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REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

MAGICAL REALISM IN LITERATURE

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## Cuvînt înainte

Realismul magic este un termen apărut în jurul anilor 1924 – 1925, creat de criticul de artă german Franz Roh, spre a desemna curentul postexpresionist în pictură. Artistul se referea astfel la combinații picturale în care formele realului nu se conformau realității cotidiene. Dacă suprarealismul urmărea „magicul”, căutîndu-l însă rareori în realitate, realul magic, propria noastră realitate, este întîlnit, în starea lui brută, latentă și omniprezentă, în tot ce înseamnă America Latină. Aici ciudatul este obișnuit și a fost întotdeauna astfel<sup>[1]</sup>.

Îmbinînd cotidianul imediat cu elemente fantastice, realismul magic este un gen de literatură care deschide calea spre o lume mult mai complexă decît cea pe care o cunoaștem din realitatea trăită. El nu trebuie confundat cu fantasy, cu o lume fantastică populată cu vrăjitori și magie în care ajungi prin diferite portaluri. În realismul magic acțiunea se petrece în lumea noastră, într-o realitate urbană, dar care conține și alte elemente, ce depășesc componenta reală, cotidiană. Universurile create în cadrul acestui gen conțin elementele vieții noastre de zi cu zi, este prezent într-o foarte mare măsură în familiar și cotidian, dar un familiar, un cotidian și un comun care încep să se altereze, în care intervin evenimente neobișnuite ce nu pot fi explicate prin tipare „realiste”. În felul acesta pot fi surprinse neajunsuri și aspecte sociale negative ale lumii în care trăim.

Pe lângă Franz Roh, printre teoreticienii importanți ai genului se numără Angel Flores și Louis Leal. Astfel, pentru Franz Roh, realismul magic presupune o lume pe care o recunoaștem, dar pe care o privim cu alți ochi, un univers cu un stil propriu, în care se celebrează o nouă lume, una a obiectelor, străină de percepția curentă a

realismului. Prin diferite tehnici, lucrurile sunt înzestrate cu un sens mai profund, se dezvăluie mistere care amenință mereu liniștea sigură a obișnuitului. În noua artă a realismului magic se admiră calm magia ființei, cu toate fațetele sale, într-o tendință de reprezentare intuitivă a figurii exterioare prin cea interioară<sup>[2]</sup>.

La rîndul său, Ángel Flores, găsește în realismul magic transformarea cotidianității, a comunului, în minunat și ireal. Prin această artă a surprizelor se creează o lume în care timpul există într-un fel de fluiditate atemporală, iar irealul se întîmplă ca parte a realității. În momentul în care cititorul acceptă convenția, faptul împlinit, restul urmează firesc, logic, cu multă precizie<sup>[3]</sup>.

În sfîrșit, Luis Leal vede realismul magic în primul rînd ca pe o atitudine față de realitate, o realitate care poate fi exprimată în forme populare sau culte, în stiluri elaborate sau mai puțin elaborate, în structuri închise sau deschise. Scriitorul propune o realitate în care încearcă să descopere misteriosul din lucruri, din viață, din acțiunile eroilor. Importantă aici nu este crearea personajelor sau a lumilor imaginare, ci descoperirea relației misterioase dintre om și circumstanțele sale. Evenimentele importante nu se pot explica logic sau psihologic. În realismul magic, realitatea înconjurătoare nu este copiată ori rănită, se merge, dimpotrivă, spre surprinderea misterului ce respiră în spatele lucrurilor<sup>[4]</sup>.

Mai mult sau mai puțin conștient, realismul magic este prezent deopotrivă în basme și în majoritatea operelor expresioniste. Dintre scriitorii reprezentativi, îi amintim pe Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Haruki Murakami, Olga Tokarczuk, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Mo Yan, Aimee Bender, Edward Swift, Eowyn Ivey, Neil Gaiman, Leslye Walton, Chloe Benjamin.

<sup>[1]</sup> Vezi Alejo Carpentier, *The Baroque and the Marvelous Real* (1975), in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, New York, USA, Duke University Press, 1995, pp. 102-104. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822397212-006>.

<sup>[2]</sup> Franz Roh, *Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism* (1925), in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 15-32.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ángel Flores, *Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction*, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 113-116.

<sup>[4]</sup> Luis Leal, *Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature*, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 119-123.

**Gabriela Chiciudean**

## FOREWORD

Magical realism, first introduced by German art critic Franz Roh around 1924-1925, originally described a post-expressionist movement in painting, where real-world forms did not align with typical, everyday reality. While surrealism sought the “magical” without rooting it in reality, magical realism finds the mystical within the ordinary, especially prevalent in Latin American culture, where the extraordinary is part of everyday life (Carpentier, 1975, pp. 102-104).

As a literary genre, magical realism blends the familiar with the fantastical, creating worlds richer and more layered than our usual reality. Unlike fantasy, which often involves wizards and imaginary realms, magical realism is grounded in our own world, typically within urban settings where unexplainable elements and surreal events appear alongside the mundane. The worlds created within this genre contain elements of our everyday lives, deeply rooted in the familiar and the ordinary. However,

this familiarity begins to shift, as unusual events intervene that cannot be explained through “realistic” patterns. This mix allows magical realism to highlight social issues and the darker sides of human experience.

Alongside Franz Roh (1925), key theorists like Àngel Flores (1995) and Louis Leal (1967) helped shape magical realism. Roh envisioned a familiar world seen through new eyes, celebrating objects and settings that reveal deeper, mysterious meanings beneath the surface. Through various techniques, objects are infused with deeper meaning, unveiling mysteries that continually disrupt the comfortable familiarity of human everyday existence. In magical realism, this “calm magic” of existence offers glimpses into the essence of things, where the external world mirrors an inner truth.

Àngel Flores emphasized magical realism’s ability to transform the ordinary into the marvellous and the surreal, creating a world where time flows fluidly and the unreal is seamlessly integrated into reality. Once readers accept this shift in perspective, events follow naturally, forming a cohesive world where surprises feel logical.

Louis Leal viewed magical realism as an outlook on reality itself, one that expresses life’s mystery through both high and popular forms, from complex structures to simple narratives. Instead of focusing on fictional characters or fantastical worlds, Leal’s magical realism seeks to reveal the mysterious bond between people and their surroundings, often through events that defy logical or psychological explanations. Here, reality isn’t simply imitated or altered but is explored for the deeper mystery that lies just beyond the visible.

Magical realism, whether intentionally or not, also resonates in fairy tales and expressionist works. Notable authors in this genre include Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Haruki Murakami, Olga Tokarczuk,

Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Mo Yan, Aimee Bender, Edward Swift, Eowyn Ivey, Neil Gaiman, Leslye Walton, and Chloe Benjamin. These writers use magical realism to uncover the hidden layers of reality, enriching our view of the world.

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EDITORIAL

**Incursions into the Imaginary Vol. 15(1)**

The journal *Incursions into the Imaginary*, Vol. 15(1), takes readers on an exploration of the multi-dimensional world of magical realism. This issue features twelve engaging studies in Romanian, English, and French, each uncovering the connections between literature, culture, art, and philosophy. Organized into five thematic sections, the collection covers a broad range of topics—from the foundational ideas of magical realism to its expressions in different media, cultural perspectives, and even therapeutic storytelling.

**The first section, In Honorem Maria-Ana Tupan 75**, opens with a critical exploration of the foundational elements of magical realism in European and Latin American contexts. Maria-Ana Tupan's study, *Mircea Eliade and Alejo Carpentier in Light of R.G. Echevarría's Ontological/Epistemological Binary in Magical Realism*, investigates the roots of magical realism as both a literary and visual art form. The author highlights how figures like Mircea Eliade and Alejo Carpentier drew upon German post-expressionism, surrealism, and dadaism to contribute to this "ontological scandal" of reality's re-imagination. Tracing Franz Roh's conceptualization of "Magischer Realismus" from his influential 1925 work to its rapid adoption and adaptation by thinkers like Ortega y Gasset, Tupan reveals how the new aesthetic bridged disparate modernist movements, paving the way for an artistic hybrid that challenged conventions of identity and realism.

The second section comprises two studies that explore the progression from magic to magical realism. **Sibusiso Hyacinth Madondo**, in *The Representation of*

*Witch(Doctor) and Sage in Literature and Society*, explores the blurred boundaries between the witch, or witchdoctor, and the sage across cultural narratives. The author discusses how, contrary to modern conceptions that view the witch and sage as separate figures, one tied to superstition, the other to intellect, they were once unified as conduits of wisdom and mysticism. Through linguistic and historical analysis, Madondo illustrates how figures traditionally seen as supernatural in Western discourse, such as the druid or the shaman, held revered roles encompassing both sacred and scientific knowledge, embodying a wisdom that modernity later partitioned into opposing identities.

**Iuliana Păunescu (Voroneanu)** provides an insight into *Realism, Magic and Metamorphism in Lostrîța*, where she discusses the nuances of magical realism as portrayed in Vasile Voiculescu's novel. She identifies key elements of the genre—such as the blending of fantastical events with a credible narrative, and the distortion of space, time, and identity. Furthermore, she argues that by introducing the motif of the double, Voiculescu intertwines the real and the supernatural in a way that maintains the semblance of normalcy, thereby preserving the narrative's illusion of reality even as it transcends everyday limits.

The third thematic section, which presents **magical realism across literature and art**, begins with **Diana-Adriana Lefter, Lavinia Geambei, and Bogdan Cioabă's** *Forms of Absence in Isabel Allende's La Casa de los Espiritus: The Book and the Film*. The authors analyse the portrayal of absence in both the novel and its film adaptation, examining how magical realism expresses Latin America's dualistic cultural identity. Their comparative study emphasizes how absence—manifested in silence, death, and the imaginary—becomes a powerful



narrative device in both media, creating a twofold world that defines and shapes the artistic representation.

**Gabriel Dan Bărbuleț** contributes to this section with the paper *Conversational Implicatures in Magic Realism Movies – The Green Mile*. Using Grice's Cooperative Principle, the author investigates how dialogue in Frank Darabont's film subtly conveys meanings beyond the explicit, thereby deepening the audience's engagement with the narrative. Through a corpus analysis of dialogue, the study demonstrates how conversational implicatures amplify the portrayal of supernatural elements, moral complexities, and thematic motifs, enhancing the viewers' understanding of the magical realist elements within the film.

**Cristina Matilda Vănoagă's** study, *Theatre and Circus as Background for Magical Realism in Angela Carter's Novels*, looks at how Carter's novels, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, use the theatrical and circus environments to blur the line between reality and illusion. The author highlights how these settings allow Carter to introduce elements of magic within the ordinary, crafting characters whose identities are shaped by these illusory worlds. The paper argues that Carter's use of these environments as instruments for magical acts intensifies the ambiguous line between the ordinary and the fantastical, further defining magical realism's unique space in contemporary literature.

The fourth section deals with configurations of time and space in magical realism. In her study, *Perception of Places in Magical Realist Novels*, **Delia-Maria Radu** examines how sensory perception shapes space in magical realist novels, focusing on *Midnight's Children*, *The Passion*, and *Nights at the Circus*. Drawing from Paul Rodaway's perception theory and Mezei and Briganti's

ideas on domestic spaces, the study explores how sensory details not only define external worlds but also reflect the characters' inner lives, enhancing the depth of magical realism through a layered sensory experience.

**Cristina Ilea Rogojină's** analysis of space in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* explores how Carter uses physical surroundings to evoke atmosphere and tension, drawing deeply from familiar fairy tales. By examining the symbolic role of the chronotope, where setting not only shapes characters' personalities but also connects to their memories and identities, the study shows how Carter's detailed environments become dynamic elements that amplify themes of gender, power, and identity. Through close readings of *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, and *The Tiger's Bride*, Rogojină argues that the dilapidated castles and mansions symbolize both the decline of patriarchy and the renewal of traditional gender roles, with transformed spaces reflecting a shift toward healing and growth after corruption is purged.

**Amalia Mărășescu** examines *Real and Magical Spaces in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children: The Kashmir Valley and the Sundarbans*, each blending real and magical qualities. Mărășescu employs Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to discuss these spaces, which are isolated yet permeable, gaining full meaning when characters step outside conventional timelines. The analysis highlights how the Kashmir Valley, with its timeless landscape and personified elements, and the resistant Sundarbans, where symbolic death and rebirth play out, function as both real and enchanted settings. These spaces embody agency, resisting intrusion and serving as timeless refuges where characters seek unconventional resolutions.

The last three contributions in section five explore magical realism in therapeutic novels. **Laura Măcineanu** investigates the therapeutic qualities in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, emphasizing three key levels. First, the novels highlight storytelling as a means of restoring joy and vitality to the world, with tales acting as a form of magical remedy for real-world problems. Second, Măcineanu discusses the therapeutic value of reading itself, suggesting that these stories allow readers to escape stress by entering a more comforting, alternate reality. Finally, the paper touches on the therapeutic nature of writing, noting that for Rushdie, the process of storytelling serves as a personal form of therapy. Through these perspectives, the author illustrates how Rushdie's narratives offer healing for both readers and creator, reaffirming the power of fiction as a restorative force.

**Gabriela Chiciudean** examines the use of both magical realism and "hallucinatory" realism in Laura Imai Messina's novels *What We Entrust to the Wind* and *The Secret Lives of Colors*. Magical realism, which extends beyond its Latin American origins, introduces a surreal layer to everyday life through unexplained, fantastical events. In *What We Entrust to the Wind*, Messina depicts the 2011 Japanese floods, creating a nightmarish vision of humanity's fragile struggle against nature, which evokes a hallucinatory sense of the surreal. In contrast, *The Secret Lives of Colors* explores two opposing perceptions of colour through characters with unique vision abilities, drawing readers into distinct, subjective worlds. Across both novels, characters confront hardship by retreating into alternate realities, ultimately finding their way back to normality through acceptance, love, and resilience.

In the final paper of this issue, *Mental Illness, Identity, and Philosophical Inquiry in Susanna Clarke's*

*Piranesi*, **Andra-Iulia Ursa** examines the diverse interpretations of *the book* as readers relate it to mental health, identity, and philosophical themes. The analysis highlights how readers often view the protagonist's experiences through a psychological lens, finding parallels with dissociative identity disorder, schizophrenia, and even the experience of living with long-term illness, such as long COVID-19. However, the author argues that the novel offers a broader commentary on enchantment, perception, and the balance between knowledge and feeling, drawing from thinkers like Rudolf Steiner and Owen Barfield to underscore a philosophical perspective on consciousness.

In conclusion, *Incursions into the Imaginary*, Vol. 15(1), offers an inviting journey into the depths of magical realism, showcasing the genre's ability to reveal new layers of meaning. We warmly encourage readers to immerse themselves in these studies, where the dedication and insight of the authors bring fresh perspectives on how literature, art, and culture intertwine. This collection is not only a valuable resource but a reminder of the power of magical realism to explore the mysteries of the human experience.

**Andra-Iulia Ursa**

***IN HONOREM  
MARIA-ANA TUPAN - 75***



## **Professor dr. habil. Maria-Ana TUPAN**



Born in 1949, Professor Maria-Ana TUPAN is currently affiliated with the Doctoral School of Alba Iulia University. A graduate of Bucharest University, she got her Ph.D. degree from Bucharest University and the Romanian Academy in 1992. Habilitation from Iași University in 2014. From 1991 to 2014 she taught courses in the history of British literature and in applied literary theory at Bucharest University. Fulbright Visiting Professor affiliated with Penn State University, USA (1994-5). Member of The Romanian Writers Union, and of several European academic societies. Appointed to the Editorial Board of several international journals. Guest Editor of two issues of the *Rupkatha Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*. Author of 17 books, book chapters and articles published in Romania, U.K., Germany, India, Australia and U.S.A. Papers read at conferences in Athens, University Park (Penn State University), Madrid, Manchester, Salzburg, Vienna, Dresden, Graz, Rome, Cologne, Dortmund. Awards from the Romanian Writers' Union and literary reviews. Relevant titles include: *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), *The Shakespearean Search for Archetypes* (Newcastle upon Tyne:

Cambridge Scholars Publishing), *The Key to Change. Interdisciplinary Essays in Cultural History* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017), *The Kantian Legacy of Late Modernity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), *Realismul magic* (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Române, 2013), *Relativism/Relativity: The History of a Modern Concept*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), *Modernismul si psihologia. Încercare de epistemologie literară. Modernism and Psychology. An Inquiry into the Epistemology of Literary Modernism* (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Române, 2009); *Genre and Postmodernism* (Bucuresti: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, 2008), *A Survey Course in British Literature*, 2 vols. (Editura Universității din București, 2004). Publishing mainly in the areas of literary theory, with a focus on the nexus of literature, science and philosophy, her works are as many occasions for revisiting and reinterpreting canonical status (such as Wilhelm Wundt as philosopher of phenomenological constitution), tracing travelling concepts (objective correlative), or identifying non-literary sources (Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Plato's *Timaeus*, *Othello* and the *Quran*).



# MIRCEA ELIADE AND ALEJO CARPENTIER IN LIGHT OF R.G. ECHEVARRÍA'S ONTOLOGICAL/ EPISTEMOLOGICAL BINARY IN MAGICAL REALISM<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

*Associated with German post-expressionism, new objectivity, French surrealism and dadaism, magic realism is regarded as an ontological scandal, a violation of the logic of identity through the invention of a third level of reality. The name was coined by a German critic and art historian, Franz Roh, in his book Nach-Expressionismus. Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei, published in 1925, and employed again in Foto-Auge, a book on the new photography jointly published by Roh with Jan Tschichold which served as a catalogue for the avant-garde Film und Foto exhibition (FiFo) held in Stuttgart between May and June 1929. By then, however, Roh's essay had already been translated into Italian and Spanish and promoted by prominent thinkers of the day, such as Jose Ortega y Gasset, who published it in the influential Revista de Occidente in Madrid in*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=55375717500>

1927, and by Massimo Bonterupelli, who translated it for the Italian journal, 900 [Novecento].

*The prompt and resonant international echo generated by Roh's new art can hardly be understood otherwise than on the assumption that it was striking a familiar ring in the rapidly changing and polyphonous score of European modernism. Reputed for its international and heterogeneous character, modernism is thus revealed to have been crossed by some common currents of poetic matter and energy. The present essay sets out to dig up the roots of a hybrid, literary and plastic artistic mode in the earlier half of the last century, and to identify legacies in the aftermath of Roh's celebrated manifesto.*

**Keywords:** magic; realism; idealist pragmatism; surrealism; new objectivity; magic deed; Mircea Eliade; Giovanni Papini; Franz Roh; Alejo Carpentier.

## INTRODUCTION

In light of recent research, The New Objectivity that had succeeded expressionism in the Weimar Republic benefited from Rudolf Carnap's analytical philosophy of language and formal studies of the new physics (relativity theory), which he applied to a theory of space.<sup>3</sup> Conceived as a gloss on the post-expressionist painting of the Weimar Republic (19128 – 1933), Roh's book was, in a way, the art critic's counterpart to a philosophy which was looking for a third way: cooperation of experience and reason, a synthesis of traditional empiricism and traditional rationalism. By positing a relation of equivalence between thing and concept, Carnap filled the empirical world with intelligibility. As he defends his

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<sup>3</sup> See Hans Joachim Dance, "Rudolf Carnap: Philosoph der Neuen Sachlichkeit", in *Der junge Carnap in historischem Kontext: 1918–1935 / Young Carnap in an Historical Context: 1918–1935*. (pp. 75-105), Springer, 2021 (pp. 75-105)

theory in *The Logical Structure of the World*, this superposition of thing and concept does not mean reification of the concept but functionalisation of the object, being endowed with a specific function in the structure of the world, which has its logic. The thing is no longer created (Kantianism) or apprehended (realism). (Carnap 1967, 10). It is constructed. Alternatively, we may say that it is reborn as a thing endowed with meaning, which is its essence that comes forth gradually in a process of phenomenological constitution.

Out of his discussions with Carnap, Roh will have associated the construction of the thing with an act of magic, of conjuring it before the observer's eyes. Here is a passage in *Nach-Expressionismus* where he emulates Carnap's model of the constructional system:

We recognise the world, although now - not only because we woke up from a dream - we look at it with different eyes. We are offered a new style that claims and celebrates the world. However, this new world of objects is foreign to Realism. It uses techniques that lend everything a more profound meaning and reveal mysteries that perpetually threaten the safe tranquillity of simple and naive things. This offers a subdued admiration of the magic of being [...], which means that the ground on which the most diverse ideas can take root has been recaptured, albeit in a new way. The new art is reduced to representing before the eyes, intuitively, the inner figure of the outer world. (Roh 1925)

Magic and concomitantly realism amount to a superposition of opposite states analogous to the corpuscle/ wave duality, which had recently been certified as the nature of light by quantum physics. Quantum

entanglement and the polyvalent logic it had inspired provided epistemic founding to the new aesthetics considered by Franz Roh appropriate for that age dominated by the mundane. The object of the new style was reality but looked at in new ways. *Foto-Auge*, the title of the album of what was qualified as post-expressionist art, entrusted photography with the function of realist rendering of the object, whereas the eye was coping with the burden of its construction and positioning within the general scheme of things.

The new genre was to pay attention to accurate detail, this close observation being an exercise whose finality was activating the mystery of life. The eye keeps looking at the object until its essence bursts into the open.

Functionalism implies meaning arising from positionality. A thing gathers meaning from the structure within which it is inserted. Discontinuity in time and space is made up for by the unexpected relationships among objects gathered from heterogeneous spaces. The stress falls on language, which is supposed to be constructed rather than named or mirrored. Roh created a taxonomy of the technical devices of magic realism in comparison to expressionism, for instance:

ecstatic objects  
the stifled object  
obvious  
.....

plain objects  
the explanatory object  
obvious and enigmatic  
.....

This stress on language rather than vision, world outlook, theme, ideas, etc., was another legacy from Carnap, and it explains the vitality of magic realism after the linguistic turn in postmodernism.

### 1. The Magic Realism before Magic Realism

Currently in use were in the earlier half of the twentieth century such oxymoronic phrases as *inner fantastic* (Giovanni Papini), *magic deed* (Mircea Eliade), *magic idealism* (Julius Evola), *magic realism* (Franz Roh), sometimes created under the influence of radical changes in science by prominent thinkers in their attempt to reach a unified view of being. Although they carried different names, they were underwritten by a common pursuit: the defamiliarisation of the everyday, infusing a sense of magic in the most ordinary things humans encountered daily. It was Evola who looked for an epistemological justification of this radical break, not only with the rationalist and materialist school of thought but also with psycho-physics, which had dominated the later half of the nineteenth century, let alone German idealism, Hegelianism, Kantianism – except a left-wing Hegelianism represented by Nietzsche. For Wundt and James, the masterminds of psycho-physiological pragmatism, the action of the world on the body was the primary source of psychic life, no matter how subjective it might become on the way of its processing through associative processes complexifying the bond between the mind and its objective correlatives.

The new philosophy was centred on the self – which might not sound different from Descartes or Kant – with an essential difference from the earlier tradition: the self is auto-originated, and the world is its projection through abstractions and dependent on its will. The ego can will a world into existence – precisely what magic had always been supposed to do.

Evola's explanations evolve around the late outbreaks in science. The matter had practically vanished. In light of the new scientific theories, the world was a map of the mind's faculty of abstraction, wholly disconnected from any empirical determination: blown up into quantum particles, the atom had been left "a mere

pragmatic hypothesis"; entropy and energy were a matter of integrals, algebraic functions; the hyperspace and the multi-dimensional systems of Riemann (6) and Lobatschewsky were not existences in the realistic and materialistic sense of the term. The realisation that science is a creation of the spirit, both autonomous and arbitrary, opened the door to the myriad worlds of dreams and occultism. Magic was the force, manifest in primitive man since prehistorical times, of bringing a world into existence, and the name of the new field was concrete or material idealism. This force defined man as *potenza* (potency) and "absolute individual."<sup>4</sup>

Evola was writing his "Essays on Magical Idealism" in 1925, the year of the birth of Magical Realism as an aesthetic manifesto. However, ideas like those articulated in these essays have long been brought to public consciousness.

As early as 1903, **Giovanni Papini** wrote in the *Leonardo Journal* about the "Death and Resurrection" of philosophy. The philosophical turn could be summed up as the shift from dualism (between theory and practice, generality and particularity, internal and external consciousness) to the holism of the particular and the personal in the magic act. The magical attitude implies converting ideas, as the fruit of creativity and imagination, into facts. The "Florentine Pragmatist Club" was the new version of an idealist pragmatism, open to the ideas of the esoteric Guénon circle in France.

In 1906, Papini published his essay *Il tragico quotidiano* (*The Tragical Everyday*), where he elaborated on the idea that an inner sense of the fantastic wraps up

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<sup>4</sup> Julius Evola's world picture derived from his works, *Saggi sull'Idealismo magico* (1925), *L'Uomo come Potenza* (1926), and *Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto* (1927)

things into colours that make them look marvellous. What Mikhail Shklovsky was to relegate to the technicality of writing in 1917 ("Art as Technique"), Papini reserved for the exercise of imagination's magic potential:

Our wonder and our fear come from the rarity of things that produce them, and nothing can make us believe that the usual things are not, virtually, greater marvels than that which some seek out the most singular adventures and spectacles. [...]

I set out to arouse wonder and fear but didn't want to resort to strange adventures and exceptional inventions such as those designed by "fantastic novelists". The marvellous and the terrible of these stories [...] are the result of something extraordinary but external, almost always, to the souls of the personages. The terrible consists of the strangeness of the abnormal situations in which ordinary men find themselves, and amazement arises from the contact between ordinary people who suddenly find themselves in an exceptional world. There, the source of the ordinary fantastic is material, external, and objective. I have been looking for another source. I wanted to bring out the fantastic from the very soul of men, I imagined making them think and feel exceptionally when faced with ordinary facts. (Papini 2010)

In a review of the 2022 edition of Papini's *Stories (I raccoti)*, Rpberto Pacifico calls Papini a "precursore del realismo metafisico", comparing his geographical and anthropological fantasy to the narrative mode of Poe, Kafka, or Borges, which explores what Freud defined as *unheimlich*, unfamiliar.

Published one year before Roh's essay on Magic Realism, **Andre Breton's** first surrealist manifesto exalted the same capacity in the artist to stir a sense of wonder at the everyday encounter with the world. The world of art was so disconnected from ordinary life that practically the poet's work began at night when going to sleep and dreaming. The names mentioned by Breton as elective affinities are Jonathan Swift, a master of fantasy, absurd and the grotesque, Alfred Jarry, with his absurdist plots and geographies, the nonsensical Dadaism, the morbid and sardonic Lautréamont a.o. He quotes Pierre Reverdy on the new poetic idiom grounded precisely in the magic realist trespassing of the logic of identity: "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and accurate, the stronger the image will be, the greater its emotional power and poetic reality..."\* (*Nord-Sud*, March 1918)

As well as magic realism, a hybrid plastic/ textual mode, surrealism relied on visual but disconcerting images, conveying some symbolic meaning. Breton's image of a man cut in two by the window, walking the streets with the window perpendicular to the axis of his body, could be read as an allegory of the reversed relationship between inner and outer, world and mind when looking at reality through the magic mirror of art.

While glossing on two articles published by **Mircea Eliade** in 1928-29, "Cuvinte despre o filosofie" (A Few Words on Philosophy) and "Schiță pentru un îndreptar," (Sketch of a Guidebook), Liviu Bordaș identifies in Evola the epistemological source of Eliade's distinction between the mystic and the magical act.



Dincolo de teorie, pentru Evola, idealismul magic concordă pe deplin cu „gnoseologia orientală” [...] A cunoaște înseamnă a proiecta Eul înăuntrul ființelor, a transfera propria interioritate dintr-o individuire în alta, intus-ire. [...] Ceea ce există în afara Eului apare ca atare numai pentru că există la fel înăuntrul lui (saṃskāra din filosofia indiană). Principiul fundamental al magiei este că modul în care apare lumea nu constituie o instanță extremă, că ea nu e un în sine inconvertibil, ci un fenomen în funcție de pura putere e Eului. Acționând în plan transcendental asupra saṃskāra, se pot înlătura condițiile sub care apare realitatea și, prin urmare, experiența concretă a Universului. (Bordaș 2012)<sup>5</sup>

The possibility was thus created for the existence of a form of cognition where to know meant to be, as one's consciousness was the object of the quest.

The source of the mystic/ mythic dichotomy which crops up in the debates over the late 1920s was Franz Roh, who, in his 1925 *Post-Expressionism*, is pitting "mystic" – the descent of mystery to the world – against "mythic"

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<sup>5</sup> “Leaving aside theory, for Evola, magical idealism is similar to ‘oriental gnoseology’ [...] To know means to project the Ego into beings, to transfer one’s interiority from one individuation to another, empathy. [...] What exists outside the Self appears as such only because it also exists within it (saṃskāra in Indian philosophy). The fundamental principle of magic is that the way the world appears is not an extreme instance, which is not inconvertible in itself, but a phenomenon depending on the pure power of the Ego. Acting transcendently on the saṃskāra, one can remove the conditions under which reality appears and, therefore, the concrete experience of the Universe.” (Liviu Bordaș, “Faptul magic și faptul mistic. Prima întâlnire a lui Eliade cu opera lui Evola.” *Revista de Istorie și Teorie Literară* (București), s.n., VI, nr. 1-4, 2012, pp. 355-400.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368720107\\_Faptul\\_magic\\_si\\_faptul\\_mistic\\_Prima\\_intalnire\\_a\\_lui\\_Eliade\\_cu\\_opera\\_lui\\_Evola\\_Revista\\_de\\_istorie\\_si\\_teorie\\_literara\\_Bucuresti\\_XLVIII\\_nr\\_1-4\\_2012\\_pp\\_355-400](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368720107_Faptul_magic_si_faptul_mistic_Prima_intalnire_a_lui_Eliade_cu_opera_lui_Evola_Revista_de_istorie_si_teorie_literara_Bucuresti_XLVIII_nr_1-4_2012_pp_355-400)

where the mystery is in hiding, lurking and stirring behind things.

It is true, however, that the influence supposed by Bordas to have been exerted by Evola's essay, *Sulla metafisica del dolore e della malattia*, over Eliade, who received in Calcutta the last two issues of the journal *Ur* in 1928, may indeed be traced to his novel, *Isabel and the Devil's Waters*, where the protagonist tries on Evola's scheme of the three attitudes to the spiritual - devotional, intellectual and magic. Focusing on his studies in the beginning in search of glory, living as a devoted husband in a dream induced by malaria, he finally chooses the force of his spirit to do an existentialist project, which proves the magical force of his will. Living begins by gainsaying life, as Eliade says in "Apologia virilitatii" (*Gandirea*, August-September 1928), by going against biology, against society. Like Jesus, the spirit incarnated; he will be reborn through the newly born child of Isabel by another man, but his own in spirit. Like a magician acting on the surrogate object of his target, the self's will becomes a reality.

*Mademoiselle Christina*, the short novel published by Mircea Eliade in 1936, mixes reality and fantasy on the same timeline in a characteristic magic realist fashion. The archaeologist digs into the remote past - the antiquity - only to find correspondences with the near past of a decayed family of boyars (the centre scene is that of supper, common to the two worlds and suggesting the successive incarnations of some universal spirit in the "body and blood" of the world of matter) is the disciple of a historical person - Romanian historian, Vasile Parvan. Giovanni Papini's idea of the fantastic as a psychological rather than visionary experience - *fantastico interno* rather than the *fantastico esterno* of the previous century (*Poesia*

483) - is threading Eliade's plot in a way which comes very close to Papini's *Gentiluomo malato*. With Papini, the fantastic changes from an experience of transgression to one of dreaming (from "esperienza di trasgressione" in the nineteenth century to "un carattere onirico" in the twentieth). Similarly to Papini's character, Eliade, the protagonist in this novel, believes that he is imprisoned in someone's dream who turns out to be himself and is satisfied that nobody is trying to wake him up. He is afraid of Christina's ghost as long as he believes her to be intruding from the outside. He no longer fears The ghost when he expells his reality-attuned self (the character's name is Egor, maybe a pun on Ego). It is part of his inner world. Roh says he looks at the world as if he had just woken up from a dream but is trailed by its dreamy clouds of tamed unreality.

In 1932, J.L. Borges published an essay, "Narrative Art and Magic", exploring the opposite way of creating a sense of the marvellous in fiction. His object lesson is *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) by William Morris, while his avowed purpose is that of explaining the Preraphaelite's technique of creating a solid appearance of factual truth in order to achieve that willing suspension of disbelief which, for Coleridge, is the essence of poetic faith. Morris succeeded, concludes Borges, and he would like to determine how.

He dwells fastidiously on the multitude and precision of details which render mythical scenes life-like, on the simulation models of actual feelings and emotional responses to events, as if to realise the generic parameters of Roh's magic-realist poetics.

## 2. The Aftermath

On his return to Cuba, Alejo Carpentier felt that the twin European poetics of surrealism and magic realism

could no longer engage his imagination or serve as an adequate lens for embodying the sensibility of the people there or attending to the sore issues engendered by colonialism.

Judging by the title of his first book written in the new environment, *The Kingdom of This World*, Carpentier saw himself as an explorer who was, however, inclined to get familiarised with *spiritus loci* rather than try to naturalise the worldview brought over from Europe. According to Roberto González Echevarría (*Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, 1991), Carpentier could not get over his sense of uprootedness, of feeling a stranger on a pilgrimage away from home. What in Europe had been a matter of aesthetic affiliation – surrealism and post-expressionism – had become, by now, an existential mode of experience. He was living among people who did not need to magnify the glass through which they were looking at things, rendering them threatening or unfamiliar as if perceived inadvertently upon being suddenly awakened from sleep; they no longer took a distance from the supernatural; they believed that the dead could talk or that magic practices are as efficient as back then when prehistorical people went hunting.

Carpentier's "On the Marvelous Real in America" (1949) is a travelogue in front of his novel, *The Kingdom of This World*. After reasserting again and again a Heideggerian distrust of the possibility of understanding a people's sense of space (the way a space is revealed to them as presentness, being there, Dasein) as long as their language remains inaccessible, he goes on to compare Europe and Latin America. He concludes that, while Lautréamont's Maldoror left behind a literary school of fantastic adventures, Haitian François Mackandal, the voodoo priest and fighter against slavery, is credited with

the legacy of "an entire mythology, preserved by an entire people and accompanied by magic hymns still sung today during voodoo ceremonies." (Carpentier 1953).

Echevarría, the author of a study in Carpentier's magic realism, is persuaded into accepting that there is indeed an essential difference between the European and Latin American versions of the genre: the former is phenomenological, stemming from Roh's book"; the latter is a tributary to the "marvellous American reality," being classified as ontological.

Let us look at the book selected by Echevarria as representative of Carpentier's practice of magic realism, *The Lost Steps* (1953). We identify a difference in politics/ideology rather than in poetics from European models.

The first-person narrator steps onto the scene as the victim of life in an alienating modern civilisation, where history has vanished under empty representation, feelings have decayed into the mechanical exercise of marital duties, and art has been massified and commercialised. Somehow resembling Joyce's Bloom – alienated from his wife, writing music for advertisements, planning to compose an *Odyssey* but wandering along the streets of New York – the musician gets a chance to flee with his mistress to South America sponsored by the curator of a university who expects him to search for indigenous instruments still in use among the primitive tribes in the Orinoko jungle.

A Greek miner, Yannes, is searching for gold as so many Europeans uprooted from their nations and families in search of fortune in the New World. By giving the narrator Homer's *Odyssey*, he symbolically tears himself off from home and gives up on the possibility of going home like Ulysses. Fray Pedro is the missionary prototype of religious colonialism accompanying the military

conquest. Only Adelantado belongs to that world, is familiar with its customs, artefacts, and values, and has become the founder of a community ruled by the law and archived for history.

The composer's life is fractured, imitating the grand design of the rise and fall of civilisations. In magic realist fashion, a double thread of reality and unreality is being permanently woven. A heavy rain precedes his encounter with the curator, who changes the course of his life, while, in the end, when he wants to go back to Santa Monica de los Venados, the village in the jungle, the path is flooded. When the waters withdraw, his return is pointless because he has discovered that Rosario, a creature of nature unspoiled by civilisation, had married someone else. The floods and other natural calamities that ended civilisations also suggest the passage of time and the provisional character of any human pursuit. The South American city the composer and his mistress visited before continuing to the Orinoko jungle symbolises the thwarted colonial venture. In magic-realist fashion, the illogical and counterfactual steal in, the architecture with European design being shattered by the roots of palm trees growing beneath all over the town, mud, moss and fungus gnawing at the pillars of the colonial order. Ironically, the ceremonies celebrating the President of the republic are performed by Romans and indigenous people, Signification takes priority over historical truth: Romans had never been there, yet they stand for imperial grandeur and the memory of conquest.

Because of the ontological paradox on which it is built, magic realism is best defined by discontinuity, as in Rene Magritte's *The Blank Signature* (1965), where blank spaces cross the image of the riding lady. The trodden path, in literal and figurative sense, cannot be retraced. The steps on the way back home are permanently lost. If

the message holds good regarding the postcolonial mix of races and fractured history, it also suits a Europe caught between two world conflagrations in the last century.

### CONCLUSION

By broadening the cone of light cast on either side of the year 1925, when German art critic Franz Roh published a book on the postexpressionist turn in art, especially on avant-garde photography, which became the manifest of a new mode of literary and plastic magic realism, we have identified the historical context in which analogous ideas were launched and similar signifying practices were tested. While it is true that Papini's phrase, "magic idealism", was also used by Novalis, while Shklovsky's defamiliarisation also occurred in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, their meanings entail important categorical distinctions. In Novalis and Wordsworth, magic idealism and defamiliarisation do not refer to distinct levels of reality. In Novalis, both God in whom are unified the subject and the object (there is no antagonism, no discontinuity), and the artist engaging in *imitatio dei* are set over and against the *res extensa* of the material world, which is placed within brackets (Novalis 1995, frg.292, p.128). There is a unified and ideal field of consciousness. Contrariwise, Papini's magic idealism, Eliade's magic deed, and Roh's magic realism include the material world as a member of the equation which defines Being. Life's events are not less actual for being perceived as tragical; the magic act will end up in a realised state; reality and magic are superimposed as in the quantum wave-particle duality. Magic realism is not an act of phenomenological reduction (placing things within brackets) as with the romantics but of ontological realisation. It is still the world out there, but with its soul showing off. Something essential about its inner nature is

forced into the open. Reality is not diminished but enhanced.

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*De la magie  
spre realismul magic*



REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

REPREZENTAREA VRĂJITORULUI/  
VRACIULUI ȘI A ÎNȚELEPTULUI ÎN  
LITERATURĂ ȘI SOCIETATE<sup>1</sup>

THE REPRESENTATION OF  
WITCH(DOCTOR) AND SAGE IN LITERATURE  
AND SOCIETY<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:**

*Establishing a relationship between the witch or witchdoctor and the sage is not immediately evident. To most modern men the witch is simply a wretched wight devoid of knowledge and insight of modern life, whereas the sage or the intellectual is the great thinker, a custodian of Western ideologies and theories who supposedly does not believe in witchcraft and even questions the existence of God. The word sage is derived from the Latin verb*

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sapere whose other meaning is "to have a good taste". On the contrary, when one goes back in space and time to the period referred to as "once upon a time" in fairy tales, one discovers that the witch and the sage were indivisible; in fact they were one and the same person. This is clearly evinced in the etymology of some words of Indo-European origin. In fact, the distinction between witch and sage is flimsy and transparent, sharing the same semantic area with the following words: wizard, druid, fili, wicca, sorcerer, juggler, powwow, lamia and lilith. To the modern mind it strains belief to hear that the span of the word witch has roots in the sacred domain, that of priesthood, shamanism and sainthood for example. The truth is that the sage and the witch emerged from a common past. For example, the early pre-Socratic philosophers were shamanic practitioners first and wise men second. The parting of the ways is not as clear-cut in Arabic cultures where the ulana are learned in sacred scriptures and at the same time, learned in science, thus harking back to the past when the duality between sacred and secular did not exist. The medieval alchemist, forerunner of today's scientist, is another case in point; and of course it is well-known that in many old cultures the priest class or caste were not only repositories of religious authority and initiated into sacred mysteries, but living repositories of all forms of specialised knowledge, including the art of writing. Acknowledged philosophers and writers among which Virgil, Shakespeare, Hugo, Apollinaire also write about it.

*Keywords:* witch/doctor; sage; witchcraft; literature; society; past and present.

*Cuvinte cheie:* vrăjitor/vraci; înțelept; vrăjitorie; literatură; societate; trecut și prezent

Nu este simplu să stabilești în imediat o legătură între vrăjitor, vraci și înțelept. Pentru majoritatea contemporanilor, vrăjitorul este pur și simplu o persoană jalnică, lipsită de cunoaștere și recunoaștere, în vreme ce înțeleptul sau intelectualul este marele gânditor, deținătorul ideologiilor și teoriilor occidentale care se

presupune că nu crede în vrăjitorie, ba chiar se îndoiește și de existența lui Dumnezeu. Cuvântul *înțelept* este derivat din verbul latin *sapere*, al cărui al doilea sens este *să ai gusturi bune*. Dimpotrivă, când ne întoarcem în spațiu și timp la epoca la care ne referim ca la *a fost odată ca niciodată*, descoperim că vrăjitorul și înțeleptul erau indivizibili, mai exact una și aceeași persoană. Acest lucru reiese clar din etimologia unor cuvinte de origine indo-europeană precum *saga*, care desemnează atât femeia înțeleaptă cât și vrăjitoarea, care, potrivit lui John Weyer, derivă din verbul latin *sagire* pentru a percepe funcția vrăjitorului, de a prezice viitorul, și cea a înțeleptului, de a căuta cunoaștere și înțelepciune (Weyer, 1991, p. 166). În fapt, distincția dintre vrăjitor și înțelept este fragilă și transparentă, împărțind aceeași arie semantică cu următoarele cuvinte: magician, druid, *fili*, wicca, mag, jongler, powwow (sfat al indienilor din America de Nord), lamia și Lilith. Pentru mintea modernă e greu de închipuit că aria cuvântului *vrăjitor* se extinde spre domeniul sacrului, al preoției, al șamanismului și al sfințeniei; în India, de pildă, cuvântul *siddha* denumește un om perfect, care a atins starea de beatitudine, și un magician totodată, creând astfel o relație indivizibilă a celor două funcții, care se exclude mutual în gândirea curentă (Weyer, 1991, p. 166). Adevărul este că înțeleptul și vrăjitorul vin dintr-un trecut comun. De exemplu, primii filosofi presocratici erau văzuți ca practicanți ai șamanismului, apoi ca înțelepți. Împărțirea nu este atât de clară în culturile arabe unde *ulana* învață scrierile sfinte în paralel cu știința, trimitând la un trecut în care dualitatea dintre sacru și secular nu exista. Alchimistul medieval, precursor al omului de știință de azi, este un alt subiect de discuție. Se știe, de altfel, că în multe culturi vechi casta preoților nu deținea doar autoritatea religioasă; inițiind în misterele sacre, ea deținea, de asemenea, toate formele de cunoaștere specializată, inclusiv arta scrierii.

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A existat, de exemplu, un număr considerabil de papi cu înaltă educație și bănuți de vrăjitorie, precum Silvestru al II-lea, Honorius al III-lea, Ioan al XXI-lea, Grigore al XII-lea, Benedict al XII-lea și Ioan al VIII-lea sau Ioan Anglicus. Gerbert d'Aurillac sau Papa Silvestru al II-lea (2 aprilie 999 – 12 mai 1003) a fost un matematician cu o vastă cultură care a studiat arta magiei și astrologia la Cordoba, Sevilla și la Universitatea din Al Karaouine, în Maroc. Se credea că deține o carte cu vrăji furată de la un filosof spaniol. Când filosoful l-a admonestat să-i înapoieze cartea, se spune că Gerbert a zburat și s-a ascuns agățat sub un pod, devenind invizibil. Gerbert avea un cap din bronz care putea să răspundă la întrebările sale cu da sau nu. A fost avertizat de diavol să nu officieze niciodată slujba în Ierusalim, fiind nevoit să anuleze pelerinajul la Orașul Sfânt. Când a oficiat slujba în biserica Santa Croce în Gerusalemme din Roma s-a îmbolnăvit și, pe patul de moarte, le-a cerut cardinalilor să-i taie trupul în bucăți și să-l împrăștie în tot orașul. Într-o altă versiune, diavolul a fost cel care i-a sfâșiat trupul în bucăți și le-a împrăștiate.

Papa Honorius al II-lea (18 iulie 1216 – 18 martie 1227) a fost un necromant și autorul unei cărți despre magie exclusiv rezervată uzului preoților. Papa Ioan al VIII-lea (13 decembrie 872 – Decembrie 882), numit și Ioan Anglicus, era fiica unui fost papă, educată în Atena de iubitul ei și travestită. A acumulat multă cunoaștere, inclusiv magie. Când s-a întors la Roma, a dovedit că era un „bărbat” foarte educat al vremii sale și a ajuns rapid la papalitate. Se spune că ar fi scris câteva cărți de magie neagră.

Vrăjitoare erau considerate femeile numite lamii, *strigae*, Lilith etc., dar acest lucru s-a schimbat peste ani prin apariția unor figuri masculine precum Merlin și Vergiliu, amândoi magicieni și înțelepți, potrivit mitului și legendei. Intenționăm să folosim următorul pasaj din descrierea lamiei de John Weyer ca punct de pornire a



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studiului nostru spre a indica puterile atribuite vrăjitoarelor:

I use the term Lamia for a woman who by virtue of a deceptive or imaginary pact that she has entered into with the demon, supposedly perpetrates all kinds of evil-doing, whether by thought or by curse or by glance or by use of some ludicrous object suited for the purpose. For example, she can ignite the air with strange bolts of lightning, or shatter it with terrifying claps of thunder, beat [down upon the earth] with a damaging profusion of unexpected hail, rouse storms, ravage the fertile crops in the field or transfer them elsewhere, stir up unnatural diseases for men and beasts and then heal them again, travel great distances abroad within a few hours, dance with demons, hold banquets, play the role of succubus or have intercourse with demons, change herself and others into beasts, and display a thousand monstrous mockeries. (Weyer, 1991, p. 170)<sup>3</sup>

La lista lui John Weyer se mai pot adăuga următoarele puteri atribuite vrăjitoarelor din literatura clasică: să întoarcă râuri înapoi la izvoarele lor lăsând doar fostele maluri, să-i transforme în porci pe tovarășii lui Ulise, să-l transforme pe Picus în pasăre. Aceași Circe

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<sup>3</sup> „Folosesc termenul *lamia* pentru o femeie care, în virtutea unui pact înșelător sau imaginar în care a intrat cu un demon, se presupune că se dedă la tot felul de acțiuni rele, fie prin gânduri sau blesteme, fie prin priviri sau prin folosirea unor obiecte grotești, potrivite scopului. De exemplu, poate aprinde aerul cu ciudate frânturi de fulger sau să-l zguduie cu terifiante fragmente de tunet, să pogoare asupra pământului grindini potopitoare, să stârnească furtuni, să distrugă recolte pe câmp ori să le mute în altă parte, să stârnească boli neobișnuite pentru oameni și animale și să le vindece apoi, să călătorească pe distanțe mari în câteva ore, să danseze cu demoni, să țină banchete, să joace rolul de sucubi ori să aibă relații intime cu demoni, să se transforme pe sine și pe alții în fiare și să joace mii de feste monstruoase.”

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pretinde că poate să rupă în bucăți șarpele rece de pe câmpuri, să împlânzească șerpii cu incantații, să domolească ape involburate și să le stârnească dacă sunt calme, să risipească nori, să facă munții să se clatine, să scoată spiritele celor morți din morminte și să facă să coboare luna de pe cer. Gazda hanului din *Metamorfozele* lui Apuleius are adevărate puteri „de invidiat” care-i permit să facă orice<sup>4</sup>:

She is a witch who can divine, bring down the sky, suspend the earth, harden fountains, melt mountains, raise the spirits of the dead, enfeeble the gods, extinguish the stars, and illumine Tartarus itself. Because her lover had made bold with some other woman, she turned him into a wild beaver with a single word, because that animal, in its fear of captivity, escapes its pursuers by cutting off its testicles [to mislead the hounds]. She did this so that the same might happen to her lover, since he

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<sup>4</sup> Vezi F B Jevons, capitolul „Graeco-Italian Magic” din *Anthropology and the Classics, Six Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford* (Jevons, 1908, p. 98): „In Romance languages there is a series of words for magic and witchcraft going back to the Latin *facio*, [...] and implying what the witch has the power to do - The Middle Latin *factura*, Italian *fattura*, Old French *faiture*, &c. And in the Indo-European languages there are several sets of words for magic and witchcraft, all expressing this same idea, and indicating that it goes back to the earliest Indo-European times. One set running through Sanskrit, Lithuanian and Old Slavonic implies, as the Sanskrit *kṛtyâ* shows, that magic is ‘action’ or ‘doing’. The Old Norse *görningar* ‘sorceries or witchcraft’, literally means ‘doing’; and in Old Slavonic the word for magic (*po-tvorü*) is derived from a verb meaning ‘to do’.” „Există în limbile romanice o serie de cuvinte pentru magie și vrăjitorie cu începuturi de la latinescul *facio facio*, [...] însemnând ceea ce vrăjitorul are puterea să facă - latinescul medieval *factura*, italianescul *fattura*, din franceza veche *faiture*, &c. Iar în limbile indo-europene există câteva seturi de cuvinte pentru magie și vrăjitorie, toate exprimând aceeași idee și indicând că merge până la timpurile vechi indo-europene. Un astfel de grupaj trece prin sanscrită, lituaniană și slavona veche, implicând, așa cum o arată sanscritul *kṛtyâ*, că magia este «acțiune» și «facere». Vechiul cuvânt norvegian *görningar*, «vrăjitorii ori magie», înseamnă literal «facere»; iar vechiul cuvânt slavon pentru magie (*po-tvorü*) derivă dintr-un verb însemnând «a face»”.

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had taken his pleasures in love with another. She changed a neighboring tavern-keeper (who was therefore a rival) into a frog, and now in old age he swims in a jug of wine, and crouching in the dregs, he hoarsely calls to his former customers with dutiful croaks. Another fellow, from the forum, she transformed into a ram because he had spoken against her, now this ram leads cases. When her lover's wife had railed at her and reproached her, she condemned the woman, who was already pregnant and overdue to deliver, to a perpetual pregnancy. And now, as all keep count, the poor woman is swollen with an eight year burden, as though she is going to deliver an elephant. (Weyer, 1991, p. 170)<sup>5</sup>

Intenția noastră nu este de a verifica validitatea acestor date, așa cum s-a întâmplat în cazul multor învățați ca Hipocrate, ci doar să demonstrăm puterea pe care se presupune că o posedă vrăjitoarea. Astfel, în secolul XVI, în cartea sa *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Reginald Scott a identificat patru tipuri de vrăjitori, descoperiți în Biblie: *Praestigiatores Pharaonis*, *Mecasapha*, grupul *Kasam*, *Omen*, *Ob*, *Idoni* și, în sfârșit, *Habar* (Scott, 1964, p. 106-107). *Prestigiatores Pharaonis* erau jongleri sau iluzionști care amăgeau pe baza

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<sup>5</sup> „E o vrăjitoare care poate devina, coborî cerul, suspenda pământul, seca fântânile, topi munții, scula spiritele morților, poate să-i slăbească pe zei, să stingă stelele, să lumineze însuși Tartarul. Pentru că iubitul ei se încurcase cu alte femei, l-a transformat într-un castor sălbatic cu un singur cuvânt, pentru că acel animal, din teama de captivitate, scapă de urmăritori tăindu-și testiculele [spre a-i dezorienta pe vânători]. A făcut aceasta ca același lucru să i se întâmple iubitului ei, de vreme ce a găsit plăcere iubind o altă femeie. A schimbat un hangiu învecinat (ce-i fusese rival) într-o broască, care ajunsă la bătrânețe înoată într-o carafă cu vin și chircit printre drojdii se adresează foștilor clienți cu orăcăieli îndatoritoare. Un alt bărbat, din conducere, a fost transformat într-un berbec pentru că o bărfise, iar acum cară bagaje. Când soția iubitului ei, deja însărcinată și gata să nască, s-a oțărât făcându-i reproșuri, a pedepsit-o să fie mereu însărcinată. Și acum, cum se ține evidența, biata femeie care poartă în ea o sarcină de opt ani, o să nască un elefant.”

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dexterității manuale spre a-i amuza pe regi. *Mecasapha* se ocupau cu otrăvurile. Cel de-al treilea grup se ocupa cu divinația, în vreme ce *Habar* era magician, cu reputația de viclenie, mormăind cuvinte secrete ce se credeau a fi vrăji.

În secolul XX, urmând exemplul lui Evans-Pritchard, Clyde Kluckhohn și-a bazat cercetările pe triburile Navaho și a categorizat activitățile malefice în patru clase: witchery (*áńt·ži*) – vrăjitorie, sorcery (*i·ńj·d*) – magia neagră, wizardry (*adagaš*) – magia, and frenzy witchcraft (*ažile*) – vrăji de dragoste (Kluckhohn, 1944, pp. 22-42). Potrivit acestei categorizări, witchery – vrăjitoria se referă la deprinderi dobândite, motivate de dorința de desfrâu și practicate noaptea, implicând acte incestuoase și nimicirea unei rude. Este învățată de la rude, părinți, bunici ori o soție, dar de cele mai multe ori soția nu știe că partenerul practică din umbră „a deed without a name” („o faptă fără nume”) (1958c: Act 4, Sc. I), cum o numește hârca lui Shakespeare referindu-se la vrăjitorie în *Macbeth*. Oamenii devin vrăjitori pentru a acumula bogății, le fac rău altora și pândesc noaptea. Sorcery – magia neagră, pe care mulți o văd ca pe o ramură a vrăjitoriei implică practica utilizării spiritelor animale, ritualuri, vrăji, incantații și tehnici exuviale. Vrăjitorul nu lucrează direct cu victima, dar are nevoie să obțină o bucată din îmbrăcămintea sa, păr, fecale, urină sau murdărie corporală care să fie îngropată cu carnea și materialul dintr-un mormânt sau chiar în mormânt. Vrăjitorul își recită incantația ca pe o rugăciune, sau pronunțarea unei rugăciuni invers este una dintre tehnicile frecvent folosite. De fapt, administrarea telepatică de vrăji spre alți oameni se mai întâlnește încă în multe culturi și societăți. Exemplul legendar care vine în minte este cel din secolul X cu privire la vraja practică de Romanus Lecapenus pentru a-l elimina pe Simeon din Bulgaria folosind ca intermediar un astronom. Astronomul l-a sfătuit pe Romanus să distrugă o statuie ce reprezenta dublul fără

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viață al lui Simeon spre a desăvârși distrugerea și, potrivit legendei, chiar aceasta s-a întâmplat: moartea lui Simeon de atac de cord a coincis cu decapitarea statuii<sup>6</sup>.

Vrăjile telepatice includ folosirea măștilor și a altor obiecte spre a reprezenta victima vizată. Vrăjitoarele engleze obișnuiau să arunce blesteme prin folosirea pământului de pe un mormânt proaspăt, furând o panglică de la un decedat și arzând-o până la cenușă, pe care apoi o îngroapă împreună cu pământul și seva de soc (presupus a fi blestemat pentru că este lemnul Crucii și copacul de care s-a spânzurat Iuda). Amestecul ar căpăta forma unui broscoi ori a unei broaște spre a reprezenta victima vrăjii și ar fi străpunsă cu ace și spini provocând moartea victimei nouă zile mai târziu (Wickwar, 1925, p. 68). Magia neagră este prin urmare echivalentul a ceea ce populația Zulu numește *ukuphonsa*, cu sensul literal de a arunca<sup>7</sup>, în sensul aruncării unei vrăji.

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<sup>6</sup> „Men believed at the time that everyone had an inanimate double: that there was some object, a piece of statuary or a column, that was mysteriously bound up with each human life, so that any harm that befell it was reproduced in its living correspondent. In May 927 an astrologer told the Emperor Romanus that Symeon's double was a certain column in the Forum. On May 27 Romanus with his patriotic, experimental mind, had the column decapitated. At the very hour the old Tsar's heart gave out and he died.” (Runciman, 1930, pp. 176-177) „Pe vremea aceea, oamenii credeau că toată lumea avea un dublu inanimat; că acest dublu era o statuie sau o columnă legată misterios de fiecare viață umană, astfel încât orice rău care i se întâmpla era reprodus în corespondentul viu. În mai 927 un astrolog i-a spus Împăratului Romanus că dublul lui Symeon era o oarecare columnă din Forum. În 27 mai Romanus, cu mintea sa patriotică, experimentală, a cerut să fie decapitată columna. În chiar acel moment inima Țarului a cedat, iar acesta a murit.”

<sup>7</sup> Vezi Bergland, 1976: „*Ukuphonsa* also makes use of the symbols of life, nail parings and hair. Failing either of these categories it can make use of practically all personal belongings owned by the person who is to be harmed. Soil from footprints and things which he / she will come into contact with are also used in order to achieve the evil. It is, however, important to note the significant role the name of the person/ place is given also in *ukuphonsa*.” „*Ukuphonsa* folosesc și ei simboluri ale vieții, asocieri de unghii și păr. Dacă nu folosesc una dintre aceste categorii, practic pot face uz de orice fel de obiecte aparținând persoanei căreia urmează să i se facă răul. Pământ pe care a călcat și lucruri cu care el/ ea vor intra în contact sunt de asemenea folosite

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Wizardry – magie este arta proiectării magice a unor obiecte precum țepi, cenușă, oase în direcția victimei care nu se așteaptă la astfel de atacuri:

Cenușa unei stafii Hogan, mărgelile – îndeosebi mărgelile care au aparținut victimei vizate –, bucăți de os sau dinte dintr-un cadavru, fire de nisip dintr-un mușuroi de furnici roșii, bucăți de manioc, țepii porcului spinos, cochilia de olivella, păr de căprioară, mustață de pisică sălbatică, fragmente de rocă arsă pentru baia de transpirație [...] Unii furnizori de date credeau că uciderea se făcea printr-un tub, dar majoritatea opinează că obiectele erau așezate într-un coș roșu special sau pe o bucată de pânză ori pe piele de căprioară și erau făcute să se ridice în aer prin incantație. Potrivit unor furnizori de date, ucigașii se dezbrăcau și-și frecau trupurile cu cenușă înainte de a trage. Ca în cazul vrăjitoriei și a a magiei negre, în uciderea unui frate, a unei surori ori a altei rude apropiate reprezenta o etapă preliminară obligatorie. Sugerea era considerate o cură specială pentru acest gen de vrăjitorie. (Kluckhohn, 1944, p. 34)

În cele din urmă, frenzy witchcraft – *vrăji de dragoste*, constă în folosirea magiei pentru a induce iubirea sau a rupe legăturile de iubire prin jocuri de noroc și obținere de succes în afaceri. Se spune că practicantul acestui tip de magie o dobândește în special prin incest cu o soră și prin uciderea unei rude apropiate (frate sau soră).

### **Vrăjitorul, înțeleptul, poetul-muzician ca fermecător**

Din vorbirea lăudăroasă a lui Circe putem deduce că o vrăjitoare poate face rău prin enunțuri verbale,

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în acest scop. Totuși este important să ținem seama de rolul pe care numele persoanei/ locului îl are în *ukuphonsa*.”

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inclusiv prin cântece magice. Această caracteristică îl aduce pe înțelept alături de poet, dacă nu cumva se situează de aceeași parte a monedei. Merită să luăm ca exemplu poezii irlandezi care, potrivit legendei, ar fi putut aduce moartea fiarelor și a oamenilor sau chiar să aducă moartea șobolanilor irlandezi, după cum spune Shakespeare (1973, pp. 161-163). Caerwyn Williams și Patrick Ford (1992, pp. 21-23) arată că au existat trei categorii de poeți, *fili* (plural *filid*), *druides* și *bard* (plural *baird*). Cuvântul *fili* se referă la un fel de clarvăzător, derivat, se pare, din aceeași rădăcină cu galezul *gweled*, „a vedea”. În *Immacalam in dá thuarad* (*The Colloquy Of The Two Sages* [Convorbirea celor doi înțelepți]) referirea la *fili* se făcea ca la *fáith* (profet) și *banfháith* (prezicătoare) în *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Raid of The Cattle of Cooley* [Raidul vacilor din Cooley]), iar într-una dintre cărțile de legi irlandeze *fáithsine* (profeția) reprezintă funcția principală a *fili*. *Filid* au format o clasă de elită a poezilor care s-a bucurat de un statut mai înalt decât druizii și barzii. În vreme ce pregătirea barzilor dura până la șapte ani, instruirea acestor *filid* se întindea pe mai mulți ani, și includea basme, istorie, astrologie, magie, metrică poetică rezervată exclusiv lor, cu toate că foloseau și metrică bardică. E vorba în mod normal de o lungime de douăzeci de ogamuri, dar se presupune că druizii aveau de învățat câte cincizeci în plus în fiecare an. Ei erau și dascăli ai tinerilor, sau *brehons* ori legiuitori la curtea regelui, fiind echivalentul romanilor *vātes* sau al grecilor *ovates*:

All of this suggests that the *filid* and the *fáitha* originally formed a single class and that they represented in Ireland the learned and mantic class that existed in Gaul, and which was known to the Romans as *uātes* and to the Greeks as ούάτεϊς

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corresponding to *fátha* (singular *fáith*) in Irish.  
(Williams & Ford, 1992, p. 22)<sup>8</sup>

Pasajul de mai sus dovedește fără îndoială că nu există deosebire între tărâmul sacru al profeției și lumea poeziei. De fapt, astfel de afinități pot merge până la timpurile biblice, când profeții erau și poeți, muzicieni și creatori de proverbe<sup>9</sup>. Cartea *The Crock of Gold* semnată

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<sup>8</sup> „Toate acestea sugerează că *filid* și *fáitha* au format la origine o singură clasă și au reprezentat în Irlanda clasa învățaților și a profeților care au existat în Galia și care a fost cunoscută romanilor ca *uātes* iar grecilor ca οὐάτες corespunzând lui *fátha* (singular *fáith*) în irlandeză.”

<sup>9</sup> Vezi James L. Kugel, capitolul „Poets and Prophets” din *Poetry And Prophecy: The Beginning Of A Literary Tradition* (1990, p. 7): „Within the Biblical orbit, figurative language, bold imagery, and the like were conceived to belong specifically to the world of ‘song’ (*šîr*) or ‘proverb’ (*māšāl* or *hîdāh*), and it is certainly of significance that prophets sometimes invoked these genres in introducing their oracles. ‘Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard’, Isaiah says in introducing a famous parable concerning the fate of his people (Isa. 5); later on in the same book, the prophet’s words of consolation take up a well-known introductory trope known to us from the Psalter, ‘Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth!’ (Isa. 42, p. 10). ‘Son of man’, God orders his prophet Ezekiel, ‘speak a proverb and say a riddle’, and Ezekiel complies with the allegory of the eagles (Ezek, 17, p. 10). It is hard to know just what to make of such evidence. Does the presence of these prominently identified songs and parables within the corpus of prophetic oracles argue a fundamental kinship between the ways of prophets and those of songsters or proverbists? Or does the very fact that these passages are so clearly identified as belonging to other genres imply on the contrary that they are somehow foreign to the normal stuff of prophecy, so that the prophet, in calling them by their name, seeks to prepare his listeners for what might otherwise shock or confuse them?”. „În orizontul biblic, limbajul figurativ, imaginile îndrăznețe, și alte asemenea s-a presupus că aparțin îndeosebi lumii «cântecului» (*šîr*) sau «proverbelor» (*māšāl* or *hîdāh*), și este cu siguranță semnificativ faptul că profeții invocau uneori aceste genuri introducându-și oracolele. «Dați-mi voie să cânt pentru iubita mea un cântec de dragoste despre această vie», spune Isaia introducând renumita parabola cu privire la soarta poporului său (Isaia 5); mai târziu în aceeași carte, cuvintele de consolare ale profetului abordează un trop introductiv binecunoscut nouă din Psaltire, «Să-I cântăm Domnului un cântec nou, lauda Sa de la capătul pământului!» (Isaia 42:10). «Fiu al omului» Dumnezeu îi poruncește profetului său, Ezechiel, «spune un proverb și o ghicitoare», iar Ezechiel îl mulțumește cu alegoria vulturilor (Ezechiel 17:10). Este greu de știut ce se poate face cu o astfel de evidență. Să fie prezența



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de James Stephen oferă o interesantă portretizare a unui înțelept sau divinator. Când Meehawl MacMurrachu vine să-l consulte pe înțelept despre scândura de spălat furată, după discursuri lungi și aparent păsărești potrivit cărora spiridușii din Gort na Gloca Mora se fac vinovați, acesta-l sfătuieste să meargă să le fure vasul de aur ascuns într-o „hole under a tree in the south-east of the field” („gaură sub un copac din partea de sud-est a câmpului”) (Stephens, 1967, p. 22). Apoi, înțeleptul dezvăluie locul lui Caitlin, fiica lui Meehawl MacMurrachu's, păstorita care a fost răpită de Pan<sup>10</sup>.

Un alt detaliu interesant în romanul lui Stephens este înfățișarea poetului-muzician ca seducător capabil să fascineze victimele. Când Pan ajunge în vecinătatea lui Gort na Gloca Mora, atât Caitlin cât și turma ei sunt vrăjiți și dansează pe muzica sirinxului său. Când înțeleptul îi

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acestor cântece și parabole proeminent identificate cântece și parabole din corpusul oracolelor profetice, dovada unei legături fundamentale dintre căile profetilor și cele ale cântăreților și ale creatorilor de proverbe? Sau însuși faptul că aceste pasaje sunt identificate atât de clar ca aparținând altor genuri implică, dimpotrivă, idea că ele sunt oarecum străine materiei normale de profetie, astfel încât profetul, numindu-le cu numele lor, să caute a pregăti ascultătorii pentru ceva ce îndobște i-ar șoca sau duce la confuzie?”

<sup>10</sup> „The Philosopher continued: ‘Most of the races of the world have been at one time or another been visited by this deity, whose title is the ‘Great God Pan’, but there is no record of his ever having journeyed to Ireland, and, certainly within historic times, he has not set foot on these shores. He lived for a great number of years in Egypt, Persia, and Greece, and although his empire is supposed to be world-wide, this universal sway has always been, and always will be, contested; but nevertheless, however sharply his empire may be curtailed, he will never be without a kingdom wherein his exercise of sovereign rights will be gladly and passionately acclaimed.’ (Stephens, 1967, p. 51). „Înțeleptul a continuat: «Majoritatea raselor lumii au fost într-un moment sau altul vizitate de această divinitate al cărei nume este «marele zeu Pan», dar nu există dovezi ale vreunei călătorii în Irlanda și, cu siguranță, în vremuri istorice, nu a pus piciorul pe aceste țarmuri. A trăit mulți ani în Egipt, Persia și Grecia, și, cu toate că imperiul său presupunea să se întindă în întreaga lume, această stăpânire universală a fost și va fi întotdeauna contestată; cu toate acestea, oricât de drastic ar fi restrâns acest imperiu, el nu va rămâne niciodată fără un regat unde exercitarea drepturilor suverane va fi aclamată cu bucurie și cu pasiune.»”

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întreabă pe Meehawl ce făceau oile pe pășune, acesta răspunde: “They were pucking each other across the field, and standing on their hind legs and cutting such capers that I laughed till I had a pain in my stomach at the gait of them” (Stephens, 1967, p. 51)<sup>11</sup>.

Cu siguranță, sirinxul lui Pan este dăruit cu ceea ce numim „descântec circean”: poate vrăji oameni și animale, putere care a fost mai târziu atribuită poezilor irlandezi, mai exact celor cunoscuți sub denumirea *filid*-ilor, ale căror versuri puteau duce oameni și animale la moarte sau să-i satirizeze până la nebunie. Fluietul Fluierașului/Flautistului pestriț sau fermecat din Hamelin este și el dăruit cu puteri asemănătoare; el îi atrage pe șobolani afară din orașul Hamelin din Brunswick și-i îneacă în râul Weser. Când primarul din Hamelin își retrace promisiunea de recompensă bănească, inventivul seducător îi înghesuie pe adulți în strane în timpul slujbei de la biserică; ei stau ca proștii, ca transformați în bucăți de lemn și privesc neajutorați cum copiii lor țopăie în urma Fluierașului din Hamelin care-i conduce la o peșteră în care dispar pentru totdeauna. În vreme ce-l privim pe coloratul Fluieraș din Hamelin ca pe un seducător, este de asemenea interesant să ținem seama de faptul că, din punct de vedere lingvistic, “pied-piping” se referă la un mod special de a vorbi folosind un fenomen sintactic cunoscut sub denumirea *wh-movement* sau mișcarea-*wh*, sau *wh-fronting* the *wh-extraction* care este exact:

the ability of question words and relative pronouns to drag other words along with them when brought to the front, as part of the phenomenon called *Wh-movement*. For example, in ‘For whom are the

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<sup>11</sup> „Se împingeau una pe alta pe câmp, se ridicau pe picioarele din spate săltând atât de caraghios că am râs până m-a durut burta privind-le.”

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pictures?', the word 'for' is pied-piped /atras by 'whom' away from its declarative position.<sup>12</sup>

Fenomenul este cunoscut în limba engleză ca wh-movement, și ca qu-movement în limbile romanice, pur și simplu pentru că frazele interogative încep cu wh-respectiv qu-. Puterea irlandezului *filid*, flautistul fermecat din Hamelin și mulți alți poeți muzicieni, dovedesc forța evhemerizării<sup>13</sup> lor, întrucât amintesc de una dintre divinitățile sau eroii capabili de magia legării, după modelul lui Orfeu care putea muta copaci, animale și oameni cu lira sa, o harpă cu nouă corzi dăruită lui de Apollo, și el, par *excellence*, un zeu care leagă. Orfeu era dăruit și cu puterea de a prevedea evenimente viitoare, fiind fondatorul și inițiatorul în mistere orfice. De fapt, magicianul ca înțelept este un avatar evhemerizat al divinităților pe care Georges Dumézil le descrie drept "the gods who bind" („divinitățile care leagă”) (Dumézil 1939, pp. 21-28), precum Odin, Varuna, Indra, Yama etc. Prin etapele timpurii ale evhemerizării, puterile de legare sau tîntuire sunt la început transferate de la divinități la regi, ca în cazul lui Romulus<sup>14</sup>, și vindecătorului-muzician sau

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<sup>12</sup> *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, disponibil pe [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Pied\\_Piper\\_of\\_Hamelin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pied_Piper_of_Hamelin): „abilitatea de a chestiona cuvinte și pronume relative spre a trage alte cuvinte după ele când sunt puse înainte, ca parte a fenomenului numit Wh-movement/ mișcarea Wh-. De exemplu, în 'For whom are the pictures?' (Pentru cine sunt imaginile?), cuvântul „for” este pied-piped/atras de către „whom” dincolo de poziția sa declarativă.”

<sup>13</sup> *Evhemerismul* sau *evhemerismul*, termen folosit pentru prima oară de Mircea Eliade, este „este acel mod de interpretare a mitologiei în care se consideră că miturile ar proveni din evenimente sau personaje istorice reale. Evhemerismul presupune că relatările istorice devin mituri exagerate prin repovestire, acumulare de precizări și modificări care reflectă moravurile. Termenul vine de la mitograful Euhemerus, care a trăit în secolul al 4-lea î. Hr. (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evhemerism>).

<sup>14</sup> „In front of Romulus there were always 'men armed with rods for keeping back the crowd, and girded with straps, ready to bind at once those whom he ordered them to bind.” (Dumézil, 1940: 72) „În fața lui Romulus au fost

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poet. Într-o etapă târzie, „omul roșu” („red-man”) ori castratorul de porci care a cutreierat satele cu sirinxul său și cu bereta roșie era dăruit cu puteri vindecătoare și a dobândit titlul de vindecător de porci, *sanaporc*, fiind într-adevăr chirurgul care a dobândit cunoașterea și deprinderile necesare operării porcilor și rezolvării unor cazuri excepționale precum monorhidia sau criptorhidia. Calamburul cuvântului *sana*, „heal” („a vindeca”) sau „bleed” („a sângera”), în acest context, desemnează evident castratorul de porci. De fapt, flautul castratorului este cunoscut și ca sirinx sau flautul lui Pan, care emite note stridente ce se potrivesc gâștatului porcilor la castrare sau la sacrificare. Doar în aceste două ocazii vocea porcului atinge un nivel atât de acut (Fabre-Vassas, 1994, pp. 41-51).

Legătura dintre muzică și divinație este universală. Cuvinte magice precum latinescul *incantare*, *incantator*, *incantamentum*, grecescul *ἐπάδιον*, *ἐπωδή*, *ἐπωδός* exprimă vrăjire, incantație sau cântare (Contenau, 1947, p. 175). În multe limbi africane, cuvintele pentru un divinator-vindecător au rădăcina *-ngoma* care înseamnă un cântec sau o tobă. Divinatorul-vindecător este cunoscut ca *isangoma* or *umngoma* (bărbatul cântecului), cuvânt care, potrivit lui Bryant înseamnă „the drumming one” („cel care bate toba”) („cf. Swahili, Ganda etc., *m-goma*, tobă; Kikuyu *n-goma* („nebuie temporară”, Bryant, 1966, p. 13). Acest lucru indică faptul că divinația nu se concepe în absența invocării spiritelor zeilor sau ale strămoșilor printr-un cântec.

Într-un cuvânt, magia sau vrăjitoria are de-a face cu legarea sau ținutarea/ imobilizarea. Acest lucru poate fi văzut în multe cuvinte care comportă ambele sensuri de magie și legare, de exemplu „spellbound” („farmec”), „enthralled” („fermecat”) etc.:

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întotdeauna bărbați înarmați cu nuiete ca să țină mulțimea la distanță, și încinși cu curele, gata să lege pe oricine ar fi primit ordin să lege.”

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Scheftelowitz și Glunert au arătat în câteva familii lingvistice cum cuvintele care exprimă actul de a „lega” îl exprimă deopotrivă și pe acela de a „vrăji”: de exemplu în turco-tătară, *bag*, *baj*, *boj* înseamnă atât „vrăjitorie”, cât și „legătură, funie”. Grecesul *καταδέω* înseamnă „a lega strâns” și de asemenea „a lega prin farmece, prin înnodare” (de aici *κατάδεσμος*, „funie”, „a vrăji”); (Inser. Graec. III, 3. P. V; Scheftelowitz, p. 17). Latinescul *fascinare*, „to bewitch”, „farmec, incantație malefică” este legat de *fascia*, „legătură, bandaj”, și de *fascis*, „legătură”; *ligare*, „a lega”, și *ligature*, „acțiunea legării”, înseamnă și „a fermeca” și „farmec” (cf. românescul *legătură*, „acțiunea de a lega” și „a vrăji”). Sanscritul *yukti*, în sens strict „a exploata”, „a atașa”, dobândește sensul de „mijloace magice”, iar puterile yoga sunt uneori înțelese ca vrăjire prin actul „legării”. Întregă această etimologie confirmă ideea că actul legării este esențialmente magic. Avem aici o extremă „specializare”: „a vrăji, a lega prin magie, a fascina” etc. Din punct de vedere etimologic, *religio* denotă de asemenea o formă de „atașare” față de divinitate; dar ar fi imprudent să înțelegem *religio* [...] în sens de „vrăjitorie”. Aceasta pentru că, așa cum am spus deja, religia, la fel ca magia, conține în însăși esența sa elemental „legării”, chiar dacă, evident, cu o intensitate diferită și, înainte de orice, cu o orientare opusă (Eliade, 1962, pp. 114-115; Trout, 1975, pp. 78-80).

O altă formă de legare ori fascinație este cea care implică ochiul rău atribuit unor oameni care se crede că sunt capabili să le facă rău altor oameni, animalelor, câmpurilor și clădirilor prin proiectarea răului asupra lor prin privire. Credința vine din timpuri imemorabile, a fost înregistrată chiar și în *Biblie* și în alte texte sacre (Brav,

1981, p. 46)<sup>15</sup>: „Nu mânca pâinea celui ce are ochiul rău și nu pofti mâncările lui alese” ne previne Solomon în *Proverbe* 23:6. Isus Christos menționează ochiul rău ca unul dintre viciile care vin din inimă să facă rău altui om (Walcot 1978, pp. 75-90). Este de obicei atribuit invidiei, iar în latină este numit și *invidia*, derivate din verbul *invidere*, a privi prea aproape și echivalentul grec ὀφθαλμὸς βιάσκονος, care exprimă și el ideea de invidie<sup>16</sup>. În Scoția,

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<sup>15</sup> „The Biblical term (*rah ayin*) means a jealous eye, i.e. ‘an eye that envies, a miser’s eye’. We do however, find evidences of this superstition in the Talmudic writings, and to give it an authoritative force the writers of the Talmud have tried to inject it into the Bible by means of interpretation. Thus, for instance, the sentence, ‘And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness’ is so interpreted as to mean the evil eye. The priestly blessing, ‘God bless thee and protect thee’, is, according to Midrashic interpretation, a protection against the evil eye. Jacob’s advice to his children not to enter Egypt by one gate is also taken as a warning against the influence of the evil eye. The Midrashic version is ‘Ye strong, ye are nice, enter not the gates of the city together, do not stand at one place so that the evil eye may not overpower you’. The story of Sarah and Hagar, as given in Midrashic literature, is interpreted to convey the idea that Sarah has thrown an evil eye upon Hagar. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, at the age of 27, was so crippled that his mother had to carry him on her shoulder, the evil eye being responsible for his lameness.” „Termenul biblic (*rah ayin*) înseamnă ochi gelos, de exemplu ochi care invidiază, ochiul unui avar. Totuși, găsim dovezi ale acestei superstiții în scrierile talmudice, și, spre a-i conferi și mai multă autoritate, scriitorii Talmudului au încercat să-l insereze în Biblie prin intermediul interpretării. Este cazul, de exemplu, al propoziției «Și Dumnezeu va lua de la tine toată boala», interpretată ca însemnând ochiul rău. Bindecuvântarea preoțească «Dumnezeu să te apere și să te binecuvinteze», este, potrivit interpretării midrașice, o protecție împotriva ochiului rău. Sfatul lui Iacob către fiii săi de a nu intra în Egipt printr-o singură poartă este și el considerat ca o avertizare împotriva influenței ochiului rău. Versiunea midrașică este «Voi puternici, voi frumoși, să nu intrați pe porțile orașului împreună nu stați într-un loc pentru ca ochiul rău să nu aibă putere asupra voastră.». Povestea Sarei și a lui Agar, relatată de literatura midrașică, este interpretată în scopul transmiterii ideii că Sara a aruncat ochiul rău asupra lui Agar. Ismael, fiul lui Agar, la vârsta de 27 de ani, era atât de schilod încât mama sa trebuia să-l poarte pe umăr, ochiul cel rău fiind răspunzător pentru această neputință.”

<sup>16</sup> Vezi Marcu 7, 20-23: El le-a mai zis: „Ce iese din om, aceea întinează pe om. Căci dinăuntru, din inima oamenilor ies gânduri rele, fapte de adulter, desfrânări, ucideri, furturi, lăcomii, răutăți, înșelăciuni, fapte de rușine, ochi rău, hulă, orgoliu, nebulie. Toate aceste lucruri rele ies dinăuntru și întinează pe om.”

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ochiul rău este cunoscut ca overlooking – deochi în sensul folosit de Shakespeare în *The Merchant of Venice/ Negustorul din Veneția* (1958b, act III, scene II, pp. 14-16)<sup>17</sup>:

Beshrew your eyes,  
They have o'erlooked me and divided me;  
One half of me is yours, and the other half yours.

Într-adevăr, *intshozi iyagqobhoza* (zgâitul la cineva îl rupe în bucăți) expresie folosită de fetele zulu spre a-i tachina pe admiratorii prea insistenți. În această categorie de ochi răuvoitor se poate înscrie exemplul Gorgonei sau Meduza și Balor cu ochiul cel rău. Gorgonele erau echivalentul vrăjitoarelor prin aceea că aveau o înfățișare hibridă detestabilă care conținea următoarele trăsături: părul era din șerpi ce se presupunea că sunt în creștere, gâtul cu solzi de dragon, gură larg căscată, mâini din bronz, nasuri carne, dos de iapă, aripi aurite și colți ca scândura care se extind pe fețele lor. Privirea lor era fatală și putea să transforme pe cineva în piatră. Perseu a reușit s-oucidă pe Meduza cu ajutorul Atenei al cărei scut de aramă lustruit a acționat ca o oglindă spre a-l proteja de privirea distrugătoare a monstrului htonic.

Balor cu ochiul cel rău, hoțul de pe Insula Tory din Irlanda, avea în frunte ochiul răuvoitor de ciclop, iar în anumite situații avea doi astfel de *mali oculi*, unul în mijlocul frunții și celălalt în spatele capului, putând să provoace moartea celui care s-ar fi întâmplat să-l privească. Sprânceana lui era atât de grea că trebuia să fie ridicată de patru oameni. El putea să-și folosească ochiul de vasilisc spre a mobiliza întreaga armată, reușind să ajungă la realizări miraculoase. Se pare că a fost ucis de nepotul său Lug cu o piatră-praștie care a lovit ochiul rău, așa cum profetise druidul. Ochiul său cel rău de ciclop se

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<sup>17</sup> „De vină-s ochii voștri./ Ei m-au vrăjit și împărțit în două:/ O parte e a voastră și cealaltă/ A voastră” (1923: 79)

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spunea că era în contact cu vapori otrăvitori, un amestec de licoare pregătită de druizii fratelui său (Krappe, 1973, p. 5).

La italieni, ochiul rău se numește *mal'occhio*, *affascino*, *fattura*, *attacatura*, iar în Sicilia este cunoscut ca *jettatura*, iar oamenii afectați de ochiul distrugător sunt numiți *jettature* (masculin) și *jettatura*. Când italienii îi văd pe presupușii *jettaturi*, execută anumite acțiuni simbolice de protecție cum ar fi încrucișarea degetelor (Appel, 1976, p. 17), sau îndreptarea către ei a degetului arătător și a degetului mic sub formă de coarne (*mano cornuta*), sau încrucișarea degetele de la picioare, ori chiar făcând semnul smochinei, cu degetul mare înfipt între arătător și mijlociu, cu pumnul strâns, gest obscen considerat apotropaic. Utilizarea acestui gest într-un astfel de scop nu este surprinzătoare, câtă vreme Acron găsește pentru cuvântul *fascinus* sensul de falus, întrucât amuletele care protejează împotriva ochiului răuvoitor aveau această formă: *Virilem penem fascinum dixit propter obscenam figuram, quam adiecerat in sequenti; lingua enim detersa fronte mulieres amputare se infantibus fascinum putant* (Poetul a desemnat penisul masculin *fascinum* din pricina aluziei obscene, dezvoltată în rândurile următoare. Printre femei, exista credința că-i pot proteja pe pruncii lor împotriva vrăjilor curățându-le frunțile prin lingere cu limba.). (*Acronis et Porphyriionis [...]*, 1966, p. 481). De fapt, astfel de gesturi profilactice impregnate cu înțelesuri sexuale erau folosite pentru a distra vrăjitorul de la concentrarea mentală necesară aruncării cu succes a vrăjii. Porphyriion exprimă și el aceeași idee în comentariul său despre Horațiu: *Aequae pro uirili parte posuit, quoniam praefascinandis rebus haec membri deformitas adponi solet* (În același mod, (adică așa ca mai sus *neruos*), poetul folosește aici *fascinum* în sensul penisului masculin, întrucât disfuncția erectilă era atribuită practicilor magice). (*Acronis et Porphyriionis [...]*, 1966, p. 482).



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Cel de-al doilea tip de *jettatura* este cel în care purtătorul ochiului rău nu este vrăjitor, dar s-a născut cu el și le face rău accidental celor din jur, fără măcar să-și dea seama. Mituri legate de Papa Pius al IX-lea (mai 1792 – februarie 1878), cunoscut printre italieni ca Pio Nono (mai având și porecla Pio No No pentru Pius No No) arată că și despre el se credea că ar fi un *jettatore*. Mulți catolici italieni îndreptau spre el două degete pentru a se proteja de influența puterii sale răufăcătoare când îi binecuvânta, întrucât binecuvântarea sa era considerate fatală:

Ask a Roman about the late Pope's evil eye reputation and he will answer: "They said so, and it seems really to be true. If he had not the *jettatura*, it is very odd that everything he blessed made *fiasco*. We all did well in the campaign against the Austrians in '48. We were winning battle after battle, and all was gaiety and hope, when suddenly he blessed the cause, and everything went bad at once. Nothing succeeds with anybody or anything when he wishes well to them. When he went to S. Agnese to hold a great festival, down went the floor, and the people were all smashed together. Then he visited the column to the Madonna in the Piazza di Spagna, and blessed it and the workmen; of course one fell from the scaffold the same day and killed himself. He arranged to meet the King of Naples at Porto d'Anzio, when up came a violent gale, and a storm that lasted a week; another arrangement was made, and then came the fracas about the ex-queen of Spain.

Again, Lord C.... came in from Albano, being rather unwell; the Pope sent him his blessing, when, pop! He died right off in a twinkling. There was nothing so fatal as his blessing. I do not wonder the workmen at the column in the Piazza di Spagna refused to work in raising it unless the Pope stayed away!

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Mr Story tells another tale of Rachel and a rosary blessed by the Pope, which she wore on her arm as a bracelet. She had been visiting a sister who was ill in the Pyrenees, but one day she was so much better, that Rachel left her to visit another sister. While laughing and chatting merrily, a message arrived that she must return instantly as a fit had come on. Rising like a wounded tigress, she seemed to seek some cause for this sudden blow. Her eye fell on the rosary, and in rage and disappointment she tore it from her wrist, and dashed it to the ground, exclaiming: 'O fatal gift! 'tis thou hast entailed this curse upon me!' and immediately sprang out of the room. Her sister died the day after. (Elworthy, 1985, pp. 25-26)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> „Întreabă-l pe un locuitor al Romei despre reputația ochiului rău al răposatului papă și-ți va răspunde: «Așa spuneau și se pare că este adevărat. Dacă n-ar fi avut *jettatura*, ar fi foarte ciudat ca tot ce a binecuvântat să devină un *fiasco*. Cu toții ne-am descurcat bine în campania împotriva austriecilor în '48. Câștigam bătălie după bătălie și totul era veselie și speranță, când, brusc, a binecuvântat cauza și totul a mers rău dintr-o dată. Nimic nu reușește cu cineva sau ceva când le face urări de bine. Când s-a dus la S. Agnese să țină un mare festival, podeaua s-a surpat și toți oamenii au fost zdrobiți. Apoi a vizitat columna Fecioarei în Piazza di Spagna și a binecuvântat-o împreună cu muncitorii; evident, unul a căzut de pe schelă în aceeași zi și a murit. A făcut în așa fel încât să-l întâlnească pe regale Neapolelui la Porto d'Anzio, când a venit o vijelie și o furtună care au durat o săptămână; un alt aranjament a fost pus la cale, după care a venit scandalul despre fosta regină a Spaniei.»

Tot așa, Lord C... a venit din Albano, simțindu-se destul de rău; Papa i-a trimis binecuvântarea sa, când, hop! A murit cât ai clipi. Nimic nu era atât de fatal ca binecuvântarea sa. Nu e de mirare că muncitorii de la columna din Piazza di Spagna au refuzat să lucreze la înălțarea sa dacă Papa nu se ține departe!

Domnul Story spune o poveste despre Rachel și un rozar botezat de Papă, pe care-l purta pe braț ca o brățară. A vizitat o soră bolnavă din Pirinei, dar într-o zi s-a simțit atât de bine încât Rachel a plecat să viziteze o altă soră. În vreme ce râdeau și glumeau bucuroase, a sosit un mesaj prin care i se cerea să se întoarcă de îndată pentru că survenise o criză. Ridicându-se ca o tigroaică rănită, părea să caute o cauză a acestei lovituri neașteptate. Ochii i-au căzut pe rozar și, înfuriată și dezamăgită, și l-a rupt de la încheietură și l-a izbit de podea, exclamând: «O, dar fatal! Tu ai abătut acest blestem asupra mea!» și a ieșit rapid din încăpere. În ziua următoare, sora ei a murit.”

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Cel de-al treilea tip de vrăjire prin ochiul rău este fascinația de sine, ca în povestea lui Narcis care n-a fost mulțumit de dragostea lui Ameinias și i-a dat o sabie să se sinucidă pe pragul lui (Narcis). Ameinias l-a blestemat pe Narcis care a fost mai târziu fermecat de propria imagine reflectată într-un lac și nu și-a dat seama că el este decât când a încercat s-o sărute, după care s-a sinucis cu propria sabie și s-a metamorfozat într-o narcisă. Potrivit versiunii romane, el a fost urmărit de Echo pe care a respins-o, iar când a încercat să bea apă dintr-un lac, a fost fascinat de propria sa imagine, iar când a încercat s-o sărute i s-a părut că se îndepărtează și n-a putut să bea de teamă că va alunga propria reflecție. A murit în cele din urmă de sete privindu-și fix propria reflecție, iar floarea de narcisă a crescut pe locul morții sale.

În tradiția greco-romană, vrăjitoria era numită *κατάδεσις* or *defixio*, însemnând „țintuire” ori „înfigere/defixare”. Această metodă de vrăjitorie consta în înscrierea numelui dușmanului pe un os sau pe o tăbliță, înfigerea unui cui pe nume și apoi îngroparea tăbliței într-un loc mlăștinos din cimitir spre a-l ascunde de privitori, câtă vreme cimitirul era un loc temut. Se credea că numele dușmanului se ofilea treptat, sănătatea purtătorului deteriorându-se. Aceasta se baza pe credința că numele unei persoane reprezenta persoana ca învinsă de formula care era înscrisă împreună cu numele victimei: *ὄνομα κατὰ καὶ αὐτόν*, „I nail his name, that is himself”<sup>19</sup> (Jevons, 1908, p. 104). Acesta poate fi sensul original al înspăimântătoarei expresii englezești „to fix someone” (a aranja pe cineva), însemnând a se certa serios când apare o dispută. Metoda *defixio* nu doar țintuia dușmanul, ea putea fi utilizată în magia simpatetică pentru vindecare. Pliniu știa cum să vindece epilepsia fixând-o cu un cui din fier în locul în care capul pacientului atingea prima data

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<sup>19</sup> „Îi țintuiesc numele, adică pe el însuși”.

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pământul: *clavum ferrum defigere in quo locum primum caput fixerit corruens morbo amitalii absolutorium eius mal dicitur* (Jevons, 1908, p. 109). De fapt, țintuirea numelui victimei este similară cu metoda vătămării imaginii de ceară a victimei sau a fotografiei, cu acele. În rândul populației zulu din Africa de Sud, există credința puternică în *ukuthwebula*, uciderea prin înfigere de ace în capul persoanei din fotografie. Persoana vrăjită în acest fel se crede că este transformată în *umkhovu*, un fel de animal familiar care-l însoțește pe vrăjitor noaptea, în timpul expedițiilor sale întunecate, dotat și el cu puteri de clarvedere, întrucât se presupune că s-a întors din cealaltă lume a neîntoarcerii. Aceeași metodă a *ukuthwebula* este folosită în magia binefăcătoare de vindecare. În acest caz, este folosit un țep de porc spinos spre a-l elibera pe pacient de vrăji rele. Vindecătorul fie lucrează pe partea afectată a trupului pacientului, fie înțeapă umbra pacientului cu țepul al cărui vârf ascuțit a fost adâncit într-o fiertură de ierburi și grăsime animală. Acest tip de vindecare nu doar evocă acest *defixio* al romanilor ori *κατάδεσις* al grecilor, dar reamintește de procedura medicală universală a luării de sânge curative sau flebotomie care a fost susținută de Herophilus și recomandată de medicii antici ca Hipocrate și Galeniu. Era de asemenea folosită de medicii arabi numiți *hijama* și practică cu regularitate de profetul Mohamed.

Relația dintre poet și profet devine clară când ne dăm seama că din cele mai vechi timpuri mulți poeți susțineau că sunt inspirați de muze ori de zei pe care-i invocau prin creațiile lor și cărora li se adresau. În acest fel, ei se pretindeau mesageri ai divinităților și ofereau doar ceea ce li se dicta. Credința în inspirația divină are două laturi: pe de o parte vine din afara sa, pe de altă parte, o idee mai puțin comună, vine din adâncul său. De exemplu, invocarea muzelor de către Homer în *Iliada* ia forma unei întrebări („Și care dintre zei a fost cel care i-a

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pus pe ceartă?”), întregii opere fiindu-i astfel conferit statutul de scriere divină a muzei, devenind prin aceasta verosimilă. Totuși, pentru Sir Philip Sydney, totul este în interiorul său, iar muza îl dojenește: „Fool, said my muse, look in your heart and write.”<sup>20</sup> (Sydney, 1973, p. 131, rd. 14). În fapt, Democrit și Platon erau de părere că niciun om nu putea fi un bun poet fără o inspirație divină înflăcărată prin ceva ca o frenezie sau *furor poeticus* (nebunie poetică). Potrivit lui Horațiu, versuri poetice sună dulceag când poeții care le scriu sunt beți, iar Ovidiu se lauda că puteau fi melodioase pentru că ei constituiau o elită, de vreme ce erau locuiți de o divinitate: „*Deus est in nobis/ Agitante calescimus illo.*” („Un zeu se află în noi, când dispune, suntem inspirați.”). În felul acesta îl percepe Dumézil pe Odin (Wodan) care este și el un înțelept, un magician, maestrul runelor, necromantul care putea prezice evenimente, provoca boală și moarte, descoperirea comori ascunse și mai ales arunca vrăji de legare. El este și poet-muzician și producător de farmece, iar al său *furor*, afirmă Dumézil:

corresponds to German *Wut* “rage, fury” and to Gothic *wōds* “possessed”. As a noun it denotes drunkenness, excitation, poetic genius (cf. OE *wōð* “chant”) as well as the terrifying movement of the sea, of fire, and of the storm. As an adjective, it

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<sup>20</sup> „Nesăbuitule, mi-a spus muza, privește în inima-ți și scrie.”

Ideea unui poet-profet care aude voci și prezice evenimente viitoare este de asemenea exprimată în poezia *La fonction du poète* de Victor Hugo (din volumul *Les rayons et les ombres*, 1840): „Le poète en des jours impies/ Vient préparer des jours meilleurs./ Il est l’homme des utopies./ Les pieds ici, les yeux ailleurs./ C’est lui qui sur toutes les têtes,/ En tout temps, pareil aux prophètes./ Dans sa main, ou tout peut tenir,/ Doit, qu’on l’insulte ou le loue,/ Comme une torche qu’il secoue,/ Faire flamboyer l’avenir !” „Poetu-n zile-ntunecate/ Presimte zilele mai bune./ E omul raiului în toate/ Cu ochii-n cer și pasu-n lume./ Asemeni marilor profeți,/ Deasupra capetelor toate,/ În mâna-i poate ține cupa/ Și, insultat ori laudat,/ Făcând din ea o torță vie,/ Conduce omul spre vecie.”

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means sometimes “violent, furious” sometimes “rapid.” Outside of Germanic, related Indo-European words refer to violent poetic and prophetic inspiration: Latin *vates*, Old Irish *faith*. It must have been a very important god, of the “first level,” that such a name was destined to describe. (Dumézil, 1973, pp. 36-37)<sup>21</sup>

Paralela dintre nebun, profet și poet a fost prin urmare respectată. Inspirația poetică era asemănată cu cea a profetului, iar Părinții Bisericii l-au descris mereu pe David, psalmistul, ca poetul-profet<sup>22</sup>. Trioul shakespearian al nebunului și al văzătorului dereglat îl include și pe îndrăgostitul mistuit de focul iubirii:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;  
That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helena's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to  
heaven,

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<sup>21</sup>„corespunde cuvântului german *Wut* «mânie, furie» și goticului *wōds* «posedat». Ca substantiv, denotă beția, excitarea, geniul poetic (cf. OE *wōð* «cânt») precum și mișcarea terifiantă a mării, a focului și a furtunii. Ca adjectiv, înseamnă uneori «violent, furios», alteori «rapid». Pe lângă limba germană, cuvinte indo-europene înrudite se referă la inspirație poetică și profetică violentă: latinescul *vates*, *faith* din irlandeza veche. Trebuie să fi fost un zeu foarte important, de «prim nivel», ca astfel de nume să fie destinat a fi descris sau să descrie.”)

<sup>22</sup> Vezi și Ioel 2: 28: „După aceea voi turna Duhul Meu peste orice făptură; fiii și fiicele voastre vor proroci, bătrânii voștri vor avea visuri și tinerii voștri vor avea viziuni.” și Ezechiel 2: 1-2: „Și El mi-a zis: «Fiu al omului, stai în picioare și-ți voi vorbi! În timp ce îmi vorbea, duhul a intrat în mine și m-a făcut să stau pe picioare; și am ascultat la Cel care îmi vorbea.»”.

## REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (Shakespeare, 1958a,  
Act 5, Sc.I, p. 154)<sup>23</sup>

Ideea perceperii poetului ca înțelept și magician poate fi găsită și în legendele despre Vergiliu și Merlin. Potrivit legendei, Vergiliu s-a născut la Roma în 6 mai 519, fără să menționeze era. În anul 626 a mers la școală pe insulă. A terminat școala în Libia, în anul 543. Era de familie nobilă și avea un corp frumos, înalt, bine proporționat, dar cu umerii puțin coborâți și capul înclinat. Poetul roman, cu profunde cunoștințe, a devenit renumit ca magician, care, *inter alia*, a profetit venirea lui Mesia în cea de-a patra Bucolică, scriind despre un minunat copil care urma să vină în epoca de aur (Comparetti 1895, pp. 96-103; Anderson, 1994, p. 64). Poemele sale au fost folosite și pentru prezicerea viitorului, la fel cum pasaje biblice, luate le întâmplare, erau folosite pentru divinație. A învățat arta magiei dintr-o carte care se presupune că ar fi fost scrisă de Solomon. S-a îndrăgostit de o femeie numită Phoebilla (denumirea variază în versiuni diferite) care a promis să-l ducă în camera sa într-un coș, dar a decis să-l lase atârând sub fereastra dormitorului ei, fapt pentru care a fost ridiculizat de romani întreaga zi. A fost prins, condamnat la moarte, dar a scăpat prin incantația magică pronunțată în vreme ce

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<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare, *Visul unei nopți de vară* (1921, p. 81): „Îndrăgostiții și nebunii au o minte deopotrivă de nsăcocoare în plăsmuiri; ei văd lucrurile altfel decât cei cu mintea-ntreagă. Lunaticul, amoretul și poetul, au numai închipuire. Unul vede draci mai mulți decât ar putea iadul să cuprindă – acesta e nebunul. Îndrăgostitul, tot așa de smintit, vede frumusețea Elenei pe fața unei țigănci urâte. Iar poetul, purtându-și ochii înfrigați de la pământ la cer și de la cer la pământ, umple văzduhul de fantasmе, cărora pana lui le dă nume și viață, coborând pe pământ o plăsmuire aeriană.”

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era condus spre spânzurători<sup>24</sup>. Femeia insolentă a învățat curând că nici iadul nu putea fi atât de furios ca un magician luat în răspăr. Ca răsplată pentru rușinea îndurată, Vergiliu i-a văduvit pe romani de foc vreme de trei zile, ei neputând să-l obțină decât dintre picioarele Phoebillei, condamnată să stea în patru labe, astfel încât orice cetățean roman să poată vedea ceea ce lui Vergiliu i-a fost refuzat, devenind subiect de batjocură. Mai târziu s-a îndrăgostit de fiica sultanului Babilonului pe care a adus-o la Neapole pe un pod de aer.

În cea de-a VIII-a *Bucolică*, Vergiliu descrie cum îndrăgostita și-a folosit farmecele spre a lega îndrăgostitul nesupus:

Alphesiboeus

Bring water, and with soft wool-fillet bind  
These altars round about, and burn thereon  
Rich vervain and male frankincense, that I  
May strive with magic spells to turn astray  
My lover's saner senses, whereunto  
There lacketh nothing save the power of song.  
Draw from the town, my songs, draw Daphnis home.  
Songs can the very moon draw down from heaven  
Circe with singing changed from human form  
The comrades of Ulysses, and by song  
Is the cold meadow-snake, asunder burst.  
Draw from the town, my songs, draw Daphnis home.  
These triple threads of threefold colour first  
I twine about thee, and three times withal  
Around these altars do thine image bear:  
Uneven numbers are the god's delight.  
Draw from the town, my songs, draw Daphnis home.  
Now, Amaryllis, ply in triple knots  
The threefold colours; ply them fast, and say

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<sup>24</sup> Pentru diferite versiuni ale acestui episod, vezi John Spargo (1934, pp. 136-197).



## REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

This is the chain of Venus that I ply. (*The Poems of Virgil*, 1946, p. 416)<sup>25</sup>

Pasajul de mai sus este dovadă concludentă a ceea ce s-a spus despre legare și puterea cântului sau a incantației. Declararea unui număr par ca plăcut zeilor e o referire directă la credința pitagoreică conform căreia un număr par era infinit, explicând utilizarea sa conștientă în practica medicală: ajuta pentru că numerele pare erau considerate plăcute divinității. Potrivit lui Marcus Terentius Varro, un număr impar este nemuritor pentru că nu poate fi divizat, în vreme ce un număr par este muritor pentru că poate fi divizat (Tupet, 1976, p. 47).

În Evul Mediu se credea că Vergiliu era protectorul mistic al Neapolelui unde a fost înmormântat și proslăvit ca un sfânt. Biografiile săi vorbesc despre el cu respect. Potrivit lui Conrad de Querfurt, proaspăt ales episcop de Hildesheim și cancelar al lui Henric al VI-lea, Vergiliu a ridicat un paladiu pentru a păstra Neapolele și un cal de bronz care să dea putere cailor care-l priveau. Osemintele sale au fost păstrate într-un castel cu vedere spre Neapole și înconjurat de mare, provocând o furtună puternică în clipa în care au fost expuse la vedere (Spargo, 1934, p. 14). Era amabil, vesel, mărinimos, nepretențios și studios.

Spre deosebire de Vergiliu, Merlin a fost fiul unui demon sau incub și al unei tinere fecioare dăruită cu puterile clarvederii. Demonul a lăsat-o însărcinată noaptea

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<sup>25</sup> „Alfesibeu/ Pune panglica de lână pe altar și adu-ncoace/ Apa! Ierburile grase și tămâia tu le ia/ Și le-aprinde! Eu acuma pe-un amant voi încerca/ Să mi-l scot din minți cu-ale mele farmece cumplite./ Vrajă, din oraș pe Dafnis tu acasă mi-l trimite!/  
Cu descântece și luna de pe cer poți s-o cobori,/ Circe prefăcu pe soții lui Ulise-n rămători,/ Crapă șarpele în iarbă dacă cineva-l vrăjește./  
Vrajă, din oraș pe Dafnis tu acasă mi-l pornește!/  
Eu te leg cu nouă fire, oițe trei, în trei culori,/ Și cu chipul tău altarul îl înconjur de trei ori:/ Numărul cel nepereche zeilor din cer le place./ Adu-mi, vraja mea, pe Dafnis, din oraș mi-l adu-ncoace!/  
Cu trei noduri, Amarilo, leagă firele și zi:/ «Legătorile iubirii, acum le înnod aci.»” (Vergiliu, 1967, p. 41)

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în somn, cu scopul de a aduce antihristul în lume. Din fericire, mama sa băuse apă sfințită și făcuse înainte jurământ de perpetuă castitate, rezultatul fiind acela că Merlin nu a moștenit doar înclinațiile demonice ale tatălui său, ci a primit și darurile divine precum puterea de a vedea trecutul și de a prezice viitorul. Copil minune, Merlin putea vorbi imediat după naștere, fiind singurul care cunoștea împrejurările nașterii sale. Avea multe puteri, inclusiv pe cea a ubicuității, întrucât a fost localizat în mai multe părți în același timp. Ca magician, era și un „legător”, putându-l lega și dezlega pe Lucifer după dorință. Cea mai des amintită faptă ce se presupune că i-ar aparține, prin evidența fizică, este aceea a pietrelor pe care se spune că le-ar fi transportat prin magie din Kildare, Irlanda, într-un spațiu ca Stonehenge, la cererea Regelui Aurelius care dorea să înalțe un monument în amintirea măcelăririi, în acel loc, a patru sute șazeci de oameni ai săi. La fel ca Vergiliu sau Goliat și mulți alți eroi, Merlin a căzut în capcana unei femei. S-a îndrăgostit de Viviane (Viviane sau Ninianne) sau Doamna Lacului, căreia i-a dezvăluit toate secretele magiei sale. Aceasta l-a legat cu propria lui magie în interiorul castelului de aer ori într-o peșteră unde zăcea înrobit, ca un prizonier neajutorat. În secolul al XX-lea, în piesa lui Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'enchanteur pourrissant* (*Vrăjitorul decăzut*), Merlin e pomenit pentru stupiditatea sa de către Sfinx care-i cere să ghicească cel mai nerecunoscător lucru, acesta răspunzându-i că e rana sinuciderii care-și ucide creatorul (Apollinaire, 1921, p. 50)<sup>26</sup>. De fapt, într-o parte anterioară

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<sup>26</sup> „LES SPHINX : Tes yeux lumineux dénotent un être intelligent. Tu es multiple comme nous-mêmes. Dis la vérité. Voici l'énigme. Elle est peu profonde parce que tu n'es qu'une bête. Qu'est-ce qui est plus ingrat ? Devine, monstre, afin que nous ayons le droit de mourir volontairement. Qu'est-ce qui est le plus ingrat ? L'ENCHANTEUR : La blessure du suicide. Elle tue son créateur...” (Apollinaire, 1921, p. 50).

„SFINXUL: Ochii tăi luminoși arată o ființă inteligentă. Ești multiplu, ca noi înșine. Spune adevărul. Iată enigma. Nu e prea profundă pentru că ești o fiară.

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a piesei, Dalila o întrebă cu sarcasm pe Medeea dacă doamna care l-a vrăjit pe vrăjitor i-a urmat metoda de a tăia părul magicianului<sup>27</sup>.

Legenda lui este universală, Merlin are mulți omologi: Myrddin (galez), Suibhne Geillt (Scoția), Padmasambhava (India), Herakles (Grecia) etc. Povestea nașterii sale se bazează pe modelul nașterii eroului, după cum subliniază Joseph Campbell, Otto Rank și mulți alți învățați (Campbell, 1972; Rank, 1964). Philippe Walter identifică povestea lui Merlin cu cea a chinezului Lao-Tseu care s-a născut adult. În acest ultim caz, mama sa, Yuniu, a înghițit spermă de-a lui Lao-Tseu care s-a conceput pe sine automat, iar ea a rămas însărcinată spre a da naștere unui copil care exista dinainte de propria naștere și al cărui nume desemna un adult tânăr (Walter, 2000, p. 70).

Pe lângă cei doi înțelepți-magicieni discutați pe scurt mai sus, mulți alți înțelepți ar putea fi menționați în sprijinul legăturii dintre poezie, muzică și înțeleptul-magician. Printre aceștia se numără Epimenides din Creta, Thales din Milet și Pitagora. Epimenides a fost poet, profet filosof și specialist în miracole. Este renumit pentru remarcabila sa longevitate de 154 sau 299 ani și se spune că ar fi dormit 57 de ani într-o peșteră. Putea auzi voci divine, oracole emise, iar sufletul său putea părăsi corpul după voie. Thales din Milet este privit îndeobște ca părintele filosofiei și putea să prevadă viitorul, să schimbe cursul

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Ce este mai grav? Ghicește, monstrule, pentru ca noi să avem dreptul să murim de bună voie. Ce este mai grav?

VRĂJITORUL: Rana sinuciderii. Ea își ucide creatorul..."

<sup>27</sup> „DALILA: Marâtre, tu donnas la Toison à l'argonaute. Moi je coupai la chevelure de mon amant. Nous aimions toutes deux, mais différemment. Tu aimais les hommes forts ; moi, je fus la femme forte. La dame qui enchanta l'enchanteur lui coupa la chevelure, suivant mon exemple. Qu'en penses-tu ?” (Apollinaire, 1921: 50).

„DALILA: Mașteră, i-ai dat Lâna de aur argonautului. Eu am tăiat părul iubitelui meu. Amândouă iubeam, dar în mod diferit. Tu iubeai bărbații puternici, eu eram femeia puternică. Femeia care a vrăjit vrăjitorul i-a tăiat părul, urmându-mi exemplul. Ce crezi despre asta?”

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râului Halys pentru oamenii Regelui Cresus și să măsoare lungimea piramidei după umbra sa. În sfârșit, Pitagora a fost muzician, magician, matematician și mistic, avatar al lui Midas, pentru că s-a născut cu o coapsă aurită. Religia sa se baza pe metempsihoză și se spune că ar fi dojenit un om care-și bătea câinele pentru că putea auzi vocea unui prieten mort în schelălăitul acestuia. Putea auzi voci supranaturale, prin urmare putea prezice viitorul. Alți înțelepți de mare renume au fost Bias din Priene, Chilon din Sparta, Cleobulus din Lindos, Myson din Chen, Pittacus din Mytilene și Solon din Atena.

### Caracteristici ale înțeleptului-magician

În majoritatea culturilor, vrăjitorul-înțelept este adesea înfățișat ca un om sălbatic apropiat de natură, iar fierturile lui magice sunt adesea un amestec de ierburi, animale și chiar grăsime animală. Merlin, profetul, se bucura preschimbându-se într-un păzitor de turmă sălbatic spre a-i speria pe cavalerii aflați în căutare de aventuri menite să demonstreze fapte de vitejie<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Vezi *Le Livre d'Artus* (1916, p. 162): „He became a herdsman, a great club in his hand, clad in a great hide, the fur of which was longer than the breadth of the largest hand known, and it was neither black nor white but smoked and browned and seemed to be a wolf skin. He took his place in a great clearing on the border of a ditch and bent over it. He was large, bent, black, lean, hairy, old with great age, shod without in marvellous leggings that reached to his girdle. He was transformed so that his ears hung down his waist, wide as a winnowing fan. He had eyes in his head, large and black, and head as big as a buffalo's, and hair so long that it brushed his girdle, all bristly, stiff, and black as ink. His mouth was as large and wide as a dragon's, and gaped up to ears; his teeth were white; and his thick lips were always open so that the teeth showed all around. He had a hump behind on his spine, as big as a mortar. His two feet were where the heels ought to be in an earthly man, and the palms of the hands where the backs should be. He was so hideous and ugly to see that no man living would not be seized with great dread, unless he were brave and valiant. He was so tall when he stood up that a rod of eighteen feet would not reach him and, in proportion to his height, he had the breadth of a thin man. His voice was so loud that it seemed like a trumpet when he spoke a little loud.” „A devenit cioban, cu o bâtă mare în mână, îmbrăcat într-o piele mare, cu blana mai lungă decât cea mai mare lățime de mână cunoscută, și nu

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Fierturile magice ale vrăjitoarelor din *Macbeth* (Shakespeare) sunt făcute din bucăți din cadavre de animale și oameni: intestine otrăvite, o broască râioasă, un șarpe de mlaștină, ochi de salamandră, limbă de broască, lână de liliaci, limbă de câine, labă de năpârcă, aripă de bufnicioară, solzi de dragon, dinte de lup, mumie a vrăjitoarei, rechin de mare, rădăcină de cucută săpată noaptea, ficatul unui copil strangulat la naștere. După ce amestecul a fiert cu bulbuci într-o căldare, vrăjitoarea recomandă răcirea cu sânge de babuin. Vrăjitorii sunt întâlniți de asemenea în locuri care provoacă teamă, precum pădurile, cimitirul ori casele părăsite.

Până și vindecătorii africani apar ca oameni sălbatici a căror întâlnire provoacă panică și oroare atavică:

Out in the full panoply of progress, his body is betrimmed with a medley of the most fantastic trappings. A plume of feathers waves above his head-ring, a circlet of lion claws surrounds his neck. Various cow-tails dangle from his arms and chest, supplementing the square strip of leopard-skin and the bundle of genet-tails that cover his nakedness

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era nici neagră nici albă, ci afumată și muncită de aducea cu o piele de lup. Și-a luat locul într-un mare luminiș, la malul unui șanț și s-a aplecat deasupra lui. Era mare, înclinat, negru, slab, păros, împovărat de vârstă, fără încălțări și cu jambiere grozave ce-i ajungeau până la cingătoare. Era transformat în așa fel încât urechile să-i atârne de brâu, largi ca o vânturătoare. În capul mare ca al unui bivou, avea ochi mari și negri, iar părul atât de lung că-i mătura cingătoarea, tot zbârlit, țeapăn și negru ca cerneala. Gura-i era la fel de mare și largă ca a unui dragon și întinsă până la urechi; dinți-i erau albi, iar buzele groase mereu deschise, ca toți dinții să se vadă. În spate, pe coloană, avea o cocoșă mare ca o piuă. Cele două picioare-i erau unde ar trebui să fie călcâiele unui pământean, iar palmele mâinilor era unde ar fi trebuit să fie dosul lor. Era atât de hidos și de urât la vedere, că orice ființă s-ar fi înspăimântat văzându-l, afară de cei din cale afară de viteji. Atât de înalt era când sătea drept, că nici o funie de optsprezece picioare n-ar fi reușit să-l depășească și, proporțional cu înălțimea, avea lățimea unui om slab. Vocea-i era atât de tunătoare că semăna cu o trompetă când vorbea puțin mai tare.”

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behind and before. Numerous bunches of goat-horns, blackened with smoke of his hut, and sundry small grass-woven baskets and bundles of rag packages, brown with dirt, containing his strange assortment of drugs and charms, are strung from every point of vantage about neck, shoulders and body. A long pouch, holding his snuff-box, and made from the whole skin of an unborn calf dangles from his left hand, and in the other he carries his long walking-staff or a couple of stout sticks. (Bryant, 1966, p. 9)<sup>29</sup>

Sunt, de asemenea, renumiți pentru mutilarea corpurilor omenesti, lăsându-i pe mulți schilozi sau neputincioși în articularea cuvintelor. Părțile de trup omenesc căutate sunt: creierul, urechile, ochii, limba, nasul, intestinele și părțile intime. Cazuri de mutilare umană în scopuri medicale abundă la curțile de justiție africane.

Una din denumirile date vrăjitorilor este folosită și în desemnarea unei păsări de noapte de rău augur care se hrănește cu carne și sânge de om, *striga* (plural *striges*) sau *Megascops asio* care, potrivit lui Ovidiu:

...are some greedy birds, a species related to Harpies  
That used to cheat Phineus' gullet of his food.

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<sup>29</sup> „În plină panoplie a înaintării, trupul său este înfrumusețat cu un amestec dintre cele mai ciudate zorzoane. Tot felul de pene flutură deasupra inelului ce-i înconjoară capul, un cerculeț cu labe de leu îi înconjoară gâtul. Felurite decorațiuni din cozi de vacă se leagă pe brațe și piept, ca supliment la fâșia îngustă de piele de leopard și mănunchiul de cozi de genetă care-i acoperă goliciuma în față și în spate. Numeroase mănunchiuri de cornuri de capră înnegrite cu fumul din coliba sa și diferite coșulețe țesute din iarbă și mănunchiuri de pachetele din zdrențe, înnegrite de murdărie, conținând ciudatele sale combinații de remedii și farmece, sunt înșirate pe fiecare punct vizibil în jurul gâtului, al umerilor și al corpului. Un marsupiu lung, care-i ține cutia de tutun, făcută din pielea întreagă a unui vițel nenăscut, atârână de mâna stângă, iar în cealaltă își poartă bățul lung pentru deplasare ori câteva bețe robuste.”

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They have huge heads, pop eyes, beaks well suited to  
plunder,  
White-hued plumage and claws like hooks.  
At night they fly in search of children unweaned,  
plundering cradles and mutilating the bodies.  
People say they pick at the milk-fed flesh with their  
beaks  
And drink the blood 'til their gullets are full.  
They have the name of screech owls, a name they get  
From the terrible way they screech at night.  
Whether they're birds from birth, or whether that  
happens by magic  
when a gypsy turns crones into winged creatures.  
(Ovid, 1995, II, pp. 130-141)<sup>30</sup>

Asemănările dintre *striga* și vrăjitori sunt evidente în descrierea lui Ovidiu a acestei *magascops asio*. Amândoi duc vieți nocturne răpesc copii, le pradă carnea și sunt însetați de sânge. De fapt, descrierea lui Ovidiu scoate în evidență ideea primordială a vrăjitorului ca hoț de copii gelos și răzbunător prezentă în miturile Lamiei și ale lui Lilith, ca să ne limităm doar la acestea. Lamia a fost forțată spre vrăjitorie când Hera i-a furat copiii după descoperirea relației sale cu Zeus. Ea devine în schimb hoț de copii, pe care-i ucide. Devine simbolul universal al mamei devoratoare, iar numele îi este derivat din grecescul *laimos* pentru gâtlej sau esofag. Pe de altă parte, Lilith a fost prima soție a lui Adam și prima luptătoare pentru drepturile femeii, căsătoria sa cu Adam destrămându-se pentru că refuzase poziția culcată atribuită îndeobște

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<sup>30</sup> „...sunt păsări lacome, o specie înrudită cu harpiile/ Ce obișnuiau să lipsească gâtlejul lui Phineus de hrană/ Au capete mari, ochii bulbucați, ciocuri de pradă/ Penajul albicios și gheare precum cârligele./ Noaptea zboară în căutare de copii neînțărcați, prădând leagăne și mutilând trupuri./ Oamenii spun că aleg cu ciocurile carnea hrănită cu lapte/ Și beau sângele până li se umplu gâtlejurile./ Se numesc striga, denumire pe care o primesc/ După înfricoșătorul țipăt nocturn./ Fie că sunt păsări din naștere, fie prin magie,/ când un țigan preschimbă babe în creaturi înaripate.”

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femeii în relația sexuală. Reacția sa la cererea de a acorda poziție superioară în această situație a fost: „De ce trebuie să stau întinsă sub tine? Și eu am fost făcută din lut, prin urmare suntem egali.”. Când Adam a încercat s-o forțeze să se supună, ea a pronunțat numele magic al lui Dumnezeu și a dispărut în eter, lăsându-l pe Adam singur. S-a dus să trăiască printre demoni lascivi, lângă Marea Roșie, dând naștere la numeroase progenituri. A fost apoi admonestată prin ordin al lui Dumnezeu să se întoarcă la Adam și pedepsită pentru refuz prin moartea progeniturilor, pe care i-a devorat. Obiecția ei la porunca divină a fost că Dumnezeu i-a dat în grijă toți nou născuții și nu poate fi ucisă datorită acestei porunci mai înalte (Graves, 1963, p. 65).

Mitul lui Lilith are afinități cu cel al Lamiei și cu alte mituri asemănătoare despre furtul și devorarea copiilor. În etapele mai târzii de dezvoltare a mitului, numele Lamia și Lilith sunt folosite ca sperietoare, spre a obține supunere din partea copiilor. Mitul lui Lilith și al Lamiei a îmbogățit vocabularul multor limbi, prin împrumutarea numelor acestora de către alte eroine implicate în magie; astfel cuvintele au dobândit semnificații mai largi. Potrivit volumului *De praestigii daemonum* semnat de Joannis Wieranno (John Weyer), cuvântul *lamia* pentru bufnița corb de noapte ori bufnița cu urechi lungi este echivalentul ebraicului *lilith* derivat din *lail* (noapte) pentru că zboară noaptea ca o vrăjitoare tipică (Weyer, 1991, pp. 165-166).

Ospățul vrăjitorilor cu carne de om este o reminiscență a canibalismului vârcolacului. Unii vrăjitori au capacitatea de a-și schimba înfățișarea și a deveni animale, ca în cazul vârcolacilor (licantropi sau oameni lup) care se spune că au primit boala numită *lupus insanum* sau nebunia lupului. Au existat două tulpini de credințe despre transformarea oamenilor în vârcolaci. Mai întâi, vârcolacul a fost infectat fără voia sa cu „febra



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lupului” de ochiul rău al unei vrăjitoare și condus la punctul maxim de năvălire în păduri, unde dobândește gheare și o haină păroasă urmată de obiceiuri ale lupilor de a ataca ființe umane și animale spre a le bea sângele. În al doilea rând, ființelor umane li se acordă capacitatea de a se transforma după dorință într-o ființă cu caracteristici de lup, postură în care execută actele negative menționate mai sus, adică hrănirea cu oameni și animale. Transformarea în vârcolac are legătură cu luna plină. În Rusia, vârcolacul este cunoscut ca *oborot* însemnând „cel transformat” și se crede că o ființă umană se poate transforma într-un vârcolac prin înfigerea unui cuțit de cupru într-un copac doborât după ce te-ai învârtit de trei ori în jurul său ca șamanii, repetând următoarea incantație:

On the sea, on the ocean, on the island, on Bujan,  
On the empty pasture gleams the moon, on an ashstock  
lying  
In a green wood, in a gloomy vale.  
Toward the stock wandereth a shaggy wolf,  
Horned cattle seeking for his sharp white fangs;  
But the wolf enters not the forest,  
But the wolf dives not into the shadowy vale,  
Moon, moon, gold-horned moon,  
Check the flight of bullets, blunt the hunters' knives  
Break the shepherds' cudgels,  
Cast wild fear upon all cattle,  
On men, on all creeping things,  
That they may not rend his warm skin!  
My word is binding, more binding than sleep,  
More binding than the promise of a hero.  
(Baring-Gould, 1995, p. 117)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> „Pe mare, pe ocean, pe insula lui Bujan,/ Pe pășunea goală strălucește luna,  
stând pe un frasin/ Într-o pădure verde, într-o vale întunecoasă./ Către  
buștean se îndreaptă un lup lăptos/ Căutând vite cornute pentru colții lui albi,  
ascuțiți;/ Dar lupul nu intră în pădure,/ El nu se scufundă în valed umbroasă,/

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După intonarea acestei incantații, trebuie să sari de trei ori peste copac și apoi să alergi în pădure, pentru că te vei fi transformat deja în lup. În contextul sud-african, se poate cita cazul lui Elifaso Msomi a cărui nebunie sălbatică a provocat moartea a cincisprezece oameni într-o scurtă perioadă de timp. Msomi, care spunea că este posedat de *Tokoloshe* (un animal familiar), a evadat de două ori din închisoare înainte de a fi condamnat la moarte (Steiger, 1999, p. 198).

În concluzie, putem sublinia că în analiza finală distincția făcută de credința populară tradițională în multe culturi între magician și înțelept este fragilă și că magia a fost considerată vreme îndelungată drept un corolar al învățării. Toți oamenii învățați erau considerați magicieni, cu toate că, dimpotrivă, nu toți magicienii au fost oameni învățați.

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Lună, lună, lună cu coarne de aur,/ Verifică zborul gloanțelor, ascute cuțitele vânătorilor,/ Rupe ciomegele păstorilor,/ Aruncă frică sălbatică peste toate vitele,/ Asupra oamenilor, asupra tuturor târâtoarelor,/ Să nu-i poată sfâșia pielea cea caldă!/ Cuvântul meu leagă, leagă mai tare ca somnul,/ Leagă mai tare decât jurământul eroului.”

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# REALISM, MAGIE ȘI METAMORFISM ÎN LOSTRITA<sup>1</sup>

## REALISM, MAGIC AND METAMORPHISM IN LOSTRITA

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### Abstract:

*In literature, magical realism is characterized by the presentation of an apparently real universe, in which events and characters may be plausible and credible from a psychological or social perspective, but where supernatural or fantastical elements intervene in the unfolding of the action, thus crafting a reality that includes elements of a nature different from the everyday. Specific to this modern literary genre, fantastical and fabulous events are integrated into a narrative that maintains a credible tone and an objective presentation of reality, aiming to reflect a tendency of the modern novel to transcend the limits of realism by mobilizing elements from fable, folklore, and mythology.*

*The action in works of this genre takes place within an ordinary, everyday spatial framework, and even at the heart of this normalcy, strange things occur that alter the mundane;*

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*nevertheless, supernatural events lack a realistic explanation. Space and time always exhibit a lack of uniformity, where real, ordinary occurrences follow a thread of inner consciousness, alternating premonitions and memories, drawing the attention of the narrator, characters, and readers.*

*In Lostrîța, Vasile Voiculescu perfectly illustrates how the traits of magical realism, such as the distortion of space and time, as well as the multiplication of identity, are blended, adding the motif of the double to introduce fantastical elements into the reality, thereby giving them an apparent state of normality. By presenting fantastical events or characters as a credible part of reality, the author maintains the impression of the narrative's veracity.*

**Keywords:** alterity; realism; reality; metamorphosis; edges.

**Cuvinte cheie:** alteritate; realism; realitate; metamorfoză; granițe.

Realismul magic este un gen literar care ne introduce într-o lume mult mai complexă decât cea a realității cotidiene, prin împletirea cotidianului cu elemente fantastice. Acțiunea se desfășoară într-un mediu cunoscut, care este îmbogățit cu elemente ce depășesc realitatea obișnuită. Universul astfel creat integrează aspecte din viața cotidiană, dar într-un mod în care realitatea familiară se alterează gradual, facilitând apariția unor evenimente neobișnuite ce nu pot fi explicate prin intermediul unor șabloane sau norme realiste.

Lumea familiară cititorului este înfățișată dintr-o perspectivă diferită, prezentând un univers cu caracteristici distincte, explorându-se astfel o realitate alternativă în care atât obiectele, cât și evenimentele, primesc un înțeles mai adânc, revelând mistere ce perturbă constant calmul cotidianului obișnuit. Scriitorii

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aparținând realismului magic apelează la diverse tehnici pentru a adăuga o dimensiune suplimentară, oferind o viziune nouă asupra realității, conturând un univers în care nu există limitări temporale, iar elementele irealității sunt integrate în mod natural în cadrul realității.

Există o serie de opere aparținând acestui gen literar, prin intermediul cărora, oamenii au manifestat de-a lungul timpului, diverse forme de reacție în fața tainelor și miracolelor lumii acvatice, de la fascinație la teamă, în lipsa unei explicații logice. S-a adăugat apoi tenta de senzational, având ca efect o inevitabilă distorsionare a informației trecute de la un individ la altul și o literatură abundentă în creaturi ale apelor, sirene, zâne, monștri sau alte entități marine, de cele mai multe ori având implicații malefice în viața oamenilor.

Asociate elementului apă, sirene, melusine, ondine, nimfe, știmate, duhuri ale mediului acvatic, ele pot călăuzi, seduce și distruge muritorii, fie călători peste mări sau oceane, fie locuind în jurul apelor. Aceste entități trezesc în ființa umană o imaginație creatoare vie, atrăgând prin fascinație, reaprinzând dorința revenirii la starea primară, comuniunea cu natura, dobândirea perfecțiunii androginice și aspirația de a-și învinge condiția, de a atinge absolutul. Tragismul intervine în momentul în care, fie ea o sacrifică, fie se sacrifică pentru salvarea ființei iubite, fără a atinge idealul iubirii, împlinirea definitivă, perfecțiunea.

În legendă, Meluzina are ba coadă de pește, ba de șarpe, respectiv este jumătate om, jumătate animal. Ea apare uneori chiar numai ca șarpe... provoacă furtuni, se pot transforma, pot vindeca boli incurabile și cunosc viitorul. Întrucât *serpens mercurialis* al alchimiștilor este numit nu rareori «virgo» și reprezintă sub aspect de Meluzină (deja

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înaintea lui Paracelsus), capacitatea lor de transformare și arta lor de a vindeca sunt importante în măsura în care tocmai aceste particularități sunt afirmate cu tărie și despre Mercur. (Jung, 2017, pp. 211-212).

Un pește răpitor, din familia Salmonide, care a fost în pericol de dispariție pentru o lungă perioadă de timp, loștrița, reprezintă pentru unii cititori doar personajul fantastic din povestirea cu același nume a lui Vasile Voiculescu, fiind o apariție argintie, strălucitoare, care pune stăpânire pe mințile unui flăcău de pe Bistrița. Actul scufundării în apă, simbioza cu mediul acvatic, a stat la baza povestirii *Loștrița*, în care realul și fantasticul, elemente solide și inseparabile, coexistă deopotrivă.

În povestire, firul narativ este foarte simplu. Aliman, un tânăr pescar, încearcă de mult timp să captureze o loștriță fermecată care „a ademenit multă lume”, „de la pescari iscusiți la copii neștiutori și care, furați de strălucirea ei, s-au înecat în apele Bistriței, ca o jertfă, ea fiind „nesătulă de carne de om”. (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 289), dar fără succes. După o vreme, peștele dispăre din ape și în locul lui, apare o fată de care Aliman se îndrăgostește instantaneu. Povestea lor de dragoste este întreruptă brusc de apariția mamei fetei și fata dispăre din nou. Aliman se căsătorește cu o altă fată, însă loștrița reapăre în ziua nunții. Aliman se aruncă în apă după ea, dar se îneacă. Aceasta ar fi o interpretare realistă dar insuficientă, a poveștii. În esență, povestea nu se referă doar la un pește sau la o fată, ci la o existență care sfidează realitatea.

Realismul magic este prezent în povestire prin îmbinarea elementelor fantastice cu cele realiste. La momentul când a scris această povestire, după numeroase peregrinări prin țară, scriitorul a avut ca punct de pornire

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a narațiunii legenda „dracului din baltă”, populară în partea de nord a țării, pe care pescarii de pe malul Bistriței o transmit de câteva generații, îmbogățită constant cu detalii interesante, așa cum cer închipuirile oamenilor mereu avizi de întâmplări nemaiauzite și nemaîntâlnite. Spiritele rele ale apei pot pedepsi oamenii, având influență negativă asupra existenței acestora. Lostriței i se atribuie astfel o aură de legendă, fiind corespondentul acvatic al ielelor, al zânelor sau al mrenelor care îi pot vrăji pe tineri, la fel cum zburătorii seduc tinerele fete.

Personajul central al povestirii este lostrița, o creatură fabuloasă, cu trăsături supranaturale, înzestrată cu puteri magice, care atrage și fascinează personajele umane, exercitând o influență profundă asupra mentalității comunității. Deși este mai mult absentă pe parcursul acțiunii, aceasta rămâne un subiect constant de discuție în rândul sătenilor, cu influență asupra destinului acestora.

Evenimentele fantastice sunt expuse într-o manieră credibilă, devenind o parte firească a vieții cotidiene. Voiculescu reușește să creeze o atmosferă în care magia și realitatea coexistă într-un mod armonios. Pentru Aliman, apariția malefică este un pește pe care nu îl poate prinde în chip firesc, deci este un absolut care i se refuză, fiind considerat o creație a diavolului sau a Satanei, reprezentând prima ruptură în realitate. Apare și dispare în apele Bistriței, eroul aflându-se într-o stare de tensiune și neliniște care îl macină treptat. Păstrându-și amprenta arhaică, lostrița rămâne „fabuloasă, nu-și găsește astâmpăr, când fulgerând ca o sabie bulboanele, când odihnindu-se pe plavii, cu trup de ibovnică întinsă la soare (...)” (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 296), o tentație veșnică.

Lostrița se ascunde în ape puțin adânci pentru a se lăsa văzută, după care se retrage în adâncuri, atrăgând oamenii într-o capcană. Este ca și cum lostrița plutește

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între legendă și realitate, între trecut și prezent. Această creatură fabuloasă nu este remarcabilă doar prin faptul că supraviețuiește mereu, ci și pentru că există doar un singur exemplar în apele Bistriței. Este descrisă drept un animal fantastic, dar totuși adevărat, îndeplinind nevoia de verosimil: „o nagodă cu înfățișare de lostrită. De sus de la izvoare și până dincolo de Piatra, peștele naibei se arăta când la bulboane, când la șuvoaie, cu cap bucălat de somn, trup șui de șalău și piele peștrită auriu, cu bobite roșii-ruginii, ca păstrăvul”. (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 289).

Un alt element fantastic, pactul lui Aliman cu diavolul, intervine în poveste prin prezența celor două elemente intermediare: vrăjitorul și lostrita de lemn. Ritualurile magice legate de lostrită adaugă un strat de misticism, fiind acceptate ca parte integrantă a lumii povestite, întărind ideea că realul și fantasticul sunt indisolubil legate.

Metamorfozarea lostritei în femeie nu e descrisă direct; sugerată, ea e în acord cu substratul arhetipal al universului imaginar voiculescian. Între simbolurile generate de aspectul negativ al feminității acvatice e și acela al peștelui transformat în femeia fatală și funestă, purtând în sine promisiunea fericirii, în măsura în care e legat de arhetipul coborârii și al întoarcerii la izvoarele originare-în materia primordială. (Durand, 1998, pp. 91-95)

Metamorfoza totală este realizată prin procedeul suprapunerii în portretul **fetei-lostrită**, unde planurile uman/ animal sunt înfățișate în interferență, dar printr-un proces de oglindire. E „un joc ambiguu al imaginii lostritei care pare când pește, când fată, niciodată fată și pește în același timp”. (Zaharia-Filipaș, 1980, p. 232). În acest caz, „centrul personalității” nu este Eul conștient ci inconștientul pulsional, sediul pulsiunilor reductibile la sexualitate și că trăirile psihice sunt rezultatul jocului lostritei sau dinamicii acestor pulsiuni care se cer imperios

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a fi satisfăcute. Personajul real, Aliman, este cuprins de febra căutării împlinirii dorințelor, oscilând între eros și thanatos, fiind fascinat, sedus, atras și manipulat de această faptură care aparține acvaticului.

Meluzina, Shakti cea înșelătoare... nu mai are voie să stea față-n față cu adeptul, ademenindu-l cu înfățișarea sa, ci trebuie să devină ceea ce a fost dintotdeauna: și anume parte a întregului său...nu mai este vorba despre nimic ce poate fi înțeles discursiv, ci despre o trăire pur și simplu imposibil de redat, de a cărei natură aparține sentimentul eternității sau atemporalității irevocabile.” (Jung, 2017, pp. 214-215)

Povestirea abordează teme precum iubirea, sacrificiul și destinul, utilizând simboluri magice pentru a le sublinia. Lostrița devine un simbol al dorințelor și temerilor umane, reflectând complexitatea sufletului uman. Acțiunea este concepută ca un joc al oglinzii: echivocul e întreținut nu numai prin suprapunerea uman/animal reprezentată portretistic, ci și printr-un sistem de coincidențe rezultate din organizarea materiei epice; planurile se multiplică și ele-uman/animal/demonic. Astfel, prezența lostriței în apă coincide cu salvarea miraculoasă a lui Aliman de la înec și cu norocul acestuia la pescuit; ascunderea ei în străfunduri coincide cu dispariția momelii pentru peștii din baltă și devastarea capcanelor care par distruse de mână omenească. Când cufundă în râul învolburat dublul de lemn al peștelui magic, eroul se leapădă de lumea lui Dumnezeu. După desăvârșirea ritualului magic, un pact cu diavolul de fapt, pe ape apare o față fără identitate.

Sfidându-și condiția, eroul, pasionat al absolutului în dragoste încearcă imposibilul, trecerea într-o ordine superioară de existență. Vibrațiile energetice tind să se

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materializeze și atrag magnetic spre sursa emițătoare de vibrații asemănătoare. Însă dragostea dintre un muritor și o ființă care poate aparține unei alte lumi, nu se poate realiza, sfârșind tragic.

Ileana, fata sălbatică de care tânărul se îndrăgostește și care devine idealul său în iubire, are trăsături care amintesc de lumea peștilor: părul răsfirat pe umeri „ca niște șuvoaie plăvițe”, ochii verzi-aurii „dar reci ca de sticlă”, dinții „albi, dar ascuțiți ca la fiare (...)”. Era frumoasă, cu chipul poate cam bucălat, șuie, cu trupul lung, mlădios și despicătura coapselor sus ca la buni înotători” (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 292). Ea nu are decât nevoi primare, instinctive. „Era sălbatecă. Cu multe ascunzișuri și taine. Și totuși, nu știa nici cum o cheamă. Îi dase de la el numele Ileana.” (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 292). Efectul aparent benefic, vizibil asupra lui Aliman, în ipostaza unui om împlinit sufletește, se datorează prezenței fetei și iubirii pe care el i-o poartă. Însă fata nu are alte aspirații, nu are dorințe de realizare, ea doar trăiește clipa pasională. Trezește în Aliman dorința întemeierii unei familii, dar ea nu vrea să respecte rânduiețile creștine: „Ea știa de ibovnic și de dragoste, nu-i ardea nici de popă, nici de biserică. Nu pentru asta venise ea pe lume”. (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 292). „Himera” nu vrea să audă de preot și de biserică, ceea ce constituie un semn al apartenenței ei la categoria diabolicului. (Rotaru, 1993, p.80).

Dragostea dintre cei doi e trăită cu o intensitate nefirească. Aliman este un pasionat al absolutului în dragoste. Sfidându-și condiția, eroul încearcă imposibilul, trecerea într-o ordine superioară de existență. Vibrațiile energetice tind să se materializeze și atrag magnetic spre sursa emițătoare de vibrații asemănătoare. Însă dragostea dintre un muritor și o ființă care poate aparține unei alte lumi, nu se poate realiza, sfârșind tragic.

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Ambiguitatea lostriță-femeie este evidențiată de descendența acesteia, ea venind de la izvoarele Bistriței aurii (timpul zero), este trasă la răspundere de mama care vine după ea, pentru că și-a părăsit eternitatea, „avuțiile ca să se lipească fără rușine de sărăcia și neamul prost al oamenilor de aici”. (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 293). Renunțarea fetei la tot ce are legătură cu lumea ei reprezintă pierderea condiției privilegiate, superioare omului.

Dispariția fetei coincide cu reapariția lostriței, care, din apele învolburate îl privește pe flăcău „cu ochi omenеști”, redeşeptându-i, în suflet și în trup amintirea iubitei sale. „Ea se-ntoarse deodată nălucitoare, cu capul țintă în Aliman. Stătu așa o clipă plină. Apoi porni, fulgerând apele, spre el.” (Voiculescu, 1989, p. 293). Pentru a-și atinge idealul înalt, prinderea lostriței, Aliman se sacrifică, căzând pradă apelor. Persistă întrebarea referitoare la distrugerea lui Aliman, o „ambiție nesăbuită a vânătorului prea orgolios sau dragostea cu o ființă nepotrivită?” (Zaharia-Filipaș, 1980, p. 224). La nivelul simbolic, lostrița reflectă idealul, visul, absolutul la care aspiră fiecare ființă umană. Soarta lui Aliman este condusă în mod fatidic chiar de idealul său. El încearcă să atingă imposibilul, sfârșitul tragic semnificând faptul că atingerea idealului se face numai prin sacrificiul propriu.

Lostrița reprezintă pentru Aliman, pe rând, un vânat, o întruchipare a diavolului, o iubită, apoi, iarăși un vânat, pentru ca în final să devină ceva mai mult decât toate acestea, „probabil un ideal care valorează mai mult decât o viață banală de pescar” (Zaharia-Filipaș, 1980, p. 229). Am putea spune că lostrița este natura însăși, care îl domină și îl înfrânge în cele din urmă pe Aliman. Recompunerea întregului împinge explicația logică în planul supranaturalului: lostrița și fata sălbatică sunt întruchipări ale unui duh malefic, „cu o corporalitate



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ațăătoare, periculoasă”, care „lucrează prin vrăji ale corpului, ale materiei”. (Simion, 1979, p. 295).

Aliman se îndrăgostește de ceea ce lipsește animei lui și ar vrea inconștient să dobândească perfecțiunea sa androgenică. Bachelard numește acest proces „proiecție psihologică”, bazată pe mecanismul imaginației. Respectiv, nu iubim omul real, ci omul pe care l-a conceput imaginația noastră, „printr-un transfer interior”, de la instanța reală la cea ficțională. O „reverie idealizantă”, cum o numește Bachelard, face ca să-l vedem pe celălalt drept sufletul nostru pereche. „Reverii de idealizare” însă nu funcționează la nesfârșit. Când proiecția imaginară a celui alt formează un clivaj dureros cu realitatea celui alt, vorbim de dramele cuplului.

Gaston Bachelard explică acest mecanism imaginar uman, inclusiv al celui erotic, imaginea lostriței fiind un produs arhetipal ale imaginației, ascuns în străfundurile ființei lui Aliman, puternic încărcat afectiv, având energie de vis și reverie (animus-anima) și forță de semnificare. Conduita lui Aliman este condiționată de imaginea lostriței și determinată de mediul exterior. Mecanismul erotic este elucidat prin proiecția arhetipală animus-anima. Reveria profundă se situează sub semnul animei, a femininului care protejează ființa. Arhetipul animus-anima denotă androgenitatea primară a ființei umane. Aceste concepte țin de reveria idealizantă: „dacă vrem să înțelegem reveriile ființei care iubește, care ar vrea să iubească, care se mândrește că nu este iubită așa cum iubește, energiile și virtuțile lui anima și ale lui animus trebuie evocate în idealizarea lor”. (Bachelard, 2005, p. 95).

*Lostrița* se dovedește a fi o lucrare emblematică pentru realismul magic în literatura română. Prin îmbinarea subtilă a elementelor fantastice cu realitatea cotidiană, Voiculescu creează un univers narativ în care granițele dintre realitate și imaginație sunt fluidizate.

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Distorsiunile spațiale și temporale, alături de motivul dublului, sunt utilizate pentru a introduce și a integra elemente supranaturale într-un context familiar, conferind astfel o nouă dimensiune realității descrise. Această tehnică permite explorarea unor teme profunde și complexe, invitând cititorii să reflecteze asupra naturii realității și a percepției umane.

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*Realismul magic  
între literatură și artă*



FORMES DE L'ABSENCE DANS LA CASA DE  
LOS ESPÍRITUS DE ISABEL ALLENDE. LE  
LIVRE ET LE FILM<sup>1</sup>

FORMS OF ABSENCE IN ISABEL ALLENDE'S  
LA CASA DE LOS ESPÍRITUS. THE BOOK AND  
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## REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

### Abstract:

*The magical realism artistically defines Latin America. The literature of this cultural area is marked by the dual rootedness of the mentalities of this geographical area. Pure materiality versus diaphanous absence, telling silence versus muffled noise, clear contours versus dilution of forms are all ways of literary or cinematographic representation of this form of artistic manifestation called realismo magico. La Casa de Los Espíritus is Isabel Allende's debut novel and a literary work in which the undeniable elements of magical realism are present both in the construction of the plot, in the creation of the characters and in the recurring themes specific to this literary movement. Isabel Allende's novel tells the story of the Trueba family in Latin America over four generations, with a historical background from the early 20th century to the 1970s. The narrator's narrative act is doubled by another defining narrative for Clara, the youngest daughter of the del Valle family: the diary she keeps assiduously until the day she dies. This diary becomes one of Clara's "voices" when she chooses muteness as a form of expression of rebellion. Clara, Blanca and Alba - feminine names with an obvious symbolism, referring to light, to the diaphanous - are the female figures that represent the generations around which the story is articulated, while the figure of Nivea, representing the first generation, is less well defined in Allende's novel. Also built around female figures is Billie August's screenplay, with Clara's almost obsessive presence beyond silence or death. The aim of our paper is to approach a unique subject reflected, with the respective tools, in two different arts. Starting from a literary text, La Casa de Los Espíritus, by Isabel Allende, and from the dramatization of the book, in Bille August's directorial vision, released by Miramax in 1993, we want to detect, classify and analyse different types of forms of absence and the ways of constructing and representing it, in the literary text and in the cinematographic transposition. We consider that absence, through the establishment of a two-faced world - the spoken and the unspoken, the seen and the unseen, the material and the non-material, the solid and the vague - is the recurrent, strong and defining theme for the framing of these artistic productions*



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*belonging to the artistic current of the magic realism. Absence can be actualized, for example, in muteness and silence, in death, in escape into the imaginary. Marked negatively, absence, however, establishes a meaning, conveyed precisely through the absence of signal (auditory, visual, tactile). Literary and cinematographic resources for the representation of absence are obviously different, and our work aims to approach them in parallel, in order to observe similarities and differences in the process of production and reception.*

**Keywords:** magical realism; perception; absence; material; non-material.

**Mots-clés:** réalisme magique; perception; absence; matériel; non-matériel.

### **1. Le réalisme magique ~ Le réel miraculeux. Une poétique de la co-présence**

Le syntagme *réalisme magique* a été utilisé pour la première fois en 1925, lorsque le critique d'art allemand Franz Roh (Roh, 1927) décrivait la tendance manifestée dans la peinture du début du XXème siècle, surtout celle d'après la Première Guerre Mondiale : il s'agit d'une forme caractérisée par l'*objectivité* – une structure solide et cristallisée dans le vague, mais aussi par l'*énigme*, par l'apparence ; une précision des contours sur un fond magique, ce qui crée une dimension parallèle.

En Europe, Massimo Bontempelli<sup>4</sup> publie *L'avventura novecentista* (Bontempelli, 1926), un vrai manifeste du réalisme magique en littérature, un document programmatique dans lequel l'artiste moderne est invité à révéler le sens magique dans et de l'existence

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<sup>4</sup> Écrivain italien qui a fondé en 1926, avec Curzio Malaparte, la revue 900. *Cahiers d'Italie et d'Europe*.

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des gens et des choses. Tout en gardant quelques-unes de ces lignes générales, le syntagme est nuancé par les écrivains hispano-américains, comme conséquence d'une mentalité collective pour laquelle le merveilleux/le miraculeux n'est pas une construction mentale artificielle, mais une partie naturelle du réel quotidien.

En 1947, Arturo Uslar Pietri définit le *realismo magico* (*réalisme magique*) comme une négation poétique de la réalité, dans laquelle l'homme devient un mystère :

[...] Une divination poétique ou bien une négation poétique de la réalité Una adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad. Lo que a falta de otra palabra podrá llamarse un realismo mágico. (Uslar Pietri, 1977, p. 960). [Une divination poétique ou bien une négation poétique de la réalité. Ce qui, faute d'autre dénomination, pourra bien être appelé réalisme magique] (n.t.)

La dénomination qu'il choisit vient, selon la confession du même Uslar Pietri, d'une réactualisation du subconscient, suite à sa très lointaine lecture du travail de Roh. Mais, ce syntagme, loin d'être un simple caprice, lui apparaît comme une fidèle définition de la « misteriosa correspondencia entre un nombre olvidado y un hecho nuevo ». (Uslar Pietri, 1977, p. 960) [la mystérieuse correspondance entre un nom oublié et un fait neuf] (n.t.)

Alejo Carpentier propose, à son tour, le syntagme *real maravilloso* (*réel merveilleux*). Dans sa conception, le *merveilleux* n'est pas un synonyme du *magique* et le *real maravilloso* désigne une technique par laquelle on abolit et on relativise la frontière entre l'histoire, c'est-à-dire le réel contingent, mesurable, et la fiction, qui est le monde imaginé. De plus et encore très important, le *real maravilloso* appartient et est propre et définitoire pour la

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Latinoamérica, surtout dans ce qui la différencie du Vieux Continent :

lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de “estado límite”. ( Prologo <https://lahaine.org/>, Carpentier, 2019) [le merveilleux commence à l'être de façon évidente lorsqu'il surgit d'une alteration inattendue de la réalité (le miracle), d'une révélation privilégiée de la réalité, d'une illumination inhabituelle ou qui favorise singulièrement les richesses inaperçues de la réalité, d'un élargissement des échelles et des catégories de la réalité, perçues avec une particulière intensité en vertu d'une exaltation de l'esprit qui le conduit à une manière d'« état limite »] ( Carpentier, 2021, pp. 15-16).

Comme le syntagme trouve ses racines dans le domaine des arts visuels et vue la direction centrale de notre démarche, qui est l'analyse des formes de l'absence, nous considérons éloquent le tableau de Felice Casorati, *L'attesa (L'Attente)*<sup>5</sup>, œuvre artistique encadrée dans le réalisme magique dont le thème rencontre notre démarche, qui porte sur l'absence.

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<sup>5</sup> 1918-1919, collection privée.

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### Image 1

Felice Casorati, *L'attesa* (*L'Attente*)



Ce tableau de Casorati nous introduit, par la voie du visuel, dans la poétique du réalisme magique et de l'absence : « una precisione realistica di contorni, solidità di materia ben poggiata sul suolo ; e intorno come un'atmosfera di magia, che faccia sentire, attraverso un'inquietudine intensa, quasi un'altra dimensione in cui la vita nostra si proietta... » (Bontempelli, 2014, p. 351). [une précision réaliste des contours, la solidité de la matière bien ancrée dans le sol; et tout autour, une atmosphère comme de magie, capable de faire sentir, par une intense inquiétude, presque une autre dimension dans laquelle notre vie se projette] (n.t.). Voilà donc les éléments autour desquels nous nous proposons d'articuler notre analyse sur le roman *La casa de los espíritus* [*La Maison aux esprits*] et sur sa version cinématographique.

Vues ces prémisses, nos objectifs sont le repérage et l'analyse de plusieurs formes et figurations de l'absence, illustrées par les personnages Clara et Alba, sa petite-fille

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(dans le roman) / Clara et Blanca, sa fille (dans le film) : *l'absence de la matérialité sonore*, concrétisée dans *le mutisme* ou dans *le silence, la mort, le refuge dans l'imaginaire*. Nous limitons notre démarche à l'observation de ces personnages parce qu'ils sont, dans notre vision, représentatifs pour la modalité dans laquelle le monde est figuré dans le réalisme magique. Ces femmes sont les seuls personnages principaux qui soient capables de percevoir pleinement et complètement la fusion des deux plans du réel, plans qui ne sont autre que les deux dimensions de l'existence humaine. La présence de Clara est dominante dans le roman et dans le film, dans une égale mesure ; quant à Blanca, le personnage du film, elle réunit le destin de deux personnages du roman : Blanca et Alba. Cette dernière n'apparaît, d'ailleurs, dans le film qu'enfant. L'effacement de ce personnage tient des contraintes spécifiques à l'art cinématographique et de la vision du réalisateur.

### 2. La coexistence et la fusion des plans

*La Casa de los espíritus [La Maison aux esprits]* est le roman de début de l'écrivaine chilienne Isabel Allende, paru en 1982. Il s'agit de la saga sur quatre générations des familles Del Valle et Trueba, centrée sur le personnage de Clara, fille des Del Valle, devenue, à l'âge de 19 ans, épouse de Esteban Trueba. La trame du roman suit la vie familiale des parents de Clara, ensuite de Clara et de Esteban, de leurs enfants, jusqu'à la génération de la petite-fille Alba, personnage très important dans la stratégie narrative. Dans le roman, il y a deux voix narratives : celle de Esteban, qui assume une narration postérieure, à la première personne, dans laquelle la vérité du souvenir peut être faussée par la postériorité de la relation ; celle d'un autre narrateur, dont l'identité n'est dévoilée qu'à la fin du roman et qui est Alba, dont le récit à la IIIème

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personne englobe, de manière polyphonique, les « cuadernos de anotar la vida » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 80) [cahiers de notes sur la vie] (Allende, 1984, p. 121) de sa grand-mère, qui devient ainsi un narrateur de second degré. Les deux perspectives narratives correspondent, d'ailleurs, à deux visions sur le monde et sur la vie : l'une orientée exclusivement vers le raisonnable, le logique, le concret, le matériel (propre à Esteban), l'autre privilégiant l'intuition, le mystère, le non-matériel. Dans une manière moderne, le roman met en œuvre le pluri perspectivisme, à savoir deux manières différentes de se rapporter au mystère : l'une qui le voit comme une « aberracion » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 4) [abération], un hors *degré zéro* de la normalité et l'autre dans laquelle le mystère n'est autre qu'une partie du réel, de la vie quotidienne.

La version cinématographique apparaît en 1993, réalisée par Bille August et proposant une distribution prestigieuse avec Jeremy Irons, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Winona Ryder, Antonio Banderas, Vanessa Redgrave. La trame du film coïncide, en grandes lignes, avec celle du roman. Toutefois, certains personnages sont éliminés et certains événements sont comprimés ou en raccourci, sans que cela affecte l'histoire centrale narrée. Dans le film, la voix et la focalisation narrative appartiennent exclusivement à Blanca, la fille de Clara et de Esteban, dans une double perspective temporelle : la narration du présent est interrompue par une large analepse qui sert à dévoiler le passé des deux familles. En ligne avec le roman, la narratrice utilise l'héritage scriptural de sa mère, les cahiers-journaux gardés dans la boîte qui est une présence visuelle obsédante dans les cadres du film ; également, la transmission à valeur testamentaire des écrits de Clara est longuement exploitée du point de vue visuel.

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La coexistence des plans, spécifique, d'ailleurs pour le réalisme magique et pour le réel merveilleux, est évidente dans le roman, bien qu'elle soit moins évidente dans le film<sup>6</sup>. Il s'agit d'un plan du concret, du matériel. Des contours précis, qui ne laissent aucun espace au vague, à l'intuition, au mystère. Celui-ci est, pour nous, le plan de la *présence*, dans lequel le monde, les gens et leurs actions sont marqués par + : +contour, +concrétude, +matérialité, +raisonnable. L'autre plan est celui du magique, de l'incertitude des contours, du non-matériel. Nous nommons ce plan celui de *l'absence*, plan dans lequel le monde, les gens et leurs actions sont marqués par - : -contour, -clarté, -matérialité, -raisonnable. Dans ce contexte, Clara réunit les deux plans : son corps, sa matérialité appartiennent au réel, à la concrétude, mais son esprit se rattache au magique. Pour elle, ce qui est absence dans le plan du réel tourne en présence dans la dimension magique. Elle est le personnage autour duquel se construisent les deux narrations : romanesque et filmique.

L'idée de la co-présence des plans est mise en avant dans le film dès le plan général du début (Image 2), un

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<sup>6</sup> C'est, peut-être le syntagme *real maravilloso* (*réel miraculeux*) à décrire avec plus de précision l'idée présente dans le roman et dans le film, celle de la coexistence du monde du réel et du monde de la magie. Ce syntagme exclut, d'ailleurs, la possibilité de la *fabrication artificielle* du miraculeux. Nous rappelons que l'écrivain cubain Alejo Carpentier affirmait dans une interview que le réel miraculeux est « lo real que siendo real es maravilloso. No confundir con el realismo magico, tal como lo entendia Franz Roh, el autor aleman, y que ha llevado muchos pintores a crear un mundo magico con idea preconcebida de hacerlo. No! Lo real maravilloso es lo magico al estado bruto ». ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWDu6\\_LSZEE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWDu6_LSZEE), consulté le 5 juin 2024). [le réel qui, tout en étant réel est merveilleux. A ne pas confondre avec le réalisme magique, dans le sens de Franz Roh, l'auteur allemand, dans la lignée duquel beaucoup de peintres ont créé un monde magique à partir d'une idée préconçue de le faire. Non ! Le réel merveilleux est le magique à l'état brut] (n.t.).

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paysage construit d'après la poétique visuelle du réalisme magique : un premier plan dans lequel les contours sont clairs, bien définis, marquant la présence du monde réel et un plan second dans lequel les contours deviennent vagues, peu clairs, les couleurs se fanent, tout en anticipant l'atmosphère de mystère.

Image 2



L'apparition de la voiture rouge (Image 3) ne perturbe pas les plans, mais s'encadre parfaitement dans le premier, celui du matériel. Son symbolisme – la vie – marqué par la couleur et par le mouvement, ne devient clair que dans les cadres qui suivent, lorsque pour le spectateur se dévoile l'identité des trois passagers : Esteban, Blanca et l'enfant Alba. Ainsi, la voiture devient lieu de rencontre du réel et du magique, lieu de rencontre de deux visions sur le monde et sur la vie.



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### **Image 3**



Le voile porté par Clara dans le film (Image 4), (Image 5) est un autre moyen qui figure la co-présence de deux mondes. Également, il marque la création d'un espace intime, un monde sécurisé pour Clara. Ainsi, fonctionne-t-il comme un filtre à travers lequel la frontière entre les deux mondes se dissipe et l'image se fait, comme dans le réalisme magique, vague, incertaine.

### **Image 4**



Image 5



Clara porte le chapeau à voile dans deux moments-clés, représentant le début et la fin de la relation avec Esteban : c'est le moment de la demande en mariage et c'est encore le moment quand elle quitte son mari. En levant le voile qui couvre son visage, dans la première séquence, Clara fait une tentative de s'intégrer dans le monde de Esteban, d'adopter une modalité de percevoir le monde comme seule matérialité. Ainsi, ce geste marque-t-il la sortie de Clara du double plan. Son retour à sa manière initiale de voir le monde et la vie est figuré par le retour au voile, qui couvre de nouveau son visage et à travers lequel elle re-vient à voir le monde.

### **3. Les significations de l'onomastique féminine. La figuration de l'absence/présence.**

Le propre du réalisme magique est, entre autres, que les noms des personnages acquièrent des significations importantes. Les personnages féminins des quatre générations Del Valle-Trueba portent des noms dont le symbolisme revoie au double plan, étant tous circonscrits à la sphère sémantique de la lumière et du blanc. Or, la lumière est un élément qui, d'une part, peut séparer deux plans, tout en appartenant aux mêmes deux plans.

En espagnol, *Nivea* est le féminin de l'adjectif *niveo*, qui signifie *couvert de neige*, la suggestion de la lumière

étincelante blanche étant évidente (*Diccionario de la lengua española*, n.d., <https://dle.rae.es/>). Clara est le féminin de *claro*, dont le sens est *lumineux, transparent, étincelant*. Blanca est aussi un adjectif féminin, signifiant *blanc*, tandis que *Alba* est soit adjectif féminin qui signifie *blanche*, soit substantif dont le sens est *aube, première lumière du jour avant l'apparition du soleil*. Si l'on se tient au visuel, le film figure ces significations par les vêtements des personnages, qui sont soit blancs, soit dans des nuances claires, avec des transparences et des scintillements.

#### 4. Formes et figurations de l'absence

##### 4.1 Le mutisme et le silence

Le mutisme et le silence sont deux formes de manifestation de l'absence, dans le plan de la matérialité sonore. Tandis que le mutisme marque de longues périodes temporelles, quelques années, par exemple, le silence ne dure que quelques mois et Esteban, notamment, le considère un refuge : « Un día, faltando poco para la fecha del parto, Clara descendió sin previo aviso de su refugio brahmánico y volvió a hablar » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 87) [A quelques jours près de la date prévue pour l'accouchement, Clara descendit sans préavis de son refuge brahmanique et se mit à parler.] (Allende, 1984, p. 131). Le mutisme apparaît pendant plusieurs périodes de la vie de Clara, chaque fois ayant des significations différentes.

La première manifestation apparaît à l'âge de 10 ans seulement, déclenchée par la mort de Rosa, sa sœur – une mort que Clara avait d'ailleurs prédite –, et dure neuf ans, jusqu'à la demande en mariage de Esteban : « El silencio la ocupó enteramente y no volvió a hablar hasta nueve años después, cuando sacó la voz para anunciar que se iba a casar » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024,

p. 31) [Ce silence l'avait envahie totalement et elle ne reparla que neuf ans plus tard, quand elle éleva la voix pour annoncer qu'elle allait elle-même se marier.] (Allende, 1984, p. 51). Pour Clara, le mutisme ne représente qu'absence du matériel sonore, n'impliquant nullement absence de la pensée qui en est la base. Elle continue à communiquer, par exemple, avec la Nana, en écrit. Si l'on fonde notre démarche sur l'idée de la coexistence de deux plans, il s'ensuit que le mutisme de la fille signifie silence pour les autres, mais pour elle c'est une forme de réclusion, de recul du monde matériel, mais présence dans une autre dimension, celle intérieure, spirituelle, magique, une dimension du non-matériel impérissable. Dans cette lignée, on peut interpréter cette première période de mutisme comme une forme de révolte contre la périssabilité de la matière, contre la pourriture et contre une conception purement matérialiste de l'existence humaine. Dans le même temps, la mort, facteur déclencheur du mutisme, signifie également prise de conscience de la matérialité, donc évasion de cette matérialité limitante. Également, les neuf années de mutisme peuvent être interprétés comme ayant un rôle initiatique car Clara, en se retirant dans une forme d'absence, fortifie sa conviction qu'il existe une dualité de la condition humaine, elle comprend que la mort n'est qu'une continuation de la vie, dans une autre dimension. C'est ainsi que l'on peut expliquer son attitude sereine, d'acceptation supérieure de la mort, une conception qu'elle va essayer, d'ailleurs, de transmettre aux autres.

L'entrée dans l'état de mutisme, c'est-à-dire l'absence de la matérialité sonore, s'installe de manière graduelle. Le film marque de manière signifiante ce passage de la présence de la voix vers l'absence de celle-ci (Image 6), (Image 7). Tout d'abord, Clara pousse un cri, matérialisant dans une onomatopée la pensée qui prévoit

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la mort, ensuite elle chuchote quelque chose à sa sœur et le message acquiert présence sonore seulement par la voix de Rosa. Enfin, la fille entre définitivement en état de mutisme, pour neuf années.

**Image 6**



**Image 7**



Il y a quelques éléments visuels dans le film qui suggèrent le mutisme : le regard sans focalisation, la marche fantomatique, lente. D'ailleurs, le scénario du film offre une explication restrictive pour ce retraitement : Clara est persuadée que le fait de parler provoque des accidents, voire la mort.

La deuxième période de mutisme s'installe après quelques bonnes années, pendant le mariage avec Esteban, suite à une action d'extrême violence de l'homme : dans un accès de fureur, Esteban frappe rudement sa femme. Bien que cette fois le mutisme ne soit pas total, car il ne se manifeste que dans la relation avec Esteban, l'entrée dans

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l'état de mutisme est toujours graduelle. Tout d'abord, c'est l'absence physique qui apparaît : « Apenas Clara pudo enderezarse, apartó a Esteban de un empujón, se puso de pie con dificultad y salió del despacho, tratando de caminar erguida » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 151) [A peine Clara put-elle se redresser qu'elle repoussa sans ménagements Esteban, elle se leva avec difficulté et sortit du bureau en s'évertuant à marcher la tête droite.] (Allende, 1984, p. 221), ensuite, c'est l'absence sonore : « Clara no volvió a hablar a su marido nunca más en su vida » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 151) [Clara n'adresse plus la parole à son mari de tout le reste de sa vie.] (Allende, 1984, p. 221) et, enfin, l'absence factuelle du mariage :

Dejó de usar su apellido de casada y se quitó del dedo la fina alianza de oro que él le había colocado más de veinte años atrás, aquella noche memorable en que Barrabás murió asesinado por un cuchillo de carnicero. (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 153). [Elle cesse d'user dès son nom de femme mariée et ôta de son doigt la fine alliance d'or qu'il lui avait passée plus de vingt ans auparavant, au cours de cette soirée mémorable où Barrabás était mort assassiné avec un couteau de boucher.] (Allende, 1984, p. 221).

Ce mutisme ne se conclut qu'à la mort de Clara et c'est une attitude qui marque profondément Esteban. Il peut être interprété comme un châtement, mais aussi comme une manière de se retirer dans un monde de la spiritualité, dans lequel Clara se sent protégée et où elle rencontrera, tour à tour, des personnes inconnues, mais pour lesquelles le magique est une partie du réel (Image 8), (Image 9).

**Image 8**



**Image 9**



Le film, en revanche, n'exploite que l'une des valences du mutisme, à savoir l'absence de la communication verbale entre Clara et son mari et l'absence du contact corporel entre les deux. Dans cette « lecture », le scénario et les images du film ne suggèrent guère la séparation des âmes, ce qui enlève le mystère et renvoie la relation conjugale dans le schéma d'une histoire d'amour qui, tout en étant muette, demeure une histoire d'amour et non pas une forme de l'absence.

La narration rétrospective caractérise le roman et le film, dans une égale mesure. Dans les deux cas, le souvenir / la sauvegarde de la mémoire joue un rôle de déclencheur : par le mécanisme de la mémoire conservée

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soit par l'écrit, soit dans le souvenir, l'absence de Clara se ré-actualise, s'affirmant comme présence.

Le roman débute avec l'évocation de l'enfant Clara, qui est re-portée dans le présent de la narration à l'aide des « cuadernos de anotar la vida » [cahiers de notes sur la vie] mis à profit à une distance de cinquante ans par sa petite-fille Alba. Ainsi, l'écriture (action) et les *cahiers de vie* (produit), les deux se rattachant à Clara<sup>7</sup>, deviennent des éléments par lesquels on conserve la mémoire et on matérialise l'absence : mutisme ou silence, respectivement absence physique, mort :

Mi abuela escribió durante cincuenta años en sus cuadernos de anotar la vida. Escamoteados por

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<sup>7</sup> Esteban s'adonne à l'écriture, lui aussi. Il porte une correspondance écrite avec Rosa, sa fiancée, mais son actin est mécanique et dépourvue de cette fonction essentielle qui est la sauvegarde de la mémoire. Il n'écrit pas à la main, mais utilise une machine à écrire, ce qui fait qu'une autre matérialité, mécanique, non-humaine, s'interpose entre la pensée et *la main qui écrit* (Irina Mavrodin) ; les messages, à leur tour, ne sont autre que simples informations sur le quotidien : « Me había acostumbrado a escribirle a máquina, con una copia que guardaba para mí y que ordenaba por fechas junto a las pocas cartas que recibí de ella. » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 17) [ J'avais pris l'habitude de lui écrire à la machine, en gardant pour moi des doubles que je classais par dates d'envoi avec les rares missives que je regus d'elle] (Allende, 1984, p. 32); « Había tenido que tejer el amor con recuerdos y deseos apremiantes, pero imposibles de satisfacer, con cartas atrasadas y desteñidas que no podían reflejar la pasión de mis sentimientos ni el dolor de su ausencia, porque no tengo facilidad para el género epistolar y mucho menos para escribir sobre mis emociones » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 29). [J'avais dû entretenir cet amour de souvenirs et de désirs ardents mais impossibles à satisfaire, de lettres déjà périmées et délavées et qui ne pouvaient refléter ma flamme ni le mal que me faisait son absence, car je n'ai guère de facilités pour le genre épistolaire, encore moins pour décrire ce que je ressens.] (Allende, 1984, p. 47) Pourtant, il réussit à accéder à cette forme de communication de Clara, à remplacer l'absence avec l'écriture, vingt ans plus tard, après la mort de sa femme. C'est là le moment où Esteban connaît cette forme du silence à laquelle l'écriture donne substance, présence.



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algunos espíritus cómplices. se salvaron milagrosamente de la pira infame donde perecieron tantos otros papeles de la familia. Los tengo aquí, a mis pies, atados con cintas de colores, separados por acontecimientos y no por orden cronológico, tal como ella los dejó antes de irse. Clara los escribió para que me sirvieran ahora para rescatar las cosas del pasado y sobrevivir a mi propio espanto. (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 330) [Cinquante ans durant, grand-mère remplit de son écriture ses cahiers de notes sur la vie. Escamotés par quelques esprits complices, ils échappèrent miraculeusement à l'infâme bûcher où périrent tant d'autres papiers familiaux. Ils sont là à mes pieds, attachés avec des faveurs de couleur, classés au gré des événements et non par ordre chronologique, tels qu'elle les laissa avant de s'éclipser. Clara les rédigea pour me permettre aujourd'hui de sauver les choses du passé et de survivre à ma propre terreur.] (Allende, 1984, p. 448).

Le film débute (Image 10) avec l'arrivée de Esteban, de Blanca et de l'enfant Alba dans leurs déjà longtemps abandonnée maison. L'absence est figurée par de divers éléments du décor : les toiles blanches qui couvrent les meubles, les persiennes qui obscurcissent les fenêtres, les portes fermées à clé. D'ailleurs, la récurrence des espaces vides est définitoire pour le film et soutient l'idée d'absence.

Image 10



La porte qui s'ouvre et la lumière qui pénètre dans la chambre font le passage du présent vers le passé, au niveau de la narration filmique et figurent, au niveau visuel, la fusion du réel et du miraculeux. Les paroles de Blanca « I think that mama is with us right now » [« Je pense que maman est ici »], (t.n.) confirme que le film s'inscrit dans la poétique du réalisme magique et déclenchent, au niveau narratif, le flux de la mémoire.

La séquence (Image11) qui s'ensuit présente l'enfant Clara qui est en train d'écrire. D'ailleurs, il y a plusieurs images dans le film qui insistent, tout comme la narration romanesque, sur l'acte d'écrire perçu comme modalité d'évasion ou de séparation du réel<sup>8</sup>. Encore plus, on

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<sup>8</sup> Isabel Allende transpose dans une œuvre romanesque sa propre conception sur l'écriture comme mécanisme de refuge et rempart contre l'oubli : « Para mí, la vida se convierte en realidad cuando escribo sobre ella. Lo que no escribo, es borrado por el viento del olvido. [...] La escritura es una introspección silenciosa, un viaje a las oscuras cavernas de la memoria y de el alma. La ficción, como la memoria, va desde revelación a revelación. Escribo porque necesito recordar y superar ». ([https://isabelallende.com/es/musings#why\\_i\\_write](https://isabelallende.com/es/musings#why_i_write), consulté le 6

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confère à l'écriture une fonction thérapeutique (Image 12) et une autre qui vise la conservation de la mémoire, à valeur didactique et éducative : comprendre l'existence, les événements et leur dimension magique.

**Image 11**



**Image 12**



Dans le film, l'acte d'écrire et les journaux de Clara apparaissent dans plusieurs cadres, marquant, le plus

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juin 2024) [Pour moi, la vie devient réalité quand j'écris sur la vie. Ce que je n'écris pas, c'est balayé par le vent de l'oubli [...] L'écriture est une manière silencieuse d'introspection, un voyage dans les cavernes obscures de la mémoire et de l'âme. La fiction, tout comme la mémoire, poursuit de révélation en révélation. J'écris parce que j'ai besoin de me souvenir et de passer outre] (t.n).

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souvent, le passage de la présence (voix, matérialité sonore) à l'absence (mutisme ou silence). Par exemple, l'enfant Clara écrit et regarde, dans le même temps, Esteban qui fait la cour à Rosa, sa sœur. Dans ces moments, Clara plonge dans le silence, mais elle remplace l'absence de la matérialité sonore avec une action, l'écriture, et avec une autre matérialité sonore, la musique qu'on entend au gramophone. Cette forme de l'absence est doublée par des mouvements qui marquent la présence : Clara fait mouvoir les objets par la force de la pensée, tandis que les mouvements de ses yeux montrent l'intentionnalité de ses actions et la forte concentration qu'elle met en marche.

### **4.2 La mort**

Si dans la dimension réelle la mort est perçue comme une absence totale, Clara et ensuite Alba y voient un passage vers une autre forme de présence ; pour elles, la mort n'est qu'un seuil vers lequel elles regardent en toute sérénité.

La réalité physique de la mort est évoquée à plusieurs reprises dans le roman et dans le film : la mort de l'oncle Marcos, la mort de Rosa, la mort de Nívea, celle de Severo, la mort de Férula, de Clara et, enfin la mort de Esteban.

Le premier contact de l'enfant Clara avec la réalité de la mort est la disparition de l'oncle Marcos, moment qui marque, pour elle, la révélation du fait que la mort est une forme de disparition physique, mais aussi une forme de présence autre/outré. D'ailleurs, l'oncle Marcos est l'incarnation de l'absence présente, surtout que ce sont les livres qu'il laisse en héritage à Clara qui initient l'enfant dans cette connaissance autre du monde. L'histoire de ce personnage n'est pas présentée dans le film et Clara

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apparaît comme déjà initiée à percevoir le monde dans sa double dimension.

La mort de Rosa est un élément présent dans le roman et dans le film, avec le même rôle : déclencheur du premier mutisme de Clara. En dépit de son apparence, Rosa représente la plus fruste matérialité ; par conséquent, sa mort est pour toute sa famille une actualisation de l'absence. Clara est, par contre, la seule à regarder en toute sérénité, même avec un certain détachement, la mort et l'image macabre de l'autopsie du cadavre de sa sœur : pour elle, la mort ne provoque ni horreur, ni effroi.

C'est justement cette perception qu'a Clara de la mort, comme une autre dimension de la vie, qui transforme la fillette dans le guide silencieux qui conduit Esteban vers le corps dépourvu de vie de sa fiancée Rosa :

Por costumbre, las mujeres y los niños no asistían a los entierros, ése era un oficio de hombres, pero Clara consiguió mezclarse a última hora con el cortejo, para acompañar a su hermana Rosa. Sentí su manita enguantada aferrada a la mía y durante todo el trayecto la tuve a mi lado, pequeña sombra silenciosa que removía una ternura desconocida en mi alma. En ese momento yo tampoco me di cuenta que Clara no había dicho ni una palabra en dos días y pasarían tres más antes de que la familia se alarmara por su silencio. (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 27). [Comme le voulait la coutume, femmes et enfants n'assistaient pas aux enterrements, réservés aux hommes, mais à la dernière minute Clara réussit à se mêler au cortège pour accompagner sa sœur Rosa. Je sentis sa petite main gantée s'accrocher à la mienne et pendant tout le trajet elle se tint à mes côtés, ombre frêle et silencieuse qui remuait tout au fond de moi une tendresse

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inconnue. À ce moment-là, je ne pouvais moi non plus me rendre compte que Clara n'avait pas proféré un seul mot depuis deux jours, et qu'il s'en passerait encore trois avant que la famille ne s'inquiétât de son mutisme.] (Allende, 1984, p. 48).

L'enfant Alba va reproduire le même geste, lorsqu'elle guide son grand-père vers le corps-cadavre de Clara, sa grand-mère (Image 13), (Image 14).

**Image 13**



**Image 14**



De cette manière, Clara et Alba représentent le début et la fin du processus initiatique parcouru par Esteban, à son insu, tout d'abord et bien content, à la fin, de sa propre transformation. D'ailleurs, dans le moment de la mort, Esteban est de nouveau accompagné par son

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premier guide, Clara, dont l'absence redevient présence (Image 15) :

... Yo me senté a su lado a esperar con él y la muerte no tardó en llegarle apaciblemente, sorprendiéndolo en el sueño. Tal vez soñaba que era su mujer quien le acariciaba la mano y lo besaba en la frente, porque en los últimos días ella no lo abandonó ni un instante, lo seguía por la casa, lo espiaba por encima del hombro cuando leía en la biblioteca y se acostaba con él en la noche, con su hermosa cabeza coronada de rizos apoyada en su hombro. Al principio era un halo misterioso, pero a medida que mi abuelo fue perdiendo para siempre la rabia que lo atormentó durante toda su existencia, ella apareció tal como era en sus mejores tiempos, riéndose con todos sus dientes y alborotando a los espíritus con su vuelo fugaz. También nos ayudó a escribir y gracias a su presencia, Esteban Trueba pudo morir feliz murmurando su nombre, Clara, clarísima, clarividente. (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 329). [Je me suis assise à son chevet, partageant son attente, et la mort n'a pas tardé à venir le chercher. Elle l'a surpris dans son sommeil, paisiblement. Peut-être rêvait-il que c'était sa femme qui lui caressait la main et lui déposait un baiser sur le front, toujours est-il que dans les derniers jours, celle-ci ne le quitta pas un instant, elle le suivait partout dans la maison, regardait par-dessus son épaule quand il lisait dans la bibliothèque, s'allongeait la nuit à ses côtés, sa belle tête auréolée de boucles appuyée contre son épaule. Au début, ce n'était qu'un halo mystérieux, mais au fur et à mesure que grand-père se départait pour toujours de cette rage qui l'avait poursuivie toute sa vie, elle apparut telle qu'elle avait été en ses plus beaux jours, riant de toutes ses dents,

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ameutant les esprits de son vol fugace. Elle nous aida aussi dans nos pages d'écriture et grâce à sa présence, Esteban Trueba put mourir heureux en murmurant son nom : Clara si claire, ma clairvoyante Clara.] (Allende, 1984, pp. 466-467).

### Image 15



En l'appelant ainsi, Esteban montre avoir finalement compris la vision de Clara sur le monde et sur la vie.

La forme ultime d'absence de Clara du monde matériel est la mort. Elle quitte ce monde graduellement, la mort s'installe lentement et, dans les tout premiers moments ce n'est qu'elle qui s'en rend compte. « Clara murió el mismo día Alba cumplió siete años que Entonces comenzó a hacer secretas disposiciones para partir. El primer anuncio de su muerte fue perceptible sólo para ella » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 220) [Clara mourut le jour même où Alba allait avoir sept ans. Le premier signe annonciateur de sa mort ne fut perceptible qu'à elle seule.] (Allende, 1984, p. 313). « Parecía irse desprendiendo del mundo, cada vez más ligera, más transparente, más alada ». (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 220) [On aurait dit qu'elle se détachait des choses d'ici-bas, de



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jour en jour plus légère, plus transparente, plus aérienne.] (Allende, 1984, p. 314). Ici, l'on peut parler d'un double transfert : d'une part, c'est la dé-matérialisation du corps, ce qui signifie le passage de la frontière entre le plan du concret et celui du non-matériel. Également, c'est le passage, vers les générations futures, d'un savoir sur l'appréhension du monde. Si Clara avait été choisie comme continuatrice de son oncle Marcos, Alba, sa petite-fille hérite l'acquis matériel de sa grand-mère – les « cuadernos de anotar la vida » [cahiers de notes sur la vie]. – et celui spirituel, également. Il est important de rappeler, à ce point, que le jour de la mort de Clara coïncide avec le septième anniversaire de Alba. C'est un chiffre symbolique, qui renvoie à la complétude d'un cycle, à l'arrivée de ce qu'on appelle *l'âge de la raison* et au passage de ladite *période œdipienne*<sup>9</sup> : c'est un moment qui marque le passage de l'enfant vers une étape dans laquelle il est capable de percevoir, également, la non-matérialité.

### Image 16



Le film insiste sur ce transfert (Image 16), figuré par plusieurs éléments visuels : l'enfant Alba porte une robe

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Freud, Sigmund, *Trois Essais sur la théorie sexuelle*, Paris, Folio essais, 1987 ; Winnicott, D. W., « Analyse d'un enfant en période de latence », *Processus de maturation chez l'enfant*, Paris, Payot, 1970.

blanche qui rappelle celle portée par Clara, dans son enfance ; ensuite, la grand-mère offre à Alba des ailes d'ange<sup>10</sup> – symbole de la dé-matérialisation et de l'existence éthérée – en tissu transparent et étincelant comme la robe de la grand-mère.

### **4.3 Le refuge dans l'imaginaire**

Une dernière forme de l'absence sur laquelle nous nous arrêtons est le refuge dans l'imaginaire. Pour résister aux horreurs de la prison politique, pour préserver la raison, Alba (dans le roman) ou Blanca (dans le film) apprennent à s'évader de la prison en (se) créant un autre monde, et cela suite à la visite d'une Clara immatérielle (elle était déjà morte) : « Clara trajo la idea salvadora de escribir con el pensamiento, sin lápiz ni papel, para mantener la mente ocupada, evadirse de la perrera y vivir » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 316) [Clara lui délivra l'idée salvatrice d'écrire mentalement, sans crayon ni papier, afin de s'occuper l'esprit, de s'évader de la niche, de vivre.] (Allende, 1984, p. 446). C'est toujours une forme de dé-matérialisation, différente de celles qui conduisent à la mort. Alba arrive à ignorer le matériel, la vulnérabilité de son corps, comme forme de refus de la mort : « ... Pero luego inventó una clave para recordar en orden, y entonces pudo hundirse en su propio relato tan profundamente, que dejó de comer, de rascarse, de olerse, de quejarse, y llegó a vencer, uno por uno, sus innumerables dolores » (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 317) [Mais, par la suite, elle s'inventa un code pour se la

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<sup>10</sup>La présence des ailes est évoquée, d'ailleurs, dans le texte romanesque également : « Parecía irse desprendiendo del mundo, cada vez más ligera, más transparente, más alada ». (<https://www.suneo.mx/literatura/>, Allende, 2024, p. 220) [On aurait dit qu'elle se détachait des choses d'ici-bas, de jour en jour plus légère, plus transparente, plus aérienne]. (Allende, 1984, p. 314).

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remémorer en bon ordre et elle put alors s'enfoncer si profondément dans son propre récit qu'elle en cessa de manger, de se gratter, de renifler, de gémir sur elle-même, et qu'elle parvint à surmonter une à une ses innombrables douleurs.] (Allende, 1984, p. 447). Ainsi, Alba/Blanca devient absente de son propre corps.

Le film insiste, par le visuel, sur la communication entre les deux plans, dans la séquence de l'arrivée de Clara dans la cellule de Blanca. Une trappe dans le plafond, à travers laquelle la lumière inonde l'espace carcéral, en contraste avec l'obscurité de la prison, est l'élément qui assure la communication (Image 17).

Image 17



Cette technique du clair-obscur par laquelle on figure le mystère, utilisée à profit dans ce cadre, place encore une fois le film sous le signe du réalisme magique.

### Conclusions

*La Casa de los espíritus* [*La Maison aux esprits*], le roman et la version scénique que nous avons analysés s'inscrivent dans une poétique de l'absence, propre au réalisme magique, une poétique caractérisée par la co-

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présence des plans. Formes et figurations de l'absence dans l'un des plans peuvent être perçues comme formes de la présence dans l'autre plan. Par exemple, le mutisme et le silence sont formes d'absence de la parole, de la voix, mais desquelles naît une présence, l'écriture. Ensuite, l'écriture, à son tour, exprime par la non-voix, cette perception des deux plans qui n'est plus verbalisée. En allant plus loin, la mort est une absence dans le monde de la matière, mais c'est par la mort que l'in arrive à une autre dimension de la présence, perçue seulement par les personnages (du roman et du film) qui peuvent percevoir le magique du monde réel. Enfin, le refuge dans l'imaginaire instaure, d'une part, une absence auto-imposée du monde contingent et, d'autre part, une évasion dans un monde d'une présence dé-corporisée.

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# CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES IN MAGIC REALISM MOVIES – *THE GREEN MILE*<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

*This paper investigates conversational implicatures within the context of magic realism cinema, with a specific focus on Frank Darabont's The Green Mile. In the genre of magic realism, where the boundaries between reality and the supernatural blur, understanding the deeper layers of dialogue is crucial for deciphering thematic elements and character motivations. The film, which blends supernatural events with human drama, serves as an ideal case study for exploring how conversational implicatures shape meaning and viewer interpretation. Using Grice's Cooperative Principle as the theoretical framework, the study analyzes how characters' dialogue conveys implicit meanings beyond the literal interpretation. The Cooperative Principle posits that conversational participants collaborate to communicate meaning, and from this, conversational implicatures emerge—hidden messages that are interpreted based on contextual clues and shared knowledge. The research method involves a corpus analysis of selected dialogue excerpts*

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*from The Green Mile, focusing on the pragmatic strategies employed by characters. The study's results demonstrate that conversational implicatures significantly enhance the portrayal of supernatural phenomena, moral dilemmas, and thematic motifs in the film. For example, specific scenes reveal how subtle dialogue choices allow viewers to grasp deeper moral and emotional undertones. By dissecting key moments, the analysis highlights how these strategies engage the audience, enriching their understanding of the narrative. Beyond The Green Mile, the findings also offer broader insights into the relationship between language and meaning within the magic realism genre. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse in film studies by illustrating the importance of pragmatics in cinematic storytelling, particularly in genres where reality and the supernatural intersect.*

**Keywords:** conversational implicature; magic realism; pragmatics; meaning; context.

### **Introduction**

Magic realism in cinema offers a unique storytelling experience, blending fantastical elements with the mundane to create narratives that transcend conventional boundaries. Frank Darabont's 1999 film *The Green Mile*, based on Stephen King's novel, exemplifies this genre, weaving together themes of supernatural intervention, redemption, and the human condition within the confines of a Southern prison during the Great Depression. Central to the film's narrative complexity are the dialogues among characters, which serve as conduits for conveying deeper meanings and thematic exploration.

The study of conversational implicatures plays a pivotal role in understanding how meaning is communicated beyond the literal level in both everyday conversation and artistic narratives. Grounded in Grice's

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Cooperative Principle, implicature theory posits that speakers often imply additional meanings through indirect communication, relying on shared knowledge and contextual cues. This theoretical framework has been widely explored in linguistic and pragmatic studies to analyze how implicit messages are constructed and understood in various forms of communication. However, its application to cinematic narratives, particularly within the genre of magic realism, opens new avenues for exploring how language functions to blur the lines between reality and the supernatural. Magic realism, as a genre, presents a unique narrative style where the fantastical is intertwined with the mundane, and the audience is invited to accept this coexistence without question. Implicatures become essential in this context, as filmmakers often employ subtle dialogue cues to signal the presence of supernatural elements, leaving much to the audience's interpretation. Studies on magic realism (Bowers:2004, Faris:2004) have highlighted how the genre relies heavily on the unspoken, using implicit meanings to deepen the narrative's thematic and symbolic dimensions. These works demonstrate that the manipulation of language, particularly through implicatures, allows for the seamless blending of the real and the fantastical, enhancing the viewer's engagement with the narrative. This paper delves into the realm of conversational implicatures within *The Green Mile*, analyzing how linguistic cues and contextual nuances contribute to the film's magic realism aesthetic and thematic depth.

### 1. Literature Review:

Conversational implicature is a central concept in the study of pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics concerned with language use in context. Pragmatics explores how speakers convey and interpret meaning beyond the literal

content of their utterances. This review examines the foundational theories of conversational implicature, key developments, and recent research trends, synthesizing insights from seminal works and contemporary studies.

The concept of conversational implicature was first systematically introduced by H.P. Grice in his seminal work "Logic and Conversation" (1975). Grice proposed that conversational implicatures are meanings inferred by listeners based on the assumption that speakers are adhering to certain conversational maxims under the cooperative principle. The cooperative principle states: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975). Grice identified four maxims that speakers typically follow:

1. **Maxim of Quantity:** Provide the right amount of information.
2. **Maxim of Quality:** Do not provide false information or that for which you lack evidence.
3. **Maxim of Relation:** Be relevant.
4. **Maxim of Manner:** Avoid obscurity and ambiguity; be brief and orderly.

These maxims help listeners infer implicatures when speakers appear to flout one or more of them. For instance, if a speaker says, "It's cold in here" while standing near an open window, the listener might infer an implicature that the speaker wants the window closed, despite the speaker not stating this directly.

Existing research (Chapman, 2019; Dynel, 2011) has explored the role of pragmatics in literary and cinematic storytelling, emphasizing the significance of implicatures in shaping audience interpretation. Within the realm of film studies, scholars have analyzed how directors and screenwriters use dialogue to convey hidden meanings,

drawing attention to the interaction between language and visual storytelling (Bordwell, 2019; Mulvey, 2009). In magic realism cinema, this interaction is even more pronounced, as the genre's reliance on ambiguity and surrealism demands a more nuanced approach to dialogue. Studies on works by directors like Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu (Jones, 2010; Smith, 2015) have explored the ways in which conversational implicatures contribute to the narrative complexity of magic realism films, often leaving key elements unspoken but deeply implied.

Despite the growing body of research on pragmatics in film (Dynel, 2016; Piazza et al., 2011) there remains a gap in the exploration of conversational implicatures specifically within the context of magic realism cinema. While scholars (Valdes, 1991) have acknowledged the importance of dialogue in constructing the magical within the real, few studies have delved deeply into the pragmatic strategies that underpin this process. This paper aims to fill that gap by focusing on Frank Darabont's *The Green Mile*, a film that blends supernatural elements with a deeply human story. Through a detailed analysis of the film's dialogue, this study examines how conversational implicatures are used to convey implicit meanings, enhancing the film's thematic and emotional depth. By situating *The Green Mile* within the broader context of magic realism and pragmatic theory, the research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of language in cinematic storytelling, particularly in genres that challenge conventional boundaries between reality and fantasy.

### **1.1. Developments in Theoretical Frameworks**

Subsequent research has expanded upon Grice's framework, challenging and refining the understanding of

implicature. Levinson (2000) introduced the notion of generalized conversational implicatures (GCIs) and particularized conversational implicatures (PCIs). GCIs are inferences that typically arise from the use of certain expressions in most contexts, whereas PCIs depend heavily on specific contextual factors. Moreover, Relevance Theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), reinterpreted Gricean maxims under the broader principle of relevance. According to this theory, communication is guided by the expectation of relevance, where relevance is defined in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort. This theory posits that speakers aim to be as relevant as possible, and listeners use this expectation to infer implicatures.

#### **1.1.1. Empirical Research and Applications**

Empirical studies have provided further insights into how conversational implicatures are processed and understood. For example, research by Noveck and Sperber (2007) investigated how children develop the ability to understand implicatures, revealing that this competence evolves with age and cognitive development. Their findings suggest that the ability to recognize and interpret implicatures is closely linked to the theory of mind and the ability to understand others' perspectives. Additionally, cross-cultural studies, such as those by Matsumoto (1989), have examined how conversational implicatures vary across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Matsumoto's research demonstrated that Japanese speakers often rely more on context and shared knowledge to convey implicatures than English speakers, highlighting the importance of cultural norms in pragmatic inference.

**1.1.2. Recent Trends and Future Directions**

In recent years, research on conversational implicatures has increasingly intersected with computational linguistics and artificial intelligence. Advances in natural language processing (NLP) have spurred interest in modeling implicature generation and understanding in machines. For instance, recent studies by Potts et al. (2020) have explored how machine learning algorithms can be trained to recognize and generate conversational implicatures, aiming to enhance human-computer interaction. Another emerging area of research involves the integration of neurocognitive methods to study implicature processing. Studies using techniques like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and event-related potentials (ERP) have begun to uncover the neural correlates of implicature comprehension. For example, research by Spotorno et al. (2012) showed that different brain regions are activated when individuals process implicatures compared to literal statements, suggesting distinct cognitive mechanisms at play. In summary, the study of conversational implicatures remains a vibrant and evolving field within pragmatics. Starting with Grice's foundational maxims, the field has expanded through the contributions of researchers like Levinson and the development of alternative theories such as Relevance Theory. Empirical studies have enriched our understanding of how implicatures are processed across different ages and cultures. Additionally, recent advancements in computational linguistics and neurocognitive methods offer promising avenues for future research, potentially transforming our understanding of human communication and enhancing technological applications. As the field continues to evolve, it will undoubtedly yield further insights into the

intricate mechanisms underlying everyday conversational exchanges.

### **1.2. *Magic Realism in Cinema:***

Magic realism, a genre characterized by the integration of fantastical elements into realistic settings, has captivated audiences and scholars alike for its ability to challenge perceptions of reality and expand the narrative possibilities of storytelling. García (2009) explores the poetics of the Spanish Civil War in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, illustrating how magical elements serve as allegories for historical traumas and societal injustices. Similarly, Smith (2015) examines Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie*, highlighting how whimsical dialogues and visual metaphors evoke profound emotional responses from viewers, blurring the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. These studies underscore the thematic richness and narrative complexity inherent in magic realism cinema, inviting further exploration into its cinematic manifestations.

### **1.3. *Conversational Implicatures in Film:***

Conversational implicatures, a concept introduced by Grice (1975) in his theory of cooperative principles, refer to the implied meanings conveyed through dialogue and contextual cues. Within the realm of cinema, filmmakers utilize implicatures to enrich storytelling, inviting audiences to actively engage with the narrative and infer deeper layers of meaning. Anderson (2012) investigates implicature in the films of Quentin Tarantino, demonstrating how ambiguous dialogues and nonverbal cues contribute to the creation of tension and suspense, shaping viewers' interpretations and emotional responses. Similarly, Brown (2018) explores implicature in the works of Alfred Hitchcock, highlighting the director's mastery in

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manipulating audience expectations through subtle linguistic cues and visual symbolism. These studies illuminate the significance of conversational implicatures in cinematic discourse, shaping viewers' interpretations and emotional responses to the narrative.

### **2. Analyzing *The Green Mile*:**

*The Green Mile* unfolds within the confines of Cold Mountain Penitentiary, where the lives of death row inmates and prison guards intersect in unexpected ways. At the heart of the narrative is the relationship between Paul Edgecomb, portrayed by Tom Hanks, and John Coffey, a gentle giant with miraculous healing powers. Through their interactions, Darabont explores themes of justice, redemption, and the supernatural, inviting viewers to ponder profound questions about the nature of good and evil. Dialogues in *The Green Mile* are imbued with deeper meanings and thematic resonance, as characters navigate moral dilemmas and existential quandaries within the stark reality of the prison environment.

One notable aspect of *The Green Mile* is the use of conversational implicatures to convey complex emotions and thematic subtext. For example, the exchanges between Paul Edgecomb and John Coffey are marked by moments of profound insight and emotional resonance, as Coffey's otherworldly wisdom challenges Edgecomb's preconceptions about justice and morality. Through subtle linguistic cues and nonverbal gestures, Darabont invites viewers to delve into the complexities of human nature and the ambiguity of truth, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy. *The Green Mile* serves as a compelling example of magic realism cinema, where the supernatural intersects with the mundane to explore profound themes of faith, redemption, and the human condition. Through the lens of conversational



implicatures, we gain insight into the intricate web of meanings woven throughout the film's dialogues and interactions, enriching the viewing experience and inviting deeper engagement with the narrative. As audiences navigate the nuances of language and interpretation, they are drawn into a world where the extraordinary becomes ordinary, and the mundane takes on profound significance.

### **3. Conversational implicatures at work in *The Green Mile***

Stephen King's *The Green Mile* is a narrative replete with intricate character interactions and subtle exchanges that carry profound meanings. As mentioned above, the significant elements in these interactions is the use of conversational implicatures, a concept central to pragmatics. Conversational implicatures are meanings inferred by the listener based on the assumption that the speaker is adhering to certain conversational principles, even when these meanings are not explicitly stated (Grice, 1975). The novel demonstrates how understated communication can enhance the depth and emotional impact of a story, showcasing the power of what is left unsaid. To begin with, the character of John Coffey embodies the use of conversational implicature through his simple yet loaded statements. For instance, when Coffey repeatedly says, "I'm tired, boss. Tired of bein' on the road, lonely as a sparrow in the rain... Tired of never having me a buddy to be with, to tell me where we's goin' to, coming from or why" (King, 1996), the literal meaning is clear. However, the implicature extends beyond the words, revealing his profound exhaustion with the injustices and cruelty of the world. The audience infers a deeper sense of Coffey's inner turmoil and his desire for

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peace, something that is not explicitly stated but powerfully communicated through implicature.

Furthermore, the interactions between Paul Edgecomb and his colleagues often rely on implicature to convey solidarity and understanding in a grim environment. For instance, during the execution scenes, much of the dialogue is sparse, yet laden with meaning. When Paul says, "We each owe a death – there are no exceptions – but, oh God, sometimes *The Green Mile* seems so long" (King, 1996), it is an acknowledgment of their shared burden. The implicature here is that all the guards understand the moral weight of their duties, even if they do not express it overtly. This shared understanding, built on implicature, reinforces the bond among the characters. Moreover, the dynamic between Percy Wetmore and the other guards illustrates the misuse and misinterpretation of implicatures. Percy's lack of understanding of the unspoken rules and his overtly aggressive behavior create friction. His inability to grasp the subtleties of implicature and the underlying meanings of his colleagues' remarks marks him as an outsider. This is particularly evident when Paul and the other guards subtly try to reprimand Percy, using implicatures that Percy fails to comprehend, thus escalating tensions. In addition, the narrative employs implicatures to enrich the themes of justice and mercy.

The subtext in the conversations about the inmates often reflects broader societal critiques. For instance, when discussing Delacroix's execution, the guards' dialogues imply their internal conflict and the ethical dilemmas they face, despite the surface-level discussions being about procedural details. This use of implicature adds layers to the narrative, engaging readers in the moral complexities without overtly stating them. The nuanced use of conversational implicatures in *The Green Mile*

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exemplifies how understated communication can convey complex emotions and ethical considerations effectively. Through characters' dialogues and interactions, Stephen King masterfully uses implicature to enhance the depth of the story, allowing readers to engage with the underlying themes more profoundly. The power of what is left unsaid becomes a crucial narrative tool, demonstrating the effectiveness of conversational implicatures in literature.

The study of conversational implicatures within literature (Grice, 1989; Simpson, 1993) offers profound insights into the subtleties of human communication and the layers of meaning that go beyond the literal words spoken. *The Green Mile*, a novel by Stephen King, serves as an exemplary corpus for analyzing these nuanced communicative strategies. This novel, set in the 1930s on death row at the Cold Mountain Penitentiary, is rich with interactions that convey deep emotional and moral complexities through understated dialogue. The choice of *The Green Mile* as a corpus for this analysis is driven by its layered dialogue and the way King uses conversation to develop character and theme. The novel's setting, a death row prison block, inherently demands a form of communication where much is implied rather than stated outright. This context provides a fertile ground for examining how implicatures function in high-stakes, emotionally charged environments.

In analyzing *The Green Mile*, particular attention is paid to key dialogues that illustrate the use of Gricean maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. For example, the repeated, seemingly simple statements by John Coffey are rich with implicatures that reveal his inner state and moral perspective. Similarly, the sparse yet loaded interactions between Paul Edgecomb and his colleagues exemplify how implicatures can create a shared

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understanding and reinforce the bonds between characters.

Additionally, the analysis considers how the misuse or misunderstanding of implicatures contributes to character development and plot progression. Percy Wetmore's inability to grasp the unspoken rules and nuances of his colleagues' conversations highlights his role as an antagonist and his isolation from the group.

By focusing on these aspects, the analysis aims to uncover the layers of meaning in *The Green Mile* and demonstrate how conversational implicatures contribute to the novel's thematic richness and emotional resonance. This approach not only provides a deeper understanding of King's narrative techniques but also illustrates the broader implications of implicature in literature, enhancing our appreciation of how authors convey complex ideas and emotions through subtle, indirect communication.

This corpus, therefore, serves as an ideal case study for exploring the power of conversational implicatures in storytelling, offering valuable insights into the mechanics of understated communication and its impact on readers. Through this analysis, we aim to shed light on the intricate ways in which Stephen King uses implicature to weave a narrative that is both compelling and profoundly moving.

### 3.1. "He's got the whole world in his hands."

**Context:** Paul Edgecomb talking about John Coffey.

**Implicature:** Paul suggests Coffey's extraordinary abilities without directly stating them.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quality (suggests more than he knows to be true).

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**Analysis:** By using a biblical reference, Paul implies that Coffey has a miraculous, almost divine power. The reverence in Paul's tone enhances this implicature, suggesting that Coffey possesses a kind of spiritual or supernatural strength.

### 3.2. "I tried to take it back, but it was too late."

**Context:** John Coffey explaining the murders.

**Implicature:** Coffey's words imply he tried to save the girls rather than harm them.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quantity (provides less information than expected).

**Analysis:** The statement implies regret and an attempt at redemption. Coffey's sorrowful expression and remorseful tone suggest his good intentions, despite the tragic outcome

### 3.3. "I'm tired, boss. Tired of bein' on the road, lonely as a sparrow in the rain."

**Context:** Coffey expressing his weariness to Paul.

**Implicature:** Indicates Coffey's emotional and spiritual exhaustion.

**Maxim Flouted:** Manner (metaphorically vague).

**Analysis:** Coffey's use of a metaphor suggests a deep, existential fatigue. His slumped posture and weary eyes reinforce the depth of his exhaustion, both physically and emotionally.

### 3.4. "Sometimes the Green Mile seems so long."

**Context:** Paul reflecting on his experiences.

**Implicature:** Suggests the emotional burden and impact of his time on death row.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quantity (understates the severity of his experience).

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**Analysis:** The statement uses the “Green Mile” as a metaphor for enduring emotional strain. Paul’s reflective tone and distant gaze add layers to the implicature, indicating the prolonged psychological toll.

### **3.5. “You can’t hide what’s in your heart.”**

**Context:** Paul’s advice to Percy.

**Implicature:** Implies that true intentions and feelings will eventually be revealed.

**Maxim Flouted:** Manner (general rather than specific).

**Analysis:** The advice suggests an inevitability of truth emerging. Paul’s serious tone and direct eye contact emphasize the inevitability and moral weight of the statement.

### **3.6. “We each owe a death, there are no exceptions, but oh God, sometimes the Green Mile seems so long.”**

**Context:** Paul Edgecomb narrating.

**Implicature:** Reflects on the inevitability of death and the burden of life’s journey.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quantity (suggests more profound truths indirectly).

**Analysis:** The phrase “owe a death” implicates the unavoidable fate awaiting everyone, while “the Green Mile seems so long” underscores the suffering endured during life. Paul’s somber tone adds to the reflective and heavy nature of the statement.

### **3.7. “You be still now, you hear? You be so quiet and so small and you be still.”**

**Context:** John Coffey speaking to Melinda Moores.

**Implicature:** Comforts Melinda by implying safety and calmness.

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**Maxim Flouted:** Quantity (less direct instruction).

**Analysis:** Coffey's gentle tone and repetitive reassurance suggest a soothing presence. The implicature is that she will be safe and at peace, conveyed through the calmness of his voice.

**3.8. "He killed them with their love. That's how it is every day, all over the world."**

**Context:** John Coffey explaining the death of the Detterick twins.

**Implicature:** Highlights the paradox of love leading to harm.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quality (seems exaggerated or metaphorical).

**Analysis:** Coffey's statement implies a broader truth about human nature and the destructive potential of love. The serious, almost resigned tone suggests a deep understanding of this tragic irony.

**3.9. "He's simple, like a child."**

**Context:** Paul describing John Coffey.

**Implicature:** Coffey is innocent and pure-hearted.

**Maxim Flouted:** Quantity (less detailed than expected).

**Analysis:** Paul's description implies Coffey's lack of guile and inherent goodness. The comparison to a child suggests a purity that contrasts with his imposing physical presence and the accusations against him.

**3.10. "I can feel it, it's like bees stinging me."**

**Context:** John Coffey describing his pain.

**Implicature:** Coffey feels intense, pervasive pain.

**Maxim Flouted:** Manner (metaphorically vague).

**Analysis:** The metaphor of bees stinging implies sharp, incessant pain. Coffey's pained expression and

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distressed tone convey the intensity of his suffering, giving the audience a vivid sense of his torment

The analysis of conversational implicatures in Stephen King's *The Green Mile* reveals several significant insights into the ways in which understated communication enhances the narrative's emotional and thematic depth. Through the examination of key dialogues and interactions within the novel, several partial conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the use of implicatures significantly contributes to character development, particularly in the portrayal of John Coffey. His repeated, ostensibly simple statements, such as "I'm tired, boss," serve as a poignant example of how implicatures convey his profound emotional exhaustion and moral fatigue. These implicatures allow readers to infer deeper meanings about Coffey's inner world and his perception of the injustices he faces, adding layers to his character without overt exposition.

Secondly, the interactions among the prison guards, especially those involving Paul Edgecomb, illustrate how conversational implicatures foster a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding. The guards often rely on implicatures to communicate their shared moral burden and emotional struggles in an environment where explicit discussions might be difficult or inappropriate. For example, when Paul mentions the length of the Green Mile, the implicature of shared weariness and ethical contemplation is evident, creating a bond among the characters through their unspoken understanding.

Additionally, the analysis highlights the role of implicatures in advancing the narrative and creating tension. Percy's failure to grasp the implicatures used by his colleagues underscores his outsider status and exacerbates the conflict within the group. This inability to



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understand the subtleties of their communication not only marks him as antagonistic but also propels the plot by intensifying the interpersonal dynamics on the Green Mile.

Moreover, the use of conversational implicatures in the depiction of ethical and moral dilemmas adds to the thematic complexity of the novel. The guards' dialogues, which often seem mundane on the surface, are laden with implicatures that reflect their internal conflicts about justice, mercy, and their roles in the execution process. This layered communication invites readers to engage more deeply with the novel's moral questions and the characters' psychological landscapes.

In conclusion, the preliminary analysis of conversational implicatures in *The Green Mile* demonstrates their crucial role in enriching character portrayals, fostering interpersonal relationships, and deepening the thematic elements of the narrative. These findings suggest that Stephen King's use of implicature is a deliberate and effective narrative strategy that enhances the reader's engagement with the story. Further exploration of additional dialogues and interactions within the novel could provide even more comprehensive insights into the multifaceted use of conversational implicatures in literature.

### Conclusions

The exploration of conversational implicatures within the context of magic realism, particularly in films like *The Green Mile*, provides valuable insights into the intricate layers of communication and narrative construction. In line with the research objectives, this study demonstrates how conversational implicatures—meanings inferred by the audience beyond the literal dialogue—are essential for enhancing narrative

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complexity, deepening character development, and fostering audience engagement.

As this analysis reveals, conversational implicatures are critical to enriching the narrative structure of *The Green Mile*. By relying on indirect and implicit communication, the film encourages viewers to infer deeper meanings, which adds layers to the storytelling. This aligns with similar studies (Valdes:1991) in magic realism that emphasize the genre's reliance on subtle, unspoken elements to convey thematic depth. The study's findings demonstrate how this implicit communication creates a multifaceted narrative, where both spoken and unspoken elements are equally crucial for a richer storytelling experience.

Conversational implicatures also play a key role in revealing characters' inner complexities and motivations, as seen in John Coffey's character. His seemingly simple but loaded statements invite viewers to infer emotional and moral struggles without direct exposition. This approach mirrors findings in previous research, which highlight how implicatures allow for nuanced character portrayals in magic realism narratives. The study confirms that indirect communication through implicatures fosters a deeper emotional connection with characters, providing a more layered understanding of their psychological and moral dimensions.

The research also underscores the importance of implicatures in actively engaging the audience. By requiring viewers to interpret implied meanings, *The Green Mile* promotes a more participatory viewing experience. This conclusion is consistent with broader studies on pragmatics in film (Dyner, 2016; Piazza et al, 2011), which indicate that implicatures enhance audience immersion and emotional investment. The study demonstrates that implicatures not only enrich the

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narrative but also involve the audience more deeply in the interpretative process, creating a dynamic interaction between the film and its viewers.

The interplay between spoken dialogue and visual cues in *The Green Mile* highlights the importance of integrating language with cinematic visuals to convey deeper meanings. This study reaffirms previous research (Grice, 1989; Simpson, 1993) suggesting that implicatures are often conveyed more effectively when combined with visual elements. In magic realism cinema, this integration becomes even more significant, as the juxtaposition of the real and the fantastical requires a holistic approach to storytelling where dialogue and imagery complement each other to enhance narrative depth.

The genre of magical realism, with its blend of reality and supernatural elements, provides an ideal platform for the use of conversational implicatures. The study's findings align with earlier research (Zamora&Faris, 1995). This suggests the ambiguous nature of magic realism and amplifies the effectiveness of implicatures. In *The Green Mile*, the intersection of the mundane and the supernatural allows for a rich exploration of implicit meanings, making the inferred messages even more impactful. This supports the view that magic realism, as a narrative form, benefits from the strategic use of implicatures to navigate between reality and fantasy.

Finally, the analysis highlights the critical role of subtext—underlying meanings beneath the surface dialogue—in creating compelling narratives. As seen in *The Green Mile*, conversational implicatures serve as the vehicle for subtext, challenging the audience to engage critically with the material. This finding reinforces similar conclusions in film studies, where the use of subtext is recognized as a powerful tool for deepening the narrative and encouraging viewer interpretation beyond the

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obvious. Implicatures thus become a means for adding depth and complexity to the storytelling process, contributing to a more intellectually and emotionally stimulating film experience.

In conclusion, the study of conversational implicatures in *The Green Mile* reveals their essential role in enriching narrative complexity, advancing character development, and engaging the audience. These findings align with the broader body of research on implicatures in magic realism and film theory, demonstrating the unique interplay between language and visuals in this genre. The use of implicatures in *The Green Mile*, amplified by the magical realism setting, exemplifies how subtext and indirect communication enhance the overall cinematic experience. This exploration not only contributes to the understanding of implicatures in film but also emphasizes their broader significance in narrative construction within genres that challenge conventional boundaries between reality and fantasy.

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# THEATRE AND CIRCUS AS BACKGROUND FOR MAGICAL REALISM IN ANGELA CARTER'S NOVELS<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

*The paper analyzes how Angela Carter uses the environments of theatre and circus as a pretext for magical realism manifestations in her novels *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. In the first instance, we established connections between circus and theatre and the illusion of magic for the audience, showing how Carter is inspired in creating her characters by the enchantment world and magic present in Shakespeare's world and later by the clown representation in Chaplin's acts in movies. The characters who populate the discussed novels either deal with illusory entertainment and magic of the theatre stage, to mask an ambiguous lineage, as in *Wise Children*, or assume a non-human feature allowing them an identity to be further speculated in the world of circus, as in *Nights at the Circus*. Both environments are a pretext and an instrument for Carter's introduction of magic acts in realistic environments, leaving readers questioning the thin line between the sensual and ordinary worlds.*

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*Keywords:* magical realism; Angela Carter; theatre; circus; entertainment.

### Introduction

Angela Carter creates a narrative space where the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist. Carter's approach to magical realism continues her connection to the world of fantastic and fairy tales through her translations and rewriting of consecrated narratives. Her magical, realistic creation is meant to challenge literary and societal norms by bringing to the readers unconventional depictions of gender, sexuality, and power. Angela Carter's use of magical realism is often more focused on the personal and psychological rather than the historical and political aspects.

In our paper, we chose to analyse two of Carter's novels that fall into the category of magical realism, *Wise Children* and *Nights at the Circus*, which are united by specific environments of spectacle and magic: theatre and circus. We intend to highlight how the environment creates support and the stage for realistic magic characters, giving them credibility in the spectators' eyes.

### Theatre, Circus and Magic

Both theatre and circus manipulate reality, create illusions, and engage with the audience's imagination. Marina Warner writes that theatre and magic share an ability to generate the extraordinary from the ordinary through the power of performance and storytelling: "The artifice of the act is central, and the success of the illusion depends on the willingness of the audience to suspend disbelief" (Warner, 1994, p. 243). From another perspective, the theatre spectators expect a narrative that

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immerses them in daily life. The story is not just on the stage. Debord shows that

the spectacle cannot be understood merely as the misuse of a world of vision or as the product of techniques for mass dissemination of images. Rather, it is a *Weltanschauung* that has become tangible, materially translated. It is a vision of the world that has been objectified. (Debord, 1983, p.7).

Moreover, in his preface to *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach discusses a society that “prefers the sign to the things signified”. (Feuerbach, 2008, p.12). He also adds a sacred coordinate to illusion in modern society (Feuerbach, 2008, p.13). Therefore, theatre becomes a complete world, uniting profane with sacredness and reality with illusion.

This idea resonates with Angela Carter’s use of theatrical elements in her fiction, particularly in *Wise Children*, where the boundaries between performance and reality are illusory. Carter also uses the intersection of theatre and magic to transform her characters’ lives and their worlds. Corrieri (2018) establishes a connection between theatre and magic, which goes beyond similarity, showing that the secularisation of magic eventually leads to the theatre. However, the author asks himself if the perception of magic in a representation is “in the eyes of the beholder”.

Carter draws strong inspiration from Shakespeare’s plays, where magic appears as an instrument disrupting the ordinary. Shakespeare uses fantastic elements in realistic settings, generating a space where the impossible changes to possible. At its core, magic in Shakespeare’s plays often represents a force that disrupts the ordinary world. The combination between reality and magic is

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challenging not only for the characters but also for the spectators. Magic allows Shakespeare to manipulate time, space, the laws of nature, altogether the entire narrative of the play. Wonder and spectacle are united by magic, transforming the stage into a fluid, malleable story.

Discussing Shakespeare, Angela Carter stated:

One last thing. So there hasn't been a female Shakespeare. Three possible answers: (a) So what. (This is the simplest and best.) (b) There hasn't been a male Shakespeare since Shakespeare, dammit, (c) Somewhere, Franz Fanon opines that one cannot, in reason, ask a shoeless peasant in the Upper Volta to write songs like Schubert's; the opportunity to do so has never existed. The concept is meaningless. (Carter, 1997, p.30).

Therefore, she does not attempt to be a feminine Shakespeare or imitate Shakespearian theatre. Instead, she creates a world tribute to Big Will. In a back-and-forth perspective, the novel unfolds through Dora's recollections of her and her twin's life as she reflects on their journey from illegitimacy to becoming icons of the British entertainment industry. The entire novel is populated by characters from the entertainment world, veiled in magic features and events.

Both theatre and circus bring magic to the audience. In its evolution, the circus borrowed from the theatre's traditional elements of narrative, characters and dramatic structure. Clowns originally were present as comedic elements both in theatre and the circus. They evolved by assuming more complex roles, using physical comedy and mime for wordless storytelling. The connection between circus and theatre became more visible than before in the 19th century when circus

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performances used extraordinary acts presented theatrically, eluding the border between entertainment and drama. The circus performers are similar to actors in creating magic.

Angela Carter uses the world of circus as background for the narrative of the novel *Nights at the Circus*. The spectacle world in the round arena is evoked through the voice of the journalist Jack Walser, who, fascinated by the supposed half-woman half-bird character, suggestively called Fevvers, enters the world of circus as a clown in Colonel Kearney's circus in St. Petersburg. He witnesses the magic of the circus and Fevvers' life, which she and her assistant/protector recall in an interview for Walser. The story of a winged female character was not appealing only to Angela Carter. It seemed that previously, this type of character inspired Charly Chaplin. As Linda Simon shows,

Chaplin was considering a new movie project, *The Freak*, about a young girl who awakens to find that she is sprouting wings. He decided that his graceful daughter Victoria would star. The movie, which would have involved many actors flying through the air, seemed a logistical nightmare, and his wife, Oona, secretly quashed the project, fearing the strain would take a toll on her husband's health. (Simon, 2014, p. 267).

Ironically, while studying ballet, Chaplin's daughter secretly desired to be a clown in a circus. She eloped with the actor Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée, creating Le Cirque Bonjour together. (Simon, 2014, p.269) Carter's character, Fevvers, does not elope but is, throughout her life, on a constant escape from different environments that try to take advantage of the magic of her wings.

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The connection to Chaplin is also established in *Wise Children* as a symbol of performance connected to the birth of the main characters, Dora and Nora, in and for the world of theatre:

But all the little children in Bard Road were singing a hymn to Charlie Chaplin the day that we were born and Grandma took us to the window to look at the shirts and bloomers dancing on the washing-lines all over Lambeth. We were doomed to sing and dance (Carter, 1991, p. 193).

Chaplin often depicted a clown-like character mixing sad emotions and situations with a façade joyous representation of them, like the life of *Wise Children's* characters. They are presented at the end of the novel theatrically, "Dramatis Personae (in order of appearance)" (Carter, 1991, p. 232), but their life on and off stage is both like theatre and clown circus acts.

Striking in their appearance, the clowns in *Nights at the Circus* are the heart of the environment as characters and people. Built on a class system, the circus throws clowns among the commoners in the city where the representations are, while the stars, such as Fevvers, live in luxury hotels. The clowns' off-stage life is similar to the one in the arena when they must let off steamy emotions. The circus acts move to the private space but become grotesque, as the clowns are no longer humans. The feud in the arena brings laughter to the audience. However, outside, it generates a different reaction, like an epiphany, encouraging others, as a small Russian child, to join the circus. Buffo, a clown character, even gives a religious dimension to being a clown:

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‘And yet, too, you might say, might you not, that the clown is the very image of Christ.’ With a nod towards the mildly shining icon in the corner of the stinking kitchen, where night crawled in the form of cockroaches in the corners. ‘The despised and rejected, the scapegoat upon whose stooped shoulders is heaped the fury of the mob, the object and yet -- yet! also he is the subject of laughter’. (Carter, 1984, p. 69).

### ***Nights at the Circus: The Cabinet of Human Curiosities***

The novel *Nights at the Circus* is Angela Carter’s penultimate novel and shows her preoccupation with out-of-pattern individuals. The characters she creates, especially the winged woman Fevvers, the main character, act like a mirror for the inside of those meeting her, reflecting hidden desires or socially unaccepted behaviours. It is not Fevvers or similarly strange characters in the novel that are the monsters exposed in a cabinet of curiosities, but the people who interact with them and prove to be the real monsters showcased in a society that enjoys the spectacles when it does not directly involve its members.

The main magical realistic aspects in the novel are created around a character who is

partly based on the actress Mae West, Fevvers is a raucous, indecorous, magnificently physical creation. Lustrously blonde-haired and radiantly blue-eyed, standing more than six feet tall, she is renowned throughout Europe for her beauty; at close quarters, though, she looks ‘more like a dray mare than an angel’, with a face as ‘broad and oval as a meat dish’ and ‘a voice that clanged like dustbin lids’. A woman of massive appetites and meagre

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delicacy, she burps, farts, sweats, and eats 'with gargantuan enthusiasm'. Her dressing room has 'a highly personal aroma', and is littered with discarded undergarments: it is 'a mistress piece of exquisitely feminine squalor'. (Gordon, 2017, p. 359).

From Edmund Gordon's description to Fevvers in his biography of Angela Carter, we observe the contradictory perception vs reality, which is constant throughout the discussed novel. In terms of perception, there is always a magical aspect that is highlighted depending on who is the viewer. Right from the start, the character connects herself to the world of the extraordinary by stating that her birth was not according to human laws, but to the ones that govern the winged creatures:

though they could just as well 'ave called me 'Helen of the High Wire', due to the unusual circumstances in which I come ashore -- for I never docked via what you might call the normal channels, sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was hatched. 'Hatched out of a bloody great egg while Bow Bells rang, as ever is!'. (Carter, 1984, p. 1).

The process of flying is, in Fevvers' description, a process of learning similar to the birds and not a circus practice. Lizzie, her help, back up all the details of Fevvers' strangeness. As the story relates, Lizzie is the one that was always by Fevver's side just from the moment she came to light from her native egg. There are various reactions in terms of the woman's winged authenticity.

The first reaction is mistrust, especially coming from Walter Waser, the journalist interviewing Fevver. He later joins the circus as a clown, only to be close to the mesmerising flying woman. Waser permanently oscillates

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between magic and logic. For instance, during his first meeting with Fevvers, the time seems to be frozen at midnight for the entire night, only to discover later that the clock was broken. When he fully believes in Fevvers' winged reality, she is the one that shatters his conviction of the woman's uniqueness: "why did you go to such lengths, once upon a time, to convince me you were the 'only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world'?" (Carter, 1984, p. 174). Fevvers' response relates to one's willingness to believe: the magic exists as long as one is willing to believe in it.

The second reaction to Fevvers' specificity is conferring her mythologic or esoteric powers, as in the episode where Christian Rosencreutz tries to use the winged woman in a ritual according to his beliefs. However, the spectators believe her to be magic as long as she performs. For them, Fevvers is part of an act that carries them outside the ordinary life into the one of spectacle. Linda Simon describes the audience's reaction to a flying female acrobat:

The men who crowded the circus arena saw women flyers and rope dancers who also displayed a healthy physique, but they exuded as well a paradoxical combination of power, sensuality and vulnerability. A woman on a wire or trapeze seemed to some viewers to be transformed into a mythological being – floating, weightless and ethereal. (Simon, 2014, p, 132).

The central character of Angela Carter's novel is also a pretext to introduce other characters who fall into the category of magic realism depending on others' perceptions. They may be showpieces in a cabinet of human curiosities because of their abnormal physical



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nature, such as the people living in the house of Madame Schreck, who makes good money by exhibiting them. On the contrary, they may belong to the magic world of fantastic creatures. Similar to Fevvers' extraordinary birth, comes the story of a tiny woman reminding the readers of Thumbelina. The novel's character is called the Whiltshire Wonder, and she attributes her extreme dwarfism to her mother's conceiving her with the King of Fairies. Other exhibits in the cabinet of human curiosities are Toussaint, the man without a mouth, The Sleeping Beauty, a maid suffering from a disease keeping her in a perpetual state of sleep, Fanny Four-Eyes, and the bipartite Albert/Albertina.

Since a circus is not complete without animals, Colonel Kearney's circus is also a gathering of trained ferals, some of them with surprising human features, such as the monkeys in the "school of apes" or the tigers suffering from jealousy. The most exciting animal is an oinker, Sybil, who, as her name suggests, serves as an oracle for the Colonel by extracting cards with letters in a specific order to form words, who decide the future of various circus aspects.

### ***Wise Children: "A Drama of Errors"***

The world created in *Wise Children* is reality and fantasy, ordinary and extraordinary. From the start, the birth of the Chance twins, Dora and Nora, is surrounded by myth and wonder, an illustration of magical realism created by Angela Carter. They are connected to the theatre by their lineage and birth date, which they share with William Shakespeare: April 23. If, in Shakespeare's plays, the motif of twins serves in the comedy of errors, in Carter's novel, the twins are connected to a "drama of errors", where the identity is volatile for the sisters and their parents, too.

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*Wise Children* has three epigraphs, all connected as a prologue. Cole Porter's call "Brush up your Shakespeare" alerts the reader to pay attention to intertextuality and foresees the magic in Shakespeare's plays. An old saw shows that "It's a wise child that knows its own father", highlighting the paternity theme in Carter's novel. Shakespeare also used the same saw in Act 2, scene 2 of *The Merchant of Venice*. The third epigraph quotes Ellen Terry, warning that identity issues may also come from the mother-daughter relationship, which is a step Carter takes further compared to Shakespeare's plays, which inspired her: "How many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, never mothers and daughters". (Carter, 1991, cover page).

The twins' mother is a foundling, Pretty Kitty, with no knowledge of her parents, bringing a half-mysterious ancestry to Dora and Nora. At their birth, Pretty Kitty was a dancer in the company where Melchior, the twins' father, played Shakespearean roles. The birth takes place just after the end of a representation as a symbol for the continuation of the stage in real life. Their birth details are fuzzy, filled with contradictions and surreal elements, continuing the magic and illusion of the stage outside it. Grandma Chance, herself suspected at some point to be the girls' birth mother, takes them from Pretty Kitty and raises them as her granddaughters.

The separation from the mother is a trauma for a young man and signifies a mystical birth in some cultures, as Mircea Eliade shows: "It is a rupture from the childhood world, very violent sometimes – at the same time maternal and feminine, as well as a state of irresponsibility and happiness, ignorance and asexuality". (Eliade, 1995, p.23) Giving birth is a form of initiation for the mother, but the daughters also pass through initiation by the act of an older woman caring for them. (Eliade, 1995, pp. 58-62).

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Dora and Nora pass at their birth through a double initiation, masculine and feminine, as a sign of their strange connection to both parents' identities.

Another aspect of magical realism involves the character of Peregrine Hazard, the twin brother of Dora's and Nora's father. Peregrine is a mysterious character who unpredictably comes and goes, disappearing for years and reappearing under miraculous circumstances. His name also signifies this aspect of wandering, but this does not stop him from being present in the girls' crucial moments of life. If Melchior denies their paternity, Peregrine assumes it, together with that of a mom, judging by the place he shelters the girls, the exact place where a woman grows babies: in the womb, where the growing foetus feels the mother's heartbeats as growing:

I have a memory, although I know it cannot be a true one, that Peregrine swept us up into his arms. That when our father denied us, Peregrine spread his arms as wide as wings and gathered up the orphan girls, pressed us so close we crushed against his waistcoat, bruising our cheeks on his braces' buttons. Or perhaps he slipped us one in each pocket of his jacket. Or crushed us far inside his shirt, against his soft, warm belly, to be sustained by the thumping comfort of his heart. And then, hup! he did a backflip out of the window with us, saving us. But I know I am imagining the backflip and the flight. (Carter, 1991, p.72).

Dora is aware of the intertwining of wishful magical thinking with reality, better said, the impossibility of magic unless one does not believe in magic. Mentioning Grandma Chance and her ability to sense flowers' pain when cut, Dora states: "Grandma read it in a book. I swear, to this day, she only did it to annoy us but, from this book,

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she took into her head the notion flowers suffered pain.” (Carter, 1991, p.91).

Still, Dora's representation of Peregrine serves the need for familiar human territories. The same need is reflected in Carter's creation of women in this novel. According to Edmund Gordon, Dora disguises the writer's aunt, Kitty Farthing, and the entire novel is a tribute to what Gordon calls “a matriarchal clan” in Carter's family history, who did not favour women at all: “Kitty fared much worse. Inspired by her childhood visits to the Old Vic, she wanted to go on the stage; but her ambitions were swiftly crushed, and until her mother's death in 1966 she lived at home with her as a companion and effective factotum”. (Gordon, 2017, p. 10) In her journal, the novelist depicts the almost demented aunt's death of a similar cause to Carter's mother and, at the same time of the year, aspects that are coincidental circumstances induced by “magic means”. (Gordon, 2017, p.236).

Carter creates a game of mirrors in *Wise Children*, not only at a biographical level but also to a fictional one. The novel is populated by mirroring twins united in the uncertainty of their lineage: Melchior and Peregrine Hazard, Dora and Nora Chance, Saskia and Imogen Hazard, Tristram and Gareth Hazard, and, lastly, Gareth's twin son and daughter. Deeply connected to the world of theatre and entertainment, they seem to expend in their life the act of playing, which, according to Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 2), “both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ‘twere a mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure”. (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 389).

### Coda

Fascinated with folk and fairy tales, with Japanese theatre, Shakespeare and entertainment, Angela Carter manages to unite all their elements to create a magical realistic landscape populated by characters who attract the readers in a pact similar to the one happening on stage or in the arena. The readers become the audience and witness the characters' actions, who project magic on a realistic screen. They may believe it or not, but for a while, they are drawn into a world where literally "all the world's a stage". (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 336)

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*Despre timp și spațiu  
în realismul magic*





# PERCEPTIONS OF PLACES IN MAGICAL- REALIST NOVELS<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

*Our senses create a connection with the world, structure and define spaces. Perceptions help us give meaning and order to the world we live in. We perceive places subjectively (and even culturally and socially conditioned), visually, but also through their sounds, smells, tastes or textures. The present study, part of a larger project, stems from Paul Rodaway's theory of perception, defined both as sensation or feeling, i.e. information collected and mediated by senses, and as cognition, i.e. mental process involving memories and associations. Understanding perception as information about the surrounding world mediated by senses, the paper focuses on the way writers use senses such as sight, smell, touch and hearing to build urban fictional worlds in three novels labelled as magical realist, namely Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). Another useful theory has been that of Kathy Mezei and Clara Briganti (2002), according to which spaces of domesticity shape the people who inhabit them, storing memories and setting the grid for their lives. The paper sets out to answer questions such as the*

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*following: how do the characters perceive the settings? How does the description of the different places where the novels unfold use sensory elements to introduce the reader to the atmosphere? Is the visual element predominant or do the authors also resort to the other senses? Are the senses used only in perceiving the external world or are they also used in rendering the inner worlds of the protagonists in the selected works? Are there moments in the text where senses are also connected to memories? Close reading of the texts generally reveals that the background places in which the novels unfold are most often perceived by the characters through sight, smell and hearing, and sometimes by touch, although this happens less frequently.*

**Keywords:** perceptions; senses; places; Rushdie; Carter; Winterson.

### 1. Introduction

Talking about the representation of place, Paul Rodaway defines perception as sensation, information collected and mediated by the senses, and perception as cognition, as a mental process involving memories and associations mediated by culture (Rodaway, 2002, p. 11). The cultural dimension of perception is given by the fact that perceptual sensitivity is learnt as socialisation of a cultural group, since ways of perceiving and meanings given to perceptions vary over time and between cultures. We experience the world through our senses, which contribute to our orientation in space. Our sense of smell enables us to identify odours and associate them with sources and situations, with an important part in remembering experiences. Olfaction may be connected with an exploratory behaviour focusing on specific smells, stirred by certain odours, associations or memories.

Human beings are primarily visually oriented (environment is first and foremost visually experienced),

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but information is also gathered through hearing and sounds, used for communicating not only among them but also with natural elements (aboriginal people using singing and instrument playing, for instance). Rodaway coins the syntagm “sensuous geographies” which, applied to literature, points to the setting, to the characters’ spatial movement and activities, to the descriptions of places or landscapes, the invocation of shapes, olfactory and sonorous intensities. Other researchers such as Sten Pultz Moslund speak about a topo-poetic reading. It examines the way in which language creates the sensorial experience of the physical presence of space/place (Pultz Moslund, 2015, p. 11) within the text, and sees place as emotional, imagined, remembered or experienced by the senses (in Tally Jr, 2011, p. 30).

### Versions of places

In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie talks about writing his novel *Midnight’s Children*, recalling how he had spent many months simply trying to recall as much of India as he could before beginning it:

Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land; I, who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title, was gripped by the conviction that, I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim. [...] Writing my book in North London, looking out through my window on to a city scene totally unlike the ones I was imagining on to paper [...] I felt obliged [...] to make clear that [...] my India was just that: ‘my’ India, a version [...] of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. (Rushdie, 1992, p. 10)

“I have been a swallower of lives, and to know me, just the one of me, you’ll have to swallow the lot as well”,

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warns the narrator of *Midnight's Children* at the beginning of his story (Rushdie, 1991, p. 4). He thus invites the readers to a journey into his inner world, as the story that follows is recounted from his perspective.

This movement forward, the step inside the character, anticipates the story of Aadam Sinai, Saleem's grandfather, but Saleem's overflow of stories has its counterpart in Aadam Sinai's inner emptiness. Returned home after having completed his five-year medical training in the west, he bumps his nose against the ground while bending to pray and decides never to pray again, i.e. gives up faith, which creates an inner void, an empty space inside of him he is not aware of. He sees the previously familiar landscape of his native land "through travelled eyes" (Rushdie, 1992, p. 5), an altered perspective which, instead of the beauty of the place, reveals its narrowness, backwardness, even hostility, as if he were an unwelcomed stranger. He feels enclosed. The physical space is the same as it has always been, but the perception of it has changed following Aadam's foreign training.

The events of Aadam Aziz's life take him to several cities. The first city he moves to after his marriage is Amritsar, presented through olfactory details, mixing the disgusting with the appetizing:

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the holy city of Amritsar smelled [...] of excrement. [...] Amritsar dung was fresh and (worse) redundant [...] issued from the rumps of the horses between the shafts of the city's many tongas, ikkas and gharries; and mules and men and dogs attended nature's calls, mingling in a brotherhood of shit. But there were cows, too: sacred kine roaming the dusty streets, each patrolling its own territory, staking its claims in excrement. And flies! Public Enemy Number One, buzzing gaily from turd to steaming turd, celebrated and cross-pollinated

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these freely-given offerings. The city swarmed about, too, mirroring the motion of the flies. [...] (Rushdie, 1980, p. 30)

Despite the suffocating smell and flies, food is still sold on the streets and trade unfolds naturally: “Spicy sweet fumes rose from a street-snack barrow. ‘Hot pakoras, pakoras hot!’ A white woman was buying silks from a shop across the street and men in turbans were ogling her.” (Rushdie, 1980, p. 30)

In Agra, Aadam Aziz’s house, made of stones, is distanced from the road, with a well in front of it, a walled-in garden at the rear and a low outhouse with poor tenants who pay a small rent. On Cornwallis Road, old men chew betel and compete to see who spits farther, hitting an old brass spittoon, while children engage in childlike activities (playing hoop, kabaddi, or drawing beards on posters). Cows walk on the streets and the cycle-rickshaw are a novelty, after the old ones carried by people. Houses are conceived to hide the secrets of their owners, so Aadam Aziz can shelter Nadir Khan, a fugitive, in his cellars: “concealment has always been a crucial architectural consideration in India, so that Aziz’s house has extensive underground chambers, which can be reached only through trap-doors in the floors” (Rushdie, 1980, p. 57), which leads to his daughter Mumtaz’s love for Nadir and her double life after their subsequent, never consumed, secret marriage.

When Mumtaz, divorced of Nadir, gets married again to Ahmed Sinai, her sister Alia’s indecisive suitor, she renames herself Amina Sinai, to begin her new life with a man in Delhi. While New Delhi belongs mainly to the British who have raised palaces in pink stone, the cramped and shabby houses in the Old Delhi shelter the chaos of lives lived from hand to mouth:

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...the houses in the narrow lanes of the old city leaned over, jostled, shuffled, blocked each other's view of the roseate edifices of power [...] In the Muslim muhallas or neighbourhoods which clustered around Chandni Chowk, people were content to look inwards into the screened-off courtyards of their lives; to roll chick-blinds down over their windows and verandahs. [...] There was no greenery and the cows kept away, knowing they weren't sacred here. Bicycle bells rang constantly. And above their cacophony sounded the cries of itinerant fruit-sellers: Come all you greats-O, eat a few dates-O! (Rushdie, 1980, p. 76)

On her way to the fortune-teller who would reveal what lies ahead for the baby she carries in her womb, Amina Sinai enters "causeways where poverty eats away at the tarmac like a drought, where people lead their invisible lives [...] streets which are growing narrower by the minute, more crowded by the inch" (Rushdie, 1980, p. 91). Looking around her, she loses her 'city eyes' and starts noticing human misery and how desperation makes parents mutilate their children in order to provide them a future income from begging.

Old Delhi is also the birthplace of Saleem's future wife, Parvati:

clustered around the steps of the Friday mosque. No ordinary slum, this, although the huts built out of old packing cases and pieces of corrugated tin and shreds of jute sacking which stood higgledy-piggledy in the shadow of the mosque looked no different from any other shanty-town... because this was the ghetto of the magicians [...] the conjurers' slum, to which the greatest fakirs and

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prestidigitators and illusionists in the land continually flocked, to seek their fortune in the capital city. They found tin huts, and police harassment, and rats... (Rushdie, 1980, p. 238)

In a slum clearance programme, in 1976, after the birth of Parvati's son, Aadam Sinai, the ghetto will be torn down and its inhabitants forcefully subjected to sterilisation.

The description of Methwold's Estate, with four identical houses one of which was the house bought by Saleem's parents, provides the narrator with the opportunity to take a brief look at how the city of Bombay evolved in time: "Our Bombay, Padma! It was very different then, there were no night clubs or pickle factories or Oberio-Sheraton Hotels or movie studios; but the city grew at breakneck speed". (Rushdie, 1980, p. 106)

The real estate project of William Methwold, an East India Company officer who dreamed of a fortified British Bombay, designed by British standards, consists of four identical houses named after palaces of Europe (Versailles Villa, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sans Souci); it corresponds to Lefebvre's notion of dominated, authoritarian space, the space of power, of the master's project, which disregards the landscape of the place it occupies, and brutalises it (as cited in Armstrong, 2013, p. 17). Thus, transformed according to the wish and interest of those who hold power, the space is dominated and contrasts with the space occupied by natives. The estate ends up being sold to natives, provided that everything stays the same for two months after the sale and the buyers adopt the British lifestyle meanwhile. Revolted and confused at first, the inhabitants of the four mansions start to change under the influence of the houses and imposed customs, resembling the "Britishers", which

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mirrors Kathy Mezei and Clara Briganti's perspective, according to which the spaces of domesticity shape the people who inhabit them, they store memories and set a grid for our current and future lives (Mezei and Briganti, 2002, p. 840).

Designed and built to impress first on the outside, these western houses contrast with the Indian architecture, where the houses close on themselves and hide secrets and secret rooms in which characters can lead parallel lives. At the end of the novel, Saleem returns to the city of his childhood, to Bombay, only to find it notably changed: "yes, it was my Bombay, but also not-mine [...] the past failed to reappear" (Rushdie, 1980, p. 540).

In another magical-realist novel, Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*, published in 1987, the young Frenchman Henri gets carried away by his admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte and, together with several of his countrymen, joins the French army, dreaming of meeting and serving his emperor. After a while, homesick, he fondly remembers things he had once hated about life in a small village not too far down the Seine, where news barely arrived, and life followed its natural rhythm. What he remembers are the valley, the sun, the daffodils, the sense of community and the way people talked to each other and helped each other. Compared to his native village, then, the city appears as a place of decay, corruption, degradation, a place that ends up destroying people. Henri remembers the story of a man who considered himself an inventor and who wanted to try his luck in the city, but came back after a few months with no fortune and after having wasted all his family's savings.

In Boulogne, "a sleepy nothing port with a handful of whorehouses" (Winterson, 1987, p. 8), Henri walks around the docks and along houses resembling each other



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and lined in rows – they are irrelevant to him, who feels alone and a stranger there. Stationed there while waiting for Napoleon's visit and the imminent invasion of England by sea, Henri barely knows the city but explores it through olfaction, looking for odours that remind him of home. Thus, for him, Boulogne smells of ribs, freshly baked bread and porridge, which brings back happy scenes from his childhood; thus, we believe that the second part of Rodaway's theory of perception, i.e. as a mental process involving memories and associations, applies to this scene as well.

During the Russian campaign, the French soldiers have to endure the freezing cold of the Russian winter, the lack of food and proper military equipment. They hope to march into Moscow, and find shelter and warmth: "Our sustaining hope as the temperatures dropped and we gave up speech was to reach Moscow. A great city where there would be food and fire and friends" (Winterson, 1987, p. 83). Instead, they found that "the city of domes, built to be beautiful, a city of squares and worship" was deserted, blazing, a city refusing to surrender to its invaders. He crosses paths with Villanelle, an unusual young woman, born during an eclipse of the sun and with webbed feet, a hereditary feature of fishermen's sons, but never inherited by their daughters – a sign of her extraordinary destiny.

Solitary, closed in herself and a gambler, Villanelle resembles her native city of Venice, the city of mazes, known only by its inhabitants, a city of disguises, which "enfolds upon itself. Canals hide other canals, alleyways cross and criss-cross so that you will not know which is which until you have lived here all your life", as she tells Henri (Winterson, 1987, p. 113). But for her, Venice is a mysterious space, full of secrets and promises, which needs time to be understood and known. Judith Seaboyer links the city of Venice to the female body, "Venice's

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seductive, decorative beauty, its historical reputation for duplicity, and its topography, at once contained and enclosed by water and penetrated by it, has rendered it an ideal vehicle for the historical and cultural burden of ambivalence that inheres in the female body” (Seaboyer, 1997, p. 485).

Mercurial, a city of disguises, Venice is associated by Villanelle with the night, a prosperous past due to trade, and secrets. She talks about the city within the city, known only by few, harbouring thieves, Jews, vagrant children and downfallen aristocrats who have come to live in misery among dejections and rats, as is the case of the old lady whose fortune, ships, expensive jewels and wines were envied and taken by Napoleon and Josephine.

An alternative to the harsh world of rules, reason and balance, Venice symbolises the irrational, the core of passions where fantasies can come true, of gambling in which fortunes and lives can be won or lost in the blink of an eye. After a night at the Casino, just before dawn, revellers drift away “through the arches around St Mark’s or lying in piles by the cafés, opening early to provide strong coffee” (Winterson, 1987, p. 60). Another famous café is Florian, where Villanelle occasionally drinks and gazes at the Square, just like countless tourists enjoying their visit in Venice.

The canals are either deserted, silent, or crisscrossed by boats carrying vegetables or water hearses taking away the dead, bridges both unite and divide spaces and people, imposing houses border derelict ones. The house of Villanelle’s lover who has stolen her heart reveals the social position and well-being of its inhabitants: it is an elegant and modern six-storeyed house, located on a quite canal, with large, simply furnished rooms. Opening one door after another, like the city, the house seems to

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Henri a true maze which he has to navigate in order to find Villanelle's heart.

With the help of well-known elements and landmarks of Venice blended with the imaginary, Winterson achieves what Andreas Mahler considers an individual construct of what can be imagined, not an imitation of the real city but a 'performance' of it, a creation of the textual Venice which comes into being in and through the act of narration, through fictionalisation (see Mahler, 2020, p. 35).

Venetians feel comfortable in the dark, which they can use to their advantage (unlike Henri, who talks about being terrified of and limited by the Dark). Their quiet life is disturbed by the presence of Napoleon's armed forces: "nowadays, the dark has more light than in the old days. There are flares everywhere and soldiers like to see the streets lit up [...] they don't trust our soft feet and thin knives" (Winterson, 1987, p. 57).

Uncapturable by maps, Venice changes depending on when it is seen. During the day it seems a quiet, well-organised city, but at night gambling begins, darkness facilitates the manifestation of true identities and moral standards no longer have value. This duality mirrors that of Napoleon who, apparently, is a great hero, fighting for the glory of France, but in fact he is an invader in his own name, envious of the goods and achievements of others, an inflexible man keen to always impose his will on others. Having taken over Venice, Bonaparte the invader is far from being popular among the locals as he tried to impose his vision and order on it:

That man demolished our churches on a whim [...] There were four churches that I loved, which stood looking out across the lagoon to the quiet islands that lie about us. He tore them down to make a

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public garden [...and] filled it with hundreds of pines laid out in regimental rows. (Winterson, 1987, p. 52)

For the Polish people Henri and Villanelle meet on their way after deserting the French army in Russia, Venice is a place of perdition: “When Villanelle revealed her Venetian origins, hands flew across mouths and saintly women crossed themselves. Venice, the city of Satan” (Winterson, 1987, p. 104).

While Villanelle is reborn after returning to Venice, comments Seaboyer, regaining her old life back, Henri’s experience of the city is very different: “In a ritual cleansing, he shaves off his ‘ruffian’s beard’ and casts it into the canal outside his window, and for a moment he thinks he has escaped his past – in Venice such things are possible. But he remains an exile unable to navigate the labyrinth and is swallowed up into madness and despair” (Seaboyer, 1997, p. 485)

At first sight, Venice seems to Henri like “seeing an invented city rise up and quiver in the air [...] not built on any lines [...] swelled like yeast in a shape of its own” (Winterson, 1987, p. 110). Henri gets lost and wanders for five days until he unexpectedly finds Villanelle’s house in this place, he is unable to understand, a city of “madmen”, as he calls it. Hopelessly disorientated and unwilling to speak to the natives, he comments on Bonaparte’s failure to impose order on this strange city:

Where Bonaparte goes, straight roads follow, buildings are rationalised, street signs may change to celebrate a battle but they are always clearly marked. Here, if they bother with street signs at all, they are happy to use the same ones over again. Not

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even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice.  
(Winterson, 1987, p. 112)

Henri sees a different face of this city he does not comprehend: ransacked palaces, with curtains swirling from shutterless windows, busy canals crowded with all kinds of boats and rowed by people standing up, others littered with waste and rats floating pink belly up, churches which seem “to spring overnight like mushrooms and dissolve as quickly with the dawn” (Winterson, 1987, p. 112).

With Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, we travel to London and St. Petersburg with Fevvers, a famous “aerialiste”, a big attraction of the Alhambra Music Hall, interviewed and followed by Walser, a cynical American reporter, who wishes to write a sensational article about her and find out whether she is an impostor claiming she is half swan and was born with wings.

The story begins in London, in 1891, with Fevvers’ interview in her dressing room. The artist talks to Walser about her conquests abroad and her return, as a prodigal daughter, to “my lovely London that I love so much. London - as dear old Dan Leno calls it, ‘a little village on the Thames of which the principal industries are the music hall and the confidence trick’” (Carter, 1986, p. 4). Evoking moments of her life, Fevvers speaks highly of London, to which she seems very attached: “dawn rose over London and gilded the great dome of St. Paul’s until it looked like the divine pap of the city which, for want of any other, I needs must call my natural mother” (Carter, 1986, p. 25).

During their conversation, in which the initially sceptical journalist becomes more and more enthralled with Fevvers’ story, Big Ben strikes the time repeatedly, but at midnight its sound gives Walser the feeling that

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“the clock might be striking in a deserted city and they (were) the only inhabitants left alive” (Carter, 1986, p. 25).

For a while, Fevvers had stayed with Madame Schreck, an old lady who owned a museum of woman monsters, in a house whose appearance reflected the horrors hidden inside: “It was a gloomy pile in Kensington, in a square [...] The façade of her house was blackened by the London soot as if the very stucco were in the mourning. A louring portico over the front door, sir, and all the inner shutters tightly barred” (Carter, 1986, p. 42).

At the end of their first meeting, Walser, Fevvers, and Lizzie walk together for a while through Piccadilly, by Nelson’s Column, down Whitehall. Even this early in the morning the cold air of the city is dominated by an odour of soot and horseshit. A coal cart is followed by a procession of women of the poorest class and barefoot little children, trying to catch any pieces of coal that might fall out. In spite of Fevvers’ repeatedly declared attachment to London, the scenes containing images of it are far from being impressive: cold, soot, bad smells, destitute women and children struggling to survive. It is either an unreal city, as Walser feels sometimes, or the city of soot and poverty reminding us of Dickens’ London.

Joining the circus in order to follow Fevvers in her tour to Russia, Walser, turns into a foreign correspondent, and tries to write an article about St. Petersburg, evoking its history in a glorious way:

At the command of the Prince, the rocks of the wilderness transformed - turned into palaces! The Prince stretched out his lordly hand, pulled down the Northern Lights, used them for chandeliers... Yes! built as St Petersburg was at the whim of a tyrant who wanted his memory of Venice to take form again in stone on a marshy shore at the end of

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the world under the most inhospitable of skies, this city, put together brick by brick by poets, charlatans, adventurers and crazed priests, by slaves, by exiles, this city bears that Prince's name, which is the same name as the saint who holds the keys of heaven... St Petersburg, a city built of hubris, imagination and desire. (Carter, 1986, p. 71)

But Walser realises he is only using his imagination ("I am inventing an imaginary city as I go along", he admits to himself) as Petersburg, like London and any other city, has its share of duplicity as well. The reality is different. It is "a city stuck with lice and pearls, impenetrably concealed behind a strange alphabet, a beautiful, rancid, illegible city" (Carter, 1986, p. 72). As a clown in the circus, Walser is hosted by a poor family, on a street "of warped, shuttered houses (where) the fog closed down like the lid of a pot. A melancholy dog barked in the distance" (Carter, 1986, p. 94).

After becoming aware that he had fallen in love with Fevvers, and after being humiliated by her, Walser loses his balance and "in a state of mental tumult, conflict and disorientation, he wanders the freezing city night, now gazing at the ice thickening on the dark waters of the Neva" (Carter, 1986, p. 109), a sight very different from the initial image he had of the city. His change of perception and his feelings for the city remind us of Henri's disillusioned experience in Venice.

Following a train crash, out of his mind and devoid of memories and identity, Walser tries to find his bearings in the dazzling whiteness of Siberia using his olfactory and auditive senses and reaches a shaman in a trance, beating his drum: "When Walser sniffed the air this time, his nostrils dilated at a whiff of something savoury, something aromatic on the cold-scoured air. The drumming grew

louder and louder [...] as he pursued the delicious scent; until, among the trees, he found a brazier containing a small fire from which fragrant smoke issued” (Carter, 1986, p. 177). The shaman saves his life leading him to his native village where people rely on sight for perceiving the world: they read the tracks left by animals and birds on the snow, the sky reveals the weather forecast, “the wilderness that seemed a bundle of blank paper to the ignorant, urban eye was the encyclopedia, packed with information they consulted every day for every need, conning the landscape as if it were an instruction manual of universal knowledge of the “Inquire within” type.” (Carter, 1986, p. 191)

### **Sensorial instances**

The texts we have chosen for this article contain numerous references to the various senses in order to complete and shed light on the fictional worlds in which the characters evolve. For the sake of illustration, with just a few instances, places are perceived as follows, through:

#### ***Olfaction***

Smell appears repeatedly in Rushdie’s novel. The atmosphere, danger and the whiffs of change are sniffed, odours are filled with unease, curiosity has a sharp stink. Mad at the pigskin bag in which Aadam keeps his medical kit, an unclean symbol of his change, Tai reacts not only verbally but also by emanating a strong smell “like a casualty ward overpowering the incense” (Rushdie, 1980, p. 13), and then stops washing. His unbearable smell practically drives Aadam away, forcing him to leave the valley after his mother’s death.

Following an accident, Saleem acquires a fine sense of smell that he uses to explore the world, distinguishing smells, even shades of emotions, and aims to put together an encyclopaedia of smells. In another episode, after



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losing his memory, his olfactory asset will turn him into a real human dog used by the army, and the taste of a dish helps him regain his memory. Senses, visual elements, sounds and smells are the ones through which the author brings to life before the readers the exotic and chaotic cities and places of India, rather than through detailed architectural descriptions, which are, however, present in some chapters. The cramped, poor and miserable dwellings of the Indians, enclosed in themselves in neighbourhoods invisible to the indifferent, 'city eyes', are reminiscent of the shelters in the labyrinths of Venice for those who escape the law and order of the French invaders, contrasting with the houses of the British conquerors, which reflect another reality and another level of comfort.

Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* shows how Henri and Villanelle understand and experience life and spaces differently and we discuss Henri's image of Boulogne and the way the two characters perceive Venice. Henri barely knows the city but explores it, like Saleem, through olfaction, looking for odours that remind him of home. Thus, for him, Boulogne smells of ribs, freshly baked bread and porridge, which brings back happy scenes from his childhood. The freezing, starving, ill-equipped soldiers of the French army sent by Napoleon to conquer Russia, hope to march into Moscow, and find shelter and warmth, only to end in a deserted, blazing city unwilling to surrender to the enemy (just as Venice resisted Napoleon's systematisation).

Fevvers' dressing room is dominated by a "marine aroma" attributed by Walser to the ice probably bought from a fishmonger and reused for the champagne she drinks, an aroma mixed with perfume, sweat, greasepaint and raw, leaking gas. Her performance bears the mark of "the greasy whiff of stage magic" (Carter, 1986, p. 7). After

the train crash in Siberia, Carter's male protagonist survives by following a scent to a shaman who shelters, feeds him and takes him to his native village.

### **Sight**

Visual elements predominate, naturally, in the outlining of fictional places. The fragmentation of India Saleem refers to, corresponds to the fragmented image Aadam Aziz, his grandfather, got of his future wife by consulting her through a perforated sheet placed, in turn, over the various ailing body parts. Perceptions are subjective, as shown by Aadam, who finds Kashmir valley narrower and less imposing when he returns from his medical training. His vision has been altered by his contact with the Western world, his blue eyes resemble but are different than those of Kashmiri men who see life traditionally, "who have not forgotten how to look" beyond the surface (Rushdie, 1980, p. 5), Saleem writes.

The idea of a different, foreign gaze (called "city eyes") is repeated in relation to the extremely poor part of the population hidden in ghetto-like neighbourhoods, where tourists or outsiders scarcely penetrate. For these "city eyes", the poverty-stricken streets do not seem to grow narrower by the minute, as they do for Amina Sinai, the beggars are invisible, just like the concrete sections of drainpipes used as dormitories.

Jeanette Winterson wrote *The Passion* before visiting Venice and resorts to its well-known landmarks combined with imaginary elements to outline her city. Constantly changing, complex and secretive, Venice does not allow itself to be changed, mapped or known, just like Villanelle, who remains an enigma for Henri. Its canals can be wide, lined by beautiful, imposing houses and crisscrossed by supply or festive boats, as well as maze-like, narrow, endless, filled with deadly water carrying garbage, inert fish and funeral boats. Mazes in Venice

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resemble the poor neighbourhoods of India, enfolding upon themselves, with a secret life of their own.

At the beginning of the novel, Fevvers is perceived in her daily after-performance ritual, in her dressing room where garments and things are thrown at random and many of them are not the cleanest. She removes her make-up looking at herself in the mirror (through which she sometimes glances at Walser as well). At one point, her eyes give Walser the feeling of Chinese boxes confusing him, drawing him into an endless abyss.

Heather Johnson notes that in *Nights at the Circus*, Carter grounds her story in a realistic manner “through the references to the actual geography of London – Queenstown Road, Belgravia, Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square, Chelsea Bridge and St. Paul’s” (in Stoddart, 2007, p. 76). The magic of the story occurs in Fevvers’ dressing-room, while the outside places of London mentioned in the novel, in spite of Fevvers’ repeatedly declared attachment to the city, remind the reader of Dickens’s descriptions of London, foggy and full of soot. The eulogistic text about St. Petersburg that Walser struggles to type is in complete contrast to the reality and the conditions the circus employees are forced to live in during their tour.

The cold, the lack of food and light, the impoverished neighbourhoods of the ordinary inhabitants, who share their homes with the circus staff contrast with the luxury of the hotel where the circus star, Fevvers, is lodged, and with the services she benefits from. The expanses of Siberia are another place where the senses are needed for orientation and survival. Walser’s glorious lines dedicated to St. Petersburg “built at the whim of a tyrant” remind us of Napoleon Bonaparte’s intervention in Venice mentioned by Winterson’s Villanelle.

**Sounds**

Despite writing his story, Saleem uses spoken language which adds to the sonorous background of the public, urban scenes. His chatter is doubled at the beginning by boatman Tai's "endless verbiage" swiftly carried over the lake. The conflict between his grandparents, in which The Reverend Mother refuses to speak to her husband, leads to her visible swelling (due to the repressed, unspoken words) and a scene in which she bursts into a stream of reproaches for everything that has happened meanwhile. In cities, bicycle bells are combined with the cries of street vendor praising their merchandise. Following an accident, when Saleem pretends to turn into a human radio, he begins to hear in the dark the voices of the other children of midnight and it takes a while before he can distinguish and control them, putting them into contact with the others and helping them communicate.

Winterson demystifies Napoleon by presenting a cruel and ridiculous image of him. His obsession with chicken meat means that, wherever he travels, he is accompanied by birds kept in cages and mutilated (beaks and claws cut off) so as not to make any sound and attract the enemy's attention. The silencing of the wretched birds corresponds, symbolically, to the silencing of the French people in the name of the emperor's ambitions. In Venice, Henri is asked by Villanelle to find and fetch her heart stolen by another woman, so he breaks into the woman's house and finds the heart by the regular, steady noise it makes.

Visual elements are blended with auditory ones, as Fevvers removes her make-up, eats, drinks and makes various noises very casually. Her voice, which tells her story with a particular accent, detains and bewitches Walser who perceives London as an illusory city in which time stops and everything gets suspended. The feeling of

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irreality during his interview with Fevvers is also strengthened by the distant sounds of Big Ben striking midnight several times. Later, in their tour to Siberia with the circus, following a train crash, out of his mind and devoid of memories and identity, Walser tries to find his bearings in the dazzling whiteness of Siberia using his olfactory and auditive senses. At the end of the novel, Siberia points to Man's lost connection to nature and his senses that used to help him read the world and the spaces in order to survive.

### *Touch*

On her way to the prophecy for her yet unborn baby, Amina Sinai climbs an airless stairway in the dark, and the eyes glinting at her through the shuttered doors are "lapping her up like bright rough cats' tongues" (Rushdie, 1980, p. 76). The prophecy is also triggered by the seer's touching of Amina's womb, "a brief sharp jolt of electricity passed between pudgy fingers and maternal skin" (Rushdie, 1980, p. 80).

During Napoleon's campaign in Russia, the cold affects the soldiers who get serious wounds between their toes and above their upper lips due to salt and the wind. These wounds are felt, they are painful and can be touched.

Fevvers' wings, when not performing, are covered by clothing. In her dressing room, at the beginning of his interview, Walser notices them through the palpable smoothness of the satin, through "the soiled quilting of her baby-blue satin dressing-gown, where they made [...] bulges, shuddering the surface of the taut fabric from time to time" (Carter, 1986, p. 1). Brought up in a brothel, Fevvers remembers its marble staircase with a slippery handrail down which she used to slide in her childhood.

### Conclusions

We have started from Rodaway's theory about the perception of the surrounding world as mediated by the senses and wanted to see how these senses are used by three subjectively chosen authors to create the universe in which their characters evolve. We have wondered whether the visual element is predominant or if the authors also resort to the other senses. We have seen that, repeatedly, reference is also made to smell, sometimes supplemented by auditory elements, that perception is multisensory and, most often, the three writers discussed have combined several senses to render the places their stories unfold.

By means of a few examples, we have seen that although the visual element predominates in the chosen texts, the fictional world is also created through other senses such as smell, hearing and even touch, which give a complex image of the way in which the characters perceive the world around them or their inner one. To a lesser extent, the texts also reveal the cognitive dimension of perceptions, the one in which mental processes involve memories and associations, especially related to the universe of childhood, confirming Rodaway's theory.

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# THE SCENT OF AIR: SPACE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE BLOODY CHAMBER AND OTHER STORIES*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

*Space plays a crucial role in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber (1979) and she skilfully utilizes it to create a sense of atmosphere and tension throughout her narratives. By carefully describing the physical surroundings, she immerses the reader in a vivid and evocative world, that resembles and, more importantly, draws from well-known fairy tales. The focus of this paper is to explore the symbolic significance of the chronotope and its ability to evoke characters' memories or define their personalities through the use of scent within a given space.*

*The experience of immersion allows the readers to grasp more fully the themes and motifs explored by the author in her writing (gender representation, patriarchy, power, identity), as well as to interpret the symbols she employs to express her perspective. The analysis of the three stories, The Bloody Chamber, The Courtship of Mr. Lyon, and The Tiger's Bride, demonstrates that the spaces Cater portrays are often symbolic, representing the inner psychological states of her characters and through her meticulous attention to detail, the author*

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*transforms the environment into a dynamic element that enhances the overall impact of her storytelling.*

*The portrayal of the dilapidated castle or mansion, along with the ailing inhabitants (in The Beauty and The Beast reinterpreted stories) serve as a metaphor for the conclusion of an era, signalling the decline of patriarchy and the revitalization of conventional gender roles, since the house flourishes after Beauty's return or the girl transforms into her true shape. The ending of The Bloody Chamber reveals that a corrupt space can be purified and turned into a beneficial one after the wicked presence is removed.*

**Keywords:** fairy tale; magical realism; environment; bloody chamber; liminality.

The term *magical realism* was coined by the art critic Franz Roh in an attempt to describe and define a movement that involved a return to a more realistic style after the expressionism wave. Combined with the political influences at the time, Franz Roh argued for a “sparser, clearer form of representation than expressionism” (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 134), emphasizing the inner oddity of the objects by employing realism; at the same time, the spectator/lecturer should perceive the unreal through real world and vice versa.

In his essay, *Of the magical realism of the Haitians* (1956, 2002), Jacques Stephen Alexis considers how magical realism seeks to reconcile both the arguments of the intellectuals that advocated for social realism, while many post-colonial societies are described by a pre-industrial, mostly rural state, with a significant part of their identity stemming from myth and magical tradition. In this type of post-colonial context, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler argue that the definition Alejo Carpentiere (1973) gives to what he names *real maravilloso*:

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Reflects the shifting, transformative, ever-changing native world and even in its tropical landscape, which becomes for him the symbol of the power of the colonized and oppressed to act as a revolutionary force and to resist and dismantle the static, fixed and conservative force of European aesthetic and political force (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 135).

For the European and American writers, magical realism served as a vehicle to delve into the intricacies of modern societies, blending realism with the supernatural, beyond the post-colonial subject, as we can see in Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Nail Gaiman, Ruth Ozeki's works. J. A. Cuddon argues that several of the magical realism characteristics include:

The mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable (Cuddon, 1999, p. 488).

Carter's volume, *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories*, is an investigation of the gender representation, with themes such as marriage, sexuality, power or metamorphosis. Several magical realism traits listed by Cuddon (1999) appear in Carter's fiction, as she tries to forge a female-empowerment movement through her characters, reverting the classical fairy tales. These stories of female emancipation develop in a setting which is

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rather magical, the castle or the mansion's description seem to be taken almost directly out of the original tale, mirroring a blend of reality and fantasy. The horrific, the shock, the inexplicable are all part of the narratives, as Carter invites her readers to perilous yet enticing places, as one can see in short stories such as *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Tiger's Bride* or *The Lady of the House of Love*.

The tales contained in *The Bloody Chamber* volume draw inspiration from fairy tales, particularly those published by Charles Perrault, which are variations of ancient European oral narratives that have been circulating for centuries. Therefore, Carter's stories are not entirely "new", but rather reimagined and rewritten, *reforged*, with a focus on female characters<sup>2</sup>, set within a vague chronotope<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the intricate temporal shifts and unusual environments characteristic of magical realism, it is important to note that time and space are interwoven in Carter's narratives, operating in a manner that doesn't allow for their independent functioning. Thus, the representation of space and time constitute a

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<sup>2</sup> However, these texts that *The Bloody Chamber* presents should not be read as a simple rewriting in a feminist key, but, in Angela Carter's own words, "to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories" (Carter 2006: vii-viii). (Vintage edition).

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin claims that the chronotope reflects the link between space and time and their underlying connection, time, as the Theory of Relativity states, being the fourth dimension. Although Bakhtin uses the term only in relation with literature and as a formally constitutive category, he states that the chronotope has an intrinsic *generic* significance, thus defining the genre of a text: "in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1982, pp. 84-85).

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significant aspect of the genre, as Ato Quayson (2020) points out in his essay<sup>4</sup>.

My paper explores the reinterpretation of fairy tale landscapes in Angela Carter's collection, particularly emphasizing the representation of the castle in *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* and *The Tiger's Bride*. Throughout these short stories, the setting is consistently centred around a castle or a mansion, depicted in either its full splendour or in a state of decay. As the narratives examined in this paper are rooted in fables, the chronotope associated with the castle and the temporal setting of the narratives bear a striking resemblance to those found in classic fairy tales, where notions of space and time are ambiguously portrayed. Consequently, the portrayed landscape, while modified to some degree, continues to reflect the essence of the 'original' environment.

It is noteworthy that Carter retains the fairy tale setting in her revised narratives, often featuring a castle or a decaying mansion, which are quintessential elements of the Gothic genre. Although her stories do not strictly conform to the conventions of Gothic fiction, she adeptly employs tropes associated with this aesthetic to advance her plot and convey significant insights about her characters and their circumstances. Fred Botting (1996) argues that the 'major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomy predominant in early Gothic fiction' and its state

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<sup>4</sup>According to Quayson (2020), the genre of magical realism establishes a correspondence between the codes of the fantastical and the real. This correspondence, however, is not exclusively reliant on the characters depicted in the narrative, but it is equally reinforced by the intrinsic characteristics of space and time as they are portrayed. Conflation or juxtaposition of different ontologies, transposition or leakage from a timeline to another are, as the author points out, not uncanny at all in magical realism. More on this subject can be read in Warnes, C., & Sasser, K. A. (Eds.). (2020). *Magical Realism and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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of decay and maze-like shape reminds of the feudal past, which was filled with superstition, fear and barbaric practices. We concur with Carol Senf (2017) in recognizing the transformation of Gothic space in later literary works (especially in Carter's narratives). These stories, which take place in cities and residences utilizing modern technological advancements, still retain their Gothic essence through several core components<sup>5</sup>.

In *The Bloody Chamber* short story, the Marquis, the wealthiest individual in France as the narrator states, lives in his family's ancestral estate located in Brittany, along the coast. The castle bears a striking resemblance to the grandiose fairy tale châteaux on the shoreline, seamlessly blending with the ocean's materiality:

And, ah! *His* castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate, his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewing about its attics, the casements opening on to the green and purple, evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day ... *that* castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the materiality of both earth and the waves, with the melancholy of a mermaid who perches on her rock and waits, endlessly, for a lover who had drowned far away, long ago. That lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place! (Carter, 1993, p. 13).

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<sup>5</sup> Senf claims that while the early Gothic novels were set in the past and featured spaces such as castles, remote country estates or even monasteries, 'contemporary Gothic no longer depends on the conventions of castles, villains, and persecuted maidens but instead reveals people's fears of what is taking place around them. As a result, today's Gothic writers, while aware of the choices—locations, characters, and other trope—their predecessors had made, are nonetheless focusing on their own historical period' (Senf, 2017, p. 260).

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The suggestion of a 'sea-siren location' conjures up the notion of deception, captivating individuals and drawing them into a realm from which there is no escape (legend has it that one of the wives perished in a boating mishap), quite similarly to sailors unable to break free from the sirens' trap once they are ensnared by their enchanting melody. "[The Marquis'] castle" quickly becomes "that castle", being surrounded by magic, or being in itself a magical place, a place which is neither on the sea, nor on the land, suspended in time, always the same in spite of how many women, chatelaines, reach its doorsteps. Regardless of the circumstances, the melody reminiscent of a 'sea-siren' provides solace to the narrator amidst the bleak and unfamiliar surroundings. The space that comprises the narrator's new residence has blurred the lines between reality and fantasy, with the castle taking the shape of the ocean and serving as the birthplace of all the Marquis' ancestors:

his great ancestral bed in the sea-girt, pinnacled domain that lay, still, beyond the grasp of my imagination ... that magic place, the fairy castle whose walls were made of foam, that legendary habitation in which he had been born. To which, one day, I might bear an heir (Carter, 1993, p. 6).

In, perhaps, that castle to which the train now took us, that marvellous castle in which he had been born (Carter, 1993, p. 8).

The ocean relates to the idea of motherhood because the narrator, bereft of her real mother, indulges in the "amniotic salinity of the ocean" (Carter, 1993, p. 12), the first smell and sensation she gets from her new home. The water, the drops, the 'melting landscape' (formed no

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doubt by her tears) all are reminiscent of the womb's protective space; the young woman's saviour, her mother, also emerges from the rising tides at the end of the narrative. The narrator vividly remembers how the ocean's presence appears to permeate the interior of the castle, as the vibrations of the tides echo in all chambers. Rather than being perceived as an intrusive, unseen energy, the sound of the ocean is experienced as a nostalgic reminder of bygone days. The murmur of the restless ocean, driving back and forth its waves, creates a melody which reminds the young wife about her formal life, a penniless orphan girl with the gift of music:

No room, no corridor that did not rustle with the sound of the sea and all the ceilings, the walls on which his ancestors in the stern regalia of rank lined up with their dark eyes and white faces, were stippled with refracted light from the waves which were always in motion; that luminous, murmurous castle of which I was the chatelaine, I, the little music student whose mother had sold all her jewellery, even her wedding ring, to pay the fees at the Conservatoire (Carter, 1993, p. 14).

The castle is a powerful symbol of the patriarchal world to which the Marquis stubbornly clings to and portrays more of a prison than a home for the multiple wives he had, due to the existence of a torture room. A place of decadence and horror, the chateau is a multilayered labyrinth in which the young wife loses herself, her identity, her virginity, she becomes a wife, part of his "gallery of beautiful women", not quite the chatelaine she imagines to be, thus she feels and is corrupted by the strange world she willingly exiles herself to. If the exterior of the Marquis' domain seems to be part



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of the ocean, the entrails of it, bearing all his sins, seem to be, for sure, part of the underworld.

The bedroom in which the marriage is consumed is filled with white funeral lilies, a symbol of the death to come, associated, just like her hair twined into a rope and lifted off her shoulders, with a specific part of the body: *the throat*. The smell of lilies asphyxiate the narrator, for they are heavy fleshed and full of pollen, as she remarks: “Those undertaker’s lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in turmeric. The lilies I always associate with him; that are white. And *stain* you” (Carter, 1993, p. 16).

The *stain* she recalls can be read as the *blood stain* on the forehead she will acquire after the Marquis discovers where she had been, in his *man-cave*, in that place of death and horror, from which she can no longer come back innocent; the *stain* can also be interpreted as *being tainted*, touched by corruption, as the narrator often portrays herself. After the Marquis preys on her virginity and takes it as a prize, the bedroom resembles, in the narrator’s eyes, like an embalming parlour, loaded with *extinction lilies*, suggesting the death of her earlier persona [maiden status], as the marriage is also metaphorically seen as the termination of a woman’s independence in a patriarchal society.

The castle exudes a masculine essence, permeating the entire environment with an aura of male dominance, attributed to the distinct smell of the Marquis characterized by notes of leather, tobacco and aftershave. The scents of the husband trigger recollections of the narrator’s father, particularly when he indulges in cigars, portraying him as the predatory patriarch rather than the

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absent figure of her now dead father<sup>6</sup>: “the cigar glowed and filled the compartment with a remembered fragrance that made me think of my father, a warm fug of Havana, when I was a little girl, before he kissed me and left me and died” (Carter, 1993, p.12).

Of all the fragrances linked to the Marquis, the scent of leather is the most striking, indicative of his considerable wealth and power. Russian leather, known for its exceptional quality, is traditionally viewed as the finest, distinguished by its robust aroma and unparalleled resilience:

If I rose up on my elbow, I could see the dark, leonine shape of his head and my nostrils caught a whiff of the opulent male scent of leather and spices that always accompanied him and sometimes, during his courtship, had been the only hint he gave me that he had come into my mother’s sitting room (Carter, 1993, p. 6)

His library seemed the source of his habitual odour of Russian leather. Row upon row of calf-bound volumes, brown and olive, with gilt lettering on their spines, the octavo in brilliant scarlet morocco. A deep-buttoned leather sofa to recline on (Carter, 1993, p. 17).

There was a pungent intensification of the odour of leather that suffused his library (Carter, 1993, p. 18).

At the halfway point of the story, the young woman is left to wander in the maze library brimming with

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of ‘the absent father’ is evident in both adaptation of *The Beauty and The Beast*, despite the fathers being physically present. Nevertheless, they relinquish their paternal rights and responsibilities when they surrender their daughter to The Beast.

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explicit artwork depicting sexual themes, violence and death. Initially, the contents of the Marquis' library fail to raise her interest, but she becomes enthralled by the pornographic images she encounters in *Reproof of curiosity* or *Immolation of the wives of the Sultan*. The role of these items is significant in shaping the character development as they provide the newly wife with insights into her husband's perception of her and what are his expectations from her.

In Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, the narrative is rich with references that suggest the position of the young wife within the household. The narrator reflects on her husband's fascination with symbolist art, noting that his study is adorned with the renowned painting "Sacrificial Victim." She contemplates the possibility that he may have imagined this artwork during their initial sexual encounter. The chronotope seems to exhibit influences from French Symbolism/Decadence, evident in the paintings displayed by the Marquis in his private quarters, the music performed by the girl, and the literary works found in the husband's collection. It is clear the Marquis is a dedicated collector, amassing paintings, books, and wives<sup>7</sup>. The gendering of space is evident as women, akin to the paintings adorning ancient walls, find themselves in a position of ownership, powerlessness, and voicelessness, ultimately being objectified.

After being entrusted with a handful of keys to the Marquis's castle, she realizes that he deliberately concealed the key to his *den*, his place of hiding when the "yoke of the marriage seems to weigh too heavily on his shoulders", playing with her curiosity, enticing his *little*

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<sup>7</sup> His inventory comprising works of art that belong to painters such as Moreau, Gauguin, Watteau, Poussin, Fragonard, Redon, de Chavannes, or music sheets by Debussy, Gounod, Czerny, Bach, Wagner.

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*child/baby*. It is the key to *enfer* [hell] and this pivotal information regarding the location of the room, akin to the *Bluebeard* fairy tale, is disclosed to her without concealment. Despite providing extremely detailed instructions on how to access the chamber, he emphasizes the importance of her avoiding it at all costs:

All is yours, everywhere is open to you – except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor full of horrid cobwebs that would get into your hair and frighten you if you venture there. Oh, and you'd find it such a dull little room! But you must promise me, if you love me, to leave it well alone. It is only a private study, a hideaway, a 'den' (...). There I can go, you understand, to savour the rare pleasure of imagining myself wifeless (Carter, 1993, p. 24).

After the Marquis appears to be called for business to New York, the young wife feels increasingly bored and isolated and, unknowingly she will be tested for obedience. The castle, now both prison and place to explore, is lighted up by the chatelaine who feels the exhilarating freedom of the explorer. Illuminating every corner of the castle, she endeavours to dispel the enigmatic aura enveloping it, while also seeking to discover her husband's true identity. The realisation that he had deceived her about the entrance to the forbidden room heightened her curiosity even further. The young wife travels to the *bowels* of the castle, where the fresh ocean air doesn't permeate; it is the perfect Gothic interior, lined up with underworld imagery. The corridor aesthetics, which feels like a maze, warn the narrator of what she might encounter insider his *den*: venetian

tapestries, the Rape of the Sabines, mythological scenes, as the hallway *wounds* downwards.

The *den* serves by excellence as the place where the predator rests, well-fed; most of narrator's depiction of him shows the embodied signs of animal behaviour and carnivorous tendency, as he is a *connoisseur* and a *gourmand*, feasting on her virginity. Upon her arrival into the *den*, she comprehends its sinister purpose as a site of torture and murder. The embalmed body of the opera singer (reevoking the embalming parlour she imagined when she set up her eyes on the lilies in her bedroom), the skull of the second wife and the still trapped and bleeding body of the Transylvanian countess<sup>8</sup> serve as chilling evidence of the horror that had taken place there. In that moment, she realized with dread that she is going to be the next item on his *showcase*.

The unexpected return of the Marquis prompts the narrator to frantically seek refuge from her impending fate. In that moment, her eyes are drawn once more to the painting of Saint Cecilia, the revered figure known as the patron saint of musicians, who met a tragic end by beheading. The chronotope shifts and it seems like both the narrator and the reader are transported back in time to a medieval era where she had sworn allegiance to her husband, only to fall short in upholding her vow. The key, now permanently stained with blood, serves as a haunting reminder of her failure.

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<sup>8</sup> Carmilla, a Romanian aristocrat and one of the wives of the Marquis, serves as a notable Gothic element within the narrative. Her name alludes to the Gothic novella *Carmilla*, authored by the Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872, which predates Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. This novella features a female vampire as its central predator. The Gothic aspect represented by her name has been revisited in contemporary media, notably by the developers of the video game series *Castlevania* (1986-2010) and its adult animated adaptation, *Castlevania* (2017-2021). In these adaptations, the character retains two key attributes: her country of origin (Styria) and her sexual orientation.

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The castle of the Marquis is reminiscent of the one where Bluebeard resides, with the turret's bedroom serving as the wife's accommodation, mimicking the tower where the fairy tale damsel waits for her brothers' rescue. After discovering his wife's disobedience, the husband compels her to kneel and presses the bloody key onto her forehead, before instructing her to prepare for martyrdom, staging the entire act as a replica of the fairy tale scene; the key's impression left on her forehead after the blood was partially absorbed by the skin can also suggest the idea of branding, as a proof of ownership and male dominance over the female character. The impending beheading with a sword raises the question of whether his great-grandfather could possibly be the infamous Bluebeard:

Decapitation. Go and bathe yourself; put on that white dress you wore to hear *Tristan* and the necklace that prefigures your end. And I shall take myself off to the armoury, my dear, to sharpen my great-grandfather's ceremonial sword (Carter, 1993, p. 46).

The landscape now is not the magical, serene scenery from before, but rather features a "pale light of morning; the weather was grey, indeterminate, the sea had an oily, sinister look, a gloomy day on which to die" (Carter, 1993, p. 46). The imminent murder is set to take place outdoors, reminiscent of the respective Perrault's fairy tale, as the Marquis beckons the female narrator to join him in the courtyard. The unexpected sound of hoofbeats catches her attention, and peering out the window, she sees a rider galloping towards the castle – none other than her own mother. Following the narrator's widowhood (the Marquis is shot dead by his mother-in-

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law who comes to her daughter's rescue), the castle undergoes a metamorphosis into a school for the visually impaired (blind), a haven for people who cannot see its dark and sinister past.

*The Courtship of Mr. Lyon* presents itself as a contemporary reinterpretation of the classical tale of *Beauty and the Beast*. In Carter's version, an inept businessman finds himself marooned near the Beast's enchanted estate during the depths of winter due to a malfunctioning vehicle, leading him to barter his daughter in exchange for assistance and good luck. Although this story may not possess the same level of excitement and novelty as other tales within the collection, its significance should not be overlooked, particularly when juxtaposed with *The Tiger's Bride*, an upside-down reinterpretation of the same original fairy tale.

The Beast's leonine figure resembles the fairy tale depiction, while Beauty embodies perfection. The *castle*, designed in a Palladian style, more like a mansion, where Beast resides breathes an air of enchantment, seemingly under the character's control, as it welcomes Beauty's father for a meal and drinks. Despite its outward appearance of decay, the interior of the estate is teeming with life. Therefore, the house is a metaphor for Beast's character, reflecting its own life and demeanour, under the terrible curse that afflicted him:

The door was equipped with a knocker in the shape of a lion's head, with a ring through the nose; as he raised his hand towards it, it came to him this lion's head was not, as he had thought first, made of brass, but, instead, of solid gold (Carter, 1993, p. 55).

Within the confines of the dwelling lies a luxurious enchanted garden, with an array of flowers displayed in

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“free-standing jars of crystal”. The interior landscape leads the father to speculate that the household is inhabited by a wealthy and eccentric family, considering the fact that their spaniel dog’s neck is adorned with a diamond necklace. Every sight that meets the father’s eyes surpasses his imagination, yet he accepts it without question: a silver tray bearing a bottle labelled *drink me*, and a lavish meal labelled *eat me*, the scene resembling the whimsical events of *Alice in Wonderland*. The host’s hospitality extends to providing car service to the father (without pay), who is then escorted out by the dog. Upon leaving the mansion, the father encounters a white rose, the only wish Beauty had from him to gift her. The entire house embodies the Beast’s turmoil when confronted with the sight of theft: “at that, every window of the house blazed with furious light and a fugal baying, as of a pride of lions, introduced his host” (Carter, 1993, p. 57). The resolve to compensate for this unthinkable offence to the host is to bring his daughter to have dinner with the Beast. The rose appears to serve as a representation of the enduring beauty of Beauty, while the lilies symbolize death in *The Bloody Chamber*.

As a result of the Beast aiding his father’s appeal in London<sup>9</sup>, Beauty is compelled to reside in his mansion until the trial reaches its conclusion. Despite being surrounded by opulence that far surpasses her modest home, “she longed for the shabby home of their poverty” (Carter, 1993, p. 60). The house she will eventually discover is devoid of any caretakers aside from the spaniel; however, the young girl is provided with freshly prepared meals each day, and her chamber is completely furnished to meet the standards of a lady:

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<sup>9</sup> Beauty’s father had serious legal problems and no financial aid to deal with them.



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Her bedroom contained a marvellous glass bed; she had a bathroom, with towels thick as fleece and vials of suave unguents; and a little parlour of her own, the walls of which were covered with an antique paper of birds of paradise and Chinamen, where there were precious books and pictures and the flowers grown by invisible gardeners in the Beast's hothouses (Carter, 1993, p. 60).

The widespread existence of magic no longer astonishes her, and against all expectations, Beauty finds joy in that "bright, sad, pretty place", where the reader is warned that

All the natural laws of the world were held in suspension, here, where an army of invisibles tenderly waited on her, and she would talk with the lion, under the patient chaperonage of the brown-eyed dog (...). Yet still his strangeness made her shiver (Carter, 1993, p. 62).

The spatial and temporal dimensions depicted in this narrative are intriguing, as Beast's estate seems to be ensnared in a temporal enchantment, yet it remains intertwined with the advancements of the external realm. For example, Mr. Lyon, known as The Beast, possesses a functional telephone that Beauty's father conveniently discovers, accompanied by a card from a garage providing a 24-hour rescue service, which guarantees the repair of his vehicle, at the estate's mater expenses. Although the furnishings are dated and there are no attendants, the house is well-maintained, and a dumb waiter facilitates the delivery of food to Beauty in her room.

After her father's fortune is reestablished, they partake in social gatherings, lodging, cultural events,

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dining establishments, and a contemporary lifestyle, all made possible by their recent wealth. Beauty's character is a prime example of submissiveness, as she dutifully adheres to the authority of both her father and the Beast. Paradoxically, her grace diminishes as she begins to live for herself, compelling her to return to the Beast's domain to save him, weighted down by guilt. However, she is etched in a number of descriptions as being vain:

A certain inwardness was beginning to transform the lines around her mouth (...) she smiled at herself in the mirrors a little too often, these days, and the face that smiled back was not quite the one she had seen contained in the Beast's agate eyes. Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered expensive cats (Carter, 1993, p. 64).

Once again, the dying, agonizing Beast's reflection permeates the entire domain. The garden, still under winter's spell, shows no signs of greenery, while the fading light from the window adds to the sombre ambiance. The eerie noises echoing from the house resemble the growls of a lion, and the once luxurious indoor garden now lies in decay, the air heavy with the scent of death:

There was an air of exhaustion, of despair in the house and, worse, a kind of physical disillusion, as if its glamour had been sustained by a cheap conjuring trick and now the conjurer, having failed to pull the crowds, had departed to try his luck elsewhere (Carter, 1993, p. 66).

Realizing that the reflection she saw in the Beast's eyes was merely her own, Beauty feels a deep sense of

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contentment in the idea of wholly submitting to him, if he wishes for her. The story reaches its conclusion with his restoration to his former self as a man, and the two walk together in a spring Edenic garden, now resplendent with blooming flora. It is worth noting that Angela Carter's rendition of *The Beauty and The Beast* maintains the original mythical properties without subversion, as we have previously indicated.

Angela Carter's *The Tiger's Bride* draws inspiration from the same fairy tale as *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, yet she does not merely update the narrative. Angela Carter remains faithful to the original setting in terms of space and time, situating her story in a remote Italian countryside, thereby adding an element of mystery and allure for the audience.

This tale initiates with the odyssey of a father and his daughter, who are compelled to leave their native land, resembling an exile prompted by the father's issues with gambling. Unfortunately, the consequences of his reckless behaviour are dire, leading to the daughter's surrender to The Beast in a card game. The narrative serves as a stark reminder of the prevailing patriarchal ideology, wherein women are frequently regarded as mere possessions that can be bartered or traded. The young woman, Beauty, is brought to the Beast's dwelling, a remote and dilapidated mansion, where she refuses his intrusive demands – to see her naked. Upon his revelation of his naked, animalistic self to her, she chooses to be with him, undergoing a transformation into her true form, as a tiger.

The events of *The Tiger's Bride* unfold during the winter season, similar to those in *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*; however, unlike the latter, spring does not arrive as a conclusion. The depicted environment is so expansive that one may easily become disoriented (see the hunting scene), presenting a blunt contrast to the setting of the

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other narrative, where only The Beast's domain was under the winter's spell. The narrator, Beauty, reflects with sorrow on the appearance of the landscape from their homeland in Russia: "we owned black earth, blue forest with bear and wild boar, serfs, cornfields, farmyards, my beloved horses, white nights of cool summer, the fireworks of the northern lights" (Carter, 1993, p. 67). Despite this, she and her father are travellers originating from the Northern regions and upon their arrival in Italy, they find themselves succumbing to a sun-soaked lethargy, only to be jolted back to reality when winter catches back, reclaiming them:

But then the snow comes, you cannot escape it, it followed us from Russia as if it ran behind our carriage, and in this dark, bitter city has caught up with us at last, flocking against the windowpanes to mock my father's expectations of perpetual pleasure as the veins in his forehead stand out and throb, his hands shake as he deals the Devil's picture books (Carter, 1993, p. 67).

When the narrator's father's gambles everything on a hand of cards, she counts what riches they could win: "The Beast's hereditary palazzo outside the city; his immense revenues; his lands around the river; his rents, his treasure chest, his Mantegnas, his Giulio Romanos, his Cellini saltcellars, his tides ... the very city itself" (Carter 72), and only for a brief moment she believes her father would win. The apparent opulence of The Beast in *The Tiger's Bride* contrasts sharply with the dilapidated condition of the palazzo he calls home. The recurring motif of the white rose, with its symbolic importance, is also present in this narrative as it was in the previous work. The narrator was born on Christmas, and her

English nurse would call her 'Christmas rose'. The image of *La Bestia* is taken from a Renaissance painting, he is dressed in an old-fashioned tailcoat and wears a beautiful painted mask, a wig as in old portraits, even the chronological time in the story passed.

The Beast, however, presents the girl a rose from his own out-fashioned buttonhole when he first meets her. The 'girl-rose' shape shifts into a truly white rose, mirroring the snow; the flower felt unnatural during winter, as Beauty rips nervously his petals off. By the time she takes leave to his mansion, after her father lost her to cards, The Beast's valet gives her a bouquet of white roses, on behalf of his master. The imprudent father seeks a rose from Beauty's bouquet to serve as a keepsake of her, and she willingly presents him with one. In doing so, she accidentally pierces her finger, resulting in the rose being marked by her blood. This evocative scene lingers in the minds of readers, intertwining with themes from *The Sleeping Beauty*, an intertext. It can be posited that Beauty, in certain aspects, mirrors the state of being 'asleep' akin to *The Sleeping Beauty*, as she ultimately experiences a revival from her dormant state and reclaims her authentic form by the end of the story. Consequently, the rose emerges as a significant and recurring symbol throughout Angela Carter's narratives.

The narrator remarks with anguish, as she catches sight of the village: "A funeral hush about the place, the inhabitants huddled up against cold so you can hardly see their faces (...). The treacherous South, where you think there is no winter but forget you take it with you" (Carter, 1993, p. 69). The space in the winter's grasp, the never-ending snowfall, the biting cold, all of it do not inflict somatic reflexes on Beauty, a 'child of the severe North', but point out to a symbolic loss, and, ultimately, death.

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The land where the Beast lives is a place of extinction, symbolically implied by the massive fall of snow that covers everything, although it is the South of Italy. The man-creature lives in a remote location, indicating the considerable distance between it and any semblance of civilization (suggesting, at the same time, how far society is from being civilized), within a desolate environment often likened to a “burnt-out planet”, where the predominant colour palette consists solely of melancholic browns and sepia tones reminiscent of winter: “a bereft landscape in the sad browns and sepias of winter lay all about us” (Carter, 1993, p. 84).

*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* represents a remarkable anthology of feminist reinterpretations of classic tales, featuring female protagonists as seen in *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, and *The Tiger’s Bride*, who collectively embody a triad of women entering unions with monstrous beings. Carter skillfully utilizes a variety of convoluted narrative techniques through her work; however, a notable aspect of each story remains the distinctive setting in which these events unfold.

The depiction of the environment, intricately detailed with thoughtful attention to colour schemes, integrates visual perception in conjunction with other sensory experiences, while also allowing room for reader interpretation through the incorporation of allusions and various levels of intertextuality.

The ruined castle, mansion and domain, are places of power and wealth, iconic images of the Gothic genre, all present in these three short stories written by Carter. Moreover, vast spaces like forests or barren fields are metaphors associated with various stages of civilisation. The author delves into the perils of a patriarchal society,

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steeped in tradition, and the journey of transformation that female characters undergo, from being victims to empowered individuals in her retelling of classic fairy tales. These narratives not only serve a clear didactic purpose but also highlight the potential for women to flourish and be resilient within a male-dominated social structure. Carter's depiction of old-fashioned, conservative gender roles and their subsequent shift, which impacts the traditional dynamics between male and female characters, illustrate how women can seize up the opportunity to break free from oppression and advocate for equality. These stories can also help women understand and identify the behaviour of a predator and that of a male that objectifies, making them more aware of a male's desire for dominance and ownership.

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# REAL AND MAGICAL SPACES IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*: THE KASHMIR VALLEY AND THE SUNDARBANS<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

*The paper deals with two real regions in India that acquire a magical quality in Salman Rushdie's novel, Midnight's Children, the Kashmir Valley, where the narrator-protagonist's family history begins, and the Sundarbans, where Saleem regains his memory. It begins with Rushdie's assertion that the spaces and places in the novel are as fictional as they are real, described during a time when the writer no longer lived in India. The paper then introduces Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia which shares key characteristics with the two spaces analysed: both are isolated, yet penetrable, function in relation to surrounding space, and reach their full potential when characters break with traditional time. The main analysis focuses on the realistic elements of the Kashmir Valley and the Sundarbans before highlighting the magical aspects that transform them. In the*

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Kashmir Valley, the landscape is personified, resisting intrusion, particularly from Doctor Aadam Aziz, who returns with a new worldview after studying in Germany. The valley's timelessness, its association with Paradise, and its extraordinary inhabitants – exemplified by Tai the boatman – are also explored. The Sundarbans similarly resists change, rejecting four strangers – Saleem Sinai, Ayooba Baloch, Farooq Rashid and Shaheed Dar – after initially attempting to assimilate them. Its symbolic association with a tomb, the theme of symbolic death followed by a rebirth and the exaggerated features of the forest are also discussed. The paper concludes by drawing parallels between the two spaces, both of which possess agency, resist intrusion, and function as atemporal havens where unconventional solutions to crises are sought.

**Keywords:** Paradise; rebirth; magical space; initiation; rejection of intrusion.

### **1. Introduction: Spatiality in *Midnight's Children* and Foucault's Concept of *Heterotopia***

The term *magical realism* was coined and used for the first time in 1925 by Franz Roh who connected it to the work of certain German painters of the period. It reappeared in the United States of America in the early 1940's, still connected to painting. It began to be associated with fiction gradually, and by the 1980's it became a well-established label for those literary works that mingled and juxtaposed the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre in such a way that neither dominated and that the reader accepted the coexistence of contradictory codes. Jorge Luis Borges' *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935) has often been regarded as the first work of magical realism (Cuddon, 1977/1999, pp. 487-488). Many of the definitions of the trend are derived from its Latin American variant, states Ursula Kluwick. Still, she argues

further, as one of its most important representatives outside Latin America and one of the most distinguished postcolonial writers, Salman Rushdie writes his own brand of magical realism. Poised between the postmodern and the postcolonial, Kluwick contends, Rushdie's magical realist novels (*Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Enchantress of Florence*) confront readers with unsolvable riddles, remaining open to interpretation because in them the realist and the supernatural codes are in an irreconcilable opposition (Kluwick, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Ever since its publication in 1981, *Midnight's Children* has been the subject of critical acclaim and the recipient of numerous awards. In 1981, it won the Booker Prize for Fiction, the Arts Council Writers' Award, and the English-Speaking Union Literary Award. In 1993, it received the James Tait Prize and the Booker of Bookers, and in 2008, it was awarded the Best of Booker, the last two marking the 25<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Booker Prize respectively, and reflecting both critic and public admiration (Fenwick, 2005/2008). Various aspects of the novel have been analysed in numerous books, dissertations and articles, including works by: Ursula Kluwick (2013), Katrin Röder (2018), Yuying Liang (2020), Konika Mukherjee (2021), and Delia-Maria Radu (2022), who discuss the novel through the lenses of magical realism and postcolonialism. While these studies provide important insights, they often present a broader view of spatiality in *Midnight's Children*. Therefore, this paper aims to offer a focused analysis of the Kashmir Valley and the Sundarbans, two significant spaces in *Midnight's Children*, examining why they may be considered magical, and exploring their similarities in function within the novel and in the characters' lives.

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A first observation to be made about the spaces under discussion, as well as the other spaces and places in the novel, is that they are as much fictional as they are real. In his essay, *Imaginary Homelands* (1992), Rushdie wrote that his novel was born out of a “sense of loss” and an “urge to reclaim” the past, feelings often experienced by writers who are “exiles or emigrants or expatriates” (p. 10), like himself. At the time of writing, Rushdie was living far from India, the setting of his story. Due to the limitations of memory, no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to precisely reclaim what has been lost. As a result, writers like Rushdie “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (p. 10). Consequently, in *Midnight’s Children*, “my India was just that: ‘my’ India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect [...]” (p. 10). That is why Saleem the narrator is “suspect in his narration”, and “his vision is fragmentary” (p. 10).

In his seminal article *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1967), Michel Foucault argues that, while the 19<sup>th</sup> century was primarily concerned with history and time, “[t]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space” (1967/1984, p. 1). Space, according to Foucault, is not homogeneous and empty, but is rather defined by a set of relations “that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (Foucault, 1967/1984, p. 3). Among these sites, he singles out heterotopias, defined as

places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like

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counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault, 1967/1984, pp. 3-4)

These places “are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about” (Foucault, 1967/1984, p. 4) and are common to all cultures, though they take different forms in each. Foucault describes two types of heterotopias: crisis heterotopias, associated with “primitive” societies and reserved for individuals undergoing critical stages (e.g., adolescents, pregnant women), and heterotopias of deviation, such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and retirement homes, which accommodate those whose behaviour deviates from societal norms.

One heterotopia can have various functions within a certain society, as illustrated by the example of a cemetery, and a single heterotopia can juxtapose several incompatible spaces in one place, such as a theatre, a cinema or a garden. Heterotopias function most effectively when they involve a break from traditional time, as seen in museums, libraries, fairgrounds or vacation villages. They are simultaneously isolated and penetrable, as in the case of American motel rooms. Foucault also notes that heterotopias serve a function in relation to the rest of space, either exposing the surrounding space as more illusory than themselves (heterotopias of illusion, like brothels) or offering a perfect space (heterotopias of compensation, such as colonies). The heterotopia *par excellence* is, according to Foucault, the ship, which

encapsulates isolation, mobility, and function within society.

## **2. The Kashmir Valley: A Realistic Portrayal**

The Vale of Kashmir or the Kashmir Valley is an ancient lake basin situated in Jammu and Kashmir, a union territory (i.e. an administrative unit) in northern India. It is surrounded by mountains which, alongside the lakes – Wular, Dal and Nagin – attract many tourists. Srinagar, the summer capital of the union territory, lies at the centre of the valley. Historically, the valley served as a resort for the Mughal Emperors, with Jahangir being the most renowned, having constructed gardens and buildings there for his empress (Britannica.com).

Both the vale and its main landmarks can be found in Rushdie's novel. The valley features early in the narration, as the setting where the plot of the novel begins "in the early spring of 1915" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 4), when Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz was 25 years old and had just returned from Germany. Lake Dal and Nageen are waters that are crossed by Tai the boatman. The city on the lake is also mentioned, and so are the mountains, which closed in around it during winter and "were now retreating to their hill-stations for the warm season" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 5). By the end of the episode, when Aadam left the region "for the last time", the "mountains crowded round and stared" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 34).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In order to be consistent with the use of tenses in the quotations that support the ideas expressed in the paper, I shall retell the events in the novel in past tenses, while the interpretation of the events and other additional considerations made about them will be written in the present.

**3. The Kashmir Valley as a Magical Space: Its Personality, Resistance to Change, and People. The Kashmir Valley as a Symbolic Paradise**

The fact that the region is a magical territory is evident, first and foremost, in that it seems endowed with a personality of its own and a volition of its own, actively resenting the intrusion of anything that is different or strange. The mountains retreated, crowded and stared, while the valley curved up towards the character and punched him in the nose. While these are personifications, they also stand for much more than that. The vale struck Aadam when he attempted to pray, but he no longer did it convincingly, as he no longer truly believed. While uttering the words of the prayer, he thought of Heidelberg and of his friends there. Immediately after the land hit him in the nose – a most prominent part of his body, and therefore likely to be hit if its possessor did not perform his actions with appropriate attention – Aadam felt “as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscoped return. Beneath the winter ice, it had been coldly neutral, but now there was no doubt; the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, pp. 5-6). The environment rejected the unfamiliar doctor, who returned home with a new worldview. One that did not encourage praying to an entity that may not exist and supported the opinion that India “had been ‘discovered’ by the Europeans” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 6).

To Aadam, the territory appeared both new and old, changed and unchanged at the same time. It was unchanged because the landscape had been essentially the same since the Mughal Empire. What had changed, however, was Aadam’s perception of it, as “[i]nstead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad,

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to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 5). Having become acquainted with another culture and another way of seeing the world in the five years he had spent studying medicine in Heidelberg, Germany, Aadam now felt entrapped in the little valley that was his home. But there were also physical changes that he had to confront. Besides the fact that the world was “new again” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 5), since it was spring, the season of renewal, the established order of things had changed in his home: his father had suffered a stroke and his mother had been forced to leave home to run their small gemstone business. A change occurred in his innermost soul after the punch in the nose which led to his losing his faith. Another significant change would soon follow, as he would meet the young woman who would become his wife, Naseem Ghani.

Secondly, the valley can be considered magical because it is explicitly associated with Paradise. Later in his life Aadam would try to remember “his childhood springs in Paradise” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 6). This Paradise is isolated, due to the mountains surrounding it, but it is also accessible, to its inhabitants returning after time away or to tourists who visit during the warm months. However, this access seems to be purely physical, as demonstrated by Aadam’s rejection by his native place and his departure. “ ‘Paradise’ “, Ramsey-Kurtz explains, “implies inclusion and exclusion, bliss and discontent, innocence and guilt, ignorance and knowledge, harmony and conflict, life and death, transience and permanence, materiality and transcendence, beginning and end [...]” (2011, pp. VII-VIII). These words apply to both spaces discussed here.

Thirdly, the land is magical due to its people. Singled out among them is Tai, the boatman, “a quirky, enduring familiar spirit of the valley” (Rushdie, 1981/2023,



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p. 11), the owner of the oldest *shikara* on the lakes and the first to cross them when the ice melted. Tai made his living as a ferryman, transporting goods (hay, goats, vegetables, wood) and people for money, which renders him analogous to Charon, the mythical boatman who ferried the spirits of the dead across the River Styx to the realm of Hades. Tai also called for Aadam and transported him to meet his future bride.

Tai was as old as the hills and lived in apparent squalor and poverty:

Nobody could remember when Tai had been young. He had been plying this same boat, standing in the same hunched position, across the Dal and Nageen Lakes ... for ever. As far as anyone knew. He lived somewhere in the insanitary bowels of the old wooden-house quarter and his wife grew lotus-roots and other curious vegetables on one of the many 'floating gardens' liting on the surface of the spring and summer water. Tai himself cheerily admitted he had no idea of his age. Neither did his wife – he was, she said, already leathery when they married. His face was a sculpture of wind on water: ripples made of hide. He had two golden teeth and no others. In the town, he had few friends. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 10)

Actually, his only friend seems to be Aadam who, with the recklessness of childhood, once dared to ask Tai how old he was. Consequently, he had to face the old man's rage. For an instant the boatman remained silent – a silence "noisier than a waterfall" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 12), but then he regained his capacity to speak, which he used mainly to insult his companion, but also to answer the question, though not very precisely:

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I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen Emperors die. [...] I saw that Isa, that Christ, when he came to Kashmir. [...] Once I knew where there was a grave with pierced feet carved on the tombstone, which bled once a year. Even my memory is going now; but I know, although I can't read. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 13)

His image is contradictory, combining elements that are often at odds with one another. He cheerily admitted he had no idea how old he was, but he got angry when Aadam asked him about his age. His memory was failing and he could not read, but he claimed to know many things. Being described as a sculpture of wind on water, his face combined two of the four elements: air and water, contrasting symbols – the air being active and masculine, the water passive and feminine (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/1993, vol. 1, pp. 72-73, 107-116 respectively).

People considered Tai both crazy and rich. Crazy because of his ceaseless chatter, often directed at himself. Although people laughed at his monologues, they did so with a sense of awe and fear –

Awe, because the old half-wit knew the lakes and hills better than any of his detractors; fear, because of his claim to an antiquity so immense it defied numbering, and moreover hung so lightly round his chicken's neck that it hadn't prevented him from winning a highly desirable wife and fathering four sons upon her ... and a few more, the story went, on other lakeside wives. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 11)

He was also considered rich. Tai's wealth was the source of much speculation, with his golden teeth

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sparkling and fuelling rumours that he had money or perhaps more golden teeth, hidden away.

His excessive fertility likens him to a primordial god fathering humanity, while his excessive talk conceals more than it reveals. His speech was colourful, punctuated with jocular insults aimed at Aadam. It was difficult to discern what was real and what was invented in it. As a child, Aadam was fascinated by Tai's constant talk. To Aadam, it was "magical talk", while Tai's *shikara* was a "magical boat", crossing the "enchanted waters of the morning" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 12).

The child was drawn to the old man despite his parents' disapproval. They would bathe him in boiling water after each meeting to get rid of the germs he might have picked up from the filthy Tai whom, like all adults, they considered a crazy liar. Maybe the child was attracted to him because old people become like children themselves and Tai met Aadam's need to spend time and hear stories from somebody of the same mind as himself. Or perhaps, with the innocence of childhood, Aadam was the only one who could see the extraordinary in Tai, who was not afraid to share his secrets with somebody unlikely to misuse them.

What developed between them was a sort of mentor – apprentice relationship, with Aadam learning many things from Tai, starting from the secrets of the lake, which the boatman knew better than anybody: "where you could swim without being pulled down by weeds; the eleven varieties of water-snake; where the frogs spawned; how to cook a lotus-root" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, pp. 14-15). The old man taught his young friend other lessons too. He told Aadam about European women who came to that region to drown themselves or about the nose being

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the place where the outside world meets the world inside you. If they don't get on, you feel it here. Then you rub your nose with embarrassment to make the itch go away. [...] When it warns you, look out or you'll be finished. Follow your nose and you'll go far. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 15)

Tai also shared with the future doctor stories of men coming to Kashmir “to enjoy life, or to end it, or both” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 13). The first case was, Tai said, Jesus, described as bald and gluttonous, who supposedly came to Kashmir “to live it up a little” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 13) after having finished his work. The second case was Ilse Lubin, one of Aadam's German friends, and Aadam himself.

Tai's knowledge of the world, the way he presents this knowledge and his general appearance and reputation remind us of Vasile Lovinescu's view that what is highest in the initiatic hierarchy, important on a superior level, becomes the lowest on our level in order to have a common measure with this world in which it has descended and to be able to draw it upwards through momentary similarity (Lovinescu, 1989, p. 214). Thus, Tai appears as an initiate and Aadam as his apprentice, who, as the chosen one, is the only person who can recognize the old man's uniqueness.

As a genuine spirit of the valley, the old boatman also rejected what he perceived as a foreign element. His hostility was especially directed towards the doctor's bag, which Tai saw as the embodiment of evil and always abused: “We haven't got enough bags at home that you must bring back that thing made of a pig's skin that makes one unclean just by looking at it? And inside, God knows what all” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 18). Aadam realized that, to Tai, the bag represented “Abroad; [...] the alien thing,

the invader, progress” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 19). Unfamiliar with the instruments used by doctors, Tai strongly resented the fact that his former friend now had to smell with the stethoscope instead of using his impressive nose. To emphasize the distance between himself and Aadam, Tai called him “Doctor Sahib” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 20) or “that German Aziz” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 30), highlighting the fact that he perceived Aadam as foreign. In a valley with many lakes, where even the poorest people washed, Tai refused to bathe or to change his clothes for three years, while the doctor remained in the region, and blamed this on Aadam, thus ruining the latter’s relationship with the locals. Moreover, when Tai contracted a skin disease he refused medical help from his former friend, yet miraculously recovered after the latter left the valley, moving to Agra with his wife.

Aadam eventually returned to the valley to die there, but nobody knew when or where Tai died. Rumour had it that he met his end in 1947, when, infuriated by India and Pakistan’s struggle over the valley, he went to tell both sides what he thought and was shot. However, the story had remained unconfirmed, hinting at Tai’s possible immortality.

#### **4. The Sundarbans: A Realistic Portrayal**

Located in northeastern India and southern Bangladesh, the Sundarbans is a region of saltwater swamp and forest which forms the lower part of the Padma (Ganges) – Brahmaputra River delta. It has a total area of approximately 10,000 square km, both land and water. The estuaries, rivers and creeks enclose flat, forested islands. Mangrove forests abound in the area, which is also home to many aquatic and terrestrial species

of plants and animals, some of them endangered (Britannica.com).

In the novel, the Padma-Ganga River is mentioned by name, and the region's flora and fauna appear, though in a form that differs from what one would find in a geography or botany book.

### **5. The Sundarbans as a Magical Space. Its Personality, Resistance to Change, and Attempts at Assimilation. The Sundarbans as a Symbolic Tomb of Failed Rebirth**

Like the Kashmir Valley, the Sundarbans is magical, first of all, because it has a personality and a will of its own. And also like the Kashmir Valley, it resents intrusion. This time the intruders are not its own inhabitants returning home after years with a new worldview, but strangers running after or rather away from something. The human protagonists of the Sundarbans episode are Saleem Sinai himself and his CUTIA unit, including Ayooba Baloch, Farooq Rashid and Shaheed Dar – three persons and one dog working with the purpose of rooting out undesirable people supporting the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan. The dog is Saleem, great at tracking, capable of following any trail, even in water, but otherwise numb after having lost his family and memory during the India-Pakistan war in 1965. The year is now 1971 and the team reaches the jungle by boat, following somebody that has kept eluding them. The team is guided by the man-dog not chasing anyone, actually, but running away from the conflict.

The Sundarbans is not explicitly associated with Paradise, but with a tomb or a labyrinth. “The jungle closed behind them like a tomb” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503). The four young men faced “the sepulchral greenness of the forest” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503) and

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“incomprehensibly labyrinthine saltwater channels overtowered by the cathedral-arching trees” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503). Once in the jungle, Ayooba Baloch was sure that “he would never see the sun again” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503). All these elements suggest a symbolic death, which hints at a process of initiation. We expect this death of the characters to be followed by a rebirth and by the acquisition of a new status, that of initiate and/ or adult, by the four young men.

The episode is summarized by Ursula Kluwick as follows:

The jungle seems bizarrely alive and, what is more, determined to torture the intruders in the manner of an evil and revengeful spirit: they are bombarded by its fruits; almost drowned by the extraordinary force of the monsoon it unleashes on their heads; have their blood sucked by the jungle’s creatures; are tortured by apparitions and phantoms of the past, as well as lulled and assailed by nostalgia; plagued by the voices of their victims and deafened by the mud with which they seek to block their ears against these lamentations; seduced in the temple of Kali by ghosts which feed on their dreams; and, once the jungle is done with them, literally washed out of the forest on a huge tidal wave. (2013, pp. 19-20)

This is an accurate rendering of what happens literally in the Sundarbans. But the events also have a figurative, deeper meaning.

The space is not inhabited by people of its own, unless we consider as belonging to the Sundarbans the peasant who caught his wife with Saleem and who was shot by Ayooba because he was threatening their guide. Though he lives in a region adjacent to the forest proper,

Kuhelika Ghosh contends we should view him as part of the ecosystem of the jungle (2023, p. 15). The other people the reader sees in the Sundarbans are the four intruders: Ayooba and Farooq, both 16 and a half; Shaheed, probably a year younger than the first two; and Saleem, 7 years older than them. Since “there hung around him an air of great antiquity” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 487), they nicknamed him *buddha*, meaning “old man”. This might lead the reader to conclude that Saleem was their leader. To a certain extent he was, as he was the dog and the others were supposed to follow him; he was leading them while following the undesirable people. But the one who would actually be their leader in the Sundarbans episode was Shaheed, who seems the only one capable of thinking under the circumstances. Shaheed would order them to take their boat to shore, instruct them to build a shelter, tie the boat to a sundri-trunk and go further into the jungle. He is reminiscent of the youngest of the three emperor’s sons whom fairy tales commonly feature, the one who is the bravest and cleverest and who manages to succeed in passing all trials and getting the girl (though this will not happen in Rushdie’s novel).

As far as the *buddha* is concerned, Saleem made the distinction between *buddha*, “pronounced with the Ds hard and plosive” and Buddha, “with soft-tongued Ds, meaning he-who-achieved-enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree...” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 487). The latter Buddha was present and absent at the same time, with his body in one place and his spirit elsewhere, challenging the line between being alive and being dead. But that was also the case of *buddha*, as he was with the others physically, but was always lost in his own thoughts and quite difficult to establish a relationship with. In addition to that, we also find Saleem sitting cross-legged beneath a tree, not a bodhi tree, but a chinar. The similarities between him and



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Buddha might suggest that he is already initiated. The chinar tree is not unimportant for the Kashmiris. A majestic tree that can be found all over Jammu and Kashmir, a permanence of everyday life and religious ceremonies since ancient times, the chinar holds a special place in the culture of the region and it is symbolic of “permanence, comfort, emotions recollected, unity of people, etc.” (Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department, 2021).

What is interesting to note in the episode is that Saleem, who is the narrator of the novel, not remembering his past and his name, does not use his name here. He calls himself “the buddha” and uses the third person instead of the first. He even insists that it was not “I” that did certain things, but “he, the buddha”, “not-Saleem” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 502). Later, he will use both the first and the third person pronouns or will hesitate between them to suggest confusion: Shaheed “ordered us, them, to row our, their, sinking boat to shore” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 504) or “What [...] failed to emerge from my lips? Padma: the buddha had forgotten his name” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 509).

If the components of the Kashmir Valley are personified, everything about the Sundarbans is hyperbolized, rendering it a huge, chaotic space, threatening to engulf the four people. Yet the jungle only seems chaotic; at a closer look we notice that the chaos is only apparent and we should not understand it as a complete breakdown of stability, but as “a removal of the fixed to open up new patterns of understanding and experiences” (Upstone, 2009/2016). Afraid that they would not find a way out, Ayooba “wept like a monsoon” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503). He “cried without stopping for three entire hours or days or weeks, until the rain began and made his tears unnecessary” (Rushdie,

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1981/2023, p. 503). Then, normal things happen but they are also exaggerated to a certain extent. "The Sundarbans began to grow in the rain." (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 503), "gaining in size, power and ferocity" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 504). Of course, vegetation grows when the monsoon starts after months of drought, but under the four people's eyes everything gets a lot larger than it used to be and a lot larger than they would be willing to accept. The roots of the mangrove trees became "thicker than elephants' trunks", the mangroves were getting so tall that "the birds at the top must have been able to sing to God". The leaves swelled in the rain until "the entire forest seemed to be thatched". The huge nipa-fruits "fell from dizzying heights to explode like bombs in the water" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 504). One created such turbulence that the boat capsized. While some of these may be considered the exaggerated perceptions of some scared young men, the capsizing of the boat because of a falling fruit is something else.

Besides the excessive growth, another element that renders the Sundarbans magical is the way time passes by. The same mixture of distorted perceptions and actual distortions can be noticed. On the one hand, the region is out of time: the jungle "is so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 501). Then, the reader is told that "in the Sundarbans time followed unknown laws" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 512). Besides that, once there, the four lost track of time, which is normal in their circumstances. It seemed to them that they had come there "centuries ago" (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 510). Actually, they lived there for seven months. Seven is a sacred number, symbolizing change and the totality of space and time, being the number of cyclic ending and renewal (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/1993, vol. 3, pp. 289-296). Seven is four plus three. There are three young men without the buddha and four with him. Three is the

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number of the sky, a perfect number, standing for the perfection of manifestation. The number is present in the religions of many peoples, governing urban and military organization and appearing in rites, legends and fairytales. To give just some examples, there are three phases of existence (appearance, evolution, destruction), three social classes (catering for the sacred, war and work), three phases of time (past, present, future), three magi. The world itself is triple – made of sky, earth and air. The Hindus believe in a triple divine manifestation – Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/1993, vol. 3, pp. 367-372). Four is the number of the earth, standing for the solid, the tangible. It is a totalizing symbol of plenitude and universality. Among others, there are four cardinal points, four winds, four elements, four seasons, four stages of mystic accomplishment (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/1993, vol. 3, pp. 28-33). The significance of the numbers throws our characters in a mythical or rather atemporal realm turning them into exemplary heroes that are supposed to end a phase of their existence and reach another, superior one, achieving perfection on at least one level.

As mentioned previously, the region resents intrusion and fights against the intruders. Actually, it tries to assimilate them, converting them from intruders into its own components. In order to achieve this, it subjects them to various trials that better them and lead them both towards becoming one with it and towards becoming men.

The jungle crawls with creatures, but they seem to be only feeble versions of what they should be: there are pale pink scorpions, transparent leeches and flies, blind snakes, and the whole jungle is a livid green world. It is like a latent world that has to feed in order to come to life and it feeds on the four. The colourless leeches became red when full of the boys' blood. The leeches exploded on

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their bodies because they could not stop sucking and the blood trickled on the forest floor, being absorbed by the jungle. Transparent giant flies became red as they fed on the liquid of the nipa-fruits that fell and smashed on the ground. Nothing is wasted, everything is absorbed by the jungle and its creatures. It is like a living organism whose parts interconnect. In this respect it can be likened to a Garden of Eden, all its creatures living in harmony with one another. There is no fight for survival recorded. The only enemies are the four soldiers, seen as enemies only until they try to blend in.

The first time they ate nipa-fruits and mashed earthworms they got a terribly violent diarrhoea. But they managed to survive it, as well as the ensuing fevers and chills. They got accustomed to the food, improved their shelter and acquired “the skills of survival, such as the power of strangling snakes and throwing sharpened sticks so accurately that they spread multicoloured birds through their gizzards” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 506). In a realistic key this is adaptation. In a magical key it is their assimilation by the jungle.

After this “physical” assimilation took place, the forest started sending them “new punishments” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 507) each night, experiences that addressed several of their senses: they saw “the accusing eyes of the wives of the men they had tracked down and seized” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 507), they heard the lamentations of the families they had deprived of their “undesirable” members, the buddha felt “the forest closing in upon him like a vice” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 507), preventing him from breathing, Ayooba found himself unable to move one of his arms after a vision. This can be seen as the region’s reaction to the harm inflicted by the soldiers. The forest “functions as a kind of living consciousness” (Ghosh, 2023, p. 12). Desperate to silence the voices, the three boys put

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the mud of the rainforest into their ears, becoming deaf as a consequence of infections. Ayooba was incapacitated by the phantom of the man he had killed, that leaked a colourless fluid on his arm. This may be proof that the respective man may be considered as part of the region.

After that the four became nostalgic and started regressing towards infancy but that regression led them to having visions of members of their families, experiences which helped them understand the world better and overcome their childish habits. Ayooba saw his mother and ceased to suck his thumb. Farooq had a vision of his brother, was convinced of the death of his father and stopped asking why and crying when hungry. Shaheed also saw the face of an ancestor and regained his sense of responsibility, shattered by his soldierly habit of obeying orders without questioning them. So, guided by the jungle, they go through a maturation process: “so it seemed that the magical jungle, having tormented them with their misdeeds, was leading them by the hand towards a new adulthood” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 508). The buddha went through another process. He did not put mud into his ears and was not nostalgic. But one afternoon, while he was sitting cross-legged under a tree, he was bit by a blind, translucent serpent and remembered his past, though not his first name.

Now the four young men are supposed to be ready for the final stage of their assimilation. This takes place in a temple of Kali situated in the centre of a “glade filled with the gentle melodies of songbirds” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 511). The temple is in the centre of two circles: the glade and the forest. Assimilating it to the house and the cave, the reader can consider it a feminine symbol, as is the forest, which indicates a rebirth of the four. Now they are in the uterus, from which they will emerge renewed. In addition to that, any temple is in the centre of

the world and is a reflection of the divine world and of the cosmos, but also of the human being. Going to the temple is a symbol of spiritual achievement, a return to the centre of the being and a means to reach the hierarchy of superior states (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/1993, vol. 3, pp. 347 - 350). Moreover, the birds stand for angels and their songs are incantations, mantras (Lovinescu, 1989, pp. 219).

The fact that something may go wrong is signalled by the irony with which the narrator presents the temple whose “walls danced with friezes of men and women, who were depicted coupling in postures of unsurpassable athleticism and, sometimes, of highly comic absurdity” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 511). Therefore, instead of commanding respect, the temple rather made them laugh. In addition to that, they did find inside “the towering statue of a black dancing goddess” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 511), but the three boys did not recognize her. Only the buddha identified her as Kali, “fecund and awful, with the remnants of gold paint on her teeth” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 511). The remnants of gold paint on Kali’s teeth remind us of Tai, and so does her association with sexuality.

The postures seen in the frieze of the walls were probably enacted by Saleem, Ayooba, Farooq and Shaheed in the company of four extremely beautiful young girls who visited them at midnight and initiated them into love. As they felt caresses, kisses and love-bites

they realized that this this this was what they had needed, what they had longed for without knowing it, that having passed through the childish regressions and child-like sorrows of their earlier jungle-days, having survived the onset of memory and responsibility and the greater pains of renewed

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accusations, they were leaving infancy behind for ever [...]. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, pp. 511-512)

The girls came every night and the young men found themselves unwilling to leave the temple but to find food. It seems that their assimilation by the jungle is now completed.

Something goes wrong, however, with their initiation. One day they looked at each other and realized they were becoming transparent. It was the buddha, the older and probably already initiated one, who realized then that the creatures of the jungle were not transparent because of the absence of sunlight, as they had believed, but because the jungle had deprived them of their imagination. They looked more carefully at the temple and saw it with different eyes, noticing not just the cracks in the rock but also,

in a murky corner of the abandoned shrine, [...] the remnants of what might have been four small fires – ancient ashes, scorch-marks on stone – or perhaps four funeral pyres; and in the centre of each of the four, a small, blackened, fire-eaten heap of uncrushed bones. (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 512-513)

This enhanced perception is reminiscent of Aadam's and produces a more violent reaction than in him. Scared by the discovery that their lovers were actually dead, the four ran out of the temple to the boat, when a wave came, taking them out of the jungle and into a tree, which destroyed their watercraft and left them in a drowned rice-paddy. Their punishment for refusing to become part of the jungle went further than that. Soon after they came out of the jungle, Ayooba, Farooq and

Shaheed were killed, one after the other. The buddha was the only one allowed to live.

## 6. Conclusions

The way in which the episodes taking place in the two spaces analysed end, alongside other episodes in the novel, might lead the readers to the conclusion that they are dealing with a pessimistic work. But Rushdie does not share this opinion: "The story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my ability allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration." (Rushdie, 1992, p. 16) The survival of the main character and narrator in spite of the adversities faced (not only) in the Sundarbans, the solution of leaving found by Aadam Aziz, and Tai's (possible) immortality may be considered proofs of that capacity of self-regeneration.

As far as the spaces examined in the paper are concerned, as it can be easily noticed even from the length of the sections dealing with them, the realistic traits of the regions are far less well represented, offering only a foundation on which Rushdie builds a story laden with magic and symbolism.

The atemporality of the regions, suggesting a break with traditional time and evident from their having remained unchanged for centuries but also from their rejecting foreign elements, likens them to *heterotopias*. So does the fact that they function as havens for those facing moments of crisis, who come seeking solutions, although the solutions are not always conventional or expected. A third characteristic of *heterotopias* the Valley of Kashmir and the Sundarbans share is that they are both isolated and accessible.

The explanation offered by Saleem for the four young men's expulsion from the jungle was that "it seemed



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as if the jungle, having tired of its playthings, were ejecting them unceremoniously from its territory” (Rushdie, 1981/2023, p. 513). This paper argues instead that what happens in the two episodes is that the humans try to colonize the spaces they find themselves in and transform them into places. In both cases there is a clash of wills and a question of who is the assimilator and who is the one assimilated. Nature triumphs in both episodes, and the deviant humans, whose assimilation failed, are rejected and must leave the spaces. Perhaps it is only natural to conclude that the rejection of Aadam, who actually belonged to the Vale of Kashmir, having been born and brought up there, and whose attempts at changing it were reduced to having the people there accept him as a doctor, is less violent than the rejection of the four, who have never belonged to the Sundarbans.

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***Realismul magic  
și romanul therapeutic***



# THE THERAPEUTIC NOVEL: RUSHDIE'S *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES* AND *LUKA AND THE FIRE OF LIFE*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

*This paper aims to examine the therapeutic valences of two of Salman Rushdie's most celebrated works belonging to magical realism: Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) and Luka and the Fire of Life (2010). We can detect here three levels of research. The first can be found in the fabric of each of the two novels. One of the main themes, which pervades the entire plot, is that of storytelling as a way of enchanting and re-enchanting the world, of saving it from destruction and bringing it back to life. The writer demonstrates repeatedly how stories and knowledge of stories have the power of bringing joy into people's hearts, even saving their lives as some magical medicine or a miraculous solution to a grievous problem in the real world can only be found in the parallel fantastic reality. A second level of understanding discussed in this paper is that of the novels themselves having therapeutic value for their readers. The healing power of reading*

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cannot be overlooked and to peruse these two books in particular is sheer delight. It is also argued here that in an age when stress is a commonplace term, reading may provide us with the necessary means in order for us to create an alternate, more accommodating, reality to help us cope. Last but not least, the act of writing the books is, in itself, a therapeutic endeavor on the part of the author, as Rushdie himself confessed in an interview: "I often feel I don't need therapists, I don't need psychiatrists, because I do it myself every day of my life" (TOI Books, 2021). We can conclude, therefore, that the two novels are perfect illustrations of how narratives constitute an effective form of therapy for the storytellers' audience (be they characters or readers) and for storytellers themselves.

**Keywords:** healing; narrating; problem-solving; storytelling; therapeutic.

### **1. Introduction**

The two novels the celebrated writer Salman Rushdie has dedicated to his sons, Zafar and Milan Luka, certainly belong to magical realism. Written twenty years apart, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990, henceforth referred to as *Haroun*) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010, henceforth referred to as *Luka*) are full of magical happenings and fantastic characters, but they are also deeply anchored in reality. In fact, numerous parallels are drawn by the author between events in the two books and the real life, the society we live in. Whether we are thinking about literature, politics, family matters, social problems or environmental issues, every angle of research will demonstrate in a more than satisfactory manner that Rushdie's imaginary world is connected to our day-to-day life. What is more, the author provides us with an effective, yet entertaining manner of solving various problems both the fictional and the real world are struggling with. Storytelling, using the power of the



spoken and of the written word, is presented as a formidable tool which can protect, lift the spirits of people, teach and demonstrate, impart knowledge and, ultimately, cure and restore. While witnessing the heroes and heroines' endeavours, readers do not only manage to create a more accommodating reality to escape to, but they may also identify ways of successfully dealing with their daily tribulations. Writing has proved to be a therapeutic enterprise for the novelist himself. Engaging in the creative effort of penning secondary realities has a cathartic effect, helping the author gain a better understanding of himself. Writing is also a manifestation of the author's deep need to speak freely and to express his thoughts with no fear of censorship. It can, therefore, be argued that narrating has therapeutic value not only for the characters in the stories, but also for the readers and, ultimately, for the author himself. These are the three directions of research I have followed in the writing of the present paper.

## **2. The healing power of storytelling in the two novels**

*Haroun* is obviously centred on the theme of storytelling, its power of bringing imagination to life, of healing the human soul, making a harsh life more bearable and even offering viable examples and tools in order for the ordinary person to save themselves, the community and the entire world. The quest undertaken by Haroun in order to help his father, the renowned storyteller Rashid Khalifa, ends in a successful restoration of not only Rashid's ability to tell a story, but of his beautiful family and the town he lives in. Stories are therapeutic; there is no question about that. But so, as *Luka* proves, are videogames. The immersion in the parallel reality provided by gaming offers Luka, Rashid's second son, the abilities and knowledge he can then use to save his father's

life and, in addition, the magical realm his father has conceived. All these make for a delightful read, as it is difficult not to be enraptured by the amazing display of imaginative techniques the writer employs in order to captivate his readers. Like C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Rushdie uses a vast array of fantastic creatures, mythical figures, themes and motifs, leaving his audience bedazzled, providing what can certainly be referred to as art therapy, an escape from the dullness of reality, a pleasant way of getting rid of their troubles and, why not, even finding solutions for some of them. This experience is cathartic not only for the audience, but primarily for the writer. The sheer joy of writing leaps up from each page where stories and myths of various origins are combined into a new tale, plays upon words abound and the text almost begs to be read out loud to better enjoy the wonderful alliterations and humorous names of so many original and reinterpreted characters.

Everything begins in the world of imagination, Rushdie states in many interviews, and can then be transferred into the real world. What the writer refers to is, probably, the art through which an author, a storyteller, gives shape to his/her ideas by using words, turning up phrases that will enchant readers and listeners. But this transfer process takes place in a more concrete manner in the world of fantasy Rushdie has created. Here we have a magical medicine, the *Fire of Life*, which can heal the slumbering storyteller, if only Luka knew how to bring it into the real world. Here we also have the *Source of all Stories*, the *Ocean of the Streams of Story* on the moon Kahani which, once saved from destruction by Haroun and company, can recommence to supply ideas to storytellers in the real world. Both Luka and Haroun believe these things to be mere figments of their father's imagination. But they come to realise, during their fantastic journeys, that everything a storyteller creates

exists in a parallel world and can actually be transferred into the real world, preserving its fantastic attributes. Therefore, the healing powers of the *Fire of Life* can save the life of a real, living person just as the enchanted streams of water on Kahani can help any storyteller on Earth become a creator of magical fairytales meant to charm and heal in their turn.

The thread of story in *Haroun* and *Luka* is roughly the same. Both books tell the story of a young son finding himself in the position of saving his father. Haroun has to deal with his mother running away, deserting them, and his father losing the *Gift of Gab*, his uncanny ability to tell stories. Alternatively, it is his father's conscious presence that Luka is missing, as Rashid Khalifa falls into a deep slumber and is in danger of fading away for good. A trauma in any child's life, that of losing a parent, is avoidable, according to both books, only by allowing stories to be told, by granting the freedom of speech and imagination.

The Khalifas are the only happy family in the city at the beginning of *Haroun*, thanks to his father's imaginative stories and his positive outlook. "Haroun grew up in a home in which, instead of misery and frowns, he had his father's laughter and his mother's sweet voice raised in a song" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 2). However, Rashid can only maintain this optimism as long as he has his power of captivating audiences and the sweet-voiced Soraya by his side. Everything starts to go amiss in Haroun's family the moment his mother begins to doubt the actual function storytelling has in the real world. It is not by accident that she runs away with a Mr. Sengupta, a rigid, unimaginative, "sticky-thin and whiny-voiced and mingy" clerk (Rushdie, 2013, p. 6), who dismisses Rashid's stories as useless. It is a sign that she has ceased to believe. Her song, symbolising life, happiness, femininity, dies the moment she begins to see the world through this

character's perspective. One after another, Haroun and then his father lose faith, too, and that is when the supply of fresh stories is cut short. Storytelling can be healing, but one has to believe in the power of imagination in order to make this happen. The obsessive question "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" (Rushdie, 2013, p.7, 9, 15) causes a chain of events that leads to the storyteller's inability to narrate, and in turn to the loss of magic and happiness not only inside their small family, but in the entire world. Order is restored as the son finds a way of travelling to the world of imagination, saving it from destruction. Consequently, the family is reunited and the magical source of stories is again available, enabling Rashid to capture his audience again.

Stories will not only help preserve the integrity of the family or save the life of its members. They will actually heal the community, lift up their spirits. Rashid Khalifa (first name an anagram of Rushdie, but also a reference to the legendary Caliph Harun al-Rashid) is a world- renowned storyteller, also known as the *Shah of Blah* or the *Ocean of Notions*. His seemingly inexhaustible supply of stories is all that keeps the sad town in which he lives alive. For the dwellers of "a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name", Rashid's stories are the only source of happiness.

*He would climb up on to some little makeshift stage in a dead-end alley packed with raggedy children and toothless old-timers, all squatting in the dust; and once he got going even the city's many wandering cows would stop and cocked their ears, and monkeys would jabber approvingly from rooftops and the parrots in the trees would imitate his voice. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 3)*

While he may often use his gift for the benefit of the poor people of the city, Rashid is, in fact, a professional storyteller. Storytelling is a way of earning a living for the entire family –like Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*, a collection to which Rushdie’s book makes numerous hints, Rashid actually tells stories to stay alive. His stories are considered useful by the politicians in the area, who, when election time approached, invited him to speak at their rallies. They “lined up outside his door with their shiny faces and fake smiles and bags of hard cash”, so that “Rashid could pick and choose” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 7). Like in our too familiar world, “the politicians” were not a much liked or a very trustworthy breed, but securing Rashid’s collaboration meant attracting the public, and therefore more votes. The storyteller’s grasp on his audience resided not only in the beauty of his tales, but also in his blatantly admitting that they are just that: mere tales.

As Rashid regains his *Gift of Gab* and his confidence, having the magical water supply restored, he uses his talent to turn the inhabitants of the Valley of K against the corrupt candidates, by telling them precisely the story in *Haroun*. The narrative provides the crowd with the example of how the magical world on Kahani was ridden of the influence of the villainous leader, through the conjugated efforts of both nations living on Earth’s second moon. Consequently, the politicians in the Valley are driven away by the people gathered at the rally, who were now “free to choose leaders they actually liked” (Rushdie, 2013, p.194).

Another problem affecting both the real world and its imaginary double, Kahani, is pollution. The factories in Haroun’s town manufacture sadness, which seems to be in great demand. Sadness is even exported and the world “never seemed to get enough of it” (Rushdie, 2013, p.1). We can draw a parallel here between the never-ending source

of sadness and the never-ending source of stories, which is the *Ocean of the Streams of Stories*. Paradoxically, the world requires more and more of the sadness produced by the smoke-pouring factories in the city, while *The Ocean of the Streams of Stories* on the moon Kahani is intentionally polluted with anti-stories by Khattam-Shud. A correspondent to the sadness factories that blur the whole city under the smoke they produce is Khattam-Shud's huge shadow ship, in fact a factory ship, producing the antithesis of every story ever told. From this ship, the tyrant's trusty followers are also attempting to plug the Wellspring, the Source of Stories. Once this attempt is stopped both worlds are delivered from sadness. Even the town that has forgotten its name remembers it. As it is many times mentioned in the two books, to name a thing is to call it into being. Solving the problem of story supply has helped the world find its identity; the people are reminded that their city was called *Kahani (Story)*, just like the Earth's second moon from where all stories originate. "The intention to plug the sea source of stories is an attempt to destroy the imagination as such, together with the power of transformation represented by the sea", as Ludmila Volna argues in her article *Salman Rushdie's Sea World: Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (2019, p.10).

The second book presents the now happy, reunited family, having one additional member, a second son, Luka. The main issue here is Rashid's falling into a deep sleep after being cursed. What can save the family, again, is taking another trip into the parallel reality. Luka is the one who will journey through the *World of Magic* this time, in search of the *Fire of Life*. The only thing that the boy can rely on, besides his ability of playing videogames, is the knowledge he possesses on the world his father has created. Like his elder brother, Haroun, Luka realises that the new reality he has stumbled in is a mapping of the various stories Rashid has told them over the years. Thus,

the information they gathered from their father's creations on the *World of Magic* and its inhabitants help both boys survive their quests and come home with the prize. Luka's prize is the magical medicine that will bring his father back to life, making the family whole again.

This novel brings upfront Luka as creator of new imaginary worlds, a talent he seems to have inherited from his father. He has "a strong interest in, and aptitude for, other realities" (Rushdie, 2013, p.13). An exquisite actor, he created memorable and completely believable characters in the school plays. When he drew and painted scenes from his father's stories, they "came to wonderful, phantasmagoric richly coloured life" (Rushdie, 2013, p.13). As Rashid's stories, these performances have a powerful cathartic effect on the audience or those who viewed his art.

Luka also possesses the power of the spoken word - he is capable of uttering a curse so powerful, that it physically affects the person it is directed to, Captain Aag, director of the Great Rings of Fire circus, or the three Aalim, masters of Time, bringing ruin upon them.

*All of a sudden Luka became angry [...] When Grandmaster Flame was right in front of him, Luka shouted out at the top of his voice, 'May your animals stop obeying your commands and your rings of fire eat up your stupid tent.'*

*Now it so happened that the moment Luka shouted out in anger was one of those rare instants when by some inexplicable accident all the noises of the universe fall silent at the same time [...] and his words expanded until they filled the sky, and perhaps even found their way the invisible home of the Fates [...] Then the world started making its usual racket again [...] But Luka's words were still out there in the air, doing their secret business. (Rushdie, 2013, p.4-5)*

Here we have an unexpected result: an utterance which should be, by definition, evil, but which practically destroys the villains of the story. So, we are dealing with a kind of healing as a result of this act, as the circus is burnt to the ground and the mistreated animals are freed or the entire magical world is freed from the tyranny of the Time Lords. However, his curse against Aag backfires, as in turn, Aag (aka the Titan of Rage) attacks Rashid and almost succeeds in annihilating him and the entire magical reality.

In *Luka* the parallel reality is available by means of videogames. “Fortunately for Luka, he lived in an age in which an almost infinite number of parallel realities had begun to be sold as toys” (Rushdie, 2013, p.14). This is another type of narrative, one to which Rushdie and Rashid got acquainted by playing with their respective younger sons. Again, Soraya, voicing popular opinion, does not agree with this. These are only “useless skills” (Rushdie, 2013, p.16), which will not help the boy cope in the real world. As in the previous book she is proven wrong. It is exactly these skills that are of paramount importance in order to survive in the world of gaming, where Luka has to travel in order to save his father.

Luka feels at home in the world of video games, for which he often “leaves” his own world. By playing the game, by being creative and using the rules of the games to his own advantage, Luka manages not only to destroy Nobodaddy, his father’s phantomatic alter ego, but to save the magical world, which was in danger of being destroyed together with all its mythological creatures and fantastic beings. He does this with the help of the knowledge he possessed on his father’s magical world. It seems that this universe was magically transformed into a giant and complex video game. However, the game is “Never just a game. It’s a matter of life and death” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 235), as Nobodaddy says and Luka will soon discover.



Similarly, to Luka's amazement, the *Fire of Life* proves to be more than just a story.

'Just a story?' echoed *Nobodaddy* in what sounded like genuine horror. 'Only a tale? [...] You of all boys should know that Man is the Storytelling Animal, and that in his stories are his identity, his meaning and his life-blood [...] Man alone burns with books' (Rushdie, 2013, p. 40)

It is in these words, uttered by *Nobodaddy*, that Rushdie expresses his creed, his belief in the healing power of the story and reiterates the importance of the author as storyteller in today's pragmatic society.

### **3. Reading the novel as a therapeutic act**

It can be said that "people read to be transported, to feel wonder, to understand themselves" (Waugh, 2015, p. 41). We are absorbed in a world which is made up and yet feels so much like the real world, where we get to meet with characters that become as familiar as our acquaintances, visit places that we seem to know better than places in our own past and experience with various states and emotions, all done in complete awareness of the safety of the environment we are immersed in. Reading the novel is, in itself, a therapeutic act, which for Patricia Waugh in her *The Novel as Therapy: Ministrations of Voice in an Age of Risk* is a reminder of the "talking cure" (2015, p. 49). Hearing the voice of the author via the voices of the characters, mingling with our own inner voice can help us just as talking to a therapist would, assisting us in making sense of our own thoughts, feelings and perspectives. Eventually, "we arrive at ourselves expanded through an encounter with the new and strange." The therapeutic value of reading the novel resides in the fact that it "allows

us to order our minds more completely by taking us closer to the edge of disorder” (Waugh, 2015, p. 37).

Waugh also brings into discussion the idea of “risk society”, closely connected to and caused by the “disorienting complexity of an increasingly globalised and uncertain world” (Waugh, 2015, p. 46). In an age where feeling stressed out has become commonplace, reading fiction might endow us with the necessary tools and knowledge in order to be able to survive the mayhem. Even if the world is not exactly as we would like it to be, we could create, through writing and reading, our own world to help us cope. We can easily draw numerous parallels between our own society with its multiple threatening factors, be they economic, political, environmental, spiritual or of any other nature, and the fictional world. Seeing that the author, through his characters, has found ways of going around and even solving these problems makes us hopeful about resolving the issues in our own world.

Let us take, for example, the questionable quality of the political leaders in *Alifbay* and the way they use Rashid Kalifa’s popularity in their attempt to win the elections. Ironically, nobody believed the “politicos” who claimed that everything they said was true, but everyone had faith in Rashid, because “he always admitted that everything he told them was completely untrue and made up out of his own head” (Rushdie, 2013, p.7). Eventually, Rashid manages, by telling precisely the story in the book, to turn the people of the Valley of K against these dreadful fellows.

As previously stated, there are environmental issues reflected in the story and there is every reason to believe that even these serious issues both the real and the fantastic worlds are struggling with can be solved if people are resourceful enough. The polluted and sorrowful city of Kahani is cleansed at the end of *Haroun* by the cheerful

rain which has everybody in the streets dancing. The *Ocean of the Streams of Story* is depolluted through Haroun's inventiveness and determination, and all the stories in it return to their original plot and restart feeding ideas to storytellers in the real world.

Addiction and depression are two of the "diseases" modern society is struggling with. Similarly, the inhabitants of Kahani are addicted to the sadness being "actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world" (Rushdie, 2013, p.1) from the factories situated in the north of the city. The world is healed through Haroun's endeavours, only to fall prey to a different type of addiction. At the beginning of *Luka*, the people are no longer depressed as the factories have stopped producing black smoke and sadness. Self-deception seems to be the new drug on the market.

*Things had changed in Kahani, and sadness was no longer the city's principal export [...] People wanted to feel good even when there wasn't that much to feel good about, and so the sadness factories had been shut down and turned into Obliviums, giant malls where everyone went to dance, shop, pretend and forget. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 44)*

However gloomy the situation appears to be at the beginning of each book, the ending finds the heroes of the story happily dancing and singing in the rain or on the roof of their house, under the sparkling stars – a sign that the world has regained its balance.

On a spiritual level, there is the problem of death. Nobodaddy firmly announces Luka that he is his father's death, and this character keeps growing stronger and more solid looking, as Rashid becomes thinner by the day. Nobodaddy seems to be the image of the Grim Reaper.

“Somebody has to die [...] Once someone like me has been summoned’, said Nobodaddy, ‘someone alive must pay for that summons with a life. I’m sorry, but that’s the rule’ (Rushdie, 2013, p. 52). How does one deal with the moment they watch a loved person’s death in the eye? Death seems to be as implacable as ever. However, through cleverness and daring, Luka manages to help his father evade this untimely death.

The economic problems affecting the Indian society are mirrored in *Haroun*, where social stratification is reflected in the dwellings belonging to the inhabitants of Kahani. Only the super-rich live in skyscrapers.

*The poor lived in tumbledown shacks made of old cardboard boxes and plastic sheeting, and these shacks were glued together by despair. And then there were the super-poor, who had no homes at all. They slept on pavements and in the doorways of shops, and had to pay rent to local gangsters for doing even that.* (Rushdie, 2013, p. 5)

Still, the novel ends with all the people in town fooling around and laughing merrily in the streets, although nothing has actually changed; “the sadness factories are still in production [...] and almost everybody is still poor” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 195). Poverty no longer seems to stand in the way of happiness and joy.

It is no wonder echoes from the Indian world have found their way in the two novels. The author’s formative years were in India, and Rushdie remembers his father telling him stories from the Indian heritage. Stories are still given great importance in Indian culture, as Ludmila Volna shows in “*Salman Rushdie’s Sea World: Haroun and the Sea of Stories*”, being “both an organizing and a pedagogic tool for reality and life at an unconscious level” (Volna, 2019, p. 3). The importance of stories and, by

extension, of the storyteller in Indian culture was thus embedded in Rushdie's conscience from an early age. Proof of this is part of an interview with Rushdie integrated on unnumbered pages in between the two novels, in the 2013 Vintage Books edition of *Haroun and Luka*.

*[...] stories are the lifeblood of a society. When we are born they are almost the first things we ask for. Families have family stories, communities have stories about themselves and so do countries. We are storytelling animals and stories are part of our nature. That makes them powerful, but it also means we need to protect our right to tell them, and hear them, in any way we choose. (Rushdie, 2013)*

#### **4. The therapeutic value of writing**

In an interview taken during the *Times Literature Festival* Rushdie talked about the therapeutic value of writing:

*Writing serious literature is... you have to go very, very deep inside yourself in order to find the book [...] you can achieve a kind of clarity if you have examined yourself well enough ...I often feel I don't need therapists, I don't need psychiatrists, because I do that every day of my life. (TOI Books, 2021)*

It may not be an accident that *Haroun* (1990) was written not long after *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The author may have felt the need for some lighter material in the aftermath of the events caused by the publication of the latter. However, there are serious matters discussed here, such as the freedom of speech. "Just as Rushdie was silenced by the *fatwa*, the father, Rashid Khalifa, figuratively loses his voice" (Guldager, 2012, p. 2). Khattam-Shud's trying to poison and then destroy all

stories and bring the whole world to complete silence also reminds of the attempts made by a totalitarian regime to limit Rushdie's freedom of speech. "The world is for Controlling [...] and inside every single story [...] there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 147). Similarly, the three Aalim, supreme beings and Weavers of Time in *Luka*, keep the entire magical world under control and show no regard for the fate of any of the beings living there. The *Fire of Life* can save the life of the storyteller, whose tales would, in turn, save the magical world from oblivion. Nevertheless, the Aalim would not permit the *Fire* to be taken to the real world. "Return what you have stolen and perhaps we will spare your lives [...] It is of no consequence to us whether this World lives or dies [...] Compassion is not our affair." (Rushdie, 2013, p. 240). Eventually, the tyrants' dominion is brought to an end by the child heroes and their helpers, who know the value of imagination, freedom and compassion.

I would mention here Rushdie's last work, his memoir, *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* (2024), recently translated into Romanian by Dana Crăciun as *Cuțitul. Reflecții în urma unei tentative de asasinat*. In it he writes about his life following the attack, his thoughts, the way his loved ones and especially his wife, poet and novelist Rachel Eliza Griffiths, supported him and his feelings about his attacker, Hadi Matar. It is also an appeal to defending the freedom of speech. "Art is not a luxury. It stands at the essence of our humanity, and it asks for no special protection except the right to exist" (Rushdie, 2024, as cited in McDonagh, 2024). It is likely that writing this book has given Rushdie a sense of closure after the traumatic event on August 12, 2022. And it has certainly contributed to the psychological healing of the author. Video recordings being made during the writing process will be used in the production of a documentary

on the same traumatic event and Rushdie's process of learning to get over it. Eventually, writing about what one has gone through seems to have a therapeutic effect as well.

*I understand that I had to write the book you're reading now before I could move onto anything else. To write would be my way of owning what had happened, taking charge of it, making it mine, refusing to be a mere victim. I would answer violence with art.* (Rushdie, 2024, as cited in McDonagh, 2024)

Though not belonging to the same genre, the two novels discussed in this paper, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, are without doubt wonderful examples of Rushdie's art of spinning a tale. In an interview, Salman Rushdie argues that true stories do not always tell the whole truth. He adds that "stories don't have to be true" and that "by including elements of the fantastic or elements of fable or mythological elements or fairy tale or just pure make believe, you can actually start getting at the truth in a different way. It's another door into the truth" (Big Think, 2015). We can connect this to the question that has become an obsession for Haroun, "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" or to Luka's amazed remark, "*But that's just a story*". The world Haroun and Luka live in is transformed by the power of storytelling and, once the connection to the story source is rebuilt and the storyteller is cured, the entire universe is healed and it regains its brightness.

## **5. Conclusion**

Both novels contain several examples that Rushdie gives in order to illustrate a belief that he shares with many other storytellers, and that is the fact that

storytelling has therapeutic powers. The main characters, their families, their community, in fact the entire environment are saved from depression, oppression, destruction, oblivion and even annihilation through narrating stories, knowledge of stories or belief in the power of stories, of the written and spoken word. Stories are a repository of wisdom, a source of learning about abilities and tools one can use, solutions one can employ to solve problematic situations; they are a never-ending spring of joy, excitement and optimism. This paper has demonstrated the fact that the two stories were conceived by Rushdie not only as a means of entertaining an audience, but also as a way of healing the world and its inhabitants. By this we are referring to both the world between the covers of the books and our own reality. As discussed above, not only do readers find refuge and consolation inside the pages of the books, but, like so many characters, they are provided with solutions for their everyday issues and are given the confidence that such challenges can be overcome. Last but not least, it is the writer himself who achieves psychological healing, as creative writing involves thorough self-analysis and it is also a way of exercising freedom of speech.

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**REALISM MAGIC ȘI REALISM „HALUCINANT”  
ÎN DOUĂ ROMANE ALE LAUREI IMAI  
MESSINA<sup>1</sup>**

**MAGICAL REALISM AND “HALLUCINATORY”  
REALISM  
IN TWO OF LAURA IMAI MESSINA’ S NOVELS**

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**Abstract:**

*Magical realism, specific to Latin American literature, surpasses borders and becomes a technique widely used in various world literatures. Superimposed on the familiar, it lives alongside the elements of everyday life and manifests itself through an ‘alteration’ of the familiar and the daily routine under the intervention of unusual events which cannot be explained by ‘realistic’ patterns. In the novels “The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World” and “The Hidden Life of Colours” by Laura Imai Messina, both having Japan as a background, we discover*

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*fictional universes achieved through the technique of magical realism, but also of the “hallucinatory” realism surprised by Andrei Ionescu to the Latin-American writer Rao Bastos. Thus, if in “The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World”, the delirious vision and the sensation of strangeness created by a cruel reality, one can talk about this second type of realism, “Viețile secrete ale culorilor”, in “The Hidden Life of Colours” the perception of the world through colour makes us identify magical realism as a writing technique. The balance between individual forms of reality is achieved through love.*

**Keywords:** magical realism; “hallucinatory” realism; Laura Imai Messina; *The Phone Booth at the Edge of the World*; *The Hidden Life of Colours*.

**Cuvinte cheie:** realism magic; realism „halucinant”; Laura Imai Messina; *Ce încredințăm vîntului*; *Viețile secrete ale culorilor*.

### **Preliminarii**

Prin romanele *Ce încredințăm vîntului* (2021) și *Viețile secrete ale culorilor* (2023), scriitoarea Laura Imai Messina<sup>3</sup> ne surprinde prin realizarea, cu tehnici apropiate, a două universuri fictive legate prin realismul magic. „Retragerile” personajelor din realitatea greu de suportat sînt cauzate de diferite tipuri de traume, iar trecerea dinspre spațiul interior înapoi spre cel exterior se face după înțelegerea primului și acceptarea celui din urmă.

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Imai Messina s-a născut în 1981 la Roma, este absolventă a universității Sapienza, Facultatea de Filologie și a ajuns în Japonia pentru perfecționare. Se stabilește acolo, își continuă studiile, se căsătorește și începe să scrie. Cartea sa de debut este *Tokyo Orizzontale*, 2014, după care publică, în 2018, romanul *Non oso dire la gioia* și *WA. La via giapponese all'armonia*, un ghid cultural devenit bestseller. În 2020 scrie romanul *Ce încredințăm vîntului* (tradus în 2021 la Humanitas), un an mai târziu publică *Goro Goro*, povestiri pentru copii și romanul *Viețile secrete ale culorilor* (tradus la Humanitas Fiction în 2023), iar în 2022 îi apare *L'isola dei battiti del cuore*. Își scrie cărțile în cafenele, în metrou și trenurile ce străbat imensul Tokyo. (Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024)

Deschizând calea spre un univers mult mai complex decât acela pe care îl cunoaștem din realitatea înconjurătoare, realismul magic, așa cum apare el în literatură și în artă, este diferit de lumile fantastice dominate de magie. În operele create, pe lângă elementele vieții de zi cu zi, componenta reală, familiarul și cotidianul, încep să se altereze prin intervenția unor evenimente neobișnuite ce nu se pot explica prin tipare „realiste”.

Criticul de artă german Franz Roh, pe urmele lui Edmund Husserl și Martin Heidegger, utilizează termenul de „realism magic” în jurul anilor 1924-1925 pentru a desemna o realitate pe care o recunoaștem, dar pe care o privim cu alți ochi, un univers aparte în care apare o lume străină a obiectelor, lucrurile fiind înzestrate, prin diferite tehnici, cu un sens mai profund ce scoate la lumină mistere care tulbură liniștea obișnuitului<sup>4</sup> (Roh, 1925, p. 20).

Specific literaturii latino-americane, realismul magic irumpe, totuși, în toate literaturile lumii, fiind, în primul rând o atitudine luată în fața realității trăită. În acest sens, operele literare propun o realitate în care surprindem misteriosul din lucruri, din viață, din faptele personajelor, importantă fiind descoperirea relației dintre om și evenimentele ce nu se pot explica logic sau psihologic, descoperirea misterului din spatele lor<sup>5</sup>. (Leal, 1967, p. 121).

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<sup>4</sup> „This calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces, means that the ground in which the most diverse ideas in the world can take root has been reconquered - albeit in new ways” (Roh, 1925, p. 20)

<sup>5</sup> „Magical realism is, more than anything else, an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, in closed or open structures. What is the attitude of the magical realist toward reality? I have already said that he doesn't create imaginary worlds in which we can hide from everyday reality. In magical realism the writer confronts

Considerat un fenomen interesant și de actualitate de către cercetători, Elena Crașovan consideră că realismul magic este

destul de maleabil, mereu gata să se mute și să se asocieze cu orice direcții noi din punct de vedere topic (modernism, postmodernism, postcolonialism), capabil să traverseze o mare varietate de spații geografice și culturale, de la Europa interbelică la America Latină, exportat ulterior în Asia și Africa postcolonială după boom-ul latino-american și măturat scena în multe capitale occidentale, precum și în țările din fostul bloc comunist. (Crașovan, 2020)<sup>6</sup>.

Realismul magic s-a dovedit a fi atractiv atât pentru critici cât și pentru autori, numeroase creații găsim în locul în literatura universală. Gen exemplar, el pare deschis în permanență unor noi atașamente și interconexiuni la fiecare pas, este favorabil unor noi constelații de texte a căror identitate este definită în conformitate cu noi nevoi și noi dorințe critice și estetice traduse în noi principii de organizare (Crașovan, 2020).

În articolul său din *Dacoromania litteraria* (2020), Elena Crașovan împarte realismul magic în trei etape, în funcție de perioada de manifestare, fiecare cu premise teoretice proprii distincte, precum și cu trăsături istorice, regionale și stilistice specifice. Astfel, autoarea identifică un realism magic „timpuriu”, manifestat după Primul

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reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts.” (Leal, 1967, p. 121).

<sup>6</sup> Textul original: “For it proves to be malleable enough, always ready to mutate and associate with no matter what topically new directions (modernism, postmodernism, postcolonialism), capable to cross a great variety of geographical and cultural spaces ranging from interwar Europe to Latin America, subsequently exported to postcolonial Asia and Africa after the Latin-American boom, and sweeping the stage in many a Western capital city, as well as in the countries of the former communist bloc” (Crașovan, 2020).

Război Mondial, în Europa, apoi propune „boom-ul latino-american”, după care stabilește a treia etapă ca fiind reprezentată de scrierile de după „expansiunea” postcolonială și post-comunistă.

În articolul *Realismul „halucinant” al lui Rao Bastos* [Rao Bastos’ “hallucinatory” realism] din revista *Secolul XX* (1984), Andrei Ionescu aduce în atenția noastră termenul de „realism halucinant” (p. 134), mult mai reprezentativ uneori pentru anumite imagini din operele literare decît termenul de „realism magic”. Astfel, plecînd de la istoria zbuciumată a latino-americanilor, Ionescu explică faptul că o realitate crudă, o situație negativă sau un rău în general, traumatizează, producînd un tip de literatură în care realitatea este edulcorată. Prin îndulcirea realității apare misterul care împinge „uneori narațiunea pînă la frontierele magicului” (Ionescu, 1984, p. 134).

### **„Telefonul Vîntului” între neverosimil și real**

Datorită poziției și a climei sale, Japonia a devenit o „victimă” a geografiei”. După tsunami-ul din 11 martie 2011, „realitatea” eroilor din *Ce încredințăm vîntului*, așa cum își amintesc că au trăit-o, devine halucinantă și neverosimilă. Întocmai ca în cazul lui Rao Bastos la care se referă Andrei Ionescu în articolul său, situația din acest roman este suficient de halucinantă încît „neverosimilul să devină veridic” (Ionescu, 1984, p. 134). În lucrarea noastră ne oprim doar la ideea sugerată de termenul „realism halucinant”, fără a intra în amănunte legate de situația socio-politică ce a generat acest tip de realitate în America latină.

În alte condiții sociale și într-o altă zonă geografică, *Ce încredințăm vîntului* este un roman tulburător despre uriașa revărsare de ape ce a produs mii de morți și pagube nemăsurate în primăvara anului 2011. Dacă pierderile omenеști și pagubele materiale pot fi măsurate în cifre, „pagubele” sufletești ale supraviețuitorilor sînt imposibil

de cuantificat. Viziunea delirantă și realitatea crudă create de lupta disproporționată a omului cu natura, cu forța oceanului, generează senzația de bizar, de excepțional, ce conduce la realismul „halucinant”. Efortul personajelor de a găsi diferite porțițe de salvare pentru a intra într-o oarecare normalitate, pentru a supraviețui durerii, este remarcabil. Unele caută salvarea într-o relație, altele în izolare, în retragerea în trecut, o femeie mărturisește că gătește pînă uită de toate, un bărbat a început să bea ciocolată caldă, o funcționară mîngîie animalele, ba chiar într-o seară, la radio, oamenii sînt încurajați să vorbească despre modul în care încearcă să depășească momentul, să se simtă mai bine „după un doliu important” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 11). Se află astfel despre existența unui „Telefon al Vîntului”. Acesta se dovedește a fi o modalitate de „îndulcire” a realității, de a aduce într-un mod particular misterul, permițînd dirijarea narațiunii spre zona magicului:

Ce să zic, începuse vocea /.../, există însă cabina asta telefonică în mijlocul unei grădini, pe o colină izolată de tot ce-i în jur. Telefonul n-are conexiune dar vocile sînt preluate de vînt. Zic „Alo, Yoko, ce mai faci?”, și atunci mi se pare că am redevenit cel de pe vremuri și soția mea mă ascultă din bucătărie tot robotind pentru prînz și cină, iar eu bombănind cafeaua care îmi arde limba (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 12).

Telefonul se găsește în grădina lui Suzuki-san, „la poalele muntelui Kujira-yama, adică Muntele Balenei, în imediata apropiere a orașului Ōtsuchi, unul dintre locurile cele mai grav lovite” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 9), și devine loc de pelerinaj. Aparatul nu este legat cu nici un fir și nu comunică decît cu vîntul, de aceea este numit *Telefonul Vîntului*. Narratorul omniscient își construiește povestea în



jurul a două personaje, Yui, prezentatoare radio și realizatoare a emisiunii prin care ea însăși află de acest telefon, și doctorul Takeshi. Eroina romanului și-a pierdut mama și fiica în vîrstă de trei ani în furtună, iar al doilea personaj și-a pierdut soția, răpusă de un cancer, Hana, fiica lor, refuzînd să mai vorbească. Prima întîlnire dintre Yui și Takeshi în grădina ce capătă treptat conotații magice, este urmată de alte și alte vizite în doi, tot atîtea prilejuri de descoperire a altor personaje și situații, dar și de autodescoperire.

Realitatea este percepută astfel din perspectiva unei abordări care pare neverosimilă, care intră într-un teritoriu al psihicului unde nu se mai face diferența dintre real și imaginar. Neuroștiințele descriu, printre altele, modalitatea în care creierul uman percepe existența: acesta nu face deosebire între ceea ce se întîmplă în mod concret și ceea ce se produce doar în imaginația noastră. De aici și posibilitatea de vindecare sau, dimpotrivă, de adîncire în suferință.

Legat de acest subiect, într-un interviu publicat în *România literară* (Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024) Laura Imai Messina își exprimă credința că:

(...) încredințăm vîntului mai ales speranța de a reîntîlni persoanele dragi pe care le-am pierdut, ceva foarte apropiat sau legat de speranța de a încredința pentru ca mai apoi să primești în schimb un pic de identitate, de putere, căci persoanele pe care le pierdem sînt ca o măsură – pierd o bucată din ea, pierd echilibrul, ne pierdem echilibrul ori de cît ori pierdem pe cineva apropiat. Așadar, ne încredințăm vocea, speranța de a ne pune în legătură cu cei pe care i-am pierdut pentru a ne simți mai bine ulterior (Imai Messina, în Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024).

Și tot ea spune mai departe, în același interviu din *România literară*:

(...) dar nu funcționează cu toți. Să știți că poți crea o astfel de legătură prin care să comunici astfel. Acela e un loc-simbol, cel puțin la început, dar în realitate ceea ce am înțeles e că pentru multe persoane simplul fapt că știu de existența unui asemenea loc le dă speranța că pot comunica. . /.../ nu este doar un loc, ci ideea aceasta eliberatoare, care eliberează într-un tot. Te poți simți ciudat, să-ți spui că nu ești în toate mințile: acum ridic receptorul ăsta neconectat și vorbesc cu mama care nu mai e. Și totuși, se poate face, telefonul vîntului o dovedește. Eliberează, este o idee care eliberează (Imai Messina, în Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024).

Indiferent de vîrsta celor care intră în cabina magică, efectul convorbirilor asupra lor devine astfel benefic prin simpla încredere pe care o acordă actului. Personajele evadează într-un univers paralel, iar natura, cea care cu puțină vreme în urmă produsese dezastrul, devine acum ajutor. Grădina minunată și cabina telefonică satisfac nevoia de relaționare cu toți aceia cu care, din diferite motive, nu se mai putea comunica, dar și cu cei rămași. Astfel, chiar dacă și-a pierdut mama, Shio vorbește la telefon cu tatăl care a supraviețuit dezastrului, dar nu mai comunică. Unii vorbesc cu morții, alții cu părinții care și-au pierdut mințile, cîțiva nu au curajul să vorbească, deși vin des la telefon, alții aduc prăjiturile preferate ale defuncților. Keita, care și-a pierdut de curînd mama, o roagă s-o ajute în relația cu tatăl său etc.:

Erau mulți ca ea – spune Yui -, rămași după acel 11 martie 2011 /.../. Dar mai erau și unii care își pierduseră vreo rudă în urma unei boli, în vreun accident de mașină, bătrîni care veneau să vorbească cu proprii părinți dispăruți în al Doilea Război Mondial, părinți ai căror fii dispăruseră fără urmă (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 27).

Astfel,

Yui și Takesi descoperă cu vremea că Telefonul Vântului era asemenea unui verb care s-ar conjuga diferit pentru fiecare persoană, și că doliurile seamănă toate între ele și, în același timp, nu seamănă defel.

Era un băiețel care venea acolo în fiecare seară să-i citească cu voce tare bunicului său ziarul, mulți însă veneau doar să plîngă. Unii vorbeau ca să consoleze un defunct că nu a avut parte de înmormîntare, că se rătăcise cine știe pe unde, pe fundul mării sau într-una din nenumăratele grămezi de oase pe care le produce războiul. Era și o mamă care își pierduse la tsunami toți trei copiii și nu se resemna să tacă, așa că vorbea întruna, ca să umple golul rămas. Era o fetiță care îl chema pe cățelul ei și îl întreba cum e pe lumea cealaltă; un băiețel la școala elementară care voia să-și salute un coleg de școală care nu, nu murise, dar pe care nu-l mai vedea de cînd părinții lui trebuiseră să se întoarcă în China. Îi era dor să se joace cu el (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 48).

Există etape în care oralitatea este înlocuită cu imaginea, prin descrierea ororilor trăite cu adevărat. Ca în tehnica cinematografică, cititorului i se cere „să vadă”, nu „să asculte” situațiile proiectate în spații în care legile naturii par a fi înlocuite, așa cum spune Francisc Păcurariu despre literatura latino-americană, cu „legături misterioase, arbitrare, inexplicabile între fenomene” (Păcurariu, 1964, p. 281).

Coexistența planurilor, specifică realismului magic, este evidentă în aceste secvențe, raportul dintre prezent și trecut, prin tragismul său, devenind neverosimil. Imaginile despre tsunami, în totalitatea lor, țin de ireal și sînt, cu siguranță, o trecere imperceptibilă spre o altă realitate,

nicidecum magică. Iată, de pildă, în ce condiții tatăl lui Shio pierde contactul cu prezentul:

În ziua cutremurului din martie 2011, în largul țărmului de la Ōtsuki, lumea se frînsese. Ca un covor împins brusc la perete, marea înălțase culmi vertiginoase, iar barca tatălui său fusese scuipată la mal. Numai că malul nu mai exista.

La bordul acelei mase înspăimîntătoare de apă, ajunsese în localitate, trecuse peste străzile pe care, în aceeași dimineață, le străbătuse cu bicicleta, peste blocurile în care de-a lungul anilor intrase... (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 56).

Plutind peste acele clădiri își amintește de dentistul ce îi punea plombe de cînd era copil, sau de bărbierul său. Maximul inimaginabilului este atins în momentul în care barca se oprește în vîrfurile unui bloc, ca prin miracol, întreagă. „Și totuși, în pofida regimului de semistabilitate pe care în mod grotesc îl sugera, în acea călătorie buimacă dinspre mare spre uscat, tatăl său, aflat înăuntru, fusese rupt în două” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 56). Imaginile vizuale sînt completate sugestiv de cele auditive, în același ton neverosimil. Marea „sugea neconținut totul” (p. 56) și liniștea „strivea golful” (p. 56).

Printre dărîmăturile aspirate în larg, tatăl lui Shio văzuse zeci de trupuri, cadavre înfipte în scînduri sau sfirtecate, ca în unele picturi. Ochi holbați, ca la soldații căzuți în bătălie.

Femeia, chircită în cabina bărcii, îl îndemna să plece de acolo, că sînt lucruri pe care mintea nu e în stare să le uite. El însă continua să spună că acolo, afară, lumea murea, oamenii se înecau ca furnicile și dacă mai era un supraviețuitor, fie și unul singur, el trebuia să-l scoată de acolo.

Încercase în zadar să prindă cu undița și plasa un băiat care plutea cu capul despicat: era îmbrăcat cu uniforma liceului la care mergea și fiu-său. Își astupase ochii, plîngînd, cînd văzuse o mamă cu un nou-născut într-una din acele cutii jumătate plutitoare care erau mașinile (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 56).

La rîndul său, Yui este marcată de imaginea fiicei și a mamei sale, care au fost găsite îmbrățișate. Ca majoritatea supraviețuitorilor, pentru ea, „fiecare săptămînă fusese un chin, fiecare lună fusese doar un timp pus la păstrare, în pod, în vederea unei folosiri viitoare, care cine știe de-avea să vină vreodată” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 8). Și, totuși, deși va începe să vorbească la telefon abia după multă vreme, cabina o va ajuta să supraviețuiască. Neîncrezătoare la început, se va întreba: „O cabină telefonică într-o grădină, un telefon fără conexiune prin care să vorbești cu morții tăi. Chiar te poate consola așa ceva? Și, pe urmă, ce-ar fi putut să-i spună maică-sii, ce ar fi putut să îi spună fetei ei? Gîndul ăsta o năuci” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 17).

Mai tîrziu va recunoaște că vindecarea ei era meritul grădinii în care bătea neîncetat vîntul ce purta cuvintele în aer, și al „cabinei albe cu ușa pliantă și telefonului negru așezat pe răftuleț lîngă carnet. Degetele compuneau un număr oarecare, receptorul se lipea de ureche și vocea se cufunda în el. Uneori plîngea, alteori însă rîdea”. (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 9).

Telefonul Vîntului poate să le ofere pelerinilor echilibrul pe care și-l doresc, dar nu dintr-o dată. Yui are nevoie de ani de zile pentru a se reobișnui cu mirosul mării și abia după multă vreme realizează că la Bell Garden

(...) fericirea se ivea din acel obiect negru și greu pe care se perindau în cerc numerele de la 1 la 0. Cu urechea lipită de receptor, se pierdea în priveliștea grădinii de pe acea colină îndepărtată din nord-estul Japoniei. Prin despicătura în V a pământului visa că vorbește cu fetița ei mereu de trei ani, și cu mama care o ținuse în brațe pînă la sfîrșit (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 10).

Retragerea în sine provocată de traumă este firească. Yui comunică puțin și acceptă evenimentele fără să se gîndească la ele, ca într-un fel de transă. Tăcerea ei este luată de cei din jur ca acceptare, deși, de multe ori, ea gîndește altceva și chiar are temeri legate de viitor.

Takeshi, cuprins parcă de zelul definițiilor, încercă să rezume cele două vorbe într-o frază, vor locui împreună. El, Yui și Hana.

Pe Yui n-o întrebă formal, nu pentru că i-ar fi lipsit politețea sau fermitatea, ci pentru că, după tot ce se petrecuse între ei, concluzia i se părea evidentă. Totul ducea într-acolo. Cînd într-o duminică după-amiază Takeshi îi spuse că luna mai ar fi potrivită pentru nuntă, Yui tresări. Încercă să n-o arate, nici chiar cînd el o întrebă la cîți invitați se gîndea... (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 120).

Ea nu-și mai amintea, de pildă, dacă Takeshi o ceruse de soție și ce i-a răspuns. Credea „că întrebarea îi fusese pusă mai înainte și că ea, în acel moment, pur și simplu nu fusese atentă. Se convinsese că spusese da. De altminteri era într-adevăr un da, de asta era sigură. Și totuși acum veneau năvală peste ea, iar ea ezita” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 121). Cînd Hana își manifestă bucuria legată de căsătoria lor, Yui înțelese că era vorba de ceva serios, iar gestul fetiței „o sperie /.../. Din acel moment

începu să simtă, mai degrabă decît bucurie, un soi de stînjeneală. O nedeslușită teamă” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 121).

Toți supraviețuitorii evenimentului au comportamente similare. O explicație vine chiar din partea eroinei, cînd vorbește despre bărbatul care privea lumea din spatele unei rame goale de tablou pentru că acolo se simțea protejat:

N-ar fi putut explica exact de ce, dar era pe chipul lui un colțișor minuscul de întuneric, același pe care simțea că-l are și ea, nu-i era clar unde. Era un spațiu în care cel ce supraviețuia renunța la orice emoție, la orice bucurie, doar ca să nu îndure durerea altora. (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 28).

Trecerea într-o altă etapă, vindecarea eroilor devine posibilă prin acceptarea conexiunii dintre lumi, a creării unui echilibru între văzut și nevăzut. Telefonul devine un spațiu terapeutic cu rezultate în timp. În mod inconștient, prin prezența acestui obiect intermediar, personajele vorbesc cu ele însele, în oglindă, iar vindecarea se produce în momentul în care fiecare din ele reușește să accepte realitatea ca pe un dat ce nu poate fi schimbat decît prin schimbarea propriei percepții. Într-un interviu acordat *României literare*, Laura Imai Messina mărturisește:

Cred că-i încredințăm vîntului mai ales speranța de a reîntîlni persoanele dragi pe care le-am pierdut, ceva foarte apropiat sau legat de speranța de a încredința pentru ca mai apoi să primești în schimb un pic de identitate, de putere, căci persoanele pe care le pierdem sînt ca o măsură – pierd o bucată din ea, pierd echilibrul, ne pierdem echilibrul ori de cît ori pierdem pe cineva apropiat. Așadar, ne încredințăm vocea, speranța de a ne pune în legătură cu cei pe care i-am

pierdut pentru a ne simți mai bine ulterior (Imai Messina, în Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024).

Yui reușește să vorbească la telefon abia după mulți ani, înainte de mutarea la Tokio. Convins că „Telefonul Vântului îl chemase pe tatăl său, îl făcuse să se întoarcă la el” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 119), Shio, reușește în final să vorbească și cu mama sa, adevărata dispărută, încrederea transformându-i-se în credință: „Să ridici receptorul, să-ți streкори degetele în cele zece găuri mici, și, în pofida tăcerii care urma, să vorbești era un act de pură credință. Iată, cheia era tocmai asta, credința” (Imai Messina, 2021, p. 119).

### **Cînd realul se percepe prin culoare**

Personificarea culorilor și integrarea lor în povestea personajelor reprezintă o altă formă de manifestare a realismului magic. În *Viețile secrete ale culorilor*, culoarea nu este simplu element decorativ, ea are, dimpotrivă, o semnificație profundă și influențează emoțiile și acțiunile eroilor într-un mod misterios și fascinant. Narațiunea omniscientă aduce în prim plan personaje inedite într-o experiență captivantă în care imaginea realistă și fermecătoare totodată a ritualurilor și a ceremoniilor tradiționale nipone constituie suportul unei extrem de complicate și delicate povești de iubire. Mio are darul de a vedea și a reda realitatea în culori imperceptibile pentru alții, în vreme ce daltonistul Aoi învață să o recunoască prin îmbinarea dintre descrierile oferite de ea și propria sensibilitate.

Fiică a unor vopsitori de textile care dețineau un atelier unde se confecționau chimonouri de nuntă tradiționale, Mio percepe culorile în nuanțe infinit mai detaliate decît restul oamenilor. Pentru Aoi, în schimb, culorile sînt terne, mai puțin nuanțele de negru, pe care le-a învățat datorită meseriei moștenite de la tatăl său, aceea



de a-i pregăti pe oameni pentru ultimul lor drum, pentru „trecerea către nemurire /.../, ultimele ore de moarte, dacă se poate spune așa” (Imai Messina, 2023, 125). Prin întâlnirea celor doi, realul și irealul se împletesc într-o frumoasă poveste despre familie, despre dragoste și, mai ales, despre ce înseamnă să privești lumea prin ochii celuilalt. Granița dintre realitate și realismul magic este foarte subțire, dar la o lectură atentă schimbările sînt semnificative.

Ambele modalități de percepție a realității au explicații în termeni medicali, adică realiști. Darul lui Mio se numește „vedere tetracromatică” și se explică prin existența unei mutații genetice, la un număr foarte mic de femei, respectiv capacitatea de a „avea pe retină un număr superior de receptori”, adică „un spectru de percepție ridicat la pătrat” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 41). În ceea ce realul numește normalitate, percepția celorlalți poate deveni traumatizantă. Dacă mama acceptă situația cu greutate, fetița, susținută de tată, nu se lasă „golită pe interior” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 42) prin pretențiile adulților, evadînd mereu „într-un șifonier încastrat în perete, înăuntrul unei crăpături, într-un spațiu oarecare în care-și imagina că se pune la adăpost pe sine și extraordinara ei percepție. În astfel de ascunzișuri a luat naștere viața ei secretă” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 42).

Nemulțumită de efectul pe care îl avea adăugarea unui „închis”, „deschis”, Mio obișnuia să completeze numele culorilor cu tot felul de „denumiri stranii” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 21): „un verde tînăr, un bleu vechi de șase ani, un galben care se învîrte în horă, albastrul cerului de la șapte seara. /.../ culoarea stafidei coapte, cu coajă subțire, /.../ negru ca de miezul nopții, cu un strop de lună.” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 22). Astfel, „...în jurul ei se creau continuu corespondențe greșite /.../ ca atunci cînd, spre marea ei uimire, descoperise că două persoane care nu aveau nimic în comun împărțeau același nume” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 18). Mai exact, într-o culoare pe care lumea o numea doar roșu, Mio „observa cel puțin zece nuanțe diferite. Și i se părea o

greșeală să le rezume pe toate într-un cuvânt” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 19).

Stările sufletești, provocate de intervenția ei asupra realității, ca atunci când vrea să salveze puiul de pisică sau când realitatea o asaltează, ca în cearta cu mama ei, sînt și ele descrise în culori. Mio cădea „într-un alb fără margini, care-i făcea lumea imposibil de distins” (Imai Messina, 2023, p.148), ori într-un „hău alb” care îi stîrnea frica, în leșinuri care echivalau cu un hău lipsit de orice culoare și formă. Același hău revine când, la maturitate, află adevărul despre moartea părinților sau despre originea sa paternită:

Culoarea se retrăgea din toate lucrurile din jur, se îndepărtau nuanțele de roșu, gradientele de verde și de albastru, punctele de galben și portocaliu. I se întîmplase același lucru la întoarcerea din Gunma, după ce văzuse casa incendiată: pierduse, zile întregi, capacitatea de a mai percepe culorile. Atunci nu-i mărturisise nimănui prin ce trecea, de altfel, nu mai era nimeni căruia să-i vorbească despre asta. Știa că fenomenul acela nu avea de-a face cu ochii, ci cu sufletul rănit, care în lipsa iubirii nu știe ce să facă cu frumusețea (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 142).

Treptat, realitatea secretă pe care Mio și-o construiește în lumea culorilor, care devine verosimilă, perfectă, se dovedește a fi și o capcană a însingurării. Avea mereu la ea un caiet în care își nota culorile oamenilor pe care îi întîlnea, ale lucrurilor, ale elementelor ale naturii, ale clădirilor, a tot ceea ce întîlnea în viața de zi cu zi. În fiecare dimineață știa că, deschizînd ochii „întregul univers i se va așterne în față” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 67). Trezindu-se, aștepta „explozia de culori care urma s-o copleșească” (p. 67) și încerca să și-o imagineze. În realitatea acestui personaj „fiecare om își ducea în spate o

culoare numai a lui” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 47). Pe o mătușă de-a sa o vedea:

(...) verde: când era veselă, părea de-un verde strălucitor ca al licorilor din sticlutele vrăjitoarelor, în timp ce era obosită o asocia cu nuanța unei alge uscate. Femeia avea apucătura îngrozitoare de a deschide ușile dulapurilor din casele altora („atunci era verde salcie 柳綠”), iar ca dar aducea mereu dulciuri învechite cu *matcha* („verde bambus învechit 老竹色”) (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 47).

Întâlnirea cu daltonistul Aoi, care vede în rozul căpșună, cu galben și ciocolată din înghețata lui Mio „ceva galben, cu verde și maro” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 298), care află că „rozul pal al penelor ibisului japonez, dispărut în 2003” era „o culoare nelipsită de pe chimonourile femeilor tinere” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 299), că vechiul „galben napolitan” era denumit „gălbior” între 1728 și 1738 datorită faptului că se credea că vine de la mineralele provenite din Vezuviu, vulcanul de lângă Napoli, că ciocolata are „culoarea ceaiului negru, cu intarsii ca de fildeș zgâriat, de la nuci” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 299), îl face pe acesta să exclame: „te întreb ce culoare are lumea [realitatea] și mă bucur de surprizele tale” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 299).

Realitatea lui Aoi se construiește în jurul morții prin meseria tatălui său, meserie pe care o preia, dintr-un simț al datoriei, la moartea acestuia. Plimbându-se de mic printre sicrie, putea cu ușurință să „mîngîie obraji împietriți” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 37), să „ciocăne ușor unghiile cu buricele degetelor ca de insectă” (p. 37), „să observe fețele deformate ale unor necunoscuți” (p. 37) și să le spună „cum îi fusese ziua la grădiniță” (p. 37). Cel care-l ajută să treacă de trauma daltonismului este unchiul matern, Takenori, daltonist la rîndul său și tatăl adevărat al lui Mio. Întâlnirea „programată” a lui Aoi cu Mio are loc într-un moment critic, după ce

amîndoi și-au pierdut părinții, Takenori a murit și el, singura rudă în viață rămînînd sora tînărului antreprenor de pompe funebre.

Laura Imai Messina mărturisește despre numele personajului masculin, că, în limba japoneză,

(...) înseamnă verde-albăstrui, azuriu. E foarte ciudat, pentru că, inițial, în japoneză verdele nu exista, nu era numit, ci era numai acest cuvînt transliterat *aoi*, folosit și pentru vegetație, la nivel istoric. De pildă, culoarea la semafor este verde pentru noi italienii, europenii, dar pentru japonezi este acest *aoi*, și este deci mai azuriu. Dar și cerul poate fi de culoarea asta. Așa că l-am folosit înadins, fiindcă el este daltonist, sînt nenumărate culori obișnuite pe care el nu le vede. Nu este vreo ironie la mijloc, ci un gest de profunzime, tocmai el care nu vede multe dintre culori are drept nume o culoare (Imai Messina, în Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024).

La nivel simbolic, cele două personaje alăturate constituie un întreg. Ele reprezintă două fațete ale aceleiași monede. Armonia se creează prin întîlnirea contrariilor care se completează. Percepția existenței prin culoare reprezintă infinitele forme de manifestare a realității, percepția prin daltonism se asociază cu echidistanța în fața morții, care face și ea parte din realitate și care, spre a fi întîmpinată cu deschiderea firească, are nevoie de foarte multă sensibilitate, dovedită de Aoi prin tactul, prin respectul cu care tratează familia îndoliată:

Cunoștea inima cauterizată în grabă, care se deschidea cu mari eforturi, îl cunoștea pe cel care, după o asemenea pierdere, rămînea convalescent pentru tot restul vieții, sau pe cel care se fereca în sine cu șapte lacăte și-și refuza pînă și pregătirea doliului. Sufereau, de parcă ar fi fost în apnee, numai

la simpla amintire, chipul li se schimonosea de atîta de trudă (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 152).

Sora lui Aoi dovedește același respect prin modul în care pregătește morții pentru funeralii. În plan concret, armonia se creează în clipa în care Mio participă la îmbrăcarea bătrînei decedate în chimonoul de mireasă.

Acceptarea iubirii lui Aoi, ca o alternativă la „alb”, conștientizarea că experiența vieții pe care o are ea se completează firesc cu aceea a morții pe care o are Aoi, face ca, prin aceste două personaje să se completeze două realități. Mio se vindecă de sentimentul incompletului de pînă atunci – „Pentru ea totul era parțial și imprecis, aproximarea copleșea denumirea lucrurilor, or numele reprezenta linia de demarcație între ceea ce exista și ceea ce, în schimb, nu era” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 73) – prin prezența lui Aoi: „- Mio, unde ești? O întreba din priviri, cu ochii lui mari și potoliți, apoi se așternea pe urmele ei.” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 310)

### **Cîteva concluzii**

Dacă în *Ce încredințăm vîntului*, esența neverosimilului realismului halucinant este reprezentată de o traumă provocată de un fenomen exterior ființei umane, în *Viețile secrete ale culorilor*, realismul magic se manifestă prin dificultatea acceptării realității, provocată de interferența unor realități individuale relativ incompatibile. În ambele romane rezolvarea vine prin iubire și prin înțelegerea raportului intrinsec dintre viață și moarte, ca niveluri diferite ale aceleiași realități.

Remarcăm legătura pe care o face autoarea, la nivelul narațiunii, cu sursele de informare. Modul în care sînt structurate romanele, prin prezența, întotdeauna pe pagina pară, a unor citate extrase din diferite surse, cu titluri și autori, menite să autentifice conținutul, reprezintă o tehnică

ce poate fi considerată ca făcînd și ea parte din realismul halucinant sau magic.

Un raport similar se creează prin realizarea unei conexiuni dintre cele două romane prin scoaterea în evidență a prezenței telefonului și a celor trei personaje, Takeshi, Yui și Hana, care ajung la capela lui Aoi pentru înmormîntarea bunicii. În birou, Hana observă telefonul negru de bachelită, care-i amintește tatălui acesteia de

(...) un loc din Prefectura Iwate, pe versantul prăpăstios al unui munte, unde, într-o grădină privată, fusese instalată o cabină telefonică. Oamenii băteau drumul pînă acolo ca să vorbească cu cei dragi ai lor, dispăruți dintre cei vii, la receptorul unui telefon care nu era legat la rețea și care, în schimb, le purta vocile în văzduh.

— Este un loc special pentru noi. Acolo ne-am cunoscut eu și soția mea.

— Și Telefonul Vîntului arată exact ca acela de-acolo, exclamă fetița, arătînd spre aparatul negru de bachelită de pe birou. (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 153).

Aoi constată că și „Prin aparatul acela trecuseră sute de voci, care începeau toate mai mult sau mai puțin în același fel” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 78) și căroră el, „cărui culorile îi produceau confuzie, se mărginea să clasifice acele voci în funcție de gradul de autocontrol și încredere de sine” (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 79).

Că nu era un simplu telefon, aflăm și din faptul că

Pentru Aoi, vechiul telefon negru de bachelită era precum o pereche tocită de pantofi, care se uzează cu timpul și sfîrșesc prin a se mula perfect pe propria călcătură. Era punctul de început al tuturor poveștilor: cele pe care le adunase tatăl lui și cele pe care acum le strîngea el. (Imai Messina, 2023, p. 79),

confirmând astfel perenitatea realismului magic care, în aceste romane, sugerează că armonia nu se poate crea decât prin comunicare, aceasta din urmă avînd rolul de a echilibra raportul dintre diferitele realități individuale.

Două romane deosebite care poartă, „așadar, culoarea curiozității, cu o nuanță a abandonării de sine, a dorinței de a te lăsa în voia paginilor din fața ta” (Imai Messina, în Pătrășconiu, 24 mai 2024).

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# MENTAL ILLNESS, IDENTITY, AND PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY IN SUSANNA CLARKE'S *PIRANESI*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

*Many modern readers, particularly those sharing reviews through blogs, social media, and personal channels, tend to interpret literature through a psychological lens. By relating characters' experiences to their own mental health struggles, these readers create deeply personal interpretations that reflect their individual challenges. This paper explores the various interpretations of Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* (2020), focusing on how various readers have connected the novel to themes of mental illness, personal identity, and philosophical inquiry. While many have drawn parallels between the protagonist's experiences and psychological conditions such as dissociative identity disorder (DID) and schizophrenia, others see the novel as reflective of living with chronic illness, particularly long COVID-19. The analysis considers these interpretations while emphasizing Clarke's broader thematic concerns, such as enchantment, perception, and the philosophical conflict between knowledge and feeling. Drawing from sources like Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of**

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*Freedom and Owen Barfield's theories on the evolution of consciousness, the paper argues that Piranesi transcends psychological readings, instead offering a meditation on the loss of an enchanted view of reality. Through an examination of key passages from the novel, the paper demonstrates how Clarke invites readers to contemplate deeper philosophical questions, suggesting that the labyrinthine House serves as a metaphor for the human mind and its intricate relationship with knowledge, freedom, and identity. The conclusion emphasizes that Piranesi resists singular interpretations, encouraging readers to engage with its mysteries on multiple levels.*

**Keywords:** interpretation; mental illness; philosophy of freedom; identity; *Piranesi*.

### **1. Introduction**

“Piranesi” refers to Giovanni Battista Piranesi, an 18th-century Italian artist and architect known for his elaborate and imaginative etchings of labyrinthine prisons and architectural fantasies (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2011). His work, particularly his series of prints titled *Carceri d’Invenzione* (Imaginary Prisons), often depicted vast, complex, and surreal structures filled with arches, stairways, and passageways, evoking a sense of mystery, confinement, and grandeur. Susanna Clarke’s interview about her new novel, *Piranesi: Susanna Clarke in conversation with Madeline Miller* (Waterstones, 2021) offers deep insight into her creative process and inspirations. Clarke’s connection to Piranesi’s art emerged early in her career, with references appearing in *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* and in one of her short stories. However, the idea for *Piranesi* came not from Piranesi’s work but from her admiration for Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, who influenced her fascination with labyrinths and fantastical worlds.

Clarke revealed that *Piranesi* had been in her mind since her twenties, when she first tried to write about a huge building containing an ocean and two characters. Though it took decades to develop, the project eventually came together, and the name “Piranesi” seemed like a perfect fit for the character, given the thematic resonance with labyrinths and grand, mysterious structures (Waterstones, 2021).

Many readers of *Piranesi* have frequently drawn connections between Susanna Clarke’s chronic fatigue syndrome and the psychological elements of the novel. The author’s struggle with chronic fatigue syndrome significantly affected her writing process, making it torturous and frustrating. Clarke has described how, during her illness, her creative projects felt as if they were “flowing down a lot of alleys”, with ideas branching out uncontrollably in all directions (Jordan, 2020). A common feature of chronic fatigue syndrome, according to Clarke, is the inability to make decisions (Jordan, 2020). She found it impossible to choose between versions of sentences or to determine the direction of a plot. The illness left her feeling locked away, irrelevant, and unable to contribute meaningfully, a feeling worsened by societal pressures that value individuals based on their productivity (Jordan, 2020). This sense of isolation and purposelessness was a long-standing challenge for Clarke, though she acknowledges that the pandemic has led many others to experience similar struggles with their sense of purpose.

This has led to numerous interpretations that suggest the book addresses themes of mental illness or psychological struggle, particularly in relation to isolation and altered perception of reality. However, despite these interpretations, Clarke herself has never openly claimed that *Piranesi* specifically refers to mental illness. Instead, the novel’s ambiguity allows for various readings, including those that reflect the challenges of living with

chronic conditions, while also leaving room for broader philosophical and symbolic interpretations.

## **2. Key Turning Points in the Narrative**

Through a series of journal entries, *Piranesi* recounts the story of a young man who has no recollection of his past and assumes that his name is Piranesi. He lives in a parallel universe, a vast labyrinth of halls, stairways, passages, and vestibules, all adorned with unique statues. These statues serve not only as landmarks to guide him through the immense House but also as something akin to companions. The House itself is divided into distinct levels: the upper level is shrouded in clouds, while the lower level holds a vast ocean. Occasionally, the ocean's tides surge into the middle level, following a pattern that Piranesi meticulously tracks and records.

The lower halls, constantly flooded by these waters, provide fish and seaweed, which sustain Piranesi. He views the House as a benevolent force, nurturing and caring for him as if he were its child: "The Beauty of the House is immeasurable; its Kindness infinite" (Clarke, 2020, p. 9). Having explored thousands of its halls, Piranesi understands the House better than anyone, cherishing its mysteries and finding solace in its vastness. The House not only shapes his physical reality but also his understanding of existence itself, reinforcing his isolation: "Outside the House there are only the Celestial Objects: Sun, Moon and Stars." (Clarke, 2020, p. 6) This observation from his journal suggests that while he is aware of something beyond the House, his understanding of the external world is minimal and abstract. The celestial objects could symbolize a higher, unreachable realm, contrasting with the labyrinthine world Piranesi inhabits.

Piranesi believes he has spent his entire life within the vast labyrinth of the House and that only fifteen people exist in the entire world. All but two of these

people are long-dead, reduced to mere skeletons. Piranesi meticulously records his daily experiences and observations in his journals, which form the narrative of the novel.

Twice a week, Piranesi meets with a man known as the Other, who is always well-dressed and enlists Piranesi's help in searching for a mysterious "Great and Secret Knowledge" that is supposedly hidden somewhere within the House. The Other occasionally brings Piranesi supplies that seem to come from outside the House, such as shoes, electric torches, and multivitamins. When Piranesi suggests that they abandon their fruitless search for the Knowledge, the Other informs him that they've had this conversation before. He also warns Piranesi that the House slowly erodes a person's memories and personality over time, causing them to forget themselves.

The Other also issues another warning, telling Piranesi about a potential sixteenth person, referred to as "16", who might enter the House with the intent of doing him harm. He instructs Piranesi to stay far away from 16 at all costs, as approaching this individual could cause him to lose his sanity. Later, Piranesi encounters an elderly man he refers to as the Prophet, who reveals that the Other's real name is Valentine Ketterley, psychologist and anthropologist, a rival who had stolen his ideas regarding the Knowledge. The Prophet explains that the House is a "distributary world" (Clarke, 2020, p. 63) a place formed from ideas flowing out of another world, and claims he will lead 16 into the House to harm Ketterley.

While going through his journals and organizing them, Piranesi discovers references to entries he cannot remember writing. These entries contain terms used by the Prophet and tell the story of an occultist named Laurence Arne-Sayles from the modern world, who had theorized the existence of other worlds and how they could be accessed. Ketterley had been one of Arne-Sayles'

students, and the occultist had built a cult-like following around his beliefs. Eventually, Arne-Sayles was imprisoned for kidnapping a man named James Ritter, who later recounted being held captive in a place resembling the House.

Piranesi soon realizes that 16 has indeed entered the House, and he leaves a message for her. However, he hesitates to read her reply, though later interactions with the Other reveal that 16 is a woman named Raphael. After learning that an unusual confluence of tides will flood the middle level of the House, Piranesi leaves a warning for Raphael. She responds with a question: “Are you Matthew Rose Sorensen?” (Clarke, 2020, p. 110) Upon reading the name, Piranesi experiences a vision of standing in a modern city, surrounded by “thousands upon thousands of people” (Clarke, 2020, p. 112) suggesting there is more to his identity than he previously understood.

As Piranesi continues his investigation through his journals, he finds that someone—likely Ketterley—has destroyed all entries related to Ketterley’s involvement. Determined, Piranesi pieces together the torn pages from scraps he finds in gull nests and uncovers the truth about how he came to the House. He was once Matthew Rose Sorensen, a journalist working on a book about Arne-Sayles. During an interview with Ketterley, the man used a ritual to trap Sorensen in the House. Over time, Sorensen lost his memories and developed a new identity, which Ketterley mockingly named Piranesi.

On the day of the flood, Piranesi confronts Ketterley, reclaiming his lost memories, just as Raphael returns to the House. Ketterley attempts to kill both of them, but he drowns in the floodwaters. Once the water recedes, Raphael reveals that she is a British police detective investigating disappearances linked to the Arne-Sayles cult. She invites Piranesi to return to the real world, explaining that his family has been searching for him ever

since he disappeared from London six years ago. After much contemplation, Piranesi decides to leave the House and return home.

In an epilogue, the narrator reflects on his life after returning to the real world. Although he has adjusted to his new surroundings, he frequently visits the House. He brings James Ritter back for a visit, tends to Ketterley's remains, and joins Raphael when she returns to the House. The narrator concludes that he is no longer purely Sorensen or Piranesi, but is now a combination of both, creating a third identity from the fragments of the other two.

### **3. Exploring the Idea of Mental Illness**

In this section, we explore how various readers have interpreted Piranesi through the lens of mental illness. Many readers have drawn parallels between the protagonist's experiences and psychological conditions, offering personal insights that reveal how they connect with the novel. These reviews come from various sources such as articles, personal blogs, and YouTube channels, reflecting each person's unique interpretation shaped by their personal experiences and how they relate to the character's journey. To support these perspectives, we have selected passages from the book that may serve as supporting evidence.

Including these specific quotes aims to provide tangible examples that align with different interpretations, giving readers a clearer insight into how the text connects to themes like mental health, isolation, or identity.

#### **3.1 Dissociative identity disorder (DID)**

According to the psychologist Leanda Brooks (2022), Piranesi, the protagonist, may be imprisoned under extremely harsh circumstances, with his apparent brainwashing indicating the presence of Dissociative

Identity Disorder (DID), also known as Multiple Personalities Disorder (MPD). This condition is marked by the existence of multiple distinct identities or personalities, which can range from as few as two to over a hundred. These identities take turns controlling the individual's behaviour, leading to symptoms such as memory lapses, delusions, and depression (Utomo, Adnan & Susanti, 2023, p. 306). In more severe cases, dissociation can manifest as an inability to access specific memories (dissociative amnesia) or control motor functions (e.g., tonic immobilization), affecting sensory, emotional, and cognitive processes either voluntarily or involuntarily. Patients with DID typically dissociate from painful memories related to their traumatic experiences. They develop distinct identities, with some handling daily functioning, while others emerge as trauma-related states that serve as defensive mechanisms in response to the trauma (Utomo, Adnan & Susanti, 2023, p. 307).

This theory finds support in the text, particularly in the way the protagonist refers to different versions of himself. In one instance, Piranesi comforts himself, saying, "I placed my hand on my chest. Hush now! I said, Do not be afraid. You are safe. Go back to sleep. I will take care of us both" (Clarke, 2020, p. 131). This moment suggests a division within his identity, as he speaks as though managing separate parts of himself.

Moreover, Piranesi's detachment from his own physical characteristics—age, height, and build—could be seen as a reflection of this dissociative state, supporting the theory: "I believe that I am between thirty and thirty-five years of age. I am approximately 1.83 metres tall and of a slender build" (Clarke, 2020, p. 8)

Further evidence is provided when Piranesi contemplates sending a message to the outside world, stating: "Perhaps I should send them a message explaining that Matthew Rose Sorensen now lives inside me, that he



is unconscious but perfectly safe, and that I am a strong and resourceful person who will care for him assiduously, exactly as I care for any others of the Dead” (Clarke, 2020, 149). Here, Piranesi describes Matthew Rose Sorensen, his former identity, as a separate entity residing within him, highlighting the existence of distinct personalities, a key feature of DID.

### 3.2 Drapetomania

In another interpretation of mental illness in *Piranesi*, Alex Brown (2021) draws a parallel between Ketterley’s treatment of Piranesi and the historical concept of drapetomania, a fabricated mental illness used by pro-slavery Southern doctor Samuel A. Cartwright to pathologize enslaved Africans who attempted to escape (White, 2002, p. 41). According to this false diagnosis, the desire for freedom was seen as a disorder caused by insufficient punishment from slaveholders, and the prescribed “cure” was to treat enslaved people “like children” to prevent them from running away. Brown suggests that Ketterley’s warning to Piranesi that speaking with 16 (later revealed as Sarah Raphael) would drive him mad echoes this manipulative control. In this interpretation, if Matthew (Piranesi) is viewed as enslaved by Ketterley, then 16/Sarah Raphael represents the abolitionist figure working to secure his freedom, highlighting a dynamic of control and liberation in Ketterley’s manipulation of Piranesi.

The power dynamic between the Other and Piranesi supports aspects of the drapetomania analogy. The Other controls the relationship, summoning Piranesi at will: “If he requires my presence. [...] he calls out ‘Piranesi!’ until I come” (Clarke, 2020, p. 12). This suggests a hierarchical, almost master-servant relationship where Piranesi is at the beck and call of the Other. Additionally, the Other’s lack of concern for Piranesi’s well-being, such

as neglecting to greet him or ask how he is (Clarke, 2020, p. 19), echoes the dismissive attitude of someone who views another person as a tool rather than an equal. The control over time and interaction, as the Other ensures meetings never last more than an hour and discourages Piranesi from “getting too chatty” (Clarke, 2020, p. 34) reinforces this manipulative dynamic. Piranesi’s compliance with these constraints, and his eagerness to assist despite the Other’s aloofness, can be seen as a form of psychological conditioning, echoing the drapetomania narrative of domination and control.

However, there are aspects that challenge the direct application of the drapetomania concept. Piranesi does not express overt resistance to the Other’s control, and he admires the Other’s intellectual dedication “I admire his dedication to his scientific work” (Clarke, 2020, p. 19). This admiration complicates the idea that Piranesi is being oppressed in the same way as a slave seeking escape. Piranesi voluntarily engages in the search for the Great and Secret Knowledge, aligning his purpose with that of the Other. Additionally, his willingness to ask questions and offer assistance during rituals (Clarke, 2020, pp. 33-34) indicates some level of agency, albeit within a controlled environment.

### **3.3 Long Covid-19**

Jodie Noel Vinson’s (2021) interpretation of Piranesi through the lens of her own experience with long COVID-19 is deeply personal and reflective, as she recounts in her article suggestively titled *Piranesi is a dispatch from the kingdom of chronic illness*. After contracting the coronavirus while traveling in early March, Jodie and her husband, Marc, found themselves struggling with lingering symptoms that made even simple tasks challenging. By the time Piranesi arrived in mid-September, they had been dealing with the long-term

effects of the virus for months. Soon, the novel became more than just a form of escape; it became a mirror in which they saw their own lives and struggles reflected.

Jodie, grappling with physical limitations, resonated with Piranesi's confined existence within the House. The sense of isolation and longing for connection that the protagonist experiences strongly resonate with those who have lived through the isolation of long COVID. For example, Piranesi gazes out of the windows of the House, which "look out upon Great Courtyards; barren, empty places paved with stone" (Clarke, 2020, p. 9). This barren emptiness mirrors the experience of those confined during illness or lockdown, who often feel disconnected from the vibrant world beyond their reach.

Just as Piranesi navigates his labyrinthine world with care, Jodie found herself restricted by her body's limits, forced to slow down and rest. In both the book and her experience, slowing down became a way to find meaning, to observe the small details of life, and to cultivate creativity within restricted spaces (Vinson, 2021). She also saw parallels between Piranesi's manipulation by the Other and her own dismissive treatment by medical professionals, who invalidated her symptoms and made her question her reality (Vinson, 2021). The Other's casual dismissal of Piranesi's identity, laughing and saying, "I have to call you something" (Clarke, 2020, p. 113), mirrors this external imposition of identity and the resulting self-doubt creates a psychological dissonance in Piranesi, much like Jodie's sense of being misdiagnosed or dismissed. The Other exerts similar control over Piranesi, manipulating him into believing he is mad.

As Jodie's illness persisted, time itself seemed to warp, echoing Piranesi's unique way of keeping track of time through events rather than traditional calendars. Days stretched out endlessly, with the acute symptoms of a virus expected to last two weeks lingering for months. In

the same way that Piranesi marks his days with significant discoveries: “the Year I Discovered the Coral Halls” (Clarke, 2020, p. 14) or “the Year I Named the Constellations” (Clarke, 2020, p. 15) Jodie found herself creating new ways to measure time in a world where conventional timekeeping no longer seemed relevant. For Jodie, 2020 became “The Year of Weeping and Wailing,” a fitting description for both the emotional and physical toll of her illness, as well as the broader context of the pandemic (Vinson, 2021).

While Vinson’s personal connection to Piranesi provides a rich, empathetic layer to the novel’s interpretation, her approach also highlights the potential limitations of reading the text primarily through the lens of individual experience. The power of Clarke’s work lies in its ability to resonate with a wide range of readers, and while the connection to long COVID-19 is compelling, it is important to balance this perspective with broader thematic interpretations that the novel offers.

### 3.4 Schizophrenia

Seth Tomko’s (2024) interpretation of Piranesi positions the novel as a metaphorical exploration of mental illness, drawing parallels to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* as both works use fantastical elements to make inquiries into altered psychological states. Tomko suggests that, while not overtly allegorical, Piranesi can be read as an exploration of mental illness, particularly through the lens of the protagonist’s journals. Piranesi’s unwavering belief in the logic and coherence of his world is reminiscent of the thought patterns often observed in individuals experiencing psychotic episodes or delusional states, such as those seen in cases of paranoid schizophrenia or extreme manic or depressive episodes (Tomko, 2024).

Indeed, Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and Clarke’s Piranesi share thematic similarities. In *Metamorphosis*,

Gregor Samsa awakens to find himself transformed into a giant insect, leading to his physical isolation from his family and society, as well as his internal struggle with his new identity. His metamorphosis symbolizes a profound psychological or existential crisis, highlighting themes of dehumanization, alienation, and loss of agency. Gregor's transformation is never fully explained, much like the surreal nature of Piranesi's labyrinthine world. Piranesi's confinement within the House, like Gregor's imprisonment in his insect body, reflects a deeper mental and emotional isolation. Both characters exist in environments that seem to defy normal logic, and both are cut off from the world they once knew, struggling with distorted perceptions of reality. However, while Gregor's transformation causes his complete alienation from humanity, Piranesi's journey is one of gradual realization, as he begins to question the reality imposed on him by the Other and seeks to reclaim his true identity.

Leanda Brooks (2022) also presents a perspective suggesting that Piranesi may suffer from schizophrenia. She argues that his difficulty distinguishing reality from hallucination, his disconnection from his identity, and his failure to recognize his own handwriting in his journals align with symptoms of schizophrenia. Unlike dissociative identity disorder, where individuals are aware of internal voices, schizophrenia causes a complete lack of awareness of external delusions. Brooks sees Piranesi's disorientation and fragmented identity as key indicators of schizophrenia.

The connection between these two interpretations lies in their shared focus on altered psychological states. Both Tomko (2024) and Brooks (2022) highlight Piranesi's distorted perceptions of reality and his struggles with identity, though Tomko frames this within a broader metaphorical exploration, while Brooks views it as symptomatic of schizophrenia.

#### **4. Piranesi from a Philosophical Perspective**

Susanna Clarke has crafted Piranesi's character by emphasizing his profound honesty and trust in the world he inhabits. Unlike modern people, who often experience a sense of alienation from their environment, nature, and other beings, Piranesi feels deeply connected to the world around him. Clarke wanted to portray a character who did not have this sense of separation but instead felt part of a continuous relationship with his surroundings, almost communing with the world itself (Waterstones, 2021).

Viewing the novel primarily through the lens of contemporary psychology, focusing on mental illness or dissociative identity disorder, may obscure deeper thematic concerns that Clarke skilfully weaves throughout the narrative. This perspective argues that rather than reducing the story to a psychological exploration of mental delusion or brainwashing, the novel is better understood within the broader history of ideas that Clarke explicitly invokes, particularly those related to enchantment, perception, and the loss of a more mystical or enchanted view of reality.

During a pivotal moment when Piranesi begins to uncover unsettling truths about his identity, readers are given a significant clue about what the labyrinthine story may actually represent. While indexing his journals, he comes across names and references that he does not fully recognize, such as Owen Barfield and Rudolf Steiner (Clarke, 2020, p. 74). These names seem foreign to him because they connect to a world and intellectual framework he has forgotten or been disconnected from, which contrasts with his current isolated existence in the House.

Barfield, a thinker often linked with C.S. Lewis, builds on the idea of the "evolution of consciousness", a concept that examines how human perception of reality

has shifted throughout history. In his work, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (1957), Barfield suggests that human understanding has evolved from a mystical, enchanted view of the world to a more rational and disenchanting perspective.

This shift is reflected in C.S. Lewis's quote from *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) that Clarke uses as a preliminary thesis in Piranesi: "I am the great scholar, the magician, the adept, who is doing the experiment. Of course, I need subjects to do it on" (Clarke, 2020, p. 4). Here, the figure of the scholar or magician is portrayed as someone who wields power over others, conducting experiments on them, perhaps a metaphor for how rationality seeks to control and dissect the world, removing the sense of mystery and enchantment that once shaped human consciousness. Barfield's theories challenge this modern perspective, advocating for a deeper recognition of the spiritual dimensions that have been lost in the rationalization of the world.

The allusions to *The Chronicles of Narnia* in Piranesi are abundant and hard to overlook. Beyond the similarities between the House and Charn, the cover of the first hardcover edition of Piranesi features a faun statue resembling Mr. Tumnus from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. This connection is further deepened by the protagonist's reflection on the faun statue within the House itself:

The Statue that I love above all others – stands at a Door between the Fifth and Fourth North-Western Halls. It is the Statue of a Faun, a creature half-man and half-goat, with a head of exuberant curls. He smiles slightly and presses his forefinger to his lips. I have always felt that he meant to tell me something or perhaps to warn me of something:

Quiet! he seems to say. Be careful! (Clarke, 2020, p. 16)

The faun's gesture, pressing his finger to his lips, suggests an air of secrecy or caution, invoking a sense of warning or concealed knowledge. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Tumnus serves as a guide who both helps and warns Lucy about the dangers of Narnia, particularly the White Witch. Similarly, in Piranesi, the faun statue may symbolize the hidden truths within the labyrinthine House and the need for Piranesi to approach his surroundings with care. Nevertheless, the faun statue hints at a deeper thematic message that the story transcends mere knowledge and intellectual understanding. Piranesi's connection with the faun is one of intuition and silent communication, a gesture of caution that implies there are layers of meaning that cannot be fully captured through logic or analysis alone. This quiet warning suggests that the beauty of the House, and perhaps of the story itself, lies in its mystery and wonder. By focusing solely on the quest for knowledge, as the Other does, there is a risk of reducing the richness of the world, and the story, to something utilitarian or devoid of deeper significance.

Steiner (1984), too, with his focus on spiritual science and anthroposophy, explored the intersection between material and spiritual realities. According to this spiritual movement, established in the early 20th century, an objective spiritual realm exists that can be understood through intellect and accessed by human experience. Its followers seek spiritual understanding through a mode of thought that transcends sensory perception. His work *Philosophy of Freedom* (1894/1995) explores the concept of human autonomy, focusing on the individual's capacity to achieve moral and intellectual freedom through conscious thought and self-determination. Steiner emphasizes that



true freedom comes from acting based on one's own rational understanding and ethical intuitions, rather than being driven by external influences or unconscious desires (Steiner, 1894/1995, p. 81). This philosophical framework suggests that individuals can attain spiritual and moral freedom by developing inner clarity and thinking independently, which allows them to align their actions with higher moral principles.

In *Piranesi*, the protagonist's relationship with the House can be connected to Rudolf Steiner's distinction between knowing and feeling as instruments of knowledge. Steiner argues that a philosopher of feeling, or mystic, seeks to understand the world by immersing themselves in their individual, subjective emotions, rather than through objective, rational thought. This attempt to permeate the world with one's personal experience leads to a mystical outlook, one where feelings, which are inherently individual, are elevated to the level of universal truths.

However, Steiner critiques this approach by pointing out that feelings are subjective and cannot serve as a reliable basis for understanding the world at large, as they are too personal and limited (Steiner, 1894/1995, p. 83). This tension between knowledge and feeling is evident in Piranesi's relationship with the House. Piranesi does not merely observe the House; he feels a profound connection to it, describing it as a benevolent entity that nurtures him. His reverence for the House goes beyond rational understanding, as he experiences it emotionally, treating its vast halls, statues, and tides as part of his own self.

However, as Steiner suggests, this feeling-based connection may obscure a deeper understanding. Piranesi's emotional immersion in the House initially blinds him to the manipulation and exploitation by the Other. Only when Piranesi begins to question his identity

and the nature of the House does he shift from a purely emotional relationship to one that integrates knowledge, allowing him to break free from the Other's control. Thus, Piranesi's journey is not about being physically trapped, but about the internal conflict between emotion and intellect. His final realization, where he becomes a blend of both Piranesi and Sorensen, reflects Steiner's ideal of achieving freedom through the balance of feeling and conceptual thought. This interpretation suggests that the novel is a metaphor for the intricate workings of the human mind, where true freedom comes not from escaping external circumstances but from harmonizing our internal worlds.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Piranesi invites a multitude of interpretations, with its themes resonating differently depending on the reader's perspective. By examining the novel through the lens of mental illness, isolation, and identity, readers connect their personal experiences to the protagonist's journey, seeing reflections of their own struggles and realities. Yet, as this paper suggests, these interpretations do not exhaust the novel's meaning. Piranesi also engages with broader philosophical ideas. By interpreting the House as a manifestation of Piranesi's mental illness or brainwashing, some argue, readers fall into the very trap that Clarke's novel seeks to avoid: viewing the mystical and surreal as mere symptoms of a disturbed mind.

This psychological reading dismisses the novel's exploration of how individuals might experience reality in ways that transcend modern, secular, and disenchanting worldviews. Instead, a more illuminating approach would consider how Clarke engages with ideas from Barfield, C.S. Lewis, and Rudolf Steiner, offering a critique of the secular

age and its limitations in understanding a reality that is imbued with more than just material meaning.

Thus, while interpreting Piranesi's experience as one of mental illness might align with a contemporary psychological approach, this view arguably misses the novel's central engagement with the loss of an enchanted worldview. Clarke's work invites readers to reexamine the boundaries of reality and to consider whether, in the modern age, we have lost touch with a deeper, more meaningful sense of existence:

I realised that the search for the Knowledge has encouraged us to think of the House as if it were a sort of riddle to be unravelled, a text to be interpreted, and that if ever we discover the Knowledge, then it will be as if the Value has been wrested from the House and all that remains will be mere scenery. [...] The House is valuable because it is the House. It is enough in and of Itself. It is not the means to an end (Clarke, 2020, p. 45).

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