



The Child As Self-Deceiver: Narrative Strategies in Katherine Paterson's and Patricia MacLachlan's Novels

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There are several ways of describing the radical paradigm shift that has happened recently or is still going on in children's literature. The transition from action-oriented toward character-oriented texts has resulted in, among other things, the successive disappearance of the omniscient, omnipresent, authoritative narrator (described as *extradiegetic-heterodiegetic* in narrative theory in Genette 1980, Rimmon-Kenan 1983), formerly the most common narrator in children's books (as found, for instance, in *Tom Sawyer* or *Little Women*, but also in much later texts, such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). Instead, the voice, most often the inner voice, of the character becomes manifest, whether the narrator is first-person or third-person. One of the primary devices to let the voice of a character or several characters be heard in a text is focalization, which is the technique of manipulating the narrative point of view, when the narrator tells the story 'as if seen through the character's eyes' (see Genette 1980, Rimmon-Kenan 1983, Bal 1985). Further devices, elaborated in Seymour Chatman's study *Coming to Terms* (Chatman 1990) are slant and filter. Both describe the discrepancy in the point of view of the principal agents in the narrative act: the narrator, the character and the

reader. Slant implies the shift between the narrator's and the reader's point of view, resulting in what is often called 'unreliable narrator'. In a slanted narrative, clues are given to the reader that the narrator may be consciously or unconsciously omitting, transforming or adding details to the narrated events.

Filter implies the shift between the character's and the reader's point of view. The consequence is a contradiction between what readers know about characters and what characters know about themselves. Throughout this discussion, the word 'filter' will be used exclusively in this sense, indicating the shift between the reader's and the character's point of view. There are many disadvantages in using a word in a terminological sense while it also has a common, everyday usage; however, this seems to be unavoidable here. A filtered narrative tells us more about the protagonists and their perception of the events than about the events themselves. In a way, the author and the reader are communicating over the protagonist's head, since the reader is allowed to make inferences beyond the protagonist's grasp. In children's literature, this may appear a more generous attitude toward the reader, since adult authors address young readers on equal terms. On the other hand, young readers frequently identify themselves with

characters, most often by sharing their point of view. When this reading strategy is deliberately impeded, young readers may feel frustrated, or on the contrary, they may find satisfaction in their superiority over the character. The delicate balance between having confidence in young readers' ability to disengage themselves from characters yet stimulating enough empathy to involve the reader is one of the many dilemmas facing contemporary children's writers.

In this discussion, I illustrate some of these problems by examining the narrative structure in some novels by Katherine Paterson and Patricia MacLachlan, two authors who have explored the narrative potential of a child perspective both in first-person and third-person form. Incidentally, contemporary narrative theory (e.g. Genette 1980) interrogates the principal differences between these two narrative modes, which are often emphasized in studies of children's literature (Lukens 1990, 120-136). As will be clearly seen from the discussed texts, focalization (that is, the 'point-of-view technique') functions similarly regardless of whether the first-person or third person narrator is used.

Filter in texts by Katherine Paterson and Patricia MacLachlan is used to empha-

size the dominant theme of the neglected child and the betrayal of the mother, which is an excellent illustration of the interdependence of story and discourse. The child's desire and frustration are both expressed and suppressed by means of language, or rather, the 'pre-verbal', the imaginary, in Lacanian terminology.

According to Jacques Lacan, the early stages in a child's development, when the child is strongly connected with the mother, are based on pre-verbal structures (images, therefore 'imaginary' stage). At later stages, children must learn to express their emotions verbally and structure them in compliance with existing norms (which are conventional, therefore 'symbolic' stage or order), which Lacan attributes to the father and calls 'Father's Law' (Lacan 1977). Without attaching too much significance to this rather mechanical model, I would like to draw very superficial parallels between the way the discussed texts are constructed narratively and their possible psychological implications. Basically, the characters' inability to verbalize their suppressed emotions, reflected in the narrative structure, may signal that they are stuck at the pre-verbal stage. The mothers' role thus becomes to conserve the child at this stage.

In her early novel *Bridge to*

Terabithia (1977) Katherine Paterson makes use of filter as her principal narrative device, doing so consistently throughout the text to foreshadow the focalizing character's shock at the death of his friend. Death is not the theme of this book, as Katherine Paterson has repeatedly stressed herself, and in the first place, it was not written in order to present young readers with an issue, even though there was a real circumstance behind the story. As Paterson says, quoting a colleague, 'One does not ... rush to give Anna Karenina to friends who are committing adultery, or minister to distressed old age with copies of *King Lear*'. (Paterson 1995, 169). *Bridge to Terabithia* is not a book about 'coping with death', but rather about the hard work of growing up, told not from the point of view of an omniscient and didactic adult, but that of an inexperienced and therefore vulnerable child.

As readers, we may apprehend very quickly not only the fact that Jess becomes friends with Leslie, but also why. For Jess, the focalizing character, it takes some time to acknowledge the fact, and not until the end of the story does he realize what Leslie has actually meant to him. Seemingly, Katherine Paterson uses quite banal devices to portray Leslie's otherness: she is a newcomer, the family is somewhat odd, both parents are

writers, they have no television, but lots of books. Leslie always wears the wrong clothes, she is bullied in school, and the fact that she can run faster than even the older boys does not add to her popularity. However, filter—the shift in point of view between Jess and the readers—helps us see what Jess himself fails to see: not only that he is curious about Leslie because of her otherness, but it is the very nature of otherness, its spiritual and intellectual value, that attracts him. It is the spiritually underprivileged child's first encounter with the boundless universe of spiritual life.

To his own surprise, Jess finds himself in a totally new world together with Leslie, not only a world where his reading and drawing interests have a value, but literally a magical world which Leslie creates with her imagination, drawing inspiration from her extensive reading. What may seem innocent play—and what Jess at first apprehends as play and make-believe—is in fact a powerful description of a rite of passage, which Jess eventually will realize. *Terabithia* could just as well be a magical Otherworld, like its model Narnia. Katherine Paterson's novels have been praised as 'the ultimate realism' (Huse 1984), but she has herself stated that they often have traditional myths as 'hypotexts', or underlying textual structures,

and that her characters are each in some way a reincarnation of the traditional mythical hero, the 'hero with a thousand faces', to quote Joseph Campbell (see Paterson 1995, 146ff). Functionally, there is no difference between Narnia and Terabithia; both are sacred places where the hero is taken to be initiated. The passage, represented in the Narnia chronicles by the wardrobe, among other things, is in Katherine Paterson's novel just as clearly marked and just as dramatic.

Intertextual links in *Bridge to Terabithia* have been investigated by many scholars (e.g. Chaston 1991, Smedman 1989, Washick 1996). Among the intertexts, C. S. Lewis's Narnia chronicles are the most evident. Young readers are presumably expected to be familiar with Narnia, which in itself poses an interesting question of authorial control. By alluding to Lewis, Paterson provides the readers with an interpretative strategy. However, this excludes readers who may have no knowledge of Narnia—for instance, because of a different cultural background, or, like Jess, because of being culturally underprivileged. For these readers, filter will simply not work since they will be as ignorant as Jess about the implication of Leslie's stories. I doubt, however, that Paterson is aware of this possibility since allusions to Narnia seem to be a

conscious part in the construction of her text. Leslie's stories, being rather a reading guideline for the readers, acquire for Jess the pronounced character of spiritual guidance initiating the novice into a mystery. Filter provides the readers with a sense of superiority over the protagonist.

In Terabithia, Jess becomes, with Leslie's help, a king and a glorious knight, strong and brave and a match for any enemy. Constructed as a spiritual questor, his transformation into a hero at the same time creates in Jess a self-delusion. What readers might see, and what Paterson conveys by small but effective means, is Jess's total immaturity and inability to leave his own dull and confined, but secure world. Since the actual passage to Terabithia is connected with a certain physical danger, Jess makes excuses of a substantial rather than a psychological nature to explain his reluctance. When the river, which is the boundary to Terabithia, bursts its banks, Jess happily seizes upon this pretext for not jumping over. Here, literary conventions suggest to an experienced reader that something dramatic will happen to Leslie while Jess is away.

I find it significant that the person who involuntarily lures Jess away from Leslie and Terabithia is his music teacher

who had done most to encourage his artistic aspirations. Another detail of Jess's filtered point of view is his evident erotic attraction to Miss Edmunds, which he of course cannot acknowledge, still less verbalize. Here, however, young readers may fail to recognize the erotic change of the relation, and filter may only work for adult readers. Similarly, while a possible interpretation of both Leslie and Miss Edmunds as mother substitutes lies beyond a young reader's grasp, a critic should not ignore it. The portrayal of subconscious rivalry on the teacher's part becomes understandable if both she and Leslie have the same function in Jess's initiation.

Filter is used in an equally skilful way to describe Jess's acceptance of Leslie's death. Just as the readers clearly see that Leslie has become his friend, while Jess himself does not acknowledge it, he also refuses to realize that she has left him, while it is obvious to the readers. Unlike most interpretations of Jess's reaction to Leslie's death (e.g. Chaston 1991), I see his resentment mostly as anxiety at having to grow up without her female guidance, which is the natural consequence of my reading the text at a ritual, rather than realistic, or mimetic, level. Like Holden Caulfield's younger brother, Leslie does not have to go

through the painful process of adolescence (towards the 'symbolic order', Father's Law), and Jess is subconsciously envious of her. If the psychological aspect, developed by Joel Chaston, suggests that a child often cannot 'forgive' a relative or a friend for being dead, the ritual aspect emphasizes the confusion of a novice left without his guide and feeling betrayed. Further, as Chaston has pointed out, in all the intertexts—the Narnia chronicles, *Hamlet*, *Moby Dick* and especially the Bible—death is presented as something noble and, significantly, as transient. Death in *The Last Battle* is simply the beginning of 'Chapter One of the Great Story ... in which every chapter is better than the one before'. Therefore Jess is not prepared, or rather thinks himself not prepared—to experience 'real', that is, irrevocable death. However, Jess's feelings are not exposed directly to us, but the point of view is once again filtered, shifted, so that we realize long before Jess that Leslie the guide has served her purpose: to open the world for Jess, thus enabling him to go further.

Now it occurred to him that perhaps Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. After you stayed for a while and grew strong you had to move on. For hadn't Leslie, even in Terabithia, tried to push

back the walls of his mind and make him see beyond to the shining world—huge and terrible and beautiful and very fragile?
(p.140)

If we only read the novel at the mimetic level, it is a tragedy that Leslie is dead, and the novel indeed offers a consolation to a reader who has in the same manner been bereaved of a relative or a friend. However, Katherine Paterson has herself rejected this reduced view of her work. On the symbolic level, Leslie has played out her role, and it does not really matter any more. What she has given Jess, nobody can take away from him. Moreover, he can carry this insight further, which is what he actually does in the very last chapter, when he builds a real bridge across the river and invites his little sister May Belle to enter Terabithia as a new queen.

In *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980), it is easy to recognize patterns and clichés from popular fiction for girls: rivalry between two sisters, a sense of imprisonment and longing to get away, a romantic infatuation with an older man, a lost childhood friend, liberation through a profession, and what is more, a typical girls' book profession, a nurse; finally, a marriage to a hardly attractive widower with three children. However, this Newbery-winning novel is

highly unusual, primarily because of its narrative form. Paterson makes use of a first-person (homodiegetic, identical with the character) narrator, which means that the narrative is both filtered and slanted, that is, there is also a shift between the readers' and the narrator's point of view. Although both the narrator and the character are called Louise, they are not the same person, and there is no radical difference between the first-person adult narrator (extradiegetic, outside the story) in *Jacob Have I Loved* and the covert narrator in *Bridge to Terabithia*. Paterson's narrative device is called anachrony (a disturbance of temporal order) in narrative theory: there is a substantial gap between the actual time of the story and the time when the story is narrated. In fact, Louise's rendering of her life when young on the island is an analepsis or flashback, which takes place as she, now a grownup, is returning to her childhood home. However, if the readers have no reason to suspect the narrator in *Bridge to Terabithia* of not 'telling the truth', the narrator in *Jacob Have I Loved* is highly unreliable. Louise the narrator tells us exactly as much as she chooses to: she may omit facts, pass wrong judgments, her memory may fail. Further, Louise the character may also be deceiving herself, and the tension between slant and filter, the interplay of

the point of view of the narrator, the character and the reader, constitutes the nerve of the narrative structure. Louise, who is thirteen in the beginning of the analepsis, that is, the inner narrative frame, may seem a classic tomboy, like Jo March or Anne Shirley. At least, Louise the narrator will present her this way. What the readers may see is a susceptible young girl, practising self-defence against jealousy, bordering on hate, towards her pretty, talented and admired twin Caroline, who has always received more attention because she was born weak and almost died. Louise the narrator tells us that Louise the character feels that she is being treated unjustly; however, it is hardly possible for the reader to decide whether this is an objective fact (the narrator states that the character felt that way), a subjective memory (the narrator believes, many years later, that the character probably felt that way), or a deliberate lie (the narrator wants us to believe that the character was maltreated). In the first place, we see that Louise the character is compensating for this feeling by being twice as diligent, by contributing to the family's economy and, which is especially significant, to Caroline's music lessons. Louise the character pretends (or Louise the narrator portrays her as pretending) to be uninterested in clothes or her looks; we see her survival

strategy, her frantic attempts to be different from Caroline, even if it means being inferior. If as readers we penetrate Louise's unnecessary sacrifice and see the motivation for it as a rather hypocritical and self-righteous compensation, does the grown-up Louise penetrate herself? It seems that Katherine Paterson wants us to be skeptical of her as well. Here we observe the contradiction between the point of view of the character and the narrator, who happen to be the same person, but at different times, as well as the point of view of the reader. Louise has patterned her life according to the Bible quotation of the title, making herself the unloved twin. In the story, she deliberately constructs herself as an object in relation to her sister, her parents and all other agents of the narrative. However, as readers we are encouraged to perceive her as a subject and share her point of view. Unless we liberate ourselves from this compulsion we cannot judge Louise, or her story, properly. The self-deceiving child is especially invigorated in Paterson's two most prominent quest novels, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1978) and *Park's Quest* (1988), which can be treated as variations on the same theme: a girl seeking her mother and a boy seeking his father. However, for Park as well, the emotional betrayal of the mother proves more impor-

tant than the physical absence of the father. Gilly is strong, independent and impudent on the surface, while deep inside she is profoundly insecure and unhappy. The title does not reflect the author's seemingly impartial judgment of the character (cf 'traditional' titles such as *Curious George*), but rather the character's predisposed judgment of herself. The gap between the two points of view challenges the readers to investigate them more closely and to take a position of their own, most obviously seeing through Gilly's self-imposed greatness. Like *Bridge to Terabithia*, this book could be easily perceived as an ideal illustration of the so-called issue oriented children's literature: a problem child placed in a foster home after a long row of earlier failures, which have all contributed to her profound insecurity. However, the plot itself would evidently never be sufficient to create a story of such intensity. The events do not come to us directly, but are refracted through Gilly's self-assured, but immature mind. While Gilly believes that she is witty and cunning, and that she is in complete control of the situation, the readers see that she is getting more and more emotionally dependent on her ugly, fat foster-mother, the blind neighbor and the young, helpless foster brother. When the ideal image of the absent

mother fails, this peculiar trio becomes Gilly's first real family, even though she is not allowed to stay with them. The superficially 'happy' ending, in which Gilly finds both her biological mother and her grandmother, is apprehended by a keen reader as an obvious irony. On the other hand, during the story, Gilly's point of view has been gradually shifting toward the reader's, implying that the author manipulates us so that we finally identify ourselves with Gilly. The narrative structure of the novel reinforces its psychological movement toward the character's spiritual wholeness; however—and this is the cornerstone of Katherine Paterson's fiction—the complete fulfilment of the self is never achieved.

Again in *Park's Quest* we meet the naive perspective where the readers are several steps ahead of the character in accepting the uncomfortable truth. Park is trying hard to shut his eyes to something obvious. He knows that his father was killed in Vietnam. But his mother refuses to discuss the father, and would not even accompany Park to the Vietnam memorial. Reading the father's name on the stone becomes the first phase of verbalizing the suppressed emotions. When Park goes to see his grandfather it appears that his mother has concealed more important facts from him.

Not only does he have an uncle, but also a half-sister, almost his own age, and Vietnamese. It is because of this girl that Park's mother divorced his father, not long before his death, which she has also kept a secret. Again, the truth about the girl, Thanh, is obvious to the reader long before Park is emotionally strong enough to accept it. He therefore keeps translating his quest into mythical dimensions, much like Gilly hiding behind her own Tolkien-inspired name or the folktale figure of Rumpelstiltskin. Quite a few critics have objected to the fact that Katherine Paterson's novels do not offer young readers any hope. Paterson has refuted this criticism by saying that 'there is no way we can tack ... hope ... on the end of the story like pinning the tail on the donkey' (Paterson 1995, p.324). Hope and future are very abstract notions for a young child, and in a filtered narrative, where the protagonists' ability to judge their own situation is limited, a happy ending would feel unnatural. The completion of the narrative does not automatically indicate a satisfactory closure of the story. Instead, we meet a disharmonious ending which almost always suggests that the character has gained something, but lost something else. There is a sort of illusionary promise of hope, expressed through the characters' filtered perception, but since their point

of view is different from ours, as readers we may wonder whether Jess can indeed cope without Leslie or Gilly without Maime Trotter. We wonder whether a new-found sister can compensate for Park's eventual—spiritual—loss of his father. Here the more general, mythical levels of texts give us a clue, suggesting a more or less imperative reading strategy, or even, I might add, a meta-fictional comment on the story; while the narrative filter allows us to make inferences beyond the characters' perception. Despite all failures, we are made to believe that Katherine Paterson's characters can go on. They have been dubbed knights in their sacred places. They have drunk from their holy grails. Then they can continue their life quests.

In all her later books, Paterson has shown a much deeper narrative sophistication as compared to the omniscient narrator of the early novels *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum* (1973), *Of Nightingales that Weep* (1974) and *The Master Puppeteer* (1975), even though these have their own unquestionable merits.

The evolution of Patricia MacLachlan's narrative strategies is still more striking. In *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (1986), the first-person narrative compels MacLachlan to use the simple language and the unsophisti-

cated world view of a young, uneducated child. Here, there is no evident temporal gap between the story and the narrative act, the story is told 'as if' by the protagonist herself. This naive perspective is apparently one of the main reasons behind the success of the book. The limited point of view proves, however, insufficient to convey the complexity of psychological issues that MacLachlan is exploring in her novels. Therefore, as in Katherine Paterson's texts, slant and filter are MacLachlan's primary narrative devices, often counterbalancing the simple plots of some of her novels, like the early *Arthur, for the Very First Time* (1980), which is much more than the nice summer-holiday story it may seem. Arthur's parents have not told him that there is a new baby coming soon. Apparently, they are not mature enough themselves to accept this baby, and instead of sharing their anxiety with their son, they choose to avoid discussing or even mentioning it. The motif of a parent or parents who choose to suppress their emotions, thus evoking a strong sense of guilt in the child, is central in Patricia MacLachlan's novels.

Arthur has figured out about the baby, but he is reluctant to probe into his own feelings, and he is unable to admit his dependence upon his parents.

Parallels with Gilly Hopkins are transparent. Arthur perceives himself as strong and self-sufficient, while the readers see that he is used to obeying his parents, that he is thinking their thoughts and acting according to their convictions. When he discovers that there are other ways of living, he very slowly makes a re-evaluation. He is used to obtaining his knowledge from books, hiding behind others' words and ideas, but Uncle Wrisby points out to him that you cannot learn everything from books. The confrontation with the orphaned Moira makes him realize that, in a way, he too has been abandoned by his parents. Filter, the discrepancy in point of view, is never totally eliminated, but is gradually narrowing, much as in *The Great Gilly Hopkins*.

The artistic means MacLachlan makes use of are extremely subtle. Arthur's concerns about the coming baby are forced aside by his worries about the pig which is about to farrow—a brilliant illustration of 'transference' in a Freudian sense. Uncle Wrisby's binoculars become a significant metaphor for Arthur's mental evolution when he learns that sometimes it is necessary to see things at a distance.

Like Katherine Paterson's, Patricia MacLachlan's novels have often been recommended by teachers and librarians as

suitable for introducing and discussing 'issues': to accept a stepmother or a new sibling, to be physically disabled, as in *Through Grandpa's Eyes* (1979), or to see the positive role of a foster-parent, as in *Mama One, Mama Two* (1982). However, Patricia MacLachlan's novels differ radically from 'issue' books in their narrative patterns. The ideological or didactic message is not imposed upon readers; coming to an insight demands strong empathy on the readers' part, as they follow the character's enduring reluctance to see life for what it is.

A still worse self-deceiver than Arthur is Willa in *Unclaimed Treasures* (1984), probably the most refined of MacLachlan's novels in its narrative structure, also exposing some prominent metafictional features (see Trites, 1993). The self-deceit is manifest on several levels. The twelve-year-old Willa does not admit the obvious fact that she is erotically attracted to an older and married man. It is mainly the narrative filter that saves the book from lapsing into vulgarity or sentiment. The irony which glitters in the outer metafictional frame allows estrangement in a manner similar to Arthur's binoculars.

Further, Willa fails to see what the reader sees clearly: that Horace is in love with her, and that her dreams about 'great

love' are therefore much closer to reality than she suspects. She fails to see that she is bringing Horace's parents together, which is the last thing she wants. She fails to see how wrongly Horace's mother has behaved in abandoning her son for some vague social ideals. She fails to see that her own mother, preoccupied with pregnancy, still means more to her than she will admit. More importantly, she fails to see how much she patterns her love for Matthew after the sentimental story which her father's student has written and which she reads surreptitiously, thus, like Louise in *Jacob Have I Loved*, constructing herself according to a predetermined model. The comment in the outer frame is: 'It was like a short story, that summer ... with a beginning, a middle and an end'.

The central metaphor of the book, 'things beneath the surface' (unborn babies, unfinished paintings, unwritten books, unclaimed treasures), is also a metafictional comment on MacLachlan's narrative device: telling things by not telling them, making the readers 'see the unseen', penetrate Willa's unpronounced feelings.

There is another important aspect which amplifies the effect of Willa's self-deceit: it is for the reader to see, from their behaviour and their conversations, how dependent the twins, Willa

and Nicholas, are upon each other, how deeply they love each other and how they understand each other better than any other person will ever understand either of them.

As we see, the self-deceiving character in Katherine Paterson's and Patricia MacLachlan's novels is most often suffering from a trauma caused by being abandoned by the mother, physically or emotionally. The character's reluctance to accept the fact, and still less, to analyze it, results in a mental escape or block. However, to express the state of mind of a mentally disturbed person seems to be a next to impossible task. In theoretical studies on narratology, the passages in *The Sound and the Fury* which focalise Benjy are often used to illustrate the closest approximation to such a narrative (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983, p.100). The use of filter, when the character's perception is shifted, however slightly, towards the readers', is then a possible narrative strategy. It is especially prominent in *Journey* (1991) where Patricia MacLachlan once again makes use of a first-person narrator, but in quite a different way as compared to *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. In both books, the narrator is intradiegetic (performing at the same level as the story) and homodiegetic (identical with a character in the story); there is

no tangible temporal gap between the story and the narrative act. The difference lies in the use of filter.

While the readers obviously have no difficulties in sharing Anna's point of view in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, they will most probably discover the character's lack of self-understanding in *Journey*. The protagonist-narrator, with the highly symbolic name of Journey, refuses to accept the truth and resists it still more stubbornly than Arthur. He also refuses to see that his grandfather's enthusiastic exercises with the camera are in fact attempts to help Journey. As the grandfather points out, the camera does not lie; in the pictures you can sometimes see truth which is not visible in reality—once again 'things under the surface'. The camera is another parallel to Arthur's binoculars, and the pictures guide Journey in the same way as the portrait Willa sits for. The composition of the novel itself is reminiscent of a photo album, with its thirteen short, fragmentary chapters, where a feeling, an event or a movement is captured in a still. The very vague metafictional frame thus depicts the character going through traumatic experience, with old pictures supporting and evoking memories, and emotions being elevated from oblivion precisely like old negatives being developed.

In a symbolically charged episode, Journey tries to tape together pictures which his mother has torn up. Journey apprehends this act as murder: she has broken his and his sister's lives, robbed them of their past. But the fragments are too small and too many; it is impossible to mend the past—at least until Journey quits deceiving himself. For the reader too, discovering the truth about Journey and his mother becomes a jigsaw puzzle. However, while Journey is reluctant to put the pieces together, hopefully the reader is all the more eager to do so.

Patricia MacLachlan's narrative leads our thoughts to Marcel Proust's famous *Madeleine* (in *Swann's Way*, Gerard Genette's master text) when she makes her character slowly remember something that he has deliberately chosen to suppress. By the time grandfather eventually manages to enlarge old negatives, Journey has already become strong enough to accept the truth. Discovering that he looks like his grandfather, Journey comes closer to expressing his deficient sense of belonging to his family.

In *Baby* (1993) the self-deceiving parents have passed on their own trauma to the child. Many of MacLachlan's earlier themes reverberate in this novel, but more important is that the first-person narrator once again is

used to emphasize the ambiguity of the narrative. The temporal pattern of the novel is extremely complicated. It may be an analepsis, similar to that in *Jacob Have I Loved* where the grown-up Larkin contemplates the events of the past. But it may equally be a 'simultaneous' narrative combined with recurrent analepses (italicised in the book) with a different focalizer, Sophie, told ten years after Larkin's narrative act takes place.

Larkin's parents are just as immature and insecure as Arthur's, or even more, as they cannot talk with her about the dead baby brother, and suppress their own sorrow instead of trying to come to terms with it. The name-giving, one of many echoes from MacLachlan's earlier texts, becomes the metaphorical articulation of a suppressed relationship. The mother also paints the portrait of the dead baby, in the same way Matthew in *Unclaimed Treasures* paints his absent wife's portrait, or Journey seeks his identity through old photographs. In this respect, the 'baby' of the title, the little foundling Sophie, is merely a catalyst initiating the reconciliation both for Larkin and her parents. Babies are featured in almost all of Patricia MacLachlan's novels, always symbolising the protagonist's insight about life, death and

resurrection.

However, the metafictional layers of the novel may suggest further reflections, if we interpret the short italicised parts as Sophie's memories ten years after the events, vague images which she at the moment lacked words to express. Sophie's successive mastery of the language corresponds to the family verbalizing their sorrow. When the family accepts that Sophie must return to her biological mother, they have come still further towards reconciliation. Sophie cannot replace the dead baby, because she is a person in her own right. Patricia MacLachlan accentuates the significance of language in understanding the most complicated emotions. Without setting words to feelings it is impossible to cope with them. It is also when the family starts calling the foundling 'Sophie' instead of the seemingly neutral, but emotionally charged 'baby', that they get better prepared to handle their sorrow. The act of naming is duplicated.

It is significant that the parents in Patricia MacLachlan's novels are intellectuals, often artists, musicians or writers. Their profession is to create illusions, and often they hide themselves behind their own creations, instead of facing real problems. Aunt Edla reads poetry for Arthur, and one of the poems is about a mocking bird: 'mocking' is a way of managing reality. By

the end of the book, Arthur has obtained a recorder. The recorder echoes in *Journey*, where the grandmother learns to play. To translate emotions into artistic expression may be seen as one of the adults' survival strategies—or their betrayal—and the children have to adjust and learn, reluctant as they may be.

The filtered narrative is thus connected with the major theme of Patricia MacLachlan's novels: identity quest through creativity, the acceptance of self as a subject rather than object in relation to other people. The logical and chronological narrative of traditional children's literature is obviously insufficient for this purpose.

In all the texts I have been discussing, the self-deceiving child is reluctant to verbalize the suppressed desires, preferring rather to disguise them in images. In Katherine Paterson's novels the images are primarily literary: the alternative world of *Terabithia*, the Bible quotation, Tolkien and Rumpelstiltskin, the Parsifal legend. In the books by Patricia MacLachlan they are primarily visual, as in paintings or photographs. These pre-verbal, 'imaginary' (Lacan) expressions of suppressed feelings precede the 'symbolic', articulated statements. In many traditional children's novels, where the narrative strategy forces the readers to share the

point of view with the protagonist, the authors find themselves obliged to articulate the gained insight for the protagonist—and thus for the reader. Contemporary writers of Katherine Paterson's or Patricia MacLachlan's calibre rather choose to let the protagonist remain, at least partially, at the pre-verbal stage and instead let the readers train their ability to express their feelings with words.

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