

Towards an Ethics of Intercultural Misunderstandings

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This paper proposes that one of the striking effects of literary misunderstandings is a challenge of our truths and cognition. Such seems to be particularly true when the sense-making process of the implicit reader is touched and redirected by the uncovering of the misunderstanding. The surprise, challenge and scrutiny that follows offers an ethical potential to rethink one's own processes of reality- and truth-construction as well as one's bias and stereotypes. The article took examples from three contemporary novels – Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Wizard of the Crow, Amara Lakhous's Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio, and Patrick Chamoiseau's L'empreinte à Crusoé in order to investigate the ethical potential of literary misunderstandings that double the misunderstandings by affecting the characters in the fictional world and involving the readers in their individual acts of reading. The examples chosen allow to conclude that literary misunderstandings have indeed the potential to offer amazement and puzzling that lead to a strong offer for revision of the sense-making processes and established truths that guide the reading process as well as cognition in general.

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The following pages investigate the relation between ethics and literature by taking a short look at intercultural misunderstandings in three contemporary novels in English, French, and Italian. Arguably the relation between ethics and literature can be questioned within the fictional world, in the reading process and in the text's relation to the world. While I will focus on the first two, you are welcome to read my choice of examples as an implicit commentary on the third one.

What could ethics of misunderstanding(s) mean?

If the “concept of misunderstanding presupposes that S[ender] and H[earer] both believe their respective interpretations of the utterance function to be the same and also to be ‘correct’” (Falkner 12), the detection and correction or repair of a discrepancy can be seen as a way of applying ethics and performed negotiation of social coexistence or conviviality.¹ This seems especially true, if one follows Falkner into the “assumption that neither S nor H are ‘correct’ in their interpretations of the utterance because there is no ‘objective’ communicative content” (Falkner 3), only a negotiated one after the startling moment of detection of incongruence. Similarly, point six of Marcelo Dascal’s eight questions to be posed when analyzing misunderstandings is no question but a straight-forward suggestion proposing that “it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the ethical aspects of communication, as they emerge in the issues raised by misunderstanding.”²

But what are these ethical aspects of communication? Dascal argues that “reaching out towards the other [...] is inherent to communication qua coordinated action, and [...] essential to the ‘coming to an understanding’ it requires” (756). He discerns a minimum of “two [...] ‘duties’: the duty to make oneself understood and the duty to understand [...]. Both require from the communicators a certain amount of effort [resting] on mutual trust between responsible individuals” and not on “misuses [...] of language – as in double-talk, demagoguery, some types of advertising, and other forms of deception” (757). Therefore the analysis of misunderstandings induced by such misuses “must take into account the moral implications of manipulative practices that evade communicative responsibility [...] and jeopardize the [...] mutual respect upon which much of the social fabric depends” (Dascal 757). This argument is very much in line with Wilfried Härle’s criticism of communicational practices in contem-

¹ According to Paul Gilroy conviviality refers “to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of social life in [...] postcolonial cities [...]. Conviviality [...] introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term ‘identity’, [...] and turns attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification” (xi).

² How often does a misunderstanding occur? How often is it detected and corrected? How is it managed? What are its causes? What is the logic of misunderstanding? “It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the ethical aspects of communication.” What about the “non-standard” cases? “Finally, theories of misunderstanding should at some point exercise some measure of self-awareness and self-criticism” (cf. Dascal 795–796).

porary politics and the media as well as his counterproposal for an ethically responsible and utilitarian way of speaking. However, in his *Ethik* the German protestant theologian goes further, imagining a culture of language that would be based on speaking the right word at the right time (chapter “Das rechte Wort zur rechten Zeit”), by “speaking well of each other,” and “speaking about others as if they were present” (433–434). In view of the current power of populist demagoguery this seems sensible, but when applied to literature it could amount to censorship of production and even reception. A perspective which treasures the *Universal declaration of Human Rights* – especially “the right to freedom of thought” voiced in Article 18 and “the right to freedom of opinion and expression” stated in Article 19 – would have to consider such censorship a violation of our human rights. However and at the same time, any willful attack on peaceful conviviality would run contrary to the “spirit of brotherhood” proposed at the end of Article 1. The dilemma of the declaration and its application seem to reside in the premise of a (universal) harmonious communication situation and becomes tangible in the negotiations of the margins of freedom of thought and speech in competitive or hostile communication situations. Such views based on a speaker’s duty stand in stark opposition to the philosophical position of Emmanuel Levinas who argues that the “prendre” (taking) in the French word for understanding (“comprendre”) points towards the absorbing, comprising and grabbing aspect of the cognitive process (Levinas/Nemo 61–62).³ According to Levinas the “difference that exists in proximity, in the face-to-face relation, does not allow for indifference; instead, it suggests responsibility. Non-indifference is the basis for our humanity; it is ‘the source of all compassion’ we do not reach out to the other willfully, but are forced to do so” (Roberts 1138).

Yet even if forced to reach out and absorb, “[t]o reach an understanding [...] is [...] a matter of [...] being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer 371). Responsibility, uttermost attention, benevolence and a considerable effort to make oneself understood and to understand are needed in order to transform undetected conflicting understandings via detection and negotiation into a common understanding. As will be shown below,

³ “La connaissance a toujours été interprétée comme assimilation. Même les découvertes les plus surprenantes finissent par être absorbées, comprises, avec tout ce qu’il y a de ‘prendre’ dans le ‘comprendre’. La connaissance la plus audacieuse et lointaine ne nous met pas en communion avec le véritablement autre; elle ne remplace pas la socialité; elle est encore et toujours une solitude” (Levinas/Nemo 61–62).

ethics of *literary* misunderstandings are further complicated by strategies of narrative mediation and conventions of fictionality.

Ethics and literary misunderstanding(s)

The quarrel between Richard A. Posner, Marta C. Nussbaum and Wayne C. Booth in *Philosophy and Literature* (21.1 and 22.2) shows the difficulty and multilayered conflicts that can arise when one is repudiating or advocating an ethical stance towards literary communication and on its way conflates moralist prescriptions for literary production with similar prescriptions for the reading-process in the expectation of a moral teaching as well as with ethical descriptions of the literary communication situation. A fantasy of prescriptive moralist interventionism is impossible to appease with a descriptive investigation of possible ethical implications that concern the act of reading. Less problematic than the determination of the ethics of literature and in literature seems the assessment of the value of narration for ethics. As J. Hillis Miller argues in *The Ethics of Reading*, “[t]here is no theory of ethics [...] without storytelling” (23) and as Hubert Zapf points out, ethics need “concrete exemplification of experience in the form of stories, which allow for the imaginative transcendence of the individual self toward other selves” (853–854).

In the following I would like to argue that the performance of a literary event called misunderstanding – no individual accidental misreading, but a narrative strategy that involves the *implied reader* (Iser) – is not only a “concrete exemplification of experience,” but a form of lived experience with an ethical quality. This ethical quality concerns “Ethics as Relationship [...] between texts and readers” (Buell 6–7) and seems especially effective when it remains undetected long enough to contradict the “imaginary object” brought forth via ideation within the consecutive reading process (Iser 147–148). Whenever the misunderstanding unfolds alongside the ideation process and the allocation of information offers no advantage, the reader is involved in the misunderstanding. In such cases the element of surprise has the potential to heighten the impact of the destruction of well-established interpretation patterns.

To some this might sound like an unnecessary narrowing of the focus as literary misunderstandings are being used in comedies and tragedies to cause laughter, tears, and shock. Therefore the exposure and consequences of a misunderstanding enforces per se meta-reflections

concerning our linguistic, cognitive, social, and epistemic conviviality. This seems to imply that every literary misunderstanding surpasses the general ethics of aesthetics. However, in many such cases the spectators find themselves in possession of a comfortable *advance of information* (Pfister 41–43) and possess an oversight in comparison to the individual characters, allowing distanced pity or derision without questioning the interpretative and cognitive abilities of the perceivers. In such cases the potential for meta-reflections and a critique or even a deconstruction of discourse is remarkably smaller than in cases in which the reader has to experience an orchestrated misunderstanding. The focus will therefore be directed towards misunderstandings that undermine the *horizon of expectation* (Pfister 31; 41–42; 98) of the reader and question the reader's position and activity. If *the act of reading* is a process of sense-making that fills the blanks and connects the missing links that arise due to differences between various schemes provided by the text, then the “blanks” that “are present in the text” and “denote what is absent from the text and what must and can only be supplied by the reader's ideational activity” show an “intimate connection” between the two (Iser 216). Iser argues that this interaction is conditioned by needs for completion and needs for combination (182), the “constitution of meaning” implying “the creation of a totality emerging from interacting textual perspectives” and enabling the discovery of “an inner world of which we had hitherto not been conscious” (158).

In the case of literary misunderstandings that involve the implied reader this interaction is being highlighted, doubled and criticized by the staging of the collapse of a previous ideation and understanding. New and long discarded possibilities contradict the previously executed choices, performed ideations and projections. Thus, cognition, habitual sense-making processes, established world-views, personal attitudes and idiolects are brought to the fore and questioned even though the reader is not misinterpreting the text, but consecutively constituting meaning according to the amount of information accessible at any given moment of the reading process. Thereby the relation between reader and text as well as reader and world are up for revision.

Three textual examples

As the following pages will show, the effect that arises from a carefully managed information distribution can be heightened if the process of misunderstanding, detection and coming to a new understanding

is foreshadowed by characters or narrators. When misunderstandings within the fictional world evolve simultaneously with or are followed by the detection of an ongoing misunderstanding on the level of mediation, the analogy and the chronology add emphasis. In other words, readers who have just been offered a laugh or cry about the stupidity of one character or the other, might be uncommonly open to self-criticism when detecting their own deception and their own misunderstanding of the same, similar, or overall situation. The following examples from contemporary novels arguably do facilitate and train the renunciation from previous beliefs, convictions, or interpretations. I take my examples from texts that present the interaction of people with different cultural backgrounds as established in the fictional worlds. Not so much because “[m]isunderstandings are particularly easy to find in cross-cultural communication” (Yus Ramos 217–239), but because it is in these examples that I found the most striking attacks on the cultural presumptions, ethnocentrism and logocentrism of the implied reader.

Exposing centrisms

In an attempted “decolonization of the mind” Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o wrote *Murogi wa Kagogo* in Gĩkũyũ and translated it into English as *The Wizard of the Crow*.⁴ The novel’s playful layers and confrontations of explicit and implicit meanings as well as ideologies from different discourses offer much space for misunderstandings and their uncovering: they are a central device for comedy and satire within this work. While positive identification is provided by the titling wizard, a role shared by the protagonists Kamĩtĩ and Nyawira, all levels of government and most social strata of the fictive state Aburĩria are depicted as extremely loyal to a totalitarian ruler, highly corrupt and greedy, highly competitive amongst themselves, ideologically blinded, helplessly egocentric and power-hungry. In one instance a big part of the inner circle of tyranny travels to New York where the Ruler expects to receive Global Bank funding for his megalomaniac project Stairway to Heaven, a modern day tower of Babylon. Contrary to his many expectations, the Ruler who is literally suffering from self-inflation will only experience an unsuccessful meeting with bank officials.

⁴ “The choice of language and the use to which it is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe” (Thiong’o *Decolonising* 4).

Rumor has it that the Ruler talked nonstop for seven nights and days, seven hours, seven minutes, and seven seconds. By then the ministers had clapped so hard, they felt numb and drowsy. [...] When they became too tired to stand, they started kneeling down before the Ruler, until the whole scene looked like an assembly in prayer before the eyes of the Lord. [...] That, it is said, was the scene that confronted three messengers – white, brown, and black – from the Global Bank [...]. They did not show undue surprise, [...] because the visitors took this to be a native religious ritual. [1] They were Bank diplomats who had been trained to understand that money knew no religion, race, skin color, or gender; that money was the root of all money, the only constant law of the new global order. Still, they had been trained to be sensitive to the diversity of cultures, and so their only fear was intrusion, lest they hurt any nerves by intruding into a live religious rite. (Thiong'o 496–498)

Arguably the accumulation of the number seven at the beginning of the quote and the three with the appearance of the messengers shows a deep play with numerology that relates the novel to the sacred and ritualistic texts as used by the exaggerated hagiographic propaganda of the regime. But these three messengers bring no presents and mistake the consequences of a prolonged logorrhea of a totalitarian ruler of grotesque proportions on his loyal ministers and guards for a religious ritual. It is therefore pure luck that the Ruler's pause after his biblical flood of words coincides with their entry. Even though noted, they still have to fight for a chance to speak as the Ruler is not used to humans that do not lend him his ear and life for the time he finds fit.

The phrase *urgent message* did the trick, and the Ruler switched off. He beheld the briefcases in the hands of the three officials. These must contain the contract between the Global Bank and Aburūria. The sight of the briefcases also stirred life in the ministers. Hope was alive. The persuasive arguments of the Ruler must have moved these officials. (Thiong'o 498–499)

While the dictatorship is characterized by a constant accumulation of hyperbolas, euphemisms, ambiguities, lies, double-talk, corruption, totalitarian repressions and self-centered isolation the emissaries are traced in a few lines as exhibiting too many intercultural predispositions and anticipations, imperial bias, colonial epistemologies, a radical neoliberal ideology as well as too little questions and no cultural interest whatsoever. Furthermore, the Global Bank conceives itself in a hierarchical communication between donor and beggar. The *cultural translatiōn* (Italiano/Rössner 11–12) between the two parties fails. Under time-pressure, and without any effort of decontextualisation, the transfer of signs, meanings, and significations is imperiled even before an equally

self-centered recontextualisation eliminates the last chances of coming to a mutual understanding. Thus multiple misunderstandings are presented even though most of them remain unvoiced and partially unsolved during their conversation. Therefore, all readers who have not pledged unwavering allegiance to the Ruler of Aburiria or the Global Bank may rejoice and enjoy these undetected misunderstandings, particularly as they seem to allow for what seems impossible: an even-handed dialogue. For the reader who has witnessed nearly five-hundred pages of hyperbolic totalitarianism, clientelism, corruption, misogyny, and state terror as well as brave and creative acts of (mainly female) resistance the criticism by the donor institution can only be perceived as a superficial misinterpretation of specific incidents that tells more about the critic than about the criticized: they do not question the solicitor's applicability for funding by dismissing the grotesquely megalomaniac project proposal, but interfere directly in the interior politics of the dictatorship; by ultimately asking for even tougher political repressions the criticism does not question the status quo of totalitarian state terror.

[W]e have in our hands two reports concerning the present state of your country, and the Bank has a few questions regarding them. [1] The first concerns your women. We have heard Aburirian women have started beating up men. In our view, this is taking women's liberation too literally and too far. [...]. The second concerns this business of queuing. [...] Your women are challenging the natural order of things, even setting up what they call people's courts; and the queues challenge the social order. We don't need to remind you of the obvious: if the masses take the law into their own hands, you will have nothing but chaos on yours. Extreme democracy. Direct democracy. The Greeks of old, in the city-state of Athens, I believe, tried it, and what happened? It brought down Greek civilization. Mr. President, go back to Aburiria. Put your house in order. Then send us a memorandum addressing anything new you wish us to consider. [...] ... but please excuse us. We have another appointment," the Bank officials said [...]. [1] The Ruler was aghast that the Bank's officials would walk out without having heard his economic theories and philosophy and especially his architectural vision for *Marching to Heaven*. (Thiong'o 499–500)

Now given the possibility that the readers who did not feel offended by the critical depiction of the totalitarian power system of a fictive country may have felt sympathy with the interruption of the totalitarian flow of words by the bank officials, the critique of policies instantly caricatures any alignment with them. Arguably this criticism and subsequent leave does not only challenge the Ruler's self-awareness and world-view, but also any presuppositions that international bodies comply with the rule of international law and fully respect democracy. Thus the pungent

parody of totalitarian dictatorship is accompanied by a similarly strong parody of monetary and political institutions on the transnational and international level. Their interpretation of the situation at hand is similarly exaggerated and one-sided, their conclusions expose highly ideological positions and an authoritarian impetus. It is accompanied by an ideological stance towards history which prefers the Roman *Imperium* over the Greek *Politeia*. The Global Bank is interested in a continuation of the stable rule of money and males, fearing change in the form of radical female emancipation and radical democratic participation. The different interpretations of international hierarchies and singular events – be it the situation the messengers found in the room or the political situation in Abuñria – are not resolved. The supplicant needs to accept the misunderstanding of the donor, only the (narrating voice and the) readers are able to comprehend the multiple failure to come to a mutual understanding.

Thus, I would like to argue, this example engages with various readers' positions and perspectives in a global context. It challenges totalitarian post-colonial regimes, ridicules utilitarian stances towards intercultural communication and – via the conservatory, patriarchal as well as misogynist rationale of the Global Bank – common presuppositions as well as official claims about the guiding principles of international economic funding. While the Ruler's continued misunderstanding of his meager value outside his realm and his relapse offer comic relief, the reader can be sure that the emissaries will go on to their next appointment with their guiding principles patriarchy and stability firmly in place.

Finding one's own centeredness

The choice of literary language is similarly important for the Italo-Algerian contemporary author Amara Lakhous who states on his webpage amaralakhous.com: "I Arabise the Italian and Italianise the Arabic." His short novel *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* uses elements of the detective story, investigative interviews and personal diary writing in order to solve a murder case and the search for a missing person who is thought to be the murderer. While eleven characters testify his or her truth in first person narration, the main character is only present via eleven "ululations" or wails that consist of various diary entries that follow the different versions of truth and add his perspective on and experiences with the person interviewed.⁵ Due to this structure a polyphonic panorama of

⁵ Ululation derives from Latin and denominates a "howl or wail; a cry of lamentation" or the "action of howling or wailing" (OED).

a culturally mixed community living in an apartment building in the center of contemporary Rome is available to the reader. Two misunderstandings that arise from the absence of an authoritative narrative instance and the progressing sequence of different truths in *Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* seem instructive when thinking about ethics of misunderstanding. The first concerns the identity of the man. Due to his good language skills he is believed to be Italian. When he declares that he comes “from the South” the Romans think of Southern Italy, not of the Southern coast of the Mediterranean. Therefore, Ahmed is misunderstood to be Amed, Amede’, Amade’, or Amedeo to the puzzling of the protagonist and at least one Muslim member of this intercultural society.⁶ In the “Eight Wail” of his diary Ahmed recalls one such incidence that is worth recording:

C’è una cosa che merita d’essere ricordata: quando Sandro [il proprietario del bar Dandini] mi ha chiesto il mio nome gli ho risposto: “*Ahmed*”. Ma lui l’ha pronunciato *senza la lettera H* perché non si usa molto nella lingua italiana, e alla fine mi ha chiamato *Amede’*, che è un nome italiano e si può abbreviare con Amed. (Lakhous, *Scontro* 98, emphasis added)⁷

As this misunderstanding only comes to the fore after 100 pages, the reader has to readjust to a name behind the name that the previous informants had offered, a more complex identity behind the identity which was offered to the sense-making process. This element of surprise and correction is enhanced via the last “truth.” This is not an interview but a final resume in line with the conventions of traditional detective stories. Criminal investigator Mauro Bettarini’s conclusion has two parts that succeed each other, the second part erasing the first via additional information and further investigations. The first deduces quite plainly that Ahmed Salmi is the murderer (cf. Lakhous, *Scontro* 123), his disappearance, apparently typical for criminal foreigners, confirming his involvement (cf. Lakhous, *Scontro* 124).⁸ The second truth challenges this

⁶ Cf. “Ottavo ululato [I] Giovedì 27 marzo, ore 22.39.” Similarly Abdallah Ben Kadour asks why Ahmed lets himself be called Amadeo if he has been given a precious name shared by the prophet Mohammed (cf. Lakhous, *Scontro* 98; 111).

⁷ “Eighth Wail [I] Thursday March 27, 10:39 PM [...] Something to remember: when Sandro [the owner of the Bar Dandini] asked me my name I answered, “*Ahmed*.” But he pronounced it *without the letter ‘h,’* because ‘h’ is not used much in Italian, and in the end he called me *Amade’*, which is an Italian name and can be shortened to *Amed’*” (Lakhous/Goldstein, *Clash* 99, italics added).

⁸ “L’immigrato delinquente è abituato a cambiare nome e a falsificare la sua identità.” (Lakhous, *Scontro* 124)

conclusion as Ahmed is found in an emergency room. Turns out he is completely innocent, having been hit by a car hours before the grieving mistress of an abducted dog killed Lorenzo Manfredini, named *il Gladiatore*, a man who organizes deadly dogfights.⁹ As the investigator falls prey to xenophobe discourse and has to amend his assessment after realizing that his premise – the murderer has fled – is flawed, the absence of any spirit of brotherhood and harmonious communication situation becomes palpable. Therefore this novel arguably uses misunderstandings and their belated uncoverings in order to confront the reader with both the racism and supremacism of the Eurocentric discourse while training the readers to scrutinize their potential gullibility and convictions.

Another Crusoe changing/challenging the real Crusoe

In Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'empreinte à Crusoe* a man tells the story of his survival on a desert island in a stream of oral narration without full-stops. He has no memory about shipwreck, instead, he finds himself on a beach, wearing a sword belt with an embroidery that reads: Robinson Crusoe. According to his own account he survived and remained sane by developing from a colonial "idiot" on hostile territory (cf. 56) into a small person ("petite personne") in deep ecological and spiritual interconnection (cf. 179). The third form of being-in-the-world – after the colonial idiot and the little person of animist belief – is induced via an earthquake that unravels any remaining elements of anthropocentrism and utilitarianism that had survived the previous deconstruction of the supremacist claim over the non-human. It is out of this blank state that the deep contact of the land-artist ("artiste" cf. 218) with an irreducible island-world arises. The shaking of the earth shakes him and his relation to all living things is suddenly gone, as orientation, balance, individuation and identification have to give in to an "abruption of perception" resulting in a blank gaze that oscillates between "the infinity of its detail" and "the excess of its entirety." His winding narration without full-stop thus explains why the captain and the ship's surgeon are not listening to a man gone crazy because of solitude, but an impressive man who is nearly indifferent to the arrival of a ship (cf. 220). Yet, even though they are impressed by appearance and monologue, the captain and the surgeon know more than the

⁹ "Ahmed Salmi detto Amadeo è innocente" (Lakhous, *Scontro* 127). "Dopo lunghe ricerche Elisabetta Fabiani era riuscita a scoprire l'autore del rapimento del suo [cagnolino] Valentino, e dunque ha deciso di vendicarsi duramente [...]" (Lakhous, *Scontro* 126–127).

survivor and the readers: In fact, the author of the logbook that frames the three parts of the account turns out – after the third part – to be a slaver and his name is Robinson Crusoe. The survivor on the desert island turns out to be Ogomtemméli, Crusoe's formerly loyal slave who turned from accomplice in the trade to abolitionist revolter and had therefore been marooned. Thus, the evolution of the lonely man is offered for revision to the protagonist and the implicit reader: the amnesic island dweller misunderstood the meaning of the name on the sword belt and his colonial zeal turns out to be the result of unconscious mimicry, a white mask on black skin. While the reader needs to recompose the character culturally, phenotypically and intertextually, his sense-making and ideational activity are put into question. More tragic consequences await Ogomtemméli when he apparently recovers his memory due to the smell- and soundscape of the slave ship and detects his misunderstanding (at least partially): He tries to free the enslaved and is killed in the attempt. As the novel ends soon thereafter with Crusoe writing his famous first entry as a castaway on the *Island of Despair* the reader is not only asked to revise the imagination of the oral narrator of this post-colonial Robinsonade, but also of the original.¹⁰ After reading *L'empreinte à Crusoe*, one has to imagine Robinson as a slaver turned cast-away who has just been informed extensively on the possibilities of island life by his former slave Ogomtemméli and is either willfully choosing to continue living as a colonial idiot, or being unable to do otherwise. Furthermore it offers the possibility of imagining an altogether different Robinson Crusoe who has learned from the narrator and the equaling shipwreck.

In conclusion then, the misunderstanding of the reference of an embroidery leads to the construction of an unconsciously usurped identity that undermines colonial hierarchies and intertextual or canonical certainties while offering a new relation to the desert island trope as well as a revision of the nexus man-earth.

Conclusion

These examples lead to the conclusion that the literary performance of intercultural misunderstandings which unfolds alongside the implicit reader's sense-making and ideation process has a metafictional potential and can therefore question these processes as well as the value system

¹⁰ "En l'an de grâce 1956. [/] Je n'en sais plus la date exacte. [/] Je reprends mon journal de bord après toutes ces semaines." (Chamoiseau 231)

of the reader and her or his cultural background, thus producing not only surprise, but also a destruction of stereotypes and possibly a deconstruction of discourse. This deconstruction, I would like to propose, includes an ethical potential. But what kind of ethics can arise from rhetorical strategies that confront readers and characters with radical openness of meaning and transfer decisions of interpretation from the fictional world to the reader's cognition? Activated via the destruction of previously established truths, fueled by amazement and shock, the intercultural misunderstandings analyzed unfold their ethical potential in the ensuing meta-reflections that inform the construction of alternative significations.

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O etiki medkulturnih nesporazumov

Ključne besede: literatura in etika / medkulturnost / kulturna identiteta / implicitni bralec / kulturni nesporazum / sožitje / Ngugi wa Thiong’o / Lakhous, Amara / Chamoiseau, Patrick

Prispevek razvija tezo, da so literarni nesporazumi kognitivni izziv našemu pojmovanju resnic in imajo lahko kot taki osupljive učinke. To se dogaja zlasti tedaj, ko se razkrivanje nesporazuma dotakne implicitnega bralca in preusmeri njegov postopek osmišljanja. Presenečenje, izziv in preverjanje, ki sledijo, nudijo etični potencial za premislek o lastnih postopkih konstruiranja realnosti in resnice ter o predsodkih in stereotipih. Članek obravnava primere iz treh sodobnih romanov; to so Ngugi wa Thiong’o: *The Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Amara Lakhous: *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* (2008) in Patrick Chamoiseau: *L’empreinte à Crusoé* (2013). Raziskuje etični potencial literarnih nesporazumov, ki podvajajo nesporazume tako, da najprej vplivajo na like v fiktivnem svetu in nato pa na bralce v njihovih individualnih bralnih dejanjih. Na temelju izbranih primerov lahko sklepamo, da lahko literarni nesporazumi res potencialno zbudijo zbežnost in osuplost, ki terjata revizijo uveljavljenih resnic in postopkov osmišljanja, ki vodijo tako bralne kakor tudi kognitivne procese nasploh.

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