loin des hommes de la ville, et, en tant qu'amie du ciel, des nuages et du vent, elle ne cesse de poser la même question : « qu'est-ce que le bleu ? » (MO, 224). Petite Croix est comme une fée qui peut parler en solitaire aux nuages et aux animaux la nature environnante.

⁶ Nicolas Grimaldi, *Traité des solitudes*, Paris, P.U.F., 2003, p. 35.

Les enfants de la mer

La mer est un élément fondamental dans l'œuvre de Le Clézio. Né à Nice, l'écrivain a grandi dans son univers, tout en nourrissant une attraction intense pour les récits d'aventures marines. Il a souvent exprimé, lors des entretiens, sa fascination pour ces lectures mais aussi le désir de découvrir lui-même les mystères de cet espace. Son voyage sur la mer commence à un âge très tendre, à huit ans, lorsqu'il s'embarque avec sa mère au bord d'un grand bateau pour rejoindre son père en Afrique. Ses personnages entretiennent aussi une relation particulière avec la mer qui remplit plusieurs rôles : la mer comme substance de leur rêve, la mer calme et violente qui attire et rejette, la mer comme lieu initiatique, la mer comme espace de la délivrance et de la liberté totale.

Il semble que Daniel de la nouvelle *Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer* ressemble beaucoup à l'écrivain. Cet enfant est passionné des voyages et de la mer de sorte que l'écrivain précise à l'incipit qu'il aurait pu s'appeler Sindbad. En effet, il avait lu les aventures de Sindbad le marin, dont il a fait sa lecture préféré. Il portait « le gros livre relié en rouge » (MO, 167) partout, comme un talisman. Daniel était un élève médiocre qui n'avait pas d'amis. A l'internat ou en classe, il ne se mêlait pas aux conversations sauf s'il s'agissait de la mer. C'était vraiment un enfant différent des autres mais pareil aux héros de Le Clézio. « Mais lui, Daniel, c'était comme s'il était d'une autre race. Les choses de la terre l'ennuyaient, les magasins, les voitures, la musique, les films et, naturellement les cours du lycée. » (MO, 167).

Il ressent très fort l'appel de la mer et c'est pourquoi il fuit l'école. Il passe par des épreuves très dures pour la gagner : un long voyage caché dans un train de marchandises, affamé et assoiffé. L'exclamation qu'il fait lorsqu'il l'aperçoit à l'horizon trahit ses émotions et sa joie : « La mer, la mer, la mer...la tête pleine de bruit et de vertige. Il avait envie de parler, de crier même mais sa gorge ne laissait pas passer sa voix. » (MO, 172). Daniel ne peut pas contrôler son état, il se transforme, ensorcelé par la mer. Il entretient une relation presque amoureuse avec elle. « C'était bien la mer, sa mer, pour lui seul maintenant et il savait qu'il ne pourrait plus jamais s'en aller. » (MO, 174) La mer est personnifiée, le héros lui parle comme à une personne en l'invitant de monter jusqu'à lui, en haut de la falaise. En plus, il lui fait des déclarations d'amour, toute en reconnaissant sa force magique. « Tu es belle, tu vas venir et tu vas recouvrir toute la terre, toutes les villes, tu vas monter jusqu'en haut des montagnes ! » (MO, 175). Il vit dans une grotte qui lui permet de la voir tout le temps pour ne pas être

séparé d'elle. Lorsqu'il doit lutter avec ses eaux qui allaient inonder son abri pendant la marée haute, Daniel n'a pas peur et ne ressent pas la fatigue mais un état de bonheur.

Ce sont des moments pareils que vit Lullaby, la protagoniste de la nouvelle portant le même titre, lorsqu'elle fait l'école buissonnière, pour contempler la mer. C'est une fille sensible qui vit dans une atmosphère familiale étouffante, avec une mère malade et un père absent. Celui-ci, vivant en Iran, lui manque et semble l'avoir initiée à découvrir la nature et les voyages. Elle partage son ennui et sa joie avec lui, à l'aide des lettres. C'est à lui qu'elle explique les raisons de sa fugue ; l'école, les professeurs, les classes, les collègues, tout, absolument tout lui fait mal. « Peut-être que je fais un peu des bêtises. Il ne faut pas m'en vouloir. J'avais vraiment l'impression d'être dans une prison. (...) Imagine tous ces murs partout, tellement de murs que tu ne pourrais pas les compter, avec des fils de fer barbelés, des grillages, des barreaux aux fenêtres ! Imagine la cour avec tous ces arbres que je déteste... » (MO, 91)

Chaque jour elle prend le chemin caché des contrebandiers pour arriver à la mer. La maison grecque, en haut de la colline, devient l'endroit d'où elle admire en solitaire la mer. Elle découvre sa beauté et son immensité qui l'enivre et lui donne des vertiges. « Immense, bleue, la mer emplissait l'espace jusqu'à l'horizon agrandi, et c'était comme un toit sans fin, un dôme géant fait de métal sombre où bougeaient toutes les rides des vagues. » (MO, 106). En plus, la mer devient un remède pour tous les ennuis et Lullaby croit qu'elle est ce qui est le plus important dans ce monde. C'est qu'elle peut offrir le réconfort et le bonheur solitaire.

La solitude foncière.

Il semble que Lalla Hawa du roman *Désert* suive le destin de sa grande famille. Dans son cas on pourrait parler d'une solitude foncière. Lalla en hérite le plaisir non seulement de ses ancêtres éloignés mais aussi de sa mère qui se plaisait à errer toute seule dans le désert. Le Clézio insiste sur l'état de solitude de l'héroïne dans deux segments temporels et spatiaux : avant le départ en France, là-bas dans le monde natal du désert et après l'arrivée, dans l'espace citadin de l'exil. Elle fait figure à part parmi la famille des solitaires du roman car elle est seule dès sa naissance, étant orpheline : son père est mort avant sa naissance et sa mère, peu de temps après. Mais, comme le raconte la tante Aamma, sa mère l'a mise au monde après avoir marché toute seule jusqu'à l'endroit de l'accouchement situé près d'un arbre et d'une source. Lalla apprend qu'à l'époque où elle était petite, sa mère aimait bien quitter la maison,

le bébé au dos sans rien dire. Après sa mort prématurée, elle devient un esprit invisible que Lalla veut ressusciter dans la mémoire en l'appelant dans le chemin des dunes : « -Où es-tu allée, Oummi (Maman)? Je voudrais que tu viennes ici pour me voir, je le voudrais bien...Oummi, ne veux-tu pas revenir, pour me voir ? Tu vois, je ne t'ai pas oubliée, moi...Oummi, dit encore Lalla, ne peux-tu pas revenir juste un instant ? J'ai envie de te voir parce que je suis toute seule...Reviens juste un instant, reviens ! » (D, 153-154).

Même si Lalla se plaît à être toute seule, son invocation trahit un état qui devient des fois douloureux. Elle se sent seule même auprès de sa tante paternelle, Aamma dans la « Cité de planches et de papier goudronné ». Même si cette tante lui raconte plein d'histoires sur sa mère, sur ses ancêtres et sur les traditions locales, elle ne peut pas se substituer à sa mère. Elle ne comprend pas ses sentiments pour le berger Le Hartani et c'est pourquoi elle est prête à la marier de force à l'homme riche « au complet gris-vert ». Lalla «découvre pour la première fois ce qu'il y a de mensonger en elle ». (D, 193).

Son héritage familial ne constitue pas la seule cause de sa solitude car on pourrait y ajouter aussi le manque de chaleur maternelle et la privation d'un foyer accueillant. Comme elle a perdu ses parents assez tôt, l'héroïne n'a pas connu la maison comme univers mythique de l'enfance, ce chez-soi où elle pût grandir auprès des siens en sécurité. Même si elle habite chez sa tante Aamma, ce n'est pas une vraie maison sans une mère qui l'anime, ce n'est pas un lieu de réconfort, c'est une maison froide. Elle lui raconte plein d'histoires sur sa mère, sur ses ancêtres et sur les traditions locales mais elle ne peut pas se substituer à sa mère. En plus, Aamma ne comprend pas les sentiments de Lalla pour Le Hartani et c'est pourquoi elle est prête à la marier de force à l'homme riche « au complet gris-vert ». Lalla «découvre pour la première fois ce qu'il y a de mensonger en elle ». (D, 193). L'héroïne se révolte contre les normes de la petite société de la Cité et contre sa tante qui n'aime pas du tout son petit ami. « Aamma n'aime pas beaucoup que Lalla aille voir si souvent le berger dans les champs de pierre et dans ses collines. Elle lui dit que c'est un enfant trouvé, un étranger, qu'il n'est pas un garçon pour elle. » (D,112). Voilà pourquoi Lalla fuit la Cité pour aller vers le cœur du désert où elle retrouve la liberté et ses amis solitaires.

Les amis solitaires

Tout comme le Petit Prince, ces enfants sont toujours en quête d'amis et d'amitié. Coupée de son milieu, Lalla se lie d'amitié avec deux autres solitaires de nature, aussi démunis qu'elle – Le Hartani, et Naman, le

vieux pêcheur. Quoique pauvre, il est un riche connaisseur des histoires et des traditions du désert. Elle ne tient pas compte des préjugés et des exclusions connus même par les plus pauvres, c'est pourquoi elle se plaît à errer dans le désert à côté de son petit ami. Pourquoi l'aime-t-elle ? Parce qu'il est aussi un solitaire qui possède au fond de son âme la passion du désert. Dans sa compagnie, elle découvre les coins réduits des rochers et la beauté des nuits étoilées. En outre, elle l'aime parce qu'il est différent des autres garçons, il ne peut pas parler mais il peut communiquer autrement, par la force magique de ses mains :

« Le Hartani sait tout faire avec ses mains, pas seulement saisir les cailloux ou rompre le bois mais faire des nœuds coulants avec les fibres de palmier, des pièges pour prendre les oiseaux, ou encore siffler, faire de la musique, imiter le cri de la perdrix, de l'épervier, du renard et imiter le bruit du vent, de l'orage, de la mer. Surtout ses mains savent parler. C'est cela que Lalla préfère...Ce ne sont pas vraiment des histoires qu'il raconte à Lalla. Ce sont plutôt des images qu'il fait naître dans l'air, rien qu'avec les gestes, avec ses lèvres, avec la lumière de ses yeux....jamais Lalla n'a rien entendu de plus beau, de plus vrai. » (D, 133).

La dernière partie de l'extrait suggère la sensibilité du jeune homme et son penchant vers le beau et la poésie, auxquels il veut initier Lalla. En fait, Le Hartani lui apprend à suivre le merveilleux du monde du désert. Mais il lui apprend aussi l'amour, ce qui scelle le destin de l'héroïne ; elle reste enceinte et de l'enfant qu'elle était, elle devient une femme. En plus, elle prend la voie de l'immigration en France et, malgré le succès remporté dans la dernière étape de son séjour à Paris, elle retourne au désert pour donner naissance à son enfant.

Mondo, le personnage de la nouvelle éponyme, est un petit enfant de 10 ans, un solitaire, sans identité, sans abri, sans famille, qui erre tous les jours à travers la ville, en quête de quelqu'un qui puisse l'aimer et l'adopter. Sa question obsédante apparaît dès les premières pages et se répète, devenant un vrai leitmotiv : « Est-ce que vous voulez m'adopter ? » (MO, 12). Le portrait que lui fait l'écrivain dévoile la beauté singulière et la sensibilité de l'enfant :

«Personne n'aurait pu dire d'où venait Mondo. Il était arrivé un jour, par hasard, ici dans notre ville, sans qu'on s'en aperçoive, et puis on s'était habitué à lui. C'était un garçon d'une dizaine d'années, avec un visage tout rond et tranquille, et de beaux yeux noirs un peu obliques. Mais c'était surtout ses cheveux qu'on remarquait, des cheveux brun

centré qui changeaient de couleur selon la lumière, et qui paraissaient presque gris à la tombée de la nuit.» (MO, 11)

Il n'a pas beaucoup d'amis en ville mais il se rapproche surtout des marginaux qui, malgré leur condition, sont des gens sensibles et sages dont il apprend beaucoup de choses. Ils n'ont pas de noms mais les gens leur ont donné des surnoms d'après leurs traits physiques ou selon leurs actions. Dans cette galerie, on rappelle le Gitan, un prestidigitateur au profil d'aigle ; le Cosaque, un accordéoniste au bonnet de fourrure qui lui rappelle son père; Dadi le colombier, son préféré, un vieil ami des colombes qui lui apprend à lire. Mondo les aide à faire leur petit spectacle de rue, dans une place de la ville. La liste des amis comprend aussi des artistes et des artisans comme le peintre de dimanche et le rempailleur de chaises. D'autres gens de la ville l'attirent surtout par leur métier comme l'arroseur public dont Mondo admire le tuyau en métal qui le fascine ou le jeune facteur qui lui lit des histoires. En dehors de la ville, au bord de la mer, il tient la compagnie de Giordan le Pêcheur, un rêveur qui lui éveille l'imagination par ses histoires des mers et des régions éloignées. Ses amis lui ressemblent car ils sont tous des amoureux de lumière et des rêveurs. « Mondo aimait bien ceux qui savent rester assis au soleil sans bouger et sans parler et qui ont des yeux un peu rêveurs. (...) Ceux qu'il aimait rencontrer, c'étaient ceux qui ont un beau regard brillant. (MO, 57-58)

Mais l'amie qu'il aime le plus est une petite vieille femme vietnamienne, Thi Chin, elle aussi une solitaire sensible et généreuse qui habitait loin de la ville sur une colline surplombant la mer. Dans ses randonnées en dehors de la ville, Mondo découvre son jardin et sa maison qui le fascinent par la lumière qu'elle émane. C'était une maison à l'ancienne, en style italien, simple et belle, avec un jardin en désordre. Il lui donne un nom singulier : la « Maison de la Lumière d'Or » parce que « la lumière du soleil de la fin d'après-midi avait une couleur très douce et calme, une couleur chaude comme les feuilles d'automne ou comme le sable, qui vous baignait et vous enivrait ». (MO, 43). Cette dame devient sa meilleure amie parce qu'elle a gardé encore la pureté et l'innocence de l'enfance qu'elle revit à côté de Mondo. Elle l'accueille et lui donne à manger. Le soir, ils se promènent ensemble et Thi Chin lui apprend à regarder les étoiles et lui lit des histoires anciennes avant de s'endormir. C'est toujours elle qui se fait des soucis après la disparition de Mondo et intervient auprès du commissaire de police pour le libérer après avoir fui le foyer de l'Assistance publique.

Les enfants se lient d'amitié avec des animaux et des choses. Petite Croix aime les abeilles qui couvrent son corps sans la piquer. Ils sont ses meilleurs amis qui lui rendent visite chaque jour, lui parlent

par leur bourdonnement et couvrent tout son corps en signe d'affection. Elle leur donne des grains de sucre et, pour la remercier, les abeilles lui apportent en cadeau un énorme bouquet formé de toutes les fleurs qu'elles ont butinées. Et l'écrivain, fin observateur et connaisseur de la nature environnante, fait une longue énumération de noms de fleurs comme s'il était un botaniste en train de rédiger un dictionnaire de spécialité.

« Chaque jour, à la même heure elles viennent. Elles savent que Petite Croix les attend et elles l'aiment bien aussi. (...) Elles se posent sur les mains ouvertes de Petite Croix, puis sur son visage, sur ses joues, sur sa bouche, elles se promènent, elles marchent très doucement et leurs pattes légères chatouillent sa peau et la font rire. (...) Nous avons vu la fleur jaune de tournesol, la fleur rouge du chardon, la fleur de l'ocotillo, (...), la grande fleur mauve du cactus pitaya, la fleur en dentelle des carottes sauvages, la fleur pâle du laurier... Toutes ces fleurs sont pour toi, Petite Croix, nous te les apportons pour te remercier. » (MO, 229-230).

D'ailleurs, elle est l'amie de toute la nature, de la lumière, des nuages et du vent.

Mondo est fasciné par une vieille barque qui s'appelle « Oxyton ». Elle ne sort jamais à l'eau et, pour chasser sa tristesse, pour montrer sa compassion, il lui tient souvent compagnie, il lui parle et lui chante une chanson qu'il a composée lui-même : « Oxyton, Oxyton, Oxyton/ On va s'en aller-er-er/On s'en va pêcher/On s'en va pêcher/ On s'en va pêcher/Les sardines, les crevettes et les thons. » (MO, 55). Il avait une relation privilégiée avec un bloc de ciment, sur la plage, auquel il se confessait, et qui était son endroit préféré. Il lui raconte même des histoires qui semblent lui plaire car « le brise-lames ne disait rien, ne bougeait pas, mais il aimait bien les histoires que lui racontait Mondo. » (MO, 18).

La communion avec la nature.

L'identité de ces enfants reste sous le signe de la lumière éblouissante qui éclate dans leur regard. Les enfants du Sahara se remarquent par la détention de la lumière. Le Hartani a des yeux qui brillent fort et « le visage tout éclairé de lumière. » (D, 124). Quant à Lalla, elle est vraiment resplendissante : « La lumière est ardente sur ses cheveux noirs, sur la natte épaisse qu'elle tresse au creux de son épaule, en marchant. La lumière est ardente dans ses yeux couleur

d'ambre, sur sa peau, sur ses pommettes saillantes, sur ses lèvres. » (D, 312).

Lullaby subit une modification sous le poids de la lumière qui pénètre dans son corps. Son regard maîtrise l'espace et s'élargit vers des horizons éloignés. « La respiration devenait de plus en plus lente, et dans sa poitrine, le cœur espaçait ses coups, lentement, lentement. Il n'y avait presque plus de mouvements, presque plus de vie en elle, seulement son regard qui s'élargissait, qui se mêlait à l'espace comme un faisceau de lumière. » (MO, 98-99). Petite Croix est aveugle mais elle sent la lumière par voie auditive, par les bruits doux et lents qui viennent de toutes parts et caressent ses cheveux et tout son corps. Pour Daniel, la lumière reçoit un rôle libérateur, c'est elle qui le rend fou et le remplit de joie qu'il manifeste en bondissant sur la plaine du fond de mer.

L'espace naturel est animé, anthropomorphisé. La lumière, le vent, les nuages, la mer, les animaux, les insectes reçoivent des qualités humaines. Jean Onimus considère que cette perspective de Le Clézio a garanti le succès auprès des enfants. Il explique que « les enfants adorent quand la nature se rapproche de l'expérience humaine ». (Onimus, 110) Il donne des noms aux plantes, aux maisons, aux insectes, aux mollusques comme, par exemple, Daniel de la nouvelle *Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer* qui appelle Wiatt le poulpe trouvé sur la plage. Mondo aimait les oiseaux qui lui semblaient bienveillants et généreux ; c'est pourquoi il en fait ses amis et partage son pain avec eux. Il trouve la paix dans les cachettes au bord de la mer ou en haut de la colline dans le jardin de la « Maison de la Lumière d'Or ». Il parle aux salamandres, veut en apprivoiser une pour l'accompagner dans ses promenades et s'endort à la belle étoile, au pied d'un arbre, gardé par des criquets, des moustiques et des araignées. C'est dans ce cadre qu'il se sent entouré de chaleur et de paix. Autres fois, il reste pendant des heures sur la plage, dès le lever du soleil, pour chercher ensuite des endroits isolés d'où il peut contempler la mer et rêver.

Lullaby découvre la maison grecque, une maison en ruine, très ancienne et très belle d'où elle contemple la mer. Son nom est très approprié, elle s'appelle « Karisma ». Elle n'a pas peur de chercher de petites créatures marines, des coquillages, des anémones de mer. Elle découvre dans les cachettes toutes sortes d'insectes et des galeries de vers qu'elle n'a jamais vus ailleurs. Dans une solitude profonde où il n'y avait que le soleil, le vent et la mer, Lullaby se confond avec le paysage et devient un élément naturel comme les autres.

« Lullaby était pareille à un nuage, à un gaz, elle se mélangeait à ce qui l'entourait. Elle était pareille à l'odeur des pins chauffés par le soleil,

sur les collines, pareille à l'odeur de l'herbe qui sent le miel. Elle était l'embrun des vagues où brille (...), le vent, le souffle froid qui vient de la mer, le souffle chaud comme une haleine qui vient de la terre (...) elle était le sel, le sel qui brille comme le givre sur les vieux rochers...Il n'y avait plus une seule Lullaby assise sur la véranda d'une vieille maison pseudo-grecque en ruine. Elles étaient aussi nombreuses que les étincelles de lumière sur les vagues. » (MO, 99).

La nature lui apprend toutes les lois de la nature qui ne sont pas expliquées dans les livres et qu'on demande aux élèves d'apprendre par cœur à l'école. Mais elles sont étranges et les leurs signes n'appartiennent pas aux hommes.

Dans *Désert*, Lalla est tellement habituée avec les oiseaux ou avec d'autres êtres vivants du désert qu'elle est capable d'énumérer toute sorte de noms d'insectes : « il y a toujours des fourmis...Lalla les aime bien...Elle aime aussi les scolopendres lentes, les hannetons mordorés, les bousiers, les lucanes, les doryphores, les coccinelles, les criquets pareils à des bouts de bois brûlés. Les grandes mantes religieuses font peur... » (D, 77-78). Pour exprimer son attitude et pour relever les connaissances de la jeune fille, le texte qui s'y rapporte contient un lexique et une syntaxe très simples. L'écrivain emploie au début des paragraphes le présentatif « il y a » qui devient très fréquent de même que le nom de Lalla qui apparaît comme sujet de différents types de verbes : Lalla « aime », Lalla « marche », Lalla « crie », Lalla « reste », Lalla « connaît » etc. Les images sont assez rares, sous forme de comparaisons qui mettent en relation des éléments très concrets comme l'est aussi l'imagination de l'héroïne. En voilà quelques exemples : « ses pieds s'enfoncent dans le sable comme deux poteaux », « les crabes gris pareils à des araignées », « les dunes sont comme des vaches couchées », « l'épervier est pareil à un poisson qui glisse sur un fond sous-marin où bougent les algues ». (D, 80-81)

Cette communion avec la nature se voit aussi chez son ami Hartani qui connaît si bien le langage des insectes et des oiseaux qu'il se confond des fois avec eux : « Lui aussi, il regarde l'épervier. Mais c'est comme si l'oiseau était son frère, et que rien ne les séparait...Quand Lalla s'aperçoit que le Hartani et l'épervier sont semblables, elle frissonne. » (D, 120)

Daniel vit comme un sauvage dans sa grotte près de la mer. A la marée basse, il cherche des animaux marins dans les grandes flaques, il chasse des patelles et voit tous les jours son ami, le poulpe.

Les solitaires magiques

Dans son effort de comprendre et de percer le mystère de l'enfance, Le

Clézio pense que les enfants sont des êtres magiques et il développe cette idée dans son œuvre de jeunesse, *L'inconnu sur la terre* : « les enfants éclairent, ils sont la lumière. Les enfants sont semblables aux pauvres, aux nomades et d'eux viennent le même sentiment de force, de vérité, le même pouvoir, la même beauté. Ils nous donnent tout cela et nous traversent. Les enfants sont magiques, les seuls êtres absolument magiques. »⁷

Les enfants des œuvres sélectionnées possèdent quelques dons qui fascinent les gens ordinaires, ils sont de vrais magiciens. « Lalla Hawa sait interpréter les rêves, dire l'avenir et retrouver les objets perdus » (D, 180). Le Hartani possède des mains miraculeuses, bien grandes en comparaison avec celles des autres gens. Elles peuvent émettre une sorte de chaleur qui s'accompagne d'un état d'esprit pareil au bonheur. Il a le pouvoir de trouver de l'eau et amène Lalla à la source lorsque celle-ci risque de mourir de soif et d'épuisement, lors d'une longue marche, à travers les dunes. L'eau qu'elle boit surgit d'un trou près d'un rocher et d'un arbre, ce qui pourrait être considéré un lieu stéréotypé des miracles. L'eau, comme élément primordial, est reliée selon la coutume de leur pays, à la naissance, puisqu'il fallait toujours naître auprès d'une source. En plus, l'eau véritable connaît souvent, en la présence de ces enfants, un changement surprenant : elle se spiritualise. « Lalla boit la lumière très pâle qui vient de l'amas d'étoiles et tout à coup il lui semble qu'elle est si près...qu'il lui suffirait de tendre la main pour prendre une poignée de la belle lumière étincelante. (D, 206-207)

Les personnages enfants sont charismatiques, ils séduisent le lecteur qu'il soit adulte ou enfant. Réels ou merveilleux, « enfants-fées » comme ils sont nommés sur la quatrième de couverture du recueil *Mondo et autres histoires*, ils ont la mission de nous guider comme des prophètes ou des dieux même. Dans *La montagne du dieu vivant*, Jon, le héros, rencontre un enfant sans nom qui vivait tout seul là-haut. Ils se lient d'amitié, Jon lui joue des chansons de sa flûte. On dirait une incarnation divine même s'il répond qu'il n'est qu'un simple enfant : « Oui, je suis un enfant. (...)Son regard bleu était plein d'une telle lumière que Jon dut baisser les yeux. » (MO, 138). Tout comme d'autres enfants de ses livres, il a des yeux qui se transforment en fenêtres ouvertes sur un autre monde. Lalla du *Désert* a aussi le don de regarder ailleurs, « de l'autre côté du monde ». (D, 327). Le regard est magique ; il a un tel pouvoir qu'il peut changer le monde. C'est aussi le cas de Daniel de la nouvelle *Celui qui n'a jamais vu la mer* qui reçoit la

⁷ Le Clézio, *L'inconnu sur la terre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 225.

force d'arrêter l'eau qui allait inonder sa grotte. « Alors il regarda la mer pour l'arrêter. De toutes ses forces, il la regardait, sans parler, et il renvoyait les vagues en arrière, en faisant des contre-lames qui brisaient l'élan de la mer. » (MO, 186)

Chez Le Clézio, le merveilleux et l'étrange naissent du réel. Selon lui, le magique se trouve dans la réalité lorsqu'on sait comment la regarder. « Il n'y a rien de plus étrange que la réalité. (...) Sur la terre, dans la vie, tout est magique, c'est une magie sans mage. La magie c'est de sentir, d'entendre, de voir. »⁸. Jon examine un caillou et ensuite il contemple le bloc de lave qui grandit sous son regard. C'est ainsi qu'il a l'impression de maîtriser la montagne.

Si le monde des enfants est magique, leur langage l'est aussi. Il complète le regard pour configurer un monde merveilleux. Cette langue est concrète, tout comme leur pensée. Les mots deviennent des images de la réalité. Le meilleur exemple est la scène où Mondo apprend à lire et à écrire. C'est le râtisseur de sable qui devient son professeur et qui a une méthode originale pour lui enseigner l'alphabet. Il le fait en gravant les lettres sur des galets, comme s'il s'agissait des mots de la nature. En même temps, il parlait à Mondo de tout ce qu'il y a dans les lettres, de tout ce qu'on peut y voir quand on les regarde et quand on les écoute. Ce sont des mots imagés qui font penser à une technique similaire de Rimbaud dans son poème *Voyelles*. Chaque lettre de l'alphabet correspond aux éléments concrets de la nature environnante. Mondo apprend à écrire son nom et il est ravi de trouver de quoi il est composé : « Regarde. C'est ton nom écrit, là. C'est beau disait Mondo. Il y a une montagne, la lune, quelqu'un qui salue le croissant de lune et encore la lune. Pourquoi y a-t-il toutes ces lunes ? C'est dans ton nom, c'est tout, disait le vieil homme. C'est comme ça que tu t'appelles ? » (MO, 62).

En guise de conclusion

Les personnages enfants des œuvres sélectionnées cherchent la solitude suite à un héritage familial, en guise de révolte ou comme un remède pour leur malaise existentiel. Ils vivent un bonheur solitaire en communion avec la nature qui devient pour eux un réservoir de connaissances et d'apprentissage.

Qu'ils soient héros des romans ou des nouvelles, ils se ressemblent. Lalla et Le Hartani, Mondo et ses confrères, ils vivent tous la même aventure cosmique. Ils sont tellement pareils qu'ils pourraient se remplacer les uns les autres dans des endroits et des

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

situations différentes. Comme le dit Jean Onimus, ils sont « simples destins en marche, simples témoins de l'homme quand on le réduit à l'essentiel, c'est-à-dire à l'existence tout court ». (Onimus, 84). D'ailleurs, cette solitude choisie par les protagonistes est aussi le choix de Le Clézio qui déclare : « Au lieu de m'amuser, au lieu de faire l'effort d'être comme tout le monde, je préférerais rester chez moi à écrire. » (Onimus, p. 13). Ses héros lui ressemblent.

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Child Labour and Fantasy in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*¹

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Abstract: Published in 1863, Charles Kingsley's widely-acclaimed children's novel *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* provides a picture of nineteenth-century England with its representation of the idyllic countryside set against the industrial towns and its emphasis on social injustices and harsh living conditions of the working class. The novel tells the story of a young chimney-sweeper, Tom, who, while being chased after by a group of people who accuse him of theft, falls into the river and transforms into a water-baby. In line with the Romantic attributes of childhood such as innocence and purity, Kingsley's novel offers a pronounced critique on the issue of child-labour. The earlier parts of the novel represent child labour prevalent in the nineteenth century in a realistic manner, whereas the latter parts, where Tom's underwater journey as a water-baby is depicted, bring a critical perspective to child labour and social inequality in an overly unrealistic style through the use of fantastic elements. Kingsley's making use of fantastic elements in his novel not only helps him present such serious subject matters in a manner, which is more proper for the child reader but it also makes it possible for him to deliver his criticism in implicit ways. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* elaborates on child labour, and to argue that the use of fantastic elements in Kingsley's novel offers an alternative way of looking at real social problems rather than escaping them.

Keywords: Children's literature, Charles Kingsley, fantasy literature, child labour, Victorian society, *The Water-Babies*

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Motto:

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran
And much it grieved my heart to think,
What man had made of man.

-Wordsworth-
(The Water-Babies 5)

Clergyman, reformist, socialist, novelist, writer of children's books³, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) was a versatile nineteenth-century intellectual who paid a special attention to the issue of labour and a myriad number of problems surrounding it. Throughout his life, Kingsley indeed took an active role in drawing attention to the issue of labour, poverty, and many other problems of the working class. He was a member of a group of reformists who called themselves Christian Socialists. With the other members of the group, Kingsley actively worked for ameliorating the conditions of the poor in England, and he offered practical solutions to social problems in such penny papers as *Politics for the People* and *The Christian Socialist* (Klaver 115). Kingsley must have seen the act of writing overly revolutionary that his identity as social reformer stimulated his famous industrial novels such as *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850). In these novels, Kingsley presented the trials of the working class and their strife for reaching better living and working conditions through exceedingly realistic representations. Yet, he transmitted the issue of labour into his fiction most experimentally in *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863), a children's fantasy novel he originally wrote for one of his four children⁴.

Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* is "often claimed to have marked the beginning of the first golden age of British children's literature", and it has become "the most widely-read and most closely-studied of all Charles Kingsley's works" (Hunt 23; Uffelman and Scott 122). It is an extremely adventurous, bewitching, and entertaining story from a

³ Even though Charles Kingsley is known for his industrial novels such as *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850), he is also the writer of several children's books such as *The Heroes* (1856), *The Water-Babies* (1863), and *Madam How and Lady Why* (1869).

⁴ In her memoir of Charles Kingsley entitled *Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of His Life* (1877), Kingsley's wife, Frances Kingsley explains how the *The Water-Babies* came to be written. Kingsley starts writing *The Water-Babies* upon his wife's request that their youngest child should also have his book since Kingsley had already written a book for his elder children, *The Heroes* (1856) (126-7).

child reader's perspective. However, an in-depth analysis of the novel from an adult gaze reveals that it is preoccupied with matters Kingsley is extremely concerned about such as "child-warfare, children's reading, sexuality, evolution, redemption and purgatory" (Hunt 23). *The Water-Babies*, in the narrowest sense, tells the story of a waif chimney-sweeper, named Tom, who works for a cruel, alcoholic, and troublesome Mr. Grimes, who almost always finds a reason to beat him. Wrongfully accused of theft, Tom is chased after by Mr. Grimes and the servants of the house where he has been sweeping the chimneys. While running away, Tom gets into a river and transforms into a water baby. The main story follows Tom's subsequent journey towards the sea and his underwater adventures. Hence, the novel can be roughly separated into two parts. The first part of the novel provides a realistic picture of nineteenth-century England. It portrays the division between the upper class and working class, and it also offers a presentation of child labour which was very common in the period. However, the novel takes a fantastic turn in the second part starting with Tom's transformation into a water-baby, and this second part opens the door of an underwater world of talking sea-animals as well as sea-fairies living in a social order which is similar to and different from the Victorian society in numerous aspects.

The fantastic part of the novel has engendered a wide range of interpretations since the publication of the novel. Many critics considered *The Water-Babies* as an example of Christian fantasy⁵. Hence, Tom's aim to reach the sea has primarily been read as a symbolic display of his journey to heaven after his possible death. His adventures, experiences, and encounters during this journey have accordingly been regarded as symbolizing his confrontation with his vices and virtues on his way to eternity. However, most of the scholarly studies on the novel have revolved around the novel's affinity with Charles Darwin's evolution theory. Known to be one of the first defenders of Darwin, Kingsley has been thought to reflect his support of Darwin's theory through his detailed description of sea-animals and mini-narratives he inscribes in the novel about certain species' evolution process. One way of reading this fantastic narrative, however, which is also the subject of this essay, might be in terms of its relationship to the social problems of the Victorian Era, such as the struggles of the labouring class, social inequality, injustice as well as the hypocritical and unethical conducts of the Victorian society. The issue of labour hence can be analysed in two ways in Kingsley's novel:

⁵ See MacSwain and Ward.

its realistic representation in the first part, and its criticism through the use of fantastic elements in the second part.

In the first part of the novel, Kingsley draws an image of a Northern industrial town which is gloomy, gruesome, and unsanitary in many ways. The working class is depicted in rags and tatters spending their time gambling, drinking, smoking pipes and fighting almost as a leisure activity. The narrator however focuses mainly on the chimney-sweeper, Tom, and his relationship with his cruel chimney-sweep-master, Mr. Grimes. The unethical conduct of child labour in nineteenth century and the hard conditions child laborers work and live in become manifest in the very first sentence of the novel: “there were plenty of chimneys to sweep, and plenty of money for Tom to earn and his master to spend” (*WB* 5). As the narrator points out, Tom, despite doing all the hard work, is not given any money in return for his labour. As he works all day long, he is also not given any opportunity to receive education or even to play games like children of his age. Tom is not able to read and write and not even able to wash himself for there is no water where he lives (*WB* 5). Moreover, he is also mentioned to be in prison himself once or twice even though the narrator does not provide any details regarding its reason (*WB* 6). As regards Tom’s miserable condition the narrator maintains that

He cried half his time and laughed the other half. He cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw; and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day in the week; and when his master beat him, which he did every day in the week; and when he had not enough to eat, which happened every day in the week likewise. (*WB* 5)

Tom is abused, degraded, and ill-treated by Mr. Grimes in every way, however, as a chimney-sweeper he cannot recognize his master’s misconduct. Surrounded by working-class people and chimney-sweepers like himself, Tom internalizes and accepts his way of living as what is normal. Devoid of any moral and formal education as well as a proper family and a house, Tom, as a boy, knows neither God nor faith and he cannot differentiate between what is morally good or bad. Hence, he takes Mr. Grimes and other adults around him as role models and desires to be just like them. As a chimney-sweeper, Tom thus thinks “of the fine times coming, when he would be a man, and a master sweep, and sit in the public-house with a quart of beer and a long pipe, and play cards for silver money” just like Mr. Grimes (*WB* 6). Furthermore, Tom takes delight in thinking how he would himself “bully [his apprentices] and knock them about, just as his master did to

him” (*WB* 6). He further adds that he would “make them carry home the soot sacks, while he [rides] before them on his donkey, with a pipe in his mouth and a flower in his button-hole, like a king at the head of his army” (*WB* 6). As Jean Webb points out, “Tom’s reaction to his circumstances is to replicate his experiences as a model for his future life”, because he “has no framework of morality to apply to his situation to bring about change for the better” (58). Hence, Tom’s miserable present condition as well as his future plans “to become a clone of his amoral master” point at the vicious circle the Victorian society is caught in with regard to child labour (Webb 58). This not only indicates the continuation of the same system in its severest form, but it also functions as a way of showing how Victorian society fails to look after its own children. Besides failing to provide equal living and education conditions for children of all classes, the industrial society also prevents the underprivileged children from dreaming of achieving better conditions.

The inequality between the living conditions of child laborers and that of upper-class children becomes evident most significantly when Tom encounters a beautiful young girl named Ellie, the daughter of Sir John in whose house Mr. Grimes and Tom have been sweeping the chimneys. Losing his way in the labyrinthian chimney funnels of the mansion, Tom finds himself in Ellie’s room by mistake. Unaware of his miserable appearance so far, Tom is shocked by the cleanliness of Ellie and the neatness of her room. In the novel, Ellie is described as follows:

Under the snow-white coverlet, upon the snow-white pillow, lay the most beautiful little girl that Tom had ever seen. Her cheeks were almost as white as the pillow, and her hair was like threads of gold spread all about over the bed. [...] He thought only her delicate skin and golden hair, and wondered whether she was a real live person, or one of the wax dolls he had seen in the shops. (*WB* 17)

It is only after Tom sees Ellie that he starts to question the life he has been leading. This marks Tom’s first awakening to his reality. He suddenly gets embarrassed by his dirt and asks himself “And are all people like that when they are washed?” (*WB* 17). He subsequently looks at his own wrist, and tries to rub the soot off, and wonders whether it ever would come off and also thinks that he should look much prettier if he grew at all like that (*WB* 17). After Tom sees his own reflection on the mirror in Ellie’s room, he is taunted by his miserable condition for the second time. It is indicated in the novel that “for the first time in his life, [he finds] out that he [is] dirty” and “burst[s] into

tears with shame and anger” (*WB* 17), because the image he sees on the mirror is “little, ugly, black, ragged figure, with bleared eyes and grinning white teeth” (*WB* 17). The events following Tom’s encounter with Ellie show once again the discriminative and insulting attitude of the upper class towards the underprivileged individuals in Victorian society. Ellie, seeing a stranger in her room shrieks and alarms the entire household as well as Mr. Grimes. Already a “victim of industrial society”, Tom “is consequently hounded out of Harthover House” (Webb 59). The entire household as well as Mr. Grimes think that Tom has stolen something from the house, and they do not even attempt to learn the truth only to find Tom’s clothes by the river.

As Tom tries to escape the household and Mr. Grimes, he cannot find any place to take refuge in. When he finally finds a cottage, which proves to be a kind of school, his dirtiness and unworthiness as a chimney-sweeper that he has overlooked for years are recalled to him once again. Once he is in the cottage, “[a]ll the children start[...] at Tom’s dirty black figure; the girls [begin] to cry; and the boys [begin] to laugh, and all point [...] at him rudely enough” (*WB* 29). As for their teacher, she with frustration asks Tom “What art thou, and what dost want?” (*WB* 29). Seeing that he is a chimney-sweeper, she further adds that “A chimney-sweep! Away with thee! I’ll have no sweeps here” (*WB* 29). With the reactions of the school children and their teacher, Tom confronts his dirtiness and his miserable condition for the third time. His physical dirt becomes a reminder for him of his difference from the other school children as a chimney-sweeper, namely an outcast and an outsider. As he falls into a deep sleep with fatigue, he dreams of a lady advising him to go and wash himself (*WB* 31). Tom’s dream, in addition to engendering religious readings, shows that he turns his physical dirtiness into an obsession. Once he is awake, he decides to get into the river with the urge and the desire of becoming a clean boy just like Ellie and the school children. It should be noted that “being clean” at this point does not simply refer to Tom’s getting the sooth off his clothes and skin, but it transforms into a symbol pointing at his wish to be freed from all of the pejorative attributes of being a chimney-sweeper. Tom “pull[s] off all his clothes in haste” and puts firstly his feet and then all of his body into the water (*WB* 31). This, on the one hand, evokes baptism. On the other hand, it symbolizes his unconscious wish to leave behind the burdens of his life as a chimney-sweeper. Tom basically wants to start a new and assumedly better life like a new-born baby. After Tom gets into the water, he once again falls asleep and wakes up as a water-baby with gills grown under his ears. Even though Tom’s sleep points at his possible death, his transformation is presented in

such a joyous way that it eventually comes to be a symbol of rebirth, renewal, and rejuvenation.

Gillian Beer maintains that Kingsley's "concern [in his fiction] is to show the way life is lived now, even if this means flouting accepted literary canons" (247). Indeed, Kingsley's transition from nineteenth-century realism to fantasy through characterization of Tom as a water-baby does not let him sever his ties with reality and real-world problems. His main concern still remains to be finding "some sense of solution to his own spiritual and intellectual crises" (Webb 57). As Webb suggests Kingsley "create[s] an alternative landscape, a water-scape of the imagination" to "confront the conflict which he could not resolve within reality" (59). Therefore, Kingsley's invention of underwater world as an alternative space and his depiction of Tom as a water-baby function for him (among many other functions) as a tool for delivering his criticism of Victorian society and its exploitation of children in various ways. It is subsequently revealed in the novel that there are, in fact, many water-babies under the water and they share the same destiny with Tom to a large extent. It is openly stated that in the novel that water-babies are those children who are neglected by their "cruel mothers and fathers", who are "untaught and brought up heathens" and "who come to grief by ill-usage or ignorance or neglect" and "all the little children who are over-laid, or given gin when they are young", or those who "are let to drink out of hot kettles, or to fall into the fire; all the little children in alleys and courts, and tumble-down cottages, who die by fever, and cholera", and all the little children who have been killed by cruel monsters and wicked soldiers; they were all there" (*WB* 104). Given that, the unconventional characterisation Kingsley resorts to allows him to engage in a simultaneously entertaining and fierce debate on the victimization of children in Victorian society. Throughout the novel, the water-babies stand out as an emblem of those children who are abused in one way or another by the society which is encapsulated by corruption and selfishness.

On the one hand, Tom's transformation creates for him a sense of emancipation from the constraints of his life as a chimney-sweeper. When Tom sees himself turned into an amphibious being, he does not show any sign of despair. Instead, he is overjoyed to become anything but a chimney-sweeper. On the other hand, his journey gives him the moral education which he has been denied to in his previous life. As a water-baby, Tom this time "learn[s] from nature, rather than the society of man", which has already failed him before (Webb 60). As soon as Tom transforms into a water-baby, he forgets about the sorrows of his

former life and also the bad habits he saw and adopted from the bad role models before him:

Tom was amphibious; and what is better still, he was clean. For the first time in his life, he felt how comfortable it was to have nothing on him but himself. [...] He did not remember having ever been dirty. Indeed, he did not remember any of his old troubles, being tired, or hungry, or beaten or sent up dark chimneys. Since that sweet sleep, he had forgotten all about his master, and Harthover Place, and the little white girl, and in a word, all that happened to him when he lived before; and what was best of all, he had forgotten all the bad words which he had learnt from Grimes, and the rude boys with whom he used to play. (WB46)

Tom's new life as a water-baby is guided by various kinds of talking sea-animals such as trout, salmon, crabs as well as fairy ladies such as Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, her sister Madame Doasyouwouldbedoneby, and Mother Carey, who all act as fairy god-mothers for the water-babies. For Tom, his adventures and encounters help him learn to differentiate between good and bad and become a well-mannered boy. Nevertheless, for the reader -especially an adult one- various ongoing conflicts in the underwater world turn into a critical reflection of the society which exploits those that are underprivileged. Even though fantasy literature takes a distinct flight from conventionally realistic representations and tends to engage in inventing alternative world orders, the relationship between fantasy worlds created in fantasy fiction and real world deserves a scrutiny. In *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Peter Hunt emphasizes that

knowledge of this world is necessary to invent one. Fantasy is, because of its relationship to reality, very knowing: alternative worlds must necessarily be related to, and comment on the real world. Fantasy cannot be 'free-floating' or entirely original [...] It must be understandable in terms of its relationship to, or deviance from, our known world. (7)

Hunt's formulation of fantasy as closely related to the real world applies well to Kingsley's underwater world, which proves to be a reflection of the predicaments of Victorian society. The various species of sea creatures, their histories, and the dynamics of their relationship with each other become eligible to be read as symbolic renditions of the conflicts central to the Victorian Era such as exploitation, inequality, and class distinction.

The exemplary story about the trouts, for example, can be interpreted as mirroring the self-centred and rapacious society as depicted in the first part of the novel. The trouts, according to the story, were once the relations of salmons. However, they in time grew “so lazy, cowardly, and greedy” (*WB* 67), and “instead of going down to the sea every year to see the world and grow strong and fat they chose to stay and poke about in the little steams and eat worms” (*WB* 67). The trouts have become so degraded in their tastes that they even attempted to eat salmon’s, that is to say their relative’s, children (*WB* 67). The trouts obviously stand for many things that Kingsley found wrong in Victorian society: greediness, degeneration, and selfishness and so forth. Yet, their attempt at eating salmon’s children, being the most terrifying detail about them, takes us back to the issue of child abuse. Through the degeneration of trouts, Kingsley makes a reference to the corruption ongoing in society and criticizes child labour and other practices where mankind abuses and exploits its own offspring.

In the meantime, Kingsley also criticizes the arrogance of Victorian society by means of his depiction of salmon as contemptuous fish. The salmon think of themselves as “the lords of the fish” being “so proud” and “bully[ing] the little trout, and minnows” (*WB* 58). Despite their vanity, the salmon cannot escape falling prey to other sea-animals or to men. This biological pyramid recalls the hierarchical relationship between the social classes of Victorian society, which is depicted in the first part of the novel. The household of Sir John’s mansion, representing the upper-class values, exercises a certain kind of power on Mr. Grimes who apparently stands for the working class. However, in Mr. Grimes’ relationship with Tom, Mr. Grimes, now being a master-sweep, stands out as the person who is in control of things. Tom, situated at the lowest step of the social ladder like the trouts, is deemed an ultimate outcast. The final remarks of the narrator regarding the enmity between salmons and trouts clarify Kingsley’s main motivation in inscribing this story in the novel. The narrator maintains that “no enemies are so bitter against each other as those who are of the same race; and a salmon looks on a trout, as some great folks look on some little folks” (*WB* 67). For Kingsley, the enmity between sea-animals functions as a way of drawing attention to the evil nature of mankind. The sea-animals as feeding on each other’s offspring as well as entrapping, looking down on, and ostracising one another suggest that humans might also become the greatest threat against those from their own kind.

Even though Tom is surrounded by many forms of evilness, inequality, and injustice in this new world, his second-life as a water-

baby helps him evaluate both himself and other people's actions from a different perspective. As Piers J. Hale also underlines, Tom learns his lessons "by doing, by experimenting, by experience, and by trial and error" (562). Accordingly, this journey becomes for him a path to "becoming a young Christian English gentleman", and better yet Tom's journey functions as a way of awakening him to the corruptions, vices, and misconducts, and hypocrisies of the society he used to be unaware of as an innocent chimney-sweeper (Hale 563).

As Tom becomes alienated from his own kind and his former reality, he can now see the evil nature of humans and their ill-deeds more clearly. One of these awakenings occurs when Tom encounters a group of men trying to catch salmon by deceiving them with light. At this scene, Tom abruptly starts to think humans as savage and selfish beings. He shudders and turns "sick at them", he feels that they were "strange, and ugly, and wrong, and horrible" (*WB* 69). He further thinks that "they were men; and they were fighting; savage, desperate, up-and-down fighting" (*WB* 69). Tom's detest of the fishermen's exploitation of salmon does not result merely from an environmentalist attitude, but it transforms into a grand symbol unfolding the savageness of mankind who tends to usurp and benefit from those that are underprivileged and not as strong as them. Fishermen trying to entrap the salmon thus become a symbol of firstly Mr. Grimes bullying Tom and secondly the entire upper-class which exploits, ostracizes and eventually degenerates the working class for its very own interests.

The underwater world of Kingsley does not only stand out as a site for reverberating the unethical and exploitive practices of Victorian society. It occasionally inclines to transgress the distinction between the upper-class and working class by subverting morally wrong practices of Victorian society. The novel poses this kind of subversion specifically when Tom arrives St. Brandan, an island, where the water-babies live. The island of St. Brandan, first of all, proves to be a utopia, an ideal space, where the water-babies are given back the opportunities they have been taken from by the self-seeking and materialist Victorian society in real life. In real life, chimney-sweepers like Tom as well as children from subordinate classes are deprived of formal and moral education. Nevertheless, on this fairy island, the water-babies are given formal education in "a neat little Sunday-school", and they are also provided with a comfortable and peaceful living environment. Contrary to the unsanitary places Tom and the other water-babies probably slept in real life, the water babies sleep on the "soft white sand" on St. Brandan (*WB* 102).

Kingsley's critique of Victorian society becomes rather explicit in his representation of the working class on the island. On St. Brandan, as the narrator puts it, "the crabs pick[...] up all the scraps off the floor and [eat] them like so many monkeys [...] to keep the place clean and sweet" for the water-babies (*WB* 102). The analogy between the chimney-sweepers clearing the soot from the chimneys and crabs picking up the scraps off the sand is quite evident. However, on this utopic island, the laborers are treated ethically and respectfully contrary to the ones in the real life. Regarding how the water-babies and fairies respect the labouring crabs, the narrator openly maintains that

But, to make up to them for having to do such nasty work, they were not left black and dirty as poor chimney-sweepers and dustmen are. No; the fairies are more considerate and just than that; and have dressed them all in the most beautiful colours and patterns, till they look like vast flower-beds of gay blossoms. (*WB* 102-3)

Therefore, one can claim that the underwater world Kingsley depicts is neither entirely perfect nor completely degenerated. It is, in fact, a sophisticated society where evil and good co-exist, unethical exercises are unfolded and different perceptions are given voice. The hard-work, morality and egalitarianism are appreciated and also awarded in the magical underwater world.

Tom's moral evolution and his transition from a chimney-sweeper to an English gentleman come to an end with him finding Mr. Grimes under the water and helping him repent his crimes. By portraying Tom as a guiding figure and role model before Mr. Grimes, Kingsley returns to the beginning of the novel but only to rework it in subversive terms. By doing this, Kingsley transgresses the boundaries between such dualities as master/apprentice, adult/child, and employer/employee, and renders underwater as subversive with regard to power relations prevailing in Victorian society. Tom's award in return for the completion of his moral tests is to go back to the real world as a moral, conscientious, and hard-working boy. As such, the novel returns to its realist frame once again yet offering this time an alternative reality for Tom. Tom not only becomes "a great man of science" in future but he also befriends Ellie, the sight of whom initiated Tom's journey in the first place (*WB* 179). As a result, the constant acts of transitions and exchanges between underwater and real world gradually obscure the boundaries between fantasy and reality. This intertwinement of fantasy and realism not only performs a liberating function for the child labourer but it also suggests a

rehabilitation for the corrupt society and offers an image of a relatively ideal society at least on a narrative level.

In conclusion, despite being written for children, Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* is a multi-layered novel which dwells upon many issues, concerns and problems of the adult-world. In this entertaining and exciting story about a child who transforms into a semi-fish, one simultaneously reads a socially-conscious one that draws attention to class-distinction, poverty, struggles of working class, and most significantly exploitation of children for economic interests. Contrary to his contemporaries who portrays the cruelty of child labour simply through realistic depictions, Kingsley, in *The Water-Babies*, offers an alternative sphere, a magical underwater world, where the misconducts of Victorian society are laid bare and criticized through symbolic renditions. As a result, Kingsley's use of fantasy so as to critique the social problems of the period shows that the use of fantastic elements in children's literature does not merely provide entertainment for the child readers; on the contrary, fantasy, even in children's books, can function as an alternative way of contemplating on and problematizing real-world issues.

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The Child and the Impossible Endings in Beckett's *The Calmative* and *Endgame*

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Abstract: Waiting, even in the theatre of the absurd, could contain the testimony of an existence. Such testimony is expressed in a Story, therefore waiting and its compensatory stories and myths are intrinsically related. For Samuel Beckett, the end of a story as a story is possible, the end of a story as an ending is impossible. *The Calmative* could be seen as the story Hamm (*Endgame*) longs to escape into. Unable to move, Hamm longs to find himself in the forests. Of all the characters in *Endgame*, Hamm is the most aware of the philosophy of the ending. It is the very presence of a boy and boyhood (not in a descriptive way, but as an essential opposition, as a stage of life or of the soul when things could have developed differently) that can join together the theme of ending with the theme of paternity, on one hand, corroborating them with the presence of a Story (and therefore of the myth, too) and the presence of waiting as a way to end the ending, by making through to it (on the other hand). The little boy in Hamm's story-within-the-play appears to be motherless, his story happens on Christmas, the little boy will be saved from starvation but will not be saved from the condemnation to life. More likely than not, the little boy is Clov at the age of innocence, before being deformed within any co-dependent relationship. Not the fact that the old man in *the Calmative* is dead is ambiguous, but the stage of his journey after death is ambiguous. The ending of *The Calmative* is one of the best depiction in world literature about the mystery of a post-mortem existence aware of itself.

Key words: Samuel Beckett, ending, myth, child, boyhood, waiting, fatherhood

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Motto:
CLOV: The end is terrific!
HAMM: I prefer the middle.
(Pause.)
Is it not time for my pain-killer?
(S. Beckett- Endgame)

Waiting and Nothingness

Waiting, even in the theatre of the absurd, could contain the testimony of an existence. Such testimony is expressed in a Story, therefore waiting and its compensatory stories and myths are intrinsically related. For Samuel Beckett, the end of a story as a story is possible, the end of a story as an ending is impossible.

Yes, there are moments, like this moment, when I seem almost restored to the feasible. Then it goes, all goes, and I'm far again, with a far story again, I wait for me afar for my story to begin, to end, and again this voice cannot be mine. That's where I'd go, if I could go, that's who I'd be, if I could be (Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing* – 4 – p. 94).

Waiting makes nothingness something with-standable. There is a difference between telling a story and living in an illusion. For Beckett, living in the world of illusion means denying the existence of death. A story coming as a replacer of somebody's existence does not mean necessarily the denial of death. On the contrary, it means letting the words be edgy and confrontational against the certitude of death. At a surface level, this could mean opposing rhetoric to the gravity of death. An insanely unbalanced confrontation. But under this surface, Beckett's trust in words is unbeatable. Words could be used as in Lucky's discourse, in *Waiting for Godot*. They reveal their emptiness. They create and perpetuate endless galimatias. Or words could be used as Hamm uses them, cleverly and in a cruel way. "Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer– says Hamm, complaining about his sufferance. He distorts the sense of his suffering by referring to his parents as being such creatures'. In *Fin de partie*, the French version : «Oh je veux bien qu'ils souffrent autant que de tels êtres peuvent souffrir.» The juggle between representative and expressive illocutionary acts, undertaken by Hamm, has a directive aim: to force Clov to act in a certain way. At the same time, the swift from representative to expressive makes appeal to sincerity. In the absence of sincerity, the expressive act of speech, an exclamation,

would be pointless. How is the condition of sincerity fulfilled? Only and only if Hamm sincerely believes in his role as a victim. But even he believes it, even if he does not, he finds a compensatory mechanism in performing injuries against the other three characters. These injuries are performed through Hamm's acts of speech on the stage. The person unable to move and see, Hamm, uses most directive illocutionary acts. He diverts representative acts into expressive ones. Why does Hamm never address Nell directly? He addresses the couple, he gives order about them. Nell echoes or mimics or translates into louder voice Hamm's phrase about the vein. Nell's last addressee in speech is Clov. But the dialogue Hamm-Nell, irrespectively Nell-Hamm is avoided, as if marked by guilt. (Hamm's guilt).

As Judith Butler says, in her book, *The Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*,

"we ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory.(...)Thus, we exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force, caught up in a bind that no act of censorship can undo". (Butler, p. 12)

Hamm's speech acts, not in their entirety, only when addressing Clov and the couple Nagg-Nell, have more to do with what has been defined as 'hate speech'.

According to this illocutionary model [reference to Mari Matsuda], hate speech *constitutes* its addressee at the moment of its utterance; it does not describe an injury or produce one as a consequence; it is, in the very speaking of such speech, the performance of the injury itself, where the injury is understood as social subordination. (Butler, p. 29).

There is a Hamm who uses 'hate speech' to produce injuries through his very speech when his discourse is directed at the others and there is a Hamm who says things bearing the mark of lucidity. Hamm's lucidity views the existence of the ending.

The speech acts in the story *The Calmative* have a different function. The stories published first in French at Minuit, Paris, in 1958 are: *Nouvelles et texts pour rien*. The 1967 edition in English contains the stories –*The Expelled, The Calmative, The End*– followed by *The Texts for Nothing*.

As the narrating voice of *The Calmative* says, *All I say cancels*

out, I'll have said nothing. Here we have not only an inability to reach an ending, but also the inability of words to have a lasting effect. The enactor of these words, the I, the voice who speaks, is to be blamed for words' rapid effacement. Is the existence in relation to his own self that is being effaced or in relation to others?

But there was never any city but the one. It is true you often move along in a dream, houses and factories darken the air, trams go by, and under your feet wet from the grass there are suddenly cobbles. I only know the city of my childhood, I must have seen the other, but unbelieving. All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing. (*The Calmative*)²

The Calmative could be seen as the story Hamm (*Endgame*) longs to escape into. Unable to move, Hamm longs to find himself in forests.

The narrator of *The Calmative* is also a witness of his own lack of traces. Later in the story we find out that his pain has disappeared. "But here a strange thing, yet another, I had no pain whatever, not even in my legs".

When he interacts with the people he meets, it becomes clear that he belongs to a different realm of existence. He is no longer in the realm of the living creatures. And he remembers the mouth of hell, as if he has already passed through it. A little boy with a nanny goat approaches him. The old man, namely the narrator, tries to utter some words to him.

So I marshalled the words and opened my mouth, thinking I would hear them. But all I heard was a kind of rattle, unintelligible even to me who knew what was intended. But it was nothing, mere speechlessness due to long silence, as in the wood that darkens the mouth of hell, do you remember, I only just. (Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing: The Calmative*, p.33).

L'Expulsé, *Le Calmant*, *La Fin* are the initial titles of the stories, before being translated into English by their author. *The Calmative* is the middle one. The story of *Le Calmant* (*The Calmative*) fits perfectly the dialogue in *Endgame* between Clov and Hamm. Hamm says that he prefers the middle and his next sentence is to ask for his pain-killer. The existence told in *The Calmative* is one exploring the after-death realm, but with a suspended ending. It is not yet time for *the*

² As an online resource, see Samuel Beckett, *The Calmative*. Online bilingual edition > https://social.stoa.usp.br/articles/0016/1697/The_Calmative_O_Calmante_Samuel_Beckett_trad.pdf

unnameable.

The end is kept open by a perfect equivoque. The self is equidistant from two possibilities. One is the stars were there, the other is the stars were not there. 'There' represents the realm where the narrator ends his journey. It also refers to what he is supposed to encounter in this final act, light or clouds. The final act is the closest possible facing *the blinding void*. Had the clouds always been there, and it is only a matter of perception that he could not see them sooner? The clouds are obstructing the stars. But they also mean that light and stars are not to be expected in the final act, light and stars are just the illusions of somebody situated on earth. The other possible ending: the end of his world is the end of world. Light and stars are not illusions. Taking this journey through words that cancel out very quickly, rendering thus the illusion of new actions at the present continuous, recomposing the 'living in the present' of a mortal life, the old man faces the very end of his after-life exploration (with no pain in the legs). His being is steeped into light. This light extinguishes the stars. Unless... they had never been there:

The ending of this short prose, the very ending, makes the reader cringe subjugated by beauty and horrendousness:

But reality, too tired to look for the right word, was soon restored, the throng fell away, the light came back and I had no need to raise my head from the ground to know I was back in the same blinding void as before. I said, Stay where you are, down on the friendly stone, or at least indifferent, don't open your eyes, and wait for morning. But up with me again and back on the way that was not mine, on uphill along the boulevard. A blessing he was not waiting for me, poor old Breem, or Breen. I said, The sea is east, it's west I must go, to the left of north. But in vain I raised without hope my eyes to the sky to look for the Bears. For the light I stepped in put out the stars, assuming they were there, which I doubted, remembering the clouds. (*The Calmative*)

The very ending of *The Calmative* puts together reality, the power of words to bring a life back, the light of another realm, an unlimited one, versus the clouds and the doubt, the perception flowing into a new memory, which is nothing but a way to kill the ending and to end the revelation or the belonging to something else but nothingness. This fragment is for sure one of the best depiction in world literature of the mystery of a post-mortem existence aware of itself. Just like in *Endgame*, where we find out through the impossibility of departure, that one window is facing the ocean, and the other is facing the earth, the man who waits for the morning from *The Calmative* may be in his

graveyard. He was granted one last voyage because he had memory and he had words to use in his encounter with other passers-by, who, unlike him, are alive for sure. But will he go to the left of north, opposite the sea? That means, if we take into account the symbols present in *Endgame*, water and earth, that closing to his final words, he must find earth again, he must be buried in earth. This was before grave, now there is nothing but the grave.

Were the stars there, and he experiences the beauty of their other dimension, belonging to an after-life realm, or is it an illusion, a reason to doubt, the clouds are all what he *remembers*, meaning that the clouds themselves are a memory and this memory is "killing" the ending.

Finding oneself in the illusion that nothingness is not certain is not enough. An equivalence between misfortunes as a laughable thing and waiting can be traced. The Beckettian laughter at tragic happenings (see Nell) and living with the certitude of nothingness redeems the power of life. The character in *The Calmative* is far from being a god-like figure, an aspect that could have been granted by his supra-terrestrial meanderings. In such a case, he would have looked for adoration, not for mutuality. But "fallen into his bodily functions as an invictus, the god-like character is seeking to be adored." (Miheţ, *Fapte vii în labirint*, p.10). The people encountered by the narrator of *The Calmative* seem to go in the opposite direction from him; however, a man will be seated on a bench.

The Child versus the Wanderer Self

The narrator is offered a sweet out of a twist of paper, a sweet that could have cost a penny. He has not been offered a sweet for at least eighty years. His age must be somewhere in between eighty and ninety. His father died at a younger age. The hand of 'the little man' brushed the narrator's hand when trying to separate the sweets stuck together. It is the moment of this brief touch that brings the awareness of an essential incompatibility between the two worlds. The narrating voice is carried on by memory, the same memory dictating the gesture of eating the sweet. Memory grants existence to this encounter with a boy. It is a meeting that could be repeated in future only if the adult memory of the boy will recall it. For the time being, the meeting of the two human beings –one alive and one no longer alive– is possible because it is re-created by the exploring memory of the narrator. The man even remembers that he could have blushed, but there was not enough blood in his extremities. He has already died, but instead of hearing himself rot, he prefers to tell himself a story, in which his wanderer self (not his

immobilized self) explores post-existence.

Where is he, the wandered self, we might ask? Living with corpses is a dreadful thing from the perspective of someone living. For somebody in a post-existence it means merely being together with those of a kind (corpses). Is he in a kind of purgatory? Maybe not a purgatory in a religious sense, but a purgatory in a spatial and temporal sense, a place from where a final destination will be reached. Death as the ending of the endings or, on the contrary, the unknown. The unknown might be another threshold of impossibility.

Of all the characters in the play, he is the most aware of the philosophy of the ending. He tells the phrase that the ending go on. His counterpart, Clov, says at the beginning nearly finished. Clov is in the realm where there is a fissure in the ending, and he can stick to it, to the fissure. He can take the fissure as a lever, to live life fully, and that would mean deserting Hamm (taking Nell's advice to desert, literally, Nell's last word on this earth. But instead, Hamm wins over Clov's last gesture. Let us say that when retold, Nell advice becomes something to laugh at, something totally inoperable, when translated into a reported discourse. It is not the dependency on Hamm that wins, but Hamm's lucidity. The final strike of the hammer (Hamm) on the nail (Clov- clou in French). There is no else to go and to be in the zone of the nearly finished. The risk of going into the finished is the risk of embracing life even tighter.

Clov's last appearance is that of a masked self, a self in disguise. He has panama hat, before he changed boots instead of slippers.

But he has in the upper hand in the emotional reign. Clov has the upper hand with Hamm in the emotions, just as Hamm has the upper hand over Clov in the lucidity.

Unable to advance, Beckett's character Hamm punishes through words, while his counterpart Clov punishes through gestures. Hamm's last favour, refused by Clov, should have been to be covered by the sheet. Hamm must do it himself. This prevents Clov from staging Hamm in the pose of the beginning. Clov's not doing it is like the equivalent of not accepting to embrace Hamm. Not accepting to embrace Hamm is the expression of too many frustrations bottled up

Glimpses of Tenderness

A moment of tenderness has already happened between Hamm and Clov, and that moment is represented by Hamm's story, a story in which a starving child becomes the main character. The child is Clov himself, when he was a 'tiny boy'. Clov's biological father received the job as a gardener. He had a problem, a baggage, a little boy left asleep.

Hamm's family is reluctant to accept the little boy. On one hand, the story is biased, Hamm portrays himself as the hero who saved Clov from a certain form of death. On the other hand, this moment reveals the depth of their interconnectedness. But also this story professed by Hamm as if we were a writer or a composer does contain the maximum of tenderness expressed by Hamm. Hamm substitutes himself to Clov's memory.

Clov's real father seems to be even further from him in the dialogue. He becomes that man. Nothing is told about him, about what he has done, if he survived or not. He was accompanied with the not so funny news that in this new kind of job one could die of natural death.

Is this a way to symbolically kill Clov's natural father, to replace him?

Why would want Hamm to become Clov's memory?

The display of tenderness goes from father to son. Apart from Hamm to Clov, tenderness is also present when Nagg tells Hamm that he was the one to protect Hamm child when he was crying. He said that the situation could be reversed. This is a situation about the human need to be needed.

Was Hamm blind as a child, or is it a progressive blindness? He was afraid of dark that could mean that he was not blind? In his condition, he is moved by Clov bit by bit. This means that they are like on a chess board. This reference to chess has been invoked many times so far

In the French version of the play, red does not appear as referring to Hamm's face. Nell and Nagg have white faces. They are on the same side. In England chess is a combination of tensions between red and white, while in other countries, the chess pieces are called black and white.

Why would be on the same side, and against the other side?

In *the Calmative*, the man has died already, but instead of hearing himself rot he prefers to unleash the possibilities of the Story and of the myth:

I don't know when I died. It always seemed to me I died old, about ninety years old, and what years, and that my body bore it out, from head to foot. But this evening, alone in my icy bed, I have the feeling I'll be older than the day, the night, when the sky with all its lights fell upon me, the same I had so often gazed on since my first stumblings on the distant earth. For I'm too frightened this evening to listen to myself rot.

The rest of the paragraph is horrible if contemplated from the world of

the living ones, but not so horrible if contemplated from the vicinity of other corpses. In *Malone dies*, the waiting that prevents an achievable ending is called *the waiting that knows itself in vain*. A story is an act of inventing a life. The end of story means reaching nothingness. The waiting that contains the ultimate reality of nothingness can make it through to the other end. The story reaching nothingness becomes real. *Because nothing is more real than nothing*. To reach nothingness is an inner transformation not granted to all people, shared by the protagonists of *Texts for nothing*.

The Art of Seeing Nothingness

The painting, the story of the tailor and the visit to an old friend, a painter and engraver are at least three elements in *Endgame* related to the theme of art and its capabilities to offer an exit.

The painting is reverted from the spectator's view, so it rests, suggest the inability of art to grasp the world. It resembles the inferno with no mirrors, as in Sartre's *Huit clos*.

The joke with the tailor means the story is more powerful than an anecdote. It is not a pastime either. In the French version the accent is on the vain glory of the tailor. It is true that there are implicit references to how the sexuality of the wearer of the trousers will be. But overall it could refer to the inability of art to see nothingness. The painter paints nothing, he is offered the theme, the beauty of the theme. But unlike the tailor who does nothing and boasts (by not being able to see beyond the complacency of his illusion), the painter is the real artist. He sees ashes. He has a vision granted to few. A madman, the unnamed painter and engraver in *Endgame*, has eyes for nothingness in a privileged moment of revelation.

He sees ashes instead of beauty. But at the same time, he pays a price with his own sanity. He actually sacrifices his sanity. The mad painter in *Endgame* could launch his gaze into nothingness.

And without going so far as that, he who has waited long enough will wait for ever. And there comes the hour when nothing more can happen and nobody more can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain. Perhaps he had come to that. And when (for example) you die, it is too late, you have been waiting too long, you are no longer sufficiently alive to be able to stop". (*Malone dies*:242)³

³https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.125753/2015.125753.Molloy-Malone-Dies-The-Unnamable_djvu.txt

Actually, the painter has the ability to see beyond and to adapt himself to what he sees through insanity.

Childhood is the age of purity not aware of itself and not altered by the irreversibility of time. The present article aims to contrast the presence of children versus mature, irrespective old age in Beckett's famous play, *Endgame* and in *The Calmative*.

Childhood as the Age when Ending Is Impossible

Childhood could be also the age unaware of endings, the age which does not know that the ending is impossible. Waiting cannot imprint its exhaustion on childhood, waiting needs duration. Is the presence of a child able to counter anxiety? Both in the play *Endgame* and in the prose *The Calmative* the references to children carry on a special tenderness. Yet these references are unable to forecast a different future. In *Endgame* the child appears in the story told by Hamm, a failed attempt to instil meaning into his life or to pass his time. There is also a possible survivor of humanity.

Living through words as the ultimate resort to aliveness is a theme accurately staged by Samuel Beckett both in his story, *The Calmative*, and in his famous play, *Endgame*. These two works have an obvious recurring element, i. e. dealing with endings, ending life or lives, ending the anxiety of living together with other human beings, ending of nature(*Endgame*), ending of time and the impossible ending (the *Calmative*). The ending might appear as a collection of faux exits: *This is what we call making an exit*. (Clov, *Endgame*). Actually, the prose and the play are connected by the author himself, when he contrasts Hamm's reply about preferring the middle, not the end, with the very time of a ritual gesture, that of taking a pain-killer. Both writings attest that, in the absence of maternity, fatherhood takes all the heaviness of existence and can only perpetuate it, not finding the exit but also not finding the end, somehow damned to repeat the same story or to turn it into a compensatory myth. "So I'll tell myself a story, I'll try and tell myself another story, to try and calm myself, and it's there I feel I'll be old, old, even older than the day I fell, calling for help, and it came." (*The Calmative*)

It is the very presence of a boy and boyhood (not in a descriptive way, but as an essential opposition, as a stage of life or of the soul when things could have developed differently) that can join together the theme of ending with the theme of paternity, on one hand, corroborating them with the presence of a Story(and therefore of the myth, too) and the presence of waiting as a denial of the ending, as a way to end the ending, by making through to it(on the other hand). In

the absence of this Beckettian waiting, and despite of it, the end repeats itself. Actually, waiting does not halt the ending from engendering itself again, but is, at least, an attempt to “kill” it, to be over, so as to make it reach-able. “The end is in the beginning and yet you go on. (Pause.) Perhaps I could go on with my story, end it and begin another.” (Hamm, *Endgame*)

Waiting kills the ending the same way memory is *killing*, in Beckett’s own words as present in the prose *The Expelled*: “Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don’t there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little.” (Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing*, p. 9)

Paternity and myth are present in the theme of the absent father, in the prayer scene of *Endgame*, a scene reflection the impossibility of praying, the lack of communion and the severed exchange of energies between the cosmic and the terrestrial. Apart from this aspect, the relationship between Oedipus and Tiresias seems to be enacted in the play. Hamm is already blind, like Tiresias, and he warns his co-dependant servant and son figure that he would be like him, caught in the act of motionless sitting, but without a co-dependant person to pity him. “Yes, one day you’ll know what it is, you’ll be like me, except that you won’t have anyone with you, because you won’t have had pity on anyone and because there won’t be anyone left to have pity on you”.

In the myth, as in Sophocles’s play, Tiresias is accompanied by a boy, thus having the eyesight of immediate things, being able to walk on the road. The boy does not help him with the innate vision of what gods transmitted to him, but he is a companion, a guarantor of innocence and a witness of telling the truth in peace, without the turmoil it shall stir. In the little boy’s presence the wrath of an unawaken Oedipus cannot fully reach Tiresias, as long as there is an innocent witness. At the level of the fatherhood theme, as present both in *The Calmative* and *Endgame*, the word *end* is also present in the verb to engender, which is reproached by Hamm to Nagg.

CLOV: Do you believe in the life to come?

HAMM: Mine was always that. (Exit Clov.) Got him that time!

NAGG: I'm listening

HAMM: Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?

NAGG: I didn't know.

HAMM: What? What didn't you know?

NAGG: That it'd be you. (Pause.) You'll give me a sugar-plum?

HAMM: After the audition.

NAGG: You swear?

HAMM: Yes.

NAGG: On what?

HAMM: My honour. (Pause. They laugh heartily.)

NAGG: Two.

HAMM: One.

NAGG: One for me and one for—

HAMM: One! Silence! (Pause.) Where was I? (Pause. Gloomily.) It's finished, we're finished. (Pause.) Nearly finished. (Pause.) There'll be no more speech. (Pause.) (*Endgame*)

At this point of the play, before the continuation of the story about the little boy, who can be no other than Clov child, despite the ambiguities intended by the author, another ambiguous moment is turned into a certitude. Now it is beyond doubt what has happened to Nell. Nagg wants two sugar-plums, the avarice of Hamm dictates just one, but the spectators are aware that there is no more recipient of the other sugar-plum. Nell has been speechless for quite a long now, as if she were expelled from the play by the story about the little boy. Her absence has turned into a confirmed death. The little boy in Hamm's story appears to be motherless, his story happens on Christmas, the little boy will be saved from starvation but will not be saved from the condemnation to life. More likely than not, the little boy is Clov at the age of innocence, before being deformed within the co-dependent relationship he has in this house, and "memories are killing", as Beckett says, therefore this is what Hamm's reprisal of the Story does to him. As a slight revenge, Clov reproaches Hamm the death of Mother Pegg, extinguished because of lack of light.

In the absence of motherhood, the world will be an inferno condemned to implicit hierarchies in the father-son relationships. The blindness will be inherited backwards, from father to son. The cruelty and lack of pity with which Nell's death is encountered will mean the perpetuation of cruelty with no end and the impossibility to feel compassion. Hamm seems to be more drowned in a form of self-pity as he threatens, like Tiresias, Clov, an Oedipus who had to kill, symbolically, his father, (Clov's biological father) by casting him out from his own memories. Here is that part in the first form of the play, written in French:

HAMM. - ... (*Prophétique et avec volupté.*) Un jour tu seras aveugle. Comme moi. Tu seras assis quelque part, petit plein perdu dans le vide, pour toujours, dans le noir. Comme moi. (*Un temps.*) Un jour tu te diras, Je suis fatigué, je vais m'asseoir, et tu iras t'asseoir. Puis tu te diras, J'ai faim, je vais me lever et me faire à manger. Mais tu ne te lèveras pas. Tu te diras, J'ai eu tort de m'asseoir, mais puisque je me

suis assis je vais rester assis encore un peu. Puis je me lèverai et je me ferai à manger. Mais tu ne te lèveras pas et tu ne te feras pas à manger. (*Un temps.*) Tu regarderas le mur un peu, puis tu te diras, Je vais fermer les yeux, peut-être dormir un peu, après ça ira mieux, et tu les fermeras. Et quand tu les rouvriras il n'y aura plus de mur. (*Un temps.*) L'infini du vide autour de toi, tous les morts de tous les temps ressuscités ne le combleraient pas, tu y seras comme un petit gravier au milieu de la steppe. (***Fin de partie***)

Coming back to the motif of boy and boyhood as present in the narration *The Calmative* and in the play *Endgame*, there is a polarity between old age and boyhood marked by the appearance of children in the two universes of eternal repetition, of eternal return. Both these Beckettian universes, namely that of *Endgame* and, irrespectively, of *The Calmative*, make no room for an ending. The end is impossible. Yet, paradoxically, ending is denied. There is an end to any story, and this makes The Story something attainable through the end. The same is valid for waiting. Not just any waiting, but the Beckettian waiting, a waiting “that knows itself in vain” (*Malone dies*): “He who has waited long enough, will wait forever. And there comes the hour when nothing more can happen and nobody more can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain. “

As the first spoken line of Beckett's 1957-play, written in French first, then auto-translated: *Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.* (*Endgame*). *The Calmative*, the middle part of a trilogy in three short-stories, containing *The Expelled*, as the first one, and *The End*, as the last one, deals with what happens to a soul post-mortem. The soul present in the *Calmative* is actually a conscience narrating encounters with strange people and mixing memories in this vacillating advancement. We know nothing about the old man's means of travelling, of passing by the people of a deserted city. Sometimes he advances in a dream-like state, other times we, the readers, have a feeling that the protagonist is clearly travelling from the direction of sky to the earth.

The theme of fatherhood is the subjacent structure of both *The Calmative* and *Endgame*. The character who is the voice of the story is older than the state of Beckett's father when he was dead. Beckett takes the voice of man, just like Krapp's alter-ego. He has only words but they can account for his existence, they grant him life, at least the life he needs to tell the story. He does not know if he is dead or alive, and we, the readers, do not know either.

He is in the place that belongs to no one. The theme of belonging is also present in the play *Endgame*. We are, as spectators, in whose

house? Whose skull? It is an interior without furniture, so that no one feels welcome, neither the characters nor the spectators. We discovered that Nagg and Nell are Hamm's father and mother. They live in ashbins from which they emerge in the same way: « Le couvercle d'une des poubelles se soulève et les mains de Nagg apparaissent, accrochées au rebord. Puis la tête émerge» . Is Nell still alive at the beginning of the play? It is a difficult question to answer. Nell's death happens on the stage. But in the end game, each day repeats the misfortunes, puts them on stage, recycles them and re-stages them in a new, maybe 'happier' story of repetitive psychological patterns and addictions. "La fin est dans le commencement et cependant on continue.» et «Rien n'est plus drôle que le malheur... C'est la chose la plus comique de monde." (Nell)

In his prose, Beckett attempted the paradoxical enlightenment found after having gone through the deepest pain one discovers in despair and darkness.

All the space in Beckett's theater is suggesting a carceral space. The Beckettian stage space is so interiorized that it becomes an extension of the body. In the play *O, Happy Days*, Winnie is buried alive, and Willie, present and absent, with an obvious scarcity of replies, does not seem alive thorough the scarcity of words.

Samuel Beckett's theatre is cantered on nothingness and empty transcendence⁴. There is only one possible refuge in the Beckettian universe - to be the place of inertia itself⁵... When man confuses himself with inertia, he no longer feels his own paralysis⁶. The body of the Beckettian character is "a suffering body" (« un corps souffrant»), according to Marie-Claude Hubert.

Inertia is also a solution to slow the proximity of death.

Faced with a character who walks with difficulty, there is almost always another who cannot move alone. This is typical for the Beckettian pair of characters, of his famous characters in tandems⁷.

The name of the character Nagg is like the verb to nag, harassing through words, constantly speaking of something. I reckon Nagg is alive, he's not just a voice or a memory. To harass others is an uncomfortable act, but an attestation of life.

Nell, in the English dictionary, is the name Helene or Eleanor.

⁴ see Nicolae Balota, *Literatura absurdului*, Bucuresti, editura Teora, 2000

⁵ Marie Claude Hubert, *Langage et corps fantasme dans le théâtre des années cinquante*, Paris, Librairie Jose Corti, 1987, p. 77.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 76

⁷ Ibidem, p. 81.

The word knell contains (perhaps) the true meaning of her role. It's a very old word, monosyllabic⁸. This word joins the sound of a bell and the sorrow of someone's death. The anticipation of death is also present, as an ominous sound: "to give forth a mournful, ominous, or warning sound. ⁹"

The modern richness in scarcity of words makes the greatness of Beckett's English language, his sense of language being comparable with that of two other geniuses: Shakespeare and Joyce.

So in the Endgame, the final chess endgame, there remains, perhaps, the absence of the theme of motherhood, the absence of the Queen, as an element of absence of balance, and the maximum tension of the paternity theme: between Hamm and Nagg, between Hamm and Clov and between Clov and Nagg. Clov is subservient to Hamm and cruel and disdainful to Nagg, which only shows Nagg's lack of authority. At the same time, Clov does not accomplish all the cruel orders received from Hamm regarding his parents. There is also the absent father, in the religious sense, when they try to pray: the characters achieve the climate of prayer, but they do not arrive there. Their life together is an imputation to divinity. Clov was raised by Hamm and cannot sit, while Hamm cannot move but crawl, yet he travels with his spirit and he imagines himself taking a raft. Hamm is tyrannical, blind and paralyzed. Clov is both Hamm's servant and caretaker. A female character, Pegg, is mentioned in connection with the certainty of her death. She is Mother Pegg, in the sense of old woman. She should be dead since there is no light in her window. Hamm did not help this woman, and Clov tortures Hamm by reminding him of his ingratitude. Pegg could have prevented the action of the play from taking the same repetitive path, but she is gone, so nothing new can occur, no element of surprise.

Nell tells the story of Lake Como, a beautiful story of a happier past. At a certain moment, she does not answer. It's hard to know if Nell is alive at the beginning of the play, because Hamm's parents are half dead, they are condemned to a larval existence. Nell's death passes as a daily fact. Nobody is worried about it. Around the house there is universal death, but in the house hell is to live like a dead person, without hope. Any present character is in a strange place, in his non-

⁸ free online dictionary

[before 950; Middle English *knellen*, *knyllen*, OldEnglish *cynllan*; c. Old Norse *knýla* to beat, strike; akin to Dutch *knallen* to bang, Middle High German *erknellen* to resound]

⁹ Knell *nəl*/ *literary* noun 1.the sound of a bell, especially when rung solemnly for a death or funeral

place in a post-apocalyptic world, maybe in ruins, maybe just under the dominion of death. Hamm says: "Gone from me you'd be dead. CLOV: And vice versa. HAMM: Outside of here it's death!" (Endgame)

The model invoked in father's story in *The Calmative* is one of heroism, but heroism is only an illusion. The concept of mimesis is an illusion too (for Beckett's relationship to illusion, see Tagliaferri, p.23). The act of courage is to assume an existence without illusions. When the character is in the shoes of his father, the reader is aware that the author has given up the mimesis.

Yes, this evening it has to be as in the story my father used to read to me, evening after evening, when I was small and he had all his health, to calm me, evening after evening, year after year it seems to me this evening, which I don't remember much about, except that it was the adventures of one Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse-keeper, a strong muscular lad of fifteen, those were the words, who swam for miles in the night, a knife between his teeth, after a shark, I forget why, out of sheer heroism. He might have simply told me the story, he knew it by heart, so did I, but that wouldn't havees, this evening it has to be as in the story my father used to read to me, evening after evening, when I was small and he had all his health, to calm me, evening after evening, year after year it seems to me this evening, which I don't remember much about, except that it was the adventures of one Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse-keeper, a strong muscular lad of fifteen, those were the words, who swam for miles in the night, a knife between his teeth, after a shark, I forget why, out of sheer heroism." (*The Calmative*)

The stage space in Beckett's theatre cancels the possibility of departure. All that remains in the human condition are the words. But the words are contradictory, they are full of negation. Time has created and will create a wear of movement and life. In this affirmation of life through the capture of words, there are moments of immense tenderness. The relationship of the characters in *Endgame*, unlike in the *Calmative*, shows more clearly that an individual cannot bear his life alone. In *The Calmative*, the voice is that of a dead person, but the stage of his death exploration is ambiguous. This person is in extreme solitude. He just encounters other figures, who act like shadows for him. He is not even in a position of victim versus executioner. That would have been a sign of aliveness. We understand why for Hamm and Clov the allusion to the ending under the form of a crime is very plausible. That would mean an ending indeed, a state in which one person is motionless, but not in inertia, paralysed in the extreme solitude of the tomb.

Man's life becomes tolerable only when he shares his suffering with others. "It was an extra-ordinarily bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer. But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing... extra-ordinary about that. Seasonable weather, for once in a way.(Pause.)Well, what ill wind blows you my way? He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears (...) No no, don't look at me, don't look at me. He dropped his eyes and mumbled something, apologies I presume. (...)My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered. Where did he come from? He named the hole. A good half-day, on horse. What are you insinuating? That the place is still inhabited? No no, not a soul, except himself and the child—assuming he existed. Good. I enquired about the situation at Kov, beyond the gulf. Not a sinner. Good. And you expect me to believe you have left your little one back there, all alone, and alive into the bargain? Come now!" (*Endgame*).

The time of impossible ending and the prison space form a unity. This unit has a primordial role in the unity of the spectacle as an effect. There is no escape through time, but also no escape through space. The only possible escape are the words again, the Story of the spectacle. "The space and time of representation combine in a coagulating unit whose theoretical expression is the concept of chronothope".¹⁰ The theatre of the absurd had the occasion to restructure not only the text itself, but also the theatrical effect.¹¹

Beckett's originality lies around the concept of time. Emmanuel Levinas, in his book *Death and Time*, has credited the idea that we cannot be in synchrony with others¹². That maybe Time is the Other One, it is the impossibility of being in synchrony with our fellow being¹³.

The character in *The Calmative* advances in a dream-like state. In the cathedral scene, a man with a little girl advanced spiral stairs in the opposite direction. In other instances, the old man tries to get up, but, as in *Waiting for Godot*, the opposite gesture wins. The dream-space is a forest, a city, a countryside, or a place beyond. A revelation takes place in a cathedral, a recomposure. The discussion with the man who has a wife Pauline is cantered on sexuality as a proof of staying

¹⁰ Mircea Morariu, *Le discours theatral*, premiere partie, Oradea, 1993, p. 50.

¹¹ Mircea Morariu, *L`effet de spectacle de Diderot à Ionescu*, Oradea, Biblioteca Revistei Familia, 2003, p. 104.

¹² Emmanuel Lévinas, *Moartea și Timpul*, text stabilit de Jacques Rolland, traducere de Anca Măniuțiu, Cluj, 1996 (transl in Romanian)

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

alive. The life of the protagonist is a post-existence, it exhibits the surroundings of a traveller who comes back to earth. The body is gone, the myth only can regenerate this body: "I'll tell my story in the past, but it was a myth, or an old fable, for this evening I need another I became what I was." (*The Calmative*, p.28). The speaking voice is free, but in the very end it could prove to be a jailbird in eternity and inertia. The myth has the power to rebuild the old man's life, and the pre-eminent figure is that of his father.

He is torn between the desire to stay and leave on a ship. He can only regress in that mug, that disguise of a man older than his father. But he is a man without present, jammed by futures.

The man is a vacillating and undecided being, not only in the end-game, but also in all prospects. The presence of a child both in story within the play in *Endgame* and in the prose *The Calmative* is a memory that prevents nothingness from installing. The child is one with no future, because that future can be part of another Story only. But the child is there as the embodiment of hope. We, the readers and the spectators, know through the presence of a child that the impossibility of the ending can be defeated. Childhood withstands nothingness. The waiting "that knows itself in vain" measures itself up against the end. (... "nobody more can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain"). Waiting, as the embodiment of the Absurd, can urge human condition to assume the certitude of nothingness rather than to fight the certitude of nothingness. Words incorporating negation ("I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything") do prevent the end from taking a toll on human conscience.

What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking. There's going to be a departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything, there's going to be a story, someone's going to try and tell a story. Yes, no more denials, all is false, there is no one, it's understood, there is nothing, no more phrases, let us be dupes, dupes of every time and tense, until it's done, all past and done, and the voices cease, it's only voices, only lies. Here, depart from here and go elsewhere, or stay here, but coming and going. Start by stirring, there must be a body, as of old, I don't deny it, no more denials, I'll say I'm a body, stirring back and forth, up and down, as required. With a cluther of limbs and organs, all that is needed to live again, to hold out a little time, I'll call that living, I'll say it's me, I'll get standing, I'll stop thinking, I'll be too busy, getting standing, staying standing, stirring about, holding out, getting to tomorrow, tomorrow week, that will be ample, a week will be ample, a week in spring, that puts the jizz in

you." (Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing* – 3 – p. 85).

These words incorporating negation can't prevent death but they can prevent the death of a conscience. In the story *The Calmative* we witness such a conscience after death.

Beckett's theatre reflects the impossibility of finding the infinite of love in others, but also the agonizing quest for that very infinity of presence, represented by the Other one, the fellow being, an infinite source for the certitude of existence.

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Aspects of Liminality and the Figure of the Trickster in P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* Novels¹

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Abstract: Drawing on Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's definition and description of liminality as well as William J. Hynes and William G. Doty's understanding and characterization of the archetypal trickster figure, this paper discusses aspects of liminality: periods of transition and liminal spaces, as well as the character of Mary Poppins as a liminal trickster figure in P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* novels.

Keywords: liminality, trickster, P.L. Travers, *Mary Poppins*

P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* series (eight volumes³ altogether), center on the adventures of the middle-class Banks children and their magical nanny in Edwardian London. The author, interested in mythology, eastern religions and philosophy, focused her narrative on the children's experience of the spiritual and the supernatural, imparting lessons about the meanings of the universe, rather than promoting social skills or teaching moral values. Mary Poppins, the eponymous protagonist of the books, and the outwardly strict nanny of the Banks children, claims kinship with various animals, mythological figures and

¹ The fragments that are cited from Travers's *Mary Poppins* novels are taken from the Kindle edition of P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins: The Complete Collection*. As page numbers are not available, the parenthetical citations specify only the title of the novel, and the number and title of the chapter from which the respective quote is taken.

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³ *Mary Poppins* (1934), *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935), *Mary Poppins Opens the Door* (1943), *Mary Poppins in the Park* (1952), *Mary Poppins from A to Z* (1963), *Mary Poppins in the Kitchen* (1975), *Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane* (1982), *Mary Poppins and the House Next Door* (1988)

supernatural creatures and is, in fact, a trickster: a boundary crosser, who challenges her protégés to use their intuition and imagination to liberate themselves from within. Drawing on Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's definition and description of liminality as well as on William J. Hynes and William G. Doty's understanding and characterization of the archetypal trickster figure, this paper discusses aspects of liminality (both spatial and temporal) as they appear in the Mary Poppins books as well as the figure of Mary Poppins as a trickster.

1. Liminality and the Figure of the Trickster

The words liminal and liminality are derived from the Latin "limen," which means "threshold". The idea was introduced to the field of anthropology in 1909 by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work: *The Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage, such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, as having the following three-part structure: separation, liminal period, and re-assimilation. The initiate (the person undergoing the ritual) is first stripped of the social status that he or she possessed before the ritual, inducted into the liminal period of transition, and finally given his or her new status and re-assimilated into society.

It was not until the second half of the 20th century, though, that the terms "liminal" and "liminality" gained popularity through the writings of Victor Turner. Turner first introduced his interpretation of liminality in 1967, drawing heavily on Van Gennep's three-part structure for 'rites of passage'. He focused entirely on the middle stage of rites of passage—the transitional or liminal stage. He noted that "the subject of passage ritual" was "in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner, 95). That is, the status of liminal individuals was socially and structurally ambiguous. He developed this idea further in a concise definition of liminality: "Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Noy to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner, 97).

Turner also pointed out that liminal individuals were polluting, and thus dangerous, to those who had not gone through the liminal period. In addition, liminal individuals had "no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows" (Turner, 98). While in the liminal state, human beings were stripped of anything that might have differentiated them from their fellow human beings — they were in between the social structures, and that it was in the gaps and intervals between two well-

defined social structures that they became most aware of themselves. Turner perceived liminality as a “midpoint of transition... between two positions” and as a temporary phase rather than a permanent state.

In the present paper liminality is used in both in its spatial and its temporal sense; that is, as a tangible transitional terrain and as a state of transition or liminal chronotope.

There are as many definitions of tricksters as myths and stories told about them or scholars engaged in studying them, typical identifications of the trickster, as they are represented in myths and literature, including animal-person (Coyote, Crow, Fox, Hare, Rabbit, Raven, Spider, Tortoise), demi-god, picaro, buffoon, swindler etc. For some scholars such as Radin and Jung the trickster figure is a transcendental or "archetypal" characteristic of the human psyche. Hence the figure represents a sort of primitive developmental level common to humanity, He is associated typically with organizing the natural world.

The overwhelming majority of all so-called trickster myths in North America give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world, and have a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who is not guided by normal conceptions of good or evil, who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him (...). (Radin 155)

For Joseph Campbell the trickster is a “super-shaman” (275) capable of shape-shifting and civilizing, a culture hero and magical creature that is present in all the mythologies of the world. For yet other scholars, such as Ugo Bianchi, the trickster is a demiurgic creator. According to William J. Hynes the difficulty of pinning down the figure of the trickster resides in the fact that tricksters by their nature are liminal creatures, who resist any attempt at classification or setting of boundaries: “the sheer richness of trickster phenomena can easily lead one to conclude that the trickster is indefinable. In fact, to define (define) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture; they are notorious border breakers” (Hynes 33).

Yet, for all the variety of forms that they may adopt, tricksters, who are mythical (and not modern) creatures, have consistent personalities Their personalities do not change or develop over the course of a tale, and the focus of the tale is not on how outside forces influence these characters to change, as is often the case in modern literature, but on how the characters’ consistent personality allows them to deal with the world. According to W.J. Hynes there are six

characteristics that all trickster share. These are the following: “ambiguous and anomalous personality” (34), “deceiver and trick player” (35), “shapeshifter” (36), “situation-invertor” (37), “messenger and imitator of the gods” (39), and “sacred and lewd bricoleur” (42).

For liminal mythic characters, like the trickster, liminality is their original state. Since liminality is betwixt and between the social structures, their existence in liminality allows them access to the social structure at any number of points. The trickster may flit across the borders at any time, penetrating the social structure at will, but he cannot stay there. He must return to that state of betwixt and between in order to manifest his powers.

It is not only the trickster’s nature as a mythic character that allows him to remain in liminality; it is also the mythic world that he inhabits that makes this possible. As mythic characters, tricksters impose their will on the world around them. In the modern era, though, the individual struggles against a much more powerful world, one that will not tolerate the imposition of will, at least not to the same extent. Thus it is interesting to see what happens to this mythic archetype when it is transplanted into a modern world.

2. Mary Poppins: the Nanny as Trickster

Chronologically the *Mary Poppins* novels are set in England in transition between the Victorian and Edwardian period. While this fact may certainly be an explanation of the Janus-faced values promoted in the narrative – the observation of rules and the cultivation of obedience and perfect manners when in view and under the control of adults, and the reclaiming of freedom and the pursuit of adventures in the periods of the day (at night, for instance) when, and in places (the park, the zoo etc.) where control weakens – it also accounts for the curious, liminal position that Mary Poppins occupies in the middle-class Banks family, as nanny for their children.

According to Katherine Holden, in the course of the 19th c. and in the first half of the 20th nannies occupied a strange, liminal position in upper and middle-class households: that between the children’s mother or parents and the rest of the household staff. The nanny was half parent and half servant; half familiar and half stranger. While this separateness was desired and seen as necessary if upper- and middle-class parents wanted to keep their children away from their own everyday lives, nannies represented a form of “beyond” in the eyes of the families they served, because of their obscure origins and liminal social status within the household. Furthermore, the figure of the nanny and/or the governess was paradoxical from the point of view of

the children, for the latter were supposed to be kept under strict control by a person who had no real authority over them, and whose strange position within the family exposed the very arbitrary nature of official adult norms, schemes and values. Consequently, many children refused to obey their nannies and/ or governesses.

In P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* novels, before the arrival of Mary Poppins, the Banks children: Jane and Michael, the twins: John and Barbara, and, later on, the baby Annabel as well, are unruly and rebellious: the scare of the nannies, who are unable to control them, but also of their parents: of their overworked father, who plans to board a ship and sail the South Seas or to hide from them in a cave, and of their mother, who, overwhelmed by her domestic and social duties, writes desperate letters to newspapers to place advertisements for a new nanny. Obviously, only a person possessing outstanding qualities, would be able to bring order into the life of this chaotic family.

From her advent to the Banks household, Mary Poppins introduces herself to the children (but not to their parents) as a border-crosser, and defier of the laws of physics: she is brought to the gate by the wind, can slide up on bannisters, and packs out huge objects, such as a camp bed, from a seemingly empty carpet bag. Her authority as a superior (supposedly magic) creature, is thus established. From the viewpoint of the parents, she is a highly competent and efficient nursemaid, a fashionable and well-mannered respectable young woman. Even the servants: Mrs. Brill, the cook, and Ellen, the maid, who are more prone to adopt a critical attitude towards the governess, acknowledge that somehow, since the day of her arrival, all things go better

While obviously the cause of a series of magical happenings and outstanding adventures, Mary Poppins is not the customary fairy. She does not cast spells, does not wave a magic wand, and does not plot to perform magic in any conventional way. It is as if magic occurred in her presence as a matter of fact. She is vain, obsessed with her dress and her looks (She constantly admires her own reflection in shop windows.) but not beautiful: "Jane and Michael could see that the newcomer had shiny black hair – "Rather like a wooden Dutch doll," whispered Jane. And that she was thin, with large feet and hands, and small, rather peering blue eyes." (Travers: *Mary Poppins*, "Chapter One: East Wind") She is conservative as regarding the children's outward behavior and deference towards herself, but at the same time revolutionizes the family by exposing her charges to supernatural adventures that liberate them from the very manners and social rules she herself told them to obey.

Mary Poppins is a modern, feminine variant of the ancient mythical figure of the trickster. Though she does not violate gastronomic, scatological or sexual taboos, which any traditional male trickster would definitely do, she does share the basic six characteristics of tricksters.

Firstly, she is an ambiguous and anomalous personality. She is the eternal visitor and/ or drifter who resists to be pinned down, defined or explained.

“And you, Mary Poppins,” Jane demanded, knowing that it was a daring question. “Where is your home – East or West? Where do you go when you’re not here?” ...
“I’m at home,” she said, “wherever I am!” (Travers: *Mary Poppins and the House Next Door*)

She is a nanny that teaches the children manners, provides them with a sense of security but at the same time allures them to leave the security of the nursery after bedtime and take an adventure in possibly dangerous places, like the park or the zoo, to offer her protégés lessons of an existential nature. She manifests both parental care:

Up and down the Nursery went Mary Poppins, tucking them all in. They could smell her old familiar smell, a mixture of toast and starchy aprons. They could feel her old familiar shape, solid and real beneath her clothes. They watched her in adoring silence, drinking her in. (Travers: *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, “Chapter One: The Fifth of November”)

and harsh punitive behavior: she banishes Jane into the painted world of a Royal Doulton Bowl, as punishment for Jane’s rebelling against the duties that befell her as the eldest daughter.

“So!” said the shadowy figure, taking a long curved pipe from his mouth. “Jane has arrived at last.” (...)

“She came through the alder wood with the boys, Great-Grandfather,” said Christina.

“Ah? How did they catch her?”

“She was cross at being the eldest. So she threw her paint-box at the Bowl and cracked Val’s knee.”

“So!” the horrible old voice whistled. “It was temper, was it? Well, well—” He laughed thinly. “Now you’ll be the youngest, my dear! My youngest Great-Granddaughter. But I shan’t allow any tempers here! Heh! Heh! Heh! Oh, dear, no. Well, come along and sit by the fire. Will you take Tea or Cherry – Wine?”

“No, no!” Jane burst out. “I’m afraid there’s been a mistake. I must go home now. I live at Number Seventeen Cherry Tree Lane.”

“Used to, you mean,” corrected Val triumphantly. “You live here now.”

“But you don’t understand!” Jane said desperately. “I don’t want to live here. I want to go home.”

“Nonsense!” croaked the Great-Grandfather. “Number Seventeen is a horrible place, mean and stuffy and modern. Besides, you’re not happy there. Heh! Heh! Heh! I know what it’s like being the eldest – all the work and none of the fun. Heh! Heh! But here –” he waved his pipe – “here you’ll be the Spoilt One, the Darling, the Treasure, and never go back any more!”

“Never!” echoed William and Everard, dancing round her. (...)

“No, no!” cried Jane. “It’s not true! It can’t be.” Her heart was thumping inside her. Never to see Michael again, nor the Twins, nor her Father and Mother and Mary Poppins!

And suddenly she began to shout, lifting her voice so that it echoed wildly through the stone corridors.

“Mary Poppins! I’m sorry I was cross! Oh, Mary Poppins, help me, help me!” (Travers: *Mary Poppins Comes Back*, “Chapter Three: Bad Wednesday”)

Secondly, Mary Poppins is a deceiver and trick player. While, she is “the prima causa of disruptions and disorders” (Hynes 35) in the lives of the Banks children, she never admits responsibility, and acts offended by any intimation of her involvement. After having lured the children from their beds at night to her own outlandish birthday celebration at the Zoo, an occasion at which animals walked freely and acted like humans, while people were on display in the cages, Mary Poppins denies any involvement and is indignant when Jane asks her about it:

“Mary Poppins,” she said, looking very hard at her, “were you at the Zoo last night?”

Mary Poppins’ eyes popped.

“At the Zoo? In the middle of the night? Me? A quiet orderly person who knows that early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise?”

“But *were* you?” Jane persisted.

“I have all I need of zoos in this nursery, thank you,” said Mary Poppins uppishly. “Hyenas, orangutans, all of you. Sit up straight, and no more nonsense.” (Travers: *Mary Poppins*, “Chapter Ten: Full Moon”)

Thirdly, Mary Poppins is a shapeshifter. Though not in the usual way of animal-person tricksters, Mary Poppins is able to modify the dimensions of her body to fit in a variety of spaces, and, while she is

never seen to change into any kind of animal, she claims kinship with talking polar bears, lions, snakes and giant turtles. Moreover, she speaks the language of all the animals (we see her conversing with starlings, cats, and the Banks's wealthiest neighbor: Miss Larks's dogs) and natural phenomena (such as the wind), with stars (the Sun) and various planets.

Fourthly, Mary Poppins is a situation inverter. Mary Poppins definitely can turn things upside down. While usually she tries to bring order to chaos, managing the daily routine of the children in the nursery, on the street and in the park, delivering praises and punishments whenever she feels they are needed and/or appropriate, this trickster nanny functions as a social safety valve for the children, as well. She always gives them the opportunity to let off steam by making them meet specific characters: three of her funny and magic uncles, all craftsmen, who under the pretense of mending various broken objects of the Banks household, encourage the children to act foolishly: laugh freely, stand on their heads, and dance to their own tunes. The visits at Mary Poppins's uncles are energizing and refreshing not only in a psychological sense but physically as well, for the children feel so easy that in all three cases (there are three visits) they lift in the air:

Jane and Michael, though they were trying hard to be polite, just couldn't help doing what they did. They laughed. *And they laughed.* They shut their mouths tight to prevent the laughter escaping, but that didn't do any good. And presently they were rolling over and over on the floor, squealing and shrieking with laughter.

"Really!" said Mary Poppins. "Really, *such* behaviour!"

"I can't help it, I can't help it!" shrieked Michael, as he rolled into the fender. "It's so terribly funny. Oh, Jane, *isn't* it funny?"

Jane did not reply, for a curious thing was happening to her. As she laughed she felt herself growing lighter and lighter, just as though she were being pumped full of air. It was a curious and delicious feeling and it made her want to laugh all the more. And then suddenly, with a bouncing bounce, she felt herself jumping through the air. Michael, to his astonishment, saw her go soaring up through the room. With a little bump her head touched the ceiling and then she went bouncing along it till she reached Mr Wigg. (Travers: *Mary Poppins*, "Chapter Three: Laughing Gas")

Fifthly, Mary Poppins is an imitator and messenger of the gods. Besides the fact she is related to several animals that act as if they were deities, Mary Poppins claims kinship with or/and befriends constellations, planets and stars. She commands the winds, and takes part in the

creation process by helping the centuries-old mythical lady: Mrs. Corry and her two giant daughters bring more light to the night by gluing stars onto the sky. Furthermore, Mary Poppins is venerated by all the entities (animate and inanimate) of the universe: her birthdays are ritualistic celebrations, and her bimonthly day-outs from the house of the Banks family are opportunities to visit alternative universes and realms. As a rule, she takes her older charges: Jane and Michael with her on these exploits, offering the children the possibility of ritual rebellion in lieu of actual rebellion, and thus rendering their real and secluded life more interesting and bearable. The adventures take place after bedtime, and/or in spaces outside the nursery: the park, the zoo. During these outings that always occur on special days, when, according to ancient Celtic belief, the veil between the real and the spiritual world is lifted (Full Moon, Halloween, the eve of Midsummer etc.) the children are given lessons on the meanings of the universe. They are taught about the radically human character of the cosmos, and realise that their daily world is more than meets the eye, more complex and interesting: a multidimensional plane of being, a dance in which all beings: human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate meet and move together in a single pattern:

Birds and animals were now swaying together, closely encircling Mary Poppins, who was rocking lightly from side to side. Backwards and forwards went the swaying crowd, keeping time together, swinging like the pendulum of a clock. Even the trees were bending and lifting gently, and the moon seemed to be rocking in the sky as a ship rocks on the sea.

“Bird and beast and stone and star – we are all one, all one—” murmured the Hamadryad, softly folding his hood about him as he himself swayed between the children.

“Child and serpent, star and stone – all one.”

The hissing voice grew softer. The cries of the swaying animals dwindled and became fainter. Jane and Michael, as they listened, felt themselves gently rocking too, or as if they were being rocked. . . (Travers: *Mary Poppins*, “Chapter Ten: Full Moon”)

Last but not least, though not lewd or/and sacred, Mary Poppins is a bricoleur. According to W. J. Hynes,

the bricoleur is a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution. Because the established definitions or usage categories previously attached to tools or materials are suspended/ transcended for the bricoleur, these items can be put to whatever inventive purpose is

necessary (42).

As bricoleur, Mary Poppins is a magnificent storyteller, who can see the imaginative and curative possibilities in a random event on the street – the appearance of a cow on Cherry Tree Lane occasions the story of “The Dancing Cow” to distract the attention of Jane from her splitting earache – or an uninteresting object on the mantelpiece: a kitsch porcelain cat, which is turned into the story of “The Cat that Looked at a King” to distract Michael’s attention from his post-birthday cake-eating toothache. Additionally, Mary Poppins has the magic and the creativity to organize an unforgettable New Year’s Eve party by piecing together and bringing alive the Banks siblings’ four favorite toys and three children’s books: *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Green Fairy Book* and *Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes* in the chapter entitled “Happy Ever After” in *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*.

3. Liminal Spaces and Periods of Transition in the *Mary Poppins* Books

As nanny and trickster, Mary Poppins is a liminal figure per se, that, naturally, exercises her magic in liminal places and during transitional periods of the day, of the month and of the year. While in the series, under the influence of Mary Poppins, all the places and spaces turn into transitional, liminal spaces, in the following paragraphs only the most characteristic and most frequented ones are going to be mentioned and discussed. These are: the nursery and the park, where the children spend most of their time; the space in-between, when they are swinging, floating, lifting and descending between the earth and the sky, and the liminal chronotopes: which are those parts of the day or those days of the year, which have a ritual significance, and which modify the rules and laws that operate in a specific space making the encounter of the inhabitants of various realms possible.

a) The Nursery and the Park

By custom, the Victorian and Edwardian nursery was a liminal place. In Arnold Van Gennep’s original understanding of the concept, liminal places were secluded spaces where the initiate or the initiates and their mentors could spend the ambiguous phase while they were outside of society but preparing to reenter it. As Georgia Grilli described it, the English nursery in the course of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th:

was an austere place filled with furniture and objects that could not be

used anywhere else in the house. It was usually set off from the rest of the house, either located in the attics or in a separate wing of the house. It had its own stairs and outside entrance and the door leading to the rest of the house was often covered with a thick green curtain that muffled the noise of the children. The parents and servants hardly ever entered the nursery and knew very little about what went on inside as it was the place where the children were brought up, as if they didn't belong to the reality and the world adults were actually involved and interested in. (...) The mother of the house may have appeared in the nursery at about 10:00 a.m., and the children would go down to the drawing room for afternoon tea—impeccably dressed and even more impeccably mannered. There was little more contact between the children and their parents than this. The presence of their governess totally filled the children's lives." (125, 127).

The nursery in the *Mary Poppins* books is, at the beginning of the series, as isolated as any of the Victorian and Edwardian English nurseries. Under the management of the trickster nanny, it retains its liminal, secluded quality but it becomes a space with a more complex educational function: a base from which the children could be launched or lured into alternative universes; a safe space, where they feel secure and protected, and where they can return to rest, and to reflect upon the meaning(s) of their outstanding adventures, and a storage place for various magical objects, all the possessions of Mary Poppins.⁴

Besides the nursery, the space where the Banks children spend most of their time and from which some of their otherworldly exploits set off, or where even some outstanding adventures and meetings take place is the Park. P.L. Travers never tells the readers, which London park she had originally in her mind, but, taken into account the proximity of the zoo as well as the type of neighborhood that surrounds it, she may have had London's Regent's Park as a source of inspiration. Apart from these two details, the Park of the book can be any of London's royal parks with its lake, statues, well-tended gardens, and the occasional nooks and spaces filled wild flowers, and ignored or maybe overlooked by the rule-abiding Park Keeper. For the Banks children, the Park is the outside equivalent to their nursery. It gives them more opportunities for socializing, but strangely, they never meet real children of their own age there, so they continue their isolated existence playing among themselves under the supervision of Mary

4 the medicine bottle that contains everyone's favourite beverage, the thermometer and the tape measure, both of which measure good conduct, the parrot-headed umbrella that can talk and fly etc.

Poppins.

As a go in-between urban and rural, civilized and natural, public and private, the Park is, just as the aforementioned nursery, a liminal space by definition. Under the creative management of the trickster nanny it also becomes a meeting place of art and reality. At the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Park in the Park” in the volume *Mary Poppins in the Park*, Jane builds a miniature world out of branches, leaves, and plasticine figures that then come to life. The plasticine figures however refuse to believe that they are anything but “real,” and Jane, Michael, and Mary Poppins descend into, and become involved in the adventures of this miniature world, which, though originally created by Jane, has already started to develop on its own. As it always happens, at the end of the day, the children return to the real world, but remain altered by their experience:

Crowned with the gold of the buttercup tree, Jane walked home under the maple boughs. All was quiet. The sun had set. The shadows of the Long Walk were falling all about her. And at the same time the brightness of the little Park folded her closely round. The dark of one, the light of the other—she felt them both together. “I am in two places at once,” she whispered... (Travers: *Mary Poppins in the Park*, “Chapter Five: The Park in the Park”)

b) Liminal Chronotopes and the Space in Between

Most of the Banks children’s magic adventures, during which they enter alternate universes, take place on special days or periods of the month or the year: at Full Moon, on the eve of Christmas, on the eve of the New Year, at Halloween, on Midsummer’s Eve etc. On these days the boundaries that separate animals from humans, the living from the dead, the sky from the earth, the sea from the earth are blurred: and the Zoo, the Park, the sea bed, the departments store etc. become liminal chronotopes: special meeting places (for a limited period of time) for creatures belonging to different realms and categories. These are the days in which the mythical meets the everyday, on which the particular becomes universal. On all of these occasions the children move in originally unfamiliar realms (the depth of the ocean, among constellations) rendered familiar, and manage to communicate with the creatures there. They usually embark on these adventures after bedtime, on their own accord, and on the invitation of a strange voice, which, as they soon find out, belongs to one of the inhabitants of the realm they are invited to discover. The owner of the voice acts as their guide. Mary Poppins never guides them herself, though she is always present. All of their exploits in parallel worlds and universes end in a

ritual dance of some kind that is meant to unite and bring harmony among the various realms of the earth, the cosmos and the mythical world. At the end of the ritual dance, they fall asleep and are brought home by Mary Poppins. They never remember how they managed to return to the nursery. The next day they reflect on their experiences on their own, for their trickster nanny never acknowledges of having taken part in the adventure, let alone provide them with an explanation.

The “in-between space” between two opposing “realities”, as Georgia Grilli observed in her fascinating study: *Myth, Symbol and Meaning in Mary Poppins. The Governess as Provocateur* is an important and significant metaphor, a metaphor to which the *Mary Poppins* books frequently return (59). In the series there are, indeed, many occasions when characters are seen to be suspended, swinging between the sky and the earth, belonging to both dimensions and to neither

Up, up, she went, till her black straw hat was higher than the trees, then down she came with her neat black toes pointed towards the lawn. Her eyes, as she rode her flying swing, shone with a strange, bright gleam. They were bluer than Jane had ever seen them, blue with the blueness of far-away. They seemed to look past the trees and houses, and out beyond all the seas and mountains, and over the rim of the world. The five swings swung together. [...] [The children] were wrapped in a dream with Mary Poppins, a dream that swung them up and down between the earth and the sky, a rocking, riding, lulling dream ... (Travers: *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, “Chapter Eight: The Other Door”)

Related to these experiences of physical “in-betweenness” is linked one of the few explicit teaching of Mary Poppins: “You can’t have anything for always” ... (Travers: “The Other Door” from *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, “Chapter Eight: The Other Door”), for the only things one can be sure in life are not objects, individuals or events but periods of transition, change and loss.

Conclusion

The content of P.L. Travers’s *Mary Poppins* novels, as well as the intent that motivated their writing went/ goes well beyond the customary fare and scope of children’s literature. What the authoress did in the series was more than a domestic tale spiced up with some tame adventures and magic tricks. She introduced the world to a new, modern trickster figure that united the independence and determination of the New Woman to the narcissism of the decadent Dandy, a trickster-nanny that

displayed all the basic characteristics, and performed all the customary “chores” of the traditional mythical trickster, but who managed to stay respectable and asexual so as to fit in the nursery of the urban, late Victorian middle class bank clerk. P.L. Travers’s *Mary Poppins* series are a veritable mythography of the modern, western trickster, the chief function of whom is to instruct and to connect through laughter, dance, story and adventure children to their parents, humans and animals, animate and inanimate, real and mythical, the Earth and the Cosmos.

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Children & Childhood
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Reflecting on Diversity: Being the *Other* Child

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Abstract: The paper attempts at conflating several topical issues – otherness, migration, identity, children's education in multicultural environments– in order to render an image of childhood experienced as part of uprooted, different, family lives. The selection of texts foreground this condition of re/shaping identities as a consequence of experiencing otherness, multiple identities in contemporary communities , as well as the intricate process of developing one's sense of cultural belonging.

Key words: diversity, multiculturalism, education, identity, childhood, family histories, cultural accommodation

On Pluralism and Diversity

When trying to map the world we are living in nowadays the above-mentioned terms are probably the most commonly used as they transcend the concept and become facts of everydayness, a reality that is conveyed by media, social media and personal connections. They used to be seen as inherent components of the now historical phenomenon of globalization resulting in a repositioning of previously marginalized cultures and voices, in the fragmentation of the liberal notion of unified subjectivity, and in the developing of a new manner to work with national values while celebrating pluralism and difference. We have to admit that there is so much knowledge of the tendency toward “planetary integration” as Zizek names it, sensed at the level of both a “sovereign nation state” and of a national culture, that the shift in the importance/influence/weight of ethnic differences in building up a nation’s image is unavoidable; they are preserved but

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“are submerged in the medium of universal integration, they are posited as particular aspects of the universal many-sidedness” (Zizek, 1992: 162).

Theorists so often point out that plurality is the condition of social and political life as it is constantly proven by the radical difference between people in opinions, in values, in preferences, a situation that can easily complicate the human interaction; the solution they suggest is but democracy which is “the common action we all engage in to peacefully manage our lives in the societies we live in. From such a perspective, multiculturalism is the normal state of affairs” and the proposed means would be “Education *for* democracy and education *through* democracy” being the proper educational activities to be employed as “instruments preparing young people for democracy.” (See Biseth, 2011: 77).

The contemporary world is facing a constant reconfiguration of cultural units, of cultural communities as there is a growing tendency towards various ways of integrating a multicultural environment by employing particular policies, meant to encourage social cohesion and to grant democratic participation to the members of any groups. The aim of any programmes and approaches would be to provide skills and opportunities for people to acquire the knowledge of democratic participation and to become good citizens of a certain society at this time of internationalization and globalization.

The Quest for a Possible Identity

When analyzing the condition of hybridity in case of diasporic cultural identity, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall foregrounds the fact that “there are people who belong to more than one world, who speak more than one language, who inhabit more than one identity, who have more than one home, who have learnt to negotiate and translate between cultures, who are the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, who have learned to live and to speak with and from difference, who speak from the 'in-between' of different cultures, who find ways of being the same as and different from the others amongst whom they live.”(see Morley, 200: 2017). As they are living in a transient zone between old traditions and new values and behaviours, McEwan's couple has to opt out and for a particular culture when Judith Bernstein decides to file for her divorce from Julian, so much faithful to the Chareidi community “whose traditions were unbroken for centuries”. Within the Chareidim,

women were expected to raise children, the more the better, and look after the home.(...) Men did not receive much education either. (...)

they were expected to give most of their time to studying the Torah”. (McEwan, 2014: 9)

Whereas men, like Julian,

wanted a warmly secure and familiar environment for the girls, disciplined but loving, whose rules and observances provided for every contingency, whose identity was clear, its methods proven through the generations, and whose members were generally happier and more fulfilled than those of the secular consumerist world outside.(12).

The case of the Bernstein girls becomes Fiona Mayer's, a High Court Judge, plea for encouraging those educational policies that praise diversity, as “ when a society is diverse, it will only stay together as long as citizens value deep diversity in itself (...) which requires accommodating education accordingly” (Biseth, 2011: 81). Consequently she decides that

“The children should continue to attend the mixed school chosen for them by their mother. They could stay on until they were eighteen and have tertiary education if they so choose”
as against the father's argument that

Chareidi women were expected to devote themselves to making a 'secure home' and that education past sixteen was not relevant. (...) girls and boys should be kept well apart at school in order to maintain their purity” thus showing how important is it for the family to understand that “children should be encouraged in their aspirations.”(McEwan, 2014: 37) and taught to “make their own decisions about the sort of life they wanted to lead. (38).

Educating children in a multicultural environment is part of acknowledging and appreciating cultural diversity and difference in terms of inheritance (for instance, ethnic food or folk dances) and in terms of humanism, that is, as being a people's tradition, customs, history; this is the way by which we admit that “all identity is constructed across difference”(Morley, 2000: 253) and that is is vital to understand that some children live a mobile, translocal life and need to find themselves in and extending globalized world.

The *Other* Children

Most academics agree upon the fact that *Otherness* is opposed and required by *sameness*, that *Otherness* is needed by the *self*, *the self* is maintained through the constant process of exclusion, opposition, hierarchization, that “the co-presence of others is (...) the condition of

life” (Morley, 2000: 265). Generally speaking, the consequence of the presence of ethnic alterity/diversity in a country, or in a community leads to a revaluation and reconfiguration of their cultural status by a process of hybridization and pluralization of different practices (e. g. culinary, community celebrations, etc.) and by a discovery of a new national ethos of the multi-sidedness of otherness/sameness. Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *Middlesex* (2002) displays a suggestive multicultural private school environment in which the protagonist, Calliope Helen Stephanides (Cal), baptised in the Greek Orthodox church of Detroit's East Side, has to discover a way to find her place against the *sameness*, The Charm Bracelets, who made the rules in the school as they have known each other since pre-kindergarten; fortunately, the image of her difference (religious and gender) is soon domesticated by the presence of a *Other* girls:

Reetika Churaswami, with her enormous yellow eyes and sparrow's waist; and Joanne Maria Barbara Peracchio, with her corrected clubfoot and (...) John Birch Society affiliation; Norma Abdow, whose father had gone away on the Haj and never come back; Tina Kubek, who was Czech by blood; and Linda Ramirez, half Spanish, half Filipina, who was standing still, waiting for her glasses to unfog. “Ethnic” girls we were called, but then who wasn't, when you got right down to it? (Eugenides, 2002: 298).

Both Calliope and the Chareidi girls become part of a process of a gradual domestication of the image of the *Other* in their attempt to craft their identities through histories and pasts of differences, and to overcome markers of social differences including class, or race, thus contributing to the development of an adequate system of educational policies, meant to create bridges between children of various cultural backgrounds:

Chareidi boys and girls were educated separately to preserve their purity. Modish clothes, television and the internet were forbidden, and so was mixing with children who were allowed such distractions. Homes that did not observe strict kosher rules were out of bounds. Every aspect of the daily existence was well covered by established customs. The problem started with the mother, Judith, who (...) was already sending the girls to a co-educational Jewish secondary school where television, pop music, the internet and mixing with non-Jewish children were permitted. She wanted her girls to stay on at school past the age of sixteen and to go to university if they wished. (...) she wanted her daughters to know more about how others lived, to be socially tolerant, to have the career opportunities she never had” (McEwan,

2014: 10).

Cultural differences and cultural plurality imply a high degree of transcultural communicative flows among the members of complex communities; sometimes individuals, and especially children, experience provocative challenges to the fantasy about being the *same*, about breaking the boundaries of exclusion:

Until we came to Baker & Inglis my friends and I [Calliope] had always felt completely American. But now the Bracelets' upturned noses suggested that there was another America to which we could never gain admittance. All of a sudden America wasn't about hamburgers and hot rods anymore. It was about the *Mayflower* and Plymouth Rock. It was about something that happened for two minutes four hundred years ago, instead of everything that had happened since. Instead of everything that was happening now! (Eugenides, 2002: 299)

Studies have decided that there is “there is no legitimate space for the Other but the Other is absolutely necessary to any nationalist project.” (Morley, 2000: 217) as Otherness generates a specific discourse that conflate several identifiable features that could posit the individual in a visible, sometimes risky position, often rising negative feelings as in the case of James Kelman's Scottish protagonist whose difference is perceived antagonistically:

I was out a message and a big boy grabbed me. He got me down and his younger brother was there. Oh that is him. The wee brother said that. I did not know who they were the big brother kneeled down on my arms so I could not move. I was trying to wrestle him off but I could not and was throwing my chest up and shouting. It was the worst dirty fighting. His hand now over my mouth and I was smothering, could not breathe, rolling about and he punched my stomach. Get that Get that, shouting to his younger brother.(...) The big brother pressed his knees down hard on my arms and then back holding my legs and I was trying to push him off and twisting my head and he slapped me on my face at my ear. I am warning ye, you stay away from my younger brother, ever hit him again and I will kill ye. (Kelman, p. 56-7)

Coping with Diversity

It is a fact that we are living in such a world where difference is so highly praised basically due to the set of educational policies for diversity that have been shaped by governments in many western countries as a result of a long history of the changes in their demographic maps

generated by the constant dynamics of migration. An important step in establishing directions and aims in the process of integration and accommodation of children coming from diverse cultural backgrounds is granting a solid citizenship education in order to develop “social and moral responsibility, political literacy to become active citizens and maintain social cohesion, it develops tolerance of others”. (Maylor et al., 2005: 61). Cultural otherness of any kind represents the very multicultural condition of a country, its readiness to regard diversity while developing a sense of belonging through having and enjoying the same rights since early childhood.

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Mark Twain and the Role of Children in the Society

Ioana Daniela Heredea ¹

Abstract: This article represents a short study on the concept of childhood through the innovative vision of Mark Twain. This study is focused on “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” and it will discuss two important aspects about childhood at the late-nineteenth century. The first one is related to the role of children in the local society as a factor of amusement and release from daily monotony. The second aspect will focus on the political and social impact upon children’s behavior and their daily activities. The reader will discover the relation between the reality and the children’s games.

Key words: childhood, adventure, freedom, society

The concept of childhood is not just a simple literary theme which is used by various writers to entertain the public, especially the children. For centuries, this theme has received so many interpretations that it became a complex topic in depicting the society in different ways. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, known as Mark Twain, wrote about childhood in a somehow different way. His writings such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Advice to Little Girls*, or *Pudd’nhead Wilson* bring something more than just playful, innocent children who find protection in the arms of their beloved parents or relatives.

The nineteenth century represents a period of social, intellectual, and political transformations not only worldwide, but also in The United States. Monarchy began to constitute a major issue for Americans, as they could not agree anymore with the repression of individual rights and behaviors. This matter included the economic and social class. However, the slaves in the South were seen as an

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embarrassing exception to the promise of a democracy which would be based on equal rights (Sloane 2-3). Historians make note of the declaration of Texan independence from Mexico by American settlers in 1836. In the same year, New England inventor Samuel Colt patented the first revolver. Given these events, Mark Twain transformed the theme of childhood in a statement for justice and freedom, becoming a spokesman against American imperialism and a critic of its violence (Messent 11).

It is known that the Post-Civil War period in the American literature was seen for a long time as a battleground where literary realism won against the literary romanticism and even the popular sentimentalism. Realists preferred to depict the normal, common life, filled with everyday events. All these went in opposition to romantics, who highlighted exotic far-away places and heroic actions. However, romantics and didactic religious writers preferred to frame their stories in moralistic admonitions. By contrast, realists chose to let characters and events bring the readers to their own moral and ethical realizations (Sloane 13). Mark Twain can be categorized as a realist writer since he depicts the daily lifestyle of his characters, but he also highlights notable social and political issues. He is considered to be an icon of humanity at large, demanding justice and freedom for all people, especially for the downtrodden colored people who were the victims of imperialism and racial prejudice in the society (Sloane 1). Therefore, in the Preface of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* Mark Twain emphasizes that the novel “is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account, for part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what querr enterprise they sometimes engaged in” (Twain, *Preface*).

The present article will bring into the reader’s attention a short study on *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and it will analyze the faces of childhood in the figures of the children characters. The following paragraphs will bring into discussion the common feature of every child, namely the adventure, emphasizing the relation between children and the daily social life of the community.

1. Children and the Monotone Society

Every child dreams of having a happy life in the family, having good friends among other children and, why not, finding its own place in the society. The concept of adventure represented a source of interest also for other writers such as Jonathan Swift, Jules Verne, Rudyard Kipling

and later J. M. Barrie, not only for Mark Twain. However, Twain's writing skills manage to keep the reader close to the book, and stimulate him to turn page after page in a comic atmosphere and a good mood. The creation of the character Tom Sawyer reveals the fact that children are more than sons and pupils; they are part of the society and part of the future.

Tom Sawyer lives in the small town of St. Petersburg, near the Mississippi River, where the spare time and the gaming activities seem to be at their home. The entire novel depicts Tom as being in a continuous "holiday", where work and duties seem not to exist. The concept of adventure is highlighted throughout the novel in such a way that all the social local actions are somehow a part of a theatre work. It seems like monotony has settled in the town and people need something fascinating that would instill them a refreshing breathe of life.

Tom's community seems to give respect to the Bible and to religion, as church attendance on Sunday is seen as mandatory among the local worshippers. At first sight, the reader could make a positive impression about this devoted community to the heavenly laws and principles. All this impression would vanish in the moment when the Sunday sermon is disturbed by an innocent fly which tries to make its own way in the congregation. This is the beginning of the small religious circus which will be conducted by no one else but Tom Sawyer!

His attempts to catch the fly in the middle of the sacred sermon is considered to be a sin by his aunt Polly, who gives him such a serious judging look that the poor boy has to release the fly. Now the reader will notice that church is just a place which people need to attend in order to be respected in the community. This duty includes all the children of the community, who become impatient and cannot find their place on their seats. But the formidable surprise is that adults also become impatient due to the long prayer and preach. Boredom seems to feel like home in the sacred place up to the point when Tom Sawyer is tempted to defeat the sober sacred atmosphere by releasing a "pinch-bug" from his box in the church: "The beetle lay there working its helpless legs, unable to turn over. Tom eyed it, and longed for it; but it was safe out of his reach. Other people uninterested in the sermon, found relief in the beetle, and they eyed it too" (Twain 57).

The sermon is defeated by the adventurous playing between the little beetle and a poodle dog. The catching of the beetle becomes the culminant point, as the worshippers' attention is turned to these beings, neglecting the sacred word of God: "There was a sharp yelp, a

flirt of the poodle's head, and the beetle fell a couple of yards away, and lit on its back once more. The neighboring spectators shook with a gentle inward joy, several faces went behind fans and handkerchiefs, and Tom was entirely happy” (Twain 58). Generally speaking, it is not necessary a shame for a child to feel the need to play in public because of his impatience. Not to be forgotten the fact that Tom Sawyer and other children of his age were forced to attend religious services, therefore children’s actions are somehow comprehensible. The striking matter of worry is actually the congregation of adults who were supposed to behave appropriately in a religious place and give a good example to the children.

As it was highlighted above, Mark Twain depicts children as a needy means of defeating monotony in the public place and bringing entertainment in different ways. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* does not omit the social status of church goers in order to make the reader fully understand the community’s situation: the mayor of the town and his wife, the judge of peace, widows, lawyers, young clerks and the ordinary people. It is obvious that not all the congregation was attending Sunday services just for the sake of social interaction. The preacher looks to be devoted to his job, but he is also aware of people’s boredom. Maybe people from church did not notice, but the child Tom noticed, while he was sometimes counting the pages of the religious message, that the preacher skipped some pages from his devotional. This gesture of the preacher is the evidence that he understood the community’s struggle with monotony. Moreover, the community is more than grateful that they will finally go home.

However, not only church is the perfect place for entertainment, but also the major events such as the criminals’ catching or summer activities. The disappearance of Becky Thatcher and Tom Sawyer in the cave becomes breaking news in the monotone community. So far, no one truly cared about Tom or Becky. The community’s worries are simply a tool of breaking the monotony which has settled in the town. Sensational news such as the children’s disappearance will stimulate people to get involved in the search of children. Mark Twain intentionally makes some remarks about the community’s reaction after the lost children are found and brought in the town:

Tin pans and horns were added to the din, the population massed itself and moved toward the river, met the children coming in an open carriage drawn by shouting citizens, thronged around it, joined its homeward march, and swept magnificently up the main street roaring huzzah after huzzah! The village was illuminated; nobody went to bed again; it was the greatest night the little town had ever seen (Twain

Let's not omit the expression that Mark Twain uses: "the greatest night"! How is possible that people refused to go to sleep just because two adventurous children got lost in a labyrinth-cave? Apparently, the community's gesture could be appreciated as they got involved in searches and were happy for the return of the children. Up to the some point, it is honest to admit that the community was small, so people knew each other. This unity of people in cases of emergency can be applauded as it was the duty of the officials to find the lost ones. But what about the other people from the community who did not move any finger for the children's safety return? A very important detail needs to be revealed: if more adults guarded and supervised the children at the party of Becky Thatcher, no child would have become lost! Here, again, a subtle sense of ignorance is noticed as coming towards the parents. Therefore, this "greatest night" is most probably a lesson for the ignorant parents, but also just a simple sensational time for the others. This great reaction of the community comes after the second disappearance of the town's children (the return of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Joe Harper was not so sensational as the cave incident).

Now the reader is led to the burial of the criminal Injun Joe, which is held near the mouth of the cave (where he was found dead): "...people flocked there in boats and wagons from the towns and from all the farms and hamlets for seven miles around; they brought their children, and all sorts of provisions, and confessed that they had had almost as satisfactory a time at the funeral as they could have had at the hanging" (Twain 254). It needs to be mentioned the fact that the dead body was discovered by Tom Sawyer, not by an adult of the community. It's very interesting how Mark Twain switches the heroic roles and how huge is its impact upon the adults from other towns. Not only the local community is in a continuous search for entertainment and sensational events, but many other communities, as seen above.

The community's strange curiosity to attend Injun Joe's funeral together with their children shows that the means of communication and transport were well developed, since people could arrive in time at this funeral. People didn't care that the dead man was a criminal, and this also emphasizes a truth: when Injun Joe was alive, no one had the courage to combat him and his crimes, because people were afraid for their lives. However, this aspect is highlighted by Mark Twain: the person who gathered his own courage to accuse the criminal was the child Tom Sawyer. The reader will encounter two complex faces of the

communities: the fear to involve and get rid of evil, and the courage to seek mobility when the problems are solved.

The monotony of the American community is revealed also in the summer holiday, when people could be entertained up to some point. Mark Twain mentions some entertaining activities in the town: the negro minstrel shows, the circus and “A phrenologist and a mesmerizer came and went again and left the village duller and drearier than ever” (Twain 178). Even the well-organized social entertaining events were not enough to satisfy the community, since the local society suffered from a great sense of monotony. So far has been discussed the role of children in entertaining the local community and its impact upon adults. The following paragraphs will focus on the types of children’s games and the political impact upon children.

2. Children and Games

It is said that children are good imitators because they can act and behave like adults. This is the case of Tom Sawyer and his friends Huckleberry Finn and Joe Harper. Living in a small community, children didn’t spend so much time to discover the various locations within the community and nearby. River Mississippi, Cardiff Hill and the isolated island, along with the cemetery become perfect places for playing, for adventure and also for meditation. It needs to be mentioned the fact that children used to play strange games, which were strongly linked to the political or social contexts from that period.

Mississippi River represents for local children a real challenge for freedom, adventure in the unknown, a new beginning and a border which breaks restrictions. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader is presented a young boy walking on the street and acting as a Mississippi navigator before Tom:

He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat. As he drew near, he slackened speed, took the middle of the street, leaned far over to starboard and rounded to ponderously and with laborious pomp and circumstance for he was personating the "Big Missouri," and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat, and captain, and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricane-deck giving the orders and executing them: "Stop her, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling!" (Twain 29)

The nature transformed itself in places where dreams could come true for children. The reader could discover not only the effort of the child

to imitate the steamboat, but also his passion of performing this wonderful act before Tom. Additional to this scene, the great river will play an important role for other actions in the novel. Mississippi River is seen as a gate to freedom for Tom and his friends and it is linked to their challenging decision to run away from home and isolate themselves on the Jacksons Island. In order to get on the island, children had to cross the river using a cork which wasn't theirs. The same river will be emphasized in the scene where Becky Thatcher and her party guests will start a short journey on water, before returning home.

The small community gave children the opportunity to see and learn many things about the ruling of the town and the country, about the local officials, and the procedures for crimes. An interesting game that Tom Sawyer chose to play with his friends was the military confrontation. No one could have afforded to miss such a triumphant game, because of the pride:

Two "military" companies of boys had met for conflict, according to previous appointment. Tom was General of one of these armies, Joe Harper (a bosom friend,) General of the other. These two great commanders did not condescend to fight in person that being better suited to the still smaller fry but sat together on an eminence and conducted the field operations by orders delivered through aides-de-camp. Tom's army won a great victory, after a long and hard-fought battle. Then the dead were counted, prisoners exchanged, the terms of the next disagreement agreed upon and the day for the necessary "battle appointed; after which the armies fell into line and marched away (Twain 35-36).

It is obvious that one of the leaders is Tom Sawyer. In all the games he plays with his friends, he always manages to become the group leader and to provide concrete instructions. Mark Twain does not provide specific details about any military incidents in the children's town, therefore children must have heard and learnt all the information about military strategies from their parents or simply by the oral communication on the streets. This image of military confrontation is strongly linked to imperialism and the cruelties which happened around the world. This thirst for power was certainly instilled in the minds of children in unexpected ways, and it was manifested through childish adventurous games.

Interestingly, the education which was given at school seemed to be just a mandatory activity which children had to attend. No wonder that the interest for books and healthy education is destroyed by

teachers such as Mr. Dobbins, who is dull and violent. But all this bad school experience is finally balanced with awkward dreams and games. Throughout the novel, Tom Sawyer and his friends pretend to be robbers, pirates, even Indians or Robin Hood. These games give them the role of destroyers and subverters of their civilization (Levy 60). The isolated island is the propitious place for playing the role of Indians. Tom Sawyer together with his friends Huckleberry Finn and Joe Harper pretend to be Indian leaders; they covered their bodies with mud and assaulted the forest in order to conquer the British colonies. This type of game is actually against imperialism, namely fighting for what was yours before and you lost. Mark Twain was himself a fighter against the cruel practices of submission, therefore this game of the children should be understood properly as a declaration for freedom.

The games with pirates and Robin Hood raise some doubts among the readers. How is possible that Tom Sawyer knew so many things, details and phrases from *Robin Hood*, if he was forced to attend school and his mind was always far away from books or Bible verses? Mark Twain did not leave any marks that Tom Sawyer would read adventure books at home or anywhere else. However, one could be surprised to find out that Tom Sawyer and his friends used to recite phrases of Robin Hood and act according to the book. Nevertheless, it is known that Mark Twain lived his childhood in Hannibal and the summers spent on the farm of his uncle John Quarles allowed him to experience different dialects, folkways and lots of humor (Sloane 2). The writer's silence on Tom Sawyer's knowledge might be intentional. The novel shows many circumstances when Tom confesses that all the superstitions he knew about treasures, diseases and ghosts were learnt from other people, in consequence there are high chances that some educated persons must have taught him about Robin Hood and other adventure books and practices.

If Mark Twain portrays children as beings with thirst for freedom, for adventure beyond any kind of borders, then Charles Dickens, another prominent writer of the nineteenth century, comes on the literary stage with the childhood topic, but one which is analyzed from a different perspective. The novel *David Copperfield* reveals a cruel industrial society which does not keep children away from work. David Copperfield is the symbol of a hard-working child, an orphan of no one who is trying to find his own way in the British society. The reader is witness to the powerlessness of children like David Copperfield. He experiences the reality of little David's cruel stepfather who beats and misuses him, finally sending him to a boarding school. Here, the maltreatment continues and right after his mother dies, Mr.

Murdstone decides to employ David as a worker in a wine-bottling factory where the young boy suffers emotionally (Schuster 29). There is certainly a trauma for a child to become all alone and to be neglected by his stepfather.

This is a striking contrast to the adventurous lifestyle of Tom Sawyer, who does not know anything about working hard and struggling in order to survive both socially and economically. David Copperfield is the type of the abused child who is trying to integrate in the society with his own efforts and with the others' help, and later to become a writer. Another aspect which should be taken into consideration is David's journey to maturity, turning the writing of Dickens into a Bildungsroman. Charles Dickens portrays the social, the emotional, and the financial development of David Copperfield, allowing the reader to discover all this information step by step.

According to Robert Keith Miller, Tom is the type of child who is incapable of learning from his own experiences, and this is the reason why he cannot reach the maturity. Even after the scary experience at Muff Potter's trial, Tom still likes to play as being a robber. Tom's little sense of responsibility is emphasized in the labyrinth-cave, and even after he returns home safe, he reveals that his juvenile egotism remains the same (Oatman 119). Mark Twain does not want to allow Tom Sawyer become a grown-up. As the writer states in Conclusion: "So endeth this chronicle. It being strictly a history of a *boy*, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a man."² By contrast, Mark Twain claims that Tom's figure as a child is more than enough for the readers, because this childish image hides relevant and realistic facts which are about to be discovered by the reader.

In conclusion, the concept of childhood has different faces in the vision of Mark Twain. The relation between children and the monotone society is fed by the powerful source of entertainment and a tool in restoring the justice of the community. The adults are reminded that common children are more than innocent beings, as they can change the fate of the local society faster than adults could do. The writings of Mark Twain are full of expression, emotions and adventure, reminding us that behind every adult is an adventurous child ready for unexpected challenges.

² Conclusion, Tom Sawyer

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“Be a man”: Constructions of Childhood in Priscilla Galloway’s *Truly Grim Tales*

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Abstract: The publication of Priscilla Galloway’s *Truly Grim Tales* in 1995 played a significant role in the evolution of the Canadian literary fairy tale. The stories from the collection are innovative both on a linguistic and thematic level. By focusing on selected tales from this collection, the present paper aims at exploring the representation of children and childhood in Priscilla Galloway’s idiosyncratic stories. These revisionist tales reinterpret complex issues such as gender, sexuality and/or childhood in accordance with the socio-cultural-historical context. Thus, the construction of childhood and portrayal of children is connected to the cultural, social and historical frame of reference and can generate further research on an interdisciplinary level.

Key words: contemporary, fairy-tale, Canadian literature, rewriting, children, gender, domestic violence

1. Introduction

Priscilla Galloway is a celebrated contemporary Canadian author, who has created an impressive and diverse body of writing, ranging from young adult novels, short stories inspired from Greek mythology to traditional fairy tale rewritings. Her most significant creations include the *Snake Dreamer*, a contemporary version of the Medusa-myth, *The Courtesan’s Daughter*, a novel that follows young Phano’s story in fourth century B.C. Greece, and *Truly Grim Tales*, an odd collection of contemporary fairy-tales. The innovative thematic choice and mode of representation challenge traditional cultural codifications and resist any form of categorization. Besides, Priscilla Galloway’s fiction reflects awareness of the ongoing changes in the contemporary literary landscape. Her fiction also stresses the importance of integrating in

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fiction emerging fields of research, such as gender studies or cultural studies.

One of her most interesting literary experiments is definitely *Truly Grim Tales*. As the title suggests, the stories from the collection are grim tales, in which Priscilla Galloway exposes issues such as abandonment, domestic violence, silencing, oppressiveness, different sexual orientations, fetishes, child abuse, control, power and *otherness*. The title is also a metafictional wordplay since it refers to the status of the tales as rewritings of the Grimm brothers' famous collected tales. Priscilla Galloway's vision looks beyond the surface and exposes the darker and more violent side of well-known fairy-tales. In an interview, Priscilla Galloway stated that her intention was "to tell the story behind the story" and to be "looking underneath" the happy-ending formula. The shockingly honest and literal depictions of betrayal, loss and violence are opposed to the allusive, symbolic nature of traditional fairy-tales. Besides, the stories feature child-characters, which heighten the overall distressing effect. As opposed to traditional fairy tales, in Priscilla Galloway's grim tales, the reader is confronted with images of children who suffer, curse and (d)evolve as the narratives unfold. Most of the eight stories problematize childhood and the idea of growing up in a harsh environment. The children from the stories experience displacement and violence amidst distressing circumstances. Thus, the stories touch upon painful social realities which affect many vulnerable children nowadays. In the next section, the focus will be on analyzing the portrayal of childhood and the construction of childhood in the stories.

2. Priscilla Galloway's Re-versions: (Bloody) Children and Stereotypes

Rewriting fairy-tales is a popular literary trend in the twentieth and twenty-first century, popularized in the Anglophone world by authors such as Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood or Emma Donoghue. Jack Zipes uses the word "contamination" to refer to the process of changing a tale, be it folk or literary. The incessant mutability of fairy tales represents one of its most perplexing characteristics as a genre. In a similar fashion to the Grimm brothers' contamination of folktales, contemporary writers embed their cultural mark on traditional fairy tales, without intending to imitate the original source:

retellings do not, and cannot, also reproduce the discursual ode of the source, they cannot *replicate* its significances, and always impose their own cultural presuppositions in the process of retelling, and second even the most revered cultural icon can be subjected to

mocking or antagonistic retellings (Stephens and McCallum 4).

Moreover, as Stephens and McCallum further observe, “the resulting version is then not so much a retelling as a *re-version*, a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration (4). This re-version is “a contaminated tale is one that has been somehow sullied and made impure”, but, “contamination can be an enrichment process; it can lead to the birth of something unique and genuine in its own right” (Zipes 79). By generating new meanings through contamination, contemporary writers produce discourses that may have an impact on societal practices:

if we see society as being constantly created through discursive practices then it is possible to see the power of those practices, not only to create and sustain the social world but also to see how we can change that world through a refusal of certain discourses and the generation of new ones (Davies Xi)

By questionings conventional practices, contemporary fairy tales are powerful tools for inducing change on social level. In this sense, Priscilla Galloway’s narratives are dynamic fictional systems in which the representation of children indicates contemporary social tensions and cultural mutations which affect whole vulnerable communities. By explicitly portraying the abused and lonely children, Galloway raises awareness of the damaging effects of abandonment and domestic violence on children.

The story that opens the collection is entitled *The Name*. Galloway’s story is a retelling of Rumpelstiltskin, as suggested by *the name* of the tale. The tale is told from a first-person perspective, which is unusual for fairy tales. The opening lines are as well strikingly different from the traditional “once upon a time” mantra: “My mother I never knew (...) Roomfuls of expensive toys, bebies of hired nursemaids served only to convince me (especially during my father’s frequent absences) that I was the loneliest child in the world” (1). The temporal dimension is fluctuating as the narrator recounts his early childhood memories. The story of a motherless lonely boy is a common motif in fairy-tales, but in Galloway’s version, a quest or the princess cannot grant the expected happy-end. The narrator’s recollections tackle abandonment issues, a common consequence of child neglect, in a strikingly blunt manner. Tatar considers that fairy tales intend “to give us a bite of reality, to confront us with monsters that seize us and sink their teeth into our most vulnerable parts” (58). In *The Name*, the

monster is absence, loss and neglect. Besides, the first-person narration heightens the intensity of the emotions associated with such a sensitive topic. Besides, the father's unrealistic expectations burden the child: "you bear a proud name, (...) the oldest name in the land. See that you are a credit to it" (1). Again, Galloway articulates, with an unparalleled eloquence, the dangers of parental coercion which might potentially shatter the child's self-confidence.

The first part of the story explicitly problematizes the devastating effects of gender-stereotypic expectations. On the other hand, the narrator's aunt considers that "a child needs a real childhood" (2). Her voice is opposed to the father's attitude but is ultimately silenced by the father's authoritative views. The child physical deformity heightens the father's hostility because a cripple boy *isn't supposed* to carry on *the name*. In this context, the family name and the stereotypical construction of masculinity is closely linked. The father associates the child's appearance with weakness and refuses to accept him. The child is left crippled after a deadly illness. The father, instead of caring for his child, acts indifferently and refuses to engage in any form of parental relationship with his son during his illness:

"I shall never forget the pain. Worse than the pain was the terror that I would not be able to breathe, that I would die of suffocation. I clung to the doctor, to the housekeeper, to any human presence in my room, and could not be pried loose. My father came only once" (2-3).

Given the situation, the child experiences loneliness and a sense of otherness: "I was desolate. Ill, crippled, and deprived of all companionship (...)" (3). At this point, the narration resembles more a journal than a fairy-tale because the explicit depictions of abandonment and otherness are uncommon in these types of tales. Galloway further insists to emphasize gender stereotyping, which is a common practice for the narrator's father: the repetition of "be a man" (3) epitomizes the enforced construction of masculinity. Such a sexist affirmation is similarly harmful for a little boy's psyche and unfairly pressures him to fit into a fixed gender role regardless of his young age. Furthermore, the story clearly states the consequences of such rigid and extreme gender stigmatization:

"Perhaps my father refused to see me because he loved me and was pained by the sight of my crippled body. Sometimes today I manage to consider this possibility. Mostly I felt desolation of being abandoned, alone and unloved at ten years of age (...) I was desolate. Ill, crippled, and deprived of all companionship (...)" (3).

The story goes on and the focus shifts to the narrator's present. But the first part which recounts childhood memories is impressive and is filled with "emancipatory impulses" (Bacchilega 6). Priscilla Galloway opts for a blunt, explicit descriptive style which tackles social issues and gender stigmatization. By naming it and externalizing the child's unhappiness, the narrator frees from the constraints of silence. Rather than constructing a unilateral child-character, Galloway creates a multidimensional, conscious child-figure who does not fulfill his role obediently: the child refuses to fit into the role his father designed for him and prefers to become a Robinson Crusoe rather than adapting to his father's demands.

The second story in the collection is called *Blood and Bone*. The spatial setting belongs to the fantastic realms: pygmy land. Unlike the first story, where the setting resembled reality, the second story is transposed into a magic terrain, thus, reminds the reader of traditional fairy-tale settings. The first-person narrator starts to unveil childhood memories, from the times when she was abducted by pygmies. When she was five years old, she was returned to humans. The story moves on to the narrator's adult life and explores marital conflicts, the power of superstition and sacrifice. But interestingly, the first pages reflect on issues such as abandonment and othering in childhood. The hints at family neglect are suggestive: "My new family was kind in an absentminded sort of way (...). They never wished to hear about my early life, however. (...) I wanted to tell Mother about my early life. School had been horrible" (17). The child was lacking parental affection: "I wanted Mother to put her arms around me and hold me and tell me how awful it must have been" (18). Interestingly, Galloway also tackles bullying: "Fatty, fatty four by eight, couldn't get through the garden gate. They liked that, and chanted it at me whenever the teacher was somewhere else" (18). Thus, Priscilla Galloway embarks on a narrative journey that transmutes into a gloomy social tapestry.

The third story in the collection, *A Bed of Peas*, explores mostly marital conflicts and recycles motifs from well-known fairy-tales, but childhood is not among its themes. Rather, the narrator tackles adulthood issues in a very conscious, direct manner, similarly to the first stories. The next story, *The Voice of Love*, is an attempt to look beyond *The Little Mermaid's* self-sacrifice: "Sometimes people think they know a story, but they never know the whole of it. And always, some of the details are wrong" (Galloway 60). Again, the story explores the complex articulations of love and marriage rather than focus on childhood and children. On the other hand, the next story in the

collection, *The Good Mother*, is an exquisite re-telling of *Little Red Riding Hood* in which the cynosure is the child Ruby. In this reimagined version of the classic tale, Priscilla Galloway focuses on ten years old Ruby and her dangerous journey to her grandmother's house. The setting radically differs from the original tale: in Priscilla Galloway's version, Ruby and her mother live next to the ocean, whereas the grandmother lives on an island, isolated from the rest of the world. The wood is replaced by the ocean, Red Riding Hood is replaced by Ruby.

The ocean, the giant clams and the journey to the grandmother's house are the story's central motifs. The ocean is a defining element in her childhood: "the sound of the ocean was always in Ruby's ears. Sometimes it crashed, sometimes it growled, sometimes it murmured, but it was always there, defining and shaping her world" (74). The highly symbolic imagery permeates the whole narrative discourse. The traditional fairy-tale motifs are reversed or altered and often words are imbued with explicit sexual content. Even the image of the child-Ruby is highly sexualized: "(...) Ruby was so startled she forgot her dream, in which a giant clam had closed on her leg above the knee" (75). Ruby is further depicted as a bold, brave girl who is unlike the passive princess typology present in traditional fairy tales. One representative scene is her attempt to convince her mother to let her go to her grandmother's to bring her medicine: "I'm ten years old. I'm not a baby. I can run faster than you can. I can be careful. I can swim if I have to" (76). Ruby's obedient nature gets her in trouble since the beasts fool her by impersonating the hunter: "Grown-ups were always in charge, Ruby knew. A child had to do what they said, especially a hunter" (79).

Another interesting part of the story is the interaction between the mother-beast and Ruby. As Ruby caresses the mother-beast's wound, the cubs were feeding off their mother's blood: "Ruby's lungs were filled with the smell of beast as she massaged the hairy hide around the hold with both hands, urging out the blood, while in turn the mother held her little ones to drink" (93). A representative and highly sexualized scene depicts Ruby and the female beast as they embrace each other:

The girl lay against the hairy creature, breathing its pungent smell. It wrapped a huge paw around her, holding her warmly, putting pressure on her slim white arm where blood was spurting. Above the steady pulse of the ocean, another steady beat filled the child's ears: the beast's own strongly beating heart. Ruby looked up. From this angle, the creature's eyes and ears weren't big at all (96).

A Taste for Beauty is Priscilla Galloway's version of *Snow White*. The tale takes place before Snow White's birth and traces the queen's life and the events that led to her ultimate moral downfall. The story starts with a violent scene: "the first two sounds are Pa hitting Mum and something breaking. The third one is her scream. It is always a thing scream, thread, lacking all sense of vitality of power. Just like Mom" (97). The first-person narrator casually, almost indifferently, recounts childhood memories which are filled with domestic violence and beatings. The lack of "all sense of vitality of power" implies a sense of weakness from the narrator's mother, who is guilty for not taking a stand against the violent outburst of the father. Again, the narratorial attitude is atypical for fairy tales as well as the literal description of the beatings. Domestic violence is not an archetypal thematic choice as well. But Priscilla Galloway integrates the violence into the narrative frame and opts for constructing a Caliban-like future queen who gradually loses her bad habits, which are a direct consequence of her chaotic and violent upbringing.

Domestic violence and female silencing are explicitly tackled. But interestingly, the little girl witnessing her mother's beating condemns her passivity. The child is aware of the painful situation: "Pa was my stepfather, but the only father I ever knew. His regular Saturday-night entertainment included beating up Mum" (97). The shocking part consists of the child's attitude towards domestic violence: "I never could figure out why Mum stayed home. He went to hit me once and I grabbed a knife. He never tried that again. I loathe Pa with a passion" (97). By boldly refusing passivity and choosing an aggressive eye-for-eye attitude, the child becomes an atypical protagonist for a fairy-tale. The fairy tale quest is replaced with running away: "I always knew I'd run away when I could. The first time, I was ten years old. The police brought me home" (98). The child loathes her environment: "Home! That's a stupid word for it! They brought me back to our house" (98). The need to replace home with "our house" further highlights the child's hateful attitude. The narrator threatens her mother to kill her if she punishes her again: "I'll kill you if you do that again," I told Mum. I meant it too" (98).

As a child, the narrator gets a job at an abattoir which implies sharpening the knives and cutting the animals' throat. The morbid description continues: "At first I thought I'd be upset, but I pretended I was killing Pa. No sweat" (98). Besides, the language the narrator uses is not employed in fairy tales. When older boys whistle at her, she threatens them:

“None of this shit,” I warned them, and they did catch on very quickly after I slashed Tom’s pants in a sensitive area. ‘I’m faster with my knife than any of the rest of you,” I reminded them, “and don’t you forget it” (98).

The Woodcutter’s Wife is the next *truly grim tale*. The story is Priscilla Galloway’s version of Hansel and Gretel and is told from the old witch’s perspective. While the narration focuses mostly on her life story and her magical metamorphoses, some ideas on children are also exposed. The witch’s attitude towards the children is harsh and she repeatedly curses them for their misdeeds: “Stupid child! Our last milk- and our last jug. (...) Idiot child, I’ll whip you till you bleed for this” (109-110). Hansel’s attitude is similarly harsh: “You’re not our mother. You can’t whip us. Only Dad” (110). When the witch finally manages to lure them into her house in the woods, her intentions are to exploit the children rather than to eat them: “I really needed a servant to do all my work. My 313th birthday was coming up. I had every right to feel tired” (120). The amusing scenes are followed by a happy-ending: the children finally manage to escape from the witch’s house and return to their father with the witch’s jewelry. The witch ultimately admits that she underestimated the children: “I had taken too much for granted, however. Gretel was not as submissive as she seemed. Wretched child!” (122). A peculiar piece of writing, *The Woodcutter’s Wife* is filled with intertextual references and unfixes normative representational modes.

The last story in the collection, *The Prince*, is the re-told version of Cinderella. The story focuses on a bisexual prince, who has a foot fetish, as he recounts his life until he meets Cinderella. The prince mentions that except for Steven, his only friend,

“I was a lonely kid (...) Oh, I saw lots of other young people. They were always being invited to the palace to keep me company. They were supposed to play with me, and they did. We did play, all very correct, all very distant-no fun ever. They could never forget I was the prince” (124-125).

Then, the narrative focus shifts to the prince’s later life, but the brief remark about his lonely childhood (as a consequence of his social status) is definitely a recurring motif in Priscilla Galloway’s *grim tales*. Loneliness, abandonment, domestic violence, alienation, otherness are leitmotifs which gradually imbue the tales with a sense of uneasiness which is further heightened by associating all these miserable states with children and childhood.

3. Conclusions

Priscilla Galloway's *Truly Grim Tales* is indeed a unique collection of contemporary fairy-tales in the Canadian literary landscape. Her representational mode and thematic choice are her main innovative practices. While canonized fairy tales operate with symbolic imagery and allusions, Priscilla Galloway boldly depicts domestic violence, abandonment, loneliness and stereotypical gender roles, using children to heighten the seriousness of the topics. By revising these concepts, Priscilla Galloway challenges the foundations of fixed cultural practices and the traditional representational forms in fairy-tales.

Galloway uses irony, intertextuality, pastiche, free indirect discourse and juxtaposition to heighten the displaced effect in her tales. As other postmodern fairy tales, her stories "re-activate the wonder tale's 'magic' or mythopoeic qualities by providing new readings of it, thereby generating unexploited or forgotten possibilities from its repetition" (Bachillega 22). *The Name* focuses on sexism, abandonment and outsidership as experienced by a child. *The Good Mother* offers an alternative Red Riding Hood who bravely confronts the giant clams and other beasts to be reunited with her grandmother, whereas *A Taste for Beauty* looks beyond the evilness of the queen from Snow White and lays stress on childhood trauma and domestic violence. *A Bed of Peas* traces the tumultuous relationship of two star-crossed lovers, while *The Voice of Love* meditates on the little mermaid's self-sacrifice. *The Woodcutter's wife* is a witch's narrative on her long life, while *The Prince* explores Cinderella from another perspective and introduces innovative elements into the fairy-tale universe. As seen, these tales are related to the canonized versions, but differ radically in the representational mode. Rather than being "unparalleled source of adventure" (Cashdan 9), these tales warn the readers about the dangers of violence and familial conflicts while also *looking beyond* traditional fairy-tales.

Priscilla Galloway deconstructs standard cultural myths in order to highlight the flaws in social expectations and cultural practices. The sad reality of children marked by domestic violence and alienation is explicitly negotiated within the fictional framework. If "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (King 2), then Priscilla Galloway's tales indeed are distorted mirrors of our own wickedness. Karl Kroeber asserted that "storytelling is perhaps humanity's primary tool for changing reality" (13), both on a literal and figurative dimension. If that is so, then reframing familial notions of childhood in Galloway's forthright storytelling mode is one way to re-configure established realities. Furthermore, Galloway's atypical representation of children

and childhood disrupts the narrative frame and also functions as a metafictional device which questions the (artificial) structure of a fairy-tale.

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Children and Childhood in Movies

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Abstract. Since the beginning of cinematography, screenwriters and directors were interested in portraying children in movies. They are of no less importance as adults, maybe quite on the contrary, children can raise essential questions regarding the meaning of an adult's life, they can challenge the adult into introspection and change, they can help adults become aware of their responsibilities and they can teach the adult to love. Unconditionally. In a few movies of my choice - *La vita è bella* (1997), *The Book Thief* (2013) and the more recent *Gifted* (2017), *The Glass Castle* (2017) and *Wonder* (2017) – I suggest a number of possible perspectives on children as seen in war contexts, in relation to adults, especially parents, and as character development.

Key words: children, childhood, movies, responsibility, war, relationship, life

The French-Swiss film director Jean-Luc Godard was once saying that being alone involves asking questions and making films is to answer them (Dudley, 1998). Cinema has always been an attraction due to its quick access to human eye, mind, thoughts, ear, and feelings. What matters when we deal with cinematography is not merely what it makes us feel like or whether it succeeds in creating visual pleasure, but also (and maybe, above all) the extent to which it succeeds in helping us encounter our true selves, the other and the divinity and helping us evolve spiritually, morally, socially.

Childhood seen in movies is a theme that became more exploited in the recent years, but it was always present on the screen since it had always raised questions in daily life and had been a source of confusion, joy, exhaustion and dilemmas altogether. Children are either

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mistreated or well-gifted, well beyond adulthood if they appear in movies, they might surprise us with their world or they might annoy us with their thinking or presence. They might as well teach us something we were certain we already possessed or something we were not aware were lacking. They come in movies as revelations, as surprises or as results of adults' errors in nurturing. They are our mirrors and our heroes at the same time.

1. Beginnings

The first record of a child on film is *Le repas de bébé*, shot in 1895 by Louis Lumière. He was recording his brother, Auguste, with his wife, Marguerite, feeding their daughter, Andrée. It is an example of real life fragments of childhood caught on film for eternity, it catches the joy of the child being taken care of the people that love her the most, moments that generally children cannot remember in their adult life, but that undoubtedly leave their mark on the emotional growth. The baby here seems happy under the wings of her protective parents and the parents seem enchanted by the presence of another member in the family, a treasure, not a burden. Another film about childhood worth mentioning could be Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon*, produced in 1902, considered by Pasquale Iannone a sort of childhood viewed from the inside out, unlike *Le repas de bébé*, which could represent childhood seen from the outside (Iannone, Febr. 2018).

Chaplin cannot be ignored on this subject of childhood and children on the screen both for his accomplishments in cinematography and notoriety, and for the movie *The Kid* (1921) - one of the greatest movies in the silent movies category - written, produced and directed by him. Not arbitrarily, *The Kid* (in which Chaplin himself plays the role of an adoptive father) focuses on a poor child growing up in unsatisfactory conditions of life. Chaplin's life itself was deprived of normal means of living; his mother struggled with financial problems, which eventually led to mental issues and Charlie being forced to go in workhouses as a child.

The movie could be seen as an attempt to raise people's awareness regarding the suffering created by poverty within families and especially in children's lives and a way to emphasize the closeness felt by the adoptive father and the lost child in spite of a chaotic life. Two strangers become a family if they do not have a family of their own, thus bringing proof to the popular idea that family is not necessarily made up of biological relatives, but by soulmates. Closeness can be built wherever hearts can love and can let themselves be loved, a theme we will encounter in many other movies. Another theme we will notice in

movies is the relationship between parents and their children, particularly parents' attitude towards the nurturing responsibility. The newborn child's biological mother withdraws from the role of motherhood voluntarily, abandoning the baby in a luxurious car, although seems to have second thoughts afterwards and comes back to the abandonment place in hopes of finding him again. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, the baby cannot be found since he is found and taken home by a tramp. The tramp becomes his illegal adoptive father, who, although raises him to be a cunning thief rather than an honest hardworking boy, grows attached to the boy and teaches him something probably more valuable: love and attachment are to be found even (or more) in poor economic conditions, a tramp can offer and feel more love than a biological parent. Thus the biological parents (his mother later becomes a well-known artist (Lawson J.H., 383)) and the welfare workers have more of a negative image, and the tramp – the outcast of the society - is seen as an affectionate and more responsible person.

Tarkovsky as well could not be ignored in this research at least for his first movie, the movie which was about to prove whether he was adequate for directing or not. *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) is a film about children used in World War II as informers. Iannone thinks that "directors use the figure of the child to amplify the horror of war" (Iannone, Febr. 2018). The more tragedy and drama in a child's context, the higher the awareness of the damage caused by wars and the nonsense they imply. The children are forced into premature adulthood and Iannone mentions a *Come and See* as one of the most representative movies in this sense (Elen Klimov, 1985, quoted by Iannone, Febr. 2018). Another sensitive theme in movies involving children and further on I will discuss a few movies of this genre since it is widely used and rather important for the reality and implications of wars.

Although *Ivan's Childhood* had its starting point Bogomolov's short story, *Ivan* (1957), Tarkovsky was not drawn as much to Bogomolov's emotional approach - he himself considers that not all prose can be transferred to the screen (Tarkovsky, 15) -, but to the choice of events that build and end the action and the character of the child, kept for the movie the main line of action, but added to the child's life his own blended childhood memories connected to the figure of his mother (Tarkovsky, 30) and the terror of the war. Tarkovsky considered that chronological order of actions is not essential (Iordanova, 2013) in a movie for creating the proper atmosphere, but the stream of consciousness that can suggest the dramatic movement

of the soul and of the memories inside a person's thoughts and feelings. Among the things that impressed Tarkovksy in the initial story of Bogomolov:

Here the hero's death has a particular significance. At the point where, with other authors, there would have been a comforting follow-up, this story ends. Nothing follows. Usually in such situations an author will reward his hero for his military exploits. All that is hard and cruel recedes into the past. It turns out to have been merely a painful stage in his life. In Bogomolov's story, this stage, cut off by death, becomes the final and only one.

Tarkovsky goes on with the following thing that impressed him in the story:

The stuff of the narrative was not the heroics of reconnaissance operations, but the interval between two missions. The author had charged this interval with a disturbing, pent-up intensity reminiscent of the cramped tension of a coiled spring that has been tightened to the limit.

This approach to the depiction of war was persuasive because of its hidden cinematic potential. It opened up possibilities for recreating in a new way the true atmosphere of war, with its hyper-tense nervous concentration, invisible on the surface of events but making itself felt like a rumbling beneath the ground.

And finally:

A third thing moved me to the bottom of my heart: the personality of the young boy. He immediately struck me as a character that had been destroyed, shifted off its axis by the war. Something incalculable, indeed, all the attributes of childhood, had gone irretrievably out of his life. And the thing he had acquired, like an evil gift from the war, in place of what had been his own, was concentrated and heightened within him.

In a non-developing, constant state of tension, passions reach the highest possible pitch, and manifest themselves more vividly and convincingly than in a gradual process of change. It is this predilection of mine that makes me so fond of Dostoevsky, for me the most interesting characters are outwardly static, but inwardly charged with energy by an overriding passion.

Ivan turned out to be a character of this kind. And when I read Bogomolov's story these things took hold of my imagination. (Tarkovsky, 16, 17)

I will look into a few movies – among which some were built on real facts – where we will encounter similar themes and analyse the way each movie deals with them: Children and childhood in war, relationship between children and parents and the evolution of the character from the beginning to the end of the movie. And the movies chosen for this research are movies that impressed me in certain aspects or have earned great popularity over the years and I considered they will be of interest to this subject: *La vita è bella* (1997), *The Book Thief* (2013) and the more recent *Gifted* (2017), *The Glass Castle* (2017) and *Wonder* (2017).

2. Children and Childhood in War

Undoubtedly, *La vita è bella* is one of the most popular and loved war movies. It focuses on Guido and his family, especially on him with his son, Giosuè, after the whole family is taken to a concentration camp during the World War II. Giosuè does not understand much of the happenings, especially of the tragedy, the big picture and the change in their lives, being only 5 years old. His perception on the war adjusts to the interpretation given by his father to all the events inside the concentration camp.

It is very similar to Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where entering another world supposed other participants and other rules to obey; thus, in order to be successful in that new world Alice had to keep in mind what she should eat in order to be able to enter certain doors, what language she should use with diverse strange characters, each with their own peculiarity. The same way, in *La vita è bella*, the child is taught that the concentration camp is a kind of new world (a positive one, although seemingly it is not) where they have to adapt (not cry, obey unfriendly rules, not express sorrow, worry) in order to become the winners (in order not to die, in fact, or at least not as soon as others). This transfiguration of reality for the child makes the father a real hero. A hero not only for his hiding his suffering, but mainly for transforming the tragedy of the suffering into a joyous act that has nothing tragic in itself.

Although the boy is at first reserved and refuses to 'play', later on discovers it might be interesting, and tempting to win.

Thus, all the tragedy the adults see, feel and understand in that context is reduced to a temporary pain in order to get a precious prize. The tragedy is given another meaning, suffering is to be taken as a comedy, since they all but play a game where no one gets hurt for real. The meaning of suffering is what Guido changes in his son's mind and soul in order to help him surpass a global and unforgettable tragedy, a

tension in which they did not know even whether his wife was still alive or how many days they would survive there. La Rochefoucauld was saying that there are accidents in life for which you need to be slightly crazy in order to survive (Gide A., 122). So Guido chooses to play the crazy card, the only one that would have spared his son a lot of pain. Even when taken to be executed by the German soldier under his son's eyes, Guido prefers to keep playing the role in front of Giosuè and Giosuè does not realize his father is heading to death. The game has an ending, the tank really arrives and the boy is overjoyed that his father's promise become true. What he does not know yet – but the mature voice of the narrator does – is that the tank belongs to the US army because the war had finally ended and the camp is liberated; he can reunite with his mother. What the boy remembers is that the rules of game were not broken, it happened just like his father told him it would. He did not perceive the war as a tragedy and that is his father's merit. Victor Frankl wrote in his book, *Man's search for meaning*, that mankind is not to be necessarily kept away from suffering at all cost; mankind needs to find a reason for the suffering, a meaning that would explain the shock the suffering creates. He himself had a tragic experience while in Auschwitz. He wrote about a psychotherapeutic method of survival: finding a purpose in life, a positive outcome of the negative situation you are in; he wrote that the thought of seeing his wife again when the war is over kept him alive and sane in the midst of the difficulties in the concentration camp. When the war was over, he found out that the reason that kept him alive died during the war. Thus proving – if we can say this – that the meaning does not even have to be real or realistic in order to be effective. As in *La vita è bella*

But we, as viewers, find the comedy his father played all the more tragic for this reason, we know what it means and what it takes to swallow one's fear and terror and play happy having no certainty whether tomorrow will exist or not. *La vita è bella* shows us there are more ways to suggest tragedy than by merely showing tragic scenes. It can also be accomplished through comedy.

The Book Thief is one of the movies that highlight the war as a way to force the children into maturity before their age. It presents Liesel on her journey to a foster family in another city and her adjustment to a new and unknown life. War hinders everything all the more so as everything is new: new parents, new friends, new school, new room, new food, or that is... lack of food. The new conditions which Liesel has to confront are at first almost unbearable, but at least she saved a book from the cemetery where her younger brother was buried, although she could not yet read. With time though, she discovers that

her foster parents are good-hearted people; they have rigid rules, but she really grows into loving her. Again the theme of strangers who become family under difficult conditions.

Liesel learns to open up to neighbours and friends, though at the beginning she refuses to speak, living in the aftermath of her separation from her family. She comes to learn that war means taking sides: some people will take the powerful side because they are afraid of dying or losing something important and thus become the aggressors; other people will stick to their principles with any cost, often becoming the victims. For example, at one point, Liesel's foster family hid in their house, a Jew, Max whose father helped Hans a lot. Because Rudy finds the journal Max gave to Liesel, Liesel has to uncover the secret of Max' presence and almost creates the context for Franz - the now aggressor - to obtain the information. Critical situations force people to show who they really are. Rudy keeps the secret although he takes some chances and then retrieves the journal for her, while Franz seems a future Nazi capable of committing crime in order to please the superiors and the system. War transforms some people into executioners, others into real friends, comrades or family.

Max' presence among them is like a ticking clock - they never know when authorities might discover him and punish them - but is also a stranger who becomes family for life (his encounter of Liesel after the war is over is like reuniting with family) and the figure of another educator. Max teaches Liesel a lot and, most of all, he stimulates her curiosity for learning. To highlight the affection created among them, I should point out the scene where Liesel shouts Max' name running past the Jews' row in order to find him, a reaction that could cost any of the family's members conscription into the army, jail etc.

All in all, the children in this movie are described by mature attitudes, they learn to take decisions under pressure and with high costs and assume the consequences of their choices.

3. Relationship between Children and Parents/Adults.

It would be proper to begin this section by mentioning *The Glass Castle*, a movie made after a book, autobiographical book, a 2005 memoir written by Jeannette Walls, the second daughter of Rex and Rosa out of four children. Rex, an alcoholic father who is more often unemployed than employed and spends all the money in the house on drink (Gillette, 2017) and Rose Mary, a painter who would rather paint something that would last years than prepare for her children a meal that would last only a few minutes. Jeannette learns to cook for the family at 3 years old, although she manages to burn herself so seriously

that she has to be hospitalized. They move at least 20 places throughout their childhood.

The glass castle is a metaphor for a promise-never-to-be-kept, the home Rex keeps promising to build for them, he even started - and always updates and develops - a house plan made of glass and leads his children to believe it will become a reality. The fact that the promise never takes shape makes the children become disappointed with their parents and responsible for their own future. If they want to have another life, they had to leave and follow their dream. This is how Jeannette and her older sister, Lori, manage to do and they want to separate themselves from their former life, feeling traumatized and scarred. The adults and children in this movie seem to switch places and not to correspond to the age they are. The children are the mature ones since they try to save money for the future, cook for the family, and the parents seem to be the immature beings who never know how to provide for their family, when it is the time to eat, how to keep their promises and, above all maybe, how to take care of the children.

On the contrary, in *Wonder*, August is the central figure of the family: not only the parents give up their lives in order to soothe Auggie's, but also his sister, Olivia. She does not even have time to open up to her mother about her own difficulties, because all her time is consumed encouraging Auggie, be there for Auggie, helping him develop, care about other people, not be afraid of them, interacting with them. His mother, Isabel, has delayed completing her master thesis because Auggie needed all the attention.

Again another example is *Gifted*. In *Gifted*, we could say we have examples of both categories. Mary Adler's grandmother fits into the category of the irresponsible parent because of her treatment towards her daughter, Mary's mother. All the tragedy in Mary's life comes from Evelyn's obstinacy to transform Diane into the accomplisher of her own dreams, driving her into despair and, eventually, into death, thus depriving Mary of her mother. On the other side, there is Frank who raises her in a completely different childhood than his and Daine's, identifying his mother's errors and trying not to repeat them.

When asked by authorities in the process of custody why she prefers staying with Frank, Mary has a quick and firm answer: "Because he wanted me before I was smart." That would be or should be one of the definitions of a parent, the child noticed and felt the love and freedom she received, recognized the true nature of love: love is unconditional. Full stop. It is not offered on certain terms, it does not last only during some periods of time. It either is or is not. Harsh truth

taken out from a child's mouth who can spot the difference between true love and fake love, between sane and unhealthy love.

In *La vita è bella*, we see the same kind of sacrificial love for children in Guido's relation to Giosuè all the time spent in the concentration camp. He would rather ignore his own suffering and pain in order to make his son feel happy and believe him; he would rather go dying with the smile on his face not to trouble Giosuè, so as not to make him realise the tragedy he really sees.

The Book Thief is no exception here, Hans and Rosa form a strong couple. At first, they create the impression that they are forever at odds with one another, hurting each other, Rosa being a cruel woman, but as we come to know them better while Liesel gets to know them better, we find out they are both good people and sacrifice their little so that Liesel and Max might survive. Hans even takes Lehman's side riskily when Lehman is taken by the police because he is a Jew. He risks his life or his family's life when he stands up for a stranger, he does not even realize the possible awful consequences of his actions until afterwards. This means putting others above oneself, this means love and maturity.

4. Character Evolution

Every movie – like life itself - takes its characters through diverse (initiatory) journeys over the course of which they either change for the good or for the bad. It is interesting to watch their transformation, their evolution or involution to see the ways in which a character could develop. All the more so as we look at young characters, prone to change in a greater degree than adult characters, who already formed their nature, temper...

For example, in *Wonder*, at the beginning of the movie, we see a scared and shy Auggie, who always wears his astronaut helmet (received as a gift from his sister) when he goes out of the house. He does want to be seen; not because he does not want to be known, but because he expects that, once known by others, they will have reactions of surprise, disgust, even fear. He craves to be known and loved for who he really is, but the fear of being rejected, laughed at, and despised because of his looks is greater. As a boy who was home taught until the fifth grade, he now knows it is time to leave the safe place and go to school, meet real people, cooperate with them, be exposed to everything he fears.

He is first welcome the way he expected, his colleagues insult him and keep their distance. Auggie gathers reasons for which he should not go to school anymore because people react negatively to his

presence and he is certain that will never change. Yet, with time, his colleagues and teachers discover he is a well-educated and intelligent boy, he surpasses everyone in the classroom intellectually and has a nice sense of humour. If, at the beginning, he is fearful and withdrawn, in the end, Auggie has made a few real friends who care about him deeply, who he comes to care about as well and has won his teachers' hearts. He learns that people are more complex than initially thought and can surprise him positively. In short, he learns that others are not necessarily "the hell".

In *La vita è bella*, Giosuè is unaware of the perils they – as family – go through, entertained by his father's funny play and not touched by the sadness he would have felt had he understood the reality he was living. But the voice of a mature Giosuè narrating the story uncovers us a person fully aware of the dangers they were facing at that time of war, touched by his father's funny play meant to relieve him from stress and saddened by his loss. Time and awareness bring changes of heart and attitude. Like Dawson said, "it is a film of two distinct halves, inspired by Dante's observation that, 'There is no bigger tragedy than to remember the happy times during the misery.'" (Dawson, 2002)

In *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette goes through a series of hurtful, unpleasant, disappointing and dangerous situations over her childhood. She develops an understandable coldness towards her parents although she keeps visiting them as adult. She is too traumatized by their selfishness and lack of responsibility to be able to admire them and that is serious pain for her. She even brings her lover to their home to introduce her future husband to them, but every contact she has with them is even more disappointing, as her father has not learnt by this age the value of true relationship, the value of mature behaviour at least in public and the beauty of affection towards other people, especially his own family. All these reasons determines her not to invite her parents to her engagement, but they show up anyhow and ruin the atmosphere. The relationship between them breaks until her father is dying and both realize a few important aspects: she realizes family cannot be replaced by any other relationship and he realizes the errors he made in raising his children. For Jeannette, the closeness to death brings another kind of perspective: in spite of all his mistakes and failures, the good moments and her father's love are irreplaceable and valid, she is aware he cannot change the weak character he has for the better. Thus the child – now mature - keeps the love towards the parents and also keeps the little and poorly expressed love of her parents.

In *The Book Thief*, Liesel is at first shocked by the separation from her mother, angry she has to live with strangers who do not love and know her, she refuses to adapt and refuses to talk to people. Her foster father's kindness and Rudy's openness help her open up to the unwanted newness and get accustomed. From a withdrawn and repulsive girl, with time, she learns to adapt and see the beautiful in other people wherever she reaches. She learns to stand up for what she believes; she learns to care for others and to follow her dream of becoming a writer. She learns to discover people's soul under the harsh attitude they display and comes to get attached to her foster mother as well.

5. Conclusions

Movies portraying children are not easy to watch, they carry heavy messages in them. They each have at least one lesson to teach. As children are themselves lessons in daily life. They teach us how to be better adults and movies represent a way in which we can see those lessons.

The key is usually adaptation to the difficult reality they have to face. Keeping the same mindset they had as children is not a solution when confronted with the adult life. Another key idea is observation of adults' errors and the challenge to create a world without those errors, to fight against those negative qualities. One of them is love. Recognize true love in others and within the self and being able to feel and live that love in relation to others. Not becoming numb affectionately is a great achievement in the midst of the misfortunes caused by war, hate, death, treason and lack of friendship.

The purpose of this research was to highlight a few aspects regarding childhood and children in certain movies that impressed me: children during wars, children in relation to their parents, with focus on the responsibility and irresponsibility of their parents and finally children as characters in evolution.

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The Loss of Identity in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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Abstract: Colonialism transformed and displaced cultural standards, traditions and beliefs, and imposed different ones that were forced upon colonized people. This is how cultural displacement began. Kureishi deals with these issues and the challenge of reshaping a national identity, recovering from its harmful experience. The quest for identity is imperative for understanding the self and having the sense of belonging. It also helps the individual identify with the society he lives in, and with the world. Protagonists in postcolonial novels have a hard time finding their place and struggle to fit between the native and imperial world. Kureishi's novel reveals the question about the newly born identity.

Key words: displacement, postcolonial children, children characters.

Displacement was regarded in many postcolonial writings as the loss of self and place, and was used as a synonym for migration. Displaced people "became alienated as they lost their cultural space along with their individual homes, and suffered psychological damage, loss of confidence and a fall in status" (Thussu 78). Salman Rushdie talks about migrants' identities in *Imaginary Homelands*: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for the writer to occupy" (Rushdie 15). From this oscillation between two (or more) cultures, the migrant can gain "a newness, which can only be achieved by bringing together two seemingly incompatible positions" (Mitrulescu 51).

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Displacement also affects the developmental process of immigrant children. They are the most exposed to racism, violence, immigration-specific challenges (acculturation, ethnic identity formation, bilingualism). It may be that children's adaptation to a certain environment is better than the one of an adult, but studies have proven the contrary. Unfortunately, displacement does not spare them, children being the most susceptible of all, their purity and naivety is engulfed by the spreading powers of colonization, trusting them into the unknown territory of the ruling colonial powers. A study made in China based on an investigation of the development pattern of urban adaptation, social identity and their dynamic relationship among migrant children, sheds light on a fact of utmost importance. The study revealed that "identification with the culture of origin declined among migrant children in public school and increased among children in migrant children school, while identification with the host culture was inversely affected" (Xiaojiao, et al.1). On the other hand, the key to social identity for migrant children is education. Education has been universally accepted as "the bedrock and engine of growth. It is a child's passport out of poverty" (Nwanosike 624). But "colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities and filled people with abnormal complexes" (Walter 273). European powers "did not establish colonial states to carry out a programme of political development or changes but to erect efficient and effective administrative states for purposes of economic exploitation and every machinery was put in motion in ensuring that they realize their aim" (Nwanosike 629). But migrant children have a difficult time adapting in schools among their peers.

Hanif Kureishi reveals this disturbing aspect in his novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where seventeen-year old Karim, the main character and narrator of Kureishi's novel, is a disturbed teenager, constantly trying to find his true identity.

The first paragraph of Kureishi's novel introduces Karim Amir, the son of an Indian father and a white English mother. The story is woven with issues such as racism, identity loss, initiation, "the outsider looking in" (Kaleta 68). Karim is both the protagonist and the narrator of the novel. First published in 1990, it is considered one of Kureishi's best novels. It combines the typical 19th century genres, *Bildungsroman* and *The Condition of England* novel, setting the novel of *The Buddha Suburbia* in a contemporary time. The novel illustrates London in the 1970s with its social and political condition. It reveals disturbing issues such as racial conflict or culture clash, and it describes the youth culture of the 70s. The novel reveals the cultural history of

Britain with its specific popular musical forms and the subcultures of that time, and their importance to the plot. It traces “the end of the influence of the hippie movement in Britain to the beginnings of New Wave in the late seventies” (Bentley 162). Also, the novel provides the reader with the images of immigrants from Pakistan and India and raises the question of identification for them and their children. The children are the second generation of immigrants, a hybrid, some half British; which makes it difficult for them to integrate in a group or in a nation and feel like they belong there.

Kureishi’s novel is a mixture elements derived from displacement. One of the key terms is hybridity, which leads to identity loss and alienation from the original culture. Hybridity means mixture in a general sense and it is the effect of colonisation on people in former colonies and on the ones that migrated to other countries. Everyone has a personal sense of who they are in the society and can shape one’s identity according to the nation he belongs to.

Although politically, the United Kingdom is a unified state, culturally it is a blend of identities. Each state and nation has its own mixture of identities, cultures, languages, traditions and historical facts. And embracing cultural hybridity while exploring the concept of national identity, can lead to a better understanding of the effects of colonialism. Hybridity could be understood by anyone who has lived as a foreigner, permanently displaced in a new culture, especially coming from a second generation of immigrants, who moved with their parents from India or Pakistan to England. This shift of culture was caused by colonialism and those who suffered from its effects know the struggle to redefine one’s identity. For hybrid children, who have two or more nationalities, the struggle is even worse. They have the feeling of not belonging to any of the cultures and are often not accepted by any compatriots, neither the Indians, nor the British. Therefore, the problem of alienation arises. The hybrid who have moved from their native country have no understanding of the ones who have not experienced alienation or displacement.

Karim Amir is a hybrid character, living between Indian and British culture, feeling Indian because of his skin colour, but on the inside he feels like an Englishman: “Englishman I am, from the South London suburbs” (Kureishi 3) and further in the novel states that: “If I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would create it.” (213) He feels alienated from his Indian origins and has a sense of belonging to the British culture, perhaps because his mother is British and he feels closer to her than his Indian father.

Ironically, he looks foreign to an English person but lives in

Britain, in the suburbs. The environment where Karim lives is predominantly British, the suburbs being populated by white working class people. Therefore, he encounters racism in various forms. His struggle to find a culture he belongs to make him deny his Indian origin. But, at the end of the novel, Karim presents a different perspective: "I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now - the Indians - that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact". (212)

Only accepting his both origins will begin to feel complete. His personality reveals a great inferiority complex due to his Indian descent and he feels humiliated when he is asked by the theatre director to imitate an Indian accent when starring in "Mowgli". In addition, Shadwell, the director, asks him to paint his body so that he could be "darker". Ironically, this scene reveals Karim as re-colonized (although being born British), and forced to accept an inferior position.

Apart from being a racial hybrid, Karim is also a social one. The mixture of cultures he is born into makes him a product of cultural conflict, and his constant moving from the suburbs into the city and back turns him into a social hybrid and the product of the class system in Britain.

Karim is one of the multiracial breed children, shaped by striking facts like facing racism or his parents' divorce (Karim's father decides to leave his wife and be with Eva, a sophisticated woman aiming high on the social ladder). The novel reveals "the rebellion of desire" (Bentley 90) against the moral limits of society, the lower class versus the upper class, the bisexual rather than the heterosexual and presents scenes of orgies as opposed to marriage. The *Buddha of Suburbia* is an amusing novel sprinkled with ironies "indebted to British social comedy" (Bentley 90) which show the readers how characters change and evolve throughout the novel. This change is predictable due to their environment; one of the themes of the novel is the theme of suburbs versus the city, and Karim is a symbol of a social hybrid, with a "lack of moral responsibility to others" (Bentley 171), since he is "a product of the cultural revolution of the 1960s of pop music, instant fame, sexual freedom, drugs, multiracialism, multiculturalism." (Bentley 90)

Empathy or moral values were not very common in Karim's generation, when Thatcherism was on the rise, in a time when no one had authentic or consistent politics. As a consequence, Karim felt free to adopt any position would benefit from, "he admits that his own protests against society's injustices are self-serving and strategic" (Buchanan 48). In the novel, Karim admits that "although I hated

inequality, it didn't mean I wanted to be treated like everyone else. I recognized that what I liked in Dad and Charlie was their insistence on standing apart." (Kureishi 149) He did not favour a specific political party, he was rather self-centred and focused on Charlie, his stepbrother, as a role model. Charlie was a selfish career-oriented young man. Towards the end of the novel, however, Karim has a change of heart and does not want to pursue his role model's lifestyle and concludes that time and money lead to greed and indulgence, and that "money can cut the cord between you and ordinary living. There you are, looking down on the world, thinking you understand it, that you're just like them, when you've got no idea, none at all." (249)

His search for identity and place in society lead to depression and his suffering makes him want to mutilate himself with pieces of broken bottles, feeling like the world wants to crush him: "my inability to get out of bed for days and days, the feeling of the world moving in to crush on me, went on and on." (249) However, the end of the novel reveals a different perspective. Karim becomes successful in his career, starring in various theatre plays and later was offered a part in a British Daily Soap. His development is seen also in his personal life, he becomes more responsible and sympathetic towards others: "I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply." (283 - 284) This shows that he managed to gain moral values and found peace with his inner self which led to a development in empathy towards others.

"Karim's sexuality and his philosophy of "fucking anyone" could be seen as a symbol for his general attitude." (Groepner 8) The novel begins with an unexperienced and young Karim. His parents haven't divorced yet and does not know anything about the hypocrisies of the world. Further in the novel, Karim matures and "feels the politics of colour; he knows the role-playing of gender, the power play of sex, he practices the pretensions of art; and, moreover, he suspects that, like everybody else he knows, he doesn't really give a damn about any of it". (Kaleta 78-79) He becomes a grown up man, ready to face the hypocrisies of society. He experiences racism and realizes the power that fame and money can have: "I felt the pleasure of pleasing others, especially as this was accompanied by money-power" (Kureishi 283).

The novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* "continues the tradition in the English novel that emphasizes antisocial elements, sexual excess, and adolescent rebellion as rites of initiation". (Kaleta 77) Karim is surrounded by the hypocrisy of the 70's, revealing a story filled with political, sexual, artistic hypocrisy and racial manifestations. The novel

is a mixture of bildungsroman and the condition of England, and it can be seen as an initiation novel with the main focus on Karim: "Initiation stories treat the process of maturation as experienced by the initially adolescent main character". (Kaleta 77) The protagonist is trying to define his place in society, but he finds himself in opposition to the world of adults, with hypocrisies of all kinds. The main character is a rebel adolescent, living in a society where coloured people represent a category of sub-human. It is difficult to understand why people who call themselves civilised, would generally accept such categorisation. Karim experiences a moral conflict, trying to erase his past and accept only his Englishness. But finds himself trapped between cultures, with a doubt about his real partisanship. He is in search of his place in life and society and peace of mind. He fights with boredom and depression, and insecurities that prevent him from clearly define himself. The story unfolds with elements of sarcasm and humour, with no stereotypes or a suggestive solution to the readers. The characters are dynamic, round, their personality changes and they are not particularly among the good ones, rather selfish at times and their behaviour is not something you can take pride in. The author wishes to create authentic characters, realistic to the society they experienced at that time, so that readers can relate to the feathers and events. Slang language aims to recreate that experience and transposes readers into the past realities. Colloquial expressions and direct use of language, together with the shocking portrayal of society in the suburbs, make the narration of events more authentic, and help the author express the sense of rebellion against the specific norms of writing a novel.

To sum up, the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* deals with specific themes like rebellion, racism, the search for identity, depression, boredom, sexual experimentation, issues teenagers confronted with. Kureishi's novel maintains the norms of initiation novels, although the author is more radical because of his protagonist's "dismissal of ideology and innate selfishness, combined with a lack of motivation" (Groeppe 12) Karim's world is filled with negative features like racism, selfishness, hypocrisy or class confusion and, "by immersing himself in the pleasures of consumption, he manages to enjoy himself a good deal." (Buchanan 42) Although a rebel in his own right, Karim does not rebel against hypocrisy or injustice, but rather tries to adapt to the norms of society so that he fits in. Kureishi writes the story using humour and has no intention of creating stereotypes, making the novel "realistic and convincing". (Groeppe 13) He does not specifically blame London's society for its injustice but rather satirizes postcolonial London. His writing becomes revolutionary by using an extremely

sexual language, highlighting and satirizing the issues at that time. Kureishi writes the novel from the perspective of a hybrid, He knows the hardships of postcolonial people, living in Britain, growing up in Britain, but being regarded as an outsider, a foreigner, the other. This contradiction is the drive he needs to animate his work and influence him to write in such a unique way. The author reveals “the paradoxes of [his] position as hybrid insider[s]/outsider[s] and as mediator[s] between communities.” (Ranasinha 223)

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Proper Names as Signs in Adina Rosetti's Stories

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Abstract: The study focuses on proper names in the context of children literature. Also, it intends to analyse the way the names of the characters contribute, in semiotic terms, to the thematic core of the literary work. In this respect, the study is centred on the proper names identified in three Romanian literary works, signed by a contemporary writer, Adina Rosetti. Considering that the name functions similarly to a sign, the perspective on names is semiotic. Conclusively, the present study is structured in three main sections: a description of Adina Rosetti's books, the semiotic theories referring to names and the analysis of several proper names according to the associations they evoke.

Key words index, icon, symbol, child reader, adult writer,

Proper names have been, for long, the object of interest for philologists, linguists, theologians, sociologists, and marketing managers (lately). Moreover, literary names were understood both by writers and by readers as special devices to convey meaning regarding characters and theme. The present study focuses mainly on literary names and their semantic contribution within the thematic unity of a literary work dedicated to children. The literary names the study is focusing on belong to the three books written for children by Adina Rosetti. Scientifically, the study is foregrounded by Yvonne Bertills's book *Beyond Identification, Proper Names in Children's Literature* and Grant W. Smith's chapter *Theoretical Foundations of Literary Onomastics*.

1. Adina Rosetti's Stories

The young Romanian journalist and writer, Adina Rosetti, published in 2014 the successful book for children (age 5-10) *Domnișoara Poimâine*

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și *Joaca de-a Timpul*, (*Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time*), beautifully illustrated by Cristiana Radu. The book published at Curtea Veche Publishing, has received several prizes and, also, has been successfully staged. Consequently, Rosetti's second book for children has been released in 2016: *De ce zboară vrăjitoarele pe cozi de mătură? ... și alte 10 întrebări fantastice* (*Why Do Witches Fly on Broomsticks... and Other 10 Fantastic Questions*), same publishing house, same illustrator. Also in 2016, the author, as her contribution to a project called *The Harvesters of Courage* (Culegătorii de curaj), published *The Book of Courage*, illustrated by Alexia Udriște.

The present study will refer to these three books dedicated to children and to the proper names the author chose for each character and place. Nevertheless, each of the books enumerated here is explicitly foreshadowed by the author's confessions regarding the motivations that stayed at the foundation of each book. In fact, precisely because of these three different author's intentionalities, the three books are quite different and, indirectly, influenced even the author's options in terms of proper names, charactonyms and toponyms. Consequently, a short presentation of each book seems appropriate for easier comprehension of the contribution proper names have inside "the thematic unity of the literary work" (Smith, 309), and how they are influenced "by context and by the literary purposes of their usage" (Bertills 37).

In the present study, I will use some of my personal translations regarding names of the characters and toponyms. The three following presentations are meant to describe the context various proper names are used in, but also to convey some of the most relevant names we want to focus on here.

Before starting narrating the story of *Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time*, Rosetti confesses, in a preface explicitly dedicated to parents, that the present story has been created out of the necessary explanation of temporal notions like past, present, future as children, at a certain age, cannot make the difference between yesterday and tomorrow. Stories could represent such legitimate lessons about time. Indeed, "proper names are subdued to the literary purposes in order to serve certain narrative purposes" (Bertills 42). That is why, in this book, a world of time is created, led by the very long bearded Great Time Magician and inhabited by his children and helpers. The Time Magician's children are Mr. Today (Domnul Azi), a fine gentleman, Mrs. Yesterday (Doamna Ieri), a nice old lady who organizes memories in jars kept inside the cupboard named Past (Trecut) and the cheerful Miss Tomorrow (Domnișoara Mâine), seldom accompanied by her little spoilt cousin, Miss Aftertomorrow (Domnișoara Poimâine). The

Time Magician has also got another daughter, exiled in the land of moors and fog, his eldest daughter named Witch Neverever (Vrăjitoarea Niciodată).

There are some other characters that populate this world such as Mrs. Yesterday's close friends: Mrs. Aforetime (Doamna Altădată), Mrs. Before-yesterday (Doamna Alaltăieri) and the very old lady, Mrs. Once Upon A Time (Doamna A Fost Odată); the elves Sometime, or Back Then, Always and Immediatly (Vreodată, Cândva, Întotdeauna și Numaidecât). Moreover, the Time's kingdom includes The Land of Past, The Land of Present, Land of Future, the hills where the elves live and the moors, Witch Neverever's home. In a parallel world, on the Earth Street, this little girl, Clara, lives together with her parents. As the whimsical Miss Aftertomorrow had a fight with her uncle and, for revenge, she asked Witch Neverever's help so that she could play with time, Clara's life started to flow quickly. Till everything was remediated, Clara realised that she could not enjoy playing, eating, sleeping, going to kindergarten. Finally, the elves re-establish the temporal balance and Miss Aftertomorrow is punished by carrying another name: Miss the Day-Aftertomorrow (Domnișoara Răs -Poimâine). The story has a happy-end and the lesson of time is served.

The second book, *Why Do Witches Fly on Broomsticks... and Other 10 Fantastic Questions*, has its start in eleven creative questions (why princesses like pink, why the dragons need so many heads, why Prince Charming (Făt Frumos) did not succeed in going by car, what happens with a frog who has never been kissed by a princess, what is the darkness afraid of, why the elves have bad grades at math) addressed to children, especially because children prefer questioning all the time.

The eleven titles, but also the stories/ the answers the author wants to give stir the children's imagination by atypical associations between classical characters (Prince Charming, the dragons, the elves) and unexpected situations, very similar to the contemporary children's life: the little princess Isabel Clementina Hermione involuntarily colours everything in pink, including her shower gel; Zmeul Zmeilor (The Dragon of the Dragons) eats a lot of cookies at the cakes shop from The Enchanted Forest and, as he feels very courageous, he goes to conquer the Dragoness who lives in the Ice Tower; Ileana Cosânzeana (the Romanian female protagonist in fairy tales) has replaced the magic Horse with a more recent vehicle, a car in the form of a lady bug, whose wheels have been stolen, that is why she decided to take the car to the Land of the Scrap Head (Ținutul Fiarelor Vechi); the little witch Bláfeldur who discovers the broom as the most useful vehicle; the

conflicts between the ladles (polonice) who own their country, Ladland (Polonicia) and the Chinese sticks; the Darkness's fear (Întunericul) of parties and light and his friends Silence (Tăcerea) and Sleep (Somnul); the dilemma some fruits (Coacăzuka, Piersy, Bananache – Little Blue Berry, Peachie, Bananie) have because they would renounce to their roundness if they were able to make a tasty smoothie.

The third volume, *The Book of Courage*, as part of a project that encourages people and, particularly, children, contains ten short stories inspired by real people and their experiences of life. Partly, the characters (anthropomorphic, with childlike behaviour) are small animals or insects, like the squirrel Vic, the butterfly Maia, or the redeemer pigeon Mir, the idealist little mouse Sever Ritz, the hen Hen who is the teacher of the lizards, the dragonfly Lilly Libelula and the small lady bugs Bob and Tea, the small but courageous guppy named Baltazar, the huge octopus Zet and its friend, the calamari Ka. Some of the characters are human, such as the two boys Aki and Hiro who live in the Land of Joy (Țara Bucuriei) and who were on the point of drowning in the Lake of Melancholy (Lacul Melancoliei), or the two girls, Ilsa and Elga who love climbing in the Land of Sweets (Țara dulciurilor), but almost died in an avalanche on the Candies Crest (Vârful Bomboanelor). All the stories teach a lesson about courage, engagement and responsibility and a reader can easily identify situations from nowadays children's daily life.

2. Grant W. Smith's Semiotic View of Names

Smith writes the chapter *Theoretical Foundations of Literary Onomastics*, studying meaning and function of names in literary works, mainly focusing on several philosophical theories of language that could define the name. John Stuart Mill (1806- 1873) made the distinction between common nouns and proper nouns, sustaining that the proper nouns, apart from the common nouns, do not include in their meaning the attributes common to all the members of a class of things named, but *designate* an individual member of a class of things, therefore „the essential functions of proper nouns are to designate a single individual.” (apud Smith 295) Mill considered that *the name*, in terms of meaning, stays strictly to its grammatical function of designating, without taking into consideration the possible associations that an addressee could make or a certain context could create, or even the word, *per se*, could signify.

This conception regarding the function and meaning of names soon became to be considered reductive, as soon as semiotic theories started to appear. The function of name as exclusive designator does

not take into consideration the possible associations and interpretations the name could create (especially in literary contexts).

Grant W. Smith observes several differences between the meaning and function of names in daily speech and their significance and role in literary texts *i.e.* he refers to “a greater degree of prosodic inventiveness in literature”, “more play with the sound of language and fewer restraints”, especially in the case of children’s literature; he also observes several rhetorical techniques by means of which authors delay the naming of characters, places in the texts, and also he remarks symbolical function of names within literary texts. (Smith 296)

Other famous theories of meaning regarding names belong to Gottlob Frege (1848 – 1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) who created the so called descriptivist theories of meaning. On one side, Frege demonstrates his theory through several examples of names that designate the same extralinguistic entity, but add meaning because of the linguistic contexts they are being used into (Mark Twain and Samuel Clemens). These contexts create associations, “add descriptive dimensions to name meaning” (Smith, 298) and, actually, are part of what Frege calls *sense*, cognitive significance of the name. On the other side, still focusing on the contextual dimension of names, Russell considers that “proper names function as abbreviated definite descriptions of things” or as “an abbreviation of proposition”, emphasizing the way the significance of names depend on their contexts. Still, what Smith observes is that Russell did not take into consideration the subjective interpretation of names *i.e.* a name could be objectively judged only as true or false, according to its contexts. (*Ibidem*)

Also, in his diachronic description, Smith refers to causal theories of name meaning, (299-301) emphasizing the main ideas of Saul Kripke’s book *Naming and Necessity*. Kripke insists on the fact that the descriptive attributes that contexts generate inside the meaningful essence of names, are not part of the meaning of names. No matter the descriptive attributes of the name, attributes which are not unique identifiers (Kripke considers them contingencies known *a posteriori* by the addresser/ addressee), the name simply functions as a designator of a particular entity *i.e.* as a rigid designator – in Kripke’s words. In his book, Saul Kripke takes into consideration only the analytical thinking of the addresser, but not her/ his associative thinking.

Furthermore, Smith identifies two other theorists such as John R. Searle and Frederick Kroon that refer to the fact that in conceiving the meaning and function of a name one should take into account the

speaker's "intentional content" when referring to a name, respectively, the *pretence* (in Krook's terms), "by addressers and addressees, are both the very existence of the reference and a causal chain of the name" (apud Smith, 301).

Grant Smith offers a new perspective on names and on their references, framing instead a semiotic theory. He agrees that a name refers to individual entities, but it also includes some cognitive associations of the interpreters: "a reference will evoke a range of content and grammar from its prior uses and, at the more specific level, it will evoke the personal associations within a user's experience." Moreover, „individuals carry associations to their use of the name that vary widely and may have little in common.”(302)

These associations, as diverse and personal could they be, should not be ignored, as they condition the success of communicative transaction between the addressers and addressees who could share or not the same cognitive associations. This should be taken into consideration also when referring to children's literature where the addresser and addressee are aged differently and have different levels of linguistic competences.

In this regard, Yvonne Bertills insists in her book on the dichotomy child – adult, as long as, in children's literature, the child is the reader and the adult is the writer. Despite the fact that the adult author tries to adjust to a child's knowledge and language, in order to be comprehensible, nevertheless the child reader will focus mainly on form of words and their lexical and phonetic creativity, and not on their rich meanings. (This is possible also in the case of in Rossetti's books, an aspect we will approach in the next part of this study.) As Bertills puts it:

Shades of meanings exist which may be more directed towards the adults, and not grasped by children. However, on a formal level, for instance, on a stylistic level, they may be adapted to the child reader. (...) Only on a close examination, the richness of the name will be self-evident, and intelligible mainly to the adult reader. (61)

I am still inclined to say that adult reader will get more out of the content and will grasp the shades of meanings as a whole, whereas the phonetic features of the name call upon the young readers' attention. By stressing the form of a name, the author can draw the attention of the younger reader or steer the reader's attention in certain ways. (63)

Going back to Smith's demonstration, we have to mention that for explaining his approach on names and references, he appeals to

Charles Sanders Peirce's well known theory on signs: the icon (based on similarity), the index (based on contiguity or correlation) and the symbol, the most complex one. Names are not just simple tags or labels (as in Mill's theory, or Kripske's conception), because they imply several associations in the mind of the interpreters. In this way, Smith identifies names as signs: "Names are best viewed as types of signs, and so, the types of associations they evoke, and hence their meaningfulness may be described as iconic, indexical and symbolic." (304)

Grant Smith scientific approach on names as signs constitutes a lead frame for the present study on proper names in children's literature *i.e.* in Adina's Rossetti's books dedicated to children. The constellation of proper names, belonging to characters and places from Rossetti's books, could be analysed from the semiotic perspective of names as signs and the indexical, iconic and symbolical associations they imply. In his study, Smith analyses not only how proper names (in daily speech or literary discourse) function as indices, icons and symbols, but also how they matter inside a successful communicative act and, particularly, inside a literary work.

Starting from Smith's directions of study, we intend to explore the way in which names (of characters and places) weigh and work inside a specific literary work *i.e.* Rossetti's stories, assigned to children, enriching its interpretative potential.

3. Names as Icons

Regarding names, iconic associations can be generated by phonological and orthographic aspects of names, by physical utterance or even graphic representations. Moreover, Smith (304) claims that these forms of names "seem to be associated with feelings and meaning, in much the same way as the prosody of a poem affects its interpretation." Even the shapes of letters may add meaning regarding the referent, as icons are based on similarity. The way the name sounds could transmit something regarding the referent. The stress on the phonology of names is even more visible in children's literature, because children are more receptive to language play, verbal humour, alienness.

Adina Rossetti names her characters accordingly. For instance, the name *Lilly Libelula* (Lily, the dragonfly), the teacher of flight for the two lady bugs, is constructed on an alliteration that brings vivacity to the name, and implicitly to the character. Moreover, the repetition of letter *l* creates a similar image to the image of a dragonfly, suggesting also the flight, as the repetition of letter *l* creates the visual effect of ascending arrows. Moreover, this particular name seems to be very

close to paronomasia when relating to the name as a compound: Lilly and Libelula. Paronomasia is defined as a lexical and syntactical figure by means of which two paronymic words occur together for the purpose of language play, special sonority, semantic associations.(Bidu-Vrânceanu 352)

Other names such as the mouse's family name, Ritz, or Zet, the name of huge octopus are onomatopoeic. The monosyllabic Ritz is very close to the mouse's squeak expressed through the Romanian onomatopoeia "chiț" /kits/. Also, the name suggests the agility specific to the mouse.

Moreover, the short pronunciation of Zet and the way it sounds /zet/, as much as its short form is antithetical to the character's physical dimensions. This creates a comic affect, but also suggests a being with a small heart. Simultaneously, its abrupt pronunciation describes the character as being bossy and dictatorial, as the octopus exploits all the fishes in the sea and do not listen to their complaints.

It is obvious that some of the names imply an emotive aspect, convey affective values and have positive or negative connotations (Cornița 40). As Benedicta Windt-Val states, "names and other terms of address often serve as a means of expressing feelings, and they can run the whole gamut from love to hatred."(278) In children's literature positive feelings are always encouraged. A nice or comic name could create sympathy and harmony. This is what Lilly Libelula does.

In the same train of ideas, Burelbach refers to the remoteness in naming. He asserts that "to achieve the effect of remoteness is to draw names from existing languages that are geographically distant from the world of the reader." (140) The researcher adds that the same effect can be achieved by means of lexical opacity and their unfamiliarity, but also by utter alieness.(142) Several names in Rosetti's writings have this remoteness effect such as: *Aki* and *Hiro* (names with Asian sonority), the boys from the Land of Happiness; *Ilsa*, *Elga* (names with septentrional resonance and very close to paronomasia) the two climbers in the Land of Sweets and *Blafeldur* (the name of the young witch), a female name whose suffix is very uncommon for Romanian feminine names that mostly end in *-a* or *-ia*; Isabel Clementina Hermione, the three surnames of the pink princess also have an exotic utterance and reflect the princess's stiltedness. Two of the three names have also atypical endings for Romanian feminine names; regardless the common ending *-a*, the name Clementina is still rather rare in Romanian language.

4. Names as Indices

As indices, Smith explains, “names certainly designate individual referents, but our understanding of the reference depends absolutely on our pre-existing knowledge of the referent.”, nevertheless the communicative process is not perfect despite the fact that “the addresser strives to evoke a domain of relevant associations with the referent known by the addressee.” (305) Moreover, as long as indices are built on contiguity, in literature, the names as indices “create an expectation that we know something or should know something about the referents”, this is why “the indexical function of names helps to stimulate our curiosity and leads us forward in our reading.” (Smith 307)

Regarding the children’s literature, most of the characters’ names function as indices, mainly being constructed on lexical associations. The richness of meanings, possible by means of symbolical associations does not appeal to a child reader due to the child’s age, partially reduced linguistic experience and restricted domain of relevant associations. In this way, the adult writer has to make sure that the communicative transaction is successive. Yvonne Bertills explains the specificity of this communicative flux:

Hence the functions of names in children’s narratives could be considered doubled: they uphold the characteristics of literary proper names, but in addition, these characteristics are modified in order to communicate to the appropriate audience, which constitute mostly children or often both adults and children. Proper names in children’s literature are bound to show “traces” in the name form of the adult author, whilst being adapted for the child readers. (Bertills 57)

Several names from Rossetti’s literary works are adapted names that make possible lexical associations for the child reader. For instance, names such as Făt-Frumos (*Prince Charming*) or the female name, *Ileana Cosânzeana*, are familiar names, as the two characters are the protagonists in Romanian folktales. Still, the two characters are re-positioned in a very different context by the author who intends to change the narrative pattern the children are acquainted to. Moreover, Făt-Frumos is not a hero, a rescuer but an old fashioned and conservatory gentleman, who, with difficulty, was seduced into buying a car for his Ileana Cosânzeana. Nevertheless, the author takes into account the children’s possible indexical associations as long as “some names have become ‘concepts’, and which are always associated with certain characteristics or certain behaviour in any context.”(Bertills

30). This is why the character is described by Rossetti as a sort of anachronical character, reluctant to novelty.

Moreover, the same name appears in a different usage, together with a determinative which transforms the name into a generic name for a certain category of characters. One of the dragon's heads from *Why do witches fly on broom... and other 10 fantastic questions* (14) has just one preoccupation, as a spare head, to take care of not being attacked by "some Prince Charming" ("vreun Făt-Frumos").

There is also a historical element showing name fashions and name traditions throughout the ages. Windt-Val asserts that in history, the literary movements have created a sort of pattern in terms of characters and naming, particularly in the case of dramaturgy, without excluding though the Romantic literary work. That is why, names sometimes function as labels/ tags "telling the audience what to expect from the characters and what role they had been given in the thematic structure of the play." (Windt-Val 275) Children reader expect to see Făt-Frumos in a certain context, but the writer surprises them.

Moreover, some of the characters detain names and some others have no name. These names function as identification labels (for the reader and for the referent) and orientate the reader towards the character/ the protagonist and inside the narrative, as Bertills(48) observes. But the presence of the name or its absence has an important role in the identification of the main character, especially for children. Except for the numerous characters in *Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time*, most of the Rossetti's short stories include one or two main characters that have specific names. This orientates children throughout the narrative and makes them aware of the importance of the characters. Nevertheless, in *Why do witches fly on broom... and other 10 fantastic questions*, the naughty elves from the Enchanted Forrest have no particular names, but they identify through the fact that they have bad grade at math. The elves function as a nameless collective character and children could easily associate themselves with them.

Furthermore, as characters in this book migrate from one story to other, the most dynamic is the pocket dragon: it steals the wheels of the Prince Charming's car, it transforms everything in pink, it writes bad marks at math, it sends the dragons to the cake shop. It is the narrative engine that generates all the stories. This nameless dragon is very important because it represents, symbolically, the force of the story, *per se*.

Other unnamed characters are the so-called *ladles* (polonice) who own their own country, *Ladland* (Polonicia). These imaginary

characters need no proper name as the author intends to describe an unexpected character living in the surprising world of flatware.

Such imaginary characters are more effective in children's literature especially because they come with a new vision in a very common world. Some of names are as imaginary as the character, and this the case of the names appearing in *Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time*. Some other names are common and others are well-known. Bertills (45) identifies three patterns for the formation of names: conventional personal names included in the general name register; invented names semantically opaque and classic, historical, universal or literary names.

The second part of *Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time* is centred on the character Clara, the little girl who could not understand that time should be spent reasonably. Regardless the fact that Clara is the author's daughter and she is the fatigueless enquirer Rosetti makes reference at in the preface, the conventional name is still suggestive. The name Clara comes from the adjective *clear*, isn't Clara clarifying some dilemmas about the temporal passage? Clara is a generic name for all the children who cannot understand time. In this context, Bertills is right to say that:

In literary contexts, a conventional name cannot be regarded as completely meaningless since the name forms often function as, for instance, stylistic and narrative devices and gain sense in the narrative context. I argue that literary characters seem to receive their names for a reason. (46)

Some of the names in Rosetti's stories generally belong to the class of common nouns, but in these stories have become proper nouns: Bob (bead), Mir (chrism), Zmeul Zmeilor (the Dragon of the Dragons), Dragonița (Dragoness), Pupăza cu microfon (The Hoopoe with microphone) or Motanul - care- suferea- de- insomnia (The-Tomcat-who-was suffering-from-insomnia). Grammatically, these names work the same as conventional names, but semantically, they are descriptive, concrete and very accessible to children. Therefore they are built on denotation. Cristinel Munteanu (76) writes about the motivated character of the proper names, referring to the fact that, semantically, names could be motivated both through denotation and through connotation. Denotative meaning of names refer to the literal meaning of the stem, of affixes, whereas the connotative meaning includes associations regarding great narratives, social contexts, well known personalities inferring the name with intertextuality.

5. Names as Symbols

Many of Rosetti's characters and narrative situations are intertextual, despite the fact that this intertextuality cannot appeal totally to the child reader. For example, the Time Magician reminds us of the Greek mythological *Chronos*, *Bláfeldur* is a type of Cinderella, the two boys lost in the Lake of Melancholy remind us of a famous fairy tale narrated by Mihai Eminescu (*Făt Frumos din lacrimă*), the story of the sad prince frog has correspondents in Romanian poetry, the pink princess is another Little Red Riding Hood.

This intertextual potential of the stories has a real contribution when referring at names as symbols. Referring to the fact that names in literature are apt to evoke symbolic associations, Grant Smith states that: „They may evoke such associations either because they have potential lexical meaning as other types of words, or because they are borrowed as names from previous contexts and evoke those associations” (308) Firstly, that is the case with the names from *Miss Aftertomorrow and the Game of Time*. Except for the name Clara, all the other names have the lexical meaning of other types of words, namely adverbs: The Time Magician, Mr. Today (*Domnul Azi*), Mrs. Yesterday (*Doamna Ieri*), Miss Tomorrow (*Domnișoara Mâine*) seldom accompanied by her little spoilt cousin, Miss Aftertomorrow (*Domnișoara Poimâine*), Witch Neverever (*Vrăjitoarea Niciodată*), Mrs. Aforetime (*Doamna Altădată*), Mrs. Beforeyesterday (*Doamna Alaltăieri*) and Mrs. Once Upon A Time (*Doamna A Fost Odată*); the elves Sometime, or Back Then, Always and Immediately (*Vreodată, Cândva, Întotdeauna și Numaidecât*). Adverbs converted to proper nouns thorough the metalinguistic function of language (*Răchișan* 938). Secondly, the names like *Făt-Frumos* or *Ileana Cosânzeana* also are apt to evoke symbolical associations.

Most of the names are semantically transparent, but there are several names with semantic opacity, namely the metaphoric names. Metaphors, metonymies, allegories are types of figurative interpretations (Smith 308) that, once used within literary names, enrich the figurative meaning of literary names and their symbolic associations. One of the most metaphoric names is *Mir* (chrism), the name of the pigeon who fed his suffering friends. *Mir* has also religious and biblical resonance. The naming of such a goodhearted character is not arbitrary. The chrism is known for its healing force. Also, the name *Vic*, a truncated name from the common noun *victory* is suggestive and contributes to the characterisation of the little squirrel who decided to follow courageously its dream.

Conclusively, the contribution names have within the thematic

unity of the literary work, manifests through the iconic, indexical and symbolic associations evoked. In children's literature, names detain a special place because they guide the child reader through the narrative and bridge the gap between the child as the addressee and the writer as the addresser in order to streamline the communicative transfer.

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Diversity-isms

Poets and the Expressiveness of Language

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Translator: Steven Reese²

For any person, the beauty of the mother tongue is a fact as complex as it is difficult to analyze. The belief that the language we speak from childhood is distinguished by its excellence is not grounded so much in a strictly aesthetic kind of valuation as it is in the vague feeling of an intimate possession. We are able to appreciate objectively, for its sonorous qualities, the song of a bird, from pure auditory pleasure; we can appreciate the vocal clarity of a foreign tongue with which we are roughly familiar or not at all—as with a musical score. But the language in which we have learned to talk, the speech of our own people, is *beautiful*—beyond any type of objective sonority—because it is “ours”; we were born *in it*, we learned it along with learning life itself, we speak it to the degree that it, in its turn, speaks us; in other words, we are linked with the history and the experience of life embodied in it, with its own way of “seeing” and expressing the world, with its “philosophy.” Precisely because we are *inside* of it, the mother tongue determines our system of interhuman relations—owing to its primary function, that of communication; but, at the same time, it also influences our options of ethical and esthetic order, inculcating in us a modality of action and, too, an angle of expressiveness. Not only do we think and speak but we also *feel* in Romanian, that is we participate in a certain ethos and ethnos, in a world of spiritual values, specific to our people.

The national language contains in itself the virtual space of its own culture, and consequently, too, the evolution of its national poetry. Latent in today’s Romanian language is the Romanian poetry of tomorrow. What has been achieved out of the language’s potential up

1 Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, volume *Lectura poeziei*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, București, 1980.

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to the present moment represents our poetic tradition, the literary models which—from Dosoftei, Cipariu, and the Văcărești poets to our great writers of today—feed the sensibility of our people in the matter of poetry. The way in which, so far, our language has released its own expressive values allows us to appreciate what exactly is involved in the labor our poets have brought to bear on their verbal material, the relation between the work of a writer and the language's system of verbal signs.

In the first place, writers are sensitive and exploit the *natural* expressiveness of some words: exclamations (present not only in popular poetry but also in a modern poet like Ion Barbu), onomatopoeia (for its ability to annul the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, offering us a “sound-figure” of the object or phenomenon to which it refers), or those synonyms that seem to them more suggestive (personally, *urgie* and *năpastă* [calamity, affliction], for example, seem to me more expressive words and richer connotatively than their equivalent *nenorocire*).

At the same time, poets draw from the hoard of *selected* expressiveness contained by folklore: proverbs, sayings, riddles, etc. Not long ago I called attention, in the poetry of Zaharia Stancu's maturity, to the apparent invention of new sayings, new proverbs, formed within a kind of *paremiological* lyricism, attesting to the poet's immersion in the values of popular wisdom; likewise I have written about the folkloric forms—from the vocabulary to the versification—found in the poetry of Emil Botta. Sometimes such an adoption of materials is accompanied by a genuine poetic adaptation of words, the creation of new values, in the spirit of a personal disposition: Botta manipulates words, modifying their forms and generating in this way new meanings; similarly, a poet like Ion Gheorghe operates forcefully on vocabulary (changing roots or endings, inventing new words, etc.), obtaining in this way—especially in the volume *Zoosophia*—remarkable poetic effects, showing how flexible the verbal material of our language can be.

Most frequently literary texts present us with an expressiveness that is *stylistic, personal*, a value index of any given writer. Everyone speaks of the “poetic” character of certain words. Too few are in a position to recognize that the “poetic” charge of such words is the product not only of a writer's personal taste, but also of a more general esthetic preference that comes from a whole school or literary orientation. Classicism has its own “poetic” words which are not those of romanticism; which, in its turn, is distinguished in this regard from symbolism, or expressionism, etc. Each of these literary orientations

possesses a kind of “lexical poetic substance” of its own, well established. An informed reader realizes that, for instance, words like *slumber, night, dream, nature, stars, angel, demon*, etc., are used especially by romantics, and that this vocabulary—despite its presence in our poetry from whatever period—constitutes a part of the Eminescian “poetic substance”; while words like, for example, *dusk, violin, lead, autumn, nerves*, etc., form the Bacovian “poetic substance” and is met with more frequently in symbolist types of poetry. This demonstrates that the Romanian language has been able to serve in an exemplary way the evolution of our modern poetry, offering it—at every step of its development, in accord with the special esthetics and poetics of respective schools—the expressive verbal material that it needed.

A poet’s effective handling of the material furnished by the mother tongue is seen much more clearly, and can be judged at its proper value especially on the level of his personal style, in the very laboratory of creation. There we can see plainly how one passes from the selection of words, according to the qualities of their inherent materials, to the complex expressiveness of the context. The latent expressive virtues of a word are awakened to another life, actualized differently from one writer to another, as part of syntactic and prosodic structures, owing to verbal combinations the outcome of which are the “poetic cells” themselves: the qualifier, the simile, the image, the metaphor. Very specialized studies have highlighted the expressive capacity of Eminescu’s style, and here is not the place to dwell upon them. I will only observe that such an expressiveness involves exploiting the Romanian language’s resources at all levels: phonic (the suggestiveness of sound in a chosen word), morphologic (the frequency of certain terms that reveal an author’s “personal vision”), syntactic (the capacity of poetic language to “make tractable” the rigidity of grammar, to “depart from the norm” as an esthetic value), prosodic (the plasticity with which the language is shaped to fit a wide variety of rhythms, from folk measure to the canons of fixed poetic forms), semantic (the appearance of new meanings, which only the unforeseen joining of words can make happen), etc. In this very nuanced and complex process, which—however much we might analyze it—remains for each poet a secret of creation, the *created* expressiveness, at the level of personal style, can surpass the sphere of the word’s material virtues, that is to say, the zone of the specifically linguistic.

Generally, it is thought that the expressiveness of a language, as of a poetry, lies in their capacity to express an emotion through the most concrete, the most evocative images, by a singular correspondence established between word or expression, on the one

hand, and the object or phenomenon witnessed, on the other. For instance, the word *hiss* is expressive because it itself constitutes ... hiss. A great French poet used to complain of the “defect” in his language, in which *nuit* and *jour* do not suit, as intonations of sound, the phenomena they designate: night and day. In our language, this “defect” might seem done away with, supposing we could think that, in Romanian, the word *noapte* has the somber tone of night, or that the vowel of the word *zi* possesses the luminosity of day. But from neither of the cases here could the conclusion be drawn that one language is, in its own phonic materiality, more poetic than the other. How much more expressive is the saying “He runs, eating-up ground” than “He runs very quickly”! It should be said, however, that in this saying the content of the linguistic expressiveness is dictated not by the *truth* of the particular image (*eating-up ground*) but by the *emotion* of whoever expresses it: the admiring astonishment before the speed of the runner—here is what is hidden behind so vivid an expression as this. The expressive image is no more than an instrument in the service of conveying an emotion of distinctive power, for which the familiar terms would be too impoverished. At the level of sophisticated poetry, too, we ought to note the terrible existential shudder exhaled, for example, from the Bacovian line *I hear matter crying*. But even the fundamental necessity of poetry to express deep and varied emotions of the lyric self-demands this frequent recourse to image, metaphor, epithet, etc. Yet these processes do not constitute the only resource of expressiveness. Figures of speech make eloquent, without doubt, a poet’s personal language. Let us not forget the formula of Goethe, according to which poetry, in its totality, is nothing other than an immense trope, an enormous figure of speech. Moreover, even the expressiveness of a line does not come always or only from the concrete, immediate character of the words used, or from the figures of speech employed, but often resides in a genuine verbal alchemy that loads the ordinary words with a weight produced by their mutual relations; instead of an evocativeness that would have come in some way by nature, we are dealing with an evocativeness without material support in the phonic or figurative layer of the words: it is an evocativeness that has to do, solely by the force of the lyric self, with making an absolutely amorphous material quiver with life. Context produces an expressiveness that does not exist in its words taken separately. Here is one conclusive example. From three abstract verbs plus an adverb of time, Eminescu achieves a line of exceptional poetic expressiveness: *I never thought I would learn to die*, which opens, like a gong, the solemn, incandescent confession of *Ode (in an old meter)*. And even in

Blaga's poetry, which insists upon the magic and mythic burdens of a word, the context—not the isolated words—is what produces the semantic eruption and, along with it, the emotional explosion. Because many times the context is capable of transfiguring, of producing essential alterations in the verbal material as such: take the Arghezian lyricism where words semantically, or esthetically, devalued, considered a- or even anti-poetic, acquire a high poetic value, are “redeemed” artistically, become “new beauties and worthies.”

Our modern lyricism has, in general, gone beyond the mystical idea of a “lexical poetic substance” and practices a poetics of context, in which—from the invasion of prosaism, to the esthetic and semantic function that a morphologic element can discharge, a simple conjunction, for example—expressiveness becomes a complex game on multiple levels by which the language's resourcefulness is confirmed. Just such a fortunate conjunction is used by Eugen Jebeleanu in the poem *Hanibal: and*, which opens the last line (*And they did not triumph*), which follows a wealth of imagery highlighting the war machine of the Carthaginian invaders, and which takes the place of a *but*, or *yet*, or *and still*, is extremely telling in its fluidity because it suggests that Hannibal's inability to win, faced with a people defending itself, is not a surprise but a normal occurrence, it is in the nature of things. Without this *and*, the poem would have been a simple parable; as it is, it becomes a *poetic* parable. At other times, expressiveness—which in general plays the role of intensifying images, amplifying an emotion—can be used to minimize, to demythologize. Personally, I have always read the poem *Melița*, by Mihai Beniuc—in which the symbol is allowed to speak on its own, without meanings being wrenched from it in an explicit way—as a grotesque unmasking not only of war, its deadly horror, but especially of *war propaganda*, the chattering of false patriotism.

Two poets, especially, stand out in our poetry today by adhering to what I would call “the implicit poetics of context”: Geo Dumitrescu and Nichita Stănescu. For the first, the preferred form is the address, centered usually on an epic plot, parable-like, in which adjectives, nouns and verbs are piled confusedly (though analysis notes their careful selection by the poet), delivered in in cascades, spun in swirls, used to strike and to ironize, filled with expressions and popular sayings, which are then also unwrapped, interpreted, turned upside-down, etc.—all to obtain a huge text that swarms, like a plasma, with multiple senses and allusions, especially of the moral sort. The large continents of truculent prose, esthetically controlled, in the poems of Geo Dumitrescu present from time to time small poetic lakes and

plateaus, scintillating with suggestion, breathing purity and liveliness, so that the real “lyric adventures” of these poems consist in the unique relations maintained, in context, by the *poetic* and the *a-poetic* to generate a modern type of lyricism, saturated alike with the concrete matter of words and with their fluttering significances. For Nichita Stănescu, the priority of context is formulated through the expression—what indicates a personal poetics—of *unwords*. What are these *unwords*? They are large poetic *units*, prolonged delirious sequences of grammatical elements, images and metaphors, delivered abruptly, in which the word as such, the isolated word, loses its literal meaning, and also its figurative one, to be dissolved into a larger unit, which is neither an idea nor a feeling anymore but a separate reality called a *verbal condition*, suggesting a concreteness gained through the fusion of abstract words, or—the opposite—suggesting an abstraction achieved through a conversion of the concrete that exists in certain words. In this way great verbal nebulae are configured that float, intertwine, are diaphanous, deeply connected—essential ideas about man, inter-human relations, the universe, etc. The way, in certain of his poems, Nichita Stănescu breaks the word into its constitutive sounds, investigating the flickering universe hidden in each of these sounds—in the totality of the word’s poetry, despite its phonic complexity and its semantic fixity, it becomes a simple sound in an *unword*, which is to say in a context that establishes a self-sufficient unity, operative through suggestion. What a vast “growth of the Romanian language” can be measured in the distance that separates, artistically speaking, the impulse behind the Văcărești poets from these highly modern, but perfectly integrated with the spirit of our voice, examples of contemporary poetry!

A created expressiveness, incorporated into the personal style of a great writer, does not constitute a strange adventure in language, however unexpected a poetic experiment might be at the moment of its appearance; rather, it indicates, almost always, a latent possibility of development in the national speech. When, in the second half of the last century, Eminescu wrote so limpid a line as *the undulating wave resounds*, or the stanza—rightly praised by Geo Gogza: *Is it not a sin / That we throw away / The fast-flying day / That we are given?*—our great poet anticipated the clarity, the euphony, the suppleness, the evocative gravity of today’s Romanian language, he foresaw—by an intuition that remains an inalienable secret—the future evolution of our voice. In that same sense, our poetry today is called upon to prefigure the future form of Romanian. The cultivation of these forms of expression, in the spirit of our national genius, the poetic creation of

the ineffable, represents the exemplary contribution of writers, the one by which our presence in the world becomes a truly meaningful act on the level of values.

Dynastic Fathers and Disinherited Sons in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Teodor Mateoc¹

Abstract: William Faulkner's novel is concerned with the tragic implications of racial thinking in the antebellum South while here the downfall of the protagonist epitomizes the breakdown of a whole social and cultural order. My paper examines the way in which the destiny of the main character is ruined by the absolute fetish of blood and racial purity. This will lead to several acts of rejection within the family and will trigger the downfall of the 'patriarch's dynastic plans as well as the personal tragedy of all those involved.

Key words: the American South, racism, miscegenation, identity, family, tragedy

Introduction

In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the distance between the time of the events (1860, and further back still through flashbacks) and the time of narration (1910) is recuperated by memory and from hearsay, as it were. The quest for what Faulkner repeatedly called 'the truth of the heart' in the tragic story of Thomas Sutpen, an epitome of the larger tragic story of the South, is complicated by Faulkner's specific use of the repertoire of modernist poetics: the interior monologue, the use of a center of consciousness (that of Quentin Compson) and especially of the shifting point of view. There are five such perspectives belonging to five narrators: omniscient, that of Miss Rosa Coldfield telling the story to Quentin; that of Quentin's father, Mr. Compson who brings in new details heard from his own father, General Compson; Quentin's point of view as he retells the story to his fellow student at Harvard, the Canadian Shreve Mc Cannon; and, finally, that of Shreve who takes the diegetic initiative in the final chapters of the novel trying to grasp some

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meaning from what he hears with the unprejudiced mind of the outsider. His voice is meant to provide an ironic distance that controls the violence of the events and attempts to re-order a plot that had not been chronologically related.

As Daniel Hoffman points out, the overriding goal of Faulkner's narrative scheme is 'to replicate in the experience of the reader the experience of the character in all its complexity and confusion'. (Hoffman, 11). The source of his fictional method, Hoffman says, lies in the creative mixture of the southern oral tradition and the modernist epistemology. In this twisted, convoluted plot², the figure of Thomas Sutpen emerges as the meeting point of what Leslie Fiedler calls 'the theme of slavery and black revenge, which is the essential sociological theme of the American tale of terror' and 'that of incest, which is its essential erotic theme'(Fiedler, 414). To which one should add that of miscegenation³ which, in the novel, is both real and potential. Real in the case of Thomas Sutpen and his first quadroon wife, Eulalia Bon whom he had repudiated. Real again in the relation he has with one of the two black women slaves brought along with his pack of 'niggers' to build Sutpen's Hundred and the result of which is Clytie. But miscegenation is also a *possibility* only - in the case of Charles Bon and Judith, but one so frightening that it has to be rejected by Sutpen even at the cost of losing both his sons and condemning his daughter to a life of desperate loneliness. Whether real or imaginary, the differences

2 In a nutshell the story runs as follows: in 1833, Thomas Sutpen, a complete stranger, arrives in Jefferson with a pack of blacks and a French architect and builds a mansion on a plot of land which he called Sutpen's Hundred. Shortly after, he marries Ellen Coldfield and has two children, Henry and Judith, as well as a mulatto daughter, Clytie, by one of his slaves. At the University of Mississippi, Henry Sutpen befriends Charles Bon who, invited to visit Sutpen's Hundred meets Judith, falls in love and later wants to marry her. Thomas Sutpen opposes the match since, as it is revealed later, Charles is his own son by Eulalia Bon, his first wife whom he had repudiated in New Orleans when he found that she had black blood. Eventually, Henry, too turns against his close friend and shoots him when he insists with his plan to marry Judith as he now knows she is his half-sister. . Back from the war, Sutpen starts an affair with Milly, the granddaughter of Wash Jones- a poor white squatter on his land- who, whereupon kills Sutpen. Judith and Clytie want to bring Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon to live with them, but he repudiated white society and married a black woman by whom he had a son, Jim Bond. Finally, the old and sick Henry Sutpen, living alone in the decaying house, will die when Clytie sets it on fire, bringing Sutpen's dynasty to an end.

3 Writing to a Hollywood producer to whom he was trying to sell the film rights, Faulkner gives a three word summary of the book: 'It's about miscegenation', he wrote. Apud Daniel J. Singal, op. cit., p. 202.

between 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are made absolute by the pervasive fetish of blood: white blood, black blood, the purity of blood, the fear of contamination. The threat of miscegenation releases the anxieties of Sutpen's white consciousness and leads him to several acts of rejection. They occur in the novel under many guises and they can be looked at from the triple perspective of class, race and gender.

1. Class, race and gender

The first rejection will determine the whole course of events and it is performed in terms of class. Thomas Sutpen is what Dilsey would have called 'poor white trash', a man on the rise, an upstart elbowing his way into acceptance and respectability. 'He wasn't a gentleman', Mr. Compson recalls, 'he wasn't *even* a gentleman' (A A, 14). As the boy of a poor white mountaineer he is turned away from the door of the plantation house by, ironically, a liveried black servant (a 'monkey') although he has come innocently, sent on an errand by his father. (The incident speaks of the complex network of southern stratification in terms of class: though lacking freedom, some slaves could have a higher status than poor whites). Later on, when telling the story to Shreve, Quentin discovers that Sutpen's fallacy has been 'innocence'. He 'didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own'(AA, 221). He is so outraged that his instinctive reaction is to take a rifle and kill the man. But soon he realizes that 'this ain't a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did'. This is the moment when his 'grand design' takes shape in his determination to have 'land and niggers and a fine house' (A A, 238). Sutpen's 'grand design' fails for reasons both historical and personal. The Civil War ruins his ambitions of a prosperous landowner (after having acquired respectability by marrying Ellen Coldfield) and his rejection of his son on fears of miscegenation brings about the ruin of his family. Both reasons are deeply ingrained in the southern mentality: unscrupulous greedy materialism and the rejection of the black as a legitimate son of the land. The latter is what Miss Rosa calls 'the fatality and curse on the South' but both will continue to take their revenge until, in Mr. Coldfield's words, 'the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sand of opportunism and moral brigandage' (AA, 260).

The second rejection is acted out by Thomas Sutpen on the grounds of race. Warren Beck sees it as coming from 'the implacability

of those Southern whites who rationalize the irritations of unsound social order into a cult of race prejudice and terrorism' (Beck, 26). Indeed, there seems to be critical consensus that the main reason Sutpen rejected his first wife and child was the discovery that they had some impure, i.e. black ancestry that would be incongruous with his 'design'. He wishes, for example, that Milly Jones were a mare so she could have a warm place in the stable; his slaves are seen as hogs wading through the swamp; Judith herself (as if repeating her father's gesture) rejects Clytie and calls her a 'nigger' and so does Miss Rosa when she comes to Sutpen's Hundred.

Charles Bon's rejection by Thomas Sutpen is even more dramatic as it is both racial and paternal. Furthermore, it leads to other instances of rejections like, for example, the estrangement between the two brothers, or the tension between the two half-sisters, Judith and Clytie. When, in a short exchange, Henry cries out to Charles: 'You are my brother!', the latter, now fully assuming his blackness, answers back: 'I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry'. (AA, 358). And Henry does stop him for good when he shoots him dead by the gate of the mansion.

The fact that Henry had highly admired Charles and had always tried to emulate him, and that Judith had loved him too, perhaps more than she had ever loved her brother, exposes once again the idea of 'race' as a culturally contrived concept that has nothing to do with personal, human worth⁴. Literally, Charles and Henry are sons of the same father; symbolically, they are also inheritors of his initial act of renunciation- which leads to what Sorin Alexandrescu in his 1969 critical monography, 'William Faulkner' calls an 'acceleration of destiny'- and, consequently, of the doom it entails. A doom perpetuated, by the way, in the second generation by Charles himself who repudiates his octoroon mistress in New Orleans and his son Charles Etienne.

Individual tragedy is reinforced by its being projected onto a larger historical background. In the end, Henry finds ultimate refuge in the house ruined by a war that has been fought to maintain an order that had itself allowed for the tragedy to happen. The 'good' (*Bon*) that might have eventuated from racial hybridity and male companionship becomes 'slavery' (*Bond*), or perpetuation of racial divisions. In victimizing the Black, Faulkner seems to suggest, the South loses its integrity/ homogeneity.

4 A telling episode is the one introducing Etienne, Charles Bon's son: in his fine clothes in New Orleans he passes for 'white'; in rags, at Sutpen's Hundred he is 'black'.

It is interesting to notice that Faulkner's initial title for both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August* was *Dark House*, a title that seems equally appropriate and thematically fit, especially for the first, and also suggestive for the similarities between the two novels. Both of them are concerned with the tragic implications of racial thinking and in each of them an antebellum house is destroyed by fire. The flames that actually consume the physical structures also destroy 'the skeleton in the closet': dark and deep-seated familial and cultural structures that have led to the major crises in the novels. Given the secrets they contain and the impact those secrets have on the families that own them, they are 'dark houses' indeed.

If the original title was meant to illustrate the bleak, tragic truth of the novel, the final title, alluding to the lament of King David at the death of his son, also implies catastrophe. However, the allusion is highly ironic: while David weeps bitterly when learning of Absalom's death, Sutpen, demonstrating a fundamental deficiency in human feelings, shows no emotion when told of Bon's end; if David does become a patriarch, fathering fifty sons and fifty daughters and founding a dynasty, Sutpen's only heir is Etienne's son Jim Bond, a mentally retarded mulatto. Instead of creating a 'kingdom', Sutpen's 'design', his house and family end up in ashes and oblivion.

Sutpen's tragedy, the failure of his grand plan is the result of the blind belief in the fetish of blood that undermines his ambition to climb on the social ladder. In other words, the issue of race is closely linked in the novel to that of class.

2. Of Sons and (Dynastic) Fathers

Thomas Sutpen's insistence on the purity of blood ruins his ambition to found a dynasty. For he is a dynastic father. In *Faulkner in the University*, we find out that the writer himself encouraged the idea of Sutpen as a dynastic father. Asked whether Sutpen ever acknowledged Clytie as his daughter, Faulkner explained that 'it wouldn't have mattered', since she was 'female', and Sutpen would 'have to have a male descendent', if he was 'going to create a dukedom' (Gwynn & Blotner, 272).

Thomas Sutpen comes in a line of other legendary father figures, yet he is very different from them. What distinguishes him from Colonel Sartoris or Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, for example, is social status; Sutpen is a 'redneck' coming from the Tennessee hills and set upon his grand design of establishing a dynasty. For what ultimately makes a dynastic father, is a son that must bear the father's name and be acknowledged as an heir who has to perpetuate that name. If what

makes a dynastic father is a son, the reverse could equally be true: what makes a son a son, is, obviously, a father. Indeed, in the patriarchal system which the dynastic order reflects there must always already be a father. In an attempt to locate the first father, through a process of infinite regression, we would have to acknowledge the pre-existence of a symbolic father, patterned after the biblical God, or God, the Father⁵. Coming back to Thomas Sutpen, his behaviour soon after his mysterious appearance in Jefferson, recalls that of a demiurge: like God, he creates Sutpen's Hundred by his own supreme will, out of nothing, out of wilderness. But I would not like to push this line of interpretation too far. Because what is at stake in Sutpen's case is not personal, or not only, but the perpetuation of the patriarchal system itself.

The intuitive understanding of it comes to Thomas Sutpen very early, in an episode that I have already mentioned, when, as a boy, he experienced the first act of rejection, performed in terms of class: sent on an errand, by his father, he is driven away from the door of the plantation house by, ironically, a black servant. The moment is crucial not only because it highlights the complex web of southern stratification in terms of class, but also because it reveals the subtle ways in which young Sutpen relates to his father and to the father figure, represented by the plantation owner. When he returns home, the boy is afraid of the consequences as he imagines that the message he was supposed to convey might have been an excuse for work not done; so he displaces his own failure to deliver the message onto his own father, while ascribing the authority to punish them both to the master. Consequently, one might say that he rejects his own father in favor of the plantation owner as a 'surrogate father'. If this might recall Freud, it needs a corrective: Sutpen does not kill the father, but wants to become him. Actually, the owner is invisible to the boy, there is no description of him that would support a paternal image; what is visible is the power that he, as a master, exercises through his black servant.

The dramatic encounter/rejection of young Thomas Sutpen results in the internalization of the figure of mastery, of what Lacan designates as 'the Law of the Father'. Lacan's theory sees this figure of mastery as a symbolic father which he gives an ontological status and which, for him, is the 'locus' of what he calls the Other. What is particularly relevant in this context is Lacan's emphasis on speech as

⁵ For a thorough discussion of 'sons and fathers' in Faulkner, see Robert Con Davies, ed., *The Fictional Father*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1981, especially A. Bleikasten's 'Fathers in Faulkner'.

the register in which the Other is made evident. The Other is always, and already, a 'he who knows' who is made evident by an 'it which speaks'⁶. While the Other stands beyond and authorizes 'the figure of mastery'- represented in reality by the name of the father, the 'paternal metaphor'- he is not himself an image, but the necessary, already given of a discourse, of language itself.

Jacques Lacan's perspective allows us to see how Faulkner's treatment of Sutpen's traumatic encounter brings the patriarchal mechanism under focus. Sutpen's musings on his having been rejected from the door of the big house unfold as a dialogue out of which an 'it which speaks' emerges as an Other, i.e, a 'he who knows'. The dialogue unfolds as Sutpen retreats to meditate on 'what would have to be done about it', and the two voices, the 'two of them inside that one body', argue for and against Sutpen's choice. 'But I can shoot him', says the first voice; and the other: 'No, that wouldn't do no good'. Then, every time the first voice asks: 'What shall we do then?', the other replies: 'I don't know'. The question might be answered, we are told, 'if there were only someone else, some older and smarter person to ask'. (AA, 234-5). Split into two voices, Sutpen then projects an Other to address, a legitimate and authoritative power to endorse action by making the distinction between good and harm, kill and not kill. Yet, that authoritative voice is silent; the master does not speak, or, at least, not directly. But one might argue that he doesn't need to, because he has servants to speak and act on his behalf. The master occupies here a position patterned on both political and theological models.

The political model is that of the king whose symbolic power is always maintained through the distance he takes above his subjects and through his servants and emissaries that carry out his edicts. This conduct is, in its turn, patterned on Christian theology and its model of absolute power. Once the God of the New Testament sends his son to deliver his message, he can safely remain invisible and aloof. His message, mediated by his Son, becomes the Law, the covenant. A son, therefore, must exist if the message is to go through, and creating that son, makes God the Father.

When Thomas Sutpen then takes his final decision and chooses not to kill the father but become him, he, too, aspires to the position of an absolute master modeled on that of the Christian God. His innocence, i.e., lack of experience/knowledge and power, is thus displaced by his assuming of the Master's Law and of the paternal

6 For this and further references to Lacan the source is J. Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, transl. by A. Sheridan, Norton, New York, 1977, p. 305

function. In practical terms, to become the master and acquire for himself a secure position in the community, in terms of class and prestige, Sutpen knows he has to have money that could eventually buy land and slaves, build a house and get a respectable wife that would give him sons to perpetuate his name as a father. The way he achieves this is hardly original; actually, Sutpen follows a track that has been beaten by many before him. During his brief period in school, he learns about a mysterious, exotic place 'called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn't matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous'(AA, 242) . In choosing colonial Haiti as the place that would initiate his design, Sutpen, too, joins the gallery of historical figures (explorers, adventurers) for whom the colonial enterprise had been instrumental in pursuing the object of their desire and becoming agents of their own destiny, following their own Law.

Also, in the assuming of the paternal function, Sutpen ironically mirrors the racial ideology underpinning southern racism. Thus, 'he would not permit the child, since it was a boy, to bear either his name or that of its maternal grandfather, yet which would also forbid him to do the customary and provide a quick husband for the discarded woman and so give his son an authentic name'(AA, 266). By so doing, Sutpen not only refuses to give his son the name of his father and thus initiate a patrilineal line, but denies him the name of any father. His attitude is supportive of the antebellum slave code which would stipulate that all black sons were to remain, legally, 'boys'. His paternal denial is performed in the name of the Father, and its justification is the belief that Charles is black. Consequently, the Father, as Master of his design, will send his agent, his son, Henry, to stop Charles from marrying Judith. Sutpen's act reveals the irony whereby a strict adherence to the Law of the Father undermines the initiator's dynastic design. In other words, the 'black blood' assigned to the first-born son in a dynastic line, proves fatal to the structure of the patriarchal southern order that Thomas Sutpen aspires to.

Eric Sundquist sees *Absalom, Absalom!* as a synthesis of Faulkner's concern with *incest* in *The Sound and the Fury* and with *miscegenation* in *Light in August* and notes that the obsession with the former seems intimately connected with the fear of the latter (Sundquist, 122). The observation brings into focus the second generation of Sutpens: Henry, Judith and Charles and points to the way Faulkner's attitude reflects or rather departs from the the socio-cultural 'taboos' of the South. It seems appropriate to invoke J. Hillis Miller here, who suggests that Faulkner's theme be seen from the perspective of anthropology. His position is that what is at stake in the

novel is the symmetrical avoidance of 'too much sameness, in one direction, or too much difference, in the other' and regards Faulkner's novel as a 'dramatization' of a familiar truth:

Too much sameness is incest, the same mating with the same. Incest is a pollution of the bloodline through an excess of purification. The narcissistic perversity of incestuous desire is brilliantly dramatized in Henry's love for his sister Judith.[. . .]. Too much difference is miscegenation, the same mating with the wholly different, introducing so much difference into the community that the bloodline is hopelessly contaminated, the community in danger of ceasing to be itself [. . .]. If too much sameness is bad, too much difference is even worse. As *Absalom, Absalom!* indicates, the violence of the taboo against miscegenation is even more compelling, more absolute and finely drawn, than the taboo against incest. An eighth, a sixteenth, a thirty-secondth [sic], even the tiniest soupçon of black blood makes someone a forbidden partner for lawful marriage intended to produce children who can be assimilated into the white community (Miller, 148-170).

Miller sees in that 'double prohibition' 'an impossible contradictory taboo' which southern history has had to struggle with, and he views Faulkner's novel both as the thematic illustration of this maxim and as a formalization of it; in other words, content and form are intrinsically linked since the 'truth' is purposefully delayed and arrived at through the common effort of Quentin and Shreve only to the end of the novel.

3. Content and Narrative Form

The analogy between the failure of a 'design' in life and the failure of narration may be expressed as one between 'performative narration' (here, discussing the possibility of incest) and 'constative narration'⁷ (concerned with miscegenation as a fact).

If Thomas Sutpen and his children are caught between incest and miscegenation, between his desire to be entirely self-sufficient and the taboo against that, on one hand, and the need to appropriate the unlike other and the taboo against that, on the other, narration is undone by the impossibility of being either purely *performative* or

⁷ As Miller explains, if in one direction a storyteller tries to stick to the facts (the *constative* effort), and ends by inventing them (the *performative* element), in the other direction if a storyteller tries to invent a purely fictional story, he always ends by referring to life and to history, since the words he must use are after all referential. See, J. H. Miller, op. cit., p. 167

purely *constative*.

In Miller's terms, *Absalom, Absalom!* might be seen as trying to maintain a delicate balance between performative/ incest and constative/ miscegenation in narration. Indeed, in *Absalom, Absalom!* the form of the narration- whether voiced by Miss Rosa Coldfield, by Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, by Quentin and Shreve, or by an omniscient narrator, plus a genealogy and chronology- is of supreme importance as it alone can render legitimate, or make questionable, the statement that Charles Bon's marriage to Judith Sutpen would have constituted miscegenation and incest and so Henry had to prevent it by killing his brother.

Before reaching this conclusion however there is another attempt at making sense of the killing. Mr. Compson suggests that the central problem was that Bon had a previous child from a mistress. For Mr. Compson then, the motive for the Greek-like family tragedy that he constructs lies neither in incest nor in miscegenation, but in Bon's intended bigamy that Sutpen must have wanted to stop after finding out about Bon's mistress and son. This is the man whom Mr. Compson calls 'at least an intending bigamist even if not an out and out blackguard, and on whose dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph of the other woman and the child'(AA, 90)-, his 'octoroon mistress'and 'the sixteenth part negro son'.

Thus 'race' comes in, but Mr. Compson's (certainly 'performative') narrative constantly revises itself and suggests that the existence of 'that other woman', and even of the child were insufficient reasons for the fratricide: the fact that Henry and Judith had grown up with their own half-black sister Clytie would not make Bon's conduct so exceptionally reprehensible as to justify violence, and Mr. Compson uses the occasion to offer the view of a larger social 'milieu' that Henry is part of and in which the different ways of making 'vessels' out of women are controlled by men,

where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction- ladies, women, females- the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women.(AA, 109)

The next revision, occurs during the inventive reconstruction of the story by Quentin and Shreve while they are imagining the past in their cold Harvard room half a century later. The 'constructedness' of their story is further emphasized by Faulkner through an instance of 'time-travelling' that suspends chronology: Quentin and Shreve's narrative

time is 1910, yet Faulkner allows them to be 'syntactically present' with Henry and Charles (the 'four of them and then just two- Charles-Shreve and Quentin- Henry', (AA, 334) at Sutpen's Hundred in 1865! The deliberate inadequacy is mentioned by W. Sollors who also wonders whether the two are 'the modern detectives who unravel the mystery and find the "chemical formula" that makes things happen in the past, or do they project what they wish to find onto the sources and come up with a story that makes the South, as Shreve puts it, "better than Ben Hur" ' (Sollors, 327)? Whatever the case, I believe that their emotional probing into the past is meant not so much to establish beyond doubt the historical truth as to offer a plausible frame to the denouement of the story. Moreover, since authorial comments are sparse in the novel, their voices could be taken as representing Faulkner's own judgement on the Sutpens and, hence, on the 'sins' of the South.

Given the fact that the Quentin Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*— so keen on keeping the family together— was haunted by incest fantasies, it is interesting that Quentin and Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!* first consider incest as fundamental to the story by imagining that Thomas Sutpen suddenly acknowledged Charles Bon as his son. This may have occurred at the moment when Henry brings Charles home for the first time and Sutpen 'looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago'. (AA, 265)

Shreve, too, articulates his own fantasy of sibling incest, believing that 'the gods condone and practice these' couplings and from this moment on, the issue of incest becomes obsessive for the two as they consider it from all perspectives: they imagine Judith's possible reaction to Bon's kiss 'on the mouth'; they consider Bon's wish to be recognized by his father, his trying to find out 'whatever it was his mother had been or done'— whatever 'tainted' her blood, and therefore, naturally, his to the extent that could have justified Sutpen's repudiation(AA, 324; 331). Finally, they discuss Bon's readiness to commit incest with his sister Judith in what proves to be the futile hope of provoking a reaction from his father as well as from Henry, who has to cope with the news that it was his own brother who was going to marry his sister.

To complicate things further, the issue of incest is connected in the novel to the pseudo-aristocratic ambition of the founder Thomas Sutpen, who, in a demiurge-like manner, is intent on creating Sutpen's Hundred in the deserted marshlands of Mississippi. Marked by the offense he had suffered in his childhood, he went to the West Indies in order to get rich, found slaveholding instrumental to his project and

decided to eliminate whatever might hinder his plans. Sutpen also

just told Grandfather how he had put his first wife aside like eleventh and twelfth century kings did: "I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside" [. . .]. 'So I went to the West Indies. (AA, 240)

Following the divine logic of kings that his father had ironically adopted, Henry Sutpen rationalizes, in his turn, the possible incest between his siblings Charles and Judith as a sign of their aristocracy:

But kings have done it! Even dukes! There was that Lorraine duke named John something that married his sister. The Pope excommunicated him but it didn't hurt. It didn't hurt! They were still husband and wife. They were still alive. They still loved!', then, again, loud, fast:[...]: 'But that Lorraine duke did it! There must have been lots in the world who have done it that people dont know about, that maybe they suffered for it and died for it and are in hell now for it. But they did it and it dont matter now; even the ones we do know about are just names now and it dont matter now'.(A A, 342-3)

Much later, after the first revelation of Bon's identity as Sutpen's son, comes the second speculative reconstruction, as Quentin and Shreve presuppose that Sutpen had talked with Henry and said that the marriage had to be stopped for reasons regarding the race of Bon's mother: 'He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro'. This hypothetical revelation, near the end of the novel, is what leads up to its famous lines about incest and miscegenation: 'So, it's the miscegenation, not the incest which you can't bear (AA, 354-6); it alone is what explains things to Quentin and Shreve and thus the whole story of the downfall of Sutpen's design becomes plausible to them and to us, the readers. Suzanne Jones argues convincingly that the consideration first of incest and then of miscegenation adds a clearer understanding of Henry's motivation to the novel:

While Henry's love for Bon is so great that he can use another code to sanction incest, his love is not strong enough to overcome the most stringent taboo in Southern society - miscegenation [. ..] Once Henry begins to view Bon as black, he can no longer regard him as a brother. In deciding to kill Bon, Henry makes a social choice, not a personal one. (Sollors, 328)

Differently stated, Henry can tolerate the idea of Charles Bon's marrying his sister even though they are all siblings, but he cannot accept the idea that his sister would commit miscegenation, and kills Bon to save her. The implication is that the power of the fear of miscegenation could exceed by far that of the incest taboo. From Thomas Sutpen's perspective, this marks the end of the design of starting a dynasty although he does not seem to realize the extent of his own guilt: 'And he not calling it retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake'.(AA, 267)

For Faulkner, the contemplation of Henry's discloses

the stronger social force of the taboo on miscegenation, and the form of storytelling enhances this critique; the focus on Bon shows Faulkner use of the liberal-realistic mode that operates on the premise that it was Sutpen's failure to recognize Bon, both at his birth and at the time of crisis, that once set inevitably into motion now completes the downfall of the house of Sutpen' (Sollors, 329)

Faulkner created a form in *Absalom, Absalom!* that makes the issues of incest and miscegenation both a plausible element in understanding the Sutpen family saga and the expression of a particular narrative that orders coherently many details that would otherwise remain unexplained. By leaving plot contradictions in suspension and by focusing on the process of storytelling as much as on the tales that result from it, Faulkner writes a family saga in which the liberal reader may find in the fratricide of the second generation a powerful critique of Sutpen as a racially biased and male-obsessed dynastic father. His critique culminates in Sutpen's inability to recognize any moral failing, searching instead for his 'mistake'.

Faulkner also offers sharp comments on the false appropriation of biblical patriarchalism by slave-owners by simply inserting a made-up biblical quote on Abraham and his generations:

Praise the Lord, I have raised about me sons to bear the burden of mine iniquities and persecutions; yea, perhaps even to restore my flocks and herds from the hand of the ravisher: that I might rest mine eyes upon my goods and chattels, upon the generations of them and of my descendants increased an hundred fold as my soul goeth out from me. (AA, 325)

In the same vein, Mr. Compson imagines how Wash Jones's belief in the curse of Ham was, in fact, a mere hope connected to his

position as a poor-white. From such a social rung, it would seem to Wash 'that this world where niggers, that the Bible said had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his granddaughter'.(AA, 282)

Biblical allusions are abundant in the novel, yet they should be taken with a grain of salt, since the novel's adaptation of the biblical incest and fratricide story of King David's children, Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar to Sutpen's Judith, Henry, and Charles Bon is treated in an ironic key that measures the distance between the ambitions and the accomplishments of the two protagonists.

Not entirely ironic is Faulkner's various allusions to Greek tragedy: his use of the family structure of Oedipus and two fratricidal sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene; the connections with the cast of the Oresteia (Cassandra, Clytie, and Agamemnon) and her pressing concern regarding parentage and kinship in a world in which 'race' makes a line that separates husband from wife, father from son and daughter, brother from brother, and sister from sister. The failed recognitions, the desperate quests for recognition, and the denials of kinship set up the mechanism for the tragic collapse of the house, and of Sutpen's design, turning the novel into a modern tragedy in which race has become a fundamental concern.

4. The Southern Psyche

The use of myth, whether religious or classical, opens up a new understanding of the novel by pointing to the way the southern psyche, as Faulkner saw it, was construed. Conventionally, the founding fathers of the South had always been seen as tradition-oriented aristocrats who had naturally inherited their identities and particular cultural values. The 'myth' had depicted southern society as quasi-feudal in character, with classes and institutions that would work together for the stability and welfare of the land. Unlike the individualistic, competitive North, the South was like one large family, as George Fitzhugh wrote in 1854: 'Love for others is the organic law of our society, as self-love is for theirs'.(Singal, 205)

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner almost parodies this claim and proposes an alternative 'myth' in which the Cavalier southern identity is not a direct legacy of a distinguished past but the product of inherent frontier characteristics that defined an antebellum southern society. It is the identity of young rednecks of the back-country who become painfully aware of their inferiority in terms of class and of their

coarseness in terms of culture once they have experienced the region's established system of social stratification. The awareness triggers mixed feelings: envy of the planter class, the desire to ape their way of life but also, at the beginning, a strong feeling of personal shame. This is the case with Sutpen: his rejection from the front door, accompanied by the 'roaring waves of mellow laughter meaningless and terrifying and loud'(AA, 232), illustrates both his low status and the crumbling of a social and moral code he thought he had known.

A new perspective thus opens to him: it causes him to see his own family as having been relegated to an ignoble status, to the realm of savagery; it also initiates his desire to move to the other side of the dividing line. To do so and pursue his 'design', he sheds his old self and attempts to create a radically new identity for himself. This explains why Eulalia, with her 'tainted' blood become unacceptable to him; this, again why he marries Ellen Coldfield, as she provides 'the two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent'. (AA, 51)

Nevertheless, for Sutpen, this is not an authentic identity, for what he has done, in effect, is to internalize a stereotype rather than fashion a true self that would have been the result of personal, accumulating experiences. Sutpen's design actually cuts him off from his past; it does not grow naturally from his ancestry, it is a model he copies from the outside. Rejecting his personal history he tries to recreate himself anew, at it were, recounting his life to General Compson with 'detached and impersonal interest' as if 'telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would still have been the same story if the man had no name at all'.(AA, 247)

Based on a static, ideal pattern, Thomas Sutpen's identity is at odds with Faulkner's own repeatedly stated beliefs: 'no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his or her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment' (Gwynn & Blotner, 84). Here lies, Faulkner indirectly suggests, the origin of that pathological identity that Sutpen clings to. Heroic, 'demiurgic' as it may appear in certain respects, it is, nevertheless founded on the false assumption that becomes visible when ambitious, low-class frontier young men, ashamed of their heritage, attempt to reject it 'for a culture and way of life that was not rightfully theirs. By proceeding in this manner.... the old Colonels, real or fictional, founded not the lasting dynasties they were hoping for but rather a society, to borrow Miss Rosa Coldfield's haunting words,

“primed for fatality and already cursed with it” (Singal, 200).

To be sure, what Sutpen bestows upon his family, is a double curse: that of a deeply inauthentic identity but also the belief that identity must be based on racial purity. In the case of some of his heirs, however, this belief will be ironically turned upside down: if for Henry racial purity becomes an existential assumption that will force him to commit the extreme gesture of fratricide, Judith will eventually shed the racist revulsion inherited from her father or, at least reconsider previous received ideas.

But what can be seen as an ironic reversal of destiny is the side-story of Charles Etienne St.Valery Bon, the son of CharleBon and his octoroon mistress in New Orleans. An orphan at the age of twelve, the boy, as if repeating the trajectory of his paternal grandfather (who had left Haiti), is forced to leave the interracial milieu of New Orleans, for the racist world of Sutpen’s Hundred where he is raised by Judith and her half-sister Clytie. The two make every effort to protect him from the knowledge of the southern racial dynamics, discourage him to speak to strangers, and try to keep him in a midway status between the races, symbolized by the makeshift bed on which he sleeps between Judith’s regular bed and Clytie’s pallet on the floor. Clytie who goes even further and attempts to eliminate his trace of impure blood, ‘trying to wash the smooth faint olive tinge from his skin as you might watch a child scrubbing at a wall long after the epithet, the chalked insult, has been obliterated’(AA, 198). Contrary to all expectations, though, Charles Etienne will choose to appropriate the ‘epithet’ as a mark of personal pride. As soon as he reaches adolescence he begins to confront his identity dilemma, secretly contemplating his face for hours in a shard of broken mirror hidden under his mattress. What P. R. Broughton describes as his ‘final vengeful gesture to make concrete his abstract identity as a black’ (Broughton, 72) occurs when he decides to marry a ‘coal black and ape-like woman’(AA, 205). This is a highly ironic reversal, one can’t help noticing, as Thomas Sutpen had abandoned Etienne’s grandmother because he thought that her almost invisible tinge of black ‘blood’ would be detrimental to his desired identity and to his ‘design’.

When Charles Etienne brings his wife to Sutpen’s Hundred, Judith will eventually reconsiders her racist assumptions but ironically again, she will unknowingly repeat her father’s ‘mistake’. Although Judith had been a sort of ‘surrogate’ mother for Etienne, racist impulses, inherited from her father, had always erected a barrier between them, so that whenever she had to touch him, her hand ‘seemed at the moment of touching his body to lose all warmth and

become imbued with cold implacable antipathy'(AA, 197-8). Now, when he has returned, she undergoes a moral self-scrutiny and acknowledges her guilt:

And who to know what moral restoration she might have contemplated in the privacy of that house...what hurdling of iron old traditions since she had seen almost everything else she had learned to call stable vanish like straws in a gale[...]. 'I was wrong. I admit it. I believed that there were things which still mattered just because they had mattered once. But I was wrong. Nothing matters but breath, breathing, to know and to be alive. (AA, 207, emphasis in the original.)

However, a certain residual racism is still noticeable with Judith. Earnestly, since there's no evidence that she knows about her father's repudiation of his first wife and child, she advises Charles Etienne to move north where he could pass for a white and leave his black family behind. Ironically, her advice invites Etienne to repeat the same fatal mistake that doomed the House of Sutpen and destroyed her possible happiness. Etienne, who seems equally unaware of Sutpen's rejection, dismisses her advice and sticks to his identitary choice. The fact that, three years later, she would lose her own life after having taken care of him (he had contracted a fatal infectious disease), touching him fully aware of the possible deadly consequences, might be seen as an expiation, as an attempt to shun the curse bequeathed by her father.

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Literary Translation as a Workshop for Creative Writing

Mircea Pricăjan¹

This is a very vast topic. All I can do is scratch at its surface and use my personal experience as a short introduction of sorts.

The other day I searched the Internet for this exact phrase: ‘literary translation workshop for creative writing’. I got back more than 1 million search results. All the major Western universities, *English*-speaking Western universities seem to have some form of this topic in their curricula. Which is kind of weird. Because why would someone coming from a dominant culture think of linking creative writing (an honest subject matter, by comparison) to translation? Such an exotic concept!

But indeed there’s no better way—not that I know of—of learning the ‘secrets of the craft’. Because, let’s face it, every translator wishes deep down inside his or her own heart to be one day the name on the cover, and not the one hidden somewhere inside the book. Almost like a character. I know that I did that! I nurtured that desire with every new book I translated, and most of the time that kept the writer in me satisfied.

If nothing else, I was a writer by proxy.

And from quite early on I started to use all the authors I translated to study their craft. In other words, I started seeing translation as creative rewriting.

There was a clear cut moment for that... epiphany. A tipping point. Up until then I had worked relentlessly and almost mindlessly to churn away book after book, most of them by the grand master of the macabre, none other than Stephen King. And funny enough it was also one of his books that rewired my thinking. It was a book about writing. Eleven years to the day that was. In 2007, four years after I had started making a living by translating literature, I received a message from one

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of the publishing houses I was working with. They wanted me to start translating *On Writing*.

Well, I have to say this book did it for me. It ended my long-lasting love affair with the author, and it gave me a push to start seeing things in a different light.

Don't get me wrong. *On Writing* is a terrific book. In fact, you most certainly would find it in almost all those Western university's course bibliographies. It teaches you all you need to know about plot, character, dialogue, back-story, about the dreadful trap of the adverbs, while also stating a few things about the right mindset of a natural-born writer. All good precious things, all true, and delivered in the author's most honest voice. But, you see, they were all at the same time things that I had seen at work before in Stephen King's books. I, his translator, maybe his most attentive reader, kind of knew his tricks before he decided to lay them down in front of everybody, in *On Writing*. And by doing that he really spoiled it for me. *On Writing* taught me to question every turn of phrase.

After that, only after that I started growing as a translator. And that is because the writer in me needed more. He needed to see for himself that ... 'there are other worlds than these', to quote from *The Dark Tower*.

And, like the gunslinger's world, I moved on. I moved to Ballard, I moved to Palahniuk, I moved to Joyce Carol Oates, I moved to H. P. Lovecraft, I moved to Raymond Chandler, I moved to Denis Johnson ... I experimented with their prose, I was eager to learn—and not merely to ... earn. I knew that I had access to the best creative writing course in the world. I struggled with Palahniuk's syncopated prose because I wanted to understand its workings—and I finally did it, otherwise one can never translated truthfully a book. I plowed through Ballard's hypnotic prose searching for its beat, hearing it closer and closer, until I managed to dance to its techno-trance-like rhythm. I then walked the meandering paths that Joyce Carol Oates uses to guide us through time and space by way of a sometimes very prolix narrative. And I followed detective Marlowe, so witty and gay, always having a sharp answer to give. And after that I was for almost a year that despicable unreliable narrator Willkie Collins, in Dan Simmons' *Drood*. And the list could go on and on and on ...

You learn the craft of writing through exercise. You imitate at first, then you start coming closer to your own true self. Step by little step at a time. You do it through reading, certainly. There is no way around that. But sometimes some lucky ones get a chance to translate literature. They are handed literally with a permit to imitate. You do it

unconsciously for a while, but sooner or later you start seeing patterns, you digest them and make them into reflexes, they become a part of you. A writer who also translates is not only the sum of the books he or she has read, but also the sum of the authors he or she has sung playback after.

This is a very vast topic. And the beauty of it, I think, is that no matter how hard you try, you can always only scratch at its surface. What happens in the deep blue stays in the deep blue. Untranslated ananand untranslatableand untranslatable by conventional means. and untranslatable by conventional means.

Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Filiation in Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*

Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*, London: Vintage, 2017, Casa Golden Londra: Ed. Vintage, 2017.

Anemona Alb¹

Salman Rushdie ruthlessly strikes again. Indeed, his latest novel (published by Vintage in 2017) is a - predictable - reiteration of a genius at work. His is never an innocuous story. Narrative, plot and character yield myriad configurations. Which in turn, beget myriad interpretations. It's a neverending concatenation of meaning - that is not the critic's feat, but Rushdie's.

In the novel under scrutiny here, *The Golden House*, it is genealogy - in the Foucaultian vein - that is tackled. And so is filiation. The *pater familias* here, Nero Golden, the patriarch - here Rushdie winks at Marquez - is larger than life. His personality, bordering on dictatorship, is reluctant to fall into any neat taxonomy.

Nor is Golden's origin - albeit in a nascent stance - straightforward. On moving to America, he concocts an ambivalent origin for himself and his folks:

The youngest of the three, an indolent twenty-two-year-old with hair falling in beautiful cadences to his shoulders and a face like an angry angel, did, however, ask one question. 'What will we say,' he asked his father, 'when they enquire, where did you come from?' The old man's face entered a condition of scarlet vehemence. 'This, I've answered before,' he cried. 'Tell them, screw the identity parade. Tell them, we are snakes who shed our skin. Tell them we just moved downtown from Carnegie Hill. Tell them we were born yesterday. Tell them we materialised by magic, or arrived from the neighbourhood of Alpha Centauri in a spaceship hidden in a comet's tail. Say we are from nowhere or anywhere or somewhere, we are make-believe people, frauds, reinventions, shapeshifters, which is to say, Americans. Do not tell them the name of the place we left. Never speak it. Not the street, not the city, not the country. I do not want to hear those names again.' " (Rushdie 2017: 8)

As visible above, Golden relishes the ambiguity of the discourse of origin, this being informed by filibuster, notwithstanding. With all the deferral of meaning, is this mere micro-history at work? Or is it macro? And which of

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them is contrived? Is this a take on the illusion of a unifying, unique macro-history? Of a mega-narrative in the Lyotard-ean vein? It is one of Rushdie's recurring preoccupations to engage in (inter)weaving intertextual multiplicity - see his *Midnight's Children*. (1981). '*This, I've answered before*' is not solely retrospective, but indeed it is apophatic, in the sense that it denies what it actually sets out to do subsequently. Indeed, Nero Golden lays out a pseudo-history, an irreverent story of his family. Irreverent to the truth, mind you. The 'identity parade' he mentions can arguably be decoded as conformity deferred. Nero Golden will not succumb to conformity. His is a paradigm of originality, idiosyncrasy. 'We are snakes who shed our skin', says he; the reptilian reference is in its own right an encryption of slithery, elusive truth and the impossibility of capturing taxonomic evanescence. Let alone encapsulating it, denominating it. Equally saliently, the skin shedding is redolent of a palimpsestic penchant that Rushdie often succumbs to, that of the layer-upon-layer of identity. When it comes to identity, the 'mask', the *persona* is rigidly stable, fixed, as it were, whereas the palimpsestic layers of skin are ever-shifting, hence versatile. Temporality is equally manipulated here to allude to the - Bergsonian - impossibility of pinning down time ('Tell them we were born yesterday.') The reference to Aphrodite-ean birth - ' (...) we materialised by magic') and the cosmic location are both a case in point. Time and place are ostensibly relative with Golden. This renders totalitarian dictatorship to his discourse. He is the ultimate Dictator, albeit his is not the political power one might glean from a perusal of the text, but a plutocratic one. The power of high finance, of decadent consumerism. One might say, a parable of the contemporary world, devoid of ideology and permeated by post-ideological values. Equally relevantly, accounts of Golden's life are embedded in journalese and the omnipresent fake news - a reference, no doubt, to the post-truth era we are inhabiting.

The ubiquity ('nowhere, anywhere') and the versatility of identity ('we are make-believe people, frauds, reinventions, shapeshifters') - all this has an anti-climatic ending to it all, that is well thought-out: '(...), which is to say, Americans.') This is the apocalyptic contemporary Babylon, wherein the leveler that is called the melting pot of the modern world resides. As Rushdie's generic migrant does (see his collection of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands*, published in 1981), Golden, too, perpetually shifts and juggles identities. But as always with Rushdie, this typological entanglement is beyond Americana. It is the elusive complexity of human nature at large.

Self-inflicted amnesia ('I do not want to hear - read remember -those names again') seems to be the only available comfort to the predicament of identity. Food for thought for all who conveniently, appeasingly regard identity as monolithic and stable.

Stories of Us...

On Mircea Pricăjan's *Calitatea luminii* (*The Quality of Light*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2016) and *Pumn de fier* (*Iron Fist*, Polirom - Junior Collection - Publishing House, Iași, 2018).

Ioana Cistelean¹

Willingly or not, consciously or not, a bridge seems to progressively construct itself and eventually connect *Calitatea luminii* (*The Quality of Light*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2016) and *Pumn de fier* (*Iron Fist*, Polirom Junior Publishing House, Iași, 2018), an imaginary pass-water thus suddenly emerging in the mind of its readers; both novels are signed by Mircea Pricăjan, editor to *Familia* literary magazine and also a gifted translator of contemporary literature.

A young couple's dynamic is to be put to trial once they become parents: Antim and Carmina learn step by step how to breathe, to preserve their intimacy, to model their rhythm according to the needs of their newborn, Codin. The book is written in the very register of absolute authenticity, in a discourse uttered, in turn, by each of the characters: all their anguishes, frustrations, Madelaines, familial backgrounds and emotional luggage, expectations are articulated be it by Antim, be it by Carmina, in some perfectly believable narrative parameters. The couple's attempt to recalibrate their inner pace by escaping their home everyday exhausting routine and thus taking a week-end trip in the mountains would bring along a series of fragmented introspections, a pondered trail of jumps from their very proximity into their personal past, a narrative game of repeated switches between reality and projection of reality in a continuous ordeal to re-define themselves, to ultimately find their new true nucleus. The book is nonetheless about all the small victories of Codin's parents while honestly expressing their most deep fears, their constant pressure to the further responsibilities they are facing, to their domestic tango in urgent need for a satisfying balance. Mircea Pricăjan speaks a familiar language, he tells a reinvigorating story, a story of each of us, applicable to each of us when confronted to a "new arrival", to a baby in the family. The novel ends brilliantly with a chapter surprisingly revealing Codin's perspective and his own way of experiencing, of touching the world, of communicating with his parents; Codin's first steps on his own are the perfect final metaphor of a harmonious dance of the young family confronted with fresh challenges, they come both as a reward and as a hope, a belief in the power of inner light. This particular metaphor acts as a promise

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of new fascinating enterprises; intriguingly enough the new fabulous enterprises are to be recorded by Mihai, the 7 year old protagonist of *Iron Fist*, a book intended for the children, but eventually written for the adults as well. Mihai is the new, a little bit grown up version of Codin; they complete each other similar to the proportion in which the two novels in discussion complete each other, posing in different stages of a becoming of age adventure.

Briefly summarized, the novel focuses on the various changes that occur in the life of a boy who has just said good bye to his kindergarten comfort zone and is to embark on his scholar venture, in the fall; his summer holiday starts with an accident (metaphorically placed under the *flight* experience) and Mihai has to spend several weeks at his grandparents, in the countryside, carrying along his plastered hand, a direct result of his attempted heroic flight; all his once familiar dynamic with his friends would obviously suffer major changes because of Mihai's current condition: he would thus slowly isolate himself from the rest of his buddies, he would build and accumulate frustrations, he would rebel against his grandparents, he would suffer the consequences of his attitude, he would begin school playing the same card of insolence and stubbornness – all in a desperate attempt of reconstructing himself, of reinventing his inner status. Mihai's birthday party scene represents the climax of the child protagonist's imagined super-powers embodied by the previously injured hand: his magic strength proves to be not physical, as he suspected, but rather psychological, as the adult readers might have already guessed. The way he saves the day at his party coincides with his major interior transformation, the moment he realizes that he has to let go of a dream and articulate his new robust, better inner voice – in other words, the very moment when he becomes aware of reality, age stage, social conventions... It is the painful instant when the hero makes peace with himself and the world, re-directing his power, re-embracing and re-discovering the world. The book is also jointing the parents' fragmented narrative, the adults' perspective on the boy's imagined world, their everyday challenge and effort to control their child's behavior, attitude, their never-ending endeavor to balance the frail line between actions and reactions, facts and consequences, distance and involvement, punish and reward – all the given strategies of an adult in order to harmoniously educate a child.

The book ultimately engulfs the story of the parents, of the grandparents, the story of the child with his magic displacement and surprising progression, the story of Mihai's friends and their social and familial references.

Both novels restoratively re-enact genuine tales of parents and children, both novels reveal familiar and reinvigorating simple truths on family, experience, progression, change, ups and downs, fears and challenges; Mircea Pricăjan is actually telling the story of each of us, in a most definitely convincing and gifted narrative manner, successfully “dooming” his readers to turn themselves into characters, to recognize stages and episodes of life, just as simple as that, in a persuasively and appealingly written modern fiction.

The Challenges of the Memory Texts

Kate Mitchell, 2010, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction. Victorian Afterimages*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Magda Danciu¹

The Victorian age and arts seem to be the core of a certain trend in the process of an experiential revisiting of past conventions and traditions and creating a hybridity of styles and genres within the abundance of contemporary experiments conflating aspirations to realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

Re-working themes, plots, structures, typical characters of the 19th – century genres has become a practice for a considerably increasing number of British novelists today who have engaged with critically re-writing narratives placed in the Victorian times, thus generating an interesting category of texts abounding in pastiche and parody, and highlighting an interest for intertextuality as a challenge for the contemporary readers. (see Kirchknopf, 2008: 53)

Kate Mitchell's book, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction. Victorian Afterimages*, published in 2010, is a thorough study of the Neo-Victorian fiction in its potential as "an act of memory" and as an imaginative "re-creation" of a period as part of "our shared history" and "our cultural memory", asserting "both continuities and discontinuities between Victorian culture and our own culture" (Mitchell, 2010: 182).

Re-creating the past implies the intention of re-evaluating the experience (both social and aesthetic) of another time and, if it refers to the Neo-Victorian fiction, this strategy situates it, as the author demonstrates in the chapter 'Memory texts: History, Fiction and the Historical Imaginary', "in relation to a postmodern problematization of historical novel"(12) as cultural memory (be it individual, or group, or national one) is a constant "field of enquiry", claiming to "historical recollection."(13).

The author observes how the achievements of the Victorian age (buildings, urban spaces, residual customs, beliefs, institutions and practices) have turned into historiographical sites to examine and assess this national heritage through its values, differences and distances, contradictions and discrepancies, as foregrounded by a particular chapter focusing on 'Contemporary Victorian(ism)s' and also highlighted in each of the continuing

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chapters that tackle the presence of the Victorian nostalgia in books authored by A.S. Byatt (*Possession*), Graham Swift (*Waterland*), or Sarah Waters (*Affinity* and *Fingersmith*).

It is useful to accept the author's findings in terms of working with memory and captured images ('The Alluring patina of loss: Photography, Memory, and Memory Texts in *Sixty Lights* and *Afterimage*'), starting from Elizabeth Edwards' statement that "photographs are perhaps the most ubiquitous and insistent focus on the 19th- and 20th-century memory", representing the very memorial media that can "erase distance, cheat time, and allow access to the past and to the resuscitation of the dead"(143).

The study concludes that Neo-Victorian fiction, imitating or reimagining certain literary achievements and conventions of the past century, deploys "the vocabulary of Victorian strategies of history-making and recollection, in order to remember the period as part of our cultural memory" (178); Neo-Victorian novelists join to celebrate the re-presentation of the Victorian era as a literary statement to preserve and understand the grandeur of a nation's cultural memory; it is their effort and contribution towards an imaginative re-birth of this particular period in order to enhance awareness of how embodied memories can operate discursively in the vast process of demonstrating the power and persistence of writers' desire to keep this historical and cultural period alive.

Kate Mitchell's research convinces the scholars and students of the truth, also discovered by other studies by examining the way in which Neo-Victorian fiction has adopted narrative strategies and forms, that Neo-Victorian fiction has got deeply "implicated in the historical location of the Victorian era", while self-questioning "the possibilities of narrating the past" and by remaining committed "to the historical specificity of the historical figures incorporated" (Hadley, 2010: 18).

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HADLEY, LOUISA, 2010, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative. The Victorians and Us.*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

KIRCHNOPF, 2008, '(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definition, Terminology, Contexts', in *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1 (Autumn), (pp.54-76).

Re-conquering the human. The poetic battle

Radu Vancu, *Elegie pentru uman. O critică a modernității poetice de la Pound la Cărtărescu*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2016.

Marius Miheț¹

Radu Vancu is, above all, a poet that has the dialectic ability to debate poetry from within. Radu Vancu's critical elegy presents itself to the reader as the very image of the poet himself; empathetic, melancholic, continuously searching for harmonies because, in the author's opinion, poets are not and cannot be but humans endowed with a special time sensor. Without them, without their poetry, humanity in the modern era – or what it's left of it – would become an 'endangered species'. The rapid dehumanization of modernity risks to lead poetry to an ordinary zone, or even worse a useless zone. Therefore, we may say that *Elegy for the Human* is in fact an attempt to restore poetry to its rightful place, above the ephemeral. Radu Vancu's demonstrations go even further: not only the poet and its role within the Fortress are saved, but also the human being – the one crushed under the weight of ideologies which instead of ensuring him a comfortable place in the modern universe, do nothing but choke him through utopias and excesses. The main character of this incursion in modern poetry is the 'philo-human being' as he emerges from the texts of some writers who opposed themselves to the 'modern anti-human being'. The elegy thus reaches a dramatic conclusion: the human being disappears from literature, painting or art in general. What makes things worse is that there are clear anti-human connections between the death of the reader and the death of the author, any form of individualism being thus abolished. According to Radu Vancu the anti-human is to be blamed for the failure of modernity, an anti-human trend promoted as heavenly utopia. His analyses take into account those who supported the human and those who opposed it – the latter category being structurally closer to the author

Ernesto Sabato, Mircea Ivănescu, John Berryman, Mircea Eliade, Emil Brumaru, E. Pound, Mircea Cărtărescu. Unlike Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valery, Tzara, Celine, Sartre, Breton etc. who pushed the human into an infernal area, the philo-human group brings the human being back into poetry, giving him back his self-esteem.

Radu Vancu doesn't let go of the imposed trajectory, not even when he

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takes things towards the benefits of the demonstration. He exaggerates in style, imposes structures in motion, and offers laborious verdicts. Being spontaneous in nature, his answers are always ready. His theoretical background – influenced by famous theorists as well as modern and post-modern philosophers – does not intimidate him, not even when he steps on unknown literary territories. Of all the poets who tried their hand in literary criticism, he is the most endowed from a conceptual and speculative point of view. No one surpasses him in his demonstrations because he gets involved in all seriousness. For him poetry is for life or death. Thus, when he becomes the defence attorney, he doesn't hesitate to use all the arguments, all the means available. And he does not lack ingenuity or phrases that save him from costly demonstrations and polemics. Yes, polemics, though Radu Vancu gathers praises for the other poets with excessive generosity.

Almost every single page unveils to the reader memorable expressions and verdicts. The author is interested not only in the anti-human versus the philo-human portrait, but also in notions that made history and today are almost forgotten. Radu Vancu belongs by far to the confessing poets of the philo-human category. Mircea Ivănescu, to whom he dedicated a lengthy monography, and John Berryman have the most exciting studies. Maybe his declared admiration goes to Mircea Cărtărescu. The analytical force of the theoretical chapter manifests itself fully and harmoniously, especially in the case of these three writers. As for Sorin Titel and Mircea Eliade, Mușina, Bodi, Dylan Thomas, the analyses simply extract the essence of the philo-human truth, but do not invite an actual re-reading. If among the contemporary writers, Vancu is the embodiment of ecumenism, when it comes to the adversaries of humanity, he becomes a player that does not hide his ideological options. The philo-humanists are, above all, people with whom Radu Vancu shares the reason behind poetry. A family of kindred spirits. All there is left for him to do is to see the invisible connections, the conceptual battles, the ideas that can be saved and harmonized in one single voice. In fact, *Elegy for the Human* is the voice that chants the salvation of the human. Poetry, philosophy, literary criticism, art – simply preserve the shining remnants of long-lasting battles.

Written with style, passion, feeling, *Elegy for the Human* is an exciting poetical tournament out of which the reader is the victorious one. Whether he returns to his lost humanity or not, one thing is sure: he will have read poetry giving up his innocence. A mature, enthusiastic, extremely useful study, with universal applicability.

A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times

by Colin Heywood, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001. Translated into Romanian by Ruxandra Visan, Bucuresti, Trei Publishing House, 2017

Dana Sala¹

Children have left not so many written traces of their own awareness of childhood along the centuries. There are not so many documents that could be useful to historians left by children themselves, since their most pleasant and time-consuming activity is playing. Also some toys and artefacts designed for children are of a perishable nature, as Colin Heywood points out.

It is no surprise that our contemporary perception on childhood may lead us into thinking that it has always been like that. The book *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* is a documented voyage into the history of another social construct (rarely regarded as such), i.e. the childhood. Children are not regarded as little adults today, in fact they are anything but that. Childhood is given its own primordial place in a system of reference. We do not have the situation of childhood as being defined from the point of view of the adult age and being judged for what might be lacking. This would mean, as Colin Heywood states, seeing children as 'impaired adults' and this was practised in other centuries. The independence of childhood as an emancipated age has not always been possible. Nowadays, we take this as the norm, not as the exception: childhood is not a second age² in regard to a primary adult age which could rank as the absolute reference point. On the contrary, in the 21st century children are seen as children without ranking the second from a referential point of view or within a comparison. They have their own rights and there is a legislation protecting them. An example provided by Heywood, an autobiography of a certain Tiennon is an example of how childhood was seen as not having something out of the ordinary. The author of the autobiography even apologises for the lack of extraordinary events in his life.

It is Victorianism that made room for some stable paradigms in the perception of childhood. Breughel has a famous painting with child games, but later painters like Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Lawrence created pictures in which children appear with a different personality as compared to

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2 If we are allowed to paraphrase and adapt to this circumstance Simone de Beauvoir's title *The Second Sex*.

the adults they accompany in the portrait.

Victorianism has changed things and much of its impact of the childhood as a social construct is still valid nowadays. Before Victorianism, children were indeed viewed as 'impaired adults'.

Antiquity had clarity in defining the ages and childhood was separated into different portions. There was a name for the infant, *infantia*, another one for the age which is nowadays devoted to primary school *pueritia*, from 7 years of age to 12, and another segment for pre-adolescence and more, *adolescencia*, from 12 or 14 to 21.

During the Middle Ages, the classification emphasised the ages of man, the last one being senectute, at Dante. Childhood is an abstraction (p.5), so there is no surprise that it differs so tremendously from an epoch to another. Heywood cites a seventeenth century author and priest, Pierre de Bérulle, who sees childhood as touched by sin. There are other example of such extremism in the so-called vigilance against depravity and its consequences. This conception on the sin generated a wrong conception of childhood, stating that is never too early to beware of the sin and its consequences. Pierre de Berulle even links childhood to abjection.

The ages with the predominance of religion over social life are not far from these kind of extremist remarks, going to the exclusion of childhood as a privileged state.

Another extreme pointed in the book concerns the clichés about childhood. All of these clichés are rooted in a conception older than two centuries. We buy into regarding everything referring to childhood and children as 'natural'. In reality, the abstractions about childhood are constructed and deconstructed by our cultural background. There are children as individual, and each of them is different. It would be difficult to bring them to a common ground. Children are exposed to committing deeds that are not innocent and to being victims of others, to being exploited, used. This happens regardless of how adults view them.

Our tendency to view children as innocent is so powerfully rooted in the contemporary imaginary, that sometimes adults can be less vigilant about some real dangers surrounding children.

It is actually the concept of the naturalness of childhood, enacted by Rousseau that is still persistent nowadays and does not let us be eager to resort to the safety net of reality.

Heywood's book on *A History of Childhood* breaths a wonderful balance, following its objectives precisely, not giving in to theories but challenging them.

The part describing the Middle Ages is dedicated to a sharp critic of Philipe Aries' book on medievalism, *Centuries of Childhood*, a book in which the French historian and thinker describes the so called *le sentiment d'enfance*. Heywood discusses the pro and cons of Aries's perspective. He even opposes the detractors of Aries but he is also keen on showing the shortcomings of the book. Aries's own book is a lot enriched by this challenge, one understands better what Aries has managed to question.

The main difficulty of Heywood's book is to reconcile different aspects that are included in our concept of childhood. He does that through deconstruction and through alert documentation. All the ramifications that have entered in our contemporary views on childhood are dismantled. That is why the author does not refer to a philosophy of childhood, or to childhood as in autobiographies, on the contrary, he takes more aspects into account. It is their synthesis that has passed surreptitiously into our perception of childhood nowadays. Thus, the author refers to the life of a child in family, to schools, education, to infantile delinquency, to attitudes towards school, to social inequalities, to childhood exploitation, to household activities, but also to the preadolescent patterns of forming new groups, to social inclusion and exclusion, to hygiene, walking and talking practices. Evidently, the most influential role in shaping the age of childhood in a family but also in shaping the perceptions we have on children, as a social construct, belongs to the relationship between parents and children. This is the benchmark in addressing the evolution of childhood as a social construct. For children, parents constitute the main alterity, the big Other One.

Peisaj în devenire. O Panoramă a poeziei din Banat (Changing Landscape. A Panorama of Banat Poetry)

Coordinated by Marian Oprea, preface by Ioana Cistelean, proof-reading by Eugen Bunaru, Brumar Publishing House, Timișoara, 2017.

Dana Sala¹

Due to its development under peculiar condition, Romanian literature has different generations of critics who are value-oriented, in a world more subdued by the whims of market economy, whose effect on books can be devastating. Romanian literary critics still focus on what will be canonical tomorrow. An anthology is always a risky selection, generally speaking. On one hand, there is a challenge in front of posterity, on the other hand the selection must inevitably operate with reductions, therefore the aim of a representative sample is hard to achieve. Romanian critics are hard to please when an anthology is published.

An anthology devoted to the poets belonging to a region is even more unlikely to be on the taste of the critics, who have very firm criteria. What are the risks of a non-canonical anthology, an anthology aiming exhaustiveness? How can you place a very good poet, acclaimed by critics or by readers near a not so famous one, who may have published only a volume of poetry, since the established criteria of the selection is extra-literary from the very start? The book contains all the poets from Banat region, regardless their ethnicity or language of poetry writing, constituting the landscape of a multicultural territory. Under the umbrella of Banat poets, the selector has opted for the following selectees: 1. poets whose birthplace is Banat 2 poets who studied or moved into Banat.

Does the book risk to make a less critical selection since its purpose is to include, rather than exclude, all the poets belonging to Banat? *Peisaj în devenire. O panoramă a poeziei din Banat* is a book very praised by critics. The secret seems to be a very specialized team who has worked on this book. The team members are all poets, Marian Oprea, Eugen Bunescu, Robert Șerban and they have associated themselves with a critic, Ioana Cistelean, who writes the preface in a flowing nonchalant style. Instead of being focused on theories and debates, the preface gives the floor to the poets themselves, through their creation. The critic is enchanted by the enterprise and has no objections, on the contrary, the critic x-rays some of the most important

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verses of the anthology, and contrasts them with a new context, that of critical reception. The introduction of the anthology is also a guided lecture of a reader, accompanied by the critic's own selection as by Ariadna's thread in a labyrinthine landscape. At the end of the anthology, there are echoes from the main critics who wrote about other anthologies dedicated to Banat, not as exhaustive as this one. Therefore, it is obvious that this anthology enjoys a good welcome from the critics, rather than being criticised.

What is the secret of this successful reception? The secret is the team behind the work, the principle of generosity and the ideal selection of the poems. The coordinator and the selector, Marian Oprea, comes with an innate sense of good poetry. His intuition acts like a radar. He knows how to make the choice of the poems. Without a good choice of poems, this anthology could not have had the same success. Marian Oprea is a poet himself and cannot be fooled by imperfect verses. He can spot the weakness of a verse, of a poem.

The reader can sense that the poets in the team who made the anthology are seekers and have their own quests and questions. The choice of poems is so good that the critics are very satisfied with the existence of the anthology, they find it an enterprise unique of its kind.

To start a book containing the poetry from Nikolaus Lenau to Moni Stănilă and Alexandra Bodnaru might seem a utopia. But it can be associated with the effort of a community to preserve the freedom of their words through their poets. Another important aspect is that the title is reflected in the anthology, the space of Banat finds its natural prolongation in time. The poets are not introduced in dull alphabetical order, the poets appear according to their birthyear. If landscape, as a spatial term, redefines the idea of world unity, it is through time that the transformations of landscape can be enacted. Lenau opens the series. After 1968, another sensitivity could be felt in language. The imaginary is also different.

Peisaj în devenire (Changing landscape) becomes a natural setting where many selves have the occasion to unravel themselves. They prove the fact that all poets form a people of undivided souls, as the poet Lucian Blaga discovers in one of his poems.

Muriel Barbery: *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*
Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2016

Giulia Suciu¹

Muriel Barbery is a French novelist and philosophy teacher, born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1969. *L'Élégance du hérisson*, translated into English as *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* is her second novel. Though the New York Times damned the book with their unflattering review “*The Elegance of the Hedgehog*’ belongs to a distinct sub-genre: the accessible book that flatters readers with its intellectual veneer”, the book went on to become a New York Times best seller, it topped the French best-seller lists for 30 consecutive weeks and was awarded various prizes: Prix Georges Brassens, Prix Rotary, Prix des Bibliothèques pour Tous, Prix de Librairies etc. to name just a few of them.

The book offers its readers an insight into the lives of the inhabitants of a small upper-class Paris apartment block. The story has two narrators: Renée Michel, the concierge of the building and Paloma Josse, the teenage daughter of a resident family. They take turn in offering us a glimpse into the upper-class ‘stylish’ life, the change of the narrator being subtly signalled to the reader by a change in the font of the letters.

Renée pretends to fit the traditional archetype of the concierge, in an attempt to hide her secret passion for literature and avoid suspicion from the building’s pretentious inhabitants. Since our perception of the people around us is limited to a stereotype of their assigned roles, Renée Michel is actually hiding behind the perceptions others have of her role. She describes herself as follows:

I am a widow, I am short, ugly, and plump, I have bunions on my feet and, if I am to credit certain early mornings of self-inflicted disgust, the breath of a mammoth. I did not go to college, I have always been poor, discreet, and insignificant. I live alone with my cat, a big lazy tom who has no distinguishing features other than the fact that his paws smell bad when he is annoyed. Neither he nor I make any effort to take part in the social doings of our respective kindred species. Because I am rarely friendly — though always polite — I am not liked, but am tolerated nonetheless: I correspond so very well to what social prejudice has collectively construed to be a typical French

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concierge that I am one of the multiple cogs that make the great universal illusion turn, the illusion according to which life has a meaning that can be easily deciphered. And since it has been written somewhere that concierges are old, ugly and sour, so has it been branded in fiery letters on the pediment of that same imbecilic firmament that the aforementioned concierges have rather large dithering cats who sleep all day on cushions that have been covered with crocheted cases.

Paloma is a 12-year-old pretentious, highly articulate girl, fascinated by art and philosophy. She plans to commit suicide on the thirteenth birthday, because she cannot tolerate the idea of becoming an adult, since in her conception becoming an adult is synonymous with making compromises, betraying your youthful ideals and renouncing your principles. She is the one who sees through Renée Michel and compares her to a hedgehog: prickly on the outside but on the inside ass refined as the falsely lethargic, staunchly private and terribly elegant creature.

For most of the novel, the two characters cross paths, but they don't actually 'see' each other. It is the enigmatic, elegant Japanese businessman Kakuro Ozu who moves into the building, befriends both of them and eventually brings them together.

Renée Michel and Paloma Josse are in fact kindred spirits; two amateur philosophers who humorously comment on the trivialities of the world around them and class obsessions of a supposedly egalitarian France. The fact that such a friendship is possible between a 54-year-old woman and a 12-year-old girl might be symbolic for the idea of communication across generations.

Towards the end of the novel, Renée teaches Paloma that not all grown-ups renounce their ideals and principles, and that you can be a grown-up and still maintain your humanity. Renée's death leads Paloma to give up her suicidal plans and live her life searching for 'an always within never'.

A book that may be considered a toolbox, an alchemist's lab in which every single one of us may find an answer to the problems we face; a journey populated with allusions to literary works, music, paintings, films etc.; a celebration of every person's invisible part; a must-read.

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Next Issue's Topic:

The Stranger
in Literature and Culture

*Thématique du prochain
numéro:*

L'étranger
en Littérature et Culture

Confluente, Annals of the University of Oradea, Modern Literature Fascicule is an academic, double blind peer-reviewed journal that appears once a year.

The executive editors and the advisory board shall decide on any change about the frequency of the journal.

TCR specializes in bridging the world of academic literary criticism and theories with the aliveness of everyday literary phenomenon as reflected in the cultural media and book-production.

The topics covered by our journal in its 2 generous sections – **Literary - Isms** & **Cultural - Isms** are as they follow:

British and Commonwealth Literature
American and Canadian Literature
French Literature
Emmigrants' Literature
Cultural and Gender Studies
Literature and Media

Foundation:

As a research journal, the beginnings can be traced back to the academic year 1966- 1967, when, under the name *Lucrari stiintifice*, the section of academic research emerged at the University of Oradea. In 1991 the research journal changed its name and template, focusing on topics of immediate relevance and on thorough going studies, on cultural studies, research articles on Romanian literature, comparative literature. In 2006 emerged *Confluente*, a Modern Literature Fascicule including academic literary studies in English, French, German and Italian. In 2012 the Ministry of Education and Research (Romania) ranked our journal category C.

Submission:

The details about the submission of papers, instructions for the contributors and on the preparation of the manuscript are published online at:

<http://www.confluente.univoradea.ro/ro/>

Peer review:

Our journal advocates the double blind peer-review system. The quality of the research article is the single argument taken into account when operating the selection of articles.

The administration of the peer-review process is the attribution of the journal's editors that are selected from the members of the advisory board. The sender of the manuscript does not know the names of the reviewers of his/her particular case, only the complete list of reviewers.

Confluences, les Annales de l'Université d'Oradea, Fascicule Littérature moderne, est une revue académique évaluée qui paraît une fois par an. Les directeurs exécutifs et le comité scientifique vont décider tout changement concernant la fréquence de la revue.

TCR a le but de réunir le monde de la critique littéraire académique et des théories avec le phénomène vivant de la littérature d'aujourd'hui tel qu'il est reflété dans les médias culturels et dans la production du livre.

Les sujets contenus par notre revue dans ses deux sections généreuses – **Littéarismes** et **Culturalismes** sont les suivants:

Les dynamiques de la littérature, tendances
L'interconnexion de la littérature et de la culture
Identité, altérité, anthropologie et littérature, études culturelles
L'identité et son expression en littérature
Temps et théorie littéraire
Myths et auteurs postmodernes
Littérature comparée et études comparées

Fondation:

Comme revue de recherche, son commencement remonte loin, dans l'année académique 1966/1967, lorsque sous le nom de *Travaux scientifiques*, la section de la recherche académique a démarré à l'Université d'Oradea. En 1991, la revue a changé son nom et sa forme se fixant sur des sujets d'intérêt immédiat et sur des études approfondies, sur la culture, sur la littérature roumaine, sur la littérature comparée. En 2006 a paru *Confluences*, un Fascicule de littérature moderne incluant des recherches académiques littéraires en anglais, en français, en allemand et en italien. L'année 2012 la revue a été classifiée niveau C per le Ministère de l'Education et de la Recherche de Roumanie

Soumission

Les détails pour la soumission des articles, les instructions pour les contributeurs et pour la préparation du manuscrit sont publiés en ligne:

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Evaluation

Notre revue soutient un système d'évaluation ouverte, considérant que les noms des auteurs des articles ne doivent pas être envoyés comme anonymes aux évaluateurs, parce que cela pourrait avoir un petit impact sur la qualité de l'article soumis. La qualité de l'article de recherche est le seul argument dont on tient compte lorsqu'on fait la sélection des articles.

L'administration du processus d'évaluation est la tâche des éditeurs évaluateurs. L'expéditeur du manuscrit ne connaît pas les noms des évaluateurs de son cas particulier mais seulement la liste complète des évaluateurs.