REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH TEENAGE FICTION

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Abstract

Child abuse began to emerge as a central topic depicted in Western children's and teenage realist fiction from around the 1990s, peaking in prevalence around the turn of the century and into the early years of the twenty-first century. In this thesis I explore the formal expression of abuse and trauma in a corpus of twenty French texts published between 1992 and 2008 for young-adolescent readers aged between 10 and 16 years. The project begins with a Propp-inspired structural model of child-abuse plot features and characters, which identifies a set cast of protagonists across the corpus which serve a specific functional role in the narrative. I then focus on the three main narratological categories of voice, mood and time, using Genette's *Discours du récit* as a framework for a close reading of the abuse texts, whilst also drawing upon various trauma theorists, to explore how choice of narrator, focalizing character and temporal perspectives are manipulated to express different aspects of and perspectives on abuse and the psychological impact of abuse in particular. The final chapter is an analysis of the means used by both protagonists within the texts, and the authors of the texts, to communicate and express abuse and trauma on a personal level, to other characters, and to readers. By drawing upon structural and narratological studies as well as trauma theory in my analysis, I show that form and content are inextricably linked across the corpus. Indeed, the protagonists' traumatic memories and painful experiences are expressed both on a diegetic level via the characters, and also reflected in the formal and structural features of the texts.

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Introduction

Whilst writing my MA thesis on adolescent identities and sexuality in contemporary French teenage fiction, I became aware of and intrigued by the existence of a body of texts dealing with child abuse in realist fiction for child and adolescent readers, a previously taboo theme. I wanted to explore the handling of the sensitive theme of abuse, looking in particular at how authors depict the abuse, the victims, and the abusers through the formal features of the narratives. Children's child abuse literature, and my interest in it, emerged in the context of the widespread press coverage of child abuse cases which has taken hold in recent years.[1] The emergence of children's and teenage narrative fiction dealing with abuse is not unique to France. The theme is also prevalent in recent American and European teenage fiction, with authors touching upon such themes as incest, teenage rape, parental cruelty, and adult grooming of adolescents in American,[2] British,[3] and German[4] fiction for young readers. Some of these texts have also been translated into French.[5] There thus appears to be a Western trend in the interest in depicting the theme of abuse within the field of children's and teenage fiction. In fact, realist fiction for adolescent readers dealing with child abuse as its theme is a development of the problem novel genre, which began to emerge from

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[1] A few recent examples of widely publicized scandals, which began to occur from around the 1990s, include: cases of abuse in the Catholic Church; *L'Affaire Dutroux*, which saw Belgian paedophile Marc Dutroux sexually abuse six girls, killing four of them between 1995 and 1996; *L'Affaire d'Outreau*, whereby in 2004 fourteen innocent people were falsely charged with sexually abusing their children; and the current British investigations into historic sexual abuse carried out by famous former television celebrities.

[2] See, for example, Ellen Howard, *Gillyflower* (London: Lions, 1989); Barry Lyga, *Boy Toy* (Boston, MA: Graphia, 2007), Chris Lynch, *Inexcusable* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

[3] Melvin Burgess, *Nicholas Dane* (London: Puffin, 2010); Elizabeth Laird, *Jake's Tower* (London: Macmillan, 2002); Robert Swindells, *Abomination* (London: Corgi, 2007).

[4] See, for example, Friedrich Ani, *Die unterirdische Sonne* (Berlin: cbt, 2014); Heidi Hassenmüller, *Gute Nacht, Zuckerpüppchen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, [1992] 2009); Jutta Richter, *Hinter dem Bahnhof liegt das Meer* (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008).

[5] See, for example, Heidi Hassemüller, *Bonne nuit, sucre d'orge*, traduit de l'allemand par Martin Ziegler (Paris: Seuil, 2003); Elizabeth Laird, *Les Coups durs*, traduit de l'anglais par Luc Rigoureau (Paris: Flammarion, 2003); Jutta Richter, *Derrière la gare, il y a la mer*, traduit de l'allemand par Génia Català (Paris: La Joie de Lire, 2003).

around the 1970s across Europe and North America as a result of increased awareness of teenagers and young adults as a specific social and economic group.[6] Nic Diament argues that during the 1960s and 1970s in France, 'ados' became socially visible due to the influence of extending compulsory education to the age of 16; higher education becoming more easily accessible; and the influence of the developing concept of the teenager in America.[7] Publishers began to target young audiences with realist texts which addressed previously taboo topics deemed to be relevant to the adolescent world, such as death, sexual identity and drugs.

I use the term 'child abuse' to refer to the depiction of the mistreatment of child protagonists in the texts, as this term is commonly used in official and legal discourse. For example, the children's charity the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and its children's helpline ChildLine, use the term child abuse on their websites.[8] The NSPCC defines child abuse as 'any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention.'[9] In my study, however, I focus on child abuse carried out by adults towards children in children's texts, as there are different power-relations at play between adults and children, and between children themselves. The term 'child abuse' also conveys the severity of the negative behaviour experienced by the child victims within the texts, particularly the rape and sexual assault of victims, as compared with the terms

[6] Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature. Volume II 1830-Present* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 289.
[7] Nic Diament, *Histoire des livres pour les enfants: du Petit Chaperon rouge à Harry Potter* (Paris: Bayard, 2008), p. 42.
[8] ChildLine, <http://www.childline.org.uk/Explore/AbuseSafety/Pages/AbuseSafety.aspx>. Accessed 30/10/2015.
[9] NSPCC <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/>. Accessed 30/10/2015.

mistreatment and cruelty, for example, which I feel do not express the brutality of such adult-perpetrated crimes.

The definition of abuse is bound by social and cultural perceptions and understanding of children and childhood, which, of course, have changed over time. Indeed, Philippe Ariès identified childhood as a social construct, and argued that it was not until the end of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth that the concept of children and childhood began to emerge fully in early modern Europe, aided by social and economic change and the development of an education system.[10] Contemporary Western attitudes towards children and childhood tend to focus upon the vulnerability of children and the need to nurture and protect them, including the desire to shield them from exploitation and hardship. For example, some forms of child punishment which were previously acceptable in Western society, such as corporal punishment in schools, are now deemed to be cruel and are illegal in many parts of the world. The social and political debates taking place in 2015 in France regarding the Council of Europe's demand for the country to ban the smacking of children as a form of punishment exemplifies changing attitudes towards child 'discipline' and abuse, and the contemporary assertion and articulation of child rights set out in law.[11]

Representations of cruelty towards children in literature for young readers are not a new phenomenon. Indeed, both fantastical and realist children's fiction has depicted the suffering and pain of children at the hands of adults for centuries. Children are seen to be beaten and cast out by parents in fairy tales, with Cinderella being bullied by her stepmother and stepsister in Charles Perrault's *Cendrillon* (1697) and

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[10] Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 70; p. 312.
[11] Council of Europe, *Progress towards prohibiting all corporal punishment in Council of Europe member states, March 2015*, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/corporalpunishment/Source/CPAppendixUpdates/Appendix1UpdateMarch2015.pdf>. Accessed 30/10/2015.

seven siblings being abandoned by parents and having to escape attempted murder by an ogre in *Le Petit Poucet* (1697), for example. The lives of child protagonists are seen to be equally grim in realist fiction. The Comtesse de Ségur, with her focus on domestic realism, frequently depicts child protagonists experiencing parental neglect and often physical cruelty. In *Un bon petit diable* (1865), for example, the child protagonist suffers cruelty at the hands of his violent aunt, while in the second of the Segur's three Sophie texts, *Les Petites Filles modèles* (1858), Sophie is beaten and mistreated by her cruel stepmother.[12] Penny Brown argues that there is an increased interest in literature of the plight of the abused child in the mid-nineteenth century due to the influence of Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and George Sand. Brown further states that three significant texts were published in the middle of nineteenth century, initially aimed at adult audiences, which dealt with the abuse of the child protagonists at the hands of their family. Jules Renard's autobiographical *Poil de carotte* (1894), now read and studied by child readers, follows the young male protagonist's humiliating and grim experience of childhood due to his cruel parents; Alphonse Daudet's *Le Petit Chose* (1868) sees the male child protagonist treated cruelly at home and school and sent away by his surrogate father; and Jules Vallès's *L'Enfant* (1879) depicts the controlling and tormenting behaviour of the male protagonist's mother.[13] Cruelty towards children is thus depicted in literature as an aspect of, and in some cases a criticism of, the harsh reality of life at the time in the late seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

My corpus texts are different from these earlier portrayals of abuse, however, in that the modern abuse narratives represent late twentieth- and twenty-first-century

[12] Comtesse de Ségur, *Un bon petit diable* (Paris: Casterman Jeunesse, [1865], 2003); *Les Petites Filles modèles* (Paris: Casterman Jeunesse, [1858], 2003).
[13] Brown, *Volume II*, pp. 120-122; Jules Renard, *Poil de carotte* (Paris: Hachette Education, [1894], 2001).

concerns with protecting children and raising awareness of child abuse as a social concern that needs to be addressed and prevented, within a legal context where child abuse is a punishable crime. A brief comparison of the paratextual material of the twenty corpus texts reveals that in eleven out of twenty texts, for example, the content of abuse is specifically mentioned on the covers or in the summaries, whilst there is often the reference to a secret to be uncovered in the narrative in the remaining nine texts. Perhaps surprisingly, only three texts contain factual information for readers on abuse or how it can be officially reported in the form of a preface or postscript. While it is not within the scope of this work, which focuses on the narrative features and functions of the texts in their own right, there is the potential to extend the study of abuse texts further to consider the implications of the physical packaging of the fictional texts, which, according to Genette in his *Palimpsestes*, has a significant influence on readers.[14] With regard to the abuse corpus, the choice of whether or not to reveal the content to the young reader on the cover or in the blurb, or by the means of their classification by theme in publishers' collections, could provide insights into the wider context of the publication and reception of abuse narratives for young readers.

My study is concerned with exploring how child abuse is depicted in French narrative fiction for young-adolescent readers between the ages of ten and sixteen years. My selection is based on the publishers' recommendations of the minimum reader age as printed on the book or on their websites. I do acknowledge, however, that any 'real' reader may of course be outside of the assigned age bracket, but my adherence to the publishers' classifications provides some measure of standardization across the corpus; I am selecting and dealing with texts that are commercially targeted at young readers within a similar age group. The age range of ten plus is a parameter

[14] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp. 9-10.

due to the shift in style and content of abuse literature from this age upwards. The texts are more advanced, stylistically and psychologically, than the introductory abuse texts for young child readers which are primarily pedagogical picture books warning young children, generally below the age of ten, about abusers and introducing the concept of abuse.[15] The age range of the texts also causes ambiguities as to how my corpus should be defined, as ten year olds would still comfortably be classed as children, whereas sixteen year olds are very much teenagers, almost young adults, with their own specific concerns and types of literature. The term 'children's fiction' is inappropriate, as it implies young children, rather than the young-teenage audience of some of the narratives. When speaking about 'children's literature' as a field, however, this term is generally taken as an all-encompassing term to refer to fiction for babies, toddlers, children, teenagers and young-adults. The French term *littérature jeunesse* or the English 'fiction for young readers' avoid the assumption of specification in the English terms 'children's' and 'teenage', yet they are too vague for reference to my own corpus texts, which cover a specific age group. I believe that the commonly used and accepted terms 'teenage fiction' and 'young-adolescent fiction', while not directly encompassing the younger half of my age group, certainly reflect the spirit of the publications in their focus on sensitive topics and the psychological and emotional impact of such topics on the protagonist. I therefore refer to the reader of the texts as 'teenage' or 'young-adolescent' readers.

Isabelle Nières-Chevrel discusses in depth the implications and origins of the various French terms used to refer to children's and teenage fiction. She explains how the initial term used to refer to literature for child readers in the nineteenth century,

[15] See, for example, Thierry Lenain et Stéphane Poulin, *Touche pas à mon corps, Tatie Jacotte!* (Paris: Les 400 coups, 2000); Virginie Dumont, *J'ai peur du monsieur* (Paris: Actes Sud Junior, [1997] 2007) and Delphine Saulière et Bernadette Després, *Abus sexuels NON!* (Paris: Bayard Jeunesse, 2004).

livres d'éducation, developed into *livres d'enfants* and *littérature d'enfants*, with the change highlighting the focus on the child reader.[16] In the twentieth century, the term *littérature de jeunesse* became commonplace, leading to debates surrounding which pronoun should be used to link *littérature* with *jeunesse*: 'pour' or 'de'? Nières-Chevrel argues that 'pour', which she favours, foregrounds the socio-economic context of the literature being produced by adults for children, while 'de' promotes a sense of vagueness regarding the relationship between the literature and its reader, and the modern term *littérature jeunesse* further suggests 'le désir de ne pas préciser le lien entre les deux termes'.[17] Peter Hollindale also observes the difficulty of defining 'children's literature', with questions raised by the unequal status of adult producers and providers of literature for child readers.[18] The arguments surrounding labels and definitions therefore feed into the wider issues of the status of children's literature and its relationship with and to literature in general. Indeed, an essay by Peter Hunt, which discusses author attitudes towards children's literature, reveals a variety of positions, including that of authors who write for themselves as a child, those who write with a specific child in mind, and those who do not target child audiences at all in their writing.[19]

There is growing professional and academic interest in the field of children's and teenage fiction generally, although there is still a relative dearth of academic research into children's literature, and specifically teenage fiction, in France compared with the Anglophone context. In the field of French *littérature jeunesse* more generally, two significant encyclopaedic works have been published. Marc Soriano's *Guide de*

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[16] Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, *Introduction à la littérature de jeunesse. Édition revue et corrigée* (Paris: Didier, 2009), pp. 14-15.
[17] Ibid., p. 17.
[18] Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1997), pp. 7-32.
[19] Peter Hunt, 'What the Authors Tell Us', in *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature. Second Edition, Volume I*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 555-570.

littérature pour la jeunesse (originally published in 1975) is a pioneering encyclopaedia containing information on specific authors, themes, and publishers in the field.[20] In 2013 Isabelle Nières-Chevrel and Jean Perrot edited a comprehensive and up-to-date French children's literature encyclopaedia which covers the period after Soriano's work.[21] The two encyclopaedic works contribute to the definition of the field through their identification and collation of significant issues surrounding French and European children's and young-adult literature.

Several historical studies have also been published which have mapped out the children's and teenage literature corpus. Denise Escarpit (1981) considers how the changing views of children in society have impacted upon the production of children's literature, while Ganna Ottevaere-van Praag's work (1999) documents the emergence of more child-focused narratives after the Second World War and the recent trend towards a negative depiction of the adult world.[22] Penny Brown produced the first literary history of French children's literature from 1600 to the 21st century in English in 2007.[23] Nic Diament (2008), in a text aimed at parents, presents the historical context and development of children's literature from moralizing fairy tales, to the modern-day mass production of texts.[24] Olivier Piffault (2008) edited a collection of pictures, photos and articles giving a historical overview of French and European children's literature

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[20] Marc Soriano, *Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse* (Paris: Delagrave, 2002).
[21] Isabelle Nières-Chevrel et Jean Perrot, eds, *Dictionnaire du livre de jeunesse: La Littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse en France* (Paris: Editions du cercle de la librairie, 2013).
[22] Denise Escarpit, *La Littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse: Panorama historique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981); Ganna Ottevaere-van Praag, *Histoire du récit pour la jeunesse au XXe siècle (1929-2000)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 1999).
[23] Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature. Volume I 1600-1830* (London: Routledge, 2007); *Volume II* (London: Routledge, 2007). Kiera Vaclavik has also published extensively on French and Francophone children's literature in English. See, for example, 'Damaging Goods? Francophone Children's Books in a Postcolonial World', *International Research in Children's Literature*, 2.2 (December 2009) (Special Issue: *Internationalisation, Transculturalism and Globalisation: Manifestations in Children's Literature*), 228-242.
[24] Isabelle Jan, *Les Livres pour la jeunesse: un enjeu pour l'avenir* (Paris: Sorbier, 1988); Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, 'Avant-propos', in *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières: Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle*, ed. by Isabelle Nières-Chevrel (Paris: Gallimard jeunesse, 2005), pp. 9-27.

and highlighting current debates in the field.[25] Piffault's text includes two articles specifically dealing with teenage fiction: Françoise Ballanger's discussion of realism and his own article on publishing since 1968.[26] Isabelle Jan (1988) and more recently Christian Polsaniec (2008), recount the commercial history of children's literature and publication.[27] Raymond Perrin has also published two books which deal with the development of the press, authors and publishing, the first of which, published in 2001, deals with the period 1901-2000, while the sequel, published in 2008, closely examines the situation between 2000 and 2006.[28] Perrin's, Polsaniec's and Jan's work contribute to knowledge specifically on the French commercial context of children's literature, detailing the surge in publishers for young children, from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, specializing in different genres and specific collections for girl and boy readers and, more recently, the collections specifically aimed at teen readers, the category into which my corpus texts fall.

Much of the recent work surrounding French teenage fiction and problem novels is carried out in the context of debates around censorship and presenting the arguments for and against depicting real-life personal and psychological problems and taboo themes to young readers. Joëlle Turin (2003) has written an overview of the current common genres of adolescent fiction, with particular reference to France.[29] Articles by Daniel Delbrassine (2008) and Véronique Soulé (2005), and psychologist Annie Rolland's book *Qui a peur de la littérature ado?* (2008) discuss the implications of

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[25] Olivier Piffault, ed., *Babar, Harry Potter et Cie: Livre d'enfants d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: BNF, 2008).
[26] Françoise Ballanger, 'Paradoxes du réalisme et enjeux littéraires dans le roman pour la jeunesse', in *Babar, Harry Potter & Cie*, ed. by Piffault, pp. 362 – 370; Olivier Piffault, 'L'édition pour la jeunesse depuis 1968: inventions et dynamisme', in *Babar, Harry Potter & Cie*, pp. 38-39.
[27] Christian Polsaniec, *Des livres d'enfants à la littérature de jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard/BNF, 2008).
[28] Raymond Perrin, *Un siècle de fictions pour les 8 à 15 ans (1901-2000) à travers les romans, les contes, les albums et les publications pour la jeunesse* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001); *Littérature de jeunesse et presse des jeunes au début du XXIe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).
[29] Joëlle Turin, 'La Littérature de jeunesse et les adolescents: Évolution et tendances', *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France (BBF)*, 48:3 (2003), 43-50.

censorship and evaluate the work of the French committee responsible for monitoring the content of children's publications on teenage fiction.[30] Rolland's work in particular draws upon her background as a therapist to address and counter some of the public concern regarding the depiction of 'unsuitable' material for young readers which was frequently debated in the 1980s and 1990s.[31] Rolland closely examines 'taboo' texts and carries out empirical work with school pupils to provide insight into how actual teenage readers confront sensitive issues in fiction, though none of the texts she uses deal with child abuse. Delbrassine, in 2010, studied contemporary authors of French teenage fiction published over the course of five years, examining the extent of author movement from entering the literary world as a children's author and moving on to publishing for adults.[32] This first study into the mobility of *littérature jeunesse* authors found that in spite of there being a 'core' loyal base of authors of teenage fiction, many authors still view children's literature as a stepping stone to 'proper' fiction.

While there are no specific French studies examining child abuse in literature for young readers, studies of sexual abuse, in particular, have been carried out in two other contexts. The first is how children's literature can educate readers and prevent abuse, and the second is studies of the depiction of abuse and its aftermath in children's literature. Jane Cousins Mills' article (1988) is a feminist account of how children's and teenage fiction can educate children on healthy sexual relationships so

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[30] Daniel Delbrassine, 'Censure et autocensure dans le roman pour la jeunesse', *Parole*, 2 (2008), 8-11; Véronique Soulé, 'Du discours non écrit à la censure ou plutôt de la censure au discours non écrit', in *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières*, ed. by Nières-Chevrel, pp. 273-288; Annie Rolland, *Qui a peur de la littérature ado?* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2008).

[31] See, for example, Marie Claude Monchaux's publication of the politically motivated right-wing *Écrits pour nuire: littérature et subversion* (Paris: UNI, 1985).

[32] Delbrassine, 'Des romanciers "pour la jeunesse" qui ne le restent pas: circulation des auteurs entre le champ de la littérature de jeunesse et celui de la littérature générale', in *L'Édition de jeunesse francophone face à la mondialisation*, ed. by Jean Foucault et Luc Pinas (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), pp. 161-173.

as to prevent abuse.[33] Cynthia McDaniel (2001) also considers how books aimed at four to eight year olds can be used as a preventative tool.[34] More recently, in 2010, Australian researchers Jo Lampert and Kerryann Walsh looked at fifteen Anglophone picture books for three to eight year olds and assessed whether the texts satisfy their own set criteria for literature which prevents abuse; for example, considering whether the texts teach child readers the correct anatomical terms for private body parts and whether texts provide support materials for parents or teachers.[35] These primarily pedagogically-focussed studies foreground the issues of suitability of material for young audiences and go some way to developing our knowledge of how texts may be used in a practical manner to educate readers and prevent abuse. Studies on abuse looking at specific texts and authors include Michael J. Meyer's article (1992) on the American teen fiction author Paul Zindel,[36] and Brenda O. Daly's (1992) analysis of the depiction of the psychological effect of sexual abuse in the American text *Abby, My Love*, by Hadley Irwin.[37] In the German context, Wiebke Vieljans has also self-published a study exploring how child sexual abuse is depicted in the teenage fiction text Heidi Hassenmüller's *Gute Nacht, Zuckerpüppchen*.[38] Vieljans's analysis consists of contextual information surrounding child sexual abuse, an analysis of the content and form of the abuse narrative, followed by a section on the prevention of abuse.

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[33] Jane Cousins Mills, 'Putting Ideas into their Heads: Advising the Young', *Feminist Review*, 28 (Spring 1988), 163-174.
[34] Cynthia McDaniel, 'Children's Literature as Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse', *Children's Literature in Education*, 32:3 (September 2001), 203-224.
[35]Jo Lampert and Kerryann Walsh, '"Keep Telling until Someone Listens": Understanding Prevention Concepts in Children's Picture Books Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse', *Children's Literature in Education*, 41:2 (2010), 146-167.
[36] Michael J. Meyer, 'Problems and Prescriptions: Child Abuse in the Novels of Paul Zindel', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 17:3 (1992), 11-14.
[37] Brenda O. Daly, 'Father-Daughter Incest in Hadley Irwin's *Abby, My Love*: Repairing the Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse During the Adolescent Years', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 17:3 (1992), 5-11.
[38] Wiebke Vieljans, *Analyse von Heidi Hassenmüllers* Gute Nacht, Zuckerpüppchen *zum Thema 'Gewalt in Kinder- und Jugendbüchern'* (München: GRIN, 2005).

Given the sensitive nature of the material present in my corpus and the depictions of children being mentally, sexually and physically abused, I anticipate seeking a relationship between the abuse narratives and trauma and trauma literature. The field of trauma studies is wide ranging and consists of studies into the psychology of trauma, as well as representations of trauma in film, literature and other media, including research into the depiction of trauma in literature authored by survivors of traumatic experiences and fictional works which 'mimic' the features of survivor testimonies. In the field of children's literature, discussions regarding the depiction of trauma in children's literature have led to two in-depth studies focusing on the Holocaust, which provide potential models for the critical exploration of abuse-induced trauma in children's fiction. Hamida Bosmajian (2002) explores the hidden subtexts of unresolved grief and the desire for normality in children's holocaust literature.[39] Bosmajian discovers that the victim situation of the child is emphasized, whilst the power and seduction of the perpetrators are diminished, so as not to shock or traumatize the child reader. She argues that meaning or resolution is added to the children's texts in relation to the Holocaust, where in reality the event is incomprehensible. Adrienne Kertzer (2002) discusses North American assumptions about what is 'safe' for children to hear in Holocaust stories with reference to her own mother's accounts of her past experiences in a concentration camp.[40] Kertzer questions her mother's motives for omitting aspects of what happened when telling stories to her daughter and also discusses the distancing and distortion of real experiences by authors in children's Holocaust literature to include a degree of optimism in the texts. Thus Bosmajian's and Kertzer's studies collectively seem to be carving out an area of

[39] Hamida Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature About Nazism and the Holocaust* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).
[40] Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature and the Holocaust* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002).

research which considers literary depictions of trauma specifically in relation to fiction for young readers and the implications of the degree of trauma represented in the narrative, which is a relatively new concern in comparison with the well-established 'adult' field of trauma studies.[41] In 2010 Kate Norbury looked specifically at the depiction of trauma in North American and Australian teenage fiction, analysing four key formal characteristics of four contemporary texts: a fragmented voice, repetition, allusion and the role of memory.[42] Norbury's work is an interesting analysis of trauma and its literary expression in fiction for young readers in an Anglophone context, which contributes to work carried out by Anne Whitehead exploring the form and content of 'adult' trauma fiction.[43] In Chapter Four of my thesis I draw upon theories of trauma literature in discussing to what extent abuse and trauma are, and 'should' be, depicted in the abuse narratives.

With regard to formal and narratological features of children's and teenage fiction, there have been several studies looking in particular at time and voice in Western children's fiction. In 1985, Catherine Sheldrick Ross, with whom I will be engaging in chapters two and three of this study, examined common characters, settings and narrators in American problem novels from the 1960s and 1970s and identified specific author commitment to mirroring the social and emotional world of teenage readers in their fiction, yet using a 'safe' narrator with whom the reader can

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[41] See, for example, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

[42] Kate Norbury, 'Representations of Trauma and Recovery in Contemporary North American and Australian Teen Fiction', *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 50:1 (Jan 2012), 31-41.

[43] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004).

identify.[44] More recently and in relation to children's literature more generally, Barbara Wall (1991), analyses historical changes in narrative voice and reader address in children's fiction, concluding that the specific narrator-narratee relationship with direct address to a child narratee is the fundamental identifying sign of children's literature.[45] Her work represents a significant commitment to the development of knowledge of the formal qualities of children's fiction, as it considers the narratological distinctiveness of British children's fiction from that of adult fiction across the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Maria Nikolajeva has published extensively over the past twenty years on the formal and narratological aspects of children's literature, including character and time. In 1996 Nikolajeva discussed the modern literary developments in children's literature. She identified, particularly in reference to fiction for older children and teenagers, the shift towards more polyphonic texts, where multiple voices and perspectives are depicted; metafiction, or self-referential fiction; and texts which move away from the circular journey in children's literature, where children set out on an adventure and then return home, to linear, open-ended narratives.[46] In a development of her hypothesis on the circular and linear structure of texts, which will be discussed in Chapter Four of the thesis, Nikolajeva identifies children's literature as a maturation process.[47] This process is represented in its use of time, beginning with non-linear, cyclical and repetitive time to represent the illusion of a never-ending childhood paradise, to linearity and the adolescent protagonist's initiation into death and sexuality. In 2002 Nikolajeva explores

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[44] Catherine Shedrick Ross, 'Young Adult Realism: Conventions, Narrators, and Readers', *Library Quarterly*, 55:2 (1985), 174-191.
[45] Barbara Wall, *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).
[46] Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 1996).
[47] Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (Lanham; London: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

mimetic and semiotic approaches to character in children's books and identifies several common functions and types of character.[48] In each of her books, Nikolajeva refers to more than two hundred primary sources published in Europe and America from the seventeenth to twenty-first century and her work provides wide-ranging overviews of literary trends and narratological developments in Western children's and teenage fiction.

More recently, Mike Cadden (2010) edited a volume of essays dealing with issues of narratology and children's literature. Included is an essay by Elisabeth Rose Gruner in which she examines the ways in which three contemporary American teenage texts draw upon traditional fairy tale motifs to add another layer of meaning to and intensify the depictions of teenage angst.[49] Gruner's work builds upon that of Australian researchers John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, who explore intertextuality in children's fiction (1998), focusing on the prevalence of retellings of folk and fairy tales in modern literature for children.[50] The studies on intertextuality in adolescent and children's fiction, which I will be returning to in my final chapter, serve to identify and explore the continued influence of traditional tales on contemporary texts and the ways in which fairy and folk tales, the origins of children's literature, remain embedded in Western culture. In 2012 Nathalie Prince explored aspects of how literary theory can be applied to children's texts using examples from a broad range of European and American primary texts.[51] She firstly discusses the history of children's literature and the ambiguities surrounding the audience-defined texts, then takes a

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[48] Maria Nikolajeva, *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (Lanham; London: Scarecrow Press, 2002).
[49] Elisabeth Rose Gruner, 'Telling Old Tales Newly: Intertextuality in Young Adult Fiction for Girls', in*Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*, ed. by Mike Cadden (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), pp. 3-21.
[50] John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Stories and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998).
[51] Nathalie Prince, *La Littérature de jeunesse: Pour une théorie littéraire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

detailed look at theory associated with analysing characters and narrative voice. Prince highlights the common use of 'dual address' to child and adult readers simultaneously (which concurs with Wall's findings) and the oral qualities of children's texts, representing their traditional roots. There has also been recent critical interest in the significance of space and place in children's fiction,[52] which could provide an interesting approach to the study of child abuse in children's texts, although in my corpus the descriptions of the locations of abuse (which consist predominantly of the child's bedroom, abusive teachers' houses, the school and the home) are limited and I have therefore not addressed this issue in this study.

There is thus a considerable amount of work on narratological approaches to children's and teenage fiction in an Anglophone and European context. There is notably less published research in France and on French literature more specifically, particularly in reference to texts for adolescent readers. Important literary and narratological studies of French teenage fiction include Danielle Thaler and Alain Jean-Bart's (2002) in-depth analysis of French and Canadian authors.[53] In the second part of the study, they compare three series depicting the life and maturation of a female protagonist from three different periods and three different authors, two of which are francophone Canadian and one anglophone Canadian: Lucy Maud Montgomery's 'Emilie' series, published between 1924 and 1927; Paule Daveluy's 'Rosanne' texts, published between 1958 and 1967; and Dominique Demers' 'Marie-Lune' series published between 1992 and 1994. Through their study of the three series spanning the twentieth century, they examine how the image of the adolescent has changed and conclude that depicted female teenage aspirations still encompass the traditional

[52] See for example, Hannah Field, Maria Sachiko Cecire, Kavita Mudan Finn, and Malini Roy (eds), *Space and Place in Children's Literature, 1789 to the Present* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).
[53] Danielle Thaler et Alain Jean-Bart, *Les Enjeux du roman pour adolescents: roman historique, roman-miroir, roman d'aventures* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

romantic desire for love and male affection. Thaler and Jean-Bart also look at the changes in the formal features of the literature and note that narrative time and voice have evolved from an impersonal narrator into the commonly used first-person narrator relaying his or her feelings and experiences contemporaneously to the reader, a finding which is reinforced by Delbrassine (2006) in his comprehensive examination of recent French teenage fiction: *Le Roman pour adolescents aujourd'hui: écriture, thématiques et réception*.[54]

Delbrassine's study, with which I will be engaging throughout Chapter Two, deals with a corpus of 247 texts published by four publishers between 1997 and 2000. His work consists of an in-depth history of fiction for teenage readers, followed by an analysis of the narrative differences and similarities between adolescent literature and adult literature, based on texts published for both audiences by the same authors, and texts which have been republished and adapted for younger readers. Delbrassine analyses the 'readability' of sentences and differences in voice and perspective. He found that more direct dialogue occurs in adolescent fiction and the events are predominantly seen and voiced through the child protagonist. The third part of the study is an overview of the main literary features and content of the 247 corpus texts, where Delbrassine analyses the use of narrative voice, the themes addressed, and how authors explain complicated or technical terms to readers. Delbrassine found that authors attempt to attract and engage child readers through informal address and first-person narration, which he refers to as the 'séduction du lecteur', whilst showing 'respect du lecteur' by dealing with topics that concern teenage readers, such as sexuality, in a sensitive manner. While Delbrassine's corpus does include narratives

[54] Daniel Delbrassine, *Le Roman pour adolescents aujourd'hui: écriture, thématiques et réception* (Paris: SCEREN-CRDP & Centre national du livre pour enfants, 2006).

that depict abuse, there are no academic studies dealing specifically with abuse texts in French and the ways in which abuse is depicted in narratives for young readers.

The variety of approaches to children's literature discussed above provide the wider context for my own study. I will be focusing on close readings of the texts and the narratological aspects of contemporary fiction for young-adolescent readers, as I examine how authors present the complexities and sensitivities of the theme of abuse. Yet my close readings and focus on the formal aspects of the texts will be in dialogue with the pedagogical aims of novels, an awareness of the age of readers, and also the corpus's relation to trauma literature. I look at the three types of abuse and how these are differently represented in the texts. The categories of abuse identified are: sexual abuse, where a child is sexually groomed, assaulted or raped; physical abuse, where a child is hit, beaten or physically hurt; and psychological abuse, where mental cruelty or emotional neglect and pain are inflicted upon the child.[55] I have identified twenty texts to form my corpus from a wider selection of around fifty narratives which fulfil the criteria of being contemporary French texts, published within the past twenty-five years, dealing with child abuse. I exclude translations of texts from other languages into French and also made the decision from the outset to focus on texts set and published in metropolitan France. The corpus texts have also been chosen to represent the wider trends in abuse fiction. I have chosen more sexual than physical and psychological abuse texts to represent the greater proportion of sexual abuse texts that I found to be

[55] For definitions of the types of child abuse, see Guy Hervé, *Abus sexuels et maltraitance: Lire et écrire avec le livre* La Frontière de sable *de Claude Clément* (Paris: Syros Jeunesse, 2003), p. 26. While the victim-protagonists are predominantly adolescents, I use the common term 'child abuse' to denote the legal situation of the victim being a minor.

published generally in teenage fiction. I exclude from the corpus texts which depict abuse only briefly, or where abuse is not central to the narrative.[56]

My focus is primarily on the abusive relationship between adult and child, so texts where abuse or an assault is perpetrated solely by another child are excluded from the selection, though the text *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, where the protagonist's two cousins abuse and bully the protagonist and another child victim, is included in the corpus as the abusers' mother colludes in and carries out the abuse alongside her children.[57] I also focus on realist fiction, excluding fantasy texts, with the minor exception being *Derrière la porte*, which contains a ghost in the plot. I have tried to select the most formally diverse texts to form the corpus, and have excluded texts which are similar in style and content to others. For example, Alain Korkas' *La Maladie bleue* deals with a father's psychological abuse and manipulation of his son and this text has been omitted from the corpus. The issues raised in the narrative are similar to those seen in Corinne Albaut's *Les Parents de Mélie*, which I have selected due to its inclusion of two very different narrative and temporal perspectives on the abuse.[58] I have tried to avoid duplication of material across the corpus to ensure that I have covered all aspects and features of the abuse texts, so that my study is a wide-ranging and representative analysis of contemporary child-abuse fiction for young teenage readers. The corpus texts are all narrative prose and include, for example, the diary form, epistolary fiction, metafiction and intertextuality and a variety of narrative voices and perspectives, including first-person and third-person narratives and single and

[56] Such texts include, for example, Marie-Aude Murail, *La Fille du docteur Baudoin* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2006); Jean-François Chabas, *Sortilège* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2007); Robert Deleuse, *Une maison derrière la dune* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).
[57] Examples of abuse by peers as opposed to adults are: Martine Pouchain's *Printemps volé* (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, 2005) and Christine Beigel's *Piste noire* (Paris: Syros, 2006), which are not included in the final corpus. Abuse texts not included in the corpus are detailed in the bibliography.
[58] Alain Korkas, *La Maladie bleue* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Corinne Albaut, *Les Parents de Mélie* (Paris: Syros, 2008).

shifting focalization. With regard to content, I have tried to include texts depicting a variety of abusers, victims and abusive situations and have thus covered texts where abusers are family members, teachers, or known to the victims (interestingly, in no text is the abuser a stranger), and where abuse is both historic and contemporary. I also made the decision to stop actively looking for new texts to include in the corpus in 2010, as there seemed to be little original abuse fiction coming on to the market, perhaps signifying that the trend for abuse-themed realist fiction had reached its peak. The figure of twenty provides sufficient texts to be able to provide a wide-ranging overview of fiction with child abuse as its theme, whilst also enabling me to deal with the texts in detail, analysing their formal features and carrying out close readings.

The corpus texts were published between 1992 and 2008. The timespan covers the last eight years of the twentieth century and first nine years of the twenty-first century, thus encompassing both some of the first publications dealing with the theme and some of the later-published abuse texts. The period is also marked by considerable activity and development in relation to the publication and public recognition of child abuse fiction for children, reflecting the increased social and political awareness of child abuse. 1992 is the date of the first publication of Thierry Lenain's *La Fille du canal*, one of the most well-known child abuse texts for young readers, having won three significant book awards: the 1992 *Prix du roman de jeunesse du ministère de la jeunesse et des sports*, judged by children's literature specialists; the 1994 *Prix sorcière*, which is judged by members of L'Association des Librairies Spécialisées Jeunesse and L'Association des Bibliothécaires de France; and the 1994 *Prix Totem*, a regional award in Montreuil. As can be seen from the full range of texts in the bibliography, there appears to have been something of a lull in the publication of abuse texts between 2008 and 2012. Yet more recently, from 2012 onwards, several

noteworthy abuse texts have been published, including Pascale Maret's *Les Ailes de la Sylphide*, which depicts the protagonist's creation of a fantasy world as a means of mentally escaping her abusive reality.[59] The changes in the presence of abuse texts on the market suggest an initial interest in and desire to represent the topic in fiction amongst authors, which then reduced as the theme had been widely covered, followed by a renewed interest in the topic from different authors and perspectives. Interestingly, in 2012 and 2014 respectively, French author Jo Witek published *Mauvaise Connexion* and English author Bali Rai published *Web of Darkness*, both of which deal with online abuse and grooming, suggesting that the most recently published abuse fiction addresses contemporary concerns surrounding internet safety.[60] The depiction of online abuse is lacking from my corpus of texts where the primary focus is on abuse and grooming that takes place in a physical rather than virtual sense.

In the final corpus, I include nine sexual abuse texts, six psychological abuse texts and five physical abuse texts. In the sexual abuse texts, Clotilde Bernos's *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* depicts the female child protagonist's experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her singing teacher, while in Claude Clément's *La Frontière de sable*, the male child narrator describes uncovering the sexual abuse of his younger female cousin by her uncle. Thierry Lenain's *La Fille du canal* consists of an omniscient narrator depicting the female child victim's experience of abuse by her drawing teacher, and the diary of her class teacher, a former abuse victim. Virginie Lou's *Les Saisons dangereuses* is an epistolary novel containing correspondence between a thirteen-year-old girl and her adult male groomer and Claire Mazard's *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* depicts the thirteen-year-old female narrator's struggle to cope with the sexual abuse

[59] Pascale Maret, *Les Ailes de la Sylphide* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2013).
[60] Jo Witek, *Mauvaise connexion* (Paris: Talents hauts, 2012); Bali Rai, *Web of Darkness* (London: Corgi Children's, 2014).

imposed on her by her uncle, which she records in a computer diary. Daniel Meynard's *Dans la gueule du vent* portrays a male teenager's identification with a werewolf legend to aid his psychological processing of abuse carried out by his stepfather in his childhood. Pierre Mezinski's *Mauvais coup* details the male protagonist's escape from attempted sexual abuse at the hands of a priest at school and his anxiety at returning to school after the incident. Brigitte Peskine's *Moi, Delphine, 13 ans...* is an epistolary text with letters exchanged between the thirteen-year-old female protagonist and a friend, a vehicle she uses to express her emotions when living in a children's home after being abused by her father. Finally, Vermot's *Quelque chose à te dire* depicts the child protagonist's discovery of her mother's experience of paternal incest as a teenager.[61]

The psychological abuse texts contain just as varied a selection of themes and formal features as the sexual abuse texts. Albaut's *Les Parents de Mélie* depicts the sustained psychological abuse the female protagonist suffers at the hands of her mother during her childhood and adolescence.[62] In Gisèle Bienne's *La Petite Maîtresse*, the child protagonist, abandoned by her parents, is manipulated by her teacher into assuming the teacher's classroom role; Valérie Dayre's *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* is an adult's retrospective account of her complicity in her aunt's and cousins' abuse of a child guest, and her experience of herself falling victim to the abusers; in Moka's *Derrière la porte* the male protagonist is abused by his stepmother; in Brigitte Peskine's *J'entends pleurer la nuit* the protagonist narrates his difficulty in confronting

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[61] Clotilde Bernos, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2006) (henceforth referred to as *Monsieur Henry*); Claude Clément, *La Frontière de sable* (Paris: Syros Jeunesse, [1999] 2003); Thierry Lenain, *La Fille du Canal* (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, [1992] 2000); Virginie Lou, *Les Saisons dangereuses* (Paris: Syros, 2006); Claire Mazard, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* (Paris: Casterman, 1999) (henceforth referred to as *P'tits bateaux*); Daniel Meynard, *Dans la gueule du vent* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2000); Pierre Mezinski, *Mauvais coup* (Paris: De La Martinière, 2007); Brigitte Peskine, *Moi, Delphine, 13 ans...* (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, 2004) (henceforth referred to as *Delphine*); and Marie-Sophie Vermot, *Quelque chose à te dire* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2008).

[62] Henceforth referred to as *Mélie*. The text consists of two parts: *Mal à ma mère* and *Paix à mon père*. The first part was initially published independently under the pseudonym Clara Vidal in 2002.

the abusive family situation in the neighbouring apartment. Finally, Marie-Sabine Roger's *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père* is a first-person account of the narrator's struggle with her strict and emotionally absent father through her childhood and adolescence.[63]

In the physical abuse texts, Isabelle Chaillou's *John et moi* depicts a twin boy and girl's experience of physical abuse by their alcoholic father and their creation of a fairy tale to explore their experiences. Cécile Demeyère's *Coups pour coups* is a multi-stranded narrative in which a boy is physically abused by his father, while Irina Drozd's *Le Garçon qui se taisait* details a female child's perspective of discovering that her boyfriend's father beats him. Serge Perez's *Comme des adieux* depicts the unconscious thoughts and memories of the gravely ill, abused male protagonist before his death, and Monique Enckell's *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère* depicts a girl's experience of abuse by her mother during her childhood until she leaves home as a teenager.[64]

Two of the corpus texts have the same author. Brigitte Peskine is the author of *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, portraying a neighbour's observation of psychological abuse, and *Moi, Delphine 13 ans…* explores a teenage victim's struggle to come to terms with her dysfunctional family background and past sexual abuse. Many of the authors have professional experience of working with children and young people. Irina Drozd

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[63] Corinne Albaut, *Les Parents de Mélie* (Paris: Syros, 2008); Gisèle Bienne, *La Petite Maîtresse* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2003); Valérie Dayre, *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2001); Moka, *Derrière la porte* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 1997); Brigitte Peskine, *J'entends pleurer la nuit* (Paris: Casterman, [2002] 2006); and Marie-Sabine Roger, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2008) (henceforth referred to as *Tu te soumettras*).

[64] Isabelle Chaillou, *John et moi* (Paris: Rouergue, 2004); Cécile Demeyère, *Coups pour coups* (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, 2008); Irina Drozd, *Le Garçon qui se taisait* (Paris: Bayard,1997); Monique Enckell, *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère* (Paris: Seuil, 2000) (henceforth referred to as *Quand je serai grande*); Serge Perez, *Comme des adieux* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 1996).

originally trained as a nurse specializing in adolescents with mental health issues,[65] and Thierry Lenain, whose work often focuses on sensitive social concerns, such as drug use, sexism, divorce and racism, has been a teacher since 1988.[66] Lenain is also the former editor of the children's literature journal *Citrouille*. Marie-Sabine Roger, Monique Enckell, Daniel Meynard, Virgine Lou, Cécile Demeyère and Isabelle Chaillou have worked in teaching or education.[67] Thus a large proportion of the authors have teaching experience, suggesting both an affinity to the adolescent audience and also hinting at the potential author interest in informing readers on the subject of abuse through narrative fiction. Several authors also write for younger children, and, in some cases, for adults. Moka, for example, whose real name is Elvire Murail, has written more than seventy texts for children, mainly mystery and fantasy,[68] after initially publishing four adult novels under her own name, including *Escalier C*, depicting the lives of the residents of a New York apartment block and the narrator's acknowledgement of his homosexuality.[69] Serge Perez and Claire Mazard have experience of librarianship, the latter within schools.[70] The trend for writing and publishing texts for a variety of audiences, and the experience of librarianship of some authors, suggest a commitment to literature and reading in general. In this study, both the literary and the pedagogical aspects of the texts will be addressed, as I explore the authors' use of a variety of literary forms and devices both to engage and educate readers.

There also seems to be a sense of community and cross-referencing amongst the child abuse authors themselves, which is particularly evident in interviews. Mazard,

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[65] Françoise Ballanger, 'Drozd, Irina ', in *Dictionnaire*, ed. by Nières-Chevrel et Perrot, p. 304.
[66] Lilian Cheilan, 'Thierry Lenain', in ibid., p. 589.
[67] 'Isabelle Chaillou', *Ricochet*, <http://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/auteurs/recherche/4586-isabelle-chaillou>. Accessed 20/08/14.
[68] Françoise Manson, 'Moka', in *Dictionnaire*, ed. by Nières-Chevrel et Perrot, pp. 668.
[69] Elvire Murail, *Escalier C* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1983).
[70] 'Claire Mazard', *BNF*, <http://data.bnf.fr/12201550/claire_mazard/>; <http://minisites-charte.fr/sites/claire-mazard/>. Accessed 20/08/14.

when asked by *Ricochet*, the online site run by the Institut Suisse Jeunesse et Médias, which authors and illustrators she believes have an interesting approach, responds with the name of several authors from my corpus: 'Il y en a beaucoup: Thierry Lenain, Valérie Dayre, Marie-Sabine Roger, Christophe Honoré, Marie-Sophie Vermot…'. Mazard also includes Clara Vidal's *Mal à ma mère* among her 'coups de cœur'.[71] Thierry Lenain, author of *La Fille du canal*, praises Marie-Aude Murail's texts when defending realist teenage fiction in an interview with Isabelle Smadja.[72] Unsurprisingly, the realist writers seem to have an interest in and be influenced by authors dealing with similar issues to themselves, hinting at a potential sense of cohesion across the corpus, which will also be further explored in this study.

Moreover, the authors have a significant community presence, visiting schools, hosting workshops and giving interviews. Meynard, for example, has taken part in an interview for *Ricochet*, in which he explains his therapeutic intentions through the example of *Dans la gueule du vent*: 'Il me semble qu'un livre, même très modestement, peut toucher le lecteur et l'aider dans sa vie. Je pars donc presque toujours d'un problème réel pour tenter de le rendre un petit peu moins dur à vivre. […] "Dans la gueule du vent" a été écrit pour donner un peu d'amour aux enfants maltraités.'[73] In a similar vein, Mazard states in an interview: 'J'espère simplement que mes livres peuvent […] aider [les jeunes lecteurs]'.[74] Lenain states his basic ethos when writing for young readers: 'Ne pas leur mentir, ne pas les trahir, ne pas les ensevelir. Ce ne sont

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[71] 'Claire Mazard', *Ricochet* <www.ricochet-jeunes.org/invités/invite/42-claire-mazard>. Accessed 9/05/14.
[72] Thierry Lenain, 'Roman merveilleux contre roman réaliste? Une Interview d'Isabelle Smadja, auteur de l'essai Harry Potter, les raisons d'un succès, à laquelle réagit Thierry Lenain', *European MediaCulture*, September 2002. <https://www.yumpu.com/fr/document/view/19580102/thierry-lenain-european-mediaculture>. Accessed 21/08/14.
[73] 'Entretien avec Daniel Meynard', *Ricochet* <http://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/entretiens/entretien/26-daniel-meynard>. Accessed 09/05/14.
[74] Mathieu Pélicart, 'Quand l'écrivain brise les tabous', *Le Télégramme*, 21 avril 2006; Pascal Huord, *Charente Libre*, 30 November 2006.

pas mes “trucs”, c’est ma ligne de conduite, celle à laquelle je tente de me tenir’.[75] Clément, in an interview in *Cahiers pédagogiques*, states that she did not choose to write specifically for children and that it was only upon publishing in this field that she became aware of the ‘considérations pédagogiques’ and the ‘cloisonnements commerciaux’ that influence the writers of *littérature jeunesse*.[76] Peskine speaks about her positive experiences of visiting schools and talking to her young readers.[77] In two schools, her text *J’entends pleurer la nuit* was read and discussed as a means of exploring children’s rights when the pupils were visited by a representative from Amnesty International.[78] The authors are thus very aware of their young audiences and the ethical and educational context of publishing for adolescents. Indeed, it seems as though the authors view their writing as a form of social service, with reader interaction considered part of the role of a children’s author. Clément’s *La Frontière de sable* is the subject of a guidebook for teachers on how to use the abuse text as an educational tool in class.[79] The work book contains comprehension questions for pupils and answers for teachers, factual information on child abuse and the legislation governing it, as well as a bibliography with details of fictional and non-fictional texts confronting child abuse. In spite of this pedagogical use of abuse fiction and of the work of the authors visiting schools and discussing their work and sexual abuse more generally, as yet, aside from Rolland’s work on how to discuss taboo texts with teenage pupils, mentioned above, there seems to be no published work concerned with reader response in relation to the child sexual-abuse texts. The views of young readers themselves are generally

[75] Jeanne de Ménibus, ‘“Ne pas leur mentir, ne pas les trahir, ne pas les ensevelir”’, *LIRE: fr*, 1 April 2006. See also ‘Thierry Lenain aux enfants: “Désirer la mort de quelqu’un, ce n’est pas tuer’, *Le Temps*, 15 April 1999.
[76] Annie Vénard, ‘Entretien avec Claude Clément’, *Cahiers pédagogiques*, *La Littérature jeunesse: une nouvelle discipline scolaire?*, no. 146. Accessed online 09/05/14.
[77] Aaurousseau, ‘L’écrivain a inspiré les adolescents’, *La Nouvelle République*, 28 November 2006.
[78] ‘Sainte-Marie et Saint-Pierre: les droits de l’enfant expliqués aux sixièmes, *Le Télégramme*, 15 avril 2005.
[79] Hervé, *Abus sexuels et maltraitance*.

published in an informal manner by the means of online forums and sites such as *Ricochet*.

Several of my corpus texts have been the subject of online or newspaper reviews. The newspaper reviews in particular are intended for parents, teachers, librarians and other children's literature professionals; that is, the adults involved in the book selecting process, rather than the readers themselves. Sylvie Newman, for example, writes of *La Petite Maîtresse* that it is '[u]n roman plein de douleurs, celle de l'enfant, qui n'a pas de mots pour dire la détresse dans laquelle la plongent le rejet de ses parents, l'éloignement de ses frères et sœurs, et les responsabilités d'adulte qu'on l'oblige à endosser; celle aussi des grands-parents, désemparés. À proposer donc avec discernement.'[80] The newspaper reviews, along with online reviews of some corpus texts by the editors of the *Ricochet* website (*La Frontière de sable*, *Coups pour coups*, *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*, *Mauvais coup*, *John et moi*), and reviews posted on La Joie par les livres' online database,[81] predominantly describe the storylines of the texts and tend to focus on the potential impact of the content on the young reader. There is currently little academic interest in the corpus texts, except for Nières-Chevrel and Perrot's *Dictionnaire*, which is a catalogue of authors and issues in children's literature, and Delbrassine's study, which is a broad overview of teenage texts. Delbrassine's corpus of 247 texts only includes four of my abuse corpus (*Comme des adieux*, *Dans la gueule du vent*, *Derrière la porte* and *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*), and given the extensive nature of his study, there is no sustained discussion of individual narratives. There is thus a gap in knowledge of the texts

[80] Sylvie Newman, 'Enfants', *Le Temps*, 19 July 2003. See also Corinne Abjeun, 'Jeunesse. *Les Parents de Mélie'*, *Le Télégramme*, 21 September, 2008.

[81] *La Fille du canal*, for example, is described as 'notre sélection de l'année'. *La Joie par les livres* <http://lajoieparleslivres.bnf.fr/ClientBookLine/recherche/NoticesDetaillees.asp?INSTANCE=joie&PORTAL_ID=bookline_view.xml&IDebut=0&chkckbox23=off&chk0=off&chk1=on&chk2=off&chk3=off&chk4=off&DISPLAYMENU=>. Accessed 23/10/14.

themselves due to the lack of critical analysis of the narratives and their narratological aspects and literary features in particular, which I intend to address in my study.

My objective in this study is to identify common ways in which child sexual, physical and psychological abuse is presented in texts for young readers, who may or may not be aware of the issue of abuse and who may or may not have themselves experienced it. My corpus consists of texts which use a variety of formal and narratological features and texts which address diverse aspects of the theme of abuse, including aspects of psychological trauma. I will therefore apply narratological analysis and trauma theory to the corpus texts to examine their formal and structural features and to address the following research questions in particular: What are the common plot elements of the abuse texts and who are the abusers and who are the victims in the stories? Are there any trends across the corpus regarding from whose voice and perspective abuse is narrated? How is the victim's trauma and experience of abuse represented in the narratives? How explicit are the abuse scenes in the texts and is there a difference in the degree of abuse narrated dependent on whether the abuse depicted is psychological, physical or sexual? I hope that my empirical research gathering information on texts and my focus on contemporary French teenage texts, which have thus far never been the subject of critical literary close readings, will add to knowledge of the field of French *littérature jeunesse* and also Western children's fiction more generally. My research into the depiction of the abuse theme in young-adolescent fiction will also provide insight into how contemporary authors approach sensitive issues in fiction for young readers and will also contribute to knowledge of trauma fiction more generally. Indeed, while studies exist on 'adult' trauma fiction and Anglophone children's trauma fiction, there is a gap in our knowledge of child abuse and trauma in French teenage literature.

Each chapter of the thesis explores a different formal aspect of the texts to provide an overall picture of the structure, narrative features and recurrent motifs of contemporary child-abuse fiction for young readers. In the first chapter I examine the structure and plot of the corpus texts by applying and adapting Vladimir Propp's structural analysis of fairy tales in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) in order to explore common plot features and characters in contemporary child-abuse narratives.[82] In the second, third and fourth chapters of the thesis I use Gérard Genette's *Discours du récit* (1972), which is a narratological analysis of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* in which Genette derives his narrative model from the grammar of the verb (tense; voice; and mood), as a tool to examine the narratological features of my child abuse corpus.[83] Chapters Two and Three compare the different forms of narration and focalization present across the corpus. I explore how different narrative and focalization techniques impact upon the presentation of abuse and abusers in the texts and consider whether one form of narration is more psychologically complex and emotionally charged than others when depicting sensitive abuse plotlines.

Chapter Four is an examination of the use and effects of different temporal techniques across the corpus texts and the ways in which time is manipulated to show the narrator's trauma and to control the explicitness of abuse presented to young readers. I refer to trauma theory and research into the realities of child abuse in order to contextualize my close readings of the corpus. I draw upon Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and her edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*

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[82] V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott. Second edition, revised and edited with a preface by Louis A. Wagner, new introduction by Alan Dundes (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968).
[83] Gérard Genette, *Discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, [1972] 2007).

(1996) and Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* (2004).[84] Referring to Caruth's studies, which identify an inextricable link between time, trauma and the mental processing of traumatic memories, and Whitehead's study on the features of fictional trauma narratives, I discuss the definitions of 'trauma literature' and intend to see how far the corpus texts share features of, or indeed, could be considered to be, trauma literature in their use of repetition and narrative fragmentation. I use Genette's three temporal categories: order, to analyse the extent of correspondence or dissonance between the order of plot events and the order of their narration; frequency, to assess the prevalence of repetition in the narration of abuse; and duration, to examine the pace of the abuse scenes to establish the amount of abuse (i.e., what proportion of the abuse scene is described to readers) and level of explicitness that is included in or omitted from the texts.

In the final chapter of the thesis I explore the prevalence of two themes which emerge from the detailed study of the narratological features of the texts as particularly significant to the child-abuse corpus, those of communicating and expressing abuse. I use research on the practices of biblio- and scriptotherapy, alongside Freud's writings on war neuroses (1921) and Pierre Janet's work on traumatic memories (1919), to analyse the depiction of the therapeutic role of communicating abuse.[85] I examine the child victims' attempts to express their feelings and communicate their abuse to others both directly and by indirect means, and the authors' use of imagery, metaphor, and intertextuality to communicate child abuse indirectly to the reader.

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[84] Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Tal; Whitehead.

[85] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, translated and edited by J.Strachey, Volume 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 1-64; Pierre Marie Félix Janet, *Les Médications psychologiques. Études historiques, psychologiques et cliniques sur les méthodes de la psychothérapie*, *Volume II* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1919).

Throughout the study, in the various chapters I draw upon different texts in different degrees of detail and for different purposes. All of the corpus texts are analysed in Chapter One, where the aim is to create a Propp-inspired structural model for the comparison of the basic child abuse plots and characters, whereas in later chapters on narrative voice and time, I select individual texts in order to show the range of techniques used and issues approached across the corpus. In the final chapter I take a broader approach to the texts, comparing and contrasting the depiction of the recurrent themes of communication and expression across the whole corpus. I hope that my approach, centred on a detailed narratological and thematic examination of twenty contemporary texts, and thus differing from the broader approach taken by Delbrassine and Thaler and Jean-Bart, will verify and expand upon the knowledge gained from their studies on modern French teenage fiction.

Chapter One
Recurrent Plot and Structural Features

In this chapter of the thesis I explore the commonalities of the structural and plot features of the child abuse corpus, which all depict victim and abuser characters and relationships. I intend to explore to what extent the portrayals of abuse, abusers, victims and plot are similar across the corpus and consequently how far abuse is dealt with in a common way for young adolescent readers. I aim to establish, for example, whether the abuser is always punished and whether abuse is always confronted and resolved. I use methodology devised by Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* as a starting point for my analysis, as Propp's structuralist study has the aim of creating a universal set of plot features which occur in fairy tales so that texts can be compared at a basic structural and plot level.[1] By applying and adapting plot features and characters identified in Propp's study to the abuse corpus, I firstly intend to devise my own plot-function index in order to assess to what extent the narratives follow a basic linear pattern similar to that of traditional fairy tales. The use and adaptation of Propp's study will also facilitate the comparison between traditional narratives and the contemporary texts, to assess how far modern realist teenage fiction has moved away from its origins in folk and fairy tales. I also plan to go beyond Propp's structural analysis to examine the narratives in their cultural context and their approach towards child abuse.

[1] Despite the title, Propp's work is about fairy tales, rather than folk tales. The confusion comes from a nuance in translation. See Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 67, fn 3; Propp, p. viii. However, definitions of fairy and folk tales and the differentiation between them are somewhat ambiguous. For one definition, see Ruth B. Bottigheimer, 'Fairy Tales and Folk Tales', in *International Companion*, ed. by Hunt, pp. 152-165.

Propp's inspiration for his *Morphology*, published in 1928 and not translated into English until 1958 and French until 1965, came in response to the desire amongst scholars to organize and dissect folk and fairy tales deriving from the oral tradition, and in particular to folklorist Antti Aarne's classification of tales based on type and composition.[2] Propp, although acknowledging the practical use of Aarne's work, criticizes his artificial and imprecise division and categorization of the tales.[3] Propp believes that in order to classify tales accurately so as to compare narratives, it is important to consider their basic structure and components. His aim is to look at how many functions are known to the tale and how the functions represent recurrent features of the tale.[4] He states: 'The result will be a morphology (i.e., a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole).'[5] Propp takes as his corpus a selection of tales classified by Aarne. The tales include, for example, tale 310 'The Maiden in the Tower', which is the equivalent of the *Rapunzel* fairy tale.[6] Propp's main conclusions are as follows:

1. *Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.*
2. *The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.*
3. *The sequence of functions is always identical.*

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[2] Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne's work *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (Index of Types of Folktale) was published in 1910. This was then translated and enlarged by American folklorist Stith Thompson in 1928 and revised again in 1968. In 2004 Hans-Jörg Uther published a three-volume edition: *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, *FF Communications*, edited for the Folktale Fellows by Sahe Apo, Hermann Bausinger, Martha Blache, Alan Dundes and Anna-Leena Siikala, vol. CXXXIII no. 284 (Helsinki: Academica Scientiarum Fennica, 2004). See also, <http://oaks.nvg.org/folktale-types.html>. Accessed 04/05/2011.

[3] Propp, pp. 10-11.

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

[5] Ibid., p. 19.

[6] Aarne, p. 50.

4. *All fairy tales are of one type [with regard to] their structure*.[7]

Propp then creates an index of thirty-one functions which appear across the fairy-tale genre in a set chronological order.[8] His functions are named by the use of a noun (for example *villainy* and *wedding*), indicating a set action which occurs in the narrative. 'Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action'.[9]

Each tale starts with an 'Initial situation', whereby family members are mentioned or the hero is introduced, though the initial situation is not classed as a function, but a significant morphological element of the tale.[10] For Propp, the function of an item is determined by its relation to the rest of the sequence, as the function cannot be defined unless the outcome is known. Although this pre-determination has been criticized by Claude Brémond, Jonathan Culler defends Propp's methodology, asserting that '[o]ne cannot, in short, isolate units of plot without considering the functions they serve.'[11] Some functions are arranged in pairs, e.g. *prohibition-violation*, though pairs do not always occur together.[12] Where functions which follow each other sequentially are carried out by different characters, then there must be a means by which the characters know what is happening so the narrative can progress.[13] Whilst all functions occur in a set order, tales may end and then begin again at certain points. For example, many tales end on the function of *rescue from pursuit*, and then begin again with a new act of *villainy*. There may also be new departures in the plot, or what Propp refers to as 'moves'. Each new act of *villainy* or *lack* within a tale creates a new 'move', which must

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[7] Propp, pp. 21-23. Italics in original.
[8] For a full chronological list of Propp's functions and his definitions, see Chapter Three of *Morphology*, pp. 25-65.
[9] Ibid., p. 21.
[10] Ibid., p. 25.
[11] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1975), p. 245.
[12] Propp, p. 64.
[13] Ibid., p. 71.

follow the set chronology of functions identified by Propp. The moves may occur directly following one another, within another move, two moves may have a common ending, or a tale may begin with two *villainies* and thus two moves. For example, a tale which begins with *villainy* and ends with a *wedding*, may then be immediately followed by another act of *villainy* and end with *rescue from pursuit*.

Propp's Functions and My Adaptations

Propp's methodology can be applied to all of the child abuse plots in some way, although no one text contains solely Propp's functions; these are complemented by five additional functions that I have devised from studying the child abuse plots. Additionally, some of Propp's functions are superfluous to my child abuse corpus and appear in none of the child-abuse narratives. The functions are therefore split into four categories: functions that cannot be applied to the child-abuse corpus, functions which are applicable to the corpus, functions which can be applied with some adaptation, and new child-abuse specific functions. Table 1, below, contains a full list of the functions, their definition and the number of texts in which they occur.

Table 1 – Plot Functions (continued overleaf)

	FUNCTION	PROPP'S DEFINITION (MY DEFINITION)	TEXTS
PROPP'S FUNCTIONS THAT WORK WELL (14)	Absentation	Victim or family member leaves home.	8
	Interdiction/ Violation	Command or interdiction is addressed to the hero, which is fulfilled or violated.	3
	Trickery	Villain deceives victim.	6
	Complicity	Victim submits to deception.	5
	Villainy	Villain causes harm or injury to victim or family.	18
	Departure	Hero leaves home either after villainy or to start the search for the object of desire.	2
	Return	Hero returns from departure.	2
	Struggle	Hero and villain in direct combat.	5
	Villain defeated	Villain is defeated (not necessarily paired with struggle, but it is paired in my corpus).	3
	Pursuit	Hero is pursued by the villain.	1
	Exposure	False hero or villain is exposed as such.	20
	Transfiguration	Hero given new appearance.	1
	Punishment	Villain is punished.	10
PROPP'S FUNCTIONS THAT DO NOT WORK (10)	Reconnaissance	Villain attempts reconnaissance.	0
	Delivery	Villain receives information about victim.	0
	First function of donor	Hero tested or attacked, leading to receipt of magical agent from donor.	0
	Hero's reaction	Hero's reaction to donor.	0
	Transference between kingdoms	Hero led or transferred to search object.	0
	Unrecognized arrival	Hero returns home and is not recognized.	0
	Unfounded claims	Hero presents unfounded claims.	0
	Difficult task	Task proposed to hero.	0
	Solution	The task is resolved.	0
	Recognition	Hero recognized by appearance or solving task.	0

ADAPTED PROPP FUNCTIONS (8)	Lack	Family member/victim lacks or desires something (e.g. potion or a bride). Either Villainy or Lack is required in the fairy tale and as such Propp counts these as subsections of one function.	7
	Mediation	Misfortune or lack is made known. Hero is approached with request or demand. Propp's tales split into victim-hero or seeker-hero tales at this point.	8
	Counteraction	Only in seeker-hero tales. Seeker-hero aids the victim.	11
	Provision of magical agent	Provision or receipt of magical aid (helper, potion, capacity) to help hero or victim.	12
	Branding	Hero is branded on the body or by receipt of towel or ring.	7
	Liquidation	Initial misfortune or lack is resolved. Search object may be found, person freed, or spell broken. Paired with villainy.	5
	Rescue (from Pursuit)	Hero saves himself or is saved. Some tales end here. Villainy can also occur again at this point and the function sequence starts anew.	11
	Wedding/(Resolution)	Hero marries and ascends the throne. Propp's wedding signifies the prize for the hero.	20
NEW FUNCTIONS (5)	Hindrance	(Conflict or events occur between characters which exacerbate the abusive situation or hinder the confession or resolution of abuse.)	13
	Resistance	(Victim shows resistance to abuse or abuser, either directly or privately.)	4
	Denial	(Characters deny or fail to acknowledge the abuse.)	11
	Helper support	(Provision of comfort or solidarity to victim from helper.)	18
	Official intervention	(Legal /social services intervene in the victim's life or abusive situation.)	8

There are ten functions which cannot be applied to any of the child-abuse texts. The majority of these functions are related to quest-plots, which are scarce in my corpus. The function *transference between kingdoms*, for example, is out of place when applied to my generally realist texts, as are the functions *unrecognized arrival*, where the hero returns home and is not recognized, and the pair of functions *difficult task* and *solution*, where a task is proposed to the hero and then resolved. The aforementioned functions relate to specific actions regarding the search for an object or attempts to defeat a villain, which highlights the divergence between Propp's quest-based corpus and my own texts, which focus on predominantly psychological plot complications, rather than physical ones. The corpus text *Quelque chose à te dire*, however, has

elements of the quest genre, as the child protagonist goes to visit her grandmother and uncovers a family secret, but in spite of the quest elements, the focus is on the realist experiences of human interactions, rather than on the search for an object or prize.

Fourteen of Propp's functions can be successfully applied to the child abuse corpus without changing their basic meaning. The functions *villainy*, *exposure* and *punishment* work particularly well and are present in the majority of the texts (eighteen, twenty and ten texts, respectively). These functions represent the basic plot elements of the abuse texts: child-abuse being committed (*villainy*), the abuser is revealed as such (*exposure*) and the abuser is often imprisoned (*punishment*). *Villainy* is absent from two texts (*Moi, Delphine* and *Quelque chose à te dire*), where the abuse does not occur within the plot; exposure occurs instead when the victim reveals past abuse. With regard to *exposure*, however, I also include elements of indirect exposure, where extra information is provided to the reader or other characters to piece together the plot mysteries. In *La Fille du canal*, for example, the victim tries to communicate her abuse indirectly via drawings.

The functions *struggle* and *villain defeated* are also easily applicable to the corpus, and refer to a specific battle or confrontation between the victim and abuser. In Propp's case these two functions can occur independently of one another, as *struggle* can occur without *victory* and the villain can be defeated without the set combat function preceding it. In my corpus, however, while *struggle* can exist on its own, *villain defeated* only occurs in relation to that individual struggle. In *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *struggle* appears without victory as a battle occurs between the victim and abuser when the singing teacher tries to force the victim to remove her clothes, while she verbally fights back, but is ultimately punished by the abuser for her resistance. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, however, *struggle* and *victory* occur together when the abuser enters the

victim's bedroom, but is repelled by Marie-Bénédicte strategically exposing her sanitary protection to ward off her sexual abuser.

Of the fourteen successfully applied functions, four appear in only one or two texts. *Transfiguration*, which relates to the hero being given a new appearance, is present in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, when the child victim changes her name from Marie-Bénédicte to Maud, in an attempt to alter her post-abuse identity. *Pursuit*, which is the victim being followed or chased by the abuser, occurs in *John et moi*, when the abuser chases the victims in a fictional story created by the child-abuse victims. *Departure* and *return*, which go together to denote the hero leaving home either after *villainy* or to begin the search for the desired object, and then returning home, appear in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* and *Derrière la porte*. While these functions are easily applied to some of the corpus texts, their scarcity is due to their close alliance to the action-oriented quest plot: chasing, going on a journey and disguises.

There are eight functions which can be applied to the child-abuse corpus after some form of adaptation. Propp's function of *mediation* splits the fairy tale into the category of either a seeker-hero tale or a victimized-hero tale. In seeker-tales the action follows the character who is searching for a desired person or object, whereas in victim tales, the narrative follows the character who is the victim of *villainy* and embarks on an adventure. The functions *mediation*, referring to a misfortune or lack being made known and the hero being approached with a request or demand; and *counteraction*, which corresponds to the seeker-hero aiding the victim, refer to the actions of the seeker-hero. In the child-abuse corpus the equivalent of a seeker-hero tale is a text which directly follows the story of the 'witness' to abuse, often a friend of the victim. Inverted commas are used for the term witness, as this protagonist does not necessarily see the act of abuse, but observes its consequences from an external perspective. In the abuse

corpus, there are four texts (*La Frontière de sable*, *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, *J'entends pleurer la nuit*) which are the equivalent of Propp's seeker-tales, as the narrative follows a character who discovers and reports the abuse from the position of a bystander. Interestingly, in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, the protagonist is initially a witness to another child's abuse, yet in the second half of the text she becomes a victim herself and in *La Fille du canal*, one narrative strand follows the victim's story whilst a second narrative strand follows an adult witness who was herself abused as a child.

In another example of the more varied nature of the corpus texts, and in a further deviation from Propp's findings, the functions of *lack*, *mediation* and *counteraction* are not restricted to witness texts; they also occur in several other texts and are carried out by helper characters who notice or intervene in the abusive situation, despite the story events focussing on the victim. *Lack*, signifying a family member's or hero's desire for or lack of something, becomes the witness or helper questioning the victim's unusual behaviour. Indeed, the witness becomes aware that something is 'lacking' with regard to the victim or his or her situation. In *Le Garçon qui se taisait lack* manifests itself as the witness noticing the victim's withdrawn nature. In relation to the abuse corpus, *mediation* becomes the helper's or witness's confrontation of the behaviour and, in some cases, the acknowledgement that the problem is (potentially) abuse, as seen in *Coups pour coups* when the helper befriends the victim after noticing his fear of his father. *Counteraction* is practical action taken by the helper, which occurs in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* when the witness-helper phones the 119 helpline to denounce the abuser.

The functions *provision of magical agent* and *branding* also require slight adaptation when applied to the child abuse corpus, as the 'magical' agent becomes

more an everyday object which provides a vehicle for the victim to express or comprehend the abuse and ultimately escape from it. In *La Fille du canal* the victim expresses her feelings through her doll, whilst in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* the victim comes to process her experiences via writing on a computer. *Derrière la porte* contains the only actual magic agent, which is a ghost summoned to help the victim. With regard to *branding*, which Propp defines as the hero being branded on the body or receiving a towel or ring, in the abuse corpus this relates to the self-mutilation or self-harm of the victim either as a result of internalizing his or her despair, or as a means of altering his or her appearance to repel the abuser. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* and *La Fille du canal*, the victims cut their hair to try to repel their abuser, whilst in *Les Parents de Mélie* and *La Fille du canal*, the victims attempt suicide.

Propp's function of *liquidation*, where an initial misfortune or lack is resolved, relates to the abuse coming to an end in the child abuse corpus. In the texts abuse stops either via *rescue*, discussed below, or via *liquidation*, where the abuser stops abusing or is no longer able to abuse. In *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *liquidation* occurs when the abuser flees, whilst in *John et moi* and *Coups pour coups* the abuse ends when the child's non-abusive parent removes the family from the abusive situation (note the difference between this and *rescue*, where the child is actively and intentionally saved. In *liquidation*, the saving of the child is a by-product of the parent's decision to leave). Propp's *rescue from pursuit* becomes the more generic function of *rescue* in my corpus. The abuse victim is either rescued by someone else, as in *La Fille du canal*, when the helper rushes to the abuser's house and interrupts the abuse, or the victim escapes the abuse personally, which occurs in *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*, when the victim boards a train to start a new life away from her family.

Propp's final function of *wedding* must be significantly adapted to suit the child abuse corpus. Propp's positive ending consists of the hero marrying and ascending to the throne, whereas I rename the final function in my corpus *resolution*. *Resolution* in the child abuse narratives is psychological in nature. It may be a relatively superficial psychological resolution, as in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, when the victim temporarily lives with his helper-friend, who describes him as being happy, and no long-term psychological damage is explored or suggested, or psychological resolution may be more complex and appear in the form of the victim confronting his or her experiences of abuse and the trauma caused by the abuse. In many cases the resolution of psychological trauma is not completed; it is presented as a long-term process. This is the case in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, where the text ends with the depiction of the victim's on-going psychological recovery from her experiences, and in *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, where the abuse has not ended, but the victim acknowledges her situation and optimistically vows to move away from her abusive father. In *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Comme des adieux*, however, the 'resolution' is seemingly an 'anti-resolution'. In the former, the text ends with the abandoned child victim futilely waiting for her parents to come and collect her from her grandparents' house. While the teacher's psychological abuse has been resolved, the child protagonist is psychologically unable to acknowledge her parents' rejection of her. In *Comme des adieux*, the resolution comes in the form of the death of the protagonist, who is unable to visualize a life without abuse. While evidently an extreme form of escapism, the death signifies the victim's release from suffering and hints at a peaceful outcome, as he is depicted as joining a deceased helper figure.

After studying the corpus and applying Propp's functions to my texts, I have also created five new functions to represent fully the basic plot elements of the child

abuse corpus: *denial*; *hindrance*; *resistance*; *helper support*; and *official intervention*. These functions are somewhat more genre-specific than Propp's functions, as all relate specifically to characters' reactions to the abusive situation. *Denial* refers to any character's denial of or failure to acknowledge the abuse. It is predominantly helper and hinderer characters who carry out this function, as in *La Frontière de sable* when the child helper initially refuses to acknowledge the inappropriate behaviour of the uncle towards his niece, but in *Les Saisons dangereuses* it is the abuser himself who denies his inappropriate sexual attraction to the child victim. *Hindrance*, another function related to complications in overcoming abuse, refers to an act which hinders the resolution of the abusive situation and is carried out mostly by hinderer characters. *Hindrance* usually takes the form of a conflict between characters which reinforces the victim's isolated position and perpetuates the abusive relationship. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and *La Fille du canal*, *hindrance* takes the form of a disagreement or conflict between the child victim and her mother, preventing her from confiding in her parent.

Resistance refers to the victim showing some form of resistance to the abuse or abuser. It is a general display of disagreement, as opposed to *struggle*, where the victim and abuser are in a direct confrontation. *Resistance* occurs in *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* when the child victim adds to derogatory graffiti about the abuser on the wall of his apartment building, while in *John et moi*, the brother and sister victims show two forms of resistance: firstly they create and recite a chant to try to ward off their abuser and, secondly, they pray for him to disappear.

Helper support is the provision of comfort or solidarity to the victim. This function relates to emotional support or attempts to boost the victim's morale and encourage denunciation, rather than physical intervention in the situation, which is

covered by *provision of a magical agent* and *counteraction*. In *John et moi*, for example, the victims' school friends provide moral support, but are unable to intervene in their friends' abusive home life, whilst in *Delphine* the victim's penfriend is the main source of emotional support to her. The function *official intervention*, however, occurs when legal or social services intervene in the victim's life or abusive situation. In *John et moi*, the victims' school informs the authorities of suspicions of abuse, although the victims deny any problems and the physical abuse is not resolved. While similar to *helper support*, *official intervention* denotes the practical involvement of official services and authorities in the abuse, rather than general emotional support, highlighting the specificities of the abuse genre. In *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait* it is the *official intervention* that enables *punishment* and *resolution* of the abuse to take place.

Thus Propp's functions generally work well in relation to the child-abuse texts, though many of the quest- and fantasy-oriented actions are adapted to suit the realist abuse corpus. There is also a requirement for additional genre-specific functions to represent fully the recurrent plot features of the child-abuse narratives, such as the recurrence of the denial of abuse and the victims' attempts at resistance.

Application of Functions to Child Abuse Texts

In all of the texts, there is a mixture of both Propp's functions and the adapted child abuse functions. However, *John et moi* includes what Genette refers to as a metanarrative, or a narrative within a narrative: the child victims' fairy-tale story, which consists purely of Proppian functions: the children are threatened by their father (*villainy*); the mother sends the children away to flee misery (*interdiction* and *violation*, leading to *departure*); a magic star comes to guide the children (*receipt of a magical agent*); the father chases the children (*pursuit*); the helper-star gives the children a

magical agent to find a witch (*provision of a magical agent*). The victims are then blackmailed by the witch into becoming her slave in exchange for their father being transformed into a loving man (*trickery* and *complicity*). Finally, the victims are rescued by their formerly abusive father (*rescue*). Thus the invented story contains only fairy-tale elements, highlighting how traditional fairy-tale plots are embedded in contemporary story-telling culture, since the child characters in the narrative fictionalize their own experiences by drawing upon familiar story lines. The primary narrative, however, although containing many of the fairy-tale functions, also contains the additional functions: helper support, denial and official intervention. Thus the traditional fairy-tale structure and plot actions are enhanced with functions relating to coping with and denouncing abuse, which has the effect of informing potential young readers of practical solutions to child abuse.

In *Derrière la porte*, the plot consists primarily of Propp's functions. Of the ten different functions I have identified in the narrative, nine of these are from Propp's set, whilst *helper support* is the only additional function. Similarly, in *Quelque chose à te dire*, the majority of functions are also those of Propp, whilst *conflict* and *helper support* are again the only additional elements. Interestingly, these two texts differ in style from the majority of the realist abuse corpus, as *Derrière la porte* contains elements of the fantastic, having a ghost character, and also resembles the storyline of Charles Perrault's fairy tale *Cendrillon*.[14] In *Quelque chose à te dire*, the abuse precedes the narrative timeframe and so the text has elements of an adventure story, where the protagonist sets out on an adventure and uncovers certain secrets, confronts the villain and returns home a hero. As might be suspected, Propp's methodology works

[14] The fairy tale intertext is discussed further in Chapter Five.

particularly well in these texts which are closer to the fairy-tale genre, as similar patterns occur in the plot structures.

Two of the more realist abuse texts *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and *La Fille du canal*, require the combined application of Propp's functions and my additional functions. In these narratives there is a clear progression of events starting with the problem and leading to the resolution, which is a similar plot structure to the fairy-tale corpus. In *Monsieur Henry* the additional elements of *conflict*, *helper support* and *denial* occur. The application of Propp's original functions and the newly created ones reveals the main story events in the linear narratives, which consist of the victim suffering abuse, being supported by a helper, the abuser being exposed and punished, with a few further complications along the way by means of *denial* and *hindrance* to add plot interest and depth. There is a sense of consequential order and connection between the functions overall, although not necessarily from one function to the next. The recurrence of functions, *conflict* and *struggle* in particular, depicts the on-going battle between the victim and abuser. This repetition of functions in the same tale is common in the child abuse texts and absent from Propp's corpus. The application of functions emphasizes the differences in the types of child-abuse texts; the more quest-based contain more of the traditional Proppian functions, and the realist, psychologically-oriented narratives, contain more abuse-specific functions.

The reduction of the corpus narratives to plot events reveals that every text has some form of resolution, be it the victim overcoming the abuse, or the acknowledgement that the abuse has long-term implications for the victim, or, in the extreme case of *Comme des adieux*, that the abuse is acknowledged and overcome through death. In the corpus, the psychological resolution often comes after the practical resolution of abuse and may not be fully accomplished in the text. There is

thus a clear distinction between the abuse texts and the fairy tale, where the *wedding* function represents the single and final outcome of the plot. *Helper support* and *exposure* occur in eighteen and nineteen out of the twenty texts respectively. Thus the elements of gaining helper support, the villain being exposed and the final resolution to the abuse are the fundamental aspects of child-abuse texts, revealing the emphasis on positive events in the teenage abuse plots: abuse may occur, but authors stress the importance of the victim receiving support, the villain being found out and the abuse coming to an end, and the victim overcoming the abuse or acknowledging the extent of its impact. There is an attempt to maintain a positive outcome, but without oversimplifying, as the acknowledgement of the impact of abuse suggests that the resolution is not simple. Moreover, over half of the texts contain the functions *villainy* (eighteen), *receipt of magical agent* (twelve), *denial* (eleven), *conflict* (fifteen) and *counteraction* (eleven). *Lack* and *punishment* also occur in seven and ten of the twenty texts respectively. There is seemingly a common concern to show the difficulties in dealing with abuse and the means to overcome it, with recurrent features being: the abuse itself, then denial of abuse and eventual exposure, conflict with another character and the ultimate escape from abuse and, in half the cases, punishment of the abuser. Thus the authors tend to present child abuse in a standard and non-threatening way with the focus on overcoming complications and the punishment of the villain, suggesting that there is some sense of commonality in this aspect of depicting abuse to young readers across the corpus texts.

However, the structure of the novels means that although many functions can be applied to the primary corpus, the order in which they appear is not regimented. In total contrast to Propp's findings regarding fairy-tale functions, apart from the fact that all but one of the child-abuse texts end in *resolution*, (in *Coups pour coups resolution*

occurs before *punishment*), there is no clear pattern or linear order of functions in the tales. *Villainy*, for example, occurs at the beginning and towards the very end of *Derrière la porte*, whereas in *La Fille du canal*, it appears in the middle of the plot functions. Functions are also repeated, particularly the act of *villainy*, as seen in *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Les Saisons dangereuses* and *P'tits bateaux*. Furthermore, an interesting distinction between the texts occurs where certain texts do not contain *villainy*, but deal with the psychological resolution of the abuse after the event. In three texts, *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Dans la gueule du vent* and *Delphine,* the abuse takes place before the opening of the novel and the plots focus on the aftermath of the villainy and exposure of the abuse. These texts therefore contain the function *exposure*, where the past abuse is revealed, and *resolution*, where the protagonist psychologically moves on from the trauma. In *Dans la gueule du vent*, although *villainy* does not occur in relation to the main child-abuse plot, it features in the text in relation to the child victim falsely believing that his girlfriend is being sexually abused by her father and setting out to rescue her and kill him. While this is part of the main story events, for the purposes of comparing my abuse plots, I consider it as a subplot, which can be defined as another mini narrative strand or story which occurs alongside the main abuse plot (which, in *Dans la gueule du vent,* is the victim's attempt to acknowledge and overcome his past sexual abuse).

In many of the novels Propp's methodology is not particularly useful in opening up the complexity of events in the narratives. In *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Dans la gueule du vent*, *Comme des adieux*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père* and *Les Saisons dangereuses*, the application of functions to the plot structure does not provide a comprehensive view of what happens in the story overall. For example, in *Tu te soumettras*, there are only six different functions across the plot:

Villainy – father's cruelty towards victim is described

Helper support – victim receives care and attention from neighbours

Exposure – father emotionally disengages from his terminally ill baby and his wife's distress, hinting (to other characters and the reader) at his abusive nature

Villainy – father's cruel and abusive behaviour towards the ill baby and his family

Struggle – victim matures and develops a deep dislike of her father's beliefs

Helper support – Kabyl woman shows compassion towards the victim

Villainy – father dismisses his family's mourning for the ill son

Provision of magical agent – friend informs victim of alternative educational, political and social ways of life

Resolution – victim vows to move away from abusive father

Yet the book contains one hundred and forty-three pages and includes many other events which are not accounted for. For example, the domestic abuse which occurs in the neighbours' house, resulting in the murder of the wife, is significant in revealing the father's severe attitudes towards others, but does not drive the abuse plot forward in the same way that Propp's functions lead to further onward actions. Even the functions which do occur in the plot structure are not particularly action-oriented, in the sense that they do not lead to onward action in the same way as in *Monsieur Henry* or *Quelque chose à te dire*. In *Tu te soumettras*, the helper support functions, for example, are isolated incidents of support, and are not connected to the resolution of the abuse. The repetition of functions also shows the lack of a clear and logical progression from beginning to end in the narrative.

Thus some of the longer-length and more psychologically complex texts have fewer functions (*Comme des adieux* and *Les Parents de Mélie*, for example), which, taken at face value, erroneously suggests a more straightforward narrative. The focus of these texts is on the psychological experiences and development of the child victim and thus the plot is less active than the more action-oriented child-abuse novels. Nikolajeva comments that there has 'been a notable shift in Western children's fiction, beginning in the 1960s, toward a more profound interest in character, toward psychological, character-oriented children's novels'.[15] However, the genre and age of the intended reader of the modern children's texts which Nikolajeva discusses is of significance here, as she refers to an undifferentiated group of readers, whereas my readers are specifically in the ten-to-sixteen age bracket. In my corpus, the more basic abuse texts, intended for readers aged ten and above, focus on the identification and resolution of abuse in an event-oriented manner to educate child readers. They therefore do not primarily focus on character development and psyche, and contain many of the plot functions in a sequential order, unlike the more complex psychological novels aimed at older readers. *Tu te soumettras*, aimed at readers aged from fourteen years, and *Les Parents de Mélie*, aimed at readers aged thirteen and over, depict psychological abuse and have more psychological and emotional character-focused plots with less action, meaning that many of Propp's functions do not apply. *Quelque chose à te dire*, however, which is targeted at readers aged between twelve and sixteen years, deals with complex family relationships whilst also containing quest-based elements which are common to the fairy-tale genre. Propp's functions therefore work well on this novel, despite it being a longer novel aimed at older readers, which

[15] Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric of Character*, p. 13.

highlights the significance of the reader, genre and focus of the texts on the structure of the plot.

Propp's Structural Analysis of Characters

Along with the thirty-one plot functions, Propp identifies seven *dramatis personae* which fulfil the functions across the fairy-tale corpus. *Dramatis personae* are different from characters, as Propp's term refers to the functional role that a figure in the text fulfils, whilst I use the term characters to denote the textually constructed figure and its characterization, i.e. the 'person' who fulfils the functional role.[16] In other words, Propp's *dramatis personae* are defined purely by their function, whereas characters have socio-cultural features such as being male, female, young or old. I will examine both of these aspects of character in the child-abuse texts. Culler notes that although not at the forefront of his study, Propp recognizes the importance of cultural stereotypes, as his functions have names which have significance to readers; for example, the terms 'struggle' and 'rescue' have specific connotations.[17] Table 2, situated at the end of this chapter, shows explicitly the relationship between *dramatis personae* and characters in the abuse corpus. Where the age of the victim is not explicitly stated, I refer to victims aged approximately eleven and under as young, and those aged twelve and above as adolescent, so as to distinguish between child victims and victims around the age of puberty, particularly significant in relation to the sexual abuse texts.

Propp's *dramatis personae* are the hero; false hero; villain; donor; helper; dispatcher; and princess and her father. The *hero* is 'that character who either directly suffers from the action of the villain in the [plot] complication (the one who senses some

[16] Greimas developed the idea of a grammar of narrative, defining characters as 'actants' and identifying a set of six binary oppositions representing the relationships between actants. See A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966) and Hawkes, pp. 87-95.
[17] Culler, p. 258.

kind of lack), or who agrees to liquidate the misfortune or lack of another person'.[18] In my abuse corpus, the hero corresponds in the first instance to the victim, and in the second instance to the witness to events who recounts the story. The *false hero*, which does not exist in the abuse narratives, is the character who presents himself as the hero, but he is revealed to be a fake, e.g. he fails a test that the real hero would pass. The *villain*, who is the abuser in my corpus, is the character who carries out the functions relating to *villainy*, *pursuit* and harming of the hero or seventh *dramatis personae*. The *donor* carries out functions relating to providing the hero with the magical agent. In my corpus, donors can provide the magical agent, or, in some cases, the victims come across the magical agent indirectly themselves, as in *La Fille du canal*, where the victim's doll acquires an extra significance.[19] The *helper* is concerned with functions of rescuing the hero from pursuit (or from abuse, in my corpus), dealing practically with the hero's misfortune and solving difficult tasks. There are three categories of helpers: universal helpers fill all five of Propp's helper functions, partial helpers fulfil several functions and specific helpers fill a single function. The *dispatcher* is responsible for setting the hero on his task, for example, asking for help resulting in the hero leaving, sending the hero on a mission or directly taking the hero somewhere. It occurs in only one child-abuse text (hence I have not included it in Table 2), in relation to sending the witness or victim away from home, resulting in abuse being uncovered.

The seventh *dramatis personae* is the *princess (sought-for person) and her father* which is both technically two characters and also a character-bound description, rather than the solely function-based titles of the other six *dramatis personae*. The pair goes together in the fulfilment of certain functions, suggesting an inextricable link between the father-daughter roles. They are responsible for functions such as the

[18] Propp, p. 50.
[19] I discuss the depictions of abuse victims' therapeutic identification with dolls and soft toys in Chapter Five.

assignment of difficult tasks relating to saving and marrying the princess and recognition of the hero, with the princess being the hero's 'prize' at the end of the story. Indeed, the princess is not an autonomous person; she is firstly possessed by the father and is secondly the product of a transaction between two men in patriarchal society, which is represented in the traditional tales. There is no 'prize' to be won in my texts and this *dramatis personae* is absent from the corpus.

The practical function of the *dramatis personae* means firstly that any character can play any role; for example both a witch and a friend could be a donor, and secondly, that different characters can play several roles, for example, a witch could be both a villain and a dispatcher. The significance of the characters lies in the role that they play within the texts; Propp's focus on characters is purely structural. Propp also explains that the numerous different characters (*not dramatis personae*) and their various attributes in fairy tales 'explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness and color, and on the other hand its no less striking uniformity, its repetition'.[20]

In the child abuse corpus, there is also a clear set of *dramatis personae*, some of which are equivalent to Propp's, although for clarity I refer to them in adapted terms which relate to the child-abuse narratives as there are some key differences between Propp's corpus and my own: my texts are not, unlike fairy tales, a series of adventures; there are fewer events and characters in the child-abuse texts; and the abuse texts also have an important psychological aspect. The figures are: victim, the equivalent of Propp's victimized hero; witness, the equivalent of the seeker hero; abuser, the equivalent of Propp's villain; helper, which is the equivalent of Propp's helper figures; hinderer, which does not have a direct equivalent in Proppian terms, but is linked to the

[20] Ibid, p. 20. Also cited in Hawkes, p. 68.

hindrance function and serves an opposite function to Propp's donor; donor, the equivalent of Propp's donor; and dispatcher, similar to Propp's dispatcher. The witness role in the child-abuse texts relates to the main protagonist taking on the role of 'rescuer', rather than victim. Therefore, in the abuse narratives, the character who is the witness can fulfil another role in the plot, which is most often that of the helper.

The *victim* and *abuser* roles are usually the fundamental roles in the narrative. Most often, there is a direct antagonistic relationship between victim and abuser, as the abuse and the victim's attempts to overcome or stop it drive the plot, as in *Monsieur Henry*, where Camille the victim tries to resist her abuser's sexual advances and in *Derrière la porte*, where the victim's attempts to seek revenge against his abusive stepmother lead to the action in the narrative. However, in some novels the victim-abuser relationship does not appear at the foreground of the plot (although the revelation of the abuse still occurs). This situation arises in *Delphine*, *Quelque chose à te dire* and *Dans la gueule du vent*, where the abuse occurs in the plot prior to the start of the narrative. In these instances, the abuser's actions have had a direct influence on the victims' life.

The *helper* figure in my corpus is the character who supports the child victim physically and/or emotionally throughout his or her ordeal, or a character who tries to stop the abuse. From a structural standpoint, the helper figure can accelerate the plot, signalling the turning point in the novel as the appearance of the helper figure often triggers the denunciation of the abuse and/or helps in the healing process. The helper may also perform the function of rescuing the victim from abuse, which occurs in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, when the witness and her parents intervene in the father's physical attack on his son. My helper figure therefore plays a more specific, subject-

defined role in the texts than Propp's equivalent of the helper, who can perform any multitude of 'helping' acts.[21]

Nikolajeva identifies the existence of the *Deus ex machina* character, who fulfils a helping role in children's novels, by appearing suddenly and unexpectedly in the plot:

> [The *Deus ex machina*] is the character, most likely an adult, who sets things right. It can be a missing parent who suddenly turns up […], forgotten distant relative who bequests [*sic*] the protagonist his title and estate, or merely an authoritative adult who neatly disentangles the problems into which the characters have got themselves.[22]

It is interesting that the helping function is common in Western children's literature, as it is in fairy tales, and Nikolajeva's observation that the *deus ex machina* is most often an adult is not necessarily true of the child-abuse corpus, as we shall see. In the abuse novels not all helper figures appear from nowhere; rather, those that aid the victim become emotionally implicated in the plot and gradually help the victim deal with the abuse. There are helpers who appear suddenly and briefly, like the *deus ex machina*, and these are often associated with punishment of the abuser and may therefore also be officials or representatives of the authorities, as in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*. Nikolajeva also comments that:

> The appearance of a *deus ex machina* usually disempowers the child protagonists, since whatever problems they might encounter, the adult figure will take care of them. Contemporary psychological novels prefer to allow characters to solve their problems unaided or otherwise leave them unsolved.[23]

In the child-abuse narratives, however, the helper figure is a positive character who, rather than negatively disempowering the child, enables the child to denounce the

[21] Propp, pp.79ff.
[22] Nikolajeva, p. 124.
[23] Ibid.

abuse, as in *Monsieur Henry*, where the helper encourages the victim to reveal her abuse through the school play, or merely supports the victim emotionally throughout the ordeal (as do the friend helpers in *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *John et moi*). Moreover, there is a large mix of child and adult helpers in the primary texts and often the child helpers are more effective than adult characters, recognizing the abuse before adults, as in *La Frontière de sable*, or seeking official help for the victim, as in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*. Child helpers are seen to be aware of, and willing to intervene in, the victim's situation, whereas the adults in the same texts are more self-absorbed. Furthermore, child hinderer characters occur in only two texts: *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait* (adult hinderer characters also appear in the same texts). This is arguably because the texts are written for young readers and therefore authors attempt to form an allegiance between the reader and young protagonist, by showing children as more insightful than those upon whom they must supposedly rely. The positive helper figures also promote the notion of children taking responsibility for more vulnerable members of society and the importance of offering help to others.

Helpers may already be known to the child victim, or may appear due to the abuse. In *Quand je serai grande* the head teacher finds a school place for the abuse victim so that she can continue her education and escape her parents, and a local tailor encourages the victim of Monsieur Henry to denounce him. Helpers who fulfil the function of incorporating official intervention in the abusive situation tend to appear later in the plot than those providing emotional support. Police officers, social workers and therapists and those working in official capacities with children often fulfil the role of these brief and official helpers. In *Les Parents de Mélie* it is a psychologist at the end of the first half of the novel who starts Mélie's healing process, telling her controlling mother: 'Je pense qu'elle est assez grande pour rentrer seule' (p. 81). Indeed, there

can be several helpers in one novel, some of whom may be present throughout the text, whilst others, like Nikolajeva's *deus ex machina*, appear briefly and more suddenly for the purposes of resolving the abuse and punishing the abuser.

The donor is the person who provides the victim with the magical agent. Helpers are often also donors, but in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, it is the victim's parents, also hinderers, who provide her with a computer, which becomes one of several therapeutic aids. In several texts (*Comme des adieux*, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, and *La Fille du canal*, for example), the magical agent (or at least one of them, if there are more than one in the text) is not specifically given by a donor character at all and in the case of *La Fille du canal*, the victim herself buys her 'magical agent' doll.

Hinderers are characters who prevent the child or helper from resolving the abuse, either knowingly, as when the helper's parents refuse to intervene in their neighbour's abusive mother-child relationship in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, or unknowingly, as in *Monsieur Henry* where Camille's mother is oblivious to Camille's plight, and sends her daughter to the singing lessons despite her protestations. Hinderers provide an obstacle in the plot which victims must overcome in order to find a resolution to their situation.

The *dispatcher* is the character who sends the victim somewhere, leading to the abuse taking place, or in the case of the witness texts, leading to the uncovering of the abuse. It occurs only in *La Frontière de Sable*, where the witness's parents send him for a 'holiday' away from their marital problems and on this holiday the witness discovers his cousin is sexually abused. Note that, although both victims are sent on trips in *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Derrière la porte*, these trips do not trigger the uncovering of abuse or the abuse itself and thus the parents are not dispatchers. In *Quelque chose à te dire* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* the child protagonists

choose to undertake visits to stay with family members independently, in spite of their mothers' better judgement. The trips lead either to the uncovering of abuse in the former, or the abuse of the protagonist, in the latter.

Table 2 also reveals the differences in the spread of roles across the different texts and hints at the 'severity' of the victim's situation. While all texts have at least one helper, the occurrence of several helpers in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, *Quand je serai grande* and *La Frontière de sable* suggests a certain amount of optimism in the texts; the abuse victims are not alone in dealing with their situation. In *Les Parents de Mélie*, however, there are four hinderers, but only one helper (a psychologist), which gives a bleak impression of the victim's position: her close friends and family prevent the resolution of the abuse and the only help the child victim receives is from a professional. Hinderers are also an interesting category in the table, as again the spread across the corpus varies massively, from texts with no hinderer, where the focus is on the relationship between victim and abuser directly, such as *Comme des adieux* and *Les Saisons dangereuse*s, to texts with multiple hinderers, such as *Les Parents de Mélie* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, where the victim is also negatively affected by prevalent social denial and ignorance of abuse personified in other characters.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Child-Abuse Characters

Table 2 further shows how the functional roles of abuser, victim, helper, hinderer and witness are fulfilled by a variety of characters in the child-abuse texts. In a deviation from Propp's solely structural study, in this section I discuss the implications of the socio-cultural representation of characters, as well as functional roles, in the corpus, as the texts are predominantly realist fiction,[24] and therefore reflect society and real

[24] The main exception being *Derrière la porte*, whose fantasy elements are discussed in Chapter Five.

abusive situations, or at least what authors believe to be representative of reality. I consider the depiction of victims and abusers, helpers, hinderers and peripheral characters, mapping issues of gender and the portrayal of parents, extended family and members of the local community across the functional roles. I discuss the *victim* and *abuser* together, as one cannot exist without the other, and taking a symbiotic approach to the two groups reveals interesting conclusions regarding the depiction of the child-victim dynamics.

In the psychological abuse novels, four out of six victims are girls, with *Derrière la porte* having a boy victim and *J'entends pleurer la nuit* containing both a boy and a girl victim. All of the abusers in this category, except the father in *Tu te soumettras*, are female, which reproduces the depiction of psychological abusers in traditional fairy tales as women, with evil stepmothers and cruel witches being common characters.[25] In *Les parents de Mélie*, *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *Derrière la porte* the perpetrators are mothers or stepmothers, whilst in the case of *La Petite Maîtresse* it is a female teacher and in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* it is the protagonist's aunt and boy and girl cousins who psychologically abuse and control the female child victim. In fact, in *Sophie*, the aunt encourages and trains her children to abuse others. The female perpetrators of abuse, except the mother in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* (whose behaviour is the result of a mental illness), share a common frustration with their domestic situation or desire to express their social superiority. In *La Petite Maîtresse*, the class teacher's struggle to cope with her own family and fulfil her professional duties leads to

[25] Interestingly, figures from the helpline *Enfance maltraitée* state that in 1995, 40% of calls regarding mistreatment of children implicated the father as abuser and 30% implicated the mother. Given that sexual abuse carried out by mothers is relatively rare (see the following two footnotes), the figures suggest that mothers are more frequent perpetrators of violence or mental cruelty than other forms of abuse. It must be noted that this information is based on reported cases. See, Liliane Binard and Jean-Luc Clouard, *Le Drame de la pédophilie: Etat des lieux – Protection des enfants* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), p 38.

her gradually psychologically manipulating the victim to take on her role whilst she is absent and with her family.

In *Derrière la porte* and *Les Parents de Mélie* the stepmother and mother are frustrated in their roles. Mélie's mother was previously, but is no longer, wealthy and she resents her daughter's youth and potential. In *Derrière la porte*, the abuser is frustrated with her feelings of powerlessness in her domestic life and Aunt Cora's incitement of abuse amongst her children in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* is rooted in her belief in the superiority of her family, which, coupled with the abdication of her husband and the children's father, leads to emotional poverty and frustration. In *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, moral and religious superiority also play a role in the father's psychological abuse, as it is his emotional detachment from his children and desire to project a positive image of the family in society, which lead to the narrator's experience of mental intimidation and strict punishments.

In the sexual abuse novels all of the victims are female and all of the abusers are male, with the exception of two texts which deal with homosexual paedophilia: *Mauvais coup*, which depicts a priest and male victim, and *Dans la gueule du vent*, where the abuser is the male victim's stepfather. The gender of abusers and victims reflects the fact that it is statistically more common to have a male abuser-female victim dynamic.[26] The male abusers are teachers, uncles, family friends, and in two cases, *Moi, Delphine* and *Quelque chose à te dire*, the fathers are the abusers. Thus the texts reflect the fact that sexual abusers are most likely to be people who are well-known to the victim.[27] In four texts the issue of incest is confronted, with *Delphine* and *Quelque*

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[26] Jocelyn Robert, for example, comments that it is very rare for women to be sexual abusers. *Te laisse pas faire! Les abus sexuels aux enfants* (Québec: Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2000), p. 14. See also American child abuse expert David Finkelhor's article: 'The Prevention of Childhood Sexual Abuse', *The Future of Children*, 19:2 (Fall 2009), 169-194, p. 172.

[27] It is a commonly acknowledged fact amongst child-abuse specialists that most abusers are family members or friends of the victim. See, for example, Gérard Lopez, *Les Violences sexuelles sur les*

chose à te dire depicting father-daughter incest and *P'tits bateaux* and *La Frontière de sable* portraying uncles who sexually abuse their nieces. Interestingly, the two father-daughter incest texts do not directly depict the abuse, as the villainy is not a plot function, but is exposed as having occurred previously. The incest is thus distanced from the reader in a way which only occurs in one other sexual abuse text; *Dans la gueule du vent* where the sexual abuse occurs again in a parental relationship, also before the narrative begins, as the stepfather abuses his stepson.

Males are also the perpetrators of physical abuse in *John et moi*, *Comme des adieux*, *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *Coups pour coups*. The abusers are all fathers of the victims and the victims are also all males, except *John et moi* where both siblings John and Elsa are victims, although Elsa as narrator only ever describes her brother and mother being beaten by her father, not herself. Thus it appears that there is a clear gender divide prevalent in the corpus with regards to type of abuse and depicted abuser, with males being seen as violent and sexual abusers, and women presented as manipulative psychological abusers. *Quand je serai grande* is an exception to this trend, as the mother is the perpetrator of physical abuse on her daughter and in *Derrière la porte* the stepmother is both physically and psychologically abusive towards her stepson. This gender stereotyping is prevalent throughout literature and more specifically fairy tales; the fact that experts have identified that sexual abuse is

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enfants (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 3-4; Robert., p. 11. Figures from the helpline Enfance maltraitée show a 10% increase in calls revealing sexual abuse between 1994 and 1995. 67% of calls denounced a close family member (father, mother, brother, sister, step-mother, step-father and grandparents) as a sexual abuser. See Binard and Clouard, p. 38; p. 36. Official figures on cases of rape and incest are unreliable due to the reluctance of victims to report cases caused by feelings of shame and guilt for the potential punishment of their relative. So whilst being an indicator of the prevalence of sexual abuse, I would take the figures to be underestimates of the real situation. See, for example, Lopez's discussion of socially and economically stable families' tendency to silence the abuse: Lopez, p. 101.

predominantly committed by males shows that authors are depicting 'the norm', but are not reflecting the extent of parental abuse.[28]

The sex of the helper figure appears not to be dependent on the sex of either the victim or the abuser. Indeed, in the sexual abuse novels, with mainly female victims and male abusers, there is a mix of male and female helper figures, which suggests that all helpers serve the same structural role: to provide the trigger for the *dénouement* and to represent a positive figure and show optimism with regards to having confidence in the world and humanity. This is particularly important in the sexual abuse novels (the exceptions being *Dans la gueule du vent* and *Mauvais coup* where the abuser is the same sex as the victim), where the same-sex parent figure is seen to hinder the uncovering of the abuse and it seems that no-one is trustworthy. The distribution of negative roles across male and female characters in the corpus also leads to a balanced representation of the sexes for adolescent readers.

Teachers, whilst in several cases constituting the abuser, are in other novels frequently seen to be helper figures. It has been noted that in girls' books 'there is commonly one special female teacher who becomes the heroine's model.'[29] Although this is not particularly the case in my corpus, the female teachers in the sexual abuse novels in particular function as helpers, which tends to redress the balance of good and evil in adult authority figures within the texts. This occurs in *La Fille du canal* where the female teacher, a former abuse victim herself, uncovers Sarah's abuse by her male art teacher and runs to her rescue. In *Monsieur Henry* the female class teacher facilitates Camille's confession and mental processing of the abuse by enabling her to act out

[28] From the non-selected abuse texts, males are predominantly physical abusers (for example, Daniel Meynard, *Tu ne boiras pas la mer et les poissons* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2002) and Marie-Sabine Roger, *Attention, fragiles* (Paris: Seuil, 2000)). Janine Teisson's, *La Petite Cinglée* (Paris: Climats, 1993) depicts a physically and psychologically abusive mother-daughter relationship. In the wider field, the American text by Barry Lyga, *Boy Toy*, depicts an interesting exception to the trend of male sexual abuser: a female teacher grooms and sexually abuses a male pupil.

[29] Nikolajeva, p. 121.

Henry's rituals metaphorically in the class play. However, a local tailor is the initial helper figure, as he listens to Camille's concerns, reduces her feelings of isolation by describing, or perhaps inventing, other victims of Henry, and confronts the abuser. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, a female teacher and a female author help the victim, Marie-Bénédicte, to acknowledge her abuse and denounce her incestuous uncle. The positive female characters here compensate for the ineffectual mother figure. Teachers are key authority figures in a child's life and one of the more consistent links to adult society, with abusive teachers representing corruption in the adult world, whilst helper teachers promote confidence in adult society. Overall there are three abusive teachers and one hinderer, and four helper teachers across the various texts. Thus there is a relatively equal spread of positive and negative teacher characters. In *La Fille du canal* and *Monsieur Henry* each text has one abusive and one helper teacher. In both texts the abusive teachers give private lessons and the helpers are school teachers, which suggests the safety of the school environment (though this is not the case in *La Petite Maîtresse*, where the class teacher is the abuser, or *Mauvais coup*, where the school priest attempts to abuse the protagonist).

The elderly person has been identified by Ottevaera-van Praag as a key positive figure in modern French children's fiction,[30] and grandparents are frequently depicted as positive helper figures in contemporary French young-adult problem novels overall.[31] In the child-abuse corpus, however, grandparent figures are somewhat limited. In *Derrière la porte*, the stepmother's gardener (who is also a step-relative,

[30] Ottevaere-van Praag, p. 207.

[31] Some examples of recent texts containing positive grandparent figures are: Bernard Friot, *Folle* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2007); Isabelle Rossignol, *F comme garçon* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2007); Marie-Sophie Vermot, *Deux fois rien* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2006). Sébastien Joanniez's *Terminus Noël* (Paris: Éditions du Rouergue, 2002) contains a positive homeless old male character, although he is not the protagonist's grandfather, but serves as a substitute. Murail's *La Fille du docteur Baudoin* is an example of one of the few texts which depict abusive grandparents: the grandfather physically and psychologically abuses his grandson.

although this is unknown initially) constitutes a caring parental figure for the abused Damien, providing him with a heater for his attic room, food and emotional support. The gardener's mother also serves as form of grandmother figure, feeding and nurturing Damien. In *La Petite Maîtresse*, it is the victim's grandparents who ultimately resolve the psychological abuse inflicted upon Caroline by her class teacher. Caroline's grandfather discovers a letter detailing her experience of abuse that she intends to send to a former teacher, and he acts upon it, denouncing her abuser. There are also two examples of negative grandmother figures in the corpus: Mélie's grandmother is a hinderer character, failing to respond to her granddaughter's plea for help and in *Quelque chose à te dire*, the victim's mother (grandmother to the child witness Ariane) conceals the sexual abuse of her daughter and also becomes a negative grandmother figure to Ariane, when she visits the grandmother and uncovers her mother's past.

Helpers can be any age and child helper figures are just as common as adult helper figures; indeed, many of the texts have both adult and child helpers, where the child supports the victim emotionally and triggers further help for the protagonist, with the adult providing more practical intervention in the abusive situation. *J'entends pleurer la nuit* uses William, a child, as the main helper figure, yet William receives practical advice from his older sister and representatives of *Enfance maltraitée*.[32] In *La Frontière de sable* it is the victim's cousin, Frédo, who first discovers the uncle's sexual abuse and initiates the victim's rescue, yet he is aided by Mehdi, a waiter in the family's café, who draws in professional help from his social-worker girlfriend, who (unsuccessfully) broaches the possibility of incest with the victim's parents. Mehdi also serves as an emotional helper to the child helper. In *Quelque chose à te dire,* the helper figure aids the child protagonist, who uncovers her mother's childhood abuse. The adult male

[32] In 2008 *Enfance maltraitée* changed its name to *Enfance en danger*.

helps the daughter Ariane uncover the truth about her mother's experience of incest and her deceased son, so that Ariane fulfils the role of her mother's helper, prompting the former victim to confront her trauma. In *Delphine*, the victim-protagonist has both an anonymous boy penfriend, who initially poses as the victim's former female schoolfriend, and a foster mother who serve as helpers, although as the abuse took place in the pre-narrative past, the characters are helpers in the sense that they enable Delphine to acknowledge – and reveal to the reader – her past abuse and overcome its aftermath. In the three novels *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *La Frontière de sable*, the child helpers are the narrators and focalizers of the texts and this witness-narrator technique is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The presence of a child-only helper figure in several texts reinforces the negative image of the adult world, in some ways supporting Ottevaera-van Praag's observation that in recent French children's fiction young people represent the good in the world and adults have negative characteristics.[33]

Due to the subject matter of the corpus, social workers, therapists, foster carers, family judges and children's authorities also appear in eight of the texts as helpers. Authorities also appear in some texts without serving a specific helping function, or where the victim does not accept the help. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* the *conseillère d'éducation* raises concerns over the victim's behaviour with her parents, but the victim refuses to engage; in *Dans la gueule du vent* the police take the victim to his foster family and a psychologist assesses the victim's mental state at the end of the text; in *John et moi* social workers try but fail to encourage the victims to confess their abuse, and in *Delphine* child protection services oversee the victim's contact with her biological family.

[33] Ottevaere-van Praag, p. 343.

The use of such characters serves to introduce young readers to social services, police and judicial officials and to how child abuse is dealt with in society. Social workers and legal officials are either already involved with families before the abuse comes to light (as in *Coups pour coups*), suggesting troubled families being prone to abuse, or show how state bodies become involved after the event, as in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, where a judge punishes the victim's physically abusive father. The presence of official helpers also highlights the severity of the abuser's behaviour and provides institutional confirmation for young readers that abusers, not the abused, are at fault. This aspect of the narratives projects the problem onto a larger social scale, as it is no longer specific to the individual victim, but a social and legal matter, which also serves a pedagogical function in the texts by educating readers on the issue of abuse. 'Official' characters present a 'realistic' image of the events and introduce child readers to the legal and official protocol of the denunciation of abuse and the necessity of seeking professional help. It has to be said, however, that the legal process is often superficially depicted and abuse immediately and easily resolved, as in *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *Monsieur Henry*, where the texts briefly mention that the abusers are imprisoned and it appears that this takes place almost immediately after the denunciation of the abuser and without the victim's involvement. There is a contrast here with the depiction of emotional recovery, which is seen to be a longer-term prospect in the texts.

The victims in *Les Parents de Mélie* and *P'tits bateaux* acquire therapists towards the end of the texts to aid their psychological recovery. Indeed, in *Mélie*, the responsibility of the abuser is never directly confronted, but the victim manages to extract herself from the situation with the support of her therapist. The presence of psychologists and counsellors in the narratives, in contrast to the role of the legal

representatives, acknowledges the personal trauma experienced by victims. The extent of the emotional impact of the abuse is therefore depicted by the victims' need for official help, hinting at the difficulty of overcoming the trauma and the time which the healing process can take. Yet therapeutic intervention also creates a positive image of the future, as the victims are seen to work through their experiences.

With regard to the characterization of *hinderers*, mothers are overwhelmingly depicted as unwitting hinderer figures in the sexual abuse novels by the way in which they appear unapproachable to their children, or ignore the child's pleas to avoid the abuser. In *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, Camille's mother frequently tells her daughter how wonderful the abuser is (p. 7), a view which resonates in the title of the text, and criticizes her daughter: 'Elle me dit capricieuse, enfant gâtée, rebelle.' In *La Fille du canal*, *Quelque chose à te dire*, and *La Frontière de sable*, the mothers are also seen to hinder the victims and prolong the abuse due to their emotional unavailability. Indeed in *Quelque chose*, it is the victim's mother who conceals the father's impregnation of his own daughter by pretending that the resulting baby is her own son. The alcoholic mother in *Delphine* is seen to be in no fit mental state to protect her daughter, and regularly disappoints and rejects her. Thus a negative image of the mothers of abuse victims is created cumulatively in the corpus, as all fail to protect their children and are portrayed as worsening the victim's situation and reducing their ability to reveal the abuse.

Furthermore, it is the mothers who carry out the majority of child care compared with the father characters and, therefore, it is they who have more interaction with the children and are seemingly presented as failing carers. However, at the end of *Monsieur Henry* and *La Fille du canal*, the mothers are appalled at the events and show remorse and support for the victims, although this positive shift in characterization is not

evident in all three of the texts: Marie-Bénédicte's mother still rejects her daughter at the end of *P'tits bateaux*, due to her conflicting loyalties towards her abuser brother and victim daughter. This family loyalty is also present in *La Frontière de sable*, where the victim's mother is reluctant to accept that her husband's brother is capable of assaulting his own niece. Interestingly, when mother characters work outside of the home, this is seen to facilitate the sexual abuse. In *P'tits bateaux* the abuse takes place at the victim's home on Wednesday afternoons when both parents are absent and in *La Frontière de sable*, the mother is presented as being oblivious to her daughter's abuse due to being preoccupied with the family business. Similarly, in *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* the mother character starts a new job and is accused by both the father and the victim of neglecting the family. Indeed, the victim claims that her mother's work commitments lead to her inability to notice the abuse. Mothers are thus generally negative characters in the texts, as they are frequently abusers and hinderers, but rarely helper figures to the victims and are thus in contradiction to their expected role as primary childcarers.

In the psychological abuse novels, *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* and *Les Parents de Mélie* and the physical abuse novel *Quand je serai grande*, the hinderers are the husbands of the female abusers, which suggests a reversal of roles from the sexual abuse novels, presenting an alternative to the common concept of female victim-male abuser. Mélie's father is both a victim and complicit in the abuse as he complies with his wife's aggressive and cruel demands and thus fails to protect his daughter. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, Sophie's uncle also fails to stop his wife's and children's psychologically abusive behaviour towards both of the victims, Sophie and Félix. However, his ineffectual behaviour is negatively depicted as the result of indifference, and lack of influence ('Personne ne fait attention à lui' [p. 155]), rather than as active

complicity, as is the case with Mélie's father. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* the father is, in effect, a structurally absent husband and parent (as is the victim's father in *Derrière la porte*), which ensures that the abusers continue their behaviour unchecked. Thus it seems that, overall, the female hinderers are more likely to actively hinder the child victims, whereas the male hinderers are guilty of hindering via absenteeism, failing to notice and acknowledge the signs of abuse.

Where hinderers are not close relatives, they appear to be members of society who do not want to become involved in the abusive situation, typically parents of friends and extended family members. In *Les Parents de Mélie*, the victim's grandmother and godparents witness abusive scenes, such as Mélie's thirteenth birthday when her parents present her with a bow-less violin, and simply pretend that they have not occurred. Furthermore, when Mélie confesses her mother's behaviour to her friend, Brigitte dismisses the idea of an unloving mother as impossible. In *Derrière la porte* the abuser's cook refuses to acknowledge the extent of the abuse on the child victim, as she 'voulait garder sa place' (p. 20) and in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* the witness's parents also refuse to intervene in the abuse of the children living in the apartment above them, not wanting to 'se mêler de ce qui ne [les] regarde pas' (p. 39), although this is later revealed to be due to the mother's own previous mental health problems and the desire to avoid a relapse. It is the baker in *John et moi* who dismisses the cry-for-help letter sent to her by the victim Elsa. The victim's helper figure in *Mauvais coup*, Père Para, drives the child home and acknowledges his abusive experience, but also serves as hinderer as he suggests that the victim should conceal the sexually predatory behaviour of the priest. The existence of dismissive hinderer characters in several of the texts, whilst adding complexity and complication to the thematically similar plots of

the narratives, suggests the authors' desires to expose the failures of wider society in protecting children from harm.

Sheldrick Ross examines the common narrative and plot features of the teenage problem novel, including the depiction of recurrent characters. She identifies 'the friend, the first sexual partner, family members, the outcast, and the adult mentor' as commonly recurring figures in young adult texts and goes on to explain that '[p]arents are often depicted as negative, blocking figures […]. The adult mentor, to whom the adolescent may turn as a surrogate parent, is often a marginal figure in the adult world, an outcast who has been disgraced'.[34] The outcast status of the mentor is, I presume, intended to mirror the teenager's own feelings of isolation and alienation from society. Similarly, Ottevaere-van Praag observes from her study of children's literature that from around 1974 criticism of the adult world became more prevalent in French young-adult texts, and absent parents are a common feature of children's literature.[35] It is perhaps therefore hardly surprising that the overall impression of parental characters in the child-abuse corpus is negative. Parents are abusers, are complicit in the abuse of their children, or are simply ineffectual and absent. In the majority of texts (seventeen out of twenty) the emotional or physical absence of a parent enables the abuse to take place. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, while the victim's mother is a positive helper figure, her absence on Sophie's second trip to stay with her aunt facilitates the child becoming the target of her aunt and cousins' abuse.[36] Parents are physically absent in *Derrière la porte*, where Damien's father works away and shows little interest in his son; *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, where the victims' father is no longer living with the mentally ill abusive mother; and *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, where Alex's mother died when he was younger.

[34] Sheldrick Ross, pp. 177-8.
[35] Ottevaere-van Praag, p. 343.
[36] Sophie insists that she goes alone on the trip and her mother must negotiate protecting her child and granting her independence.

Given the topic of child abuse, it seems inevitable that parents are depicted negatively: they are either unaware of the abuse, fail to prevent it, or carry it out. This phenomenon of ineffectual and harmful parents is common in many twenty-first century French young-adult novels, which is due to the trend in modern children's fiction to foreground the child protagonist's experiences, and, specifically, his or her voice and perspective.[37]

In seven texts one parent is depicted as an abuser whilst the other is present physically in the narrative. The non-abusive parents are, however, emotionally absent or unable to provide physical support to the child victim. *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, *John et moi*, *Coups pour coups* and *Delphine* all depict mothers who also suffer at the hands of the fathers' aggression and are therefore unable to protect their children, whereas in *Quelque chose à te dire*, the victim's mother conceals the father's rape of his daughter. In *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Quand je serai grande*, however, the situation is reversed and it is an ineffective father who fails to protect his daughter from an abusive mother. The existence of these emotionally absent but physically present figures contributes to the child's experience of abuse and isolation, as they are effectively victims of both parents.

Although relatively rare in the corpus, positive parent characters exist in four of the sexual abuse novels and one psychological abuse novel, with two of the five positive parents being mothers. The protagonist's mother in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* tries to enable Sophie to mature independently, rescuing her at the end of the novel when the psychological abuse of her daughter by her relatives becomes apparent: 'Lève-toi, ma toute petite. Viens. Nous partons' (p. 158). In *Les Saisons dangereuses*, Marjo's mother and father put an end to the inappropriate relationship between their daughter and the older family friend, with the mother's assertion, 'On n'a

[37] In my MA dissertation, *Representations of Adolescent Identity in Modern French Teenage Problem Novels*, University of Nottingham, 2008, all of the 15-20 texts studied dealt with parent-child conflict and in the majority of the texts, the parents failed to support their children in some way.

pas le droit de jouer avec les sentiments des enfants…' (p. 62), echoing throughout the final pages of the novel. The mother then supports her daughter after the child mourns the loss of her first love (p. 74). The mothers in these two novels play a traditional maternal role, protecting their daughters from their abusers. In *Les Saisons dangereuses*, Marjo's parents, however, deal with their friend, the abuser, whereas Sophie's mother simply removes the child from the abusive aunt's house, without confronting her sister, with whom she was already on strained terms.

The fathers in the sexual abuse novels are portrayed more positively than their female counterparts, who are seen to hinder the victim in his or her attempts to escape the abuse. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* Marie-Bénédicte's 'Papriska' supports his daughter through the aftermath of the abuse while the mother is emotionally absent. Indeed, the father actively encourages Marie-Bénédicte's post-abuse identity by welcoming his daughter's name change from Marie-Bénédicte to Maud (the connotations of each [*bénie* and *maudite*] and the protagonist's desire to change from the former to the latter after being abused emphasize the abuse-victim's trauma, whilst also constituting an aspect of her psychological healing). Camille's father in *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and Sarah's father in *La Fille du canal* both play a limited role within the novels, yet both are seen to defend their daughters against the mothers' criticisms. Camille's father retaliates in defence of the victim when the mother appears stressed with her new job (pp. 12; 31), whilst Sarah's father attempts, albeit unsuccessfully, to be emotionally supportive towards his troubled daughter. Although he fails to reach out to Sarah, he acknowledges his failures: 'Il pose un baiser timide sur sa joue. […] Il se souvient combien il souffrait du silence de ses parents' (p. 29). In *Mauvais coup*, whilst the protagonist's parents are not aware of the abusive incident, his father suspects that something is troubling his son (p. 93). Thus whilst these fathers are not actual helper

figures and fail to save their children, they provide a hint of optimism for readers and promote the confiding of abuse in parents. Nikolajeva comments that 'parents who ignore their children are not necessarily evil. Their physical or emotional absence may be the prerequisite for the protagonist's maturation', which is the case in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*.[38] In the sexual abuse novels in particular, the child protagonist's lack of maternal support, whilst not necessarily a 'prerequisite for maturation', forces the victim (and reader) to consider other alternative sources of support and independently develop the strength to denounce the abuser. Indeed, from a structural perspective, the lack of confidence in the parents is a prerequisite for the child's emotional struggle and journey, creating a storyline and complications in the plot. The inclusion of the understanding father figure, however, at least provides some hope for the child protagonist and a source of optimism for the reader.

There are also four instances of positive 'replacement' parents in the texts. The victims' foster parents in *Dans la gueule du vent* and *Delphine* serve to support the child victims in overcoming their abusive past family situations, while in *Coups pour coups* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait* it is the parents of a child friend who serve as positive adult figures to their own child and to the child victim. Thus in these texts, where both of the victims' parents are implicated in the child's abuse, either directly as abusers, indirectly as hinderer figures, or due to their absence, another character or pair of characters represents the traditional supportive and nurturing function of the parent.

Common minor characters in the child-abuse genre are siblings, friends and classmates, teachers and head teachers, who represent the main social spheres of a child's life. Characters from minority ethnic backgrounds are also present in several novels, but only as secondary and never as major characters. In *Monsieur Henry*, the

[38] Nikolajeva, 'Beyond the Grammar of Story, or How Can Children's Literature Criticism Benefit from Narrative Theory?', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 28:1 (2003), 5-16, p. 10.

adult helper figure is James 'un grand Noir qui habite dans le quartier' (p. 44), whilst in *La Frontière de sable* the adult helper figure Mehdi is presumably a descendent of immigrant parents or grandparents, given the North African consonance of his name. Indeed, a restaurant customer declares: 'dans ton pays, les gamines, à cet âge-là, elles sont déjà bonnes à marier', which is met with Mehdi's assertion: 'Mon pays, c'est ici' (p. 45). Furthermore, a Kabyle character is included in *Tu te soumettras*, to whom the protagonist's father shows suspicion and hostility due to her differing ethnicity. The family of the protagonist of *Mauvais coup* originates from Poland and the child character is seen to encounter difficulty when he tries to spell out his name at school (p. 150), whilst *Quand je serai grande* also depicts the difficulties of Polish migrant workers. Thus in three of the texts the issue of discrimination and prejudice is also broached, whilst the inclusion of characters from different backgrounds provides a range of subjectivities for readers, which in the case of the corpus texts leads to the depiction of a multitude of attitudes and perspectives and presents a broader portrait of society, which confirms Nikolajeva's findings across the spectrum of children's fiction.[39]

The texts *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, which have a more linear plot and are for younger readers, contain a wide range of two-dimensional backdrop characters to set the scene, such as neighbours and school friends. The lengthier and more psychologically complex novels *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie and Les Parents de Mélie* contain a small sample of peripheral characters relevant to the settings in which the child protagonists are placed and in both texts. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, the abusers' friends, and a charity worker play the role of respectable members of the community who perpetuate the child abuse by being complicit in the abusers' behaviour which they fail to criticize. In this sense, the

[39] Ibid., p. 8.

peripheral characters of the more complex books play a more significant role in the texts. In *Coups pour coups*, peripheral characters are given a narrative voice and perspective as the text is constructed using different characters' perceptions of story events. Moreover, the inclusion of characters of different religions and ethnicities represents modern-day eclectic society and those within it.[40] In *Delphine*, the presence of numerous peripheral characters, including social workers, foster mothers, foster siblings, school friends and biological family members, exemplifies the protagonist's chaotic home life, reflecting the child's feelings of confusion and lack of belonging in the world. Indeed, the family is an on-going source of conflict for the victim. However, where there is a lack of peripheral characters in the child-abuse novels, an isolated image of the child protagonist is created. In *La Fille du canal*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père, Les Saisons dangereuses,* and *Derrière la porte*, the limited range of characters gives the impression of the child victim being alone in his or her struggle against the abuser, cut off from the rest of the world.

The examination of recurrent characters across the child-abuse corpus reveals that, in line with Propp's findings, there is a finite number of structural roles in the abuse texts. The roles of abuser, victim, helper and hinderer are the core figures which play out the plot functions in the narratives, with the witness character being a further role which appears dependent upon whose actions the plot follows: victim or witness. Yet in spite of the limited number of roles, there is a vast array of characters across the texts, who are seen to fulfil the roles in different and often contradictory ways. Teachers, for example, are presented as both abusers and helpers across the corpus and parents are predominantly depicted in a negative manner, with mothers particularly villainous in some of the texts. The texts depict the most common abuser-victim dynamics, that of

[40] The polyphonic qualities of the corpus texts are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

male sexual abusers and female child victims, which shows an attempt to reflect the social reality of abuse. The most socially taboo scenarios, however, that of father-daughter incest and male homosexual paedophilia, are present in only four of the texts, and those are the more psychologically-oriented texts.

Conclusion

The existence of a specific set of recurrent features in the novels suggests a common cultural approach to the issue of abuse, with positive helper figures and the ultimate punishment of the victim and resolution of abuse a common concern in French young-adolescent fiction, serving a pedagogical function. The characterization of *dramatis personae* also reveals significant trends across the corpus. Abusers and hinderers are commonly portrayed in the texts as parents, perpetuating the modern phenomenon in French young-adult fiction of failing parents who prevent or, indeed, prompt their children's emotional and independent development. Helpers either offer emotional support, fulfilling the traditional parental role, or offer practical resolutions to the abusive situation. Teachers are presented equally as positive and negative characters, sometimes all within the same text, which prevents stereotyping of the teaching role. Moreover, just as Propp remarks regarding the fairy tale corpus, although there is some uniformity to the tales, there is also a great variety among the stories caused by diverse characterization. The variety of ways that abusers and helpers in particular are depicted represents the recurrence of key settings and relationships in teenage fiction. Young protagonists spend the majority of their time in school, or at after school activities, and with friends and family. In this sense, there is a limited arena from which abusers emerge and there are no abusers who are strangers, in spite of high profile real-life cases involving victims being abused by strangers. There is also a variety of secondary

helper characters in the texts, a significant proportion of whom have different ethnicities to the victim. Racial differences are positively depicted, although characters from different racial backgrounds are limited to secondary roles in the texts.

In none of the novels does the abuse continue past the point of the end of the narrative. In spite of this, resolutions are far from psychologically complete in all of the texts, hinting at the far-reaching impact and damage caused by abuse. *Trickery*, *villainy* and magical agents and helpers are common across the corpus, although modified slightly from Propp's fairy-tale bias to more realist features based upon abuse, manipulation, and aids to enable the denunciation of abuse.[41] Indeed, many of Propp's features can be applied directly to the texts or adapted to reveal the functions of the modern abuse corpus, suggesting that authors of contemporary teenage fiction incorporate traditional plot elements from fairy tales into their narratives, and also that elements of fairy tales appear in a wider set of narratives. However, what also becomes clear is that some of the more complex novels with more than one strand or aspect to the plot are not represented fully by the linear, action-oriented analysis. Indeed, it has been impossible to draw a chronological list of functions applicable to all of the abuse texts as functions occur at different points across narratives and are also often repeated. The lengthier and more complex texts, such as *Mélie* and *Tu te soumettras*, also appear to have fewer functions, which reveals that although perhaps appearing 'basic' when analysed via functions, this examination is incomplete and misleading. The reduction of these texts in particular to plot functions highlights the important difference between fairy tales and some of the texts of the abuse corpus, and that is the way in which issues of narration and time alter the order and perspective of the story, as the child-abuse texts often contain repetition or extended descriptions of certain events.

[41] Chapter Five focuses on the narrative and dramatic ways that child victims communicate their abuse.

Propp himself acknowledges: 'The *style* of a tale is a phenomenon which must be studied separately',[42] and the ways in which narration and time affect the story in the child-abuse texts will be considered in subsequent chapters of this study.

[42] Propp, p. 113.

Table 2 – Child Abuse Characters (continued overleaf)

TEXT Green-sexual Grey-physical White-psychological	VICTIM	WITNESS	ABUSER	DONOR	HELPER	HINDERER
Le si gentil monsieur Henry	10 yr old girl		Male singing teacher	Female teacher	1. Black male tailor neighbour 2. Female teacher	Mother
La Frontière de Sable	8 yr old girl	12 year old male cousin	Paternal uncle		1. Male cousin witness 2. Male employee of family 3. Female social worker partner of male helper	Mother, primarily, and father
La Fille du canal	11 yr old girl	Female teacher	Male art teacher		Female teacher witness	Mother and father
Les Saisons dangereuses	12 year old girl		Male family friend		Mother	
Maman,les P'tits bateaux	12/13 year old girl		Maternal uncle	Parents	1. Female writer 2. Female teacher 3. Father	Mother
Dans la gueule du vent	Young boy		Stepfather	Foster mother	Foster family	Mother
Mauvais coup	11/12 year old boy		Male priest 1		Male priest 2	Male priest 2
Moi, Delphine, 13 ans…	13 year old girl		Father	1. Penfriend 2. Foster mother's daughter	1. Foster mother 2. Male penfriend	Mother
Quelque chose à te dire	Witness's mother when she was 14	Adolescent daughter	Victim's father		1. Adult male helps daughter 2. Daughter helps victim	Victim's mother
John et moi	Approx. 12 year old girl and boy twins		Father	Class teacher	1. Child friends 2. Social worker	1. Mother 2. Female baker
Coups pour coups	11 year old boy		Father		1. Male friend 2. Female cleaner 3. Social worker 4. Enfance maltraitée representative	1. Mother 2. Male head teacher
Le Garçon qui se taisait	10/11 year old boy	10/11 year old girl classmate	Father	Mother (deceased)	1. Girl classmate witness 2. Girl's parents 3. Judge	1. Mother (deceased) 2. Male classmate

Comme des adieux	Adolescent boy		Father and mother		1. Adult male family friend	
Quand je serai grande	Girl from childhood to adolescence		Mother	Second female neighbour	1. Female neighbour 2.Second female neighbour 3. Father 4. Female headteacher	1. Father 2. Female teacher
Derrière la porte	Approx 11/12 year old boy		Stepmother		1. Gardener 2. Ghost	Female cook
Les Parents de Mélie	Girl from childhood to adolescence		Mother		Female psychologist	1. Female friend 2. Male doctor 3.Grandmother 4. Father
La Petite Maîtresse	Approx 11 year old girl		Female teacher		1.Grandparents 2. Male & female friend	Parents
Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie	Young girl (narrator) and young boy		Aunt, male cousin, female cousin		Mother	1. Uncle 2. Narrator for the young boy
J'entends pleurer la nuit	13 year old brother and 7 year old sister	13 year old boy	Mother		1. Female social worker 2. Boy neighbour 3. Boy neighbour's adult sister 4. Enfance maltraitée representative	1. Helper's parents 2. Victims' male and female neighbours
Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père	Girl from childhood to adolescence		Father	Female friend	1. Female Kabylle 2. Male and female neighbours	Mother

Chapter Two
Child Victim Narration and Focalization

In the following two chapters I examine the effect of using different narrative voices and different focalizers to present the topic of abuse. According to Mieke Bal, the 'narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts'.[1] Indeed, the choice of a specific narrator corresponds to what is told, how much of it is told, and how it is told. Who narrates the story and from whose point of view the events are told have a significant role to play in the child-abuse corpus, as the texts deal with a very sensitive subject that directly involves child and adolescent victims. Thus the narrative voice and perspective influences how much narrators and readers 'know' and understand within the narrative. Due to the unequal balance of power between the adult author and child reader, narrative voice and perspective in children's literature has become a popular area of study for children's literature researchers.[2] Nikolajeva argues: '[i]t is usually difficult for child readers (or any unsophisticated readers) to liberate themselves from the subjectivity imposed on them by the text; therefore the choice of narrative perspective in children's fiction is in many respects more important than in general fiction'.[3] While Nikolajeva's equating of young readers with a lack of sophistication and her claim that voice and perspective is of lesser importance in general fiction than in children's fiction are clear over-generalizations, her comment highlights the central issue relevant to my corpus of how narrative perspective or voice impacts upon the depiction of the themes of incest, sexual assault and violence, in texts written by adults,

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[1] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Translated by Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 12.
[2] See, for example, Cadden, ed., and Prince, *Pour une théorie littéraire*.
[3] Nikolajeva, 'Beyond the Grammar', p. 11.

but targeted at readers who are deemed legally too young to have any experience of sexual intercourse, yet who may of course be, or know, potential victims.[4]

Nikolajeva discusses the coexistence of the child's perspective with an older narrative voice, which she argues is prevalent in fiction for young readers. 'The voice and the point of view do not necessarily coincide [in fiction], and in children's literature they seldom coincide, since the narrative voice belongs to an adult while the point of view is that of a child'.[5] Nikolajeva argues that a child focalizer with an adult narrator is more effective than an autodiegetic narrator in children's literature, as 'a personal narrator who is a child telling the story more or less as it unfolds, in simultaneous personal narration, lacks both verbal and cognitive skills to articulate his emotions. An adult narrative agency focalizing young characters can verbalize their thoughts and feelings for them.'[6] Nikolajeva's observations may be relevant for certain texts, yet her argument highlights the assumption that a child-focalized and child-narrated text inevitably lacks sophistication and complexity, a claim I feel is open to further investigation. In a similar vein, Wall uses analysis of the narrator-narratee relationship to define what a children's book is and identifies the direct address to a child narratee as the fundamental indicator. Wall, however, acknowledges the difference between children's and teenage fiction, commenting that 'present-day adolescents would react unfavourably to any suggestion that there is any gap [between (adult) narrator and (teenage) narratee] at all. Hence the predominance in teenage fiction of adolescent

[4] The age of consent in France is fifteen, although intercourse with minors under the age of eighteen is forbidden if carried out by an adult in a position of authority over the adolescent. See articles 227-22 to 227-27 of the *Code pénal*, <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070719> Accessed 06/01/14.
[5] Nikolajeva, p. 11.
[6] Ibid., p. 12.

first-person narrators, or of third-person narrators narrating exclusively at the mental level, and in the jargon, of the adolescent protagonist.'[7]

Furthermore, the assumption that authors of children's and young-adult fiction need to 'dumb down' or restrict narrative techniques to ensure the comprehension and protection of young readers is expressed by Sheldrick Ross in her analysis of the common features of characters and narrators prevalent in teenage problem novels:

> [w]orks of YA realism normally […] use a relatively representative, even average, narrator rather than one who lives on the extreme verge. The safe narrator is necessary to protect the relationship into which the reader is invited to enter with the narrator. In general it can be said that in YA realism there is always a crisis of some sort; involvement in this crisis is what precipitates the protagonist's transition from innocence to experience […]. If, however, the crisis is of an extremely painful nature, […] then the narrator witnesses the crisis and has to take some responsibility for bringing about a solution but is not the one who experiences it directly.[8]

She further argues that '[t]his convention of narration is a way of providing a carefully controlled framework in which the crisis of identity portrayed in the book is kept within manageable and acceptable proportions for the reader.'[9] I feel that the assertion that a witness narrator is automatically less explicit than a victim-narrator is one which requires further exploration in this and the following chapter.

More recently, Delbrassine, analysed a corpus of 247 texts (184 of which are French-authored) for young adults published between 1997 and 2000. He examines the narration and focalization of adolescent fiction and compares this to that of adult fiction written by authors of teenage literature. He uses a four-option table devised by Jean-

[7] Wall, pp. 247-8.
[8] Sheldrick Ross, p. 184.
[9] Ibid, p. 184.

Louis Dumortier (2001) largely based upon Genette's categories of focalization and narration, discussed below, to examine the frequency of the possible combinations of narrator and focalizer. Dumortier refers to the 'auteur narrateur' and 'personnage narrateur', where the former corresponds to Genette's heterodiegetic narrator and the latter to the homodiegetic narrator. He differentiates between: 'auteur narrateur+non focalisation'; 'auteur narrateur+focalisation par un ou plusieurs personnages'; 'personnage narrateur+focalisation par le personnage'; 'personnage narrateur+focalisation par le narrateur'.[10] The most frequent *mode-voix* combination in teenage fiction (present in 100 out of 247 cases)[11] was found to be the character narrator with focalization through the narrator, followed by 38 cases of 'auteur narrateur+focalization par 1 ou plusieurs personnages'. Delbrassine argues that, as adult literature uses more cases of the 'auteur narrateur', authors of teenage fiction use the autodiegetic narration and protagonist focalization to engage directly and 'seduce' the teenage reader.[12]

Across this and the following chapter, I explore the use of different narrators and focalizers throughout my own corpus to examine the range of voices and perspectives present. I also aim to explore what impact using the victim as narrator and focalizer has upon the depiction of child abuse in comparison with using a witness as narrator-focalizer, using zero-focalization or using a variety of perspectives. In this way I hope to establish whether the witness voice is 'safer', as Sheldrick Ross claims, and whether autodiegetic narration and focalization, the most frequent mode of narration in my abuse texts (seven out of twenty texts, named below), and in teenage fiction more

[10] Delbrassine, *Le Roman*, p. 125.
[11] Ibid., pp. 422-429.
[12] Ibid., pp. 115-138.

generally,[13] expresses the impact of abuse on the victim in a more direct and empathetic manner than the other modes of narration, as Wall suggests. Alternatively, is Nikolajeva's claim valid for my own corpus texts: do the heterodiegetic texts contain 'adult guidance' within the narration and how does child-focused autodiegetic narration and focalization affect the depiction of the 'psychological depth' of the protagonist's experiences in comparison with texts with heterodiegetic narration or zero focalization? In Genette's *Discours du récit* he defines the terms 'voix' and 'mode' to distinguish between who is telling a story, that is, who is the narrator of the diegesis, and from whose perspective the story events are seen, or, who is the focalizer.[14] Although Genette discusses these two categories in separate chapters, he admits that voice and focalization are often confused.[15] Indeed, when examining the use of narrative perspectives in the child-abuse corpus I have found that focalization and narrative voice often have a symbiotic relationship, particularly in texts containing the victim as narrator and focalizer.

I use Genette's terminology and the categories outlined in his *Discours* to distinguish between the techniques used in the texts. The narrators will be defined by their relation to both the diegetic level and their presence or absence in the story. They are either extra-diegetic, meaning they are narrators of the first-degree narrative, or intra-diegetic, meaning they are narrators telling a story within another narrative. Narrators are also either heterodiegetic or homodiegetic, where heterodiegetic narrators are absent from the stories they tell and homodiegetic narrators are characters in the story and can further be identified as autodiegetic if they are the main protagonist.[16]

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[13] See, for example, Delbrassine's study. Also for example, Brown, *Volume II*, p. 308 and Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear*, p. 219. For a discussion of the problem-novel genre, see Thaler and Jean-Bart, pp. 157-159 and Delbrassine, pp. 237-254.
[14] See Genette, 'Mode', pp. 163–218 and 'Voix', pp. 219-274.
[15] Ibid, p. 190.
[16] See Genette, pp. 236-238; pp. 256-266.

With regard to focalization, Genette distinguishes between the non-focalized narrative, where a narrator reports more than any character knows; internal focalization, where a narrator says what a character knows; and external focalization, where the narrator reports less than a character knows, as in a murder mystery, for example. Internal focalization can further be categorized as fixed, where events are seen through one character; variable, where different focal characters are used; or multiple, where the same event is seen through different focalizing characters. In the realm of narrative mood, Genette also considers the 'distance' of narration, where narrator presence and interference in telling the story and relaying speech affects the level of diegesis of the text. Indeed, Genette identifies three levels of speech: *narrativisé* or *raconté*, where the speech is summarized and distanced from the uttering protagonist, for example: 'On a expliqué le plan à nos meilleurs copains' (*John et moi*, p. 101). The second form is *transposé*, denoting the narrator's telling of a character's words, but 'cette forme ne donne jamais au lecteur aucune garantie, et surtout aucun sentiment de fidélité littérale aux paroles "réellement" prononcées':[17] 'Elle a crié qu'elle ne voulait pas d'amis, seulement s'en aller d'ici où personne ne l'aime' (*Delphine*, p. 48). The third form of speech is *discours rapporté* and is commonly known as direct speech, where a character's words are presented as a direct quotation: '— Chante! Tu es là pour ça, petite mule!' (*Monsieur Henry*, p. 20).[18] This aspect of narration will also be considered along with narrative voice and focalization.[19]

Across the twenty corpus texts, I have identified five types of narration and focalization: witness narration, where a child-friend character observes and narrates the

[17] Ibid., p. 175.
[18] Ibid., pp. 174-176.
[19] For detailed explanations and examples of reported, direct, indirect and free indirect discourse see Bal, pp. 140-141; Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1991); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 109-116; and Genette, p 172-180.

abuse victim's story, present in three texts (*J'entends pleurer la nuit*, *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *La Frontière de sable*); polyphonic narration and focalization, present in four texts (*Les Saisons dangereuses*, *Coups pour coups*, *La Fille du canal* and *Moi, Delphine 13 ans…*); autodiegetic victim narration and focalization, present in seven texts (*Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, *La Petite Maîtresse*, *Comme des adieux*, *Dans la gueule du vent* and *John et moi* [which also contains an embedded narrative with a heterodiegetic narrator, that will be discussed in Chapter Five]); heterodiegetic narration with zero- or child-victim focalization, present in three texts (*Derrière la porte*, *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Quelque chose à te dire*); and finally, what I call dual perspective narration, where the main narrative is narrated or focalized by the child victim, but is framed by the adult victim's retrospection, which is present in three texts (*Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*, *Mauvais coup* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* [which also places the autodiegetic narrator as a witness to the abuse of another child]). As focalization can vary throughout the same narrative, I classify the corpus texts based upon their predominant mode of narration and focalization, but I refer to the presence of alterations in perspective caused by free indirect discourse or shifts in focalization where applicable.

In this first of the two chapters on narrative voice and perspective I discuss three of the five categories. The first is the use of autodiegetic child narrators with internal focalization by the child victim who relays events contemporaneously. The second is dual focalization, where we encounter focalization through both the victim as a child and through the victim as an adult and this adult narrator frames the child's story. This technique, present in three victim-narrator texts (it is also used in the witness-narrator text *La Frontière de sable*, discussed in Chapter Three), in itself

appears to be a relatively recent trend in teenage fiction, or perhaps just unique to my abuse corpus, as Wall, cited above, comments on the predominance of teenage-narrated texts and Sheldrick Ross notes in 1985 that narrators 'are still adolescents when they tell the story. There is not the double perspective, common in adult books about growing up, in which the youthful point of view is qualified in the light of the subsequent experience of the mature narrator'.[20] In *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*, the text contains a prologue narrated and focalized by the adult protagonist, which precedes the main narrative, narrated and focalized by the protagonist as a child. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, the narrator is seemingly heterodiegetic with focalization predominantly limited to the child Sophie's perspective, though it is apparent that the impersonal narrator is the adult Sophie. In *Mauvais coup* the main narrative consists of a child-victim autodiegetic narrator-focalizer recounting his escape from abuse. The text is framed by the narration and focalization of the victim as adult, who in the first chapter appears as a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization, but at the end of the text reveals his identity as the former child victim. The third type of narration and focalization is use of a heterodiegetic narrator with both zero focalization and internal focalization through the child protagonist, present in *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Mélie* and *Derrière la porte*.

In order to present a broad yet detailed view of the narrative techniques, I will be examining in depth a selection of texts displaying each narrative technique. I firstly examine the most popular technique in my corpus: autodiegetic narration with internal focalization through the child-victim narrator. I briefly discuss all seven texts which use the technique, before presenting a close reading of two of the novels: *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Dans la gueule du vent*. *Petite Maîtresse* depicts contemporaneous

[20] Sheldrick Ross, p. 183.

psychological abuse on a female victim, whilst *Gueule du vent* presents a male victim's difficulty in coming to terms with past sexual abuse. Thus the selection of these two very different texts should help to establish common, and perhaps unexpected or unusual uses of autodiegetic narration and focalization. The second section of the chapter will focus on dual focalization in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, although I also refer to *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*. Finally, I examine both *Derrière la porte* and *Les Parents de Mélie* in order to consider how heterodiegetic narrators with internal focalization through the child victim are used through the corpus.

Autodiegetic Child-Victim Narration and Focalization

The seven corpus texts: *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, *Comme des adieux*, *John et moi*, *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Dans la gueule du vent* are narrated by and focalized through the child-victim protagonists. In *P'tits bateaux* and *Monsieur Henry* the two female protagonists narrate their experiences of sexual abuse by male adults. In *P'tits bateaux* the protagonist Marie-Bénédicte explores her feelings towards her sexually abusive uncle on a computer she receives for her thirteenth birthday. The computer serves as a confidant as the narrator recounts past experiences of abuse and current difficulties in communicating with others around her: 'Je n'ai pas dormi la nuit. Ce soir, petit ordinateur, je te raconterai dès que je rentrerai' (p. 50). The computer becomes a narratee, enabling the abuse victim to tell her story, at her own pace and in her own way, to an unthreatening receiver, whilst the reader of the text is distanced from the diegetic level, reading the narrator's private thoughts written on her computer.[21] In *Monsieur Henry*, language and expression is a form of power for Camille, as the

[21] The therapeutic role of the computer diary is discussed in chapters four and five of the thesis.

protagonist physically struggles to show resistance to her abuse, but tells her story to the (adolescent) reader of the text.[22] The autodiegetic narrator recounts contemporaneously her experiences of going for singing lessons with Monsieur Henry where he sexually assaults her:

> Tout en me tenant dans ses yeux pleins de griffes, il me frotte, il me frotte, de plus en plus fort, tire l'élastique de ma culotte, m'enlève tout. Je pleure en mille morceaux. […]
>
> Et puis j'entends cette voix, cette voix qui est la mienne et qui m'arrive, je ne sais d'où:
>
> — Tu fais le ménage ou quoi? (p. 42)

Camille's narration reveals her inner distress at being assaulted by the teacher, yet the direct speech shows her calm and controlled exterior: she attempts to belittle her abuser and control her own reaction to his abuse, even if she cannot stop his actions.

Tu te soumettras explores the unnamed female narrator's strained relationship with her emotionally and psychologically abusive father, who is the narratee in the text. The narrator states:

> Je suis une enfant. Je te crains.
>
> Plus grave: je te crois.
>
> Tout ce que tu me dis est la vérité vraie, si dénuée d'espoir, si souvent déplaisante. Je n'aime pas la vie comme tu la présentes. (p. 17)

The short sentence and paragraph structure creates a terse and cold tone to the narrative, representing the narrator's emotional distance from her father. The juxtaposition of 'enfant' and 'crains' emphasizes the power relationship between father and daughter, as the narrator is a vulnerable child at the mercy of her bullying father.

[22] The verbal, artistic and bodily means of expressing abuse that Camille uses in *Monsieur Henry* are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Indeed, the constant contrasting of the pronouns 'je' and 'tu' throughout the narrative reflects the basis of the whole oppositional relationship. The narrator also frequently includes free indirect speech from her father, which emphasizes the disjuncture between father and daughter from her perspective. When the narrator discusses the father's reading habits, she assumes his voice: 'Les loisirs sont futiles. Ils sont bons pour les fainéants, les personnes âgées, et les enfants. Les inutiles.' (p. 21) The assimilation of the father's opinions into the first-person narration emphasizes the dominance of the father's voice in the child's life. Yet as the narration continues and the narrator grows older, she begins to question the father's overbearing ideals, evident when relaying his desire to send her to a convent: 'Ce sera *pour mon bien*. Ce bien, dont tu décides – seul – et qui occulte la lumière aussi sûrement qu'un linceul.' (p. 119). The italicization of the father's words visually distances the phrase from the narrator's voice, unlike the previous quotation. This distancing of the father's speech represents the narrator's resistance and growing independence, which increases through the course of the narrative.

Comme des adieux and *John et moi* both depict the child protagonists' suffering at the hands of physically abusive fathers. Raymond, narrator of *Comme des adieux*, recounts his miserable existence via imagined happy past memories and imagined negative thoughts of the future as he lies dying in hospital drifting in and out of consciousness. The autodiegetic narrator opens the text by revealing his abused childhood to the reader: 'C'était mon refuge dessous le lit, ma cachette, c'était là que je me terrais lorsque mon père voulait me choper pour m'en foutre une' (p. 7). The accuracy of Raymond's narration of his past, however, is called into question through the narrative as contradictory depictions of family life are presented to the reader, with imagined happy past memories and negative future dreams intermittently depicted

alongside Raymond's actual positive past experiences at his special school, the subject of the second text in the trilogy. There is a description of the narrator's former girlfriend Anne coming to visit Raymond in hospital, 'Mais Anne, je sais que tu es là, je sais que c'est toi, […] il est trop tard, s'il te plaît, je suis fatigué, ne m'en veux pas' (p. 99-100), yet the reader is left uncertain as to whether this visit is real or imagined, given that the only source of information is from the confused and semi-conscious narrator. Indeed, the fictional status of the narrative strands to come are suggested to the reader in the early stages of the text, as Raymond explains: 'Tout au fond de mon lit, je pense à la vie que j'aurais aimée, celle que je n'aurais jamais, je pense à ce que j'ai été, ce que je suis, je pense à ce que je serai dans pas longtemps' (p. 31).

Every narrative strand, however, ultimately ends negatively for Raymond in the continuation of his dysfunctional family relationship and his suffering of physical abuse. Even mentally, the narrator is unable to escape his past and imagine a positive future and the story ends in his death, which is, unusually, recounted by the narrator himself. The narration of the narrator's final passing at the end of the text is particularly interesting, as it is one continuous section of prose, yet is fragmented with short and incomplete phrases:

> Ce sont des chants maintenant… Doucement… Mammouth en grand… En couleur… Des voix du ciel, ça ne peut venir que du ciel, du ciel, de là-haut, de tout là-haut… J'ai trop chaud, il fait trop froid…Le cochon passe… Je respire si mal… Des chants, des chants comme à la messe, avec la harpe, la voix des anges, des orgues… […] T'as dit au revoir à Anne? Oh! Oui, oui, j'ai fait comme des adieux! (pp. 109-111)

Raymond's descriptions of angelic songs, harps, colours and feeling too hot yet too cold, represent his mental (and physical) instability due to their disjointed nature. Yet,

more significantly, the descriptions are images which are traditionally associated with dying and heaven. The victim's narration and focalization is thus somewhat unnerving for the reader, as he or she experiences the intimate account of the death alongside the protagonist and is drawn into the narrator's mental confusion and ultimate demise. The reference to saying goodbye also perhaps suggests that Anne's visit was imagined, as the protagonist mentally prepares himself for his death by coming to terms with his past and striving for forgiveness from his former girlfriend.

In *John et moi* the narrator, Elsa, describes her and her brother John's fear of their alcoholic father who physically beats both them and their mother. Elsa narrates her perception of her father's behaviour:

> Tout le monde pense que c'est un homme mais tu croirais un ogre à cause de sa bouche géante qui gueule tout le temps en laissant voir un gouffre rouge d'où sort un bruit d'avion qui s'écrase, à cause des yeux qui te percent le ventre et le coeur en te regardant tellement fixement que tu te sens t'évanouir, à cause de ses mains immenses qui battent l'air pour trouver une tête à claques […] (pp. 16-17).

The informal tone of the narration, with the reader address using the pronoun 'tu', and the contrast of what 'tout le monde' thinks, with Elsa's own detailed animalistic description of her father shows her to confide in the reader whilst also emphasizing her fear of and disgust at her father.[23] The lengthy sentence structure, also a feature of *Comme des adieux*, adds to the impression of the narrator unreservedly conversing with the reader and inviting him or her into her story. Thus the narrative voices of *Comme des adieux* and *John et moi*, and even *Monsieur Henry*, which invite the reader into the narrative, are very different from that of *P'tits bateaux*, where Marie-Bénédicte

[23] The victims' description of abusers using animal imagery is common in the corpus texts and is discussed in Chapter Five.

is caught up in (writing) her own trauma, and also that of *Tu te soumettras*, where the narratee is the abusive father and the reader is external to this victim-abuser/narrator-narratee relationship. Yet a different kind of intimacy occurs in these two narratives, as the reader is positioned as a witness to the private revelations of both narrators.

In *La Petite Maîtresse* the eleven-year-old female protagonist relays her feelings of rejection due to being sent by her parents to live with her grandparents, whilst her two older sisters and two younger brothers remain at home. The narrator's family distress is compounded by her new class teacher's psychological intimidation of Caroline as she forces the child to lead lessons whilst she retires to her apartment. The autodiegetic narrator reveals feelings of overwhelming sadness when she writes a letter to her family whom she now rarely sees: 'C'est au moment de signer ma lettre que j'ai envie de monter dans un train, à cause de cette étrange tristesse qui me vient lorsque j'écris mon prénom au bas de la page' (p. 15). Caroline's narration of her intimate thoughts reveals that, by signing her letter, she feels confronted with her physical and emotional distance from her family, feelings which she fails to express directly to the characters around her. Furthermore, Caroline is seen to feel even more excluded from her family when she does see them. During a Christmas visit, the parents' negative attitude toward their daughter is relayed via the family's transposed speech:

> — Oh, elle a de ces réactions, elle n'est pas tous les jours commode, a dit ma grand-mère. Ma mère a répondu qu'elle en savait quelque chose et qu'on n'était jamais certain, quand on me faisait un cadeau, de m'avoir fait plaisir. Ma soeur aînée approuvait en évitant de me regarder. De peur d'être allée trop loin, ma grand-mère a reconnu que j'avais de bons côtés, que j'étais, par exemple, souvent polie, gracieuse, facile à habiller et que je portais bien la

toilette, qu'à l'école je n'avais pas la tête dure, que la maîtresse avait l'air contente de moi, elle avait mis de bonnes appréciations sur mon carnet. (p. 68)

The transposed speech summarizing the scene of the narrator's mother and sister exposing her personality flaws gives the impression that the narrator is an unacknowledged bystander to the discussion, highlighting her position as outsider, as well as foregrounding the child's rejection by her parents. Caroline's witnessing of this scene without interrupting to defend herself also reveals her vulnerability: she is unable to voice her opinion, and simply accepts the situation.

In addition to revealing the vulnerability of the young adolescent in relations with other characters, the victim-narrator technique also creates suspense at the beginning of the narrative, as Caroline reveals having a school-related secret: 'Au sujet de l'école, je dois me taire. Je ne peux pas faire autrement' (pp. 12-13). As well as creating intrigue in the plot, there is repetition of the theme of remaining silent and the narrator's inability to speak to those around her, expressing herself privately to the reader in the narration of the story. The main abuse plot is then revealed to the reader from the point of view of the child victim, as she recounts how her class teacher came to intimidate and manipulate her psychologically:

Elle m'a touché l'épaule et elle m'a chargée d'aller au bureau:

— Caroline, tu vas me remplacer quelques instants. Je compte sur toi.

Voilà comment les choses ont commencé. (p. 35)

The narrator also reveals how this unwanted obligation impacts upon her psychologically: 'Séquence après séquence, je me vois faire et je ne me reconnais pas. […] Je suis quelqu'un d'autre, je me fais un peu peur' (p. 39). The assumption of another, adult, role leads to Caroline's experience of a confused sense of self as her identity is destabilized.

The narrator's frustrations and the internalization of her family and school-based pain are then transferred onto the grandfather's chickens, which the narrator fears. After the upsetting visit from her parents, Caroline seeks revenge on the grandfather's cockerel and intends to kill it with her boyfriend Petit Guy, who dissuades her from the plan (pp. 95-96). Thus while the reader may deduce that the narrator's obsession with the chickens and cockerel is a result of her feelings of powerlessness at home and school, the narrator does not, or, rather, cannot, verbalize this connection. So whilst Nikolajeva claims that child focalization and narration often lacks psychological depth, it appears that in *Petite Maîtresse*, the autodiegetic narrator reveals her internal distress, but the reader is left to interpret the narrator's behaviour, arguably making the text more complex and psychologically rich. Indeed, the narrative also contains a large four-page section of the narrator's stream of consciousness depicting Caroline's rambling thoughts (pp. 120-124), with no paragraph break for two whole pages. Within this stream of consciousness the narrator's preoccupation with her grandfather's chickens is re-emphasized: 'Et voici que ce sont des coqs qui s'échappent de la mallette, battant des ailes, des coqs qui s'élancent dans la pièce et planent sous le plafond! […] Comment pourraient-ils sortir de la chambre quand toutes les issues sont bouchées? Ils m'ont sentie, ils m'ont vue, ils se déplacent vers mon lit' (p. 122). The narration consisting of exclamations and rhetorical questions highlights Caroline's state of psychological instability and confusion: the narration is an uncensored and seemingly unedited expression of her inner state of consciousness.

What ultimately cuts through the narrator's confusion is her urge to write a letter to express her abuse. Caroline gives a running commentary on her letter and the thought processes behind it. 'Je grelotte, pieds nus, en chemise de nuit. Bizarrement, je suis émue, […] et j'écris: "Je suis un peu fatiguée […]". 'Il a fallu avouer complètement.'

(p. 130). The therapeutic aspect of letter writing, further discussed in Chapter Five, is evident, as the act of physically expressing her burden eases Caroline's psychological distress. In fact, the letter is then discovered by the grandfather as Caroline writes it, which leads to the revelation and resolution of the abuse without the narrator having to speak directly of her troubles, which she has thus far struggled to do.

Even after her grandfather reads the letter and the abuse has been uncovered, Caroline is still reluctant to speak. In a lengthy scene depicting the dialogue surrounding the circumstances of the teacher's abuse, Caroline's contribution consists of: 'Je dis que la situation s'est créée petit à petit' (p. 133). Her meek voice is sandwiched between those of her grandparents, leading to her grandmother assuming Caroline's speech: 'Bien sûr que ça ne s'est pas fait du jour au lendemain, voyons, approuve ma grand-mère. J'ai vu Lina changer depuis la rentrée des classes' (p. 133). In amongst the grandparents discussing Caroline without her involvement, the protagonist summons the courage to express her intention to leave: 'Je vais m'en aller'. This again leads to the grandparents speaking over Caroline and on her behalf as the direct speech of the grandmother shows: 'Cette institutrice t'a fait du mal. C'est pour elle que tu as peur? Voyons, tu n'es pas coupable' (p. 137). 'C'est une brûlure qui mettra quelque temps à guérir' (p. 150). Here the adult voice serves to reassure the victim, as well as the reader, of the abuse victim's innocence, without compromizing the technique of child narration and focalization.

The child narrator's naivety and vulnerability is then highlighted at the end of the narrative. The psychological abuse is resolved, yet the neglectful family situation remains, as Caroline's parents fail to collect her from her grandparents' house. The narrator, however, appears psychologically unable to confront this reality: 'Je me rendors et, de nouveau, j'entends ces voix sur le matin. Mon coeur bat plus vite. On

vient me chercher! Je me dresse dans mon lit, ce sont de fausses alertes. Ils ont dit qu'ils viendraient, ils ne peuvent pas m'avoir oubliée. Ma valise est faite et mes chaussures sont cirées' (p. 152). The limitation of the child autodiegetic narration is evident as Caroline fails to accept her abandonment, yet the blinkered focalization serves to emphasize the protagonist's emotional vulnerability in the face of her parental rejection; the reader knows that Caroline will be left with her grandparents, which increases empathy for the protagonist.

Dans la gueule du vent also uses an autodiegetic narrator who recounts his life with his foster parents where he arrived at the age of twelve after his mother's institutionalization for mental illness. Unlike Caroline in *Petite Maîtresse*, in *Gueule du vent*, Florent's abuse occurred prior to the start of the narrative and consisted of his stepfather sexually abusing him. The text depicts Florent's difficulty in coming to terms with his past, evident in his obsession with a folk legend of the Bête du Gévaudan and his transference of his experiences and the legend onto his girlfriend's father, Roger, who he wrongly believes is an abuser. The violence and anger expressed in the narrative voice, which Delbrassine also observes when discussing this text,[24] is the foregrounding feature of the narration. The first lines of the novel set a sinister tone for the story to come, centring on the narrator's preoccupation with killing and aggression: 'La Bête, je la tuerai' (p. 7).

> Elle me verra comme un qui va la tuer. Fatiguée de trembler, elle voudra en finir et se jettera sur la lame qui s'enfoncera dans sa poitrine jusqu'à la garde, pissera un sang jaunâtre comme celui des vers de terre, gigotera de plus en plus mollement puis me regardera une dernière fois, le blanc de ses yeux rougeoyant et la gueule grande ouverte, dégouttant de bave. (p. 8)

[24] Delbrassine, pp. 319-320.

The narrator's graphic fantasy of killing suggests an unhealthy preoccupation with hunting, as he presents himself here as a dangerous predator, leading to the beast killing itself out of fear. His belief in his murder mission is compounded as he states: 'je téléphonerai à la gendarmerie pour avouer mon crime et, quand les uniformes seront là, je quitterai Favolle entre deux gendarmes' (p. 8). The narrator's descriptions of the wind and the natural surroundings of Favolle as he enters the hamlet also consist of destructive animal imagery as he states that the wind 'avait les traits d'un monstre et ressemblait à ces animaux qui prennent la forme de ce qu'on en raconte' (pp. 10-11). The narrator thus creates an image of both his environment and of himself as being pervasively dangerous, which initially sets the tone of a hostile and intimidating narrative voice for the reader to follow. The tone of narration then changes, as Florent explains the reality behind his arrival in Favolle: 'C'est entre deux gendarmes aussi que je suis arrivé à Favolle. La différence, c'est que j'avais douze ans et que si les flics m'accompagnaient, c'était pour me protéger' (p. 8). There is a direct contrast between the narrator's fantasy of being a violent killer wanted by the police and the reality of him being protected by the officers, which highlights his powerless position and encourages reader intrigue as the narrative begins.

The narrative voice also contains frequent instances of direct reader address and provides extra information for clarification, such as Florent explaining: 'elle est institutrice, ma nouvelle mère, j'avais oublié de le préciser' (p. 52). The narrator then divulges details of his abusive past and his desire to seek revenge upon his stepfather: 'Mon second père j'en parle pas. Il est français mais c'est un monstre et on l'a mis en taule, derrière ses barreaux il ne fera plus de mal à personne. Le jour où il sortira s'il sort un jour, je le tuerai. Comme la Bête…' (p. 34). This direct reader address is an aspect of what Delbrassine identifies as 'la séduction du lecteur', consisting of two

techniques: 'la tension' and 'la proximité'.[25] 'La tension', focusing on the engagement of the reader through the use of spoken tenses, dialogue and narrator-focalizers who recount events directly,[26] contributes to the creation of 'la proximité', a sense of closeness and identification between the narrator and reader, increasing the reader's investment in the narrator and narrative.[27] These techniques certainly seem to be evident in *Dans la gueule du vent*, where the simultaneous autodiegetic narration and Florent's informal address to the reader encourage empathy and identification with the protagonist. This close reader-narrator relationship renders the revelation of his abusive experiences particularly emotive. Indeed, Florent describes having a nightmare about the beast and is particularly confused upon waking, as he fears that the shadow approaching is his abuser, when it is actually his foster father coming to comfort him: 'La silhouette démesurée d'un homme se profile sur les murs de ma chambre et je replonge sous les draps, me recroqueville comme un foetus pour échapper aux doigts qui vont me tripoter. […] Quand je reconnais Joël, je tends mes bras vers lui et aussitôt je fonds en larmes' (p. 56). Florent's fear is foregrounded and the reader is exposed directly to his confusion and vulnerabilities, encouraging engagement with the text and empathy with the victim.

In spite of the empathy created for the narrator, Florent's unreliable perception is highlighted to the reader in scenes of direct speech when other characters attempt to correct his misguided convictions. When asked by his foster parents whether he has proof that Roger sexually abuses Lucie, Florent responds: 'Aucune mais je suis sûr que c'est une bête, ce type, il a une gueule d'obsédé…' (p. 65). Yet in spite of the adults warning Florent against making false accusations, the protagonist continues with his

[25] Delbrassine acknowledges Aiden Chambers's work on authors' attempts to target and engage their audience, p. 196.
[26] Ibid., p. 197.
[27] Ibid., p. 198.

quest. Upon finding Lucie with her father shot beside her after an argument, Florent assumes that Lucie has killed him because of being sexually abused. Even when Lucie denies the attempted murder and abuse, stating in her own words: 'il ne m'a jamais fait ce qu'on t'a fait' (p. 130), Florent cannot accept the statement, due to his own psychological involvement in the allegation and his transference of his own experience onto his girlfriend: 'Je savais qu'elle me mentait ou se mentait à elle-même' (p. 131). The narration therefore foregrounds the child victim's experiences and thoughts, however unreliable, since the focus is on his voice and his trauma. The reader must interpret Florent's intimate fantasies in the context of the depiction of other characters' direct speech and the dialogue between Florent and his girlfriend and family. The narrator's perception is thus contradicted and, in spite of his intimate relationship with the reader, his unreliability is exposed.

Florent reveals to Lucie his past sexual abuse and his identification with her, which is narrated indirectly in the text via transposed speech and use of the wolf metaphor:

> Comme elle restait sur le sommier, muette et hébétée, je lui ai parlé de ces bêtes malfaisantes […]. Je lui ai raconté comment elles entraient dans nos chambres, la nuit, à pas de loup et s'approchaient en douce de nos lits. […] Et on faisait le mort jusqu'a ce qu'elle s'en aille. On n'était plus personne. Rien qu'un objet. (pp. 129-130)

The transposition of the dialogue into prose form narrated by Florent focuses on his role in the conversation, as he controls the information given to Lucie and the reader, emphasizing his perspective and his experience, which is foregrounded throughout the autodiegetic narration. This very personal expression of his abuse, and his acceptance of Lucie's denial of herself being a victim, is then seen to provide immediate relief to the

narrator, as he is able to accept and begin to move on from his past: 'Elle est partie, la Bête, où s'envolent les nuages et moi je ne tomberai plus jamais dans la gueule du vent' (p. 144).

In both *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Dans la Gueule du vent*, the autodiegetic narration and focalization foregrounds the child victims' feelings and experiences of abuse. Their pain and torment is the focus of the narrative and the reader sees what the focalizer sees and believes, with occasional scenes of direct speech to provide alternative external perspectives. Indeed, in both texts the narration incorporates some of the protagonist's fantasy, with Caroline feeling persecuted by the chickens in *Petite Maîtresse* and Florent mistakenly hunting down a metaphorical beast in *Gueule du vent*. The reader is left to negotiate between the narrators' unguarded revelation of their feelings and thoughts and the (un)reliability of their version of external story events. The closeness and informality of the reader-narrator relationship encourages readers to feel a loyalty toward and empathy with the child victim. Furthermore, the juxtaposition in both texts of the narrator's freedom of expression of their feelings, and their silence and inability to speak in scenes with other characters, highlights the difficulty of the child victims in verbalizing their experiences. The use of autodiegetic narration and focalization is thus particularly significant in the child abuse corpus, as here the victim is empowered to tell their version of events and their truth, in contrast to their position as victim in the abusive relationship.

Autodiegetic Narration with Dual Focalization

Three corpus texts use an autodiegetic narrator where focalization occurs both through the child victim and through the adult the child becomes. *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère* and *Mauvais coup* use both an adult narrative voice and focalization and the

child's narrative voice and focalization, with the former having the adult voice and perspective in a prologue, and the latter using the adult voice and perspective in the first and final chapter of the main narrative. *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* uses an adult narrative voice and focalization, present in the prologue and epilogue of the text, and an adult narrator with child focalization in the main narrative. *Quand je serai grande* begins with the depiction of a telephone dialogue between the narrator and Armand, her brother, wherein Armand reports their mother's death and the narrator refuses to go to the funeral. The narrative continues with adult Mouna's autodiegetic narration as she describes her shock at the news of the death and the thought of her mother, who physically and mentally abused her as a child:

> Mon corps tremble. Je suis en sueur, j'avance à tâtons. Envie de vomir. Je saigne du nez! Dans la glace de la salle de bains, je la vois, je me vois. Mine de rien, elle est là, devant moi.
>
> — Tous tes frères et soeurs sont venus à mon enterrement (pp. 9-10).

It becomes clear that the physical reactions of vomiting and bleeding, representing disgust and rejection, are symptomatic of the abusive childhood that the narrator suffered at the hands of her mother. Indeed, the prologue proceeds with the narrator's description of a traumatic childhood memory, wherein her mother finds and burns Mouna's hidden notebooks detailing her desire to kill her,[28] and beats her daughter: 'La mémoire ne veut pas lâcher. Je la hais' (p. 13). The final line of the prologue, 'Enfant, j'ai été mise en esclavage. Il me reste du froid et j'ai faim. La tête est lourde à porter. Je m'endors enfin' (p. 14), sets the scene for the story to come, which is the simultaneous autodiegetic narration of Mouna's abusive past.

[28] This recurrent theme of writing as a therapeutic act across the abuse corpus will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The present-tense narration recounts chronologically and somewhat episodically Mouna's experiences of being beaten, neglected and psychologically bullied by her mother throughout her childhood until she ran away as a teenager. The narrative reveals the young girl's perspective and thought processes when exposed to her mother's cruel behaviour. For example, after taking apart a toy doll she was warned not to touch, the narrator explains: 'Il y a de la paille et un moteur à l'intérieur. Ma mère découvre le massacre. Je suis un monstre. Elle me frappe fort. Moi, à l'intérieur, j'ai du sang.' (p. 19) The child's focalization seemingly includes the narrator's assimilation of the mother's words, calling her a monster, whilst the narrator's observation of her own blood foregrounds her vulnerability, making the mother's violence appear even more callous. The straw in the doll and the blood in her are depicted as discoveries to the child victim, as she indirectly describes being beaten until she bleeds. The protagonist matures through the course of the narrative and the reader is confronted with the origin of the memory recounted in the prologue of Mouna's mother discovering her daughter's diaries. Here again excessive violence is described, the result of which must be cleaned up by the victim, along with the narrator's expression of her mother's contempt towards her: 'Elle frappe. Trop fort. Je saigne tant. Partout je mets du sang. Il faudra nettoyer, ramper, frotter.' (p. 155). 'Comment elle a pu sortir de son ventre, une telle calamité? Je suis la calamité.' (p. 155) The free indirect discourse depicting the mother's disgust at having given birth to her daughter is strikingly similar to the comments of Mélie's mother in *Les Parents de Mélie*, though Mélie herself is depicted as feeling physically sick at the thought of being inside her mother's womb (p. 47).

In the final line of the novel, when the girl runs away from home, the young-adult voice and perspective hints at potential opportunities ahead of her: 'Place de la Gare, commence l'infini déploiement des lignes bleues.' (p. 185) Thus the prologue

serves to highlight the lasting impact that the mother's abuse had on the child victim and the main narrative comes as an explanantion for the mystery of the prologue. The story is a return to the childhood memories and experiences in light of the death of her mother, rather like the second half of *Les Parents de Mélie*, discussed in the next section, where Mélie revisits her relationship with her father after his suicide. Yet the main narrative is presented as the child's own words and perspective, as if she were narrating her childhood as it occurred, creating a sense of immediacy and enabling the narrator to foreground the confusion of the child and her emotional and psychological vulnerability when confronted with her unstable and cruel mother.[29]

Mauvais coup is based on a childhood memory of the author Pierre Mezinski, rendering it semi-autobiographical. While Genette's focus and categories in his *Discours* are based on the characteristics of narrative fiction, I still consider *Mauvais coup* in my narrative category of dual focalization along with the other fictional texts, as the narrative techniques are comparable, in spite of the origin of the story being told, and the epilogue itself suggests that the memory has been altered ('Poète je suis, poète je reste' [p. 238]).[30] The text contains a narrative frame whereby the adult narrator introduces the story in an anonymous manner, using an omniscient, third-person voice, before the autodiegetic child narrator assumes the narratorial role, recounting his personal trauma. The adult narrator-focalizer returns at the end of the story, but this time using the first-person voice and identifying himself as the former child narrator. The narrative begins with the omniscient narrator's description of the child protagonist sitting

[29] Teisson's *La Petite Cinglée* is another adolescent realist abuse text dealing with an abusive mother-daughter dynamic.

[30] *Mauvais coup* may be the only explicitly autobiographical text, although Perez's trilogy, for example, has been suspected of being autobiographical, an assertion Perez denies (Cécile Boulaire, 'Serge Perez', in *Dictionnaire*, ed. by Nières-Chevrel et Perrot, pp. 730-731) and Enckell's *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère*, is supposedly 'inspiré par le vécu de l'auteur'. 'Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère', *Ricochet* <http://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/critiques/livre/7456-quand-je-serai-grande-je-serai-etrangere>. Accessed 20/08/14.

on the bus on his way back to school: 'Il a quoi? Onze, douze ans? Il n'est pas bien gros, pas bien grand, ce n'est certainement pas une force de la nature.' (p. 10) The rhetorical question creates a sense of distance between the protagonist and the narrator, suggesting that the narrator is externally estimating the age of the child, seemingly having no connection to the protagonist. In the second chapter the child protagonist assumes the narrative voice: 'Aujourd'hui j'ai du pain, gros de pain sur la planche. C'est comme si me pendait au nez une compo super importante, d'où tout mon avenir dépendrait(!)' (p. 41). The simultaneous narration provides the reader with an immediate and intimate version of events, foregrounding Mezinski's anxiety, whilst creating suspense by delaying the revelation of the issue. It is not until the penultimate chapter of the text that the narrator eventually describes the school priest's attempt to seduce him (pp. 183-199) and it becomes clear that his anxiety surrounds the potential repercussions of setting a cabin on fire to escape.

The return of the adult narrator in the final chapter again alters the tone and perspective of the text, as the narrative voice remains autodiegetic, but the focalization changes to that of the adult victim, as he reviews the childhood memory in a more distanced manner. The child escapes the abuser and is driven home by Père Para, in whom the child confides and who ensures he is protected from punishment. Yet this 'helper' encourages the concealment of the abuse and thus protects the abuser, although the way in which the incident is concealed seemingly aids the victim's recovery from the initial trauma. Indeed, when considering his thoughts surrounding writing the account of his traumatic experience, the adult narrator explains: 'Écrivant ce récit, je craignais que ça n'allume en moi de la haine ou de la rancune. […] Ça me suffit, semble-t-il, d'avoir pu le contrecarrer à temps.' (p. 233) The narrator thus initially hides his identity as protagonist at the beginning of the text, using the heterodiegetic

voice, and reveals himself at the end of the story, seemingly after having recounted his past from a distanced perspective and having discovered no remaining resentment or trauma due to the event. As the opening narrator is not initially acknowledged as the child victim, the reader is able to identify more closely with the child's contemporaneous narration and focalization, without associating it with the older, adult narrator. Yet the merging of child and adult narrator at the end of the text has the effect of foregrounding the difference in perspective between a child caught in the moment of an abusive 'near-miss' and an adult remembering something once traumatic but swiftly resolved.[31] There is a shift from the first narrator, starting out on a revision process, to the second, child narrator, recounting the event, to the third narrator, who has written the story and discovered that there is no remaining resentment due to his past experience.[32]

In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* there are two modes of narration and focalization. The prologue and epilogue of the main narrative use autodiegetic narration with focalization from the adult Sophie, as she recounts a tale from her childhood to her son Félix. The adult Sophie becomes an intradiegetic narrator of the main story, recounting her experience from her childhood perspective, with occasional instances of adult focalization and narratorial comment, despite the impersonal 'pseudo-heterodiegetic' voice. While Genette uses the term heterodiegetic to refer to the narrator who is not a character in the story, this is often equated with the term 'third-person narrator'. The impersonal narrative voice enables the depiction of the child Sophie's perspective alongside the adult Sophie's voice. Three levels of seeing and understanding then are prevalent throughout the text: what the child Sophie knows and sees, what the adult Sophie knows and sees, and what the reader knows and sees. In the prologue the adult Sophie recounts a conversation between herself and her son,

[31] Chapter Four discusses the relationship between time and memory in *Mauvais coup*.
[32] Writing and the mental revision of traumatic experiences is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

where her son asks: 'Tu dis toujours qu'il y a des choses qui font grandir, mais tu pourrais m'en dire une, toi?' (p. 9) and the scene is set for the story which follows, where the child Sophie goes on holiday with her mother to visit her aunt and cousins and is naively impressed by their lavish lifestyle, and blind to their psychological manipulation of and cruelty towards Félix, a visiting child. Upon returning home from the visit, Sophie arranges another stay with her cousins without her mother. On this second visit, however, Sophie is forced to re-evaluate her opinions as the family begin to bully her, leading to her mother Rosemonde coming to her rescue. The text ends with an epilogue narrated by adult Sophie, who analyses the impact that the experience has had upon her own life and her attitude towards her own son.

The narrator of the main narrative follows the child Sophie's perspective on her visit to see her aunt and occasionally corrects or modifies the child's focalization. Indeed, the narrator explains that Sophie considers her aunt and cousins with the 'émerveillement d'enfant' (p. 17), which distances the narrative voice from the child's focalization and suggests a naïve and unreliable focalizing perspective. This highlighting of the unreliability of the child focalizer creates a distance between narrator, focalizer, and reader to encourage a critical reading of Sophie's perception. Furthermore, in the scene in which Sophie's aunt, Cora, talks of 'du marbre de Carrare', the narrator reveals the irony of Sophie's miscomprehension: '*Cas rare*, comprend Sophie qui, comme il est mentionné plus haut, n'a pas encore visité l'Italie' (p. 38). The narrator further undermines Sophie's naïve admiration for Cora when the child's aunt sprays some of her perfume on Sophie, a scent which Sophie has previously criticized: '— Voilà, tu sens aussi bon que moi maintenant! Ah… aussi bon que la penderie en plastique au fond du garage, donc. *Horreur de rose*?' (p. 40) The narrator is thus seen

to inform the reader of Sophie's former attitude, highlighting her change in character and impressionability.

This adult narrative voice which guides the reader and provides supplementary information could be mistaken for an example of Nikolajeva's adult narrator/child focalizer; the child Sophie's perspective is foregrounded with elements of *style indirect libre* and the adult narrator adds to the child's view. Yet where Nikolajeva's explanation of the adult narrator/child focalizer seems to imply covertly and didactically guiding child readers, in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, the narrator is explicitly adult and is revealed as the main protagonist personally reconsidering a youthful experience. Indeed, in the epilogue the narrator comments on the son's request to be given an example of something which has made her grow up: 'Plus tard, des années après, je me suis dit que dans vingt ans je raconterais cette histoire à ma fille ou à mon fils. Cela me paraissait important. Je t'ai peut-être appelé Félix en souvenir de quelqu'un qui est resté pour moi à la fois une honte, une leçon et une reconnaissance, et en me promettant de faire mon possible pour que tu sois heureux' (p. 163). The naming of the son Félix (meaning 'happy') and the narrator's lifelong commitment to making *him* happy, reveals the long-term emotional and psychological impact of Sophie's abuse and her own complicity in the abuse of the child-victim Félix. Adult Sophie's initial reluctance to answer Félix's question (p. 11) implies a sense of shame and hints at the burying of the negative memory. The dual perspective also highlights the importance of the themes of growing up and of maturity, present in the main narrative. Indeed, in the prologue and epilogue Sophie's maturity is established; she has come from the point of childhood naivety to adult maturity and knowledge, which her childhood abusive experience encouraged.

The principal themes of seeing what is physically taking place and the subjective perception of what is seen in relation to psychological abuse is reinforced through the use of a scene of direct speech and Sophie's external focalization of events. When Cora sees her children viciously hitting Félix, who is tied to a tree, the narrator describes the scene:

> — Vous n'avez pas froid, au moins?
>
> — Pas du tout, maman chérie, dit Violaine.
>
> Et Cora s'en va.
>
> Félix n'a rien dit; Cora n'a rien vu. Sophie est abasourdie. La réalité n'est-elle pas ce qu'elle a l'impression de voir?' (pp. 94-5).

The direct speech shows Cora's indifference to the abusive behaviour, complemented by the narrator's description of her being unwilling to 'see' the reality of what is occurring around her, whilst Sophie is stunned into silence, destablized by the normalization of abuse exhibited by the adult in authority, while the victim remains voiceless. The narrator's caustic rhetorical question at the end of the passage hints at the self-delusion surrounding the whole family and, indeed, Sophie, as it questions the objectivity of reality and interpretation after the description of Félix being brutally beaten by the other children. Sophie plays the role of witness to the abuse, in this scene and the events leading up to it, as she stands and watches the events unfold, but cannot bring herself to intervene in the situation. When she sees Grégoire holding a blade next to Félix's face, Sophie shouts at her cousins to stop, but is dismissed by them both as 'encore jeune' and 'pas suffisamment aguerrie' for the 'game'. As the torture of Félix continues, Sophie is a bystander: 'Sophie se tait. La tête lui tourne. Si elle s'évanouissait, ou si elle parvenait à vomir, est-ce que le jeu, enfin, s'arrêterait?' (pp. 92-93). Sophie here is a reluctant witness to the events and she is psychologically and

physically unable to rescue Félix in the face of two older and more powerful abusers: her physical reactions to feeling overwhelmed by the situation are testament to her own vulnerability.[33]

Alongside Sophie's inability to see the truth, Cora and the cousins' denial of abuse and Félix's silence, a further level of perception is present in the novel in the scenes of direct speech between Rosemonde and Sophie as the mother attempts to guide her daughter during their stay and open her eyes to the cruelty of the family and her daughter's complicity in the bullying of Félix:

> — Quand on se range du côté des plus forts, ce n'est pas forcément par lâcheté… Parfois, c'est simplement par aveuglement ou par ignorance. Il faut essayer…
>
> — J'ai sommeil, dit Sophie en étouffant sa voix dans l'oreiller. Je suis en train de m'endormir. (p. 71)

> — Tu ne peux pas arrêter un peu? demande-t-elle à Rosemonde, un matin dans leur chambre.
>
> — Arrêter quoi?
>
> — De t'occuper comme ça de *lui*! Cora trouve ridicule que tu lui fasses la lecture. À son age! Mes cousins aussi. Ils se moquent de toi, dans ton dos!
>
> […]
>
> — Tu es encore petite, mais comme tu changes. Je suppose que je dois l'accepter. C'est aussi ça, avoir des enfants: admettre que toutes les influences extérieures les ballottent. (p. 103)

[33] The role of the 'reluctant witness' is discussed in relation to the witness-narration texts in Chapter Three.

The first scene highlights the significance of seeing and accepting what one sees, with Rosemonde indirectly addressing Sophie's ignorance of the reality of events and Sophie dismissing her mother's words physically and psychologically. Sophie's unwillingness to hear her mother or see the abuse reinforces the image of her as naïve and immature. In the second scene, Sophie's embarrassment at her mother's defence of Félix shows the extent of the influence that her cousins have upon her: her concern over her image is prioritized over hurting her mother and comforting Félix, highlighting the child protagonist's self-absorption, which ultimately renders her susceptible to her aunt and cousins' manipulation. In both scenes, there is external focalization of both characters: the narrator relays the conversation and what each character does, but reveals nothing directly of what is thought by mother and daughter.

In Part Two of the text, there is a shift in events and in focalization as the narrative reaches its climax with Rosemonde becoming suspicious of her daughter's behaviour and coming to rescue her on the second visit to see her cousins on her own. The first chapter includes a letter written by Sophie to her mother, where the child protagonist's text is supplemented by the narrator's explanatory comments. When Sophie describes going to church, for example, she writes: '*Cora dit que ça ne peut pas me faire de mal*.' The narrator then reveals the details of the episode: 'Cora a aussi proféré des reproches à l'encontre de Rosemonde qui n'a pas donné de religion à ses enfants. Sur ce chapitre-là, Sophie est rodée.' (p. 124) Sophie thus omits the full extent of Cora's behaviour, both in her letters and seemingly to herself, yet the narrator fills the gaps, leaving little doubt as to the aunt's cruelty. Moreover, when Grégoire and Violaine chase Sophie in an attempt to read one of her letters, the protagonist feels uneasy at their excuse when reprimanded by their father: 'Dans les minutes qui suivent, Sophie a l'étrange impression de revoir une scène de film déjà vue. Grégoire et Violaine

s'expliquent, se justifient. "On jouououe… Pour la faire bisquer… […] Comprend rien à la plaisanterie…"' (p. 129). The cousins' behaviour is reminiscent of their self-justification when persecuting Félix in Sophie's presence, which placed Sophie in the position of a witness to the abuse, emphasizing her transformation into the role of victim in the text.

The following chapter of the text consists solely of a scene of direct speech of a telephone call between Sophie and her mother, without narrator interference:

— Ça va, mon chat?

— Ça va…

— Tu es sûre? On ne dirait pas.

— Ça va, je te dis. (p. 135)

Sophie's short utterances and refutation of her mother's concern show that her pride and independence hinder her acknowledgement of the reality of the situation. Thus, in a similar way to the autodiegetic narratives discussed above, the scene of direct speech here emphasizes the child victim's silence and inability to express her abuse to others. Indeed, without the adult narrative intervention, the reader has a solely external perspective of a closed conversation between Sophie and her mother. The scene of direct speech, then, also depicts the difficulty in assessing the child's situation from an external perspective: Rosemonde suspects that something is wrong, but Sophie's denial leads to her mother delaying her intervention in the abusive situation.

Following the phone conversation, the narrative returns to the adult Sophie's narration with internal focalization through the child Sophie as the narrator exposes the depths of the protagonist's exclusion and shame that she has misjudged the situation:

> Quand on est une grande fille qui a insisté, décidé toute seule, contre l'avis de sa maman, de comment, où et avec qui elle passerait les vacances, on ne dit

> pas non plus qu'on a le cœur qui saigne de l'indifférence aussi soudaine qu'inexpliquée des cousins auprès de qui la vie était merveilleuse trois mois plus tôt. […]
>
> Ils l'ont reçue comme un fardeau, un paquet encombrant. Hélas, ce sont des gens polis, bien élevés: l'invitation pour juillet avait été lancée, acceptée… Cora se sentait sans doute engagée. (pp. 142-3)

The inner turmoil of the child protagonist is revealed as she expresses guilt for her bad faith. There is the theme of silence and embarrassment here, with Sophie's repetition of 'on ne dit pas' and the narrator reveals what Sophie would have liked to have said at the time as a child, but was unable. Sophie also minimizes her own experience of abuse, as she searches for innocent reasons for the aunt's and cousins' cruel behaviour. Adult-narrator Sophie thus assumes the internal focalization of the child and expresses her thoughts. In this sense, the autodiegetic narration with dual focalization serves to liberate the child's voice and perspective and to re-evaluate the misguided choices made by the child which resulted in her becoming a victim of abuse. The adult perspective also emphasizes the impact of the abuse: the childhood experience informs her adult choices and her parenting decisions, as Sophie relays the story to her son and names him after the fellow child victim.

Heterodiegetic Narration with Zero and Child-Victim Focalization

In the texts *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Derrière la porte*, an impersonal heterodiegetic narrator recounts the story events. In *Quelque chose à te dire* the heterodiegetic narrator describes the child protagonist Ariane's trip to her estranged maternal grandmother where she discovers a family secret. The narrative ends with Ariane's mother revealing to her daughter her childhood experience of sexual

abuse by her father, which resulted in her giving birth to a son. The baby was then killed by Dominique's (and his) father, when the abuser drunkenly jumped off a cliff with the baby. The narrative contains predominantly external focalization to enable the mystery plot to develop, with internal focalization through the eyes of the child protagonist as she attempts to uncover the family past. It is thus different from *Derrière la porte* and *Les Parents de Mélie*, as the protagonist of these texts is the victim of abuse which is described as it happens. In *Derrière la porte* the focalization is predominantly through the eyes of the victim-protagonist Damien; in *Mélie*, for the most part focalization is internally mediated through the protagonist Mélie, but the narrator is also omniscient, or in Genette's terms, non-focalized. Focalization occasionally switches from character to character with free indirect style and the narrator's knowledge is greater than that of the protagonist Mélie.

Derrière la porte depicts the child protagonist's life with his physically and mentally abusive stepmother while his father works away. Damien discovers a love triangle involving his stepmother's ancestors and uses black magic to conjure the spirit of the deceased spurned admirer, Lili-Catherine, who ultimately destroys the house and attempts to harm his stepmother, known as Madame, step-grandmother and stepsister Lorraine. The text is thus a strong example of one that contains the fairy-tale elements discussed in the previous chapter, with the villain being a wicked stepmother and the inclusion of the fairy godmother. The main narrative uses a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization, but each chapter is preceded by a section of italicized text with the child-victim protagonist Damien as the autodiegetic narrator. When Damien realizes he can search for Armand, the family gardener and Damien's adult helper, if sent to fetch bread by his stepmother, the narrator switches between the internal focalization of Damien and Janine, the housekeeper:

> Damien réfléchit: un aller-retour pour la boulangerie… au moins trois quarts d'heure! […] Il pourrait partir à la recherche d'Armand sans éveiller les soupçons! Janine ne suivait pas le même cheminement de pensée. Elle voyait arriver le moment où Madame allait lui demander de lui apporter le pain pendant ses jours de congé. Elle ne savait pas comment dire non. (p. 104)

The narrator deals with the two characters' perspectives to show the impact of the abusive stepmother's power over her stepson and her housemaid: Damien needs a legitimate reason to gain freedom from his attic bedroom, whilst Janine needs a reason not to go to the baker herself.

The heterodiegetic voice also serves as a means of including the abusive stepmother's thoughts and insecurities:

> [Madame] en voulait à Janine d'être en congé, elle en voulait à son mari d'être absent, elle en voulait au micro-ondes… Elle était contrainte de s'occuper et de sa mère et de sa fille, comme une vulgaire servante. Damien allait payer pour tout ça. (p. 108)

The depiction of the stepmother's feelings of frustration are presented as her justification for bullying Damien: she is exercizing control over something, or rather someone, that she can. The brief narrative inclusion of the abuser's perspective, which is present in *Les Saisons dangereuses* and *La Fille du canal* discussed in the next chapter, invites the reader to assess critically the motivations of the abuser and the consequences of these motivations on the child victim. The narrative also contains free indirect style originating from Damien's class teacher and his helper, to represent the concerns of other characters for the child-victim protagonist: 'Mme Laborde avait des doutes. Au fil des mois, elle avait vu Damien maigrir, les cernes se creuser sous ses yeux' (p. 41); 'Armand acquiesça. Autant être prudent s'il voulait continuer de veiller sur

Damien' (p. 63). The class teacher's external view of the child reveals suspicions of abuse, yet her lack of intervention emphasizes Damien's isolation as the potential helper chooses to dismiss what she has seen. Armand's perspective, however, presents a more positive image of the adult characters, as he reveals his desire to protect the victim. The zero-focalization thus provides insight into the motives and perspectives of various characters, giving a broader view of the impact and origins of Damien's abuse.

The heterodiegetic narrator of *Derrière la porte* also describes in succession scenes which occur simultaneously, highlighting the narrator's control over the depiction of story events from a detached and objective standpoint. When Damien is in the cellar, the narrator describes how Lorraine is recovering from the car accident upstairs in the house (p. 129) and the narrator is able to depict the scene of Madame's car accident, whilst also reporting Damien's whereabouts (p. 80). The narrator does, however, withhold information vital to plot development, such as Lili-Catherine's relationship to Damien's stepfamily, which creates narrative tension. Indeed, the story revolves around family secrets, revenge and a fantasy ghost storyline, and the heterodiegetic narrator reports the necessary information to drive the plot, whilst maintaining suspense and providing a motive to continue reading. The packaging of an abuse narrative in this way, with the inclusion of fairy-tale elements of a wicked stepmother and fairy godmother, is perhaps an attempt to diversify the genre and provide a different approach and perspective for readers to the realist abuse texts.

While the narrator is omniscient, the focalization is often through the child victim Damien, revealing his feelings and perspective on his abuse. The narrator depicts Damien's thoughts when he is locked in the cellar by Madame, surrounded by rats:

> Ça devait faire horriblement mal, une morsure de rat. Il fallait qu'il pense à autre chose. Un exercice de calcul mental. […] Dix mille rats multipliés par vingt-cinq virus de la peste divisés par quatorze grands-mères… (pp. 30-31)

The narration assumes Damien's inner thoughts by means of free indirect discourse as he tries to distract himself from his imprisonment. The humorous tone to the passage encourages reader involvement in the protagonist's dilemma. The narrator further reveals Damien's feelings of abandonment and the reasons for his emotional investment in a ghost: 'Il n'avait plus de mère, il n'avait pas de père. Il n'y avait que Lili-Catherine qui tenait ses promesses. À cet instant, Damien ne pensait pas à Armand. Il n'avait que le désespoir dans le cœur. Et le désespoir le ramena peu à peu à la haine' (p. 87). Thus, just as in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, *Derrière la porte* consists of narration focalized by the protagonist in order to increase reader empathy for the child-victim and to create a sense of affinity between the protagonist and reader.

At the beginning of the novel, the preface consists of Damien describing his former life with his mother compared with the life he now leads: '*Je veux rester derrière la porte. Dans ma maison d'avant, j'avais une chambre au rez-de-chaussée. Je ne regardais pas la porte. Elle n'existait pas*. […] *La porte, c'est tout ce qui compte. La porte est entre Elle et moi*' (p. 7). Damien's fascination with his door emphasizes his concern with his own private space and feeling of being 'shut off' from Lorraine and Madame, with it also being a mechanism to distance himself from his stepmother. At the beginning of the final chapter of the text, when Damien is at the supportive pseudo-grandmother Mamie Char's house, his feelings of contentment and security are evident: '*J'ai mangé de la dinde aux marrons et de la buche au café. Je ne me souvenais plus que c'était aussi bon, un repas de Noël. J'aime bien ma porte*' (p. 179). The reference to the door again highlights the change in Damien's life and situation: he is no longer

alienated from his step-family, grateful for the physical and emotional barrier between himself and Madame, but has his own valid position and sense of belonging within a new family. The inclusion of Damien's own narrative voice gives the impression of a reliable and direct portrayal of his thoughts and emotions. The autodiegetic sections set up each chapter by reinforcing the importance of the protagonist's experiences and perspective for the heterodiegetic chapter which follows, while also highlighting the position of Damien's voice in the family dynamics: excluded and marginalized.

Les Parents de Mélie consists of two parts: *Mal à ma mère* and *Paix à mon père*. The former is an episodic narrative which depicts the dysfunctional and psychologically abusive behaviour that Mélie's parents inflict upon her, especially her mother, over the course of Mélie's early childhood through to adolescence. The latter depicts Mélie as a young adult who has moved away from home and, with the help of a psychologist, has begun to overcome the damage caused by her mother's abuse. This second part centres on Mélie being informed of her father's suicide, and the protagonist's re-evaluation of her childhood relationship with her father. Whilst I refer in passing to *Paix à mon père*, my focus is on *Mal à ma mère*, as there is a clear cognitive gap between the child's focalization and the heterodiegetic narrative voice. In the first pages of *Mal à ma mère*, the narrator describes Mélie's thoughts regarding her mother: 'Mélie a deux mamans. Elle en est sûre, depuis qu'elle est toute petite. Depuis qu'elle a vu, à la télévision, un dessin animé dans lequel les héroïnes sont deux jumelles. Deux fillettes identiques qui, cependant, ont des personnages très différentes. L'une est douce et gentille, l'autre est violente et méchante. Sa maman est ainsi.' (p. 7). The relative shortness and standard syntax of the sentences reflect Mélie's consciousness and her childlike logic in associating her mother's mental instability to a fictional television programme, which emphasizes her position as a young child trying to make

sense of her unpredictable mother. The phrase ‘Sa maman est ainsi’ following the emotive terms ‘violente et méchante’ further reveals the child’s acceptance of her mother’s behaviour having seemingly found an explanation for it. The narrator further explains Mélie’s everyday life with her mother and her attempt at reassuring herself that the evil mother is not a permanent fixture: ‘Lorsque sa mère est de bonne humeur, c’est bien sûr maman rose qui est là. Et lorsqu’elle se transforme en harpie, c’est que maman noire a pris la place. Il n’y a qu’à attendre, maman rose reviendra.’ (p. 8) The repetition of the syntax starting with ‘lorsque’ and the subordinate clause starting with ‘c’est’, and the words ‘là’ and ‘place’, and ‘attendre’ and ‘reviendra’ give the impression of spoken, lyrical language reminiscent of the style of a children’s nursery rhyme, which reflects the focalizer’s age and cognitive stage. The juxtaposition of the child-like narration, including the repetition of the term ‘maman’, with the recounting of information regarding Mélie’s mentally unstable mother, emphasizes the child’s vulnerability.

The first part of the narrative consists of a selection of chronological scenes from Mélie’s childhood wherein the narrator focuses on the child victim’s perspective of events, avoiding explanatory information. In the scene where Mélie hides in the living room while her parents are arguing, unaware of her presence, the narrator comments: ‘Personne ne fait attention à elle. On ne sait même pas qu’elle est là. Elle n’ose pas bouger. Elle sent bien qu’elle devrait être ailleurs. C’est une scène de grandes personnes. Pas belle. Pas pour les enfants.’ (p. 15). The scene is focalized through Mélie, with what appears to be free indirect discourse representing Mélie’s inner voice that the scene is ‘pas pour les enfants’. The phrase suggests Mélie’s assumption of the common adult-voiced warning aimed at protecting children from inappropriate scenes, which is ironic given that it is the child victim who is aware of the inappropriate

behaviour, whilst the parents continue to argue. In another episode, the narrator relates Mélie's feelings when her mother pushes her away, by describing the physical effect of the mother's response on her daughter, avoiding elaborate emotional and psychological identification with the protagonist; showing the scene, rather than telling:

> Elle a envie aussi de poser un baiser sur la joue de sa maman. La peau rose ressemble à du velours. La bouche, rouge, brillante, a l'air d'une grosse cerise. Maman voit le mouvement de sa fille vers elle, et l'arrête brutalement:
>
> — Ne t'approche pas, c'est fragile! […] Les yeux piquetés d'éblouissement, Mélie fut longue à s'endormir. (p. 9)

The narrator qualifies the mother's action with the emotive term 'brutalement', showing Mélie's understanding of her mother's rejection. The physical aggression appears all the more cruel given the description of the daughter's admiration for her mother and desire to kiss her. Similarly, when her mother turns into the dreaded maman noire after the pair have been merrily making pancakes together, the narrator describes Mélie's experience of the events: 'Mélie va dans sa chambre. Les crêpes sont pesantes, maintenant, dans son ventre. Elle regrette d'en avoir tant mangé. Elle s'allonge sur son lit. Prend son nounours dans ses bras et le serre très fort contre elle.' (p. 14) Here the narrator recounts Mélie's encounter with the cruel side of her mother's personality directly followed by her imminent physical discomfort, which the protagonist associates with her consumption of pancakes. Nikolajeva observes that 'if writers want to create an illusion of an authentic child perspective, they must pretend that the narrator does not know or understand more than the focalizing character.'[34] Indeed, the narrator remains loyal to Mélie's view of the situation in the passage; maman noire arrives, Mélie feels uncomfortable but attributes this to the pancakes. Yet the ordering of the events and

[34] Nikolajeva, 'Beyond the Grammar', p. 12.

description of Mélie clutching her teddy bear suggest a causal link between the discomfort Mélie feels and her tumultuous relationship with her mother, and hints at Mélie's own awareness of the source of her discomfort. The narrator is certainly aware of more, yet does not reveal it, which foregrounds the child-victim focalizer's experience and highlights her constant state of unease.

While the focalization is predominantly centred on Mélie, the narrative voice certainly appears to be more linguistically and cognitively advanced than the child protagonist. The narrator chooses specific negative modifiers when describing the mother, which do not seem to originate from Mélie. The mother is described as having 'yeux reptiliens' (p. 49), which is arguably an unlikely turn of phrase for a young child.[35] Similarly, when the family doctor internally examines Mélie, the narrator describes the mother's sadistic pleasure:

> Elle rencontre le regard de sa mère, juste au-dessus d'elle. Sa mère qui l'observe, en train de se faire pénétrer par une main d'homme. Ses yeux sont froids, secs, avec une sorte de satisfaction dans les prunelles glacées. Et puis, toujours le petit sourire acide, sadique:
>
> — Alors, docteur? (p. 22)

The narrator's stark description of Mélie's anal examination has connotations of sexual abuse, which is then followed by the description of the mother's 'sourire acide, sadique', with adjectives not congruent with a nine-year old's lexis. The narrator appears to be judging and emphasizing the extent of the mother's cruelty and psychological dysfunction; she is gaining pleasure from her own daughter's pain. The protagonist is subsequently shown to be crying at home after the ordeal, gaining comfort from her teddy, as in the previous scene, highlighting her child status and vulnerability: 'Mélie

[35] The use of animal imagery to describe the abuser is common across the corpus, and in *Monsieur Henry* and *John et Moi* in particular, and is discussed in Chapter Five.

tient son nounours tout contre elle, et elle pleure longuement, sans vraiment savoir pourquoi' (p. 22). The portrayal of Mélie's distress is evidently linked to the invasive examination she has undergone and also presumably to seeing her mother's satisfaction at the child's position of fear and discomfort. Yet just as in the scene with the pancakes, Mélie is described as not quite knowing why she is upset and her quiet, private tears over the incident and her inability to express her thoughts and confusion verbally emphasizes her isolation and lack of control in her life. The narrator's sophisticated lexis and superior knowledge of the situation, with predominant child focalization through the narrative, exemplifies Nikolajeva's description of child focalization with an adult narrative voice: the adult knows more than the focalizing character and expresses the child's experiences at certain points in more complex ways than is consistent with a child's voice. Yet there is a significant distinction to be made here, as the narrator's evaluative comments seem to appear in reference to the mother and depictions of her behaviour, whereas Mélie's thoughts, feelings and understanding are depicted with a sense of fidelity and authority.

The narrative voice also subtly reveals extra knowledge of narrative events in instances of prolepsis, whereby the narrator makes future assertions,[36] or advance notices, of which Mélie herself cannot be aware at the time, even stating this overtly. After seeing blood on her parents' sheets, the narrator claims that Mélie will henceforth be afraid of the colour red: 'Le lendemain matin, Mélie aperçoit, dans le lit de ses parents, une tache rouge. Maman recouvre vite avec le drap de dessus, mais c'est trop tard. Mélie a vu. Elle ne sait rien encore du sang de la femme. Mélie pense que papa a blessé maman dans la dispute. Elle le regarde, horrifiée.'; 'À partir de ce jour, Mélie aura peur du rouge. Elle ne portera jamais cette couleur. Elle ne pourra manger que de

[36] Genette, p.28.

la viande très cuite, ayant perdu sa coloration d'origine. Les fraises, les cerises et les framboises lui feront horreur.' (p. 29). The narrator's supplementary information on Mélie's future highlights the far-reaching impact of her fear and experiences. Moreover, the narrator does not explain to the reader the meaning or significance of 'le sang de la femme', suggesting the reader is assumed to be aware of menstruation and thus to be older than the protagonist. The technique serves to target and engage the adolescent reader and forges a certain level of reader-narrator complicity: the reader and narrator know about menstruation, but Mélie does not. In this sense, then, Nikolajeva's focus on a 'guiding' adult narrative voice is less relevant to *Les Parents de Mélie*, though the role of increasing complexity of the narrative is certainly assumed by the heterodiegetic narrator.

The narration also contains elements of Mélie's voice and thoughts as her heightened emotions are represented in the narration with the use of verbal fillers and exclamations, which give the impression of direct insight into Mélie's consciousness: 'Mélie jette un regard furtif à sa mère. Ouf, elle n'est pas fâchée.' (p. 14); 'C'est maman noire, c'est sûr!' (p. 11); 'Mélie continue à pleurer, doucement, longtemps. Elle veut sa maman rose. Où est sa maman rose? Pourvu qu'elle revienne. Elle ne veut plus voir celle-là, elle lui fait trop peur.' (p. 16). The inclusion of this free indirect style suggests that the narrative remains loyal to Mélie's perspective, with an authoritative narrator relating the events. The narrator also uses direct quotation to cite the words of Mélie when she repeats her obsessive rituals which emerge due to the psychologically damaging relationship with her mother: 'Elle se met à tourner dix fois autour de la pièce, en répétant "maman rose, maman rose, maman rose…". Puis elle tourne dix fois en sens inverse, en disant "maman noire, maman noire, maman noire…". Dix fois dans un sens, pour faire revenir maman rose. Dix fois dans l'autre sens, pour chasser maman

noire. Enfin, elle peut s'endormir, apaisée.' (p. 17) The increased level of fidelity to the protagonist's uttered words highlights the extent of Mélie's disturbed state of mind as her repetitive chanting is emphasized to the reader visually.

In the later stages of *Mal à ma mère*, Mélie's growth and development are represented in the narration and focalization of the narrative. A significant scene occurs where Mélie's mother becomes aware that her daughter has begun menstruating and is horrified by the development: 'Cela fait plusiers mois que Mélie cache son secret, sans savoir pourquoi. Et maintenant, à cet instant, elle sait pourquoi.' (p. 64) Mélie's own psychological maturity is foregrounded, as where previously the narrator describes Mélie's 'not knowing' in scenes, here Mélie 'sait pourquoi'. Mélie's internal focalization continues as she identifies her mother's fear and anger: 'Comment, elle, la petite Mélie malingre et chétive, a osé prétendre au rang de femme, alors qu'il n'y en a qu'une dans cette maison, une seule qui a droit à ce statut. "Ô Reine, vous êtes la seule Femme ici-bas… Mais une petite Mélie est devenue femme à son tour, plus jeune, et qui sait, plus belle que vous peut-être…"' (p. 64). The free indirect discourse seems to originate from the fairy tale Snow White where the stepmother talks to the looking glass for reassurance of her beauty and superiority. The intertextual link integrated into Mélie's focalization shows her awareness of her mother's resentment of her daughter's femininity and the mother's fears and insecurities regarding being usurped. The likening of her mother to a wicked fairytale stepmother also suggests Mélie's own feelings of fear and contempt for her mother.

Although Mélie's direct speech is sparse in the narration of *Mal à ma mère*, suggesting the isolation and vulnerability of the child victim just as in *La Petite Maîtresse*, as Mélie matures throughout the text more scenes of direct speech occur where Mélie interacts with other characters. Towards the end of the first half of the

novel there are three scenes with substantial amounts of reported speech depicting Mélie's voice: the scene in which Mélie asks her mother for a bra (pp. 48-50), the scene where Mélie confides in her friend Brigitte that her mother hates her (pp. 56-60), and the scene where Mélie tries to tell her grandmother about the toxic relationship she has with her mother (p. 68-71). In the first scene, Mélie confronts her mother regarding her refusal to buy her a bra: 'Mais maman, j'ai de la poitrine, regarde!' (p. 49); 'Maman, tout le monde se moque de moi, à la gym!' (p. 49). In the second scene, she tells Brigitte that the broken items her mother gives her as presents are '[t]ous des gifles!' (p. 59). Mélie has evolved into a teenager and her own psychological development and maturity is highlighted. She can articulate her feelings and tries to speak out about her abuse, where as a young child she witnessed and was a victim of the dysfunctional family dynamics, without fully understanding them, hence the heterodiegetic narrator who expressed Mélie's words and feelings for her in the form of free indirect style.

Mélie's internalization of her feelings and the rejection of her voice and words by those around her lead to Mélie losing control of her emotions in one episode after her mother accuses her of being 'folle'. Mélie's anxiety is expressed physically when she carries out her rituals and rips apart her teddy with her teeth, stuffing it into her mouth to the point of near suffocation:

> Sa respiration devient difficile. Elle suffoque. Panique. Veut hurler. Appeler à l'aide. Mais aucun son ne sort de sa bouche encombrée. Elle essaie d'expulser un peu de la matière qu'elle a accumulée dans ses joues, pour laisser passer un filet d'air. (p. 79)

> Elle ne sait pas pourquoi elle a agi ainsi. Pourquoi elle a voulu mourir en tuant son nounours. Pourquoi elle a choisi de vivre, in extremis. Pourquoi elle a

> décidé de suivre son calvaire de vie, au moment où elle allait en être libérée. (p. 80)

The scene of Mélie's destruction and consumption of her teddy is narrated in short sentences representing her struggle for breath and rising panic as she becomes aware of the critical choice between life and death. Mélie's lack of voice and her silence, represented by the blocking of her mouth and suffocation, is a predominant theme across the narrative. She does not have a narrative voice, her thoughts and perspective are told by an impersonal narrator, she does not speak in family scenes, and when she grows older and does speak, she is silenced. The choice of her childhood comforter as a potential suicide prop is also significant, implying the protagonist's inability to be soothed and comforted at a basic innate level. The narration of Mélie's reflection on her choice to save herself also consists solely of the description of her thoughts and confusion, and does not explain them on Mélie's behalf, which grants a certain authority and control to Mélie despite the voice not being her own.

Mélie's lack of success in the discussion with her mother, and Brigitte's and her grandmother's unwillingness to listen to and validate Mélie's thoughts and voice, reveal the helplessness of Mélie's situation; she is aware of her status of victim, and has developed the courage to express this to others, but as a teenager with only family and friends in whom to confide, Mélie does not yet have the resources to overcome her situation. That is, until the very end of Part One, when a scene of reported speech is depicted when Mélie visits a therapist at her mother's insistence:

> La mère de Mélie se lève en même temps que sa fille. La thérapeute s'interpose:
>
> — C'est pour mademoiselle, je crois.
>
> — Oui, oui, mais je souhaiterais vous voir d'abord, si c'est possible.

— Non, c'est inutile. Il est inutile également que vous l'attendiez. Je pense qu'elle est assez grande pour rentrer seule.

La claque. Air pincé:

— Bon, bon. Je vous laisse donc.

Part, raide et digne.

— Allez, entre. Je m'appelle Hélène. Et toi, quel est ton prénom? (p. 81)

Here the external voice of the therapist enters the narrative and supports the child victim, with the final page of *Mal à ma mère* signifying a turning point in the victim's life and hinting at Mélie's recovery, which is explored in *Paix à mon père*.

In the second half of the novel, the heterodiegetic narration with focalization through Mélie remains, but the difference in the protagonist's perspective from the first part of the text is evident. Melie's critical and distanced view of her mother is seen when she encounters her mother for the first time after hearing of her father's death:

> Mélie la trouva seule, dans le salon, en robe de chambre. Le visage sec. Avait-elle pleuré? Impossible de le dire. Lorsque sa fille entra, elle poussa de grands cris pour faire croire à une détresse insoutenable, puis, voyant que celle-ci ne la suivait pas dans son explosion théâtrale, elle se mit à répéter, comme un leitmotiv: 'Je suis veuve, je suis veuve…' jusqu'à ce que Mélie la coupe d'un bref: 'Lui, il est mort!' (p. 88).

Here, as an adult, Mélie is able to confront her mother's selfish behaviour and resist the emotional guilt and psychological manipulation that her mother attempts to impose upon her. Mélie's internal focalization shows her critical evaluation of her mother's behaviour and Mélie now voices her displeasure and takes control of the scene. The depiction of maturity and growing up which was prevalent in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, through the adult Sophie's retrospection, is a significant theme here in *Les*

Parents de Mélie: Mélie now has the awareness and experience to protect herself from her mother's behaviour.

The restricted focalization used throughout *Les Parents de Mélie* remains true to Mélie's experiences and perception of abuse, whilst the heterodiegetic narrative voice emphasizes the extent of the mother's cruelty and the impact of this behaviour on Mélie, which in some ways supports Nikolajeva's observation of the existence of an adult narrative voice in children's fiction with a young child focalizer. Yet the difference in age of the intended reader and age of the protagonist is what facilitates the mature voice, rather than the need for a 'guiding' narrator: the narrator bridges the gap between the seven-year old protagonist and the teenage reader and forges a relationship based on complicity and understanding: the reader and narrator are aware of the significance of certain events, whilst young Mélie is not. The gradual shift in the depiction of Mélie's voice from free indirect style incorporated into the narration, to more direct speech as Mélie grows older represents the psychological as well as physical development of the protagonist: she learns to verbalize her feelings and confront both her mother and other characters about her abuse and the complexity of the level of focalization and tone of narration begin to converge as Mélie also sees what the narrator understands. Indeed, in *Paix à mon père*, there is no noticeable gap between the narrative voice and the focalization, as Mélie is now a young adult with a detached awareness of her mother's dysfunction.

Conclusion

The autodiegetic narrator with child-victim focalization used in *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Dans la gueule du vent* foregrounds the child's voice and grants the victims the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences. This is particularly

significant given the abuse subject matter and the silencing of the child in the abusive relationship. The narrator's difficulty in speaking out to other characters is contrasted with the intimate emotional and psychological turmoil the narrator-focalizer divulges to the reader. The depiction in both texts of the victims' complex psychological processing of the abusive experiences refute Nikolajeva's claim that child narration and focalization would result in 'artistic failure', by emphasizing the specificities of teenage fiction as distinct from children's literature. Indeed, with these corpus texts, the narration and focalization are loyal to the adolescent victims, whose mental development and ability to verbalize their thought processes are more advanced than those of young child protagonists. Furthermore, this confiding in the reader and the narrating of events as they occur are aspects of what Delbrassine refers to as the *séduction du lecteur* and the close reader-narrator relationship also supports Wall's observation that teenage fiction mimics the reader in voice and focalization. Yet whilst the autodiegetic mode is the prevalent form of narration and focalization across the corpus, this technique is only one of five narrator-focalizer combinations, which highlights the variety of ways chosen to depict the topic of abuse and thus challenges the assumption that the focus of teenage fiction is the 'winning over' of the reader.

The technique of dual focalization depicted in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* foregrounds the child's perspective and naivety, with the adult narrator identifying Sophie's misperception and bad faith. The narrator is heavily involved in the telling of events and commenting upon them, just as in the child-victim narrated texts, although adult Sophie's retrospection adds another level of perception to the narrative. The adult retrospection in the prologue and epilogue, rather than being an attempt to guide the child reader, as Nikolajeva suggests in reference to children's fiction, adds psychological depth and interest to the text. *Les Parents de Mélie* and *Derrière la porte*

use narrators who are external to the story and who recount events predominantly through the child victim's focalization, but each have a rather different focus. In *Mélie*, the narrator describes what is seen by Mélie and integrates her words, which she cannot externally voice, in the narration via free indirect discourse. The somewhat more cognitively developed narrative voice comments on Mélie's mother and the depiction of the long-term impact of Mélie's psychological abuse, which is beyond the scope of the child's focalization. The narrative voice targets the older implied reader, creating a relationship based on mutual understanding of the victim's dysfunctional family. In *Derrière la porte*, the heterodiegetic narrator reveals external perspectives on Damien's situation via focalization through the eyes of Damien's teacher, the gardener and the cook. The alternating focalization also enables the narrator to provide the reader with insight into the motivations of the abusive stepmother. Damien's experiences, however, are foregrounded by the autodiegetic chapter openings and the reader is encouraged to read the heterodiegetic sections with the child-victim's position in mind.

Thus whilst the child-victim is the focal interest in the heterodiegetic texts and some free indirect discourse is present to depict the inner thoughts of the protagonists, the significant difference between these narratives and the autodiegetic mode is the lack of the victim's voice and expression of his or her abuse directly to the reader. The dual focalization bridges the gap between these two narrative forms, as the victim has a voice, but it is a retrospective, distanced voice. The choice of whether to grant the child-victim a narrative voice represents the convergence of form and content within the child abuse corpus, as the silencing effect of abuse and the victims' inability to communicate their suffering to others is a common theme across the corpus. It therefore seems pertinent that the autodiegetic mode is the most prevalent, with another large proportion

using the autodiegetic child-witness narrative voice, which, as I now go on to discuss, also foregrounds difficulties in verbalizing and expressing knowledge of abuse.

Chapter Three
Witness Narration and Multiple Narrative Perspectives

In this second of two chapters on narration I explore the use and effects of varied narrative voices and perspectives in those child-abuse texts where the narrator is not the exclusive narrator or focalizing character. Firstly I discuss the use of the witness narrator, which occurs in three of the twenty corpus texts: *La Frontière de sable*, *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait*. This technique consists of a child narrator-focalizer who recounts an external view of the abuse and abuse victim to the reader. The witnessing child may not directly witness the abuse taking place, but he or she is the first of the protagonists to suspect a problem and narrates events to the reader. *Quelque chose à te dire*, discussed in Chapter Two, is in some senses a 'witness' text, as the child uncovers the mother's abuse. However, the victim is no longer a child and the 'witness' does not experience the situation contemporaneously with the victim and I have therefore excluded it from this analysis. In *La Frontière de sable* it is the victim's older cousin, Fredo, who narrates the discovery of the uncle's paedophilia, in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* it is William, a child neighbour of the abuse victims, who confronts the issue of potential psychological abuse and relates the story to the reader, and in *Le Garçon qui se taisait* it is Natacha, classmate and girlfriend of the abuse victim who reports the father's physical abuse of Alex to the adult characters in the text and tells the abuse story to the reader. In the first section of this chapter I explore the effects of using an external child witness as a narrator to an abuse text. I question the assertion made by Sheldrick Ross, discussed in the previous chapter, that using a friend or witness as the narrator of a teenage problem novel which deals with sensitive or controversial subject matter 'is a way of providing a carefully controlled framework in which the crisis of identity portrayed in the book is kept within manageable

and acceptable proportions for the reader.'[1] I address this claim by considering the child witness's gradual discovery and acknowledgement of abuse and the impact of the denunciation of the abuse and abuser on the narrator.

The second half of this chapter explores the use of polyphony in the texts, that is, the presence of more than one narrator and/or focalizer. I explore whether the variety and mixture of narrators and focalizers reduces the impact of the abuse content and the extent of the victim's suffering presented to the reader. I discuss the employment of conflicting voices and the way in which the reader must negotiate between opposing perspectives in *Coups pour coups*, which consists of several accounts of events narrated and focalized by different protagonists, including the child victim, and *La Fille du canal*, which consists of a heterodiegetic narrative and also a diary form 'written' by the victim's teacher who herself is a former child victim of sexual abuse. I then examine the use of the epistolary form in *Les Saisons dangereuses*, consisting of correspondence between an adolescent girl and an adult male family friend who sexually seduces her, and *Moi, Delphine 13 ans…* which consists of correspondence between the adolescent protagonist Delphine, previously sexually abused by her father, and a male adolescent Antonin, whom Delphine believes is her friend Audrey. In this section in particular I examine the way in which the perspectives of victims, external witnesses and even the abuser interact and diverge, inviting the reader to interpret events and their implications.

The Child-Witness Narrator

J'entends pleurer la nuit, which deals with psychological abuse, *La Frontière de sable*, which depicts sexual abuse, and *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, which deals with physical

[1] Sheldrick Ross, p. 184.

abuse, all use homodiegetic narrators who are not abuse victims themselves, but child witnesses to the events who tell the story of the victims from an external perspective.[2] *J'entends pleurer la nuit* is narrated by William who, after moving home, suspects the children who live above him of being psychologically abused by their mother, who, it is later revealed, suffers from bipolar disorder. The novel depicts William's parents' denial of the neighbour's behaviour and the child witness's struggle to deal with his awareness of the situation. William eventually phones the children's helpline *Allô Enfance Maltraitée*, which leads to the resolution of the abuse. In *La Frontière de sable* the narrator, Fredo, is the child victim's cousin who stays with his aunt and uncle during the school holidays, when he discovers the sexual abuse of Laurette by her paternal uncle. The text is focalized for the main part through Fredo as a child, with an epilogue and prologue being the voice and focalization of adult Fredo, as he describes coming to terms with his childhood experience. *Le Garçon qui se taisait* is narrated by eleven-year-old Natacha who is attracted to her classmate Alex. A relationship develops between the pair, and Alex then reveals that he is physically abused by his father. At the end of the novel, Natacha and her parents discover Alex in a semi-conscious state in his home, having been attacked by his father. I use a comparative approach to the following section to explore four key effects of the use of witness narration and focalization present in all three texts: the limited and naïve external perspective on abuse offered by child witnesses, the child narrators' attempts to deny or minimalize the abusive situation, the narrators' struggle to comprehend the victims' experiences and, finally, the presence of an adult pedagogical voice in the narration.

The child-witness narrators in the texts have a limited understanding of what is going on, only initially noticing the strange behaviour of the victim and then relaying to

[2] I discuss the therapeutic role of victims communicating their experiences to witnesses in Chapter Five.

the reader information that the victims themselves make explicit. In *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, Natacha explains that she and her peers share a perception of Alex as 'quand même bizarre' (p. 11), creating intrigue in the plot by highlighting the boy's unexplained behaviour and her curiosity: 'il a toujours une expression un peu triste. Non, ce n'est pas le mot exact. Absent. Voilà. Le plus souvent, on dirait qu'il est ailleurs, très loin, peut-être à l'intérieur de lui-même' (p. 30). The narrator's search for the words to describe her classmate emphasizes the ambiguity of Alex's behaviour: something appears to be not quite right, but the narrator is unable to determine what.[3] The narrator also reports Alex's concern regarding a routine check with the school nurse and comments on his subsequent absence from school on the day of the visit with cynicism, but without concern for the possible reasons behind the absence: 'Il a réussi son coup, Alexandre! Le jour de la visite, il n'est pas venu. Une brusque fièvre. Tu parles!' (p. 26). When Alex admits that his father physically abuses him, Natacha retrospectively reassesses her friend's behaviour and realizes that his actions were due to abuse (p. 44), yet, as observer, she lacks the knowledge and experience to contemplate such a possibility. Internal focalization through Natacha as a child observer gives a naïve perspective: the adult characters are oblivious to Alex's plight, whereas Natacha witnesses the warning signs, but parental child abuse does not occur to her.

The child witness as discoverer of abuse and instigator in its resolution also occurs in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, as it is the protagonist William who gradually uncovers the mental illness suffered by his neighbour Mme Désiré and the psychological abuse suffered by her children. William describes hearing family arguments: 'les disputes commençaient peu après mon retour du collège. Au début, j'ai cru à de simples crises de mauvaise humeur (qui n'en connait pas?), mais j'ai bientôt

[3] Attempts to express and communicate abuse are explored in depth in Chapter Five.

découvert qu'il s'agissait en réalité d'un véritable rituel' (p. 20). William's suspicions increase, leading him to worry about the welfare of the children with their mother, which shows a level of perception and concern in the child witness-protagonist that is absent in the other characters, though he is unable to explain and understand his concerns:

> Pourquoi les tenait-elle par la main, à leur âge, dans une cage d'escalier? Il n'y avait pourtant pas de risque qu'ils se fassent écraser par une voiture! Et pourquoi évitaient-ils de me regarder? […] Cette femme me faisait peur. Pourquoi? (pp. 28-29)

The narrator's external focalization on the abuse reveals awareness of a family problem, evident in the unease depicted in his rhetorical questions, yet William's position is external to the abuse and, being physically external to the apartment in which the psychologically damaging behaviour occurs, he cannot be sure of what is happening to Kevin and Jessica. William, and consequently the reader of the text, actually sees very little with his own eyes. The narrator's extent of knowledge of the abuse consists of what he infers from the constant crying of Jessica, which he hears from his own room (p. 39), from Jessica's 'expression de tristesse' (p. 43) and from overhearing Mme Désiré's suicide threats (p. 30), all of which create intrigue in the plot as the external manifestations of abuse must be interpreted.

In *La Frontière de sable*, Fredo's position as witness to the abuse is more complex than that of Natacha in *Le Garçon qui se taisait* or William in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, as the abuser is a trusted family member who is greatly admired by Fredo. The narrator views Manu as '[u]n vrai mec, costaud dans son corps et dans sa tête. Un mec comme [il] voulai[t] en devenir un, plus tard' (p. 10). The narrator also describes feeling safe with Manu, after abuse-victim Laurette attempts to discourage Manu from joining her and Fredo: 'Avec lui, on n'avait peur de rien. On se sentait en sécurité' (p. 27). This

inherent trust in Manu therefore affects Fredo's perspective of events and Laurette's discomfort in his presence is not understood by the narrator. Furthermore, Fredo seeks advice on Laurette's strange behaviour from her abuser: 'Manu haussa les épaules. — Les filles, tu sais, quand ça grandit, ça change' (p. 35). The irony of Fredo asking the paedophile about the young girl's welfare is evident, yet not necessarily to the first-time reader, who sees events through Fredo's eyes and uncovers the sexual abuse alongside him. Indeed, Fredo's reliance on Manu is a framing device which reveals him to be an unreliable narrator. It is only retrospectively that the uncle's exploitation of a sexist cliché to fool Fredo and explain Laurette's behaviour has a sinister tone, equating Laurette's psychological turmoil caused by abuse with 'normal' female behaviour, implying that she is to blame for her distress. The witness-narrator also recognizes what appears to be affection towards Laurette, as Manu presents a caring external image of himself as he addresses his niece: 'Tonton Manu est là pour te protéger, ma douce.' (p. 48) and gives Laurette what Fredo perceives as 'une brève caresse affectueuse sur ses cheveux' (p. 49). These gestures result in Fredo feeling jealous of Laurette's relationship with Manu: 'Personnellement, je trouve que Laurette avait de la chance. Depuis le départ de ma sœur aînée, chez moi, il n'y avait personne pour prendre mon parti' (p. 49). Fredo's idolization of Manu in addition to the abuser's apparent affection towards his niece therefore initially prevent the narrator from suspecting Manu of being anything other than caring towards Laurette.

The child witness's struggle to comprehend the behaviour of his cousin is also foregrounded as Fredo frequently questions Laurette's actions.[4] Laurette's unease is particularly confusing to Fredo when she attempts to comfort herself physically:

[4] See also Daly's discussion of the witness narrator as a means of exploring the behaviour of an abuse victim in Hadley Irwin's young-adult child-abuse text, p. 5.

> Elle émettait une sorte de murmure continu, en suivant le va-et-vient du fauteuil. Le genre de bruit et de mouvement que les mères font, sans y penser, pour bercer leur enfant. Sauf que là, c'était elle-même qu'elle berçait. […] On aurait pu croire qu'elle avait du chagrin. Pas vraiment. En tout cas, elle n'était pas dans son état normal. (p. 20)

Just as in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, the child witness struggles to formulate his thoughts regarding the victim's unusual behaviour, similarly underlining the elusiveness of the abuse. Fredo wonders why his cousin struggles to sleep at night when she has what he believes to be a loving family, concluding: 'C'est compliqué, les filles, des fois' (p. 30). The dismissal of the peculiar behaviour as caused by gender reveals the narrator's ignorance of Laurette's position and his attempt at reassuring himself by finding an innocent reason for her worries. Indeed, Fredo's explanation echoes the sexist stereotype which Manu himself uses to dismiss concerns over Laurette's behaviour, showing his emulation of Manu. The naïve child focalizer's assumption of such stereotypes emphasizes the role played by socially prevalent gender stereotypes in the acceptance of victim blaming and the perpetuation of abuse.

Yet the narrator's doubts are evident when he is further seen to ask himself: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle avait, Laurette?' (p. 31). After confronting her when she runs away from the family café after being teased by a customer, Fredo describes how Laurette appears to be physically burdened by something: 'On aurait dit que quelque chose encombrait sa poitrine et sa gorge, trop énorme pour s'évacuer' (p. 47). Fredo initially dismisses Laurette's behaviour as 'une autre façon de se rendre intéressante!' (p. 58), but admits: 'Mais, dans le fond, je sentais monter une angoisse' (p. 58). The narrator also dwells upon his observations of Laurette's introversion when he discusses his cousin with Mehdi, family friend and waiter in the café: 'Elle était moins bavarde

qu'avant. Mais… avant quoi?' (p. 53). The narrator's anxiety manifests itself during interactions with his cousin when the girl tries to communicate her unease. In a very powerful scene, Laurette explains that she cannot sleep because she fears the monster coming in the night, a reference to the sexually predatory uncle joining the girl in bed to abuse her. Fredo, however, unaware of the implications of Laurette's confession, offers to comfort his cousin by joining her in her bed. The silence from Laurette that follows this ironic suggestion is dismissed by Fredo as he reassures himself that his cousin is exaggerating her nightmares: 'Je pensai qu'elle s'était endormie, quoi qu'elle en dise' (p. 63), when the silence more likely represents the young girl's fear of suffering abuse at the hands of her cousin. Thus Fredo inadvertently makes the situation worse for Laurette, before his understanding develops.

Gradually, however, Fredo starts to become suspicious of his cousin's relationship with Manu. The narrator is seen to reassess his opinions of the uncle during the scene at the beach where Fredo witnesses Laurette struggling to keep her clothes on whilst Manu tries to remove them:

> Il y avait quelque chose qui sonnait faux dans son ton enjoué. Pour la première fois, je me dis que Manu pouvait mentir, faire semblant d'être innocent. Mais innocent de quoi? J'observai ma cousine. Elle serrait les dents comme si elle avait froid et sortait de l'eau. Pourtant, il faisait chaud et elle n'était même pas entrée dans la mer. (p. 70)

The narrator begins to analyse the situation more objectively, questioning Manu's suspicious behaviour, to which he was initially oblivious. Furthermore, when Fredo asks Laurette whether she wants to go swimming and she replies negatively, the narrator describes Manu's hostile defence:

> Il eut un regard que je ne lui connaissais pas. À la fois dur, bref et fuyant. […] Même sa voix me parut différente, tranchante, artificielle. Il dit:
>
> — Ça lui ferait du bien. Je sentis monter en moi une sorte de colère:
>
> — Et si elle pense que ça ne lui fait pas du bien, elle, de se baigner dans l'eau glacée, au mois de novembre? C'est son droit. C'est son corps à elle, non? […] Cette fois, il me jeta carrément un regard qui tue, fulgurant. Jamais, depuis que je le connaissais, je n'avais décelé en lui autant de violence contenue. (p. 71)

Fredo's reference to Laurette's rights is arguably evidence of a more mature perspective, which jars with the supposedly child voice of the narrator and hints at the pedagogical intentions of the author. The depiction of Manu's hostility to Fredo's response then leads the child witness to analyse repeatedly the adult's reaction: 'Mais il y avait eu ce regard de Manu. Un regard de crotale. Ce ton si différent. Et puis, on ne force personne à entrer dans la mer, début novembre… Je ne savais plus quoi penser' (p. 75). Fredo's own experience and perception of Manu therefore has more of an influence over his opinions than Laurette's strange behaviour, emphasizing the significance of the child's focalization and perception in the novel. Indeed, throughout the novel there is sustained external focalization on the abuser from the perspective of a child, who must negotiate between his personal experiences and history with Manu and the current behaviour of both the abuser and victim, which contradicts his preconceptions.

The narrative focus on the child witness also foregrounds the psychological impact of the discovery of abuse on a young bystander. Before Fredo is fully aware of the sexually abusive relationship between Manu and Laurette, he feels anger at his cousin's withdrawn behaviour and his sense of responsibility to her: 'Laurette n'était pas ma soeur. Pas mon rôle de la surveiller!' (p. 57). After the family friend Delphine comes

to talk to Laurette's mother about her relationship with Manu, Fredo himself fears being interrogated: 'Je sentis qu'elle allait me bombarder de questions. Comme je ne savais que répondre sans accuser Manu, sans preuves, je m'en voulus d'avoir déclenché l'affaire' (p. 84). Thus the child witness's frustrations, due to his limited ability to understand and accept the gravity of the situation, are foregrounded. Fredo's reluctance to confront the paedophilia is connected with his idolization of his uncle, as well as his disinclination to confront the trauma and its aftermath, highlighted by the phrase 'avoir déclenché l'affaire', emphasizing Fredo's own feelings of emotional exhaustion. The depiction of Fredo's problems encourages reader empathy with the narrator and suggests that encountering personal difficulties is common, but the extent of these difficulties is also relative and subjective: Fredo's problems seem overwhelming to him, yet in comparison with Laurette's situation they pale into insignificance, though obviously not at first for the child narrator.

Similarly, in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, the narrator's discovery of the abuse initially causes deep distress. The child narrator is seen to have his own personal problems before becoming embroiled in the abuse, as his sisters have recently moved out of the family apartment and he is facing the upheaval of moving home. The depiction of William's own turmoil increases empathy for the narrator, just as in *La Frontière de sable*, and shows his vulnerabilities before he becomes gradually involved in the situation. The narrator is physically affected by overhearing abusive encounters: 'Mon cœur battait, comme si j'avais surpris un secret' (p. 16). The image of secrecy is repeated when William describes his involuntary implication in the whole affair: 'J'avais l'impression d'être entré malgré moi dans un secret dont je ne voulais rien savoir. En me taisant, j'espérais m'en débarrasser' (p. 32). The theme of keeping secrets, similarly present in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, highlights the burden of awareness of abuse for the

child witnesses, which is heightened for William as, unlike Natacha and Fredo, he (aurally) witnesses the abuse and is met by anger from the victims. Moreover, after hearing Mme Désiré threaten to kill herself, and the subsequent cries from her children, William exclaims: 'Je n'étais pas seulement glacé d'horreur mais furieux contre ces gens qui entraient par effraction dans mes oreilles. Je ne voulais pas savoir' (p. 30). The metaphor of breaking in to describe the noise shows William's feelings of violation at being unwillingly involved in the situation, also experienced by Fredo in *La Frontière de sable*. William's and Fredo's reluctant position as witness to abuse is similar to that of Sophie in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, discussed in the previous chapter, where she unwittingly becomes drawn into an abusive situation and does not know how to react. Sophie watches on helplessly as her cousins, whom she idolizes, torture Félix and as her aunt sees, but refuses to acknowledge, the bullying. In *La Frontière de sable* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, however, a willingness and desire to help the victims develops in both witnesses.

In *J'entends pleurer la nuit* William's parents deny the abusive situation due to their own desire for self-preservation, whilst the child narrator wants to alert the authorities. William describes how his family tries to make more noise than the neighbours, with the physical attempts at blocking out the noise a metaphor for the psychological denial of abuse: 'En cas de choc, de cri, de chute d'objet, nous haussions le ton, débarrassions énergiquement la table, mettions le lave-vaisselle en route ou faisions couler de l'eau' (p. 21). The narrator also quotes the direct speech of his parents when depicting their excuses, as his father says that he does not like to '[se] mêler de ce qui ne [le] regarde pas' (p. 39), whilst his mother dismisses concerns surrounding the children's behaviour: 'Les petits du neuvième sont propres et bien nourris, a renchéri maman. Le reste, c'est une question de caractère, […] nous n'avons

pas à juger…' The narrator's direct presentation of the parents' opinions distances him from what they say and he emphasizes his condemnation of their attitude with the rhetorical question: 'Pourquoi refusaient-ils d'admettre l'évidence?' (p. 47). Although William's parents later admit that their denial of the abuse is due to concern for William's mother's health, given that she has previously suffered from mental exhaustion (p. 87), and their identification with Mme Désiré as a mother, the parents' reluctance to get involved in the neighbours' affairs provides explanatory information to the reader by representing the social barriers to denunciation of abuse by external parties, whilst simultaneously suggesting, via William as narrator, that this view should not be acceptable. The way in which William's mother's breakdown is concealed from the narrator further reinforces the image of mental illness as a taboo topic, prevalent throughout the text with the adults' ignorance of Mme Désiré's inability to cope with her bipolar disorder.

William's commitment to helping Kevin and Jessica is undoubtedly also fuelled by a school visit from a representative of *Enfance maltraitée*: 'elle nous avait regardés l'un après l'autre, en disant: "Toi, toi, toi… tu es responsable. Tu dois signaler un enfant en danger. Sinon, tu te rends complice de ceux qui lui font du mal"' (p. 57). This direct address increases William's feelings of responsibility in the abusive situation by suggesting that inaction is also a form of abuse. The spokesperson from the helpline represents the need to challenge common social attitudes dictating that the privacy of the family should be respected. The narrator's guilt at not proactively trying to protect his neighbours is compounded by feelings of helplessness as a child being dismissed by the adults around him: 'Je suis devenu tout rouge et mes yeux se sont remplis de larmes. Une fois de plus, ils [les parents] m'ont expliqué que nous n'avions aucune preuve de mauvais traitements' (p. 51). William's tears represent his own vulnerability

and his experience of being disregarded shows him to be a victim also, suggesting that if non-abusive parents are blind to the welfare of their children, then there can seemingly be little hope for the abused children themselves. However, the parents' reactions juxtaposed with William's persistence and the direct speech from the representative of *Enfance maltraitée* undermine the stance of self-preservation adopted by the parents and show the child to be the true hero in the novel by independently acting upon his moral judgment. There is a reversal of the traditional view of children's naivety versus adult wisdom, which is commonplace in children's literature.[5]

In all three of the texts the child witness narrators are depicted as struggling to come to terms with their growing knowledge of the abusive situation. In *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, Natacha is incredulous when Alex confesses his father's abuse: 'Je n'arrive pas à comprendre. Plus exactement, je ne peux pas. Je ne veux pas comprendre.' (p. 41) The child witness has loving parents and a stable home and such a distressing situation is alien to her. The way in which Alex asks Natacha to keep the abuse a secret is also seen to weigh heavily on the narrator, as she exclaims: 'Ça me chamboule trop, ce secret. Ça fait à peine une semaine que je le porte, mais je n'en peux plus.' (pp. 51-2). The motif of secrecy takes on particular significance in the abuse texts, with the child victim often suffering due to being sworn to secrecy and upholding the secret of abuse due to loyalty, fear and the power or position of the abuser.[6] Natacha is also left speechless when she sees the physical state that Alex is left in after his father's attack: 'Alex est là, recroquevillé sur le lit, gémissant, tout ensanglanté. Je n'arrive presque

[5] This role-reversal also occurs in *John et moi*, where the victims and their friends have meetings to think of solutions to the abuse and in *Delphine*, where the protagonist and her penfriend discuss and resolve the victim's psychological trauma caused by her absent and abusive parents. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, however, the protagonist's mother is aware of the manipulation of Sophie's cousins and aunt, whereas the child victim is depicted as naïve and unwilling to accept her mother's guidance.

[6] In *Monsieur Henry* and *P'tits bateaux* both female child victims feel bound by secrecy to their abuser and cannot verbally express their abuse. Ultimately, both speak out by the indirect means of role play in *Monsieur Henry* and a computer diary in *P'tits bateaux*.

plus à parler. Je ne peux que m'agenouiller auprès de lui' (p. 65). The narrator's shock at witnessing Alex's suffering reveals the impact of abuse for both the witness and the victim; if the friend is distressed by the situation, then the position of the victim character is far worse, although not directly explored.

In *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, the narrator's position as unwilling witness causes him distress, as morally he believes that something must be done to protect Mme Désiré's children, but his perspective on the abuse is in conflict with that of the actual victims, who see William's concern as a threat. Jessica believes that William is trying to have her and her brother removed from their mother (p. 97), whilst brother Kevin physically threatens William: 'Encore un mot sur ma mère et je t'éclate la tronche' (p. 68). The child victims are unable to express their abuse due to their desire to stay with their mother and, in a way that is similar to Natacha's dilemma of remaining loyal to Alex or helping him to escape the abuse in *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, the witness must negotiate between his desire to intervene and his feelings of guilt for betraying the victims' wishes. In fact, William acknowledges the children's perspective, stating: 'Kevin défendait sa mère, c'était classe. Nous, on martyrisait une femme seule, c'était nul' (p. 69). William's fear of being perceived as malicious suggests his confusion regarding his decision to report the children's mother and reveals the different and conflicting levels of perception and reality in the text: the victims' perception of their own family as under threat from external interference, the witness's perception of the family environment as abusive, and the witness's awareness of the possible interpretation of his interference as spiteful. Thus the narrative focus of *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit* is on the external interpretation of abuse and the psychological struggles which come with unwillingly being placed in the position of discovering abuse. The witness narrator-focalizer, rather than necessarily being 'safer' than the victim-narrator as

Shedrick Ross claims, depicts an alternative perspective on a complex and sensitive topic.

In *La Frontière de sable*, the internal focalization of the child observer portrays the confusion of a powerless child witness whose illusions of his world and relationships with the adults around him are shattered as the abuse becomes apparent: 'Une sale sensation m'envahissait. Manu avait toujours été pour moi comme un grand cousin, plus âgé' (p. 73). 'Et, soudain, il m'apparaissait hostile, presque dangereux. […] En qui pourrais-je croire, à présent, si je ne faisais plus confiance à Manu?' (p. 74). The narrator's uncertainty is manifested as anger towards Laurette, as he blames her for his growing distrust of Manu and his unease: 'J'en ai marre de tes salades! À cause de toi, j'ai plus confiance en Manu. Mehdi et Delphine se font des idées, et ta mère est fâchée. Un beau gâchis… Bonjour, les vacances!' (p. 87) Fredo's resentment towards his cousin for spoiling his holiday highlights his difficult situation of being in an unavoidable witness role and trying to comprehend an issue alien to the majority of children. Fredo's hostile reaction also emphasizes Laurette's precarious situation, as her own cousin resents her and denies the mounting evidence of abuse. The narrator further physically breaks down due to the emotional strain of acknowledging the sexual abuse: 'Je libérai mon chagrin, ma colère, mon malaise, ma culpabilité accumulés depuis des jours en bourrant l'oreiller de coups de poings' (p. 95). Fredo's position of witness thus leads to a huge emotional burden being placed on the child narrator. However, it is Fredo's physical release of stress that leads to the resolution of Laurette's situation, as he punches a pillow which reveals a note from Laurette stating her intention to run away. The pillow incident serves as a *deus ex machina*, whereby the plot is resolved while maintaining the convincing characterization of Fredo, as the narrator's

acknowledgement of his own negative feelings then brings about his acknowledgement that his cousin is in danger and needs his help.

The child-narrated and child-focalized main narrative of *La Frontière de sable* is framed by a prologue and epilogue from Fredo as an adult retrospective narrator and in this way the narrative set-up mirrors the dual-focalized texts *Quand je serai grande* and *Mauvais coup* discussed in the previous chapter, except that the focus is on the child's experience of being in the witness position. This framing device suggests that the effect on the witness narrator is more profound than in *J'entends pleurer* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, as Fredo depicts the long-lasting impact that uncovering the sexual abuse has on him. The adult narrator comments: 'je ne pouvais empêcher les événements anciens de remonter, irrésistiblement. Ils ont formé un mur invisible qui m'encerclait' (p. 5). The narrator's reference to a metaphorically physical barrier enclosing and oppressing him, years after the trauma, highlights the far-reaching burden carried by the witness of abuse.[7] The adult narrator comments on the significance of acknowledging that the abuse took place and gives a direct moral message: 'La frontière que Laurette avait tracée dans le sable, on ne doit pas la laisser s'effacer' (p. 111). 'Notre enfance nous avait été ôtée d'un seul coup, définitivement. La différence entre Laurette et moi, c'est que, moi, ça m'avait forcé à grandir. Mais en elle, quelque chose avait été détruit' (p. 110). The description reveals the far-reaching effect of abuse on the victim and witness by going beyond the scope of a contemporaneously narrated child-focalized novel. The distinction is also made between the witness, whose innocence is shattered, and the victim, whose sense of self is irreparably damaged. The adult voice therefore validates the child focalizer's distressing experience of uncovering the abuse and makes it clear to the implied reader that the discovery and end of the

[7] See Laub's chapter 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in Felman and Laub, pp. 57-74.

sexual abuse does not signify the end of the traumatic ordeal for the victim. The plot is thus resolved within a short time, but there is a suggestion that complete resolution for the victim takes much longer.

The three narratives also include an adult pedagogical voice either via reported or direct speech, which serves to educate the narrator, and through this the reader, regarding the criminality of child abuse and the appropriate reaction to denunciations of abuse. In *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, when struggling to cope with the knowledge of Alex's experiences, Natacha exclaims: 'Je suis certaine que mes parents trouveraient une solution' (p. 46). The narrator's comment reveals the limitations of Natacha's ability to help Alex and promotes the concept of confiding in a trusted adult. Furthermore, Natacha explains the legal process and consequences of denunciation via reported speech:

> M. Merrien, le juge, n'a pas voulu mettre le papa d'Alexandre en prison. Il a expliqué que cela ne servirait à rien, qu'il était malade et qu'il fallait qu'il comprenne pourquoi il se comportait comme ça avec son fils. On a appris qu'il avait été lui-même battu par ses parents. Il parait que ça arrive très souvent. Mais je ne trouve pas que ce soit une raison suffisante. (p. 69)

The reference to the father's own abusive past provides a wider perspective on the cyclical nature of abuse. Yet the final sentence reassures the reader that abusive behaviour is unacceptable regardless of the context. The professional voice overrides the assumptions of the child narrator and Natacha also confronts potential worries that an abuse victim may have through the guise of Alex's concerns: 'Au début, Alex n'osait pas dire qu'il avait peur de retourner chez son père, mais le juge a su lui donner confiance, et enfin Alex a pu parler.' (p. 69) The phrase itself has a problem–resolution structure, whereby the narrator presents Alex's fear but immediately diminishes this,

creating a simplistic and non-traumatic image of the denunciation process, which encourages a positive approach to expressing abuse. The inclusion of external perspectives narrated by the child witness enables the author to depict adult reassurance for those affected by child abuse without moving away from the child's perspective.

In *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, it is William's older sister Judith who identifies the concept of psychological abuse in the text, exclaiming '[c]'est aussi traumatisant que la maltraitance physique' (p. 39). Judith is used to give a clear message that emotional abuse exists and should not be ignored. In a similar way to *Le Garcon qui se taisait*, in *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, William's older sister reassures her brother that denunciation does not automatically lead to family break up and here it takes the form of direct speech in the narrative: 'Maintenant, ils privilégient plutôt le maintien dans la famille…' (p. 88). Yet some informative and didactic passages are also presented in William's voice:

> la psychose maniaco-dépressive se manifeste par une alternance de phases d'excitation et d'abattement. Un médicament, le lithium, permettait de régulariser l'humeur, mais les malades se sentaient parfois assez guéris pour arrêter de le prendre, et là… Bref, une nouvelle crise pouvait toujours survenir et mes parents n'avaient pas envie de revivre ça une autre fois. (p. 83)

This extract consists of William's acquired knowledge and is thus an attempt to include informative and reliable material in the text. The inclusion of the professional perspective overrides the ineffective adults in the narrative and highlights the importance of acknowledgement and action with regards to child welfare. The style of the passage, with its inclusion of specific medical jargon, suggests William's internalization of the information he has been told and thus includes mature adult

knowledge and perspective, suggesting a certain guidance for the reader whilst maintaining child-centred narration and focalization in the text.

William also attempts to 'prove' his status as a child by mocking adult behaviour. He states: 'c'est bien connu, les parents sont insupportables dès qu'ils changent leurs petites habitudes!' (p. 10). The parodying of parental behaviour creates a sense of collusion between reader and narrator. Similarly, at the introductory meeting in the new apartment block, William describes his parents wanting to make a good impression on the members of the *conseil syndical*: 'On se serait crus chez mes grands-parents lors d'un rassemblement familial, quand chaque adulte donne des gages de bonne conduite, ce qui fait bien rigoler les enfants' (p. 24). William presents the adults themselves as behaving and being treated like children, which has a humorous effect in the text. The narration also contains several instances of imitated speech in parentheses, such as 'qu'il a jeté violemment (ouille!) sur un chariot' (p. 11) and '[je] l'ai porté moi-même au huitième étage par l'escalier (dur, dur!)' (p. 11), creating the impression of a dialogue and direct address between narrator and reader. The informal and oral tone of the narrative is an example of Delbrassine's *séduction du lecteur*, discussed in the previous chapter, which creates an allegiance between the adolescent reader and narrator.[8] This allegiance encourages identification with William's perspective of the discovery of the abuse and his response to it. *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, therefore seems to consist of a plethora of adult and child voices and perspectives condensed into the narration of a teenage voice and focalizer.

La Frontière de sable is less overtly didactic than *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, but it does contain instances of adult reflection on the sexual abuse suffered by Laurette. The adult character Delphine is included in the narrative to

[8] Delbrassine, p. 196.

offer a professional perspective on Laurette's behaviour when her parents appear oblivious to the inappropriate relationship between Manu and his niece. The narrator reports overhearing a scene between his aunt and Delphine as the family friend informs Laurette's mother of her concerns: 'L'intimité, ça se respecte. Même celle d'une gamine de huit ans.' 'Laurette est une petite fille et il n'est pas tout à fait naturel qu'elle dorme tout le temps avec son frère de seize ans et encore moins avec son oncle de trente' (p. 82). This direct speech enables the narrator to present adult opinions despite using a child focalizer. Delphine's comments provide information for the implied reader regarding children's privacy and respect for their bodies, whilst also revealing the failure of Laurette's parents to notice their daughter's turmoil. Just as in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *La Frontière de sable*, there appears to be a hierarchy of voices in the novel, with the professional character representing the correct response and attitude to potential abuse. Thus the inclusion of adult voices within the narration is perhaps an alternative means of 'guiding' the young reader to the need for an adult narrator to supplement child focalization, discussed in the previous chapter.

The three texts using child-witness narrators all deal with a different form of abuse, yet the narrative technique and effects thereof are similar, as the authors have chosen the child-witness narrator specifically to explore the impact of abuse from the point of view of the person uncovering abuse. The child-witness narrative voice and focalization raises awareness of the impact of abuse on friends and family members, emphasizing its far-reaching consequences, whereby Natacha is physically shaken by witnessing Alex's physical state after being beaten by his father, Fredo affected by his cousin's experience of sexual abuse well into adulthood and William suffering from feelings of guilt at overhearing the emotional abuse that a mentally-ill mother inflicts upon her children. While Sheldrick Ross claims that the use of a witness narrator is less

distressing and explicit than victim-narrated texts, my analysis of narration here and in the preceding chapter refutes her argument. Witness texts focus, rather, on an exploration of the emotional and psychological devastation of child abuse on both the victim and those close to the victim. The external focalization on abuse highlights the difficulty in detecting, acknowledging and naming abuse for both adults and children. Natacha sees and witnesses the child being beaten at the end of the text after having been incredulous when Alex confessed his abuse to her, William hears his neighbour's shouting but abuse is denied by his parents, and Fredo's knowledge of his cousin's sexual abuse is eventually deduced, but not verbalized by himself or the victim. In spite of the witnesses' difficulty in acknowledging and confronting the possibility of abuse, in each text it is the child who ultimately resolves the abusive situation and helps to free the victim. The adult characters, often parents, appear less interested and more reactive to events. This is the case in many works of teenage fiction, as both Nikolajeva and my own work has shown,[9] but the inclusion of inadequate parents is much more damning when the subject of the texts is the abuse of children by adults.

Multi-stranded Narratives: Polyphony and Polymodality

Multi-stranded narratives are defined by Robyn McCallum as being 'constructed of two or more interconnected narrative strands differentiated by shifts in temporal or spatial relationships, and/or shifts in narrative point of view (who speaks or focalizes). In polyphonic narratives, events are narrated from the viewpoints of two or more narrators

[9] Nikolajeva states that the physically or emotionally absent parent is often a device to enable child characters to mature and evolve and to advance the plot. *Rhetoric of Character*, p. 117. *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and *La Fille du canal* both contain emotionally distant parents who are oblivious to their daughter's plight. My own MA research revealed several non-abuse texts with ineffectual parents: Marie-Aude Murail, *Oh, boy!* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2000); Jean-Paul Nozière, *Un jour avec Lola* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2001); Marie-Sophie Vermot, *Cinq* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2004).

or character focalisers.'[10] Whilst the term multi-stranded narratives can refer to differences in voice or focalization, polyphony more specifically denotes varying narrative voices in a text and I think it is therefore important here for reasons of clarity and differentiation to include Genette's term polymodality in addition to McCallum's definitions. Genette's term denotes switches in focalization in narration, which is distinctly separate from the narrating voice.[11] Multi-stranded texts are, at least until very recently, relatively rare in children's literature, as there is a tendency to use first-person narration and character focalization.[12] Yet as McCallum explains, multi-stranded techniques 'are strategies which enable the representation of a plurality of narrative voice, social and cultural discourses, perceptual, attitudinal and ideological viewpoints. In doing so they can work to efface or destabilize a reader's sense of a single authoritative narratorial position, and thereby situate readers in more active interpretive positions.'[13] Such destabilizing effects are particularly interesting in child-abuse novels, as they enable the authors to explore the complex dynamics of abusive relationships and their appearance to characters unaware of abuse.

Four of the corpus texts consist predominantly of two or more narrative voices which are used to recount the abuse tale. *La Fille du canal* consists of the adult-helper's diary of her perspective on child-victim Sarah, the child victim's abuse, and the teacher's memories of her own abuse as a child, alongside a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization who narrates the story contemporaneously and with little narratorial intervention. *Coups pour coups* consists of several narrative strands: child-

[10] Robyn McCallum, 'Metafictions and Experimental Work' in *International Companion*, ed. by Hunt, pp. 397-409, p. 406.
[11] Though voice and focalization have often been confused. See Genette's discussion of this in relation to theoretical studies of narration, p. 190.
[12] John Stephens, 'Did I tell you about the time I pushed the Brothers Grimm off Humpty Dumpty's Wall? Metafictional Strategies for Constructing the Audience as Agent in the Narratives of Janet and Allan Ahlberg', in *Children's Literature and Contemporary Theory*, ed. by M. Stone (Wollongong: New Literatures Research Centre, 1991), pp. 63-75, p. 63. Nikolajeva discusses the emergence of polyphonic narratives in *Children's Literature Comes of Age*.
[13] McCallum, p. 406.

victim Quentin's autodiegetic narration is the predominant mode in the narrative; however, in the first half of the text his head teacher narrates and focalizes certain sections, and the school cleaner also narrates her own perspectives on the child protagonist.[14] *Moi, Delphine, 13 ans…* is an epistolary novel with correspondence between the teenage victim-protagonist and an old school friend, who, it turns out, is actually an unknown male teenager who receives the letters unintentionally but responds as if he were Delphine's friend. *Les Saisons dangereuses* is also an epistolary novel; in this case the correspondence takes place between an adolescent girl and an adult family friend with whom she falls in love. While both *Les Saisons dangereuses* and *Delphine* use the epistolary form, in *Delphine* the correspondence aids the victim's recovery from her abuse, whereas in *Les Saisons dangereuses* the correspondence is the vehicle for the abuse. In this section I examine how the authors manipulate multi-stranded narration and polymodality to present conflicting views on abuse, abusers, and victims. Due to the difference in narrative form of the texts, I analyse their use of plural voices and focalizers individually, cross-referencing where appropriate.

In *Coups pour coups* the main narrative voice is autodiegetic, with the child-victim describing his experiences of physical abuse carried out by his father. At various intervals throughout the narrative, however, focalization and narration occur through different characters, including Quentin's head teacher, a social worker and a school cleaner, to depict external views of Quentin's life. The narrative begins with internal focalization through Quentin as he is reprimanded by his head teacher for bad behaviour: 'Je reste immobile, respirant le moins possible. Je ne suis plus Quentin. Je

[14] Jean-Claude Mourlevat's *L'Enfant océan* (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, 1999) has a similar structure, with various characters providing their own account of what they have seen. The different narrative strands read together uncover the plot mystery of the whereabouts of seven brothers who have run away from home due to wrongly suspecting that their parents are going to kill them.

ne suis plus qu'un morceau de viande palpitante posé sur une chaise devant un bureau blanc comme de la neige' (p. 7). The autodiegetic section depicts the protagonist's fear and vulnerability despite his violent outburst. Yet the following chapter includes internal focalization through M. Rémillon, Quentin's head teacher, who reveals a different perspective on the protagonist: 'Drôle de gosse! Drôle de comportement! Toujours dans les mauvais coups, agressif avec ses camarades, insupportable en classe, toujours à repousser les limites, fatigant, chahuteur, bagarreur, explosif… bref, ingérable.' (p. 13) The reader is therefore presented, within the space of six pages, with two very different images of Quentin: an internal perspective of Quentin's thoughts, feelings and vulnerability, and an external view of the protagonist as an aggressor.

There is also a dual perspective on the teacher, as in Quentin's eyes M. Rémillon appears to be a strict, controlled man, yet internally we catch a glimpse of the adult's frustration. Indeed, the head teacher's own concealed aggression is revealed, as the heterodiegetic narration of the second chapter contains sections of text in a contrasting typography with elements of free indirect style: '...Tout à l'heure, il a bien failli craquer et lui donner une claque, à ce sale gosse!' (p. 14). It is ironic that the head teacher is reprimanding Quentin for his aggression when he himself is repressing his desire to hit a child. The head teacher in fact appears to epitomize the abusive father: externally he is controlled and respectable, whilst behind closed doors he expresses anger and a desire to corporally punish.[15] M. Rémillon shows empathy for Quentin's parents, dismissing their reluctance for Quentin to visit a psychologist as 'normal': 'Un peu rétifs à l'idée de rencontrer un psychologue, peut-être, mais qui ne l'est pas?' (p. 15). This external view of the family suggests that there is nothing suspicious in their

[15] Demeyère does imply that the father's upbringing was also severe. For example, in the episode where Quentin is reprimanded for kicking a ball at a neighbour's window, his father explains that when he did something similar, his own father 'taught him a lesson' so he never did it again. The section ends with Quentin himself saying he would never do it again, hinting at the cyclic nature of abuse.

appearance, and Quentin, who is a victim of physical abuse, is seen as a troublesome bully. It is the predominance of the child victim's autodiegetic narration through the course of the text that reveals the truth of Quentin's victimhood to the reader.

Quentin's voice and perspective are used to describe the episodes of physical abuse carried out against him: 'Papa s'emballe. On dirait une machine folle impossible à maîtriser. Il me regarde avec des yeux exorbités où brille une colère d'enfer. Sa main me tord l'oreille. Je tombe sur les genoux' (p. 58). Quentin's description of his intimidating father reveals the psychological, as well as physical, impact the father has on the child. Furthermore, the lack of reference to the pain caused suggests the child's detachment from his own experience as a means of protection and also hints at the frequency of the painful interactions: Quentin simply accepts the 'punishment'. The internal focalization through the victim also reveals the extent of Quentin's isolation at school. Quentin explains how one of his teachers ignores the fact that he has not completed his homework, '[c]omme si cela n'avait aucune importance' (p. 39), and after suffering at the hands of his abusive father, Quentin returns to school the next day and is met by other pupils throwing snowballs at him, resulting in Quentin attacking the other pupils and their ringleader, Tom: 'La foudre atteint mon cerveau et bloque mes pensées. Je ne vois plus rien. Plus rien que ma haine' (p. 62). Quentin's description of being physically taken over by his anger echoes the child's external focalization of his father's 'yeux exorbités', which hints at the father's anger and aggression being transferred to the child victim. Indeed, Quentin's description of becoming overwhelmed by hatred is contextualized by our knowledge of the previous day's abuse and his feelings of persecution by his peers: he is at peace neither at home nor at school, which leads to, and explains to the reader, his violent outbursts. The depiction of Quentin's vulnerability is also emphasized when he experiences great pleasure due to brief

interactions with the school cleaner: 'De la voir, me fait chaud au ventre' (p. 29). Quentin's perspective is then followed by a chapter consisting of focalization through the cleaner Jocelyne, who describes the protagonist as a 'gosse malheureux' (p. 36). Quentin's internal acknowledgement of his feelings, coupled with the external sympathetic perspective of Jocelyne reinforces the image of the protagonist as fragile and troubled. Jocelyne's revelation of her own grief for her dead son also continues the theme of concealment and conflicting internal realities and external images.

Towards the end of the novel external perceptions of the family and of Quentin's father begin to change, as certain characters become suspicious of his volatile personality. After Quentin's and Tom's fathers are called to school to be informed of their sons' fighting, Quentin's father reveals his aggressive nature: 'croyez-moi, ce sale gosse va entendre parler du pays!' (p. 73). Tom's father's growing concern for Quentin is suggested via the victim-protagonist's external focalization on him: 'Je lève les yeux vers lui. Une barre soucieuse lui traverse le front. Son regard glisse sur Papa, puis revient sur moi' (p. 75). Tom himself also suspects the abusive relationship between Quentin and his father as he attempts to absolve his peer of any responsibility for the fight, claiming that it was he who initiated the brawl. Additionally, a narrative section towards the end of the text presented in a different typeset, contains focalization through a social worker visiting the family who questions the mother's well-being, noting an 'air de tristesse fatiguée inscrit sur son visage!' (p. 102). The social worker's expression that '[l]a détresse, parfois aussi, ça avance caché, il faut deviner' (p. 103) has a wider implication for abuse: Quentin does not vocalize his experiences, but lets his behaviour and frequent bruises speak for him. Tom then 'hears' Quentin's 'détresse', as he suspects Quentin's father of being abusive towards his son. Indeed, physical abuse leaves visual traces for external witnesses, which are absent in the case

of sexual and psychological abuse. The shifting of perspectives in the text highlights the difficulty of uncovering abuse due to the conflicting behaviour of abusers when in private and public. This conflict is ultimately foregrounded in the narrative via the predominance of Quentin's internal focalization revealing his inner turmoil and victimhood, which is in contrast to the aggressive image that his peers and school teachers have of him. Hence the varied perspectives, far from distancing and reducing the depiction of Quentin's distress, actually serve to explain and convey its intensity.

Moi, Delphine and *Les Saisons dangereuses* are both epistolary novels. In *Les Saisons dangereuses* it is the abuser and victim who write to one another about their clandestine relationship, whereas in *Delphine* it is the child protagonist and the male adolescent, Antonin, posing as Delphine's former school friend, who write to one another. Antonin continues the pretence of responding to Delphine as Audrey, providing an active listener to Delphine's concerns and responding with sympathy. Delphine's negative perspective is countered by 'Audrey', who provides the protagonist with insight into the reasons behind her feelings. In addressing Delphine's criticism of her brother's behaviour, Antonin replies 'Peut-être que ton frère, à sa façon, il en bave aussi… J'ai lu dans un livre qu'il n'y a pas de méchants, seulement des malheureux' (p. 78). Delphine then responds: 'C'est toi qui avait raison, il est plus malheureux que mauvais, et je n'ai rien fait pour l'aider, au contraire.' (p. 99). Here Antonin sympathizes with Delphine's pain, providing an alternative interpretation of her troubled relationship with her brother, whilst validating the victim's expression of her thoughts and feelings. The final pages of the narrative, when Antonin reveals that he is not Audrey, sees Delphine admit that, despite believing the respondent was someone else, the writing of her story is what helped her emotional and psychological healing: 'j'avais arraché ces mots, ces pensées, ces choses difficiles, sales parfois, et la poste m'en débarrassait, comme le

courant d'un fleuve…' (p. 140). Delphine's water metaphor reveals how she associates her writing with a cleansing process, where she can wash away her 'sale' past. The two juxtaposed perspectives enabled by the author's use of the epistolary form serve to expose the extent of Delphine's vulnerabilities: the protagonist resorts to revealing her private struggles to a former school friend with whom she had no close relationship, which emphasizes her real-life isolation. Yet Delphine's pain is surmounted with the help of her 'new' supportive friend.

Les Saisons dangereuses manipulates different perspectives of the same events, using the technique of interlaced dual narration, whereby the child protagonist's views of certain situations are juxtaposed with those of the adult abuser, inviting the reader to negotiate between the (un)reliability of both accounts.[16] As McCallum notes, this narrative technique 'can work to overtly structure a novel as a "dialogue" between two social, cultural, historical or gendered positions'[17] and in the novel, the positions represent the binary oppositions of child and adult, victim and abuser, female and male, as the twelve-year-old protagonist, Marjo, writes love letters to a thirty-year-old family friend, Frédéric, who replies and encourages the contact despite pretending to discourage Marjo's attraction towards him.[18] The relationship consists of attraction and physical gestures of affection from the adult towards the minor, as well as correspondence, which serves to groom the child victim. The love letters are eventually discovered by the girl's parents and the inappropriateness of the relationship between Marjo and Frédéric becomes explicit with the introduction of the parents' reaction to events and the abuse is halted.

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[16] The explicit narration and focalization of events from the abuser's perspective appears to be rare in teenage fiction. I found one other text using this technique, which consists of the teenage rapist narrating the text and the rape scene itself: Chris Lynch, *Inexcusable* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

[17] McCallum, p. 406.

[18] I discuss letter-writing as a medium of communication between Frédéric and Marjo at greater length in Chapter Five.

The letter convention enables the author to relay two perspectives on the relationship, with the letters composed by Marjo highlighting her intense feelings for Frédéric. The child narrator reveals her excitement at the prospect of spending time alone with Frédéric ('Toute la journée seuls tous les deux!') and she believes the pair has an intimate relationship: 'On se comprend sans se parler. Tu n'as pas besoin de me dire ce qu'il faut faire, et tu fais exactement ce que j'aurais fait à ta place' (p. 17). Similarly, Marjo believes that going for a drink with Frédéric represents a mutual desire to be together: 'Après, sur le port, quand on est allés boire un chocolat avant de rentrer à la maison parce qu'on ne voulait plus se quitter […]' (p. 20). From Marjo's perspective, the behaviour of Frédéric is affectionate, loving, and, more importantly, welcomed: she does not see herself as a victim. In the initial letters sent from Frédéric to Marjo, however, Frédéric denies any romantic feelings for Marjo: 'Il faut que tu cesses de m'écrire ces lettres délirantes, si tu veux que nous continuons à faire des régates ensemble' (p. 34). The beginning of the novel thus portrays two conflicting sets of feelings between the adult and child narrator, leaving the reader to assess the validity of each view. Frédéric's questionable intentions are, however, suggested to the reader due to his evident desire to continue seeing Marjo and his willingness to engage in clandestine correspondence.

The disjuncture of the point of view of the two protagonists is explored in the text when both Marjo and Frédéric narrate the same events separately through their own focalization. Marjo writes of the couple's time together on a boat trip: 'Tu as passé ton bras sur mes épaules et on est restés assis, tous les deux, à l'avant, à regarder le soleil se coucher comme deux amoureux.' (p. 19) Marjo's romanticized view of events leads her to liken herself and Frédéric to lovers. Frédéric, on the other hand, presents the physical gestures very differently in his letters: 'Quand je passe mon bras autour de

ton épaule pour regarder le soleil couchant, cela ne veut pas dire que nous sommes des amoureux. Simplement, quand je t'ai connue, tu étais une petite fille' (p. 23). Frédéric thus denies any romantic motive behind his affectionate behaviour, but he does not deny carrying out the actions, including playing with the young girl's hair (p. 20). There is a disjuncture here between Frédéric's words and his actions, which the reader must negotiate in order to identify the true abusive nature of the relationship between the adolescent victim and adult groomer. Furthermore, Frédéric continues to invite Marjo on trips, in spite of both the girl's feelings and his repeated denial of any ulterior motive (p. 25). In this sense, Frédéric is physically doing little to discourage Marjo's perception of his feelings, yet is constructing a written external cover for his underhand seduction of the adolescent. The dissonance of Marjo and Frédéric's narration of events causes a sense of confusion within the narrative, emphasizing the way in which each protagonist's reality is constructed.

Yet there is a shift in Frédéric's narration halfway through the text, when he admits his romantic feelings for Marjo: 'Non, c'est vrai, tu n'es pas une petite fille pour moi. Oui, j'aime te serrer dans mes bras, te caliner, j'aime t'embrasser, j'aime te voir courir sur le bateau. Tu le sais, et depuis le début de cette correspondance, tu cherches à me le faire avouer' (p. 37). Frédéric goes on to suggest that, when Marjo grows older, the couple can legitimately be together: 'Il nous suffit d'attendre quelques années, et plus personne ne sera choqué de nous voir ensemble.' (p. 55) This delayed confession of Frédéric's 'true' feelings highlights the unreliability of his earlier accounts of events and reinforces Marjo's perception of the relationship. Furthermore, the adult protagonist's denial of his feelings and his suggestion of hiding the relationship until Marjo is older, reveal his awareness that his behaviour is unacceptable. Indeed, after confessing his true romantic feelings for Marjo, Frédéric exclaims: 'Est-ce que nous

n'étions pas heureux sans parler?', which is a clear attempt to ensure the relationship remains a secret in order for Frédéric to protect himself.

Frédéric also attempts to justify his behaviour in his letters by apportioning the blame for his relationship with Marjo onto the child victim. The abuser claims to be drawn into the relationship through guilt, as the child protagonist harms herself after he denies having any feelings for her and requests that they stop the letter correspondence: 'je te soupçonne de t'être coupée aux mains, griffé le visage et arraché les cheveux devant moi pour me faire peur, m'obliger à revenir sur la décision que t'annonçait ma lettre, et avouer' (p. 38). Marjo indeed admits to reacting violently after receiving Frédéric's news that his intentions towards her are purely platonic:

> J'avais l'impression d'être folle: sur le bateau, quand on est tous les deux, je sens bien que tu ne me parles pas comme à une gamine, que tu ne me serres pas comme quand j'avais huit ans. […] Pourtant, ta lettre me disait que j'étais une toute petite fille, que tu étais mon ami sans plus… (p. 43)

The girl's reaction is provoked by the discord between Frédéric's words and actions, as she is left confused as to the status of the relationship between the protagonists. Thus the dual narration depicts contradictory images of the victim and abuser, whilst focusing on the impact of the manipulation and abuse on the young victim.[19]

Despite Frédéric's attempted manipulation of events in the letters, Marjo is unequivocally depicted as his victim. Frédéric describes himself as 'bouleversé' after the end of the relationship with his former partner and explains how the flirtatious letter exchange with Marjo served a therapeutic purpose for him: 'j'avais besoin de t'aimer parce que ma vie, sans Marion, devenait un désert' (p. 66). Frédéric thus manipulates

[19] Mourlevat's *L'Enfant océan* and Valérie Dayre's *C'est la vie, Lili* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 2002) both present ambiguous images of abusive parents, where the protagonist either mishears and acts upon his parents' (abusive) intentions, as in *L'Enfant océan*, or, in the case of Dayre's text, creates her own fictional story of neglectful parents.

the adolescent girl; using Marjo as an ego-boosting exercise, dismissing his feelings as brotherly (p. 71) and admitting he simply got too involved with Marjo and the letters: 'Je me suis laissé aller à des gestes trop graves, avec toi' (p. 71). Marjo, on the other hand, is seen to be significantly affected by the relationship. The child narrator is depicted as naïve, despite her bold letter confessions, and her vulnerability is revealed in her comments regarding her desire to start menstruation and become a 'vraie femme': 'J'ai douze ans, bientôt treize, et maman m'a dit que dans moins de deux mois environ je serai une vraie femme, avec des seins et des règles' (p. 21). The child focalizer views her relationship with Frédéric as a means to realize the maturity and independence she craves: 'Je suis grande, pour la première fois de ma vie' (p. 21). The aftermath of the end of the relationship is emotionally traumatic for Marjo: 'Mais moi, qui t'aimais grand, j'ai tellement mal, depuis que tu es parti, que je te déteste' (p. 63). Her turmoil results in physical pain, emphasizing the depiction of Marjo as an uncertain adolescent exploring her sexuality and independence, drawn into a painful and inappropriate situation with a trusted adult. The depiction of Marjo's pain and emotion is also in contrast to Frédéric's initial denial of feelings and his guarded stance, which prevents emotional identification with Frédéric at the same level as with Marjo, reinforcing the depiction of Marjo as the innocent party in the affair.

The reader's role as critic within the text is also guided by the inclusion of the parental perspective on the relationship between Frédéric and Marjo, as well as Frédéric's own awareness of his inappropriate behaviour. Marjo describes the scene she overhears between Frédéric and her parents when they discover the secret letter exchange, which consequently brings the affair to an end: '"Tous les enfants aiment les messages secrets..." Les enfants! Et dire que j'étais heureuse avec toi parce que tu me parlais comme à une grande personne!' (p. 62) 'Et maman qui en rajoutait : "On n'a pas

le droit de jouer avec les sentiments des enfants…"'. The protagonist's anger at being dismissed as a child is clear, yet her employment of the direct speech reveals the adult perspective of events: Marjo *is* just a child and emphasis is placed on the pre-pubescent status of the girl, discussed above. The implied adolescent female reader of the text is invited to empathize with Marjo firstly as an adolescent in love and in turmoil and secondly as the victim of a predatory and manipulative male adult. Thus the text becomes a morality tale, warning of the dangers of secrecy and sexual seduction by older men, which are confirmed by both Marjo's parents and her emotional distress. The dual interlaced narration is a means of showing the manipulation of the abuser and reducing the scope for identification with Frédéric, as the focus is on the honesty and emotions expressed by Marjo in her letters.

La Fille du canal has two imbricated narrative strands throughout: a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization who simultaneously recounts the story of Sarah, the child protagonist, who is sexually abused by her drawing teacher. The second strand, discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, consists of an autodiegetic diary written by Sarah's class teacher who herself is a former victim of child sexual abuse. The predominantly external perspective on Sarah's experiences are thus complemented by the very personal and intimate account of the adult teacher's suspicions surrounding Sarah's misery and her involuntary recollection of her uncle's assault when she was Sarah's age. The heterodiegetic narrator recounts story events from a somewhat distanced perspective, by describing what occurs without commentating upon it, unlike the judgmental heterodiegetic narrator of Mélie, discussed in the previous chapter. The heterodiegetic narrator moves from scene to scene in the text and the narrator's omniscience and distance from the diegesis are foregrounded at the beginning of the narrative with the analeptic and proleptic assertions: 'Cette histoire

commence avant les premières pages. Elle s'achèvera, comme tant d'autres, au-délà des dernières. Sans doute jamais.' (p. 9) The narrator merely reports the action of the diegesis: 'Sarah erre dans les rues, les mains enfouies dans les poches. Les larmes roulent sur ses joues rougies par le froid.' (p. 21). This objective narration of the tears, without any explanation or reference to Sarah's feelings, creates a poignant image of the girl, invoking a sense of her isolation and withdrawal, which is again reinforced when the narrator describes the detached reaction of passers-by to Sarah running through the streets insufficiently dressed: 'Des passants se retournent sur le passage de cette enfant si peu vêtue. Certains haussent les épaules. Mais personne ne l'arrête' (p. 66).

Just as in *Derrière la porte*, the heterodiegetic narrative voice in *La Fille du canal* switches between simultaneous scenes and juxtaposes the abuser's and victim's reactions to the revelation of the abuse following the rescue of Sarah by her class teacher:

> Tard dans la nuit, une voiture du Samu freine devant le Café de la gare. Un homme saoul titube sur la chaussée. Il est tombé à plusieurs reprises. Sa figure est en sang. Quand les médecins approchent, il crie: 'Ce n'est pas moi!' Sa voix déchire la nuit.
>
> […]
>
> Sarah ouvre brusquement les yeux. (p. 83)

The switch between the external focalization of Sarah's silent and startled awakening and the man's drunken behaviour creates a distanced and detached description of events, which invites the reader to assess the implications of the scene, without identifying with either protagonist. The juxtaposition of both protagonists, however, suggests that Sarah's waking is a direct response to the abuser's cries; Sarah

unconsciously hears the voice and is still unwillingly connected to the man, which undermines the art teacher's drunken declarations of innocence and foregrounds Sarah as the ultimate victim of the situation. The opposing perspectives of victim, abuser and witness are also contrasted through the narrative to show the destruction caused by abuse on the victims. Over the course of one page in the text, the heterodiegetic narrator describes the actions of Sarah, of her teacher after she enquires about Sarah's absence with her hostile mother, and contrasts this with the whereabouts of the abuser:

> Assise en tailleur sur son lit, elle berce sa poupée.
>
> Le combiné encore en main, l'enseignante sanglote. Son mari l'enlace. (p. 53)
>
> À l'autre bout de la ville, le professeur de dessin embrasse sa mère.
>
> — Bon anniversaire, maman! La vieille dame fête ses quatre-vingt-cinq ans. La femme du professeur a preparé le repas. Ses enfants se sont occupés du cadeau. (p. 54)

The short, externally focalized, descriptions of Sarah's rocking and her teacher's sobbing invite the reader to deduce the extent of the victims' internal pain. The emotive image of the two victims is then contrasted with the carefree image of the abuser's life created by the descriptions of his exclamation, suggesting a joyful and happy atmosphere. The depiction of the abuser having his own caring family, suggesting he himself is a 'family man', also shows how he is able to conceal his true identity as an abuser.

The heterodiegetic narrative further includes scenes of reported speech and the voice and perspective of other characters to reveal the family tensions in Sarah's home environment. The passage describing Sarah's return home after having all of her hair cut off depicts the actions of mother, father and daughter, exposing the

dysfunctional family relations which contribute to Sarah's inability to confide in her parents:

> Sa mère a articulé deux ou trois sons inaudibles avant de la gifler avec force. Sarah s'est enfuie dans sa chambre, ignorant son père qui, enfoncé dans le fauteuil du salon, l'appelait timidement. Pour lui dire quoi, de toute façon? Il ne savait pas parler à sa fille. C'était sa femme qui s'occupait de ça. (pp. 14-15)

The external account of the mother's attack on her daughter is contrasted with the internal focalization through the father, where his emotional absence is foregrounded. Sarah is thus failed by both of her parents in different ways. This lack of emotional and practical support for Sarah perpetuates the sexual abuse, as she is unable to confide in the adults around her. Indeed, the narrator includes the internal focalization of the child and her feelings of rejection and abandonment: 'La fillette a souvent ce sentiment d'être une fille indigne, cette enfant dont on ne veut pas' (p. 26).

The text also includes a scene of direct speech between Sarah's teacher and mother, where the teacher tries to alert the mother to Sarah's vulnerability:

> — Notre foyer est très équilibré, si c'est ce que vous tentez de savoir.
>
> — Ne vous m'éprenez pas. Je respecte la vie privée de tous mes…
>
> — Je l'espère. De toute façon, inutile d'aller chercher si loin. C'est dans la nature de Sarah de se laisser aller. Elle a souvent besoin d'être secouée. Je vais m'en charger, vous n'aurez bientôt plus à vous plaindre de me fille.
>
> Le ton glacé de la mère de Sarah désarçonne l'institutrice. Elle bafouille:
>
> — Je ne me plains pas… je trouve simplement Sarah triste…(pp. 26-27)

The mother's defensive attitudes and unapproachable nature are thus directly portrayed to the reader and are in contrast to the concern for the young girl shown by her teacher, revealing the latter to be Sarah's only potential source of aid. The mother's hostile

reaction to the teacher further complicates the resolution of the abuse for Sarah, as the teacher attributes Sarah's difficulties to her mother and this enables the teacher to herself deny the potential abuse: 'Je comprends l'air taciturne de Sarah. Il ne doit pas être facile de grandir à l'ombre de cette femme!' (p. 31)

The autodiegetic diary, however, serves to personalize the heterodiegetic narration, as the teacher writes her own past story and present experience of Sarah, and thus fills the role of speaking for the child victim. The teacher is reluctant to acknowledge the potential abusive situation, searching for possible alternative reasons for Sarah's behaviour: 'Un décès dans sa famille? Des tensions entre ses parents? Je devrais le lui demander. J'en ai eu l'intention à plusieurs reprises, mais à chaque fois un sentiment étrange m'a retenue.' (p. 11) This reluctance closely resembles the reluctance to uncover the abuse present in the child-witness texts discussed in the previous section, but unlike the child-witness texts, it is the teacher's inability to confront her own past sexual abuse that prevents her from acknowledging Sarah's predicament. The teacher is evidently aware unconsciously of Sarah's plight, but is psychologically unable to act upon it. Indeed, she eventually admits to herself, again in the diary, that she has been denying her own past, as well as Sarah's present: 'Pendant vingt ans, j'ai cru oublier. Mais pendant vingt ans, j'ai gardé avec moi la trace de ce jour: cette photo, que Sarah a remarquée sur le mur. Je me souviens quand elle a été prise: quelques heures après…' (p. 41) Sarah's attraction to the photo of her teacher during her own period of abuse shows the identification to be mutual, as if Sarah is appealing for help from someone she knows understands her situation, both emotionally and practically.

The focalization through and direct speech from the teacher in the heterodiegetic narration further reinforces the identification between the two protagonists. Sarah admits to the teacher her feelings of guilt and complicity, resulting

in the teacher's assertion of the victim's innocence: 'Elle aimait bien ça. C'est de sa faute. Ils vont la punir.'; 'Elle avait le droit, Sarah. Ce qu'elle ressentait n'appartient qu'à elle. *Lui* n'avait pas le droit d'en faire autre chose. C'est lui qui sera puni, pas elle.' (p. 79) Here the dialogue suggests that the teacher's address to Sarah is also a means of speaking to her former child self. The narrator explicitly reveals that the teacher's interactions with Sarah are a means of addressing her own childhood concerns, which have remained with her to adulthood:

> Elle lui dit ce que la petite fille de la salle de bains a si longtemps ignoré:
>
> — À aucun moment tu ne lui as donné ton corps. À aucun moment. Il te l'a volé, Sarah. Il te l'a volé. (p. 77)

The teacher's speech serves as an authoritative adult voice in the narrative to unequivocally assert the abuser's guilt and victim's innocence to both herself, the protagonist, and the reader, which also occurs through the parents' voices in *Les Saisons dangereuses*. By rescuing and reassuring Sarah, the teacher is able to heal her own child self and recover from her past, suggesting the positive impact of her identification with the child victim. The inclusion of the autodiegetic diary narration adds a personal perspective to the narrative and in this sense the dual perspective narrative depicts both the external circumstances and relationships enabling the abuse to take place and also emphasizes the emotional and psychological impact of the abuse on the victim in both the short and long term.

Conclusion

The analysis of perspectives present in the seven texts discussed in this chapter, alongside the discussion of the autodiegetic victim narratives discussed in Chapter Two, reveals that the texts containing a personal, homodiegetic narrator, whether that

be a victim or a witness, depict a comparable level of explicitness regarding the description of emotional and psychological distress. The witness texts simply choose a different focus for the pain and turmoil, while also making clear that the situation is worse for the victim than for the witness. In *La Frontière de sable*, *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, the child-witness narrators are the focal point of the text and the novels depict their perspective on the abuse, with the experiences and feelings of the abused character secondary to the narrator's interpretation of them. Yet the focus on the limited and often confused child-witness perspective serves the purpose of revealing the difficulty in uncovering child abuse from an external standpoint and mirrors the actual reading of the text. Interestingly, *La Fille du canal* provides a very different perspective: the adult witness experiences the same reluctance and denial as the child-witness narrators in acknowledging the victim's abuse, albeit due to denying her own past as an abuse victim, reinforcing the theme of concealment of abuse across the corpus.

The multi-stranded narratives frequently present the victim's perspective in conflict with that of other characters. The abuser-victim letter exchange in *Les Saisons dangereuses* shows the contradictory written version of the relationship between victim and abuser, highlighting the unreliability of the voice of Frédéric and the unequal power-relationship between adult and child. In *La Fille du canal*, the heterodiegetic narrator switches from character to character and scene to scene to provide poignant contrasts and affinities between protagonists, whereas the autodiegetic diary form depicts the emotional distress of the adult witness and former victim, who projects her own experiences onto the silenced child victim. The dual narrative technique here renders the text more distressing than could be achieved using either technique on its own, as readers are exposed to two levels of pain and distress: the distance of the

heterodiegetic narration creates an image of Sarah's isolation, whilst the teacher's diary personalizes the victim's situation and intimately describes her own identification with the child's suffering: both child victims' pain is expressed through the teacher. The splitting of a character into both a witness and a victim also occurs in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, where the child protagonist initially watches Félix suffer abuse from her cousins and goes on to become their victim herself. So, here, the witness becomes a victim, whereas in *La Fille du canal*, the victim becomes the witness, leading to a close identification with the contemporary child victim due to her past suffering.

The variety of narrative voices and perspectives also highlights the differing thematic precoccupations present in the corpus. The theme of perception and changing perspectives is present in the dual-perspective, witness, and mutli-stranded texts and invites the reader to negotiate between conflicting views and to construct his or her own truth from those which are presented. The reader is encouraged to engage with the narratives and is presented with the complexities of the abuse subject matter. The dissonance between the various external views of abuse in the texts emphasizes the subjectivity of perceptions and the reader's need to interpret the individual strands of the story to build up a coherent picture of events. There is not just a simplistic view of abuse presented to young readers, but complex issues of the victims' and witnesses' feelings of guilt and complicity are broached. In *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *La Frontière de sable* the witnesses negotiate between their reluctance to become involved in the situation and their feelings of responsibility to resolve the abuse, whilst in *La Fille du canal* and *Les Saisons dangereuses* the victims struggle with their role in the abusive relationships. In *La Frontière de sable*, *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *Les Saisons dangereuses* there is a hierarchy of voices, with the social worker and professionals in *La Frontière de sable* and *J'entends pleurer la nuit* overriding the denial

of other characters surrounding the abusive situations. In *Les Saisons dangereuses* it is Marjo's parents' voices who filter into the narrative through Marjo and Frédéric which make explicit the inappropriate relationship between child and adult and the teacher in *La Fille du canal* reassures Sarah that she is a victim and in no way responsible for her abuse.

The witness perspectives also foreground the difficulty of being an external and unwilling bystander to abuse, whilst the autodiegetic texts depict the difficulty for victims in coping with abuse and finding solutions. The multi-stranded texts reflect the conflicting perspectives of abusers, victims, and external bystanders, as well as representing the numerous people affected by one case of abuse. These intertwined pespectives differ from the texts of dual focalization, whereby the child's voice and/or perspective is framed by the adult former victim, as the latter highlight the long-term psychological impact of abuse on the former child victim. The heterodiegetic narration in the corpus provides a more distanced voice which still foregrounds the victim's experience and isolation, suggesting an air of objectivity and thus authority in telling the tale. Perhaps the variety of modes represented in the corpus reflects the relatively recent confrontation of the abuse theme as the plot focus in realist fiction for young readers. The authors attempt to negotiate difficult adult subject matter and explore different means of presenting this to child readers. Sheldrick Ross' argument that the witness narration is a 'safer' option thus seems to be of limited interest: the type of narration alone does not govern the explicitness of a text, but simply changes the focus of the story. The next chapter will show that how explicit the abuse narratives are is more closely linked with temporal perspectives on abuse.

Chapter Four
Temporal Perspectives On Abuse

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the use of different narrative voices and focalizing characters in the corpus texts, and the relationship between these narrators and focalizers and the abuse plotline, determines the focus of the abuse story. Yet the narrative voice and perspective used are inevitably bound by temporal parameters which also affect what is told to the reader and how. The time-span and order of the narrating, relative to the time-span and order of the story events and the number of times a story event is narrated, or its total omission from the narration, are all significant aspects of time which are used to determine how explicitly abuse is presented to readers, at what point the abuse is revealed in the story, and how many times abuse scenes are told. It is this temporal aspect of narration in relation to the depiction of child abuse in the corpus texts which will be explored in the current chapter.

While time is a significant narratological category in its own right, I believe it is a particularly significant category to explore within the abuse corpus, as the temporal aspect of a victim's experience of trauma and his or her (in)ability to process and overcome stressful events is a focal interest in the field of trauma studies. Caruth states that:

> The pathology [post-traumatic stress disorder] cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the

> time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.[1]

She further explains that trauma fractures and evades time: 'the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.'[2] Similarly, Elissa Marder explains that traumatic events 'fracture the very experience of time for the person to whom they "happen"',[3] whilst Kali Tal acknowledges the recurrent flashbacks of abusive experiences suffered by the (adult) victims of child sexual abuse.[4]

The inextricable link between time, trauma and literature is particularly relevant to my corpus texts, given that a significant aspect of the child-abuse narratives consists of their depiction of both the child victims' attempts to locate and understand their experiences of abuse, and the authors' manipulation of time to control the extent of abuse to which young readers are exposed. The expression of psychological trauma through temporal techniques is in sharp contrast to what Nikolajeva argues is the traditional relationship between time and children's texts: 'the cyclical, repetitive character of events is the very essence of traditional children's fiction which often has a purpose, conscious or unconscious, to create an illusion of a neverending [*sic*] paradise'.[5] The image created in the abuse texts for the protagonists is, rather, one of a never-ending hell.[6] Some of the corpus texts, *La Fille du canal* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* in particular, could themselves be defined as 'trauma literature', that is, 'an[y] work of literature which deals with traumatic events or the aftermath of such events',[7] as

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[1] Caruth, *Explorations*, pp. 4-5.
[2] Ibid., p. 9
[3] Elissa Marder, 'Trauma and Literary Studies: Some "Enabling Questions"', *Trauma and Literary Studies*, 1.1 (2005), 1-6, p. 1.
[4] Tal, p. 213.
[5] Nikolajeva, *Mythic to Linear*, p. 10.
[6] *Les Saisons dangereuses* is the exception to this rule, as the victim does not consider herself as such.
[7] David J. DeRose, '"A Lifetime of Anger and Pain": Kali Tal and the Literatures of Trauma', *Postmodern Culture*, 7:1 (January 1997). Accessed online at [http://www.kalital.com/Text/Worlds/DeRoseRev.html],

the focus of the narrative is on the sexual abuse victim's psychological struggle to come to terms with their abuse. Esther Rashkin argues that 'texts structured or organized by trauma, […], are always to some degree concerned with how narrative becomes impeded, and how signifying processes and understanding become blocked or obstructed. They are also concerned with how rhetorical, linguistic, and structural devices can be deployed to convey—albeit allusively or cryptically—outlines or traces of the trauma that is too conflictual, shameful, or painful for words'.[8] Tal, however, comments on the specificities of texts authored by trauma survivors, as opposed to fictional texts dealing with trauma,[9] while Whitehead studies trauma fiction as a distinct genre and identifies 'intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice' as the main formal features of trauma fiction.[10] Given the traumatic and explicit nature of the material presented in some of the abuse texts, I aim to address how far the narratives resemble trauma fiction, specifically considering two of Whitehead's categories: repetition and fragmented narration.

In this chapter I use Genette's three categories of time, duration, frequency and order, to analyse the range of temporal perspectives used in the texts. Duration is the analysis of the pace of the narrative, or as Genette puts it, the '*constance de vitesse*'.[11] Frequency consists of 'les relations de fréquence (ou plus simplement de répétition) entre récit et diégèse', that is, considering how many times an event is narrated compared with how many times the event actually occurs,[12] and the study of order is

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08/10/2013. See also Esther Rashkin's discussion of trauma in literary texts where she assumes 'trauma literature' to include fictional narratives: 'Reading the Mind, Reading the Text: Reflective Functioning, Trauma Literature, and the Task of the Psychoanalytic Critic', *American Imago*, 68:1 (Spring 2011), 37-48, pp. 40-41.

[8] Rashkin, p. 41.

[9] Tal, pp. 116-117.

[10] Whitehead, p. 84. Norbury identifies a fragmented narrative voice, the role of memory and ghosts, repetition, and allusion as four key features of North American and Australian teen trauma fiction, p. 32.

[11] Genette, p. 83. Italics in original.

[12] Ibid., p. 111.

the study of the chronology of the story compared with the order of its narration.[13] My intention is to explore the way in which the child abuse and the protagonist's trauma are inherent in the structure of the text, as well as featuring in the story; that is, how does the way the narratives are told encapsulate what is told? The examination of time and the narration of time, then, inevitably merge with issues of narration and focalization and in this third chapter focusing on narratological characteristics of the corpus I will draw together issues of voice and perspective as they influence the manipulation of time in the narratives and, therefore, the depiction of abuse.

The first section of the chapter examines frequency, or instances of narrative repetition. I examine the use of repetition as a means of foregrounding the victim-protagonists' psychologically overwhelming experience of being abused. I discuss four texts: *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*. I have selected *Mélie* as its repetition of specific scenes from a child perspective and then again in the second half of the text from Mélie's young adult perspective is particularly interesting and is exploited more here than in any other text. *Tu te soumettras* is the most interesting and complex example of a text which appears to contain little repetition in the narration of plot events (the rest of the primary corpus would fall into this category), but repetition is in fact woven into the narrative in certain scenes to represent the narrator's emotionally abusive upbringing. I also include *Monsieur Henry* and *P'tits bateaux* in this section as they are the two texts in which repetition of abuse and repetition of the narration of the abuse occur most often and are most obvious to the reader.

I then examine the manipulation of narrative and story order in four texts which all diverge from a chronological narration of story events and illustrate the scope of the

[13] Ibid., p. 23.

manipulation of order across the corpus. There are two main order categories into which the primary texts fall. Firstly, texts that follow a generally chronological, simultaneous narration of the story, with some discordance between story order and narration order (*J'entends pleurer la nuit*, *Comme des adieux*, *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, *Coups pour coups*, *La Petite Maîtresse*, *Derrière la porte*, *Et tu te soumettras*, *Monsieur Henry*, *John et moi*, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *La Fille du canal*, *Dans la gueule du vent*, *Delphine* and *Les Saisons dangereuses*), and, secondly, texts in which narrative order is affected by adult or mature retrospective narration intertwined with or framing the child victim's contemporaneous narration of events (*Mauvais coup*, *Les Parents de Mélie*, *La Frontière de sable*, *Quand je serai grande, Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*).

I discuss *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, as it is the strongest example of a simultaneously narrated text which contains instances of discordance between the events taking place and their order of narration. I also discuss *Mauvais coup* as it is the most developed example of story order being affected by adult retrospective narration, in that the child's perspective and the adult's perspective are narrated in different chapters intermittently throughout the narrative. *Quelque chose à te dire* and *Comme des adieux* are included in this section since their techniques for manipulating the story order are unique in the corpus texts: the former has a 'reversed' story order where the abuse, which took place decades before the starting point of the narrative, is revealed at the end of the text, while the latter consists of various narrative strands each depicting a certain time, or imagined time, in the narrator's life as he lies in hospital drifting in and out of consciousness. Through the exploration of the four texts I examine how a disjointed order of narration can formally represent the different levels of a victim being, as Caruth states, 'possessed by' his or her abusive experiences and I also

explore how the texts diverge from the traditional 'cyclical', idyllic nature of young children's fiction.[14]

In the final section I examine the pace of abuse scenes in four texts. As well as considering how texts use the techniques of scene, summary and ellipsis to represent the child victims' trauma during episodes of abuse, I also question how much abuse is shown to readers of the narratives. I discuss the sexual abuse novels *La Fille du canal* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, as both texts contain the most explicit, detailed and frequent descriptions of sexual abuse across the corpus. The physical abuse novels all recount physical attacks and are similar to each other in their use of scene to depict violence towards child protagonists. I have chosen to discuss *John et moi*, where the child victim Elsa narrates contemporaneously her father beating her brother and mother, as it is the most interesting example of the narrator verbally expressing the trauma and pain both of herself as witness and of her brother as victim. I have also chosen to include the psychological abuse novel *Les Parents de Mélie*, as it is the strongest example of an episodic text across the corpus, that is, a text in which the abuse is depicted in set scenes. I aim to examine whether the omission or summary of abuse scenes is more prevalent in texts dealing with one type of abuse over another and I have thus chosen examples of the most explicit texts to discuss. Given the controversy amongst critics, parents, and authors surrounding the depiction of sexuality in books for young readers,[15] I want to test the assumption that the sexual abuse novels, dealing with a 'double taboo' of abusive relations and sexuality, omit more abuse scenes than the physical and psychological abuse novels. In doing so, I also

[14] Nikolajeva discusses various texts including *Peter Pan*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Wind in the Willows* in the context of their utopian, mythical and/or cyclical features.
[15] For example, see Marie-Hélène Inglin-Routisseau, 'On est prié de fermer les yeux…', *La Lettre de l'enfance et de l'adolescene*, 68:2 (2007), 57-62.

return to Sheldrick Ross' argument discussed in the previous two chapters that the choice of a specific narrator determines the level of trauma depicted in the narrative.

Frequency

Frequency is defined by Genette as the correlation between how often an event occurs in a story and how often it is narrated.[16] He identifies three main types of frequency: singulative narrative, where the events and their narration are equal; repeating narrative, narrating multiple times what happened once; and iterative narrative, narrating once what happened multiple times.[17] In the following section I examine how the use of different types of narrative frequency affects the depiction of abuse in *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*. *Mal à ma mère*, the first half of *Mélie*, recounts episodically the psychological abuse experienced by the child protagonist, whereas the second part, *Paix à mon père*, depicts an older protagonist attempting to come to terms with her father's suicide by retrospectively assessing her relationship with him in the context of her abusive childhood. *Mal à ma mère* contains twenty-two individual scenes which narrate an episode of abuse in Mélie's childhood. The text contains predominantly singulative narration, where unique scenes are depicted, with occasional instances of iterative narration, providing the context of the abuse and Mélie's everyday life. In one scene, Mélie is described as having flu: 'Mélie est rentrée de l'école toute chaude, toute frissonnante. Elle a la grippe. Maman rose est là. En cas de maladie, c'est toujours maman rose qui est là' (p. 12). The iterative narration, which follows the singulative narrative describing Mélie's illness and her 'good mummy' being there, builds a case for the consistency of the abusive experiences in the child's everyday life;

[16] Genette, p. 111.
[17] Genette, pp. 112-115.

the times when the child is ill prove to be an exception to the usual presence of 'maman noire'. In *Mélie*, the iteratives set the general scene, whilst the singulative provides a specific example of how the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship impacts upon the girl. Furthermore, the narrator appears to suggest that the child victim is attempting to comprehend the mother's erratic behaviour and observes the correlation between 'maman rose' and illness, thus learning to prolong her illnesses (p. 12).

An iterative narrative also occurs within a singulative narrative, when the narrator describes her mother's unstable state of health:

> *Plus* Mélie va mal, *plus* sa mère devient mauvaise et acariâtre. Elle l'accuse *sans cesse* de la rendre malade. […] *Un jour*, elle rentre à la maison, triomphante, en brandissant une espèce de grande coquille blanche, en plâtre. Elle éructe à l'intention de Mélie:
>
> — Regarde dans quel état tu m'as mise! Je vais être obligée de dormir là-dedans maintenant, par ta faute, tellement je souffre du dos.
>
> *D'autres fois*, elle la regarde avec des yeux fous furieux, en hoquetant:
>
> — Quand je pense que c'est moi qui t'ai mise au monde! Mais qu'est-ce que j'ai fait au bon Dieu pour mériter ça!
>
> Oui, elle a donné naissance à Mélie. Mais ce qu'elle ne sait pas, c'est que cette pensée provoque des nausées chez sa fille. […] *Chaque fois* qu'elle y pense, elle est prise de dégoût, de répulsion. *Une fois*, l'image de sa naissance s'est imposée si fort à son esprit qu'elle n'a eu que le temps de courir vomir dans les toilettes. (my italics, pp. 46-47)

Here there is a mixing of the singulative and iterative, whereby several of Mélie's encounters with her mother merge into one narrative strand. Genette explains that in *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, Proust uses singulative examples to reinforce the

iterative, as the text is overwhelmingly iterative in nature. He cites a scene exemplifying this technique:

> Plus explicite encore dans son caractère d'exception, l'incident des seringas dans *la Prisonnière*, qui débute ainsi: 'Je mettrai à part, parmi ces jours où je m'attardai chez Mme de Guermantes, un qui fut marqué par un petit incident…' et après quoi le récit itératif reprend en ces termes: 'sauf cet incident unique, tout se passait normalement quand je remontais de chez la duchesse'. Ainsi, par le jeu des 'une fois', des 'un jour', etc., le singulatif se trouve-t-il lui même en quelque sorte *intégré* à l'itératif, réduit à le servir et à l'illustrer, positivement ou négativement, soit en respectant le code, soit en le transgressant, ce qui est une autre façon de le manifester.[18]

In *Mélie*, however, the iterative reinforces the impact of the singulative. The use of the temporal adverbs 'sans cesse' and 'd'autres fois' followed by the example of the dialogue between Mélie and her mother, suggest the frequency of the individual scenes of abuse that Mélie must endure. Throughout the text, the predominance of singulative scenes shows the unpredictability of the mother; there is no routine or regularity to her overreactions and abusive acts, except, of course, that she usually does overreact. The way in which the mother's behaviour is so unpredictable is in itself part of the abuse and also a factor in Mélie's anxiety and obsessive compulsive behaviour, as she seeks to gain order and control in the only way she can.

Mélie's rituals and obsessions are mentioned on fifteen separate occasions throughout *Mal à ma mère*, revealing the dominance of her anxiety and her attempts to quell it in her everyday life. Yet despite the rituals being an attempt to control her own fate, the compulsions come to control her. The narrator reveals Mélie's naivety

[18] Genette, p. 141.

regarding her predicament: 'Par ailleurs, elle avait pris l'habitude, dans la journée, de compter tout par trois. […] Elle se disait qu'en rentrant chez elle, elle n'aurait plus besoin de cela. Elle se trompait.' (p. 39) The narrator's summarizing iterative 'avait pris l'habitude' and the proleptic assertion indicated by the comment 'Elle se trompait', reveals the collusion of both time and narrative voice in the depiction of Mélie's abusive experience: the rituals are a necessary support for her, and her dependence on the superficial sense of control gained through carrying them out is reinforced to the reader by the external perspective on and interpretation of the protagonist's behaviour. Within the singulative descriptions of Mélie preoccupied by her obsessions and compulsions, the iterative is used to narrate the actions involved in the carrying out of the rituals. After stressful encounters with her mother, Mélie begins to develop set patterns of behaviour in an attempt to chase away her maman noire: 'Elle tourne dix fois dans un sens, en prononçant la lettre "r", et dix fois dans le sens inverse, en prononçant la lettre "n"' (p. 27). The actions are condensed into one narration and this repetition of turning and counting is one of the few predictable constants in Mélie's life. Mélie's repetitive behaviour also signifies her helpless position in the abusive situation, as the turning is cyclical, with no way out.

In *Paix à mon père*, two instances of repeating narrative occur, where an event described initially from the child's viewpoint in *Mal à ma mère* is repeated from Mélie's perspective as an adult. In these scenes in particular, the intermingling nature of narrative time, voice and perspective is evident as Mélie's past is revisited. One scene details Mélie witnessing her mother's dramatic health scares and hypochondria and the other scene depicts the protagonist's residence at a *maison de santé* due to her lack of weight gain and her mother's perception of Mélie as frequently ill. The parents arrive at

the centre out of the blue and whisk Mélie off for a day of 'fun', before returning her to the institution and disappearing just as quickly as they arrived:

> Mélie se laisse entraîner, incrédule, vers la sortie, une main pour maman, une main pour papa.
>
> […] Ses parents sont venus 'en coup de vent' sur la Côte, avec des amis qu'ils ont laissés sur une plage, le temps d'aller voir leur petite chérie dont ils s'ennuient tant. Ils l'emmènent manger des glaces, choisir une petite robe bain de soleil, un collier de coquillages. Puis c'est l'heure de retour. On la ramène au centre. […]
>
> Mélie n'a pas eu le temps de leur dire qu'elle voulait plus rester là. Qu'elle se sentait malheureuse et abandonnée. (pp. 37-38)

The episode foregrounds Mélie's confusion and ends with a description of Mélie's emotional suffering exacerbated by the parents' cruel visit. This episode is then revisited when the narrator describes the young-adult Mélie's memory of the visit:

> Et puis cette visite, au milieu du mois d'août. *Ils étaient venus tous les deux pour voir leur Mélie… et surtout leurs amis qui habitent Jean-les-Pins*. Ils ne lui avaient *consacré qu'un bref après-midi*, à *courir* acheter des glaces et une robe neuve. Et ce jour-là, ce qu'elle sait, Mélie, c'est qu'elle portait ce petit chemisier blanc et cette jupe écossaise. *Ce dont elle ne se souvient pas, c'est d'avoir vu son père*. Pourtant, il était là. C'est certain. Ils étaient venus ensemble. (my italics, pp. 101-102)

The repetition of the scene from a different perspective and in a different tense reveals the young-adult focalizer's development throughout the course of the novel. There is now a clear awareness that her parents' behaviour towards her was cruel, evident in the second paragraph with the anticipation created by the inclusion of ellipsis markers

before the revelation that parents' friends were the main reason for the visit. Here the narrative perspective is of crucial importance to the repeated telling of events, as the young adult is reflecting on her relationship with her father in the aftermath of his death, highlighted when Mélie clearly mentions her father in the first extract, yet describes being unable to picture him in the second. The time gap between the episodes foregrounds the ambiguity of memory and Mélie's struggle to replay the exact scene in her head over a decade later: time creates narrative distance and alters the perspective of the narration of events. Furthermore, the second episode reports the scene in the space of three sentences, suggesting that the adult protagonist is attempting to emphasize the speed of the visit and her parents' superficial consideration of their daughter, whilst the first extract shows free indirect discourse from the parents and Mélie's despair after the event. Indeed, the first passage is ironic in the fact that the reader is allowed to see the parents' insincerity where Mélie becomes carried away in the momentum of the visit, while the second account reflects her later knowledge.

Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père depicts the female protagonist's experiences of emotional abuse carried out by her father. The text initially contains iterative narration giving the impression of a pervasive atmosphere of fear and abuse, then, as the narrator matures, she becomes more analytical of her situation, and more singulative episodes appear. The text gives a detailed account of the narrator fainting from fear when addressing her father:

> Te regarder dans les yeux m'éblouit, me brûle la cornée d'une auréole grise, d'une flaque de nuit qui grandit, et grandit. Qui finit par tout envahir, parfois, jusqu'à la crise. La chute, le trou noir. Et ces jours-là, maman accourt, me tapote les joues, me tamponne les tempes à petits gestes vifs, avec une serviette mouillée, me donne un peu d'alcool de menthe sur un sucre. (p. 9-10)

> Le jour suivant, ou le surlendemain tu ordonneras:
>
> — Regarde-moi quand je te parle! (p. 11)

The iterative narrative is depicted with such precision that it appears ritualistic, as does the father's response. The narrator's overwhelming fear of her father, and her ultimate physical inability to bear it, is thus depicted as a frequent household occurrence. The habitual continuation with the intimidation in the wake of the daughter's fainting further suggests the father's deep-rooted desire for power and control. Whereas Mélie's experiences are foregrounded in episodic, singulative, unpredictable scenes of abuse, the narrator of *Tu te soumettras* depicts a sense of regularity and routine to the father's behaviour.

The narrative also contains episodes where iterative and singulative narration merge, and this occurs in particular in the narrator's description of her encounters with her neighbours. The narrator regularly spends time with M. Willerbach while he recounts his past experiences:

> Lorsque je vais chez eux pour voir les lapins, le jeudi après-midi, il me donne toujours un grand verre de grenadine avec deux petits-beurre Lu et parfois, pendant que je goûte, il se sert un verre de blanc et ressort ses albums.
>
> Il me raconte ses exploits – *douze combats, onze victoires, un titre départemental*.
>
> […]
>
> — Là, je suis en garde, tu vois? La garde anglaise, ça s'appelle! Un vrai verrou! Tu vois, quand tu mets ton bras droit comme ça, tu te protèges le foie avec ton coude et le menton avec ton poing, du meme coup. Vas-y, pour voir? (p. 34)

The account of M. Willerbach's speech in the iterative episode is such a specific description, that whilst it is arguably an insertion of a singulative to give a specific example of a conversation, it seems to me, rather, to be an example of what Genette calls the pseudo-iterative:

> C'est-à-dire de scènes présentées, en particulier par leur rédaction à l'imparfait, comme itératives, alors que la richesse et la précision des détails font qu'aucun lecteur ne peut croire sérieusement qu'elles se sont produites et reproduites ainsi, plusieurs fois, sans aucune variation.[19]

> Le récit affirmant littéralement 'ceci se passait tous les jours' pour faire entendre figurément: 'tous les jours il se passait quelque chose de ce genre, dont ceci est une réalisation parmi d'autres'.[20]

In *Tu te soumettras*, as the scene is written in the present tense, not the perfect or imperfect, it is more difficult to ascertain the status of the utterance as singulative or iterative. Yet the ambiguity of the phrase has the same effect as the pseudo-iterative; the reader sees the description as an exaggeration; the man cannot surely be saying exactly the same words with the exact same exclamations each time that the girl is with him. Rather, the narrator conveys the repetitive nature of her exchanges with the neighbour, whilst emphasizing the fullness of the conversation and the pleasure gained from both herself and Willerbach during their interactions.

Throughout the narrative there is a repetition of the phrase 'Je grandis' (p. 58, 76, 84, 85), which is one continuous stage being overstated and emphasized by the narrator, showing her desire to grow up and away from her father's control. As the narrator ages, there are more episodes of singulative narration as her horizons widen

[19] Genette, p. 120.
[20] Genette, p. 121.

and she develops awareness of her emotionally damaging environment. The recollection of Mme Brachard, who is abused by her husband, coming for help and being turned away by the father is a pivotal singulative episode for the narrator:

> Elle pleurait en longeant la façade. Les pleurs se sont dilués dans la nuit.
>
> J'avais honte. (p. 74)

The abused woman is then murdered by her husband, a scene narrated in detail in the singulative, as Mme Willerbach describes the event to the narrator's mother. Following on from this, further singulative memories are narrated: the narrator's friendly interaction with a Kabylle lady (p. 89), her meeting a new friend, Sophie, and all that the girl teaches her about prejudice (p. 126). Yet these singulative episodes depicting the narrator's development are also interspersed with iterative narration relating to her father and homelife, which remain hostile. In particular, the death of the narrator's brother, whilst itself a singulative event, is followed by gloomy iterative scenes: 'L'été s'avance. L'école est terminée et je suis en vacances. Temps terriblement libre, qui dure trop pour moi. Maman se lève chaque jour plus transparente, plus légère. […] Tous les jours, elle fait les vitres. Pour elle, c'est devenu une sorte de rite.' (p. 139). The juxtaposition of the seasons moving on with the mother's repetitive and seemingly therapeutic window cleaning highlights the gulf between the narrator and her family as she tries to move forward and away from her traumatic past, while her mother cannot move on from her own trauma of her son's death.

In the two sexual abuse texts *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* and *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, the authors make use of repeating narrative, whereby the same event is narrated more than once, as well as iterative narration. Both texts deal with the sexual abuse of the child protagonist which takes place weekly on Wednesday afternoons. For Marie-Bénédicte of *P'tits bateaux* the abuse occurs at her own home

and is carried out by her uncle after school. For Camille, in *Monsieur Henry*, the abuse is carried out by her singing teacher at his apartment. Thus within the two texts the iterative narration is very similar in determination, which is the time-span covered by the repeated period, and specification, which is the rhythm and recurrence of the event.[21] There is a routine to the abuse, emphasizing the opportunism of the abusers and the entrapment of the victims; the paedophilia has become an inherent part of their weekly routine. In *Monsieur Henry*, the abusive scenes described towards the beginning of the novel contain iterative narratives wherein Camille, the victim-narrator, describes the events which always take place when she goes to see Monsieur Henry:

> Chaque fois, c'est le même cinéma:
>
> — Regarde bien la position des lèvres, pour tes vocalises, ni trop ouvertes ni trop fermées. De ses mains anguleuses, il entrouvre ma bouche, pour me montrer. (p. 8)

She finishes the scene with the iterative 'J'ai envie de le mordre. Chaque fois.' (p. 9) Several pages later in the text, the narrator repeats the description of the ritual:

> Parce que, *chaque fois* il ouvre la porte, il me regarde avec ses yeux merlan-mayonnaise congelé, me fait son sourire coffre-fort, et j'ai déjà peur.
>
> *Chaque fois*, ma mère fait des civilités, puis disparaît dans l'escalier.
>
> Après, il dit *toujours* les mêmes phrases.
>
> […]
>
> — Bonjour, petite. Nous enlevons notre manteau? Peut-être aussi notre petit pull? Il fait chaud ici!
>
> *Chaque fois*, je commence à transpirer à grosses gouttes. (p. 14, my italics)

[21] See Genette, p. 127.

The repetition of 'chaque fois' at the very beginning and end of the scenes and the narration of the precise details of Henry's speech place emphasis on the predictability of the abuse, highlighting the victim's vulnerability in that all she can do is expect and tolerate the frequent encounters.[22] On the level of the plot, the iterative narratives increase efficiency in the relatively short novel by providing detailed accounts of the abusive behaviour and depicting its frequency and regularity in the space of one or two short scenes.

After the regularity of the abuse is depicted, Camille then describes a singulative event: the first time she goes to see Henry without her mother accompanying her on the journey. This episode contains another 'first'; that of Camille witnessing Jérôme, potentially another child victim, leaving Henry's house (p. 18). After the unique event of identifying a fellow victim, Camille endures Henry and his unfailing predictability: 'Alors, bonjour Petite, nous enlevons notre manteau…' The ellipsis markers here represent the unfolding of the whole rehearsed abuse scene and, although Henry trails off in his utterance, Camille is conditioned as to what to expect next, as she plays the forthcoming abuse in her head in detail:

> J'attendais en me déroulant son cinéma.
>
> Qu'il me colle tout contre lui pour que les notes sortent.
>
> Qu'il agite ses doigts comme des tentacules.
>
> […]
>
> Et puis, ouvrir la bouche comme il le demande avec ses mains. Impératives.
>
> […]
>
> — Ce pull, allez, enlevons ce petit pull. (p. 19)

[22] I discuss the metaphors used by Camille to describe Henry in Chapter Five.

Indeed, throughout the description of this one scene *sans maman*, Camille constantly slips into iterative narrative: '*Chaque fois* il referme ses doigts sur ma nuque et me pousse devant lui vers la salle de musique' (p. 20). The narration then returns to the singulative narration of the initial scene: '*Cette première fois* sans maman j'ai trop peur, je fixe la sonnette' (p.25). The switching from iterative narration of past experiences to the narration of the current scene, which also contains repetition of the phrase 'cette première fois', blurs the distinction between past and present and reveals the overwhelming sense of inevitability of the child's experience, despite the contemporaneous narration of the one scene of abuse.

As the narrative progresses, singulative narrative is foregrounded as Camille tries to alter the pre-determined patterns of abuse by resisting her abuser: 'Cette fois, il m'enlève mon pull de force. […] Et je le mords, oui, je le mords. Pour la première fois.' (p. 26) The way that Camille emphasizes this singulative narration, signifies a shift in her focus from enduring the abuse to fighting back not just mentally, but also verbally and physically. This then leads to further proactive behaviour from Camille, including dressing like a boy to discourage Henry and adding her own drawings to offensive graffiti about her teacher on the wall of his building. The singulative episodes plot the personal development of the protagonist and reveal the changes in Camille's attitude towards the abuse from fear and resignation, to the gradual feeling of empowerment, which leads to the iterative assertion: 'Chaque mercredi, je grandis' (p. 38). The assertion is identical to the narrator's repeated phrase 'Je grandis' in *Tu te soumettras*, suggesting that the narrators benefit psychologically from the repetition of positive assertions. The phrase itself suggests that growing up is a means of moving away from victimhood: adulthood gives physical strength and reduces the child victims' vulnerability and reliance on others around them.

In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, repeating narrative occurs when Marie-Bénédicte refers to the first instance of sexual abuse she experiences at the hands of her uncle. The date of the episode is repeated seven times throughout the novel, with six references appearing in the first twenty-eight pages of the book (pp. 10, 17, 18, 21, 28), which highlights the narrator's fixation on the date and its traumatic significance. Indeed, the recollection of the date of the abuse, rather than the abuse itself suggests a psychological block whereby Marie-Bénédicte is unable to escape the abuse, yet also unable to confront it. When, subsequently, this first scene of abuse is narrated by the protagonist, it begins with the singulative: 'Sortie de ma classe de sixième…' (p. 21), which is followed by the iterative 'comme tous les mercredis, j'avais mangé à la cantine.' (p. 22). The inclusion of the iterative shows that the day was initially the same as any other until the pivotal moment of abuse, which changed the narrator's concept of routines and regularity. The narrator describes her first sexually abusive encounter with her uncle in two separate scenes. Marie-Bénédicte first reveals her uncle's preoccupation with stroking her hair: 'J'aime tes cheveux, a-t-il répété. Ils sont longs, ils sont doux…'; 'Il les a caressés longuement' (p. 23), and repeats three times Laurent's words 'J'aime tes cheveux' (p. 23), showing the narrator's feelings of being overwhlemed by the uncle's verbal justification for his behaviour. In the second scene depicting the first abusive episode, repeating narrative is present when Marie-Bénédicte again describes her uncle stroking her hair: 'Ils sont longs, ils sont doux. Il a caressé longuement mes cheveux' (p. 28). This repetition and continuation of the narrator's abuse story creates a certain rhythm and suggests the momentum with which Laurent was able to accelerate his predatory behaviour and move on from stroking the narrator's hair to touching her body. Furthermore, intermittently in the abuse scene Marie-Bénédicte reflects upon her past relationship with her uncle: 'À toutes ses

demandes, j'ai dit oui. Peut-être tout simplement pour le voir sourire, pour ne pas lire de la peine dans ses yeux. Petite, si je lui faisais de la peine, vite, je sautais dans ses bras pour effacer son regard triste' (p. 23). The narrator describes her iterative compliance as a child and attempts to reconcile her current situation of being emotionally and sexually exploited by her uncle with her complicity and desire to please Laurent as a small child.

The cyclical narration of the abuse scene and its repetition and continuation signifies Marie-Bénédicte's mental preoccupation with the trigger moment when the abuse began and this repetition and resulting fragmented narrative voice are two of the three features identified by Whitehead as prevalent in trauma fiction.[23] Unlike Nikolajeva's assertion that traditional cyclical children's texts represent the eternal paradise of childhood, while linearity represents the young-adult's initiation into sexuality, death and adulthood, the exact opposite occurs in *P'tits bateaux*: the repetition and circular structure shows the victim's struggle to move on from her sexual abuse. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, after considering the phenomenon of WWI veterans being haunted by their experiences on the front line, Freud (1920) discusses the role played by repetition in overcoming traumatic experiences when he observes his grandson playing *fort und da* with a toy in an attempt to overcome his separation anxiety and seek revenge on his mother for leaving him.[24] Janet (1919) also comments on the way in which one of his patients frequently replays a traumatic experience in her mind, sometimes physically re-enacting it, until the memory is transformed from traumatic memory, which is set rigidly in the trauma victim's mind as it happened and cannot be recalled or retold spontaneously, to narrative memory, which the victim is

[23] The third feature identified by Whitehead, intertextuality, is not relevant to the temporal analysis of my texts, but the device is discussed in the forthcoming chapter on communicating and expressing abuse in the primary texts.
[24] Freud, pp. 14-17.

able to retell and edit in different forms.[25] He explains: 'Tous ces malades semblent arrêtés dans l'évolution de la vie. Ils sont "accrochés" à un obstacle qu'ils n'arrivent pas à franchir.'[26] Flashbacks, then, serve the purpose of forcing the victim to confront the difficult memory in order to process it. There is a distinction to be made between unconscious flashbacks, and the gaining of control by transforming the flashbacks into narrative memories. In particular, Caruth argues that 'the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way.'[27] In *La Fille du canal*, the teacher suffers from uncontrollable and intrusive flashbacks to the scene where her uncle sexually abused her, whilst it seems that Marie-Bénédicte's replaying of the first sexual abuse scene in her mind is a more conscious manifestation of her difficulty in comprehending her past. Her constant return to it signifies that she has not mastered it. In *Les Parents de Mélie*, however, Mélie's return to and revision of her memories of abuse in *Paix à mon père* reflect her successful integration of her past into her consciousness.

P'tits bateaux contains a turning point in the narration, however, when iteration is used to describe the Wednesdays that the uncle does not come to see the protagonist, rather than when he does: 'Deux mercredis qu'il n'est pas venu' (p. 48). 'Quatre mercredis sans croix noire sur mon agenda' (p. 49). This is then contrasted with the abuse victim's singulative account of seeing her uncle Laurent with another woman: 'Une jeune femme l'accompagnait et lui souriait.' 'Il ne viendra plus maintenant. Je le sens. J'en suis sûre' (p. 49). The narrator's life has gone from being defined by the episodes of abuse to the episodes of non-abuse and her recording of these events is an attempt to process new routines, which also have a psychological impact on her.

[25] Janet, p. 269.
[26] Ibid., p. 271.
[27] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.

Interestingly, at the end of the narrative, iteratives acquire the positive function of representing the narrator's gradual recovery. The father '*régulièrement*, le soir, vient dans [sa] chambre [lui] dire bonne nuit' (p. 62), and the narrator explains that 'Maintenant, *tous les mercredis après-midi*, je vais chez une psychologue' (p. 62). The implicit prolepsis here in the description of her visits has positive connotations of future recovery as the Wednesday afternoons are now filled with the healing routine of going to a psychologist, which is a direct replacement for the damaging abuse previously filling that time period. The continuity of the temporal setting also seems to be a part of the healing process, whilst the positive iterative behaviour of Marie-Bénédicte's father presents the former abuse victim with a safe male relative through whom she can rebuild her self-esteem.

The analysis of frequency across the texts reveals the significance of time and routine in the impact of abuse on the child victims. In *Mélie* there is a foregrounding of singulative narrative to emphasize the unpredictable nature of Mélie's mother. This unpredictability then becomes an iterative, in the sense that there is a constant anticipation of the abuse. In *Mélie*, the unpredictability is a source of trauma, whereas in *Monsieur Henry* and *Tu te soumettras* it is the predictability of the abuse that causes anxiety. Both the predictability and the unpredictability, however, signify the protagonists' lack of control over their situation. The role of Mélie's father in her abuse is also revisited, as the repeating narrative serves to fill gaps in child Mélie's perspective of events. The narration of the same events from two different time perspectives highlights the inextricable relationship between time and focalization, as a change in one category necessarily impacts upon the other and Mélie's mature focalization shows her detached perspective on her past. Where this relationship is not true, however, is in the repeating narrative in *P'tits bateaux*, where the memories of the

first episode of abuse are repeated from the exact perspective that they were experienced the first time. As is common in trauma literature, the victim narrator is pulled back to her past until she is able to work through it, represented by the positive iteratives at the end of the narrative. In *Tu te soumettras*, the narrator uses more singulative narration as she grows older and becomes more aware of her abusive family environment: her experience of abuse becomes punctuated with external events presenting an alternative to her current life. There is iteration of the desire to grow up in both *Tu te soumettras* and *Monsieur Henry*, which represents the child victims' desire to move away from their vulnerable childhood status.

Order

According to Genette, the study of narrative order considers 'les rapports entre l'*ordre* temporel de succession des événements dans la diégèse et l'ordre pseudo-temporel de leur disposition dans le récit'.[28] Any such study focuses on narrative anachronies, which are 'les différentes formes de discordance entre l'ordre de l'histoire et celui du récit'[29], which, he states, are 'l'une des ressources traditionnelles de la narration littéraire.'[30] The two main anachronies identified by Genette are prolepsis, 'toute manoeuvre narrative consistant à raconter ou évoquer d'avance un événement ultérieur' and analepsis, 'toute évocation après coup d'un événement antérieur au point de l'histoire où l'on se trouve'.[31] While prolepsis is relatively scarce in the primary texts, analepsis is plentiful across the corpus. By focussing on the disturbances to chronological narrative order, I aim to show how temporal inconsistencies reflect the psychological impact of abuse on child victims and alter the way in which abuse is experienced by readers. This

[28] Genette, p. 23.
[29] Ibid, p. 24.
[30] Ibid., p. 25.
[31] Ibid., pp. 28-9.

section examines the manipulation of in the sexual abuse texts *Quelque chose à te dire*, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, and *Mauvais coup*, and the physical abuse text *Comme des adieux*. I examine the presence of analepses in the novels, the intermingling of past and present and the temporal inconsistencies in the versions of events in *Quelque chose à te dire* and *Comme des adieux*.

P'tits bateaux is the shortest of the four texts, with sixty-three pages in total and seventeen chapters. The story time in *P'tits bateaux* ranges from the narrator's twelfth birthday on 22 December 1996 until 1997 after Marie-Bénédicte expresses her uncle's sexual abuse to her school teacher via the medium of a computer diary. There is then a two-year gap in the narration and the final chapter details events of 1999, when the legal proceedings have taken place and Marie-Bénédicte is in the process of recovering from her abuse. Analepsis occurs frequently in the narrative present when the uncle's regular sexual abuse is depicted, as Marie-Bénédicte remembers her first experience of abuse, which took place on 15 May 1996, (seven months prior to the start of narration), and the subsequent Wednesday 22 May 1996, and further into the past, back to her younger childhood and family holidays with the uncle. The first mention of the initial episode of abuse is simply with reference to the narrator's choice of password for her new computer: 'Mais j'ai créé un code: 15.05.96. Le 15 mai 1996. Date où tout a débuté' (p. 10). The short sentence structure with the date as a separate sentence followed by the reference to 'tout' emphasizes the personal significance of the date and alludes to the gradual revelation of the narrator's secret: this date and whatever happened on it is the premise of the narrative. Yet this introductory analepsis reveals very little about what actually happened, as the narrator herself is restricting the extent of her recollection. Two further analeptic episodes, however, reveal the details of the abuse and Marie-Bénédicte's feelings: 'Même encore aujourd'hui, la bouffée d'angoisse

de ce jour-là me remonte à la gorge comme une nausée. Je ne veux pas. Je ne veux pas. Ce n'est pas un jeu. Je l'ai laissé faire.' (p. 28) The narrator's description of a physical reaction resulting from her retrospection shows the strength of her connection to the past event. The mixing of two temporal levels here signified by the change in tense emphasizes the legacy of the narrator's damaging past, with the reference to 'une nausée' implying disgust and rejection of the memory, a memory which is so strong that it causes this physical and psychological reaction in the present.

This and the other analepsis which deals with the first abusive encounter, could be classified in Genette's terms as external analepsis, as they refer to an event which occurs outside of the narrative timeframe. Genette argues that '[l]es analepses externes, du seul fait qu'elles sont externes, ne risquent à aucun moment d'interférer avec le récit premier, qu'elles ont seulement pour fonction de compléter en éclairant le lecteur sur tel ou tel "antécédent"'.[32] Evidently there is no formal interference in the first narrative in *P'tits bateaux*, yet the frequent flashbacks drive the first narrative on a thematic level, actually increasing the impression of interdependency between the external analepsis and the current narrative, despite it being outside of the first narrative and the reader's direct experience. This strong intermixing of form and content in the presentation of abusive past experiences is a defining feature of trauma literature written by survivors. Tal, in her study of trauma literature, comments: '[f]lashbacks are a common phenomena [sic] in women who have suffered sexual abuse, just as they are in combat veterans, holocaust survivors, and other PTSD sufferers'.[33] Mazard presents the psychological impact of abuse on Marie-Bénédicte in a similar way to that of real trauma victims, with the narrator's difficulty in processing and accepting her experiences manifested in the way that abuse is remembered, with repetition of the

[32] Ibid., p. 40.
[33] Tal, p. 212.

abuse scene, as discussed in the frequency section above, and the retrospection and resulting fragmented narrative voice seen here. Thus while Genette explains that external analepsis enlightens the reader in Proust, in *P'tits bateaux*, the technique also serves to aid the protagonist, who is struggling to come to terms with her past.

The anachronies in *P'tits bateaux* also reveal a significant intermingling of the past, present and future, as the protagonist's whole life is centred on her experience of abuse. The references to Marie-Bénédicte's first abusive encounter impact upon her pre-abuse memories and her concerns regarding the future, creating a disjointed narrative representing the narrator's fragmented identity. The narrator flits between her memories of the abuse, her uncle's assertion directly before sexually abusing her that he has 'énormément de tendresse pour [elle]' (p. 38), and her innocent childhood relationship with him:

> Quand j'étais petite, je le trouvais magnifique. Mon Tonton Tildou. […] Je ferme les yeux plus fort encore. J'ai quatre ou cinq ans. Je suis dans ses bras. Je ris aux éclats.
>
> [...]
>
> — À l'eau, le bout de chou!
>
> Je crie 'Non!', mais pour la forme. C'est un jeu.
>
> […]
>
> — Au secours! Au secours! À l'aide, Tildou!
>
> […]
>
> Maintenant, il m'enfonce, me fait couler au plus profond de mon désespoir.
>
> À l'aide! À l'aide! (pp. 38-9)

The flashback is followed by the narrator's return to the present, with the abrupt shift in perspective from happy childhood memories to feelings of desperation. The

continuation of the drowning metaphor through the two temporal levels, whilst depicting the narrator's desperation, suggests that Marie-Bénédicte's childhood is tainted by her abuse. Firstly, her once innocent memories are reconsidered in the light of the knowledge that her uncle Laurent is, and probably was at the time, a paedophile and, secondly; there is a sense of betrayal for Marie-Bénédicte that Laurent is using her childhood trust of him to abuse her. The sharp shift in temporal perspective is also seen in reference to how Marie-Bénédicte views her future as a result of her experience of abuse: 'Depuis que je sais écrire, mon père m'offre des agendas. […] Au début, grand bonheur. J'avais sept ans. J'écrivais des choses simples, du style*: "Aujourd'hui, il neige. C'est beau." ou "Il pleut, mais je n'arrive pas à être triste"*. She continues: 'À partir de l'agenda 96, du 15 mai: feuilles blanches.' 'L'agenda de cette année 1997, je ne l'ouvrirai même pas' (p. 18).

The change in three temporal perspectives in the space of three phrases perpetuates the fragmented form of the narrative and Marie-Bénédicte's inability to separate her future, past and present identity from her experiences of abuse, while her inability to write in her diary (discussed further in Chapter Five), reveals her reluctance to confront her new abuse-ruled life. Margaret Higonnet discusses techniques which flout the traditional chronological order in children's narratives, identifying the mosaic as a form of fragment which '[achieves] the effect of surprise [...] through the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated sections (or subfragments) whose unity is revealed to be thematic.'[34] This type of fragment 'violate[s] our anticipation that the narrative will evolve in a defined, continuous way.'[35] Higonnet's article focuses predominantly on children's picture books, yet I believe her discussion of the mosaic and the use of fragments is particularly significant to the sexual abuse corpus and *P'tits bateaux* in particular, where

[34] Margaret Higonnet, 'Narrative Fractures and Fragments', *Children's Literature*, 15 (1987), 37-54, pp. 39-40.
[35] Ibid., p. 39.

the frequent references to past memories intermingled with present experiences create a disjointed narrative. Higonnet further cites Culler: 'Works "which succeed as fragments or as instances of incomplete totality depend for their success on the fact that our drive towards totality enables us to recognize their gaps and discontinuities and to give them a thematic value"'.[36] Thus fragmentation itself serves as both form and content. The anachronies in *P'tits bateaux* represent Marie-Bénédicte's psychological trauma as they mirror her fragmented memories and highlight her inability to overcome her past. Here again it seems that the manipulation of time impacts upon narrative perspective as the flashbacks both lead and represent the narrator's focalization of her experiences.

There are allusions to a potential future in *P'tits bateaux*, rather than true prolepsis, which would be rare in a contemporaneously narrated text with a teenage focalizer. The narrator's thoughts of the future are significant in their indication of a change in Marie-Bénédicte's temporal perspective from the painful present to a possible future. As these 'pseudo-prolepses' depict a time beyond the scope of the narrative, they would be considered to be external. Genette argues that external prolepsis serves as a form of epilogue.[37] In Mazard's novel, Marie-Bénédicte reveals her fears for the future in the narrative, with the assertion: 'Le mercredi 15 mai 1996. Passeront les années, je n'oublierai jamais.' (p. 21) The assertion is decidedly pessimistic, with the protagonist concerned with the ongoing psychological impact of the abuse she has suffered. However, the final prolepsis in the text, which occurs at the very end of the novel, suggests a more positive outlook: 'Je serai écrivain plus tard' (p. 62). The change from negative to a positive declarative sentence suggests a sense of control and shows

[36] Culler, p. 171, cited in Higonnet, p. 39.
[37] Genette, p. 61.

the emotional development of the narrator from her feelings of hopelessness to her gaining a sense of direction in life.

Mauvais coup is part of an editorial collection consisting of children's literature authors writing about their own childhood experiences. The text depicts the attempted sexual seduction of the male child protagonist by a priest at his school, the boy's escape by setting the cabin on fire and fleeing, and his fear of punishment for his actions. Three main temporal levels interact throughout the story: an extradiegetic adult narrator who frames the main diegetic level in the first and last chapters of the text, the simultaneously narrated main diegesis depicting the child's return bus journey to school one week after the attempted abuse, and the child narrator's flashbacks to the attempted seduction, which is not fully revealed to the reader until halfway through the narrative. The main narrative time period depicted is thus the bus journey to school, where the protagonist contemplates the events of the past week. In the opening chapter of the text, the seemingly heterodiegetic narrator describes the child protagonist sitting on a coach on his return to school eight days after a mystery incident: 'mais revenons à notre car Sancoins-Bourges, ce beau dimanche de mai de l'an 1961. On va partir bientôt.' (p. 13) The narrator initially situates himself in the past, which becomes the narrative present as the story progresses. Chapter two of seven assumes an autodiegetic narrative voice, as the child protagonist narrates his present experience on the bus, whilst also recalling past events, including a neighbour giving him parsley to help his coach sickness. These meandering analepses are then curtailed as the narrator reveals that a significant and psychologically distressing event occurred one week ago: 'Tout n'est pas ma faute, mais quand même! Je n'y suis pas allé avec le dos de la cuiller!' (p. 49). This suggestive analepsis, hinting at feelings of culpability, adds an element of mystery to the narrative as the reader is unaware of the event causing

the narrator's anxiety, which is also the case with *P'tits bateaux* before the abuse is revealed to the reader.

The narrator admits that he is plagued by images of 'him', with no explanation of who the person is, ('Je donnerais cher pour ne plus penser à lui, pour me purger de sa trogne et du son de sa voix qui me rendent malade depuis huit jours' [p. 61]). The chapter also reproduces a quotation of speech originating from Duraton, the character feared by Mezinski, directly before the mystery incident occurrs when Duraton encounters the protagonist after missing his school bus and encourages him go back to his cabin for a drink (p. 69). The narration then returns abruptly to the diegetic present with a description of the coach: 'Le car a pris bonne cadence' (p. 70). The reproduction of Duraton's speech, which is repeated in full when the child-narrator reveals and chronologically recounts the abuse in a later analepsis, inserted into the first narrative with no context, creates a temporally disjointed chapter, resembling the narrator's overwhelming anxiety as he prepares for his return to school after the abuse and his arson. The bus journey in the present is thus a time of relative safety, bridging the gap between the past traumatic event and the uncertain future. Mezinski's anxiety occurs over a short and specific period of time: the eight days between the attempted seduction and his arson and the return to school to face the consequences of the fire. It is thus very different from the prolonged psychological trauma and flashbacks depicted in *P'tits bateaux*: Mezinski escapes the abuse and is concerned with being punished for his actions, whereas Marie-Bénédicte's whole present and past is dominated by her failure to escape.

The disjointed narrative order continues with a section of the text detailing the week between the attempted seduction and the return to school, which includes three days of fever. The narration also returns intermittently to the narrative present and the

bus journey (p. 85, 94). Chapters five and six then relay chronologically all that happened when Mezinski missed his bus and was led by Duraton into his cabin in the school grounds. The abuser gives the boy alcohol and wants to pull out his teeth, then locks him in the cabin, leading to Mezinski setting fire to the hut and running away. Thus it is only at the halfway point of the narrative that the plot mystery is revealed to the reader and the starting point of the story becomes apparent. What then occurs, however, is a quick resolution of the plot complication. The narrator describes encountering Père Para and repeats the story of missing the bus to him, omitting the attempted seduction, and the priest then drives Mezinski home. The return to the narrative present describes the narrator's arrival at school after the week of absence, where he is met by Père Para who reveals that he is aware of Duraton's advances and encourages the protagonist to keep the episode secret (p. 229-30).[38]

The final chapter of the text returns to the voice of the adult framing narrator, who explicitly reveals his status as the protagonist, before recounting to the reader the events in the several decades following the events of May 1961: 'Un jour, trente ans plus tard, j'entendis parler de Duraton, dont je n'avais jamais vraiment oublié l'existence' (p. 232). The return of the adult voice completes a circular motion and repackages the story as an autobiographical account of an abusive experience. The dynamic of the child-victim/child-narrator/adult-narrator also creates two levels of remembering, with the older narrator's ability to relay the feelings of his child-self remembering the abuse. This narrative weaving between different temporal levels and the disjointed retelling of the story depicts the child victim's chaotic attempts to comprehend what happened the week before, which are then put in the wider context of an adult reflecting on a formerly traumatic experience. The manipulation of order is thus

[38] In Chapter One, I discussed the ambivalent role of Père Para as both helper and hinderer to the denunciation and recovery from abuse.

an exploration of the nature of memory and the impact of time on the psychological experience of that memory, which is similar to the effect displayed in *Mélie* when the narrator revisits her childhood experiences from a young-adult perspective.

The adult narrator-focalizer considers his traumatic experience retrospectively and takes a distanced approach to the encounter which is very different from the child's focalization. The adult narrator reveals that when he was locked in Duraton's cabin, the music played was Peter and the Wolf, a tale of a young boy's triumph over a predatory wolf: '*Pierre et le Loup*! Il ne l'avait pas fait exprès, mais… il n'y a jamais de hasard!' (p. 237).[39] The revelation fills a textual gap in the earlier narrative which refers to Duraton playing music (p. 196), but also emphasizes the narrator's emotional detachment from the incident as he humorously relates the irony of the soundtrack to the seduction. The narrator also reveals his desire to write, which is a common theme across the corpus, discussed in Chapter Five, and acknowledges that revisiting the experience presents him with no bitterness towards Duraton: 'Mes comptes avec lui sont nets' (p. 233). His work is more a play with words: 'Entrelacer des mélodies et des rythmes différents, pour faire, d'un choc de reflets, naître une ambiance, un feeling – l'aspect onirique du souvenir' (p. 236). Mezinski's description of the creative and playful origins of his writing show his emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of narrating his experiences, whereas for the (fictional) trauma authors Marie-Bénédicte and Sarah's teacher in *La Fille du canal*, writing serves a necessarily functional role in dealing with their traumatic experiences. Thus in contrast to *P'tits bateaux*, whilst the narrator here acknowledges the contemporaneous trauma of his escape from the paedophile, he has not suffered any long-term psychological trauma: he remembers the event, but is left unscathed by it. Furthermore, in the para-textual material at the end of the narrative there is a box of

[39] The wolf metaphor for a male sexual abuser is more clearly exploited in *Dans la gueule du vent* discussed in Chapter Five and in Régine Joséphine's *Je t'aime, signé Lou(p)* (Paris: Oskar, 2012).

text, in which the author states his artistic intentions in telling the story: 'Poète je suis. Poète je reste. Je n'ai pas écrit ce texte pour dénoncer qui ou quoi que ce soit' (p. 238). So while the *récit* seemingly has no therapeutic benefit or purpose of denunciation, in *P'tits bateaux* Marie-Bénédicte's written diary fulfils exactly those roles: it is a means of confronting the abuse and passing her story on to denounce her abuser and gain official recognition of her victimhood.

Comme des adieux is the third text of a trilogy, all of which is narrated and focalized by the child protagonist Raymond, who relays his experiences at the hands of his bullying school teacher and physically abusive father. The first and second novels deal with Raymond's miserable home and school life and his transfer to a school for students with special educational needs, where he makes friends and falls in love with Anne. The second text ends, however, with Raymond being expelled from the school. *Comme des adieux* depicts Raymond's thoughts, memories and dreams as he slips in and out of consciousness as he lies in hospital due to a bad fever, which is exacerbated by his parents' initial failure to seek medical treatment for him. The temporal perspectives and the victim-protagonist's focalization, discussed in Chapter Two, are inextricably linked, as Raymond intermittently narrates his memories, current feelings and dreams and thus switches between past, present and imagined future times. Raymond reveals positive memories of being at his former school before his expulsion: 'Là-bas, à Capbreton, j'avais des amis que j'aimais bien. […] Avec eux, au moins, je pouvais parler sans qu'ils se foutent sans arrêt de ma gueule […]' (p. 41). The narrative also includes analeptic descriptions of seeing Anne for the first time: 'Elle patientait au milieu des autres, elle attendait son tour pour me dire bonjour et se présenter' (p. 77). Raymond's memories of being away from his abusive family are the only positive aspects of his life and the analepsis located within the present-tense hospital narrative

strand provide the reader with glimpses into Raymond's actual life and experiences in amongst his semi-conscious present state and his imagined past and future.

The text also consists of a past tense narrative strand woven in amongst the present-tense narrative which recounts a positive image of Raymond's family life. The narrator describes how he was 'pourri gâté jusqu'aux os' and explains: 'la vie me souriait, elle m'avait eu à la bonne' (p. 13). The positive dream, however, turns into one of negativity and abuse towards the end of the text, after a family trip to the seaside results in the father strangling his son and physically assaulting the whole family: 'Mon père nous avait fait plier le parasol en nous donnant des coups de pied dans le cul' (p. 107). Raymond is unable to escape his abusive circumstances even in his dreams, as his escapist thoughts inevitably lead back to his abuse. Indeed, the narrative also comprises a strand told in the future tense wherein Raymond imagines what will happen when he leaves hospital: 'Ma mère fera semblant d'être vraiment soulagée et mon père de me protéger. On marchera, comma ça, jusqu'à la voiture, comme une famille unie, enfin rassemblée après la longue maladie du petit.' (p. 39) The narrative progresses to depict Raymond's fears of the suffering to come, evident when he describes the proleptic episode of his mother beating him: 'elle trouvera toujours une excuse pour m'en mettre une, méritée ou pas, elle trouvera toujours une excuse' (p. 97). Thus the interwoven narrative strands from different temporal perspectives serve initially to disorient the reader, mirroring the narrator's confused mental and physical state. Yet the final outcome of the text, whereby every strand ends in physical abuse, compounds the depiction of Raymond's negative and predestined existence. The protagonist cannot imagine a life without abuse, which leaves death as his ultimate means of escape. The bleak 'resolution' to the narrative is compounded by the way in which Raymond's parents actually contribute to his death through their neglect at the

onset of his illness. However, there is a small aspect of positivity for Raymond suggested by the way in which the baker, who failed to save Raymond at the end of the first text in the series due to his own demise, seemingly comes back for him at the end of his life.

In *Quelque chose à te dire* the heterodiegetic narrator describes the young protagonist's visit to her grandmother. During the contemporaneously narrated ten-day long trip, the protagonist Ariane starts to uncover a family secret, but it is not until the final three pages of the novel that this secret is fully revealed when Ariane's mother, Dominique, reveals via an analepsis that she was sexually abused by her father when she was a teenager. The rape resulted in the birth of a baby boy, who Dominique's mother (Ariane's grandmother) claimed as her own. Further tragedy occurred when Dominique's father committed suicide with the baby, killing the infant. The story ends with the 'beginning' in that the whole basis of the plot is Ariane's mother's childhood experience of sexual abuse. In this sense it is very different from the first hand abusive experiences depicted in the victim-protagonist texts *Mauvais coup* and *P'tits bateaux*. Yet the depiction of the intermingling of past and present is similarly prevalent in this text, as the protagonist is embroiled in historical events when she contacts her estranged grandmother. The narrative starts with the protagonist Ariane arriving at grandmother Julia's house (pp. 9-10) and then the inclusion of a series of analepses informs the reader of how Ariane arranged the visit (pp. 10-12). The narrative contains further analepses of greater reach (the temporal 'distance' away from the first narrative) which detail the protagonist's childhood discussions with her father surrounding her mother's past and the mother's deceased 'brother': 'C'est à Dominique de t'expliquer la situation quand elle se sentira prête, avait-il déclaré à sa fille' (p. 15). This assertion actually serves as a premonition of what is to come in the narrative and hints at the

nature of the secret, as Dominique reveals the mystery of the family past directly to Ariane at the end of the text.

The weaving in and out of various points in time sets up the mystery of the plot, with the protagonist and reader left wondering what it is that Dominique is keeping from her daughter, whilst the resurfacing of the past emphasizes the long-term inter-generational impact of abuse and, in particular, the concealment of the abuse.[40] Indeed, three generations are affected by the incest in different ways and on different levels: the grandmother's complicity leads to her estrangement from her daughter and granddaughter and Dominique attempts to shut off her past, but is forced to confront it when Ariane questions her own heritage. Indeed, the narrator comments towards the end of the narrative: 'Durant des années, Dominique avait réussi à maintenir séparés deux pans de sa vie et maintenant, à cause de sa fille, elle allait devoir replonger dans des souvenirs douloureux' (p. 117). Thus the impression that sexual abuse cannot be forgotten or denied is foregrounded, suggesting that Dominique's past, despite her efforts to distance herself from it, forms a part of her new life and identity, affecting her role as mother. The depiction of the legacy of incest is similar here to that experienced by Marie-Bénédicte and her need to reassess her life in light of her own experience. In *Quelque chose à te dire*, however, the pain for Dominique lies in her mother's concealment of the abuse, a behaviour pattern which Dominique must herself overcome as she eventually shares her history with her daughter. Yet Dominique also suffers grief for her son who was taken from her in two ways: firstly by being re-categorized as her brother, and, secondly by being murdered by her abusive father.

The anachronies within the narrative suggest various versions of the truth, until the revelation of the abuse at the end provides the correct version. While the revision

[40] Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1987), deals with the legacy of trauma and the impact that traumatic experiences can have on future generations.

process is considered to be a therapeutic aspect of trauma writing,[41] in *Quelque chose à te dire*, the versions are intended to mask reality and it is not until the victim's version of events is recounted that the real story emerges. The first time Frédéric, Dominique's deceased son, is mentioned in the novel is in the context of him being the mother's younger brother who died of meningitis aged two (p. 21). Further into the narrative, Ariane's new friend Nathan informs her of 'la version officielle' of events leading to Frédéric's death; that Dominique's father fell over the cliff due to poor visibility caused by fog (pp. 49-50). The use of the term 'version officielle', however, suggests scepticism and hints at a further version of events, although Nathan himself gives an equally false version. The real story is only revealed when Dominique speaks out, with an analepsis describing her father when young: 'C'était un jeune homme sensible, étudiant aux Beaux-Arts de Nantes et amoureux fou de Julia Legohen, dont le talent n'allait pas tarder à se préciser' (p. 130). The narrator further describes, in a similar fashion to Marie-Bénédicte's recollections of her pre-abuse relationship with her uncle, her previously positive relationship with her father: 'Père et fille semblaient liés par une grande complicité. On ne les voyait jamais l'un sans l'autre.' (pp. 131) Thus the context to the story is provided and the victim's perspective is revealed. However, Dominique's use of the impersonal third-person to narrate the events has a distancing effect and reflects the abuse-victim's detachment from her previously hidden past.

Yet the mother goes on to explain, using the term 'viol', which is conspicuously absent from the abuse corpus, how one night, one event, just as in *P'tits bateaux*, changed the course of her life: 'l'irréparable s'était produit: un viol et, en même temps que ce viol, la conception d'un enfant: Frédéric.' (p. 131) Thus the deceased child that Ariane thought was her uncle, was in fact her half-brother. Dominique then contradicts

[41] Tal, pp. 131-132.

the earlier stories presented to Ariane, revising the 'revised' past and revealing the cover-up stories concocted by her mother:

> Et puis une nuit de tempête, cette fameuse nuit d'automne, Antoine força de nouveau la porte de la chambre de sa fille. Il avait bu. […] Il arracha Frédéric des bras de sa mère et sortit sous la pluie battante.
>
> […]
>
> Antoine courait avec l'enfant vers la falaise. […] À bout de souffle, Dominique finit par se cramponner aux jambes de son pantalon, mais, d'une violente poussée, Antoine se dégagea et se jeta du haut de la falaise, son fils dans les bras. (p. 134)

The narrative then returns to and ends with the present: 'Un léger silence s'ensuivit. Ariane n'osait plus regarder sa mère' (p. 136). The mystery is thus resolved and temporally we are back to the beginning, as the trauma victim's story has been told in its entirety, by the victim herself, confronting the past and erroneous versions of events perpetuating the concealment of abuse.

The analysis of story order highlights the way in which the authors of *Mauvais coup*, *P'tits bateaux* and *Quelque chose à te dire* thread their narratives around a specific abusive event, portraying its impact on victims, either immediate in the case of *Mauvais coup*, or long-term in the case of *P'tits bateaux* and *Quelque chose à te dire*. The manipulation of time becomes intertwined with that of voice and perspective, as the child-victim focalizers Marie-Bénédicte and Mezinski are fixated on a specific traumatic event and frequently return to the narration of this episode, preventing a logical progression in the narration of the story. For Marie-Bénédicte, her sense of self is anchored in her past and the date on which her life changed forever, and for Mezinski, his adult retrospective tale focuses on the immediate fear he experienced as a child

following his escape from abuse. In *Quelque chose à te dire*, however, the inverse narration of events is driven by the creation of a plot mystery. The reader is presented with the unusual relationship between the protagonist's grandmother and mother and uncovers the mother's past abuse alongside Ariane. The protagonist's quest to uncover the family secret also serves to highlight the long-term and inter-generational consequences of abuse, as Dominique is estranged from her mother and her past is concealed from her daughter. *Comme des adieux* is rather different from the other three texts, as it focuses on the psyche of the child-victim, and includes memories of events which occurred in the previous texts in the trilogy. Indeed, the plot is circular and yet disjointed, as Raymond drifts between thoughts of his present situation in hospital, an imagined past happy family life and an imagined abusive future, which all merge at the moment of his death.

Duration

Using Genette's terminology of scene, consisting of detailed descriptions of narrative events and situations; summary, where a brief overview is presented; and ellipsis, where information is omitted from the narrative, this section focuses on the scenes in which there are direct accounts of the abuse in order to determine how much abuse is shown in the corpus.[42] Issues surrounding how much abuse is presented and whether there are variations in the approach taken to the depiction of violence, sexuality and cruelty, are particularly significant in fiction for young readers given the legal constraints of children's literature set out by the law 16 July 1949 'sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse', in which Article 2 states:

[42] See Genette, p. 92; p. 103; p. 107.

> Les publications visées à l'article 1er ne doivent comporter aucune illustration, aucun récit, aucune chronique, aucune rubrique, aucune insertion présentant sous un jour favorable le banditisme, le mensonge, le vol, la paresse, la lâcheté, la haine, la débauche ou tous les actes qualifiés crimes ou délits ou de nature à demoraliser l'enfance ou la jeunesse, ou à inspirer ou entretenir des préjugés ethniques.[43]

On the 15 July 1960 and 25 March 1966 the law was further modified to dictate the setting up by the Ministry of Justice 'une commission chargée de la surveillance et du contrôle des publications destinées à l'enfance et à l'adolescence.'[44] Delbrassine claims that the law and Commission provide the motivation for children's literature authors and editors to be self-censoring.[45] He found in his study of contemporary teenage fiction that authors show a 'respect du lecteur', whereby they keep in mind the emotional and cognitive development of their young readers when presenting taboo topics, including sexuality and death.[46] Yet these legal constraints and author self-censorship have by no means prevented the emergence of what is deemed by some to be inappropriate content for young readers.[47] In this section I analyse the physical abuse novel *John et moi*, the psychological abuse novel *Les parents de Mélie* and the sexual abuse novels *La Fille du canal* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux.* Taking each in turn, I compare the ways in which the portrayal of abuse is handled in texts dealing with each type of abuse.

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[43] See Légifrance, <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006068067&dateTexte=20081226>. Accessed 24/05/14.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Delbrassine, 'Censure et autocensure'.

[46] Delbrassine, *Le Roman*, p. 308; 334.

[47] For initial concerns regarding the emergence of 'problem novels, see Sheila Egoff, 'Precepts and Pleasures: Changing emphasis in the Writing and Criticism of Children's Literature', in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature* , ed. by Egoff et al. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 419-446. More recently, Monchaux discusses French children's texts that she feels are 'morally corruptive' in *Écrits pour nuire*.

Of the physical abuse texts, there are two, *Coups pour coups* and *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, which contain fewer scenes of abuse than the other texts. In *Coups pour coups*, there are some scenes detailing the father's physical punishment of his son (p. 58), but there are also omitted scenes, whereby the reader is given details of Quentin's bruises and pain, without the depiction of the violence that caused them (p. 76). In *Le Garçon qui se taisait*, there is one scene at the end of the text where the witness and her parents intercept the abuse, but no violence is seen; Alex is described as bleeding and in pain on the floor (pp. 65-68). These shorter texts, with younger protagonists than the others, are less explicit than *Comme des adieux*, *Quand je serai grande,* and *John et moi*, all of which contain more explicit descriptions of violence carried out against the child victims. In *John et moi* the abuse scenes consist of a mixture of detailed depictions of cruelty to the protagonists and ellipsis of the most violent attacks.

In the following scene, one of three violent episodes, the two most violent of which I discuss, Elsa witnesses and simultaneously narrates physical abuse by her father directed towards her mother and twin brother:

> Et le lendemain, quand il [le père] est arrivé et qu'il a demandé à ma mère pourquoi on était là alors qu'on ne faisait même rien et quand elle a répondu que les enfants il fallait bien qu'ils vivent et quand il lui a dit de la fermer et […] *qu'il l'a poussée tellement fort qu'elle a buté contre la table et qu'elle a poussé un cri* et quand j'ai commencé à avoir du mal à garder les yeux ouverts et à avoir du mal aussi à fermer les yeux et quand *ma mère ne s'est pas relevée* et que j'ai entendu pleurer cette femme-là, toute seule par terre, et que John s'est approché et quand cet idiot de s'être approché s'est pris un *coup de pied* et que lui aussi *il est tombé* et que je suis restée la seule debout, là, et que c'était à mon tour d'y aller et que j'ai pu rien faire…

J'ai sorti une grenade.

Non, je veux dire je me suis sentie malade.

J'ai mis en route le fusil mitrailleur.

Enfin, je veux dire j'ai regardé ailleurs.

J'ai appuyé sur la gâchette.

En vérité, j'ai cherché une cachette.

Il s'est écroulé.

Enfin quoi, il a fini par s'en aller. (pp. 18-19, my italics)

The lack of punctuation throughout creates the impression of the protagonist describing rather quickly the events taking place in front of her eyes, with little time to reflect on what she is seeing. The dearth of commas shows her inability to draw breath as everything snowballs in front of her, suggesting a surge of adrenalin, emphasizing the trauma induced by witnessing the violence. The use of sixteen subordinate clauses and the drawn out nature of the passage caused by the wait for the main clause also creates the impression of controlled and sophisticated word play as the narration of events fills the time in which they occur and creates dramatic pace, denoting a scene of action in the narrative. The scene also contains ellipsis where a gap exists in the narrative between the mother being pushed and her ending up on the floor, yet the violence is for the main part described openly with exact terminology, rather than euphemisms or summaries. When the main clause does finally come, it opens with the beginning of the rhyme, changing the tone of the passage entirely, as Elsa cuts off psychologically from the scene she is witnessing. Elsa's description of violent weapons and wanting to kill her father emphasizes her anger, yet there is a deliberate deflation in the narration of events, caused by the contrast between Elsa's desire for revenge and the reality of turning away, which foregrounds the narrator's powerlessness.

The final abusive scene in the novel is in complete contrast to the fast pace of Elsa's first description of abuse, with the narrator slowly recounting her father's violent acts and her feelings at the time:

> Je.
>
> Ne.
>
> Veux.
>
> Pas.
>
> Que.
>
> Tu.
>
> La.
>
> Frappes.
>
> Encore.
>
> Laisse-tomber, mec, mon père, laisse tomber.
>
> Maintenant je me suis assise sur le tapis et mon cœur bat tellement vite que je m'essouffle. Et sans faire exprès je vois que ça pleure et même que c'est moi qui pleure et l'autre qui ouvre la porte de la cuisine pour battre ma seule mère que j'ai encore, même si elle est pas parfaite, vas-y, laisse-la tranquille.
>
> (pp. 117-19)

The initial presentation of one word per line as a separate sentence takes up significant physical space within the narrative and the visually fragmented structure suggests pauses in Elsa's narration, slowing down the overall pace of the narrative and the depiction of the scene. This slowing of time and attention to each word suggests Elsa's attempt to gain some control over the situation, as all she can do in reality is stand by and watch. Furthermore, the repetition of the isolation of individual words arguably represents the father's slaps on the mother, suggesting a certain tempo to his abuse as

the narrator chants in time to the beating, although the act of hitting is not directly narrated in the text. Thus Elsa's narration reveals the violence, but in a very controlled manner.

Thus violence in the two scenes is represented by changes in pace in the narrative, which signify the traumatic impact of the physical abuse on Elsa, although she is never seen as the direct victim of her father's violence. The physical abuse scenes are depicted in their entirety, although there is some filtering of the worst elements. The explicit depiction of violence and trauma in both scenes further refutes the argument put forward by Sheldrick Ross discussed in the previous two chapters that the use of a witness narrator is less explicit for readers than an autodiegetic narrator recounting his own distress. Elsa's fear and anxiety at witnessing her mother being beaten by her father is foregrounded in this scene, alongside the brutal nature of the attack. Thus the temporal handling of the abuse scenes is as significant in the overall level of trauma conveyed in the texts as narrative voice and perspective.

In the psychological abuse texts *La Petite Maîtresse*, *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* and *Derrière la porte* explicit and detailed scenes of psychological abuse are narrated in the texts, along with accompanying physical cruelty, which is particularly prominent in *Derrière la porte* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*. In *J'entends pleurer la nuit*, however, the abuse scenes are overheard by the witness, so the focus is slightly different due to external focalization, but there is still the explicit narration of the witness overhearing the mother shout at her children and threaten to commit suicide. *Les Parents de Mélie* consists of a constant and consistent stream of abusive childhood experiences, which in isolation could possibly be explained away, or may not seem like clear-cut cases of abuse. Indeed, the ambiguity of the scenes reinforces the ambiguity and elusiveness of psychological abuse – at what point does

punishing a child, or struggling to parent, become 'abuse'? In the case of *Mélie*, the episodic style of narration gradually gathers momentum and by the end of the novel the abusive nature of the relationship is indisputable. In the scene depicting Mélie's family party for her fourteenth birthday, the narration is significantly more detailed than the previous scenes from *John et moi*, and it is narrated in continuous prose. The heterodiegetic narrator slows down the pace of narration by focussing on both the action taking place and Mélie's inner thoughts. The scene opens with the phrase: 'Ce jour-là, celui de son anniversaire, une autre humiliation est prévue au programme', (p. 50) which suggests the beginning of a story and an element of prolepsis, informing the reader that abuse will take place and suggesting that the mother has deliberately planned out the humiliation.

Following the introductory phrase at the beginning of the scene comes a brief analeptic summary of events that have taken place thus far: 'Maman a bien fait les choses pour Mélie, pour la famille. Comme chaque année, elle a invité les grands-parents, la marraine et le parrain de sa fille. Elle a préparé un bon repas.' The summary suggests the mother's meticulous preparation for the day, and also creates a sense of occasion for the main event and Mélie's humiliation. The indication of iteration with the phrase 'comme chaque année', further sets the scene for the cruelty to come by giving a sense of ritual to the celebrations and the impending abuse. The atmosphere is depicted as being joyful and light-hearted at the start of the episode, however, and the scene resembles that of any other traditional family birthday celebration: 'Mélie vient de souffler ses quatorze bougies, sous les applaudissements et les vœux de bonheur' (p. 51).

The narrator then moves on to describe Mélie's opening of her presents, which is narrated simultaneously giving a sense of immediacy, so that the reader experiences

the most important aspect of the birthday – the humiliation – along with the child protagonist. The scene progresses in a logical and chronological order: 'Les cadeaux. […] '[P'tite Mé] a acheté pour sa petite-fille un sac en jean dont celle-ci avait très envie, et, à l'intérieur, elle a glissé l'enveloppe qui contient l'argent du futur soutien-gorge' (p. 51). The use of 'Les cadeaux' as a separate sentence at the beginning of the second paragraph of the scene suggests a pause as the narrator emphasizes the importance of the upcoming event for Mélie. The description of Mélie's 'futur soutien-gorge' refers to a previous episode in the narrative when the mother embarrasses her daughter by producing her old maternity bras for the protagonist when Mélie asks for her first bra, and also alludes to the teenager's future intentions of buying herself the underwear with birthday money. The reference here serves to create the impression of a continuous succession of shameful episodes Mélie must endure, which also elongates the description of the current scene.

Mélie is then finally described as coming to the most important present of all: that from her parents, and here the narration of events slows down as Mélie lingers on the unopened present and the anticipation of what is to come: 'Reste le grand carton, tout long, que Mélie garde pour la fin. Le cadeau de ses parents. Elle n'ose espérer… pourtant, la forme du paquet…' (p. 51). Mélie's free indirect thought pauses the action, creating suspense for the reader, and the ellipsis markers reveal her excitement at the prospect of receiving a violin. The narration of the revelation of the violin case also focuses predominantly on Mélie's thoughts, lingering on her positive feelings and expectation:

> En retirant le scotch elle sent son cœur battre comme un fou. Une immense gratitude la submerge. Comment a-t-elle pu penser tant de mal de sa mère!

> Quelle fille ingrate elle est! Dorénavant, elle sera parfaite, idéale, puisque ses parents sont si généreux. (p. 51)

The emphasis on Mélie's gratitude towards her parents is followed by the slow and meticulous description of Mélie examining her gift: 'Elle sort délicatement l'instrument de sa boîte, le caresse, le met en position contre son menton. Elle cherche l'archet, pour faire un premier essai, juste pour entendre le son des cordes. Il n'y a pas d'archet.' (p. 52) The narrator enumerates each stage of opening the case and the act of taking out the violin, drawing out the scene and anticipation of the protagonist, which contrasts with the stark, short declarative: 'Il n'y a pas d'archet', which heightens the impact of the discovery for Mélie and, indeed, the reader. This shock is then compounded by the mother's articulation of the ultimate humiliation for her daughter: 'À toi de mériter l'archet! Ça dépendra de tes résultats scolaires'. The depiction of Mélie's appreciation of her parents is juxtaposed with the mother's sadistic shaming of Mélie.

Yet in contrast to the drawn out lead-up to the opening of the violin and the climax of it being bow-less, the end of the scene passes rather quickly: 'Mélie est atterrée. Elle ne dit rien. Recouche le violon dans son lit, les yeux baissés. […] Plus personne ne parle. L'atmosphère est lourde, lourde' (p. 52). The repetition of the adjective 'lourde' emphasizes the change in the atmosphere from the initial joy described at the beginning of the episode.The focus also turns to the audience of the humiliation, who becomes complicit in the abuse through the deliberate avoidance of the topic, demonstrated by the grandmother's attempts to diffuse the tension with her 'ton faussement enjoué': 'Eh bien, en attendant que Mélie joue du violon, si on mettait un peu de musique!' (p. 52). Finally, the phrases 'Mélie peut se lever de table et filer pleurer dans sa chambre. […] Elle sanglote jusqu'à plus de larmes, plus de chagrin, plus de désespoir, plus rien' (p. 53), depicts three actions in the space of the first

sentence and has a summarizing effect: now the main event of the day, the humiliation, has taken place, normal order can be resumed, signified by Mélie being ignored. The summary also implies that Mélie's disappointment has to be concealed from her family members; she must wait for the correct moment to leave the table and then show her feelings. The repetition of the 'plus de' structure further emphasizes the child protagonist's despair and isolation. Thus in *Mélie* the narration of the psychological abuse is more explicit than the physical abuse in *John et moi* as no omission occurs. Indeed, the scene is elongated to portray the full extent of the mother's cruelty and Mélie's disappointment is commensurate with the build-up of her excitement.

In the sexual-abuse texts, there is a definite reduction in the amount of abuse shown compared with that depicted in the psychological and physical abuse texts. In *Delphine*, the victim reveals her abuse gradually and implicitly, stating that her father has been ordered by court against having contact with her (p. 57), and that he did 'une chose horrible, interdite' (p. 125). In *Quelque chose à te dire*, the protagonist's mother simply states she was raped by her father when a teenager, without giving details. In *La Frontière de sable* the witness narrator sees none of the abuse, just the abuser's attempts to insist on the victim taking off her clothes, whilst in *Mauvais coup* and *Les Saisons dangereuses*, no actual sexual assault takes place. The abuse in both texts is more a form of grooming, whereby the abuser initially gains the trust and confidence of the victim with a view to developing a sexual relationship with him or her, although in the case of the latter there are descriptions of physical gestures toward the child. In *Dans la gueule du vent* and *Monsieur Henry*, slightly more abuse is revealed to the reader as the former uses metaphor to express the abuser's sexual actions, discussed in Chapter Five, while descriptions of abuse in the latter build up from Henry verbally grooming the victim, through to unwanted physical contact and to narration of him

exposing himself and rubbing himself against the child. In two texts, *La Fille du canal* and *P'tits bateaux*, however the sexual abuse is depicted more directly and explicitly in the texts than in the other narratives.

In *La Fille du canal*, in the first of three significant abuse episodes, the narrator describes Sarah entering her art teacher's house, with a whole chapter dedicated to the scene (pp. 21-22), but says little about what happens when the child is in there:

> Il marche derrière elle dans l'étroit couloir. De sa main, il débarrasse les cheveux en brosse des flocons qui s'y sont accrochés.
>
> — C'est dommage que tu les aies coupés. Ils étaient si beaux.
>
> Ils pénètrent dans l'atelier. La porte se referme sur eux.
>
> La séance achevée. Sarah erre dans les rues, les mains enfouies dans les poches.
>
> (p. 21)

The physical gap within the text represents all that has gone on 'behind closed doors' and ellipsis occurs in relation to the abuse. The significance of focalization becomes apparent, as the reader's view is restricted to external perspectives and protected from the details of the abuse taking place within the house.

In the second scene, slightly more detail is revealed, as the narrator states: 'Sarah s'arrête près d'un vieux fauteuil. Le professeur lui caresse le visage du bout des doigts. […] Le professeur parle. Il parle en déshabillant Sarah. Sarah ne dit rien. Elle s'assoit dans le fauteuil. Elle ferme les yeux.' (p. 45). The description of the abuser caressing the protagonist's face shows attempts at intimacy, leaving little doubt of his sexual intentions. The narration of the teacher undressing Sarah with no reference to her reaction reveals her vulnerability and the unequal power relation between the pair,

creating an uncomfortable and sexually suggestive image. Indeed, Sarah sitting with her eyes closed, just like her doll, suggests an attempt to mentally block out the abuse she must endure.

The narrative also contains a full chapter-length scene depicting events that take place in the drawing teacher's flat, which focuses on the impact of the abuser's emotional manipulation of his victim, rather than the sexual relationship between them. The scene portrays Sarah remembering her first abusive encounter with the teacher, which led to feelings of pleasure and confusion: 'Elle frémissait lorsque sa main effleurait la sienne pour mieux lui indiquer la position des doigts sur le crayon. Le plaisir était en elle. Le professeur, lui, ne paraissait pas troublé.' (p. 67) However, these positive sensations dissipate, as the scene describes how the teacher's physical gestures become more invasive and Sarah's pleasure becomes discomfort:

> Le professeur parlait, mais Sarah n'entendait plus ses mots, juste sa voix qui l'enveloppait, qui la transportait. […] Elle ne s'est pas rendu compte que le professeur lui dénudait le torse. […] Elle a voulu se recroqueviller, replier les bras sur sa poitrine, mais il a crié 'Ne bouge pas!' Sarah n'a plus fait un geste, comme une enfant coupable s'immobilise, comme une enfant terrifiée se fige. (pp. 68-69)

The narrator's lingering on this initial scene and Sarah's confused reaction to it contextualizes Sarah's current position as the victim of regular sexual abuse. The gradual escalation of the teacher's behaviour is revealed and the focus on the first instance of abuse serves as an interruption to the scene being narrated contemporaneously, representing Sarah's own desire to comprehend her situation. Indeed, the narrator comments at the end of the scene: 'Cette fois-là, le professeur n'a rien exigé d'autre. Pourquoi l'aurait-il fait? Sarah était maintenant prisonnière. […]

Sarah était enfermée à double tour à l'intérieur d'elle-même' (p. 69). Thus the psychological and emotional abuse which facilitates sexual abuse is highlighted to the reader, as Sarah is groomed to assume feelings of complicity.

After the depiction of Sarah's first experience of abuse, a page break occurs before the original scene continues with the contemporary narration of Sarah's teacher undressing her and asking her to pose for him. At the end of the passage the narrator describes the protagonist's reaction to the teacher touching her: 'À chaque endroit de sa peau où les doigts nerveux se posent, l'enfant ressent une profonde brûlure' (p. 70). The burning sensation is both a physical rejection of the abuser and a manifestation of Sarah's emotional pain. Thus after Sarah's initial pleasure and guilt are explored in the analepsis, the teacher's behaviour is foregrounded as inappropriate and harmful to the child victim. The use of a detailed scene to describe Sarah's dilemma and memory of the first instance of abuse reveals the psychological consequences and complexities of child sexual abuse, without depicting the details of what the abuse entails. There is also a contrast between Sarah's instinctive burning sensations and the teacher's escalating behaviour, emphasizing the issue of unwilling consent in the text.

In *P'tits bateaux*, Marie-Bénédicte records the events leading up to the beginning of her abusive relationship with her uncle in her computer diary. The scene is the first description of the sexual abuse in the novel and describes the initial lead-up to the Laurent's advances, as he meets her from school and accompanies her home. In the scene, Marie-Bénédicte describes her former relationship with her uncle:

> Je l'aimais beaucoup. Beaucoup. Super souvenirs avec lui. Alors, quand il m'a demandé, assis sur mon lit:
>
> —Tu m'aimes, Marie-Bénédicte?
>
> J'ai répondu 'oui'. Vite. Fort.

> Il a souri. Et ça m'a fait plaisir de lui faire plaisir. Je l'ai même redit pour voir réapparaitre son sourire. […] Sourire que j'associais à la mer, au soleil, au bonheur. (p. 21)

The focus of the scene thus starts, as in *La Fille du canal*, with the male adult's emotional manipulation of the victim and the grooming behaviour. The depiction of the uncle's question is punctuated with Marie-Bénédicte's inner consciousness and her interpretation of the events taking place based upon her past happy memories with her supposedly loving uncle, providing the context for the situation and drawing out the short exchange between Laurent and the protagonist.

The scene then continues with the inclusion of a description of Laurent intensifying his questioning of the protagonist and tricking her into complicity: 'Tu sais, a-t-il dit, j'ai énormément de tendresse pour toi. Tu veux bien jouer à un jeu avec moi? Un jeu auquel les petites filles jouent quand elles aiment leur oncle. Mais il ne faudra pas dire à ta mère, ni à ton père… À personne'. The scene includes the details of Laurent's utterances, with the narrator able to recall his words exactly as the conversation took place, suggesting the significance of the discussion in her mind and in the emergence of the sexually abusive relationship. The abuser then asks to stroke the child's hair, as Marie-Bénédicte narrates the resulting sexual contact:

> Drôle de question. Mais j'ai dit oui. À toutes ses demandes, j'ai dit oui. Peut-être tout simplement pour le voir sourire, pour ne pas lire de la peine dans ses yeux.
>
> […]
>
> — J'aime tes cheveux, a-t-il répété. Ils sont longs, ils sont doux…
>
> Il les a caressés, longuement.
>
> J'aime tes cheveux.

J'aime tes cheveux.

J'aime tes cheveux.

Combien de fois me l'a-t-il dit!

Les mercredis suivants, il l'a moins dit.

Mais il a continué à les caresser. (p. 23)

The scene ends in the early stages of the abusive incident, then follows an instance of analeptic summary, with the phrase, 'À toutes ses demandes, j'ai dit "oui"', avoiding explicit details, but suggesting an escalation of Laurent's behaviour. Similarly, instances of proleptic summary are present, where the narrator asserts: 'les mercredis suivants, il l'a moins dit' and 'Passeront les années, je n'oublierai jamais', which reveal little about the abuse itself, but indicate the temporal extent of the abuse, in that it becomes a continuing occurrence, and the impact of the abuse, as the narrator will always have the memory imprinted in her mind. However, it is a long passage in a relatively short novel of fifty-six pages, with substantial narrative time and space dedicated to setting the scene of the abuse and the protagonist's experience of the first time it occurred. The repetition of the 'J'aime' structure and the focus on the direct speech has the effect of elongating time in the passage, illustrating the narrator's psychological struggle with the memory.

The ellipsis markers present between Laurent saying Marie-Bénédicte should tell neither her parents nor anyone else about their relationship suggests a pause in the utterance to emphasize the implication of the request. The episode is not a chronologically relayed scene of even pace, as several temporal levels interact throughout, with Marie-Bénédicte dwelling on her pre-abuse relationship with her uncle, the beginnings of the incest and the description of her current feelings of hatred towards

Laurent. Mazard thus creates a temporally complex scene to mirror the child-victim protagonist's complex relationship to her abuse and abuser.

The second scene dealing with abuse, five pages later, is a direct continuation of the first, going into greater detail of what happened during the encounter:

> Le 15 mai 1996.
>
> — *Ils sont longs, ils sont doux…*
>
> Il a caressé longuement mes cheveux.
>
> Puis j'ai senti son souffle sur ma nuque, sur mon cou.
>
> […]
>
> Et ses mains ont parcouru mon visage, mes bras, mon corps. Il me souriait.
>
> […]
>
> J'ai acquiescé d'un sourire. Son visage a rayonné. Alors, pour lui faire plaisir, je l'ai laissé faire. Je l'ai laissé me déshabiller. Promener ses doigts partout sur mon corps. Il s'est déshabillé aussi.
>
> Même encore aujourd'hui, la bouffée d'angoisse de ce jour-là me remonte à la gorge comme une nausée. Je ne veux pas. Je ne veux pas. Ce n'est pas un jeu. Je l'ai laissé faire.
>
> — Si tu m'aimes, n'en parle surtout à personne.
>
> Quand il est parti, j'ai tremblé de froid. (p. 28)

This abusive episode takes up most of chapter seven in the novel and follows directly on from the end of the first scene with Laurent's direct speech as he caresses Marie-Bénédicte's hair. The ellipsis markers after the phrase 'Ils sont longs, ils sont doux' give a sense of repetition and progression in the uncle's abuse. There is a clear development in the level of detail depicted from the first scene, as the author seemingly

gradually introduces the reader to the sexual abuse, firstly describing the touching of the hair and then the child's body with the information that the uncle also got undressed. The inclusion of the physical gap between the paragraphs arguably represents the rape of Marie-Bénédicte, which the reader is left to imagine. Of course, the scene might be read very differently by a child who can imagine what occurs in the gap and by one who would have no understanding at all. In this sense, the summaries and ellipsis are used in both scenes to present sexual abuse to the child reader without explicit details and without forcing an unaware reader to confront the actualities of rape or even sexual intercourse. However, they also represent the narrator's own emotional and psychological difficulty in recalling the abuse, and, like Sarah, her feelings of guilt and complicity, which is evident by the way in which the different temporal levels interact in the scene, with Marie-Bénédicte described as feeling physically sick in the present as she relives the memory of her uncle touching her body and all that proceeds from it.

The analysis of sexual abuse scenes specifically raises issues regarding the negotiation of the protection of real child readers from exposure to sexually explicit material and the need to confront the taboo of discussing sexual abuse, which facilitates its existence. The French law of 16 July 1949 to protect children and prevent child corruption is a formal expression of the cultural concern to shield vulnerable readers from distressing content, which rape and abuse evidently are.[48] The desire to protect children, however, is cited by authors of controversial children's texts as the very reason for presenting violence and sexuality to readers.[49] Indeed, psychologist Rolland argues against over-zealous censorship of *littérature jeunesse*, stating that we

[48] *L'Affaire d'Abbeville* denotes the controversy surrounding a *collège* teacher being remanded in custody after parents complained to authorities about his teaching of Agota Kristof's sexually explicit text *Le Grand Cahier* to students in 3e. See Rolland, pp. 107-115.
[49] See, for example, Melvin Burgess, 'Sympathy for the Devil', *Children's Literature in Education*, 35:4 (December 2004), 289-300.

need to show children how to deal with fear, and the variety of topics presented in young-adult fiction offers readers the chance to explore their own views and identity.[50] The authors of *La Fille du canal* and *P'tits bateaux*, whilst being fairly explicit and suggestive in their narration of sexual abuse, are seemingly mindful of the potential emotional vulnerability of young readers and manipulate time in the abuse scenes to limit the extent of potentially traumatizing material depicted. Indeed, not all explicit representations of sexual abuse are omitted from the narratives, as both texts include descriptions of adult male abusers touching and stroking naked child victims.[51] In *La Fille du canal* and *P'tits bateaux*, the omission of key segments of time is also attributed to the victim to represent the difficulty in accepting experiences of abuse, whilst also serving as a device to justify the author's need to omit certain scenes. The taboo, then, seems to be surrounding the depiction of sexuality and intercourse, rather than sexual abuse. There is thus evidence in the sexual-abuse texts of what Delbrassine identifies as 'le respect du lecteur', as, while the authors choose to confront the realities of paedophilia, they must do so in a controlled manner due to the implications of presenting potentially damaging and illegal material to child readers.[52]

The analysis of the duration of the scenes reveals differences in the complexity of the temporal perspectives on abuse, as the physical and sexual abuse scenes are more carefully packaged than the psychological abuse scene in *Mélie*, with more temporal levels and interferences by the means of ellipsis and summary. The most sexually and violently explicit aspects of the abuse are omitted, whilst leaving little

[50] Rolland, p. 27, pp. 162-229. Inglin-Routisseau, p. 58, also argues that depicting sexuality in teenage fiction is a way for adolescents to familiarize themselves with their fantasies and anxieties.
[51] While my corpus texts do contain explicit and disturbing sexual abuse scenes, there is, unsurprisingly, a large gulf between the level of sexual contact and abuse depicted in these texts and, for example, Christine Angot's texts *L'Inceste* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2001) and *Une semaine de vacances* (Paris: J'ai lu, 2013), which deal with incestuous child sexual abuse for adult readers.
[52] Delbrassine found that ellipsis is commonly used to represent sexual intercourse in contemporary texts for young readers, whilst some scenes are of a documentary style to educate readers on sexuality. *Le Roman*, pp. 291-292.

doubt over the level of abuse perpetrated. Yet the sexual abuse texts succeed in addressing the taboo subject of sexual abuse in literature for young readers by selectively framing the sensitive material, avoiding the potential risk of creating texts which could themselves be deemed to be traumatizing. The temporally distorted narration of the sexual and physical abuse scenes seems also to represent the psychological impact of the events experienced by the protagonists. The unmediated narration of the child's planned humiliation in *Mélie* serves to represent the disorienting effect of pervasive psychological abuse on the child victim. Indeed, the trauma depicted in the aftermath of the abuse in the scene from *Mélie* is similar to the sexual abuse scenes: the adult abusers distort the child victims' understanding of positive, loving relationships and of adult-child power relations. There is an emphasis on the psychological and emotional impact of all three types of abuse on the victim. The filtered narration of the sexual and physical abuse in particular, suggests a concern to find a way of presenting abuse both in and outside of the texts and in the following, final chapter of the thesis, I explore the direct and indirect means that both protagonists and authors use to communicate abuse to others.

Chapter Five
Depicting and Communicating Abuse

The previous three chapters on narrative voice and time have revealed the ubiquitous nature across the corpus of the theme of communicating and expressing abuse, and in particular the psychological difficulties, but also need of doing so. In this chapter, I continue my analysis of the formal and textual features of the primary texts, but focus on the ways in which the authors depict the themes of expression and communication to the reader. Academics in the field of trauma studies have identified amongst trauma survivors, particularly Holocaust survivors, the desire to communicate and express trauma through writing in order to come to terms psychologically with the atrocities they have experienced. Bibliotherapy is the practice of using books to confront personal and psychological problems,[1] and Suzette Henke coins the phrase *scriptotherapy* to denote 'the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment.'[2] James Pennebaker explains that 'Writing about the thoughts and feelings associated with trauma […] forces individuals to bring together the many facets of overwhelmingly complicated events. Once people can distill complex experiences into more understandable packages, they can begin to move beyond the trauma.'[3] The role played by the child victim-protagonists writing and acting out their abusive experiences reflects the actions of real-life trauma writers in authoring their testimonies: the child victims also attempt to master their feelings and experiences of abuse through the means of writing, reading, art, imagery and drama. I therefore draw upon trauma studies research and sociological research into child abuse to illustrate the significance of the victim-protagonists' expression of abuse.

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[1] Hugh Crago, 'Can Stories Heal?', in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 163-173.
[2] Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life*-Writing (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. xii.
[3] James Pennebaker, cited in Henke, p. xi.

In particular I focus on the protagonists' and authors' attempts to confront abuse and trauma indirectly, expressing and recounting events in ways that distance the victim or reader from the painful extent of the victims' experiences, as opposed to the direct and literal communication of abuse. Therapists Joyce C. Mills and Richard J. Crowley argue that metaphor and symbol are significant tools in helping both patients and therapists find a more indirect way to approach and deal with emotional and psychological problems,[4] whilst psychoanalyst Bettelheim, in his work exploring the benefits of fairy tales for children's emotional and psychological development, also states that symbolic images are more successful at tapping into unconscious issues.[5] This chapter explores the two levels of indirect means of expression in the texts: on an extra-diegetic level, the imagery and metaphor used by authors to depict child abuse to readers; and the diegetic level of child protagonists expressing their abuse through drama, art and literature and their attempts to communicate their experiences to characters around them. I also examine the use of fairy tale and classical intertexts in the primary corpus and their significance to both the victims' attempts to comprehend and communicate abuse within the text and the authors' attempt to communicate abuse through the text. The use of the fairy tale intertext is particulary significant, given the findings in Chapter One that several corpus texts contain elements of fairy tales, and this chapter addresses the more direct inclusion of the traditional tales in contemporary realist abuse narratives.

The first aspects of indirect communication of abuse to be considered are the use of drama and games as a means of re-enactment and metaphor as a way to express feelings and experiences, which are seen in *La Fille du canal*, *La Frontière de*

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[4] Joyce C. Mills and Richard J. Crowley, in collaboration with Margaret O. Ryan, *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within* (New York & London: Routledge, 1986).
[5] Bettelheim, p. 12; p. 37.

sable and *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*. The practices of bibliotherapy and scriptotherapy as aids to the victim-protagonists' denunciation of abusers and their psychological overcoming of abuse will be discussed in *John et moi*, *Et tu te soumettras à loi de ton père*, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* and *La Fille du canal*. I then consider how the response of the receiver of the victims' testimonies is just as significant to the resolution of the victim's trauma as the writing-out and acting-out process in *Moi, Delphine… 13 ans*, *La Fille du canal*, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *La Petite Maîtresse*, and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*. Whilst I focus predominantly on closely examining three or four texts for each section, in the interests of showing the prevalence of indirect means of expression and their therapeutic qualities, I refer to all texts relevant to the discussion, albeit briefly. The final section of the chapter looks at how certain texts contain significant intertexts which affect the levels at which abuse is presented, both by the victim in the text and by the author to the reader. The use of fairy tale intertexts in *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *John et moi* and *Derrière la porte* will be considered, as will the references to folk legend in *Dans la gueule du vent*, and to classic texts in *Les Saisons dangereuses* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*.

Drama, Games, Imagery and Identification

The reluctance or even inability of the abused protagonists to tell others of their abusive situation, discussed in the previous chapters, leads to the victims finding alternative means of expressing their pain. In the sexual abuse texts *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, *La Fille du canal* and *La Frontière de sable* and the psychological abuse text *Les Parents de Mélie*, the abuse victims seek comfort in acting, games, and word play and use these acts to express their pain for personal relief and to communicate their experiences indirectly to others. The victims in *Les Parents de Mélie*, *Monsieur Henry*

and *La Frontière de sable* use imagery to refer to their abusers as a means of psychologically processing their experiences. As we have seen, in *Les Parents de Mélie*, in order to deal with her mother's frightening and contradictory behaviour, Mélie creates two mothers in her mind: maman rose, a kind and loving mother figure, and maman noire, who is an evil, witch-like mother figure, much like the evil stepmothers and fairy godmothers of fairy tales. Bettelheim argues when discussing real-life case studies, that '[f]ar from being a device used only by fairy tales, such splitting up of one person into two to keep the good image uncontaminated occurs to many children as a solution to a relationship too difficult to manage or comprehend.'[6] The creation of the fantasy image of the good mother-bad mother dichotomy allows Mélie to distance the evil behaviour from her own mother, creating a protective psychological barrier for her to cope with her experience of abuse and perhaps suggesting the beginnings of the child protagonist's psychological disorders which develop through the course of her childhood.

In *Monsieur Henry* one of Camille's private coping mechanisms is her inventive use of animal imagery to refer to her abuser's behaviour. She describes him as having 'une tête de tortue avec des dents qui brillent' (p. 8) and '[d]es yeux de crapaud, exorbités' (p. 40). Camille's association of her singing teacher with animals which connote slime and disgust, expresses her contempt towards Henry and his behaviour, enabling her to distance herself psychologically from him. Camille also expresses Henry's unpredictability through animal metaphor: 'Il fait cela tout le temps: passer du coq, bec et griffes dehors, au mouton bêlant' (p. 41). This description of Henry alternating between aggression and feeble bleating shows the protagonist's uncertainty as an abuse victim, unable to predict and thus mentally prepare for her abuser's

[6] Ibid., p. 67.

behaviour. The narrator also creates the metaphor of Henry being predatory with herself being his prey. She frequently alludes to the idea of Henry trying to catch her, referring to his fingers as 'tentacules' (p. 19) and stating: 'J'attends de savoir par quel bout il va m'attraper' (p. 40). Camille's repetition of the singing teacher's assertion 'Je ne vais pas te manger!' (p. 9, 25, 41) and her pondering who else will 's'engouffrer dans la gueule de Monsieur Henry' (p. 43), connote images of being devoured and overpowered. Similarly, with reference to Henry's comments regarding eating the narrator, Camille states: 'il ne va pas me manger. Il fait bien pire, il m'aspire. C'est aussi une sangsue…' (p. 41). Henry is indeed a parasite feeding on Camille's youth and naivety. When the singing teacher touches Camille's mouth, she explains: 'J'ai envie de le mordre' (p. 9), emphasizing her own animalistic instinct to protect herself from the predator. Camille's manipulation of language and the creative expression of her feelings give her a sense of control in the abusive situation, as she initiates, invents and masters this depiction of Henry, albeit on a private level.

Having expressed and processed her experiences as an abuse victim in a personal manner, Camille moves on to the wider public communication of Henry's behaviour, with the aid of her initial imagery. Camille's class teacher asks the children to create and perform a school play for parents and the local community, encouraging the pupils: 'inventer à partir de ce qui vous est arrivé, à vous, à personne d'autre' (p. 56), which prompts Camille to invent her own story based upon her experiences with Monsieur Henry, personified via his cat in the character of Chat Gris:[7]

> Ce serait un vieux chat gris qui ne voudrait pas mourir. Alors il dirait qu'il est prestidigitateur: avec sa baguette et son béret, il exauce tous les souhaits. […]. En vrai, il serait vampire et sucerait le sang avec ses deux dents de devant,

[7] The resemblence of Camille's play to *Little Red Riding Hood* is discussed in the upcoming section on intertexts.

> comme si ça serait pour rire, ce serait un méchant qui ferait mourir les enfants. Avec ça il vivrait, même il rajeunirait et personne ne verrait ce qu'il fait en vrai. (p. 57)

Camille's depiction of a character who conceals his true intentions refers to her mother's repeated assertion that the singing teacher is 'si gentil', despite Camille's disagreement, rendering the child victim isolated in the abusive relationship. The vampire metaphor, like the leech metaphor, is another reference to a parasitic creature, which further expresses the victim's feelings of exploitation. The narrator also focuses on specific physical traits of Monsieur Henry which unnerve her and incorporates these into the character of Chat Gris: 'Comme particularités, j'ai choisi des yeux et un cou rétractables, deux dents de devant en or.' (p. 58) Camille is therefore indirectly revealing her circumstances to the outside world via the medium of creative drama and characterization.

Furthermore, the character in the play who is attacked by Chat Gris is a girl called Isabella, which is the name of the child who Camille's adult-helper friend, James, claims is also a victim of Henry. Camille admits: '[Isabella] devient moi, quand moi je joue le rôle d'un autre.' (p. 77) Camille imitates Henry's language towards her, particularly the reference to him eating her: 'Nous faisons la timide? Il ne faut pas avoir peur de Chat Gris, il ne va pas te manger.' (p. 78) Camille's role-play is empowering, as her vulnerability in reality is overcome by her assumption of the role of the controlling abuser and she is able to reveal the true nature of Henry. Camille is also able to express her own fear and victimhood indirectly via the character of Isabella, which is less painful for the narrator. Indeed, the transposition of the sexual abuse into the third person enables Camille to communicate her experiences without explicitly stating what has happened. Camille claims that the production is 'pour jouer', which lessens her

perception of the gravity of the situation: 'J'espère que je ne vais pas bafouiller, perdre mes mots encore une fois et rester muette. Parce que là, c'est pour jouer, c'est pour rire. Je peux les dire.' (p. 71) The acting out of different roles enables Camille to explore her experiences and prepare herself for the revelation of the abuse, which is of significant emotional and psychological benefit to the victim, as '"the ability to make sense of threatening experiences is crucial" for children to survive and be emotionally healthy.'[8] The dramatic performance is therefore a defence mechanism for the narrator – she is able to process her psychological turmoil and express herself in a way in which she feels comfortable, whilst denouncing her abuser to others in a metaphorical manner. Indeed, it is after this performance at the end of the novel that the narrator's family discover and accept their daughter's revelation and Camille believes she will one day be able to express her abuse directly.[9]

In *La Frontière de sable*, Laurette attempts to express the sexual abuse she receives at the hands of her uncle Manu in the form of a game. Frédo suggests playing with his cousin, which leads Laurette to explain a game involving a monster, a cave and a line in the sand: 'Là, c'est la frontière. De l'autre côté, c'est l'enfer […] Si tu passes la frontière, tu sais pas où tu vas. Tu risques de te perdre dans le noir'. (p. 39) The evocative imagery created by Laurette's description of 'crossing the line' represents her feelings of despair in her abusive situation: her personal boundaries have been crossed and she has been violated. Laurette's game is an attempt to communicate her sense of loss to her cousin using her own language to express her experiences. Encouraging child-initiated games and play is viewed by social worker Madge Bray as the most

[8] James Garbarino et al., *Children in Danger: Coping with the Consequences of Community Violence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), p. 103, cited in Eliza T. Dresang, 'The Resilient Child in Contemporary Children's Literature: Surviving Personal Violence', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 22:3 (1997), 133-141, p. 136.

[9] *Monsieur Henry* resembles Christiane Rochefort's *La Porte du fond* (Paris: Grasset, 1988), an 'adult' text which depicts retrospective memories of childhood sexual abuse. The female victim also uses animal imagery and meets fellow abuse victims who use drama to overcome their experiences.

supportive means of aiding child sexual abuse victims to reveal their experiences, as children use their own words and references to communicate something which is initially beyond their comprehension.[10] Indeed, Laurette's distressing game and stories suggest a desire to express her inner turmoil, yet she is doing so in a child-like manner, by transferring her own sexual abuse experiences into a fantasy story, just as Camille does for her school play. The fantasy elements of both the girls' tales render the experiences less real, enabling the victims to express the sexual abuse in a more indirect and thus psychologically manageable manner.

The game described by Laurette also contains many references to the sea, and water imagery is present in both *La Frontière de sable* and *La Fille du canal*. Laurette explains to Fredo that in the 'game' she must try to escape from the monster by running into the sea: 'J'irais dans la mer. Et je nagerais jusqu'au bout. Peut-être que je n'y arriverais pas. […] Peut-être que je disparaîtrais?' (p. 40). The protagonist's statements are a metaphorical representation of her abusive experiences, with her uncle being the monster and the sea and waves representing her desire to escape from her situation and her feelings of helplessness in her battle against Manu; she believes that the only way to overcome the abuse is to 'disappear'. Laurette then leaves a letter for Fredo when she runs away from home in which she refers to the monster and the cave:

> Le monstre reviendra. Il revient toujours. […] La frontière de sable ne doit jamais être franchie. D'un côté, il y a la grotte sombre et le monstre. De l'autre, la mer. Je préfère la mer. Quand j'aurai nagé jusqu'au bout, je pourrai tout recommencer. Si j'y arrive pas alors ce sera comme si je n'avais jamais existé. Et se cera fini. (p. 96)

[10] Madge Bray, *Sexual Abuse – The Child's Voice: Poppies on the Rubbish Heap*. Edited and Introduced by Sarah Boyle (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997).

The repetition of the 'frontière de sable' imagery signifies Laurette's belief that there is no return from her situation as the abuse cannot be undone. Furthermore, Laurette's choice between 'le monstre' and 'la mer' shows her desperation and physical desire to get away from the situation: the choice appears to be to accept the abuse or to commit suicide, which Laurette then admits she is unable to execute: 'je suis entrée dans l'eau. Mais… j'ai pas pu! C'est trop froid… trop loin… trop difficile…' (p. 103).

In *La Fille du canal* water is also used on an extra-diegetic level to represent the child abuse victim's thoughts of suicide and her feelings of despair at her situation. Sarah is frequently depicted walking along the canal by herself and identifies the canal as a means of escape from her life. In one scene, Sarah imagines a boat coming to take her to meet her deceased grandmother, who then embraces Sarah (p. 17). Yet the reality soon becomes clear, that the canal is frozen and her grandmother is dead; Sarah remains alone and isolated in her abuse. The frozen canal becomes an obsession for Sarah, which leads her to drench herself in cold water then leave the house to walk across the ice: 'Sous l'effet de l'eau glacée, son corps s'anesthésie peu à peu. […] Elle se rhabille sans même se sécher, et sort.' (p. 44) 'La fillette quitte la rive. Elle s'avance sur la surface gelée. Sous son poids, la glace craquelle. Sarah ferme les yeux. Elle gémit. — Grand-mère… grand-mère…' (p. 44). Sarah views the canal as a gateway to her grandmother's protection and a means of escape from her own situation, with its frozen nature mirroring her own feelings of oppression. The escape onto the ice also represents her desire to break away from her life and abuse, again suggesting suicide.

The inclusion of suicidal desires in these two texts, and in *Mélie* where the protagonist nearly suffocates herself, are arguably rather risky in children's novels

dealing with child abuse.[11] Interestingly the suicide attempts in *La Fille du canal* and *La Frontière de sable* involve drowning, with the water motif perhaps representing amniotic fluid and the child's desire to return to the safety of the womb. In neither text does the child victim carry out the act; both Sarah and Laurette are rescued by others from their attempted suicide and from their abusers, which conquers their isolation and thus addresses the reasons for them to contemplate suicide in the first place. Indeed, in *La Frontière de sable* Laurette states: 'j'ai pas pu!' (p. 103) and she is then rescued by her cousin from the sea and from Laurent. In *La Fille du canal*, a passerby intervenes in Sarah's walking on the ice, which prevents her falling into the freezing water as she runs away, albeit to her abuser's house. Sarah is also ultimately rescued from the abuse, as her class teacher interrupts an abusive episode and takes the child to safety. At the very end of the text, the narrator asserts: '[d]emain, l'eau du canal coulera.' (p. 83), which signifies the way in which the abusive situation has been in some ways resolved for the two abuse victims: the teacher-helper has uncovered Sarah's abuse and confronted her own experience in the process. Thus the frozen water imagery, representing feelings of entrapment, has changed to one of flowing water, representing the freedom gained from the communication of the abuse. The flowing water also reflects the continuity of life even after abuse; in spite of the horror that has occurred, there is scope for optimism in the future.

In *La Frontière de sable* and *La Fille du canal*, the female protagonists also identify with toy dolls and project their own situation and fears onto the inanimate objects. The dolls provide the girls with comfort and a sense of control. In *La Frontière de sable*, Laurette is frequently described as carrying around her toy rabbit and, when

[11] Suicidal thoughts and attempts of suicide are not unique to the child abuse corpus. See, for example: Christophe Léon, *Dans l'enfer de Dante* (Paris: La Joie de lire, 2009); Marie-Claude Bérot, *Aube rouge sur l'océan* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Janine Teisson, *Écoute mon cœur* (Paris: Syros, 2005).

feeling vulnerable in her battle to deal with her uncle's sexual advances, the rabbit becomes a support for the young girl: 'Elle le serrait contre elle comme si c'était la dernière chose au monde qui lui restait. On aurait dit une de ces orphelines égarées sur un chemin, dans un pays en guerre comme on en voit souvent dans les magazines. A la télé, ou dans certains films.' (p. 49) The narrator's description of Laurette holding her rabbit highlights the psychological and indeed physical impact of the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her uncle: he has stolen her virginity which is often described as a physical state or possession, as well as an aspect of emotional or psychological identity. Indeed, at various points in the novel Laurette repeats her feeling that she has had her 'trésor' taken from her, with the connotations of the metaphor expressing the child's feelings of loss of such a precious and valuable aspect of herself. The comparison with an orphan in a war-torn country also reinforces the image of Laurette as emotionally helpless in her suffering, whilst her comforting of the rabbit suggests the projection of her own feelings of desperation onto the toy, which she then treasures and protects. The identification with the toy is thus a private comfort to Laurette. She does not use her rabbit to communicate with others, yet she does leave it for Frédo when she runs away to the sea, prompting Frédo, aware of his cousin's attachment to the toy, to take it with him on his search for Laurette to return it to her.

In *La Fille du canal* Sarah uses a doll both as a private comfort and as a means of communicating her sexual abuse to her teacher. The victim develops a fascination with her plastic doll, upon which she inflicts injuries and characteristics similar to those which she herself experiences. The third-person narrator makes numerous references to the resemblance between doll and child, highlighting Sarah's passiveness: 'La fillette fixe sa poupée et ses traits se figent jusqu'à ce que, dans la pénombre, l'immobilité de l'une réponde étrangement à celle de l'autre.' (p. 10); 'Elle était aussi impassible que la

poupée qu'elle avait installée sur ses genoux, face au miroir' (p. 14.). Sarah cuts her doll's hair, reflecting her own haircut (p. 15) and sets her doll alight:

> Elle la déshabille et l'allonge. Les paupières aux cils synthétiques se ferment. Sarah sort un briquet d'un tiroir. Elle l'allume. […] Elle l'approche sans hésitation du ventre de la poupée. Le plastique noircit puis ramollit. Avant qu'il ne redurcisse, Sarah appuie l'extrémité de son doigt sur la blessure. L'empreinte de son index s'y inscrit. Elle serre alors la poupée meurtrie contre sa poitrine. (p. 10)

Sarah thus acts out her frustration and pain on the doll, as her identification with her toy becomes evident. The burning and description of the doll as 'meurtrie' reveals Sarah's feelings of being destroyed by her abuser, whilst the position of her thumb imprint in the doll's stomach is also symbolic of her own sexual exploitation and resembles human branding, representing her damaged identity. Sarah's hugging of the doll is also seemingly an attempt to comfort herself. Moreover, when looking for a new doll to replace the burnt one, the significance of the girl's desire to find 'la poupée la moins expressive, la moins sophistiquée. Une poupée qui fermait juste les yeux' (p. 14) becomes evident when the narrator describes Sarah's reaction to being inappropriately touched by her teacher: 'Il parle en déshabillant Sarah. Sarah ne dit rien. Elle s'assoit dans le fauteuil. Elle ferme les yeux' (p. 45); 'La fillette ne bronche pas. Elle n'ouvre pas les yeux. Elle semble ne s'apercevoir de rien.' (p. 76) Sarah identifies with her doll as she herself feels inanimate, unable to respond or communicate her abuse to those around her: she simply closes her eyes and endures what is inflicted upon her, just like her doll.

The doll also serves as a means of communication for Sarah, as she is able to relay the abuse to her teacher using the prop when she cannot verbally express her

feelings. The teacher suspects Sarah's situation and then uses the doll to broach the issue of abuse to the young victim: 'Elle dépose avec précaution la poupée sur les genoux de Sarah. — Elle m'a parlé… Je l'ai entendue…' (p. 77) Sarah also transposes her feelings of guilt onto the doll as a means of exploring her own complicity in the abusive relationship, as she points to the doll when stating: 'Elle aimait bien ça. C'est de sa faute. Ils vont la punir.' (p. 79) The third-person expression of Sarah's feelings of pleasure evoked by the abuser's voice distances the admission from the victim; the medium of the doll is a safe way for Sarah to enquire about her own role in the relationship and her fears of punishment. Sarah's teacher is then able to reassure the victim of her innocence, continuing with the indirect reference to the doll: 'Ce qu'elle ressentait n'appartenait qu'à elle' (p. 79). At the end of the novel, the child's mother takes the doll and places it in a cupboard under the sink. Yet Sarah goes to retrieve the doll and hold it close to her, (p. 83), which is seemingly an expression of self love and acceptance, implying that the victim has come to acknowledge that the abuse was not her fault. The retrieval of the doll also suggests the inability of the experience to be 'swept under the carpet' and forgotten; it will always be an aspect of her life.

Biblio- and Scriptotherapy

The depiction of writing and reading as a means of coming to terms with and expressing abusive experiences is prevalent across the corpus. Bettelheim argues that reading can help children to understand themselves and life, stating that literature for children must 'giv[e] full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future.'[12] In a similar vein, children's literature scholar Hugh Crago comments on the positive role of books in

[12] Bettelheim, p. 5.

providing other perspectives on a reader's problems: 'If the intervention is successful, the reader recognizes that the book has something personally significant to say to him/her, perhaps becomes conscious of the dimensions of his/her own problem, and sometimes perceives potential solutions to it.'[13] In *P'tits bateaux*, the act of reading provides comfort to the abuse victim, as she identifies with a particular character in a book, which can be a means for actual child readers to deal with their own problems.[14] Whilst in the school library, Marie-Bénédicte discovers the book *Petite Princesse* which deals with incest. It is written by the (fictional) author Aline Nuage who visits the school to discuss her work. When reading the book, Marie-Bénédicte describes strong physical symptoms as she identifies with the victim in the text: 'une boule d'angoisse au fond de la gorge à chaque page.' (p. 37); 'Mon histoire. Écrite comme je l'aurais écrite.' 'Je l'ai lue. Relue. Relue' (p. 37). Marie-Bénédicte's repetitive reading of the text suggests that she gains comfort from seeing 'her' story already written out and a sense of relief that she has found someone, fictional or otherwise, with whom she can identify. Furthermore, reading 'her' story from an external viewpoint enables Marie-Bénédicte to consider her abuse from a more distanced perspective, which is in contrast to her authoring her very intimate and personal diary on the computer. The depiction of the therapeutic relationship between the fictional text and protagonist foregrounds the fictional nature of *P'tits bateaux* itself and encourages reader reflection on the roles of literature. In *Le Garçon qui se taisait* and *Quand je serai grande, je serai étrangère* the child victims both gain pleasure from reading and are frequently seen to read privately on their own. While the practice of bibliotherapy is not seen directly here as in *P'tits*

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[13] Crago, p. 167.

[14] Kathryn A. and Mark A. Markell, *The Children who Lived: Using Harry Potter and Other Fictional Characters to Help Grieving Children and Adolescents* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. xiii.

bateaux, the protagonists seek solace in fictional worlds in order to escape their own abusive reality.

One of the earliest references to post-traumatic stress disorder and the mind's attempts to process traumatic experiences is made by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), when he identifies the condition 'traumatic neurosis', stating that it occurs 'after severe mechanical concussions, railways disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life'.[15] He comments: 'Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright. […] These dreams are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis'.[16] The involuntary repetition of the memory, then, represents the unconscious mind's attempt to work through the overwhelming events. In the child-abuse corpus, the resurfacing of repressed memories is depicted explicitly in the case of Sarah's teacher in *La Fille du canal*, discussed in Chapter Four. Furthermore, in relation to the mental processing of trauma, Dominick LaCapra develops Freud's early discoveries and identifies the processes of 'acting-out', where a person unconsciously relives and acts out the past as if it were the present, remaining caught in the trauma, and 'working-through', which is the gradual reformulation of memories and the past.[17] The process of 'acting-out' appears in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, where Marie-Bénédicte acts out her desired reaction to her abuser when she slaps an admirer at a party, stating: 'Je ne veux pas que tu me touches!' (p. 42), despite the recipient being someone whom she respects. In this situation, Marie-Bénédicte's anger towards her abuser is transferred unconsciously

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[15] Freud, p. 13. See also Caruth, in her Introductions in *Explorations in Memory*.
[16] Freud, p. 32.
[17] LaCapra cited in Whitehead, pp. 86-87. See Also Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 4.

onto someone external, someone of whom she is a peer, and someone whom she feels strong enough to confront.

In addition to the unconscious repressed memories of Sarah's teacher in *La Fille du canal* and Marie-Bénédicte's unconscious 'acting-out' of her contempt for Laurent in *P'tits bateaux*, the conscious working through of memories and feelings by the abuse victims is prevalent across the corpus. The protagonists use writing and the drafting of their abusive stories to process their traumatic experiences. Indeed, scriptotherapy can act as a way by which the trauma victim can process and reprocess traumatic and seemingly senseless events in order to assimilate them into comprehensible experiences.[18] In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, Marie-Bénédicte receives a computer as a birthday present from her parents, which she initially views as being 'froid, impersonnel.' (p.10) This impersonal quality, however, is what encourages the narrator to use the machine to record her thoughts relating to her abuse. Marie-Bénédicte gradually realizes that: 'Tapoter sur le clavier n'est pas déplaisant. Finalement, pas mécontente de cet ordinateur. Je vais peut-être prendre l'habitude de m'en servir.' (p. 11) The narrator starts to use her computer like a diary, where she seeks comfort when feeling depressed and where she can explore her abusive experiences by reflecting upon past events, for example: '15.05.96. Le 15 mai 1996. Date où tout a débuté.' (p. 10) Marie-Bénédicte also confesses: 'Mon ordinateur me réconforte. Je peux rester des heures ainsi à tapoter n'importe quoi, ce qui me passe par la tête' (p. 21). Marie-Bénédicte even begins to develop an intimate relationship with the inanimate object, describing it as her 'seul ami' and explaining how she needs to confide in it (p. 36). The computer provides a safe, distanced, and non-judgmental listener for Marie-Bénédicte, enabling her to express her thoughts in a private manner.

[18] Henke, p. xi.

Furthermore, the computer narrative serves as both a form of metafiction, or self-reflexive fiction,[19] inviting the reader to analyse the fictional status of the text, and also provides a legitimate scenario for the narrator to reveal to the reader what she is unable to tell other characters.

Marie-Bénédicte's writing also enables her to process her confused thoughts and experiences. The ordering of chaotic thoughts is prevalent in literature written by trauma survivors, as Tal explains that '[t]he theme of drawing together fragments into a whole is found again and again in the literature of trauma; re-piecing a shattered self.'[20] The narrator describes how her thoughts are 'désarticulées comme une marionnette' (p. 15) and how her mind, 'de plus en plus souvent, saute d'une idée à l'autre.' (p. 15) These disordered feelings only subside when Marie-Bénédicte is writing on her computer, revealing the ordering and therapeutic effect of her typing: 'J'arrive à me concentrer uniquement sur mon ordinateur, uniquement…' (p. 15) The narrator also describes carefully constructing her phrases during the writing process: 'Ciseler les mots. Sculpter les phrases' (p. 20). The terms 'ciseler' and 'sculpter' suggest a creative and physical act, suggesting that the protagonist feels she is being proactive in her analysis and expression of her thoughts. The protagonist's drafting of her own experiences into a written text is representative of her creating her own narrative of the abuse, which Janet deems crucial in overcoming what he calls, 'la reminiscence traumatique'. He explains that memory 'consiste essentiellement dans l'acte de raconter'.[21] 'Une situation n'est bien liquidée, bien assimilée que lorsque nous avons réagi non seulement extérieurement par nos mouvements, mais encore intérieurement par les paroles que nous nous adressons à nous-mêmes et par la mise en place de ce

[19] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.
[20] Tal, p. 137.
[21] Janet, p. 272.

récit comme un chapitre de notre propre histoire'.[22] Marie-Bénédicte's redrafting of memories is a means through which she can try to master her past to create a coherent mental narrative of events.

In addition to her computer diary, Marie-Bénédicte also uses a paper diary in which she marks out a black cross on each Wednesday that her uncle Laurent visits (p. 18). The crosses provide a visual marker of the narrator's feelings of despair on these days. Marie-Bénédicte also states her desire to express the significance of these crosses in the diary:

> Dans mon agenda 1997, à chaque mercredi, j'ai eu envie de marquer:
>
> 'Mort de mon oncle Laurent. Mon oncle Laurent mort. Laurent mon oncle mort...' (p. 19)

The narrator's restructuring of the phrase is an expression of her private feelings, representing her belief that her only escape from the abuse is with the death of her uncle, however she manipulates the syntax (unlike the victims in *La Fille du canal* and *La Frontière de sable*, who view their own death as escape). Marie-Bénédicte also observes the four Wednesdays which do not have a cross by them: 'C'est idiot, mais je ne suis plus habituée à être libre le mercredi.' (p. 49). The narrator's counting of each abusive occurrence suggests that she is ordering her life through her diary, enabling her attempt to regulate the chaos she is experiencing and giving herself a sense of control. Yet Marie-Bénédicte does not actually write in her diary; it appears to be merely a prop for physically recording and ordering her abusive timeline, which provides comfort to her before she feels ready to start writing out her experiences in her computer diary (and ultimately passing this on to communicate her abuse to her teacher). Indeed, the computer diary is easily edited and deleted, unlike a paper diary,

[22] Ibid., p. 273; Whitehead, p. 87.

and the protagonist is thus able to control the extent to which she confronts her experiences; if what she writes and remembers is too psychologically painful for her, she can delete it from the screen (and her mind) without leaving a trace; a process which is overtly described in the text.

In *La Fille du canal*, both Sarah and her teacher rely on the written form to express their feelings and experiences of abuse. When Sarah's teacher asks the class to describe 'un paysage hivernal', Sarah's description is one of the canal, which we have already seen relates directly to her feelings of helplessness: 'L'eau ne coule plus. Les enfants pleurent. La ville meurt.' (p. 39) Sarah's desperation also comes through in other areas of her school work, as she draws 'des personnages sans yeux, et d'autres sans mains. Des personnages sans bouche' (p. 56). The drawings of incomplete people also represent her own feelings of powerlessness and this bears a resemblance to her fascination with her expressionless doll. Sarah's artistic communication appeals directly to her class teacher, herself abused as a child. The teacher notices how Sarah labels her drawing: '*Le peintre les enferme dans son tableau*' (p. 75), and links the grim drawing and description of the painter to Sarah's art teacher, ultimately leading her to uncover the abuse. The written report and drawing therefore have a positive effect on Sarah's situation as they effectively draw attention to her concealed abuse. She too, then, ultimately needs to communicate her experiences to others, which occurs paradoxically through communicating her inability to communicate.

The class teacher identifies with Sarah's situation and tries to find her own means of expressing her emotions through writing in her diary: 'J'utilise Sarah pour qu'elle parle à ma place, parce que je ne parviens pas à écrire ce souvenir. […] Je dois l'écrire.' (p. 42) Sarah's teacher realizes that her identification with Sarah is a means of deflecting her inability to deal with her own past. Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub

argue that survivors of trauma must tell their story in order to 'survive' and Laub claims: 'The "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny.'[23] In *La Fille du canal*, it is the teacher's ability to tell the story to herself which is the key to her psychological healing. She is clearly aware of the benefits of a written confession of her abuse, yet struggles with the act itself and, after vowing to write out her experiences, the text then contains a full page displaying the words, 'JE NE PEUX PAS' (p. 51). The existence of these words on the hypothetical diary page actually suggests, however, that the teacher's writing down of the silence, of not being able to write out her feelings, is another form of expression and of working through her emotions and past: just as Sarah above, the teacher must communicate her inability to communicate in order to express herself. For the teacher, however, the act of saving Sarah, of communicating an abuse that is not her own, helps her to come to terms with her own inability to save herself from her childhood trauma. Indeed, the ultimate rescue of her pupil serves as a revision of her own past where she can right the wrongs of her childhood, where she was not rescued, and thus simultaneously save her (former) self.

In *John et moi*, rather than writing out her own reality, the child-victim narrator Elsa writes her own version of a fairy tale which is based upon her and her brother's experience of being physically abused by their father. The *conte de fous* composed by the protagonist is prompted by a school assignment to write a fairy story and closely resembles the Brothers Grimm tale *Hansel and Gretel*.[24] Henke comments that fictionalizing personal trauma experiences provides an indirect means of writing about and hence processing traumatic experiences: 'What cannot be uttered might at least be written – cloaked in the mask of fiction or sanctioned by the protective space of iteration

[23] Laub, p. 79.
[24] Brüder Grimm, 'Hansel und Gretel', in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Hamburg: Projekt Gutenberg, [1812] 2012).

that separates the author/narrator from the protagonist/character she or he creates and from the anonymous reader/auditor she or he envisages.'[25] For the narrator, as Henke suggests, the creation of a fictional tale with fictional characters provides sufficient space and distance from her very real experiences to explore her situation psychologically. The tale consists of two children being sent away from home by their mother to escape their ogre father. The children are guided by a star and encounter a witch who tricks and captures them. The ogre-father finds the children and rescues them, turning into a 'good father' at the end of the story. The happy ending to the story is crucial as it represents the narrator's desire for her own abuse to be resolved and the return of a loving father. The victim's role as author of her own tale gives her a sense of control over her future and suggests her hope for a resolution. Interestingly, the text uses the technique of *mise en abyme*, as Elsa is a fictional abuse victim, who then fictionalizes her own abusive experience, which, like the metafictive element of *P'tits bateaux*, mirrors the different levels of reading and writing as therapy outside of the textual world.

Language and words become crucial in the process of overcoming and denouncing sexual abuse in the novels and are also closely related to the theme of reading and writing. According to Tal, '[t]he inability to communicate trauma is evident in the preoccupation of trauma authors with the limitations of language.'[26] In three of the novels, the narrators are effectively (fictional) trauma authors, attempting to express their abuse. The depiction of the preoccupation with words and meaning is further complicated in *Monsieur Henry*, *La Frontière de sable* and *P'tits bateaux* as the 'authors' are constructed as children and thus have accumulated fewer words to express their trauma. Marie-Bénédicte describes testing out different words during her

[25] Henke, p. xix.
[26] Tal, p. 122.

writing process, attempting to find the expression that most accurately reflects her internal state of mind: 'Jongler avec les mots. Les lancer. Les rattraper. Choisir le plus juste pour préciser une pensée.' (p. 21) Her review process also leads her to delete different words, enabling her to fully explore her emotions and emphasizing the importance of meaning to the narrator: '"Je suis dégoûtée de la vie." Touche correction. Non: écoeurée. Non: triste. Non: "Je suis DÉSÉSPERÉE."' (p. 21).

Similarly, when her school teacher asks the pupils to write down the words that are in their head, the protagonist thinks to herself: '*Seule. Crier. Peur. Honte. Mort...* [...] Ce sont mes mots à moi. Les seuls que je ressente.' Marie-Bénédicte automatically chooses a selection of words with negative connotations, yet she feels unable to express these intimate feelings to others and copies words written by her peers: 'Neige. Amour. Solidarité. Transparence. Frisson...' (p. 38) This gulf between the protagonist's hidden feelings and those which she presents to the world shows how language can also betray the victim's true emotions. However, later in the text, during the class meeting with the author Aline Nuage, Marie-Bénédicte learns the specific terms for her abusive uncle: 'L'abuseur? L'incestueux? J'ai tiqué. Je ne connaissais pas ces mots. Mots moches. Dégoûtants. Bien adaptés.' (p. 53) Through discovering the terminology that relates to her experiences, Marie-Bénédicte realizes she is not unique in her situation, and she is thus encouraged to acknowledge her circumstances.[27] The narrator also appears to be comforted by the composition of the words, which she deems ugly, as in her mind this reflects the whole nature of the abusive relationship.

[27] Mazard mirrors the role of her fictional author in *P'tits bateaux* when she visits a college and asks pupils: 'Savez-vous comment cela s'appelle quand un adulte viole un enfant de sa famille?'. Pélicart, 21 avril 2006.

The struggle with words and language is thus closely linked to the protagonist's identity and her ability to express this identity.[28]

In *La Frontière de sable* Fredo narrates his story retrospectively, explaining how as a child he did not possess the ability to break the silence surrounding the abuse: 'je manquais de mots pour le rompre. Maintenant, j'en ai de nouveaux. Pourtant, je ne peux toujours pas en parler. Alors, j'écris, pour essayer de comprendre comment c'est arrivé.' (p. 6) The narrator thus recognizes his inability to process and express accurately the impact of sexual abuse from a child's standpoint, as well as referring to the psychological benefit of writing out the abuse. At the end of the novel, Fredo repeats the same sentiment: 'Elles [ces choses-là] ont formé ce mur invisible qui m'encerclait parce que je manquais de mots pour le rompre. Maintenant que j'ai mûri, j'en ai trouvé de nouveaux pour écrire pour briser en silence le silence, pour comprendre comment c'est arrivé.' (p. 111) The text has thus come full circle, with Fredo's tale representing an exploration of his past using words, language and concepts which he has acquired since the event: he is 'filling in the gaps' that he had at the time of Laurette's abuse. Fredo also assumes the language used by his cousin to refer to her feelings of worthlessness, in order to reassure the abuse victim that she will in time overcome her sexual abuse: 'On te le rendra ton trésor. Moi, Mehdi, ta maman, ta maîtresse… tous ceux qui te veulent vraiment du bien.' (p. 100) By using terms which she understands, Fredo validates Laurette's perception and experiences.

In *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, language is of great importance to Camille, but whereas the victims of *P'tits bateaux* and *Frontière de sable* use words and writing to come to terms with their situation, Camille manipulates language to show resistance to

[28] The search for ways of verbalizing traumatic experiences is the key theme in Marie Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1977), where the protagonist works with a psychiatrist to help her to let her body and voice express her abusive childhood relationship with her mother.

her abuser and it becomes a form of power for her. The protagonist's subtle resistance starts when she and Henry attempt to manipulate each other through the use of names. Camille admits to disliking the way her singing teacher calls her 'Petite' and Henry informs Camille that she should address him by his first name (p. 7). Yet Camille admits: 'Il continue à m'appeler "Petite". Et moi "Monsieur Henry"' (p. 8) The juxtapostion of the two characters and their dismissal of the other's requests sets up a clear battle of wills between victim and abuser. Similarly, the narrator displays her contempt for Henry by addressing him using the pronoun 'tu': 'Je mène le jeu, je renverse les âges. Il n'y a pas que les grands qui décident. Pour la première fois, je le tutoie.' (p. 26). The use of pronouns becomes a recurrent battleground between victim and abuser, as Henry also uses questionable terms when talking to his pupil. After exclaiming how warm his apartment is upon Camille's arrival, undoubtedly due to Henry's manipulation of the heating thermostat, the teacher encourages Camille to remove layers of her clothing: 'Nous enlevons notre manteau?' (p. 14) Camille mentally rejects the teacher's use of 'nous' to refer to her clothes and she comments: 'Je ne sais pas pourquoi il dit "nous"' (p. 14); 'Il y a moi, il y a lui. Ce n'est pas la même chose. Il ne faut pas confondre.' (p. 15) The 'confusion' of boundaries between Henry and Camille is what enables the abuse to take place, and Camille's assertion of her individuality in linguistic terms reveals her recognition of how her teacher has removed the physical boundaries between them: 'Qu'est-ce qu'il croit? Que je lui appartiens? Je rentre en résistance: mon territoire est imprenable.' (p. 26)

Furthermore, the narrator manipulates her language in an attempt to belittle Henry's behaviour. When Henry exposes himself to Camille, she reacts with sarcasm: 'il commence à ouvrir son pantalon sur ce qu'il croit la première merveille du monde' (p. 26). The narrator's dismissal of Henry's act serves to banalize it, showing Camille's

inner confidence and contempt for Henry to the reader. Camille then proceeds to belittle her abuser directly, and in a dismissive tone, by comparing his genitals with those of her young brother: 'Arrête. Mon frère, il a le même' (p. 27). Camille also becomes obsessed with different words to describe her singing teacher and imagines a choir singing a short rhyme she has created: '*M'sieur Henry sois honni, sois banni, au tapis*' (p. 35). The repetitive structure of the chant resembles a magic spell and shows the protagonist's exploitation of language to empower her, whilst also suggesting her level of helplessness in that she is seeking some form of divine intervention to stop her abuser. The narrator's self-expression is similar to Marie-Bénédicte's attempts to express her feelings by finding and exploring specific meanings. Camille explains: 'j'ai trouvé tous ces mots dans le dictionnaire des synonymes', suggesting that she has not currently got the linguistic ability to communicate her thoughts; she is searching out the words that convey her feelings accurately. Yet, crucially, in the same way that the fictional author in *P'tits bateaux* provides Marie-Bénédicte with the word for her paedophilic uncle, the reference to the dictionary in *Monsieur Henry* suggests to young readers that the words can be found and that the abuse can be expressed.

Camille does not write a diary of her abuse in the same way as Marie-Bénédicte in *P'tits bateaux* and the teacher in *La Fille du canal*, but she does express herself via grafitti on the wall of Henry's apartment building. Camille sees a drawing of her abuser composed by someone else, which suggests that she is not his only victim: 'On avait écrit en haut: *PROFESSEUR DE CHANTAGE*, et en bas: *MONSIEUR HENRY A UN TOUT PETIT ZIZI*.' (p. 36) Camille's realization, 'Je n'étais plus seule' (p. 36), is practically identical to that of Marie-Bénédicte, in that she feels a sense of relief that other people have experienced the same trauma as herself. Camille then finds the courage to add her own words: '*OUI, UN ZIZI TOUT RIQUIQUI*.' '*PAUL-ERNEST*

HENRY OUISTITI, ESPÈCE DE HARAKIRI…' (p. 37). Despite admitting that she 'ne sai[t] même pas ce que "harakiri" veut dire…' (p. 37), Camille's writing out of the words give her a sense of physical release as she expresses her frustrations, giving her a sense of achievement: 'Voilà, j'ai parlé sur le mur' (p. 38). The narrator also draws 'une petite fille qui regardait droit Henry Ouistiti'; 'On aurait dit qu'elle le défait' (p. 37). The drawing thus also becomes a very public expression of Camille's desire to confront Henry and communicate her disapproval of his behaviour. The protagonist uses the graffiti to express her feelings indirectly through drawings and rhyming sounds and words, which are evidently phonetically empowering to the victim, in spite of their somewhat random meanings. However, Camille chooses a very public (though anonymous) medium to do this, which again creates a safety barrier for the victim. Despite the ambiguous nature of Camille's drawing, the narrator realizes that her abuser will understand the message, giving her a sense of control: 'Il saura que c'est moi la fille verte aux tresses mais, pour la première fois, c'est lui qui devra se taire' (p. 41). At this point in the text the communication of resistance to the abuser seems of primary importance to the victim. However, upon her next visit to the singing teacher, Camille notices that the drawing has been removed by the authorities: 'Le grand dessin d'Isabella et moi avait disparu. Le mur était repeint de neuf. Dans un coin on avait inscrit: *Défense d'afficher, sous peine d'amende, loi du 29 juillet 1881*. Défense d'afficher la vérité.' (p. 59). The irony of this statement is that the writing on the wall is penalized, yet the illicit behaviour that it attempts to reveal is simply covered up, literally and metaphorically.

While the therapeutic aspect of writing out the abusive experiences is of great significance to the protagonists of the abuse texts, in *P'tits bateaux* and *Moi, Delphine 13 ans…*, the role of the reader or receiver of the written texts is of equal, if not greater

importance than the act of writing, as victims unburden themselves onto others. Freud highlights the role of the analyst in helping patients to master their troubled unconscious. He uses the analogy of the analyst as a telephone receiver, stating that the analyst 'must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient', emphasizing the significance of the 'right' recipient of a patient's revelations to the psychological healing process.[29] In a similar vein, Laub, drawing on psychoanalysis, comments on the fundamental role played by the listener to testimony in the victim's healing process. He asserts that if the victim's trauma is not truly heard, then the act of telling might be experienced as a return to the trauma.[30] He states: 'only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear – and listen to – himself.'[31] In *P'tits bateaux*, while Marie-Bénédicte gains psychological comfort and clarity from confiding in her computer, her ordeal is not fully resolved, practically or psychologically, until she passes on her computer disk to her teacher: 'Je n'ai pas eu besoin de parler, d'expliquer. Ils ont la disquette. Témoignage. Preuve.' (p. 61) The disk containing the narrator's 'packaged' story serves as evidence of the abuse and is a physical substitute for a spoken statement. As Tal asserts, '[l]iterature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it "real" both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author.'[32] The story is passed on to a trusted confidant who accepts unquestioningly the situation and reports the abuse to the authorities.[33] However, Marie-Bénédicte's mother refuses to

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[29] Sigmund Freud, 'Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis (1912)', in *The Case of Schreber, Papers on the Technique and Other Works,* SE 12 (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958), pp. 111-120, pp. 115-116.
[30] Laub, p. 67.
[31] Ibid., p. 71.
[32] Tal, p. 21.
[33] When discussing Marie-Bénédicte writing down her abuse on a computer during a visit to a collège, Mazard explains: '"Parce qu'écrire, c'est aussi communiquer et briser le silence"'. Pélicart, 21 avril 2006.

hear the testimony, slapping her daughter upon discovering the abuse: she cannot psychologically accept the actions of her brother and thus physically rejects Marie-Bénédicte.[34] It is due to her teacher's and father's willingness to listen to the confession and accept the victim's story that Marie-Bénédicte can fully process and recover from her ordeal with the aid of another significant, professional listener, a psychologist, who occupies the victim's troubled mind on Wednesday afternoons, at the exact time that the abuse formerly took place.

In *Moi, Delphine* the responses received by the victim from her penfriend are just as important, if not more so, as Delphine's acts of writing out her feelings. As in *La Fille du canal* and *P'tits bateaux*, the writing process enables the protagonist to confront and process her past and current traumatic experiences in a controlled space. Delphine sends letters to her former schoolfriend, Audrey, although she is not aware that the recipient and respondant is, in fact, an unknown male called Antonin. Delphine comments on the pleasure received from sending her letters: 'Et puis quand je glisse une enveloppe dans la boîte jaune au coin de la rue, je me sens heureuse' (p. 16); 'Je sais, j'ai déjà écrit hier. Mais je me suis disputée avec ma soeur et mon corps pèse trois tonnes.' (p. 47) The imagery created is of a physical unburdening taking place when the protagonist writes down her emotions and experiences. Letter-writing and the physical act of posting them to someone else represent a psychological relief from her problems.

Despite claiming that the pleasure comes from sending the letters themselves (p. 124), Antonin's replies clearly soothe the protagonist. Indeed, after sending several letters without receiving a reply, Delphine writes again: 'Écris-moi, s'il te plaît, même une seule ligne…' (p. 15). Delphine's plea shows her need to be acknowledged by

[34] See Chapter One for a discussion of the negative portrayal of mothers in the abuse texts.

someone, somewhere, as she feels so insignificant in the children's home. The respondent's replies, however, also specifically address the protagonist's issues, as well as simply functioning as an acknowledgement of her existence. Antonin supports Delphine and tells her what she needs to hear to heal psychologically from her mother's neglect ('Ta mère t'a fait du mal, même si ce n'était pas exprès. Tu ne lui dois rien. C'est à toi que tu dois quelque chose' [p. 91]), and suggests reasons for the protagonist's chaotic life ('C'est peut-être pour ça que ta mère est tombée dans la boisson: parce que personne n'était là pour l'aider.' [p. 31]). Delphine also states that Antonin's replies provide her with a sense of solidarity: 'Mais ce n'était pas des réponses […]. C'étaient des messages, des signes, et parfois, je sentais ta solitude entre les lignes.' (p. 140). Indeed, the protagonist identifies with Antonin's own feelings depicted in the letter, enabling her to trust him and eventually confess the sexual abuse she suffered as a young child (p. 96).

The fact that Antonin is believed to be the female peer Audrey highlights the way in which the functional role of respondant is significantly more important than who he is as a character. Antonin pretends to be Audrey when replying to Delphine, stating: 'À la troisième [lettre], j'ai compris que tu avais besoin d'une réponse, quelle qu'elle soit' (p. 137). Antonin feels obliged to fulfil the role of therapeutic listener, keeping his real identity concealed so as not to traumatize the protagonist further. There are textual clues as to the real identity of the respondent, as 'Audrey' frequently makes excuses and comments that s/he does not have braces, which leads to Delphine's question: 'on t'a enlevé ton appareil?' (p. 33). Delphine misses these clues, as she expects a certain role to be fulfilled in a certain way and as Antonin tells Delphine what she wants and needs to hear, the façade can continue until Delphine's trauma is resolved and she can psychologically deal with the truth. There are also multiple readings here for the reader

of the text dependent upon whether he or she follows Delphine's interpretation of events, notices the textual clues, or reads the text more than once.

The recipient of Delphine's letters also becomes more embroiled in her life and implicated in the trauma via the medium of reading and listening to the victim's story. Laub observes that 'the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself.'[35] Antonin is seen to take on some responsibility for Delphine's troubles, as he acknowledges her need for a respondent: 'J'avais honte de mentir, mais pas trop parce que je savais que je te faisais du bien' (p. 137). Antonin's implication in the victim's experiences also creates a strong bond between the writer and reader: 'Tes lettres, je les lis et les relis; ensuite, je les cache sous mon matelas, et crois-moi, personne ne les découvrira jamais. C'est juste entre toi et moi' (p. 127). However, rather than being simply traumatized by Delphine's trauma, Antonin himself also gains emotionally from the letter exchange. He identifies with Delphine's loneliness and the correspondence is a welcome distraction from his own life: 'J'ai écrit ces lettres pour moi; je me sentais si bien après' (p. 140). The identification functions to show the commonality of Delphine's feelings of isolation, even though Antonin has not experienced the same trauma, bridging the potential gap between the victim's experiences and those of the reader and encouraging empathy for Delphine.

Interestingly, there is another significant act of letter-writing and receiving in the text, which emphasizes the therapeutic effect of communicating abuse to the 'right' listener. Delphine's father, who sexually abused the girl when she was younger, writes a note stating simply 'Pardon' (p. 125) and sends this to his daughter shortly before he dies. The protagonist's response is to ingest the letters on the page: 'Je les ai

[35] Laub, p. 57.

mangées. Mastiquées, avalées. Parce que c'est dans le ventre que j'ai besoin de ce pansement. Pas dans la tête' (p. 125). The letter fills a physical lack in the protagonist caused by her father's abuse: ingesting the apology makes it more real to Delphine and is also an attempt to heal her abused body. The letter being written and sent on the father's deathbed also represents his own desire to unburden himself from his past, in a similar way to that in which Delphine seeks relief from expressing her past and present trauma by sending letters.

In *La Petite Maîtresse* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, the writing of a letter and the receipt of the letter by another character initiate the rescue from abuse. In *La Petite Maîtresse*, Caroline decides to write a letter to denounce her psychologically abusive teacher. She states: 'je ne vois pas à qui envoyer ma lettre. Mais comme il faut absolumment que j'écrive une lettre à quelqu'un, je décide tout à coup de m'adresser à mon ancien instituteur' (p. 127). The desire to communicate the abuse is evident, despite initially struggling to choose a receipient for the confidence. Although she decides to confide in her former teacher, before Caroline sends the letter, her grandfather intercepts and reads it, claiming: 'On va régler ça […]. Ça ne va pas traîner (p. 131). Thus whilst the intended recipient does not read the letter, the message is received by the 'right' person and the victim's abuse is heard and ultimately resolved, highlighting the significance of the listener's response to the victim's denunciation.

In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, there are two significant letters included in the narrative. The first is written by the child victim Félix, and is sent to Sophie's mother, thanking her for caring for him during his stay. Félix passes on a message to Sophie revealing her cousins' manipulation which led Sophie to believe that they have magical powers. Félix admits: 'Moi aussi je ~~croy~~ j'ai cru qu'ils été sorcier en vrai les prémières vacances, j'ai découver apré' [*sic*] (p. 109). The letter reveals the way in

which Félix felt unable to communicate directly with Sophie at the time of the events, as she too colluded in his abuse. The letter as a medium for his message enables Félix to present his feelings directly, but in an indirect manner, which feels 'safe' to him. Felix's message, however, is not accepted by Sophie, and she then herself falls victim to her cousins as she fails to listen to the victim's testimony.

The second letter in the narrative is written by Sophie to her mother Rosemonde, recounting her experiences when staying at her aunt's house. The letter is carefully constructed, as Sophie tries to minimize the impact of her words and hide the abuse which has taken place. There are non-italicized phrases in the text, however, which indicate commentary from the extradiegetic narrator regarding her aunt Cora's manipulation and criticism of Sophie and her family, which undermines Sophie's guarded correspondence:

> *Ils vont à l'église le dimanche. Alors moi aussi, j'y suis allée hier, parce que c'est le jour de congé de Gina, que j'aurais dû rester toute seule, et Cora dit que ça ne peut pas me faire mal.*
>
> Cora a aussi proféré des reproches à l'encontre de Rosemonde qui n'a pas donné de religion à ses enfants. (p. 124)

Thus while the real reader of the novel receives supplementary information, the fictional reader of Sophie's letter, her mother, must actively listen to the victim in order to receive the 'right' message, which is a veiled denunciation of abuse and expression of Sophie's isolation. In a conversation with Sophie after the letter has been sent, Rosemonde's suspicions regarding the veracity of the letter lead to her prompting her daughter to admit her unhappiness (p. 138). Rosemonde hears and acts upon Sophie's subtle calls for help, arriving unannounced at Cora's house to rescue Sophie (p. 157). The letter, then, in the case of *Delphine* and *La Petite Maîtresse* succeeds in finding the

'right' recipient, who deciphers the message and provides the necessary support or intervention, resolving the abuse in *La Petite Maîtresse* and resolving the victim's turmoil in *Delphine*. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, while the victim's mother is the intended recipient, the message is incomplete and requires interpretation to enable the daughter's rescue. While the trend in the corpus is that of correspondence playing a positive role in resolving and overcoming abuse, in *Les Saisons dangereuses*, however, the letter-writing forms the basis of the abuse, perpetuating the inappropriate relationship between victim and abuser.

Significant Intertexts

The child-victim-protagonists' use of writing and reading as a means to express abuse is complemented by the inclusion of references to other texts in the abuse narratives, particularly fairy tales. John Stephens argues in reference to intertextuality that 'no text exists in isolation from other texts, and from their conventions and genres'.[36] Intertextuality in children's texts has been a significant area for study,[37] due to the common and established history of the reworking of fairy-tale discourse in children's fiction.[38] Wilkie, when discussing intertextuality in children's books, identifies three types of intertextuality:

> (1) texts of quotation: those texts which quote or allude to other literary or non-literary works; (2) texts of imitation: texts which seek to paraphrase, 'translate' and supplant the original and to liberate their readers from an over-invested admiration in great writers of the past, and which often function as the pre-text of the original for later readers (Worton and Still 1990: 7); and (3) genre texts:

[36] John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (Essex: Longman, 1992), p. 84.
[37] See, for example: Stephens; Stephens and McCallum; Wilkie; and Gruner.
[38] Brown, *Volume II*, p. 7.

> those texts where identifiable, shared, clusters of codes and literary conventions are grouped together in recognisable patterns which allow readers to expect and locate them, and to cause them to seek out like texts.[39]

In seven of the primary corpus texts, the influence of pre-texts permeates the child-abuse narratives, altering the expression of abuse on both the diegetic level, where the protagonist in several texts expresses abuse via fairy tale imagery, and on an extra-diegetic level, where the author uses familiar texts as a means of presenting the abuse topic to the reader. *Derrière la porte*, more a text of imitation, appears to be a re-writing of *Cendrillon*. The fairy tale narrative within *John et moi* and the play within *Le si gentil monsieur Henry* are genre texts as they use common fairy tale conventions in the narratives. *Dans la gueule du vent* has the traditional folk-like legend *La Bête du Gévaudan* as an intertext and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* draws upon La Comtesse de Ségur's *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, whilst *Les Saisons dangereuses* alludes to Pierre Chorderlos de Laclos' eighteenth-century epistolary novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* cites its namesake, the traditional French nursery rhyme, in the text.

Derrière la porte closely resembles Perrault's fairy tale *Cendrillon*. In Perrault's text, Cinderella is the family scapegoat, with her sisters and stepmother treating her as a slave. The fairy godmother temporarily transforms Cinderella into a princess, who attends the Prince's ball and leaves a glass slipper behind, which leads the Prince to come looking for his Princess-to-be. In *Derrière la porte*, it is a male protagonist, Damien, who is at the mercy of his abusive stepmother, but seeks revenge by conjuring an evil sprit from the step-family's past. The narrator of *Cendrillon* comments that the protagonist 'couch[e] tout au haut de la Maison, dans un grenier, sur une méchante

[39] Wilkie, pp. 132-133.

paillasse',[40] which is exactly where Damien sleeps, although in his case the straw mattress is replaced by a lack of heating. Moreover, in both texts the victims' fathers are emotionally absent (Damien's is also physically unavailable, working away from home), and fail to protect their children from the abusive stepmothers. *Derrière la porte* contains aspects of the fantastic, particularly the ghost 'fairy godmother' to the abuse victim, the equivalent of Cendrillon's fairy godmother. In both texts, it is the fairy godmothers who enable the central protagonists to break free from their oppressive situations.

Stephens and McCallum argue that use of fairy-tale intertexts in modern children's stories 'serve[s] to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences'.[41] I think the reference to a 'body of shared allusions and experiences' is significant with regards to the use of fairy-tale intertexts in child abuse texts, as using familiar imagery with which children are raised invites certain reader expectations. The content of fairy tales is often gruesome and frightening, yet, as Bettelheim states, good triumphs over evil: 'In fairy tales, as in life, punishment or fear of it is only a limited deterrent to crime. The conviction that crime does not pay is a much more effective deterrent, and that is why in fairy tales the bad person always loses out.'[42] Thus in spite of difficult content, in both the fairy tale and the abuse narrative, the intertextual suggestion is of a reassuring outcome, which occurs in *Derrière la porte*. Indeed, Bettelheim promotes the use of the fairy tale in supporting the healthy psychological development of children. He states that '[t]he deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of

[40] Charles Perrault, 'Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre', in *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Paris : Folio, (1697] 1997), pp. 78-90, p. 79.
[41] Stephens and McCallum, p. 3.
[42] Bettelheim, p. 9.

modern children's literature, and so the child is not helped in coping with them.'[43] He further argues that '[w]e want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that *they* are not always good; and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to be.'[44] In fact, this belief that young readers need to confront troubling matters in literature echoes the assertion of many contemporary children's authors in response to facing criticism for dealing with themes such as drugs, sexuality and abuse in fiction for young readers.[45] Thus the *Cinderella* intertext in *Derrière la porte* is a means of the author appealing to the readers' literary knowledge to engage them in the text and to highlight the relevance of the traditional tale to modern-day readers.

Monsieur Henry and *John et moi* are realist texts depicting child abuse as the central issue to be resolved, but in contrast to *Derrière la porte*, the fairy-tale intertexts are used directly by the protagonists. Stephens and McCallum argue that:

> The pre-text is always bearer of some historically inscribed ideological significances, but does not invariably fix ideological significance. Rather, it functions as a site on which metanarratival and textual processes interact, either to reproduce or contest significance. Because both of these are subject to change between one historical moment and another, any particular retelling becomes, at least potentially, a new negotiation between the already given and the new.[46]

With regards to *Monsieur Henry* and *John et moi*, the fairy-tale genre intertexts come with connotations of fantasy and 'happy-ever-after' resolutions, which then interact with the realist portrayal of the physical and sexual abuse of the child protagonists. In *John*

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[43] Ibid., p. 10.
[44] Ibid., p. 7.
[45] See, for example, Marie-Aude Murail, 'Dialogue avec Nadège', in *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières*, ed. by Nières-Chevrel, pp. 156-176 and Burgess, pp. 299-300.
[46] Stephens and McCallum, p. 9.

et moi, the metanarrative, which has previously been discussed in relation to narrative voice and plot structure, consists of Elsa's own 'conte de fous' in which a brother and sister leave home due to the father's aggression. The children find themselves in the woods and are helped by a guiding star and led to an evil witch, with whom they do a deal and whom they outsmart, which eventually leads to the father being turned into a loving man again. Thus the metanarrative borrows elements from *Hansel and Gretel* to create the new tale: children being sent away to the woods, an evil witch who tries to capture and trick the children, a guiding star (in the original it is a duck) and the punishment of the villain and happy return home to the parents.

The inset fairy-tale narrative reveals the children's desire for their problems to be resolved easily and also highlights how unrealistic this desire is: the children's fairy-tale ending of a repenting father is juxtaposed with the narrative ending whereby the victims flee their home with their mother to escape the abuse. Escaping the father is a more realistic resolution for the reader, rather than the reformation of the abuser, and the actual ending is indeed a positive one, with the mother no longer willing to accept the abuse for herself and her children. However, the intertext provides some hope for the protagonists in the way of identification with Hansel and Gretel. The fairy tale depicts a brother and sister who set out on their journey together and survive the obstacles thrown at them; there is comfort in them having each other. The victim-protagonists are drawing upon familiar imagery which resonates with them to process their abusive situation. For the reader, the fairy tale intertext shows the psychological impact of abuse on the protagonist, through her need to fictionalize her truth using a traditional tale dealing with abandonment, fear and the children's triumph over adversity.

In *Monsieur Henry*, the use of the fairy-tale intertext is twofold: firstly the juxtaposition of fairy tales and child abuse shatters the assumption of real life happy endings, but secondly, the exploration of abuse within the bounds of recognizable imagery provides a familiar context for child-victim Camille to express the complex concept of abuse to those around her. In the school play, Camille dresses as Henry's cat and animal characters flock to see him to have their wishes granted, including one sheep who has lost his parents: 'Allez, enlève [ta laine], petit mouton, et viens tout près de moi, nous parlerons. Tu es si doux, si mignon…' (p. 74). Chat Gris then grabs his victim and sucks his blood before the sheep stumbles out naked. The request for the sheep to remove its wool coat mirrors Camille's interaction with Henry where he encourages the girl to undress, while the reference to blood-sucking is a harrowing scene representing the predatory characteristics of the teacher and echoes Camille's descriptions of Henry's behaviour, discussed earlier.

The scene of trickery is reminiscent of Perrault's *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, wherein the wolf dresses as Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, having already eaten her, and then seduces the girl and eats her too.[47] The abuser in Camille's play is effectively a wolf in cat's clothing; he is viewed by others as 'si gentil', as the victim's mother frequently reminds her, yet he is a deceitful paedophile. The format of the play and revelation of abuse is identifiable with Perrault's tale and shows Camille's attempt to express her traumatic experiences in a 'safe' way: a traditional fairy tale that children are introduced to from a young age. Perrault's fairy-tale ending results in the child being devoured, (though the Grimm version of the text substitutes this for a 'happy' ending whereby the wolf is shot dead and the Grandmother and girl cut out of his belly).[48]

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[47] Charles Perrault, 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge', in *Contes de ma mère l'Oye*, pp. 43-46, p. 46.
[48] Bettelheim argues that Perrault's ending could have been similar, but was altered for the nurseries of Louis XIV, p. 168.

Camille's mirroring of the gruesome fairy tale element, with Chat Gris devouring his victim, expresses the extent of her feelings of violation due to Henry's abusive behaviour.

In his psychoanalytic analysis of *Little Red Riding Hood* Bettelheim argues that the tale has strong sexual connotations, particularly the scene in which the wolf tries to lure Red Riding Hood to the bed so he can eat her:

> When the girl undresses and joins the wolf in bed and the wolf tells her that his strong arms are for embracing her better, nothing is left to the imagination. Since in response to such direct and obvious seduction Little Red Riding Hood makes no move to escape or fight back, either she is stupid or she wants to be seduced. In neither case is she a suitable figure to identify with. With these details Little Red Riding Hood is changed from a naïve, attractive young girl, who is induced to neglect Mother's warnings and enjoy herself in what she consciously believes to be innocent ways, into nothing but a fallen woman.[49]

Bettelheim's analysis of the traditional fairy tale highlights the sexually predatory undertones of the pretext and brings to light the connection between the oral devouring of the victim and sexual seduction in *Monsieur Henry*. In Camille's play the metaphor of the lamb being eaten by the predator is an indirect yet striking expression of the child's experience of sexual abuse seemingly borrowed directly from the *Little Red Riding Hood* tale. The sexual connotations of the *Little Red Riding Hood* scene and its echoing in the scene of the play invites the audience of the school production to infer the sexual nature of Henry's behaviour, without Camille having to state it explicitly, and also reinforces the central theme of sexual exploitation in the primary narrative. The intertext here, then, just as in *John et moi*, is for the benefit of the child victim and enables her to

[49] Ibid., p. 169.

bring about a resolution to her situation. However, Bettelheim's damning view of Red Riding Hood as aware of the wolf's identity and attempts at seduction undermines the whole premise of the story: a naïve and trusting Red Riding Hood is tricked and ultimately 'abused' by a manipulative predator. On a basic level this plot echoes that of all of the abuse plotlines in my corpus texts. Indeed, Bettelheim's negative interpretation of the seduced girl is certainly not supported in the child-abuse text, where the lamb-victim and child-victim are depicted as being at the mercy of manipulative and cunning predators, who deceive not just the child but also those in the local community. Yet Bettelheim's comments echo the attitudes of denial and victim-blaming surrounding child abuse depicted in several of the sexual abuse corpus texts,[50] whilst also underlining the significance and variety of potential interpretations of intertexts in the child-abuse novels: regardless of the intentions of the author, a reader, adult or child, brings his or her own interpretations to the text.

In her study of the influence of fairy tales on three modern young-adult novels, including Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, which deals with the rape of the female adolescent protagonist, Gruner discusses what she calls 'transliterating' fairy tales, which is taking salient fairy tale images and altering their significance and meaning in a new text. She argues that re-using aspects of the traditional fairy tale in 'the sometimes gritty world of young adult fiction restores their more troubling aspect.'[51] This is indeed true of *Le si gentil monsieur Henry*, where Camille's fairy-tale play creation has a fatal ending for the victim, which is certainly reminiscent of the gruesome fictional fairy-tale ending of the traditional *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*. In *John et moi* and *Derrière la porte*,

[50] In *La Frontière de sable*, the victim's mother tells the social worker that sexual abuse does not happen in 'nice' areas; in *Quelque chose à te dire*, the victim's mother hides the father-daughter incest; in *P'tits bateaux*, the victim's mother slaps her daughter upon finding out that her brother had been raping his niece; and in *Mauvais coup*, the 'helper' priest tells the victim not to tell anyone about his experience with the sexually predatory priest.
[51] Gruner, p. 17.

the abuse theme overall and the depicted scenes of abuse explored in Chapter Four in particular, create a sinister tone throughout the narratives which is reminiscent of the frightening atmosphere created in *Hansel and Gretel* and *Cinderella* when the child protagonists are alone and at the mercy of the cruel adults around them. In *John et moi* and *Monsieur Henry* the issue of the protagonists using fairy-tale elements to express abuse also shows their own therapeutic relationship with literature and the fictionalizing of abuse, as we have seen. Furthermore, the way that the authors of both texts have used fairy-tale tropes for their own original texts highlights the stature of many traditional fairy tales and their numerous versions and re-versions. As McCallum states when referring to intertextuality, many tales are 'no longer folktales but rather original creations which have a general intertextual relationship with folktale schemata, are not indebted to particular tales, and no longer pretend a direct connection with oral tradition'.[52]

In addition to the presence of fairy-tale intertexts across the novels in the corpus, four texts, *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, *Les Saisons dangereuses*, *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* and *Dans la gueule du vent*, contain intertextual links to other types of literature. Marie-Bénédicte sings the lyrics of the nursery rhyme *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, to herself in her head as a form of escapism during the sexual episodes she endures, '[p]our avoir moins mal. Pour ne pas penser' (p. 29). The rhyme depicts a child naively questioning his mother on sailing boats and has connotations of childhood innocence and faith in the adult world. [53] Marie-Bénédicte's repeated reliance on the rhyme during abuse shows her desire to return to her own former state of childhood

[52] McCallum cited in Gruner, p. 4.
[53] The first verse is thus: Maman les p'tits bateaux/Qui vont sur l'eau/Ont-ils des jambes?/Mais oui, mon gros bêta/S'ils n'en avaient pas/Ils ne march'raient pas. <http://comptine.free.fr/comptine/maman_les_p%27tits_bateaux.html>. Accessed 10/02/2012. The lyrics depict a child being dismissed and told nonsense by his mother, which is of significance to events in *P'tits bateaux*, given that Marie-Bénédicte's mother emotionally dismisses her daughter and struggles to acknowledge the abuse.

innocence, before the abuse began. The author's inclusion of the rhyme also represents the child abuse victim's vulnerability: as a child she is reliant upon the adults around her and the unequal power relationship between Marie-Bénédicte and her uncle enables the initiation and perpetuation of the incest.

In *Les Saisons dangereuses*, the influence of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is reflected both in the title of the novel and in the epistolary form.[54] The pre-text deals with deceit and sexual immorality and consists of a cruel game of revenge between two rival aristocrats and former lovers, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont. The narrative events are revealed via letters exchanged between the various characters and include the Marquise challenging the Vicomte to seduce the young Cécile Volanges, who is due to be married. Cécile is courted by Valmont, regularly raped by him and miscarries his child. Unlike in *Monsieur Henry*, *P'tits bateaux* and *John et moi*, the allusion to the intertext in *Saisons dangereuses* is for the benefit of the reader of the text, not the protagonist, as knowledge of the intertext suggests the sexually abusive nature of the relationship between adult and child from the outset of the narrative. Initially in *Les Saisons dangereuses* it is Marjo, in her letters to Frédéric, who is seen to be the instigator of the inappropriate relationship, as she declares her romantic feelings for the family friend, whilst Frédéric dismisses Marjo's perception of the pair as a loving couple, as discussed in Chapter Three. Prior knowledge of the clandestine manipulation of the young naïve victim in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and the linking of the pretext to the child-abuse narrative makes explicit Frédéric's predatory seduction of Marjo and emphasizes the unequal relationship of power between adult and child.

[54] Pierre Chordlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: David Neveu, 1782).

Unlike the common fairy tale intertexts discussed above, where child readers and their parents are likely to be familiar with the stories, child readers would not necessarily be aware of the intertextual link to Laclos' novel and the significance of such an intertext on potential interpretations of *Les Saisons dangereuses*. Yet a lack of knowledge of the intertext does not prevent a coherent reading of the text. Indeed, at the end of the novel Frédéric's predatory nature becomes clear when he admits to being flattered by the young girl's attention and Marjo's parents confront the abuser, making his manipulation of the girl explicit. Furthermore, given that the intertextual link is for the reader's benefit, the plot resolution is not affected by a reader's ignorance of the intertext: the allusion to *Les Liaisons dangereuses* supplements the overall reading of the text and provides further levels of interpretation, rather than determining the plot and meaning of the primary narrative. Indeed, children's literature critics are keen to stress that a reader's potential lack of knowledge of an intertext should not prevent intertextual links from being included in fiction for young readers, as Wilkie cautions:

> Literature for children has to tread a careful path between a need to be sufficiently overreferential in its intertextual gap filling so as not to lose its readers, and the need to leave enough intertextual space and to be sufficiently stylistically challenging to allow readers free intertextual interplay.[55]

The implications of Wilkie's comments are that the extra level of interpretation offered by the intertext may be open for enjoyment by an adult reader, or a well-read young reader, or even perhaps shared between adult and child reading the text together. In the abuse texts, the extra level of interpretation provides opportunities for discussion of the abuse topic in more indirect ways, particularly in *Les Saisons dangereuses*, where a discussion of the intertext sheds light upon the abusive situation in the primary

[55] Wilkie, p. 136.

narrative. The different levels of interpretation offered by the inclusion of intertextual links also opens the opportunity for different re-readings of the texts at a later date.

Another classic intertext is present in the corpus narratives, as Valérie Dayre's *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* echoes the title of La Comtesse de Ségur's *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. Ségur's text consists of numerous episodes dealing with the trials and tribulations encountered by the young protagonist Sophie, which generally consist of her unwise decisions, made in good faith but resulting in disaster and ultimately punishment for herself. Sophie is also often accompanied by her cousin Paul in her exploits. However, in contrast to the bullying cousin relationship between Dayre's protagonists in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, despite bouts of bickering, in the original text Paul often defends and supports his cousin, whilst Sophie often regrets her malicious behaviour towards him. The theme of youthful naivety permeates Dayre's narrative in which the child protagonist's misjudgment of her aunt and cousins leads to her becoming the victim of their abuse. In particular, there is an incident in both novels centring on beautification gone wrong. In the original *Sophie* novel, Sophie naively cuts off her own eyebrows in the hope that they will grow back to be thicker and more attractive,[56] whereas in *Les Nouveaux Malheurs*, it is the abusive cousin who vindictively cuts Sophie's hair very short and unevenly, resulting in the aunt and cousins mocking Sophie and the victim feeling humiliated. The revision of the episode from the pre-text to the modern novel has a more sinister tone, creating a darker impression of the protagonist's 'learning curve' at that later stage of her emotional development. Indeed, Dayre's novel is the next chronological step in the development from childhood to adulthood: Ségur's Sophie is a young girl playing childhood games which often go wrong, whilst Dayre's protagonist is on the cusp of adolescence, dealing

[56] Comtesse de Ségur, 'Les Sourcils coupés', in *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (Paris: Casterman, [1859] 2003), pp. 49-51.

with more adult emotions and trying to maintain her own sense of self in a psychologically damaging environment.[57]

Ségur's Sophie is scolded due to her actions, and the text has a mostly humorous tone, with the narrator and reader together laughing at her recurrent mishaps. Yet certain episodes have a sinister undertone, with Sophie showing her potentially cruel and (self-) destructive nature. One tale in particular, 'La poupée de cire', depicts Sophie gradually destroying a wax doll, firstly by leaving it out in the sun to warm up, resulting in its eyes melting, then washing it, resulting in its facial features coming off, then burning the doll's hair off by trying to curl it (p. 14-15). Finally, the doll is subjected to being taught how to climb trees, resulting in it falling and breaking into pieces. Sophie's gradual torturing of the doll, whether intentional or not, shows a sadistic streak in the child and her matter-of-fact response to the 'death' ('Sophie ne pleura pas, mais elle invita ses amies à venir enterrer sa poupée' [p. 15]), is chilling, particularly in light of the earlier discussion of abuse-victim protagonists acting out their own experiences on doll figures as a means of catharsis. The darker side of Ségur's text is noted by Isabelle Jan, who comments on Sophie's sadistic tendencies.[58] The Ségur intertext perhaps serves as a precursor to the later narrative and shows how 'humorous' childhood misdemeanors can develop into cruel and psychologically disturbing behaviours, of which Dayre's Sophie becomes the innocent victim at the hands of her abusive cousins due to her naivety and desire both to impress and be impressed.

In *Dans la gueule du vent* the intertext is the folklore tale of *La Bête du Gévaudan*, a legendary man-eating wolf-like creature which prowled the Lozère region

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[57] Brown discusses how Sophie is initially 'seduced' by her aunt and cousins' lifestyle and must reassess her view at the end of the text, *Volume II*, pp. 296-297.
[58] Isabelle Jan, *On Children's Literature*, translated from the French. Edited and with a preface by Catherine Storr (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 141.

of France in the eighteenth century. As in *Monsieur Henry* and *John et moi*, the intertext is used in the diegesis as a means for the victim to process his experience. The protagonist's foster mother Marylène introduces him to the tale of the beast on the first night of his stay: 'La Bête a existé, tu sais, mais elle s'est transformée peu à peu en légende et elle a représenté tout ce que les gens redoutaient' (p. 28), which is a clear parallel to the psychological burden carried by Florent as a result of the abuse. The beast comes to symbolize his traumatic experience and his obsession to overcome both his abuser and his past. Florent finds comfort in listening to the legend and explains his own werewolf story: 'Fallait qu'une nouvelle peur chasse l'ancienne et je préférais trembler en écoutant l'histoire de la Bête plutôt que de revoir la silhouette du loup-garou qui poussait la porte de ma chambre au milieu de la nuit […]' (p. 30). The intertext then acts as a form of therapy for the protagonist; he is able to discharge his fearful emotions in a controlled and safe environment when listening to the story.

The references to the legend also contain graphic descriptions of the predatory exploits of the werewolf: 'cette bête cruelle joue comme un chat qui cherche à se jeter sur sa proie… Elle mange d'abord le foie et le coeur avec une avidité inconcevable, suce le sang avec rage et le siffle sur les bêtes à cornes qui veulent s'opposer à ses férocités' (p. 31). This gruesome description evokes the memory of Florent's abuse, representing his own feelings of vulnerability at the hands of his stepfather (p. 31). The imagery of the beast devouring its prey is also strikingly similar to Camille's use of metaphor to describe her sexual abuser in *Monsieur Henry*, and the unequal power relations between victim and abuser is foregrounded in both texts. Florent's obsession with the Bête du Gévaudan enables him to communicate indirectly his disturbing past to others, as he reveals his experiences to his foster family via descriptions of how the 'beast' behaves:

> Et tous ces loups-garous roderont dans les villes et les campagnes à la recherche de chair fraîche. Et d'alcool. Et de sexe. De sexes des femmes ou même d'enfants. De filles et de garçons. De sexes, de sexes. Déguisés en vampires, ils suceront vos corps. (p. 114)

This expression of his past is met with silence from his family: 'Avec mes mots, je l'ai [le silence] creusé, comme on creuse une tombe. Je n'avais jamais causé aussi longtemps depuis quatre ans et j'ai vu mes frères terrorisés, les parents consternés.' (p. 115) So whilst the legend is a means of indirectly communicating his past, the horror and psychological impact of his experiences still permeate through to the receiver of the utterances via the graphic predatory werewolf imagery. The narrator's revelation that he has not spoken as much in four years as in that one passage also highlights the therapeutic role played by the identification with the beast legend in enabling the child victim finally to share his hidden past with his supportive foster family.

Florent also takes part in a play about the Bête du Gévaudan, which is another means by which he indirectly expresses his frustrations and anger:

> Je me suis alors avancé sur le devant de la scène et j'ai lancé ma chansonnette comme un appel ou un avertissement.
>
> Venez les yeux en pleurs
>
> Écouter je vous en prie
>
> Le récit des horreurs
>
> D'une bête en furie! (pp. 35-36)

The narrator's plea for the audience to listen to his warning represents his desire to communicate the threat of the metaphorical beast. In a similar way to Camille's use of the play to reveal her abuse in *Monsieur Henry*, Florent is able to express his fears and experiences indirectly in a controlled and safe environment. The acting and animated

expression of his lines also provides a physical outlet for Florent's internalized anger and frustrations: he has found a medium for the release of his tension and for the communication of his terrible past which has been haunting him since childhood.

The therapeutic aspect of the identification with the legend takes a more sinister turn, however, when Florent internalizes the *Bête* legend as a metaphor for his own experiences and then projects his inner turmoil outwards onto his girlfriend, believing that she is being sexually abused by her father. Roger, the girlfriend's father, is indeed a strict and physically aggressive character, but he is in no way sexually abusive towards his daughter. Extracts of the *Bête* intertext are italicized and scattered throughout the narrative, particularly in reference to Roger, Florent's beast substitute: 'On verra bien, alors, si c'est un être humain mais je sais déjà, moi, que c'est un animal rampant et qu'il pissera *un sang jaunâtre comme celui des vers de terre*...' (p. 87). The instinctive use of the language of the *Bête* narrative shows Florent's over-involvement in the legend, which leads to him setting out to kill Roger. Indeed, the psychological impact of Florent's past traumatic experiences lead to the over-identification with the story, revealing the risk of the process of bibliotherapy failing if a text is too close to the victim's own story.[59]

Florent finds that Roger has already been shot, however, having fallen on his gun when his daughter defended herself from his physical blows. Mistakenly believing that Lucie has shot her father because he abuses her, Florent reveals his own past abusive experiences: 'je lui ai parlé de ces bêtes malfaisantes qui prenaient aux enfants le goût de vivre et leur donnaient le dégoût de tout. […] S'asseyaient près de nous et s'assuraient qu'on dormait bien avant de glisser leurs sales pattes sous nos draps' (p. 129). The revelation of the abuse to his girlfriend, still using the wolf imagery,

[59] Crago, p. 169.

and the resulting resolution of the misplaced victim identification, enables Florent to chase the beast from his psyche: 'Elle est partie, la Bête, où s'envolent les nuages et moi je ne tomberai plus jamais dans la gueule du vent' (p. 144). Thus in spite of Florent's all-consuming obsession with the legend, his identification with the community's fear of the beast, and his attempts to uncover and kill it, force him to confront his fears and help him to process his experiences.

While readers of *Dans la gueule du vent* may not initially be familiar with the beast legend, the author draws attention to the intertext and provides the reader with a bibliography at the end of the narrative, which suggests the importance of the knowledge of the intertext to the reading of the child-abuse narrative. This is seemingly because, as in the case of the familiar fairy-tale intertexts *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood* and the nursery rhyme *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, it is the protagonist of *Dans la gueule du vent* who relies upon the intertext to express and communicate his abuse. The knowledge of the intertext and references to it are therefore more significant to the overall plot of these texts, whereas in *Les Saisons dangereuses* the intertextual reference is on an extra-textual level: it is there for the reader, but a lack of knowledge of it does not alter the actions of the protagonists or prevent a coherent reading of the narrative.

Conclusion

Expressing abuse and the emotional trauma caused by abuse is a prevalent theme across the child abuse corpus, with the issue touched upon in over half of the texts. There is an overwhelming variety of methods of communication used by the victims to express their trauma and abuse, including games, plays, imagery, graffiti, diary entries, fictional and fairy-tale texts, songs, and dolls and toys. Drama and imagery enable the

victims of *Monsieur Henry* and *La Frontière de sable* to confront their relationship with their abuser in a more psychologically distanced and 'safe' manner. By projecting emotions onto a doll or fictional characters in a play, the protagonists can explore their position as victims and act out alternatives to the current adult-abuser, child-victim dynamic, as seen in *Monsieur Henry* when Camille acts out the role of the abuser. In *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* and *La Fille du canal* Marie-Bénédicte and Sarah's teacher seek solace in writing down their experiences and process their past by drafting events on paper until a coherent and confrontable abuse narrative is created. The act of writing and typing provides physical actions alongside the mental recollection of abuse, as the overcoming of trauma is also a physical, bodily process for the victims, exemplified by Delphine's ingestion of her father's apology letter. Whilst writing is in itself depicted as a cathartic exercise, in *Moi, Delphine* the victim's healing process is aided by the replies she receives to her letters, as Antonin encourages Delphine to express her feelings. In *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie* and *La Petite Maîtresse* the abuse is ultimately resolved when letters are written by the victims and are read by active recipients who listen to the protagonists' revelations. *Les Saisons dangereuses* is the exception to this trend, as here the correspondence is a vehicle for the abuse, rather than a means of remedying it.

The use of fairy-tale intertexts is another means by which the narratives express abuse indirectly, both by the protagonist and by the author. Fairy tales are rather gruesome in their original forms, with child-eating wolves in *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, for example, so it is perhaps appropriate that Henry's victim uses this traditional narrative as a vehicle to present her contemporary experience of abuse. Indeed, as we saw in the very first chapter of the study, there is a predominant fairy tale influence on the structure and plot features of the corpus texts and the prevalence of fairy-tale

intertexts within the stories supports the conclusions of Chapter One, that traditional tales are still prevalent in modern-day culture. The intertextual aspect of many of the corpus texts also highlights the two aspects of communicating abuse: the individual's struggle to express and come to terms with abuse and the authors' attempts to find a variety of ways to deal with the sensitive topic. Indeed, the inclusion of intertexts foregrounds the literary aspects of the texts, despite the plot focus being on a specific 'issue', thus the sensitive subject matter is dealt with, without compromising the quality of the narrative, which is one of the most frequently cited criticisms of the original 'problem novel' genre.[60]

Several corpus texts also have the common quality of self-referentiality, with references to narrators creating and writing their own stories. The reader is invited to think about the use of words, language and texts more generally, deepening the reader experience of the narrative, as well as echoing the central issue of communicating abuse by both the protagonists and the authors. Furthermore, the overwhelming presence of literature, art and stories being used by the protagonists mirrors the role of the abuse corpus in wider society. The victims find comfort in reading and writing about their abuse, and the child-abuse texts serve to educate (adult and child) readers on the realities of abuse. Whilst readers may have no direct experience of the theme addressed, the common feelings of isolation, betrayal and helplessness are broached and resolved through the narratives, widening the relevance of the texts and the fictional theme of using literature and art to explore personal turmoil.

[60] See Egoff.

Conclusion

My focus on the narratological features of the texts throughout the study provides a greater understanding of the abuse narratives and their composition. My creation of a Propp-based structural model to analyse and compare the plot features and structure of the abuse novels shows that there are certain elements common to all of the abuse narratives, which are similar to the traditional optimistic elements of the fairy-tale genre: abuse, helper support, exposure of abusers, and resolution. The concern with the acknowledgement, uncovering and, more importantly, the ending of abuse highlights the role of the texts in presenting an optimistic outcome for young readers with regard to abuse. The focus on the positive in the young-teenage texts also suggests the underlying motivations for, and implications of, depicting child abuse in literature for adolescents: educating in a difficult subject matter while also reassuring readers. The identification in the study of the frequent weaving of adult and professional voices and perspectives into the narration further reveals the educational dimension of the texts, as the reader is informed of the practical aspect of denouncing abusers and the realities of abuse in the guise of an adult character's narration. The pedagogical aim of the texts is hardly surprising, given the educational and librarianship background of many of the authors of the narratives, identified in the Introduction.

There are also some interesting similarities and key differences in the ways that the three types of abuse are depicted in the texts. Firstly, autodiegetic victim narration is the most frequent type of narration across the abuse categories, yet there is a wide range of styles of narration and focalization in each category. The prevalence of the autodiegetic voice assumes a particular significance in the texts, as the child's voice is foregrounded in the text and the victim, in the position of

being silenced by the abuser, is granted the freedom to express him or herself, which becomes an important part of the resolution of abuse-induced trauma. The consideration of plot and structure across the corpus reveals that the psychological abuse texts have less linear, action-oriented plots than the sexual and physical abuse texts, while the Proppian plot elements were less successfully applied to the sexual and psychological abuse narratives. The analysis of plot structure fails to account for the intricacies of the psychological aspect of the sexual and psychological abuse narratives, where the interest is not always an instance of abuse, or an 'action' which can be plotted in the structure of the texts, but the exploration of feelings and behaviours.

The date of publication of the texts has no impact on the simplicity or complexity of plot; there is a wide spread of both structurally and formally complex narratives and less developed, linear plots across the seventeen-year time span. What does come out of the consideration of chronology, however, is that the later-published sexual abuse texts (*Mauvais coup* (2007) and *Quelque chose à te dire* (2008)) are less explicit than the two earlier texts *La Fille du canal* (1992) and *Maman, les p'tits bateaux* (1999). In these later texts there is an exploration of different, perhaps more challenging, aspects of sexual abuse being broached for the first time: homosexual grooming and historic father-daughter incest leading to the birth (and murder) of a baby. In the earlier sexual abuse texts, the focus seems to be on the depiction of sexual abuse in realist fiction for the first time and attempts to portray the horrors and actualities of the abuse to the reader. So, perhaps, in later texts there is seen to be less of a need to focus on scenes of the abuse itself and more on the psychological and emotional impact of abuse as a whole.

The sexual abuse texts are, on the whole, more formally interesting than the physical and psychological abuse texts. There are more complex issues at play in the sexual abuse texts, with the protagonists, and authors, 'hiding' the abuse and representing the long-term psychological trauma resulting from young child victims being raped and assaulted by adult men. (Indeed, there are no female sexual abusers in any of the texts.) The sexual abuse texts contain more metaphor and indirect representations of trauma and abuse, as the victims struggle to process and confront their experiences and express them within the narratives, and the authors do not directly state the extent of the reality of rape and sexual assault to the young readers. Indeed, the depiction of the victims' difficulty in expressing and verbalizing their abuse within the narratives serve as a technique through which the authors are able to censor the representations of sexuality in the texts. Art, literature, theatre and metaphor also become a tool for sexual abuse victims to come to terms with and express their experiences, but do so indirectly. In *Monsieur Henry* and *La Frontière de sable*, play-acting enables the victims to confront the relationship with their abuser in a controlled and distanced manner. In *Monsieur Henry* and *P'tits bateaux*, imagery is manipulated by the victims to express their contempt towards the abuser. Verbal games become a source of empowerment; giving victims a sense of control and an indirect means of denouncing their abusers in the sexual abuse texts.

The study has also revealed what aspects of abuse are deemed to be suitable for representation in fiction for young readers and which must be censored or omitted. Indeed, the authors tend to depict scenes of psychological abuse freely and explicitly, with some limiting of scenes of physical violence, while sexuality must be carefully handled within the texts. The exploration of the category of time

in the corpus highlights the role played by the external adult author in crafting the young victim's focalization of abuse and thus controlling the number and nature of direct sexual abuse scenes witnessed by the reader. The authors appear to be mindful of the content and audience of their work and the legal constraints surrounding children's publications, and must limit their depictions of abuse accordingly, as seen in *Maman, les p'tits bateaux*, when Marie-Bénédicte's narration of her recollection of her rape ends before the full act occurs. There is thus a concern to be honest with young readers, whilst simultaneously protecting them from potentially traumatizing content. Indeed, the taboo seems to surround the depiction of sexuality itself, rather than sexual abuse per se. My identification of the authors' approach to child-abuse fiction specifically concurs with Delbrassine's findings relative to adolescent fiction more generally: authors confront difficult and emotive themes with the vulnerabilities of the young reader in mind.

It is interesting that there is a distinct lack of the term 'rape' and 'sexual assault' in the texts, apart from *Quelque chose à te dire*, where the mother describes being a former victim of 'viol' and *P'tits bateaux*, where the victim explores the meanings of the terms 'abuseur' and 'inceste'. The language is thus seemingly also censored and carefully selected alongside the abusive actions portrayed, with authors being mindful of not overwhelming young readers with the technical terms relating to child sexual abuse, focusing on the impact of its occurrence. Furthermore, there is no instance of female-perpetrated sexual abuse within the texts, and the father-daughter incest texts are, along with the male-perpetrated homosexual abuse texts, distanced from the reader by the means of retrospection and metaphorical descriptions of the abuse. Thus while the horror of abuse is made evident in the texts and through the existence of the genre more

generally, there still appear to be certain taboos which are not confronted in young teenage literature and are thus seemingly deemed to be unsuitable for young audiences. Given the relative newness of this specific genre of realist abuse fiction intended to educate and raise awareness of abuse, perhaps the taboos will lessen over time and what is not addressed in the genre currently will come to appear in future texts, as awareness of what constitutes an abuse text, through work such as my own, eases parental and professional concerns surrounding the depiction of such sensitive material in children's and teenage fiction. My work has revealed that while the theme of abuse is not necessarily congruent with what parents or teachers consider to be suitable for young readers, or of interest to them, the supposed 'adult' content can be presented carefully and tastefully for children to make them aware of the existence of child abuse, both without scaremongering and without making light of a serious issue. Furthermore, the mere existence of abuse literature for children is of great social significance; if we do not address the occurrence of abuse and rape of children in their literature, we are potentially perpetuating the secrecy that surrounds abuse and enables it to continue.

The authors' careful packaging of the abuse topic and their need to limit and omit certain aspects and scenes of child abuse in the texts has led to the deployment of a wide range of narratological and formal features across the corpus. Indeed, form and content become intertwined, particularly in the sexual abuse texts, as flashbacks, repetition and ellipsis contribute to the formal representation of the protagonists' internal turmoil. In this sense, some of the child-abuse texts could be considered to be examples of trauma fiction and my application of trauma theory in the study, and in the analysis of narratological manipulation of time, in particular, reveals how the victims' psychological distress is

expressed through the formal temporal features of the narratives. The text *P'tits bateaux* most closely resembles trauma fiction in the corpus, as the reader is frequently exposed to the abused narrator's flashbacks, and Marie-Bénédicte's difficulty in confronting and overcoming psychologically her past and contemporary experiences of abuse is foregrounded through the use of repetition and analepsis. *La Fille du canal*, however, contains the only example of intrusive repressed memories, when the formerly abused teacher is unwillingly overcome by memories of her childhood sexual abuse, resulting in the physical, bodily rejection of the memory through vomiting. Moreover, while narrating abuse, the child-abuse authors use complex and varied narrative techniques such as altering perspective and temporal frames both to respect the age of the reader, whilst simultaneously foregrounding the nature of the abuse and the victim's difficulty in processing and expressing their experiences. In *P'tits bateaux*, *Dans la gueule du vent* and *La Fille du canal* in particular, the change in perspective, temporal techniques and use of euphemism and metaphor for the abuse emphasize the victims' psychological trauma and the extent of their suffering. There appears to be a clear emphasis on aesthetic pleasure and creating enjoyable, formally interesting texts for the young audience which reflect the complexity of the issues explored.

It must be said, however, that even in the plot-oriented texts for the younger half of the age bracket, which are seemingly primarily concerned with educating readers, rather than exploring the psyche of the abused protagonist, the authors still make a variety of formal and narratological choices to engage and entertain the reader whilst serving a didactic function; this is a concern prevalent throughout the history of literature for children. In *La Frontière de sable*, for example, which is a half-way house between the more narratively and

psychologically complex texts and the more simplistic, there is adult retrospection, and the metaphors of games and a line in the sand for the sexual abuse, whilst in *Coups pour coups* there is a variety of narrative voices and perspectives intertwined which contradict one another and invite the reader to think about and question the narrative events. There is thus a clearly didactic side to the narratives, yet the presence of such a variety of literary techniques reveals not just theme-driven narratives, but challenging and formally interesting texts for young readers, in which abuse happens to be the subject matter. It is here that the other significant aspects of the authors' backgrounds and interests, identified in the Introduction, come to light alongside the pedagogical concerns: their commitment to writing, literature and reading. As it is in all literature, not just children's literature, some texts are more formally interesting and aesthetically pleasing than others.

The differences between texts with rapid plot resolution and those which explore the complexities of psychological resolution also highlight the different levels of literature for young readers, from shorter, more linguistically and structurally straightforward texts for child readers, to more complex texts on a par with adult fiction. Indeed, there appears to be a somewhat contradictory quality to some of the abuse texts; they have a close link to traditional fairy tales and childhood in their structure, or through intertextuality, which is twinned with the more adult subject matter of reliving trauma and psychological conflict. This mirrors the situation of the young-adolescent readership, in limbo between childhood and adulthood. Indeed, the limitations of the nomenclature, which I encountered at the beginning of the study, become more apparent through the close readings of the texts. The terms 'teenage fiction' or 'adolescent fiction' are often innocently used and taken as a blanket term to refer to all texts marketed at readers aged from

around eleven or twelve years upwards, yet through the detailed study of specific texts it becomes apparent that the linguistic and structural complexity of the narratives varies greatly across the corpus, as does the age of the protagonist and reader (from young child to adult) and the explicitness with which the abuse is presented.

The ways in which the narrative voice and perspective collude to 'seduce' the reader and create a sense of affinity between reader and protagonist suggest a psychological interest in reading abuse texts for teen readers who may or may not have experience of abuse: the young reader may identify with the abuse victims' more general feelings of despair and alienation from the adult world, and from their parents in particular, commonly experienced during the teen and pre-teen years. The reader's identification with an abuse victim or witness to abuse, and his or her difficult feelings and the resolution of his or her pain, may provide a sense of solidarity for the reader or offer the reader a sense of belonging or optimism with regard to their own personal troubles. There is also aesthetic and intellectual pleasure in reading a well-constructed story, which broadens the reader's horizons by dealing with sensitive subject matter with literary complexity. Whether the pleasure in reading the narratives extends to voyeuristic pleasure in spying on a distressing situation seems unlikely, particularly given the authors' depiction of the psychological turmoil of both victims and witnesses in the narratives. Indeed, in *Sophie*, the protagonist initially watches and identifies with the abusers before suffering herself and learning through her own experience, while *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *La Frontière de sable* have the distress of the witness at their core. These two examples highlight the ubiquitous depiction in the corpus of the psychological pain and damage caused by watching and discovering the abuse of

others. In some of the narratives a significant aspect of the reader experience is governed by the uncovering of the abuse secret. Indeed, the analysis of the plot structures of the corpus reveals that a core group of texts have mystery-based storylines in which the abuse of the protagonist is gradually hinted at and ultimately revealed and overcome through the course of reading. This mystery element to the plot serves as a motive for reading the abuse texts and a tool for reader engagement.

The protagonists' attempts to tell their abuse story to the reader become a significant and recurrent theme within the abuse narratives. The prologues and epilogues in *J'entends pleurer la nuit* and *La Frontière de sable* set the scene of the witnesses retrospectively sharing their story of witnessing abuse, while in *Quand je serai grande* and *Les Nouveaux Malheurs de Sophie*, the prologue reveals an adult narrator, who then begins to tell the story of her own past abuse. In *Monsieur Henry* the victim narrator at the end of the story proclaims that when she is older, she will tell her story, which invites the reader to reconsider the text he or she has just read as the victim's own creation. In *Et tu te soumettras à la loi de ton père*, the narrator addresses her father directly, albeit hypothetically, as if the text is a means of re-evaluating her childhood experiences. The self-referentiality of the narratives encourages the reader to think more closely about the language used and the final textual product created, which deepens the reader experience and also invites critical reflection on the way abuse is handled by both the narrator and the author of the texts. This presence of metafictional features and themes in the corpus also echoes the central issue of communicating abuse by protagonists and authors, highlighting the subjectivity of the writing process and the difficulties of representing abuse in adolescent fiction.

The frequent depiction in the corpus of art and literature as therapeutic aids to the victim's communication of their abuse mirrors the potential role of the child-abuse texts in the real world: tools for exploring and communicating abuse to others. While my focus throughout the thesis has been on the texts as literary creations, the issues raised surrounding the possible real-life role of the abuse narratives leads to significant and interesting questions surrounding the social and pedagogical functions of young-adolescent child-abuse fiction. There is, however, as discussed in the Introduction, a lack of research in this area and my own findings on the texts themselves pave the way for more empirical work with young readers to examine how child-abuse fiction is received by the target market and whether the fictional texts can be used in a therapeutic setting with abuse victims.

Indeed, my examination of the content and textual features of the abuse corpus may be of interest to both academic and non-academic audiences. The examination of the narratological aspects of the texts and my identification of five common categories of voice and perspective, in particular, and the similarities between the adolescent texts and adult trauma fiction in their manipulation of time to represent trauma, may be of interest to academic children's and French literature researchers, as it adds to our knowledge and understanding of the structure and formal techniques of literature for young readers. My identification of the issues handled and explorations of the ways in which they are addressed in the texts may also be of use to children's literature professionals. The study provides detailed information on the content and functions of the texts, which may enable teachers and librarians to recommend the texts to young readers and parents knowledgeably. Furthermore, my work has shown that the texts dealing with trauma and abuse present the sensitive material in a non-traumatizing and carefully

packaged manner to child readers, and I hope that this may ease some of the potential uncertainty and fear amongst parents, teachers and librarians surrounding the existence of fiction for young readers which deals with the theme of abuse. Indeed, given that the paratextual material does not always reveal the nature or extent of the content of the abuse stories, as I stated in the Introduction, the consideration of the external packaging of the abuse and its comparison with my findings on the narrative handling of abuse would be a fruitful area of further research.

The narratological methodology I have developed based upon analysing the structure of plot, voice, perspective, time and metaphor could also be usefully applied to other types of corpus, such as trauma narratives or other problem novels. This would enable the comparison of a variety of types of children's and teenage fiction to explore the similarities and differences in their basic structure and treatment of difficult topics and content: is there a sense of an overall approach or cohesion to literature for child and teenage audiences? A further development of my work would be to use its methodology to analyse the representation of child abuse in other media. Indeed, my findings that scenes of sexual abuse and rape contain more omission and ellipsis in the texts than the physical and psychological abuse, where violence and mental cruelty are frequently overtly depicted, raises interesting questions surrounding how explicitly scenes of abuse are represented to young audiences in other media as compared with literature. Given the visually direct nature of film and television, for example, are productions that target young audiences, and which confront trauma and abuse, more heavily moderated and censored, with fewer scenes of violence and further ellipsis and metaphor of sexual abuse scenes? Such enquiries could provide interesting insights into ways of

packaging sensitive material for young readers, and into the similarities and differences in the roles played by literature and printed texts, films, and television in both educating and entertaining adolescents.

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