

Vygotsky and the notion of *perezhivanie*: what does it contribute to the reading of literary texts?

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ABSTRACT

Literature is an object of art and of culture for which Vygotsky held a most particular love. But how does it participate in the cultural development of the child? We will first draw some thoughts from the very earliest works of Vygotsky. These works demonstrate that the question of art for Vygotsky was a central concern which probably determined the subsequent course of his scientific work. We will show through data from a literature class that feeling, thinking and imagining operate in a system, but differ in make-up and intensity according to the age. In this way we hope to provide some empirical support for the basic argument Vygotsky made in his pedagogical works.

Introduction

In this paper, we invite Vygotsky into our classroom and welcome one of his central, and late arising, conceptions, *переживание* (*perezhivanie*), which we have translated into the French language as “*expérience vécue*” or “experience that has been lived over.” Although this concept is now very much in vogue and has as a result received a wide and perceptive theoretical exegesis (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2016), it seemed necessary to us to interpret it in our own way. Accordingly, we introduce the esthetic *expérience vécue* as the basis for analysis of a course in reading literature.

On the one hand, in order to render the esthetic *expérience vécue* operational, it is important to translate the term. We do not wish it to remain an exoticism susceptible to reification; we want clarification, precision, and use. On the other hand, we have found that, like most of the major concepts we find in Vygotsky, that of the esthetic *expérience vécue* is complex and cannot be interpreted except in terms of the dynamic relationship between the developing child and the milieu in which he or she deploys that *expérience vécue*.

So we begin, first of all, with a brief discussion of the context of our work. We then embark on some short theoretical reflections concerning the teaching of literature and the esthetic *expérience vécue*, and we show that this concept was indeed central to the pedagogical work of Vygotsky. Only then do we bring Vygotsky into our classroom and show how the esthetic *expérience vécue* confronts individual modes of thinking in pupils apparently replete with their own experiences and judgments. We show how esthetic experience gives rise to forms of collective thought which can transform these subjective points of view through reformulation and through the reinterpretation of signs. This takes place through the use of pupils’ words, bodies, and voices, all with the help of the teacher. Behind their understanding of signs and behind the effects of the text, over and above appropriation of knowledge, we can catch a glimpse of the construction of a personality in the process of this collective labor.

The context of our work

Our work may be fairly characterized as both descriptive and quasi-experimental. The context is an intact classroom studying two works of literature – Jean de la Fontaine’s 1668 retelling of the Aesopian fable “The Wolf and the Lamb,” a fable which is also analyzed in Vygotsky’s (1971) *Psychology of Art* (pp. 120–121) and a story by the contemporary Swiss writer Jean-Marc Lovay (1996), “The Negress and the Chief of Avalanches.”

Both texts present difficulty to the reader. In addition to its allegorical quality Fontaine’s fable is written in mid-seventeenth century French, almost as inaccessible to modern francophone school-children as Shakespeare or Milton would be to Anglophone children. Similarly, the books of Jean-Marc Lovay are notorious for syntactic complexity. According to the critic Isabelle Rüf:

“The books of Jean-Marc Lovay testify to a chaotic world, threatened by diffuse dangers, where the logical categories are no longer valid. The barriers between the human and the animal, the real and the dreamlike, the animate and the inanimate, are porous. (...) To take advantage of this unique prose, one must indulge oneself with its music, agonizing, fascinating and funny, leaving aside the demands of rationality, and allow the magic to operate. It’s the same with his diction: rough, sincere, engaging. (Rüf, 2012)”

The problems these texts present to the children are therefore non-trivial ones, potentially well beyond their actual zone of development. Indeed, these two texts have been the object of study before (see Ronveaux et al., 2013). The present study, however, introduces two theoretical aspects taken from Vygotsky’s pedological work and therefore largely untouched in the earlier study: the teaching of literature as the learning of a social technique of emotion (Vygotsky, 1971) and the unit of personality formation, particularly during the school years: esthetic *expérience vécue*.

Theoretical aspects

Literature as an object of art and culture held a particular attraction for Vygotsky during his own school years and at the outset of his career. But why did he take such an early and profound interest in it, and what did its concepts bring to his humanistic vision of human development? In two of his earliest texts – the chapter on esthetic education in the *Pedagogical Psychology* that he prepared for use in teacher training and the *Psychology of Art* which he submitted in lieu of a PhD thesis when he moved to Moscow – we can confirm that his goal was not the use of literature for the teaching of some other subject (language, morals, or even esthetics) but the enculturation of the reading subject’s emotion and imagination. This goal is not identical to the goal of “appreciating literature,” but we see no reason to consider it antithetical to it either.

Are esthetic emotions the counterpart to academic concepts?

Esthetic emotion, imagination and creativity form only one aspect of the development of the child’s personality, of which the development of a literary sensibility is only one special case. But the very same thing could be said of concepts in the development of the relationship between thinking and speech, and Vygotsky nevertheless chose to devote two chapters – by no means the least important ones – of his magnum opus *Thinking and Speech* to them. The experimental and then the descriptive examination of the development of concepts served as a special case in the development of verbal thinking. Couldn’t it be that the experimental and descriptive examination of esthetic *expérience vécue* in the classroom similarly offer us a case study in the development of artistic sensibility, as one aspect of the child’s personality?

Hofstetter and Schneuwly (2018) have pointed out that, although Vygotsky’s incomplete manuscript “Teaching on the Emotions: A historico-psychological study” has been published in French as his “theory of emotions,” it does not actually represent a well worked out theory of emotional development. The same may be said of Vygotsky’s 1930 work “Imagination and Creativity in

Childhood,” which was intended to popularize the theoretical work of others rather than articulate Vygotsky’s own views on the relationship between the teaching of literature and the cultivation of imagination. We are left, then, with Vygotsky’s pedological texts.

Esthetic expérience vécue as a unit of analysis for artistic sensibility

In the pedological texts written contemporaneously with the chapter on science concepts in *Thinking and Speech*, Vygotsky does propose a number of different “units of analysis” for various problems. Thus word meaning is proposed for the problem of establishing a developing relationship between thinking and speech. For the problem of establishing a developing relationship between the child and the social situation of development, he posits the unit of *perezhivanie*.

As a concept, *perezhivanie* has become extremely popular but remains very vague; indeed it is tempting to suggest that its popularity owes something to its vagueness (and this is one reason why in the study below we will insist on translating it as esthetic *expérience vécue*). Although Vygotsky does use *perezhivanie* in a technical sense, it is not intrinsically a technical word: in Russian, it suggests worry, care, concern, stress, suffering, being tested, ashamed, confronted or embarrassed by something, but it also has a more general and generally positive sense of overcoming, surviving and surmounting a difficulty, and it is certainly this sense that we see used in *the Psychology of Art*. It is a relationship between the internal and external which takes into account subjective emotions and tensions and confronts them with other subjective emotions as well as with objective facts.

Then could esthetic *perezhivanie* or esthetic *expérience vécue* in the classroom offer a zone of potential development through mediation comparable to that of science concepts in the classroom? has described *perezhivanie* in terms that clearly suggest it could: “A prism that refracts the unique combination of social and individual characteristics [...] and defines [...] the social situation of emotional development,” “a cultural form through which one experiences the inter-mental social relationship (the “dramatic collision”) [...] of the child. A dynamic basic unit of consciousness.” In a concrete situation, it presents the role and influence of the environment on development; behind the lived experience, development maintains a dynamic relationship with the environment, for, as Vygotsky (2018) puts it, “the child who understands the meaning of the event will react differently than the one who does not understand (p. 117)”

Esthetic *expérience vécue* is not simply the meaning of an event; it is the esthetic meaning of an esthetic event. Therefore, it seems worth consulting one non-pedological Vygotsky (1998) text, his 1930 work on the actor’s paradox (pp. 237–245). In this paper, Vygotsky considers the problem of whether an actor needs to “live” what he represents (as “method” actors are encouraged to do in Hollywood) or rather present only a polished “aping” of an idealized abstract model. Given Vygotsky’s emphasis on the meaning of experience and not simply the experience, it should come as no great surprise that Vygotsky takes a rather Brechtian view and argues that the convincing actor is indeed one who is capable of expressing an emotion which is not felt: the less one feels, the more one makes others feel. This highly dialectical approach is what we must try to operationalize in the child, who, reading, must be at one and the same time the actor and the audience.

Operationalizing esthetic expérience vécue

Vygotsky’s argument for a certain distancing suggested to us that the unit of our analysis should be not simply the esthetic reaction, but also the moments of judgment articulated by the reader. According to Gabathuler (2013), we distinguished between two degrees of judgment

- (i) Spontaneous judgments, essentially emotional, which account for first reactions of learners. These were often more idiosyncratic and individualistic rather than instances of social or shared emotion.

- (ii) More distanced judgments integrating analytical and interpretative dimensions. At this level it became difficult to distinguish between a judgment and an interpretation: explanations were given without omitting an emotional dimension.

This raised the question of how to pass from a spontaneous reaction to a true esthetic *expérience vécue*. While the uncanny, the strange and the bizarre in the text could fully leave strong traces of emotion and imagination, incomprehension of text was more likely to simply frighten the learners. Esthetic *expérience vécue* appeared to have a definite zone of proximal development: if this was exceeded, the students found themselves cut off from the possibility of over-living the esthetic experience.

“Often,” Vygotsky (1925/2005), says, “one cannot understand why one must not only allow art to produce its full effect, allow it to evoke an emotion, but also explain that, and, if possible, do so in a way that does not kill the emotion” (p. 354). We had, therefore, to consider first of all the full effect of the text on student learners. Then, in the second place, we needed to examine the mediation of the teacher, how she or he managed to explain the meanings without killing the emotions. Finally, we tried to see how emotions could be transformed or reorganized into what Vygotsky would call a true esthetic *expérience vécue*.

The spontaneous judgment

Table 1 shows the how the full effect of the text varied with the text and with the developmental age of the child, at least as far as spontaneous judgments are concerned.

The variation according to the text leaps to the eye. At a glance, we can see that the text of La Fontaine causes very few feelings regardless of the degree of schooling of students. We can see in this general picture a clear illustration of the neutralization of an emotion in the fable; the largely didacticized text has been sanitized from contradiction and from emotional dimension by explanatory principles circumscribed to ethical, thematic and referential aspects (e.g., the explicit moral and the indirect references to Louis XIV). The contradictory effects of the text in both form and substance (e.g., the elements mentioned in Vygotsky’s analysis in *Psychology of Art*) were not raised by teachers. Yet this literary dimension, these intentions, and these contradictions between form and substance are surely the very keys to the concept to be generalized. In contrast, the Lovay story seems to elicit numerous spontaneous emotional reactions both among teachers and students at all three grade levels. This text creates surprise. This text resists the traditional narrative scheme and stands in the way of a mechanical explanation of cause and effect. The points of reference of evidentiality, of well-known reality, seem to fade away and, under this highly destabilizing influence the emotional dimension appears in full force.

The table shows how “the full effect of the text” is reflected in spontaneous utterances at different grades. The criterion of the uncanny in Lovay’s text seems to be the gateway to its feeling. This uncanniness, a disconnection from the real by the literary text, replaces factual reflection with a certain emotional refraction. Of course, this uncanniness also exists in the fable, in its refracted construction of the real, for example, in the fact that the animals speak or that the lamb is condemned from the

Table 1. Spontaneous judgments according to work and age.

School Age	“bizarre” (weird)	“étrange” (strange)	“étonnant” (surprising)	Total
La Fontaine “The Wolf and the Lamb”				
Primary	23	0	0	23
Lower Secondary	13	0	0	13
Upper Secondary	3	0	0	3
Lovay “The Negress and the Chief of Avalanches”				
Primary	48	10	4	62
Lower Secondary	50	43	6	99
Upper Secondary	29	22	16	67

beginning. But here any direct reference to the real, to recognized facts (e.g., the contemporary power of Louis XIV) is discarded; with Lovay's story, it is the effect of the unknown that blows through and turns the weather vane, disturbing and intriguing, exciting curiosity and enticing further steps toward an esthetic emotion. But this sense of the uncanny can only partly explain the reactions of pupils and teachers; the various types of positive and negative reactions must also be clarified. Table 2 breaks these down in more detail.

We established four main categories in the many expressed feelings for the story. While the positive and negative reactions do not show any clear progression, the categories of uncanniness and also of coherence and realism showed a more stable tendency. Teachers and learners alike were at pains to explain their sense of estrangement, and the conflict seemed to play out in particular over the difficulty of abandoning the literal comprehension of the text in following a narratologically pre-established schema. The impossibility of doing this allowed the preservation of a tension between contradictory feelings and enabled other facets of literature. Thus we see more negative reactions in the first year of middle school, and these have to do mainly with establishing the coherence and realism of the text. Table 3 breaks down the "uncanniness" reactions from Table 2. The actual French expressions used by the learners are given in quotes, with a proximal English translation in parentheses.

We can see how the emotional reactions of the students change dramatically – no pun intended – with the age of the students. Some of the categories (e.g., emotion, to disturb, to shake/knock off balance) collapse for lack of data, but attention to reactions seems to increase markedly. Breaking down the negative reactions likewise shows a certain differentiation by age (Table 4).

Table 2. Categories of expression of feeling for the Lovay story by grade level.

Categories of expression	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Uncanniness	83	104	122
Coherence, realism, etc.	25	48	74
Negative reactions	15	26	11
More or less positive reactions	30	29	25
Total	153	207	232

Table 3. Breakdown of uncanniness responses by age level.

Uncanniness	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
"bizarre" (weird)	48	30	29
"étrange" (strange)	6	8	17
"étonnant" (shocking)	4	6	7
"surprenant" (surprising)	0	5	8
"ressentir/sentir sentiment/sensation" (to feel or to undergo a feeling)	12	39	18
"emotion" (emotion)	3	2	1
"réagir/réaction" (to react, reaction)	1	7	23
"perturber" (to perturb)	5	0	4
"déranger" (to disturb)	1	7	1
"troubler" (to trouble)	1	0	7
"déstabiliser" (to shake, to knock off balance)	0	0	1
"provoquer/provocation/provocateur" (to provoke, provocation, provocateur)	2	0	6
Total	83	104	122

Table 4. Breakdown of negative reactions by age level.

Negative reactions	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
"bête" (dumb)	1	6	1
"désagréable" (disagreeable)	0	5	3
"ennuyeux" (annoying)	9	10	2
"enerver" (irritating)	2	3	0
"choquer" (to shock)	1	1	5
"dégouter" (to disgust)	2	1	0
Total	15	26	11

Table 5. Breakdown of positive reactions by age level.

More or less positive reactions	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
"marrant" (funny)	2	2	6
"sympathique" (nice, pleasant, personable)	4	6	2
"fantastique" (fantastic)	13	9	9
"magique" (magical)	2	4	4
"subjectif" (subjective)	0	3	1
"fiction" (fiction)	0	3	0
"plaire/plaisir" (please, pleasure)	6	2	3
"amuser" (to amuse)	3	0	0
Total	30	29	25

The decline of annoyance and the rise of the value of shock seems particularly striking in Upper Secondary. Positive reactions, in contrast, do not show any such striking tendency, with the possible exception of humor ("funny") (Table 5).

How can we interpret these changes with age level? In particular, how to interpret the spike in negative reactions in lower secondary, which corresponds more or less to the crisis period at the transitional age (the Crisis at Thirteen). Around thirteen, the child has already been able to accumulate experiences onto which the imagination can be grafted. Experiences thus constitute a fertile ground for the development of the imagination, and by means of generalizing these experiences, the adolescent is able to detach himself or herself from real objects and abstract a self from them, which enables their analysis. At the same time, adolescent imagination is tugging in the opposite way, toward esthetic emotion that conceives of the text as something more than a concrete object. Yet in both cases, we must say that the central neoformation of this age is the passage from concrete thought to abstract thought.

Should we forego working on these different literary dimensions until this function reaches its maturity? Not from our point of view, but neither should we forego clarifying the object of teaching that we propose for literature class, for this is the object revealed in tasks proposed by the teacher (Schneuwly, 2001). Conceptual thinking and the deliberate use of the imagination are processes that are still immature, but which can be the subject of a zone of development. That is to say, at each stage, a generalizable understanding is possible comparable to that which is achieved through the continuation of established functions, but by means of a rupture with those functions and the exercise of a new one. This suggests that the meaning of the literature text will not be constant from the point of view of the child; it will expand during development by absorbing new content. Writing of a death in the family, or some other traumatic event, Vygotsky (2018) said, "the child who understands the meaning of the event will react differently than the one who does not understand" (p. 117). But what exactly would correspond to this change in the meaning of an event in a literature class?

Some teachers manage to direct readers' attention to potential catharsis by a detour of first impressions rather than their erasure. To overcome the subjective reactions of students, one of the tools widely used by teachers is the imagination. The spontaneous reactions of the pupils often occur during a collective work on the reformulation of Lovay's text. In this work, teachers frequently invite students to use their imagination. The reading of Lovay's news operates as a revelation of certain reading processes that are generally ignored. The evocation of the imagination thus appears as a prerequisite for an esthetic reception; imagination is a necessary instrument for transforming spontaneous reactions into experiences.

To explain the emotion in a way that does not kill the emotion

The data was rich in teacher mediations, illustrated by gestures, intonation and the various teaching devices exemplified in the extracts below. These enabled children to overcome their first impressions of incomprehension or rejection in order to establish a concrete relation with the text, understanding the world proposed

to them and eventually positioning themselves vis-à-vis the author by successive reformulations, by using their bodies and voices collectively, and above all by the spoken word. In this example, the teacher uses sound – both by drawing attention to repetitions in the text and by defining the word

Teacher: le verbe grésiller apparaît trois fois/d'accord/pour comprendre un texte difficile nous allons donc nous attacher d'abord aux mots/et ces mots-là ben s'ils reviennent souvent c'est que l'auteur y attache une certaine importance (...) donc il veut essayer de donner un message/donc pour comprendre le message on est obligé de regarder la définition d'accord/en l'occurrence je suis pas sûre que vous sachiez vous saviez que grésiller voulait dire faire que quelque chose se fronce ou produire de façon répétée des éclats intenses/on est tous d'accord que la définition qu'on connaissait du verbe grésiller/x que moi c'est la deuxième /d'accord c'est produire un bruit d'un corps qui frit

(The verb “grésiller” appears three times/OK/to understand a difficult text so we will attach ourselves first to the words/and these words, well, if they come back often it is that the author attaches a certain importance (...) so he wants to try to send you a message/so to understand the message we have to look at the definition, so/in this case I'm not sure you knew, or if you know that “grésiller” means to make something furrow or frown, or else to produce pops in rapid succession/we all agree on these known definitions of the verb “grésiller”/for me it's the second one [i.e. to produce rapid pops in succession, Trans.]/right/it's to produce the sound of a body frying).

In this example, the teacher uses guiding gestures to weave together reformulated positions and propositions by the students, validating them and encouraging them to take the floor, and then guiding the students to put the referential content at arms length and foregrounding the symbolic dimension of the story.

Sor: c'est raciste je suis sûre que c'est raciste madame

(It's racist; I am sure that it's racist, madame).

Teacher: oui mais parce que Sor tu t'imagines une négresse en tant qu'une femme noire ↓ là c'est vraiment un symbole de quelque chose il faut pas prendre ça au pied de la lettre bien sûr hein ↓ /et puis on peut quand même se dire que cette négresse c'est elle qui sauve le village est- ce-que c'est raciste je sais pas je peux pas répondre à cette question

(Yes, but because Sor you imagine to yourself that a negress is a black woman, but here it's really a symbol of something you can't just take it at its word of course, right?/ and then one can after all tell oneself that this negress, it's her who saves the village, is that racist? I don't know, I can't really answer that question).

In this example, the teacher attempts a polyphonic interpretation of the text, first approaching the text via the sonority of its words, seeking to pen a space favorable to creativity and to imagination. A collective feeling of jubilation is created by means of a collective reading with many voices. One pupil reads the whole text, while others choose words or phrases that they wish to speak aloud when the passage presents them.

Teacher: bon jusque là on s'est attaché à comprendre le texte mais peut-être que ce n'est pas forcément/la meilleure méthode d'aborder ce texte d'essayer de comprendre c'est bien de poser quelques jalons de voir un petit peu de quoi ça parle mais peut-être que finalement on peut aussi avoir une autre approche et c'est ce que j'aimerais faire avec vous maintenant j'aimerais qu'on ait une approche plus orale/et plus/déliée du souci de tout comprendre bien sûr on a vu qu'il y a des aspects absurdes aussi d'autres aspects qu'on pouvait comprendre mais est-ce que le but c'est forcément de comprendre

(good, up to here we have been trying to understand the text but maybe that's not necessarily/ the best method to approach the text to try to understand it it's good to pose a good so far we have been trying to understand the text but maybe it is not necessarily/the best method to approach this text to try might be to put in a few markers [*jalons*, literally "stakes," like the stakes used by surveyors or by mountain climbers – Trans.] to see a little bit what it's talking about but finally we can also have another approach and that's what I would like to do with you right now I would like to take a more oral approach/ and then/ to give up worrying about understanding everything, for sure we have seen that there are some absurd aspects and also some aspects that one could understand but is the goal really to understand?)

The imagination is not summoned in the same way by teachers at every age. Sometimes it is a question of appealing to mental images which orient to representations of the real; at other times, the teachers to present the text as object, but to guide the attention of the pupil to certain features and not others (the double semiotisation described by Schneuwly, 2008). As Vygotsky (1925/2005) puts it, "The real or concrete character of the story of the fable must in no way be confused with reality in the ordinary sense of the word. It is a peculiar reality, of pure convention, so to speak, a state of voluntary hallucination in which the reader places himself" (p. 166). For example, with Lovay's short story, we propose to students new conventions to escape from the "ordinary reality" and to discover the other, textual, world, proposed by the author. For this, they must accept an entry into the uncanny, the unknown, the incomprehensible, the disturbances conveyed in the first impressions.

Traces of development?

These data show the variety of mediations in the interventions of teachers, illustrated by the setting up of educational devices that emerge from ordinary reading activities. These are what allowed students to overcome their first impressions of incomprehension and rejection so as to establish an active and concrete relationship with the text, understand the imaginary world that was being proposed to them, and then to position themselves differently by successive reformulations. Using their body, their voice, collectively and especially by the word. As Wittgenstein (1958) remarked, what animates the sign, ultimately, is its use (p. 30).

How might we gauge the age-sensitive effects of these interventions? We have chosen to heed the commentary of teachers and pupils themselves. The students seemed to realize the usefulness of the didactic device proposed by the teacher to approach the texts.

Jad: j'ai aimé parce que: c'est un texte qu'on est pas habitué à lire alors on n'est pas du tout amené à faire ce genre de texte mais voilà/mais voilà moi je trouve que si on avait pas travaillé sur ça ben on xxx

(I liked it because it's a text that we were not used to reading so we weren't really ready to do this kind of thing, but there/ but there me, I found that if we hadn't worked on that, ...)

Teacher: ah voilà vous auriez pas/je voulais vous poser la question si vous aviez trouvé ça tout seul chez vous vous auriez fait quoi

(Ah, there, you wouldn't have/ I wanted to pose that question, if you had found it all by yourselves what would you have done).

Pupil: je l'aurai pas lu

(I wouldn't have read it).

Pupils: on l'aurait pas lu

(We wouldn't have read it).

Pupils: xxx

Teacher: vous auriez renoncé assez vite

(You would have given up pretty quickly).

Mig: moi je l'aurai compris

(I would have understood).

Ens: on aurait renoncé assez vite /

“We would have given up pretty quickly”).

In the classes that served as examples, teachers called on students to work alternately in written and oral mode. They gave the floor to the students, who expressed themselves on the text and through text, going from the personal word to the collective construction. They distanced the polemic concerning racism in Lovay distance by holding him at arm's length from ordinary reality. In this way they enabled another entrance into the narrative text and into its effects allying emotion and imagination through the mediation of the voice, the body, and writing.

Therefore, we may observe that the activities proposed by the teachers and the process of their unfolding form a part of the esthetic experience; they thus fulfill the conditions which establish a kind of language game that does not stand in a logical, transparent relation with the text:

- The story from Lovay destabilizes the habitual stances of students and teachers, impelling them to transcend them and find other modes of working.
- Where students bid welcome to the strangeness of the story, they develop a keen sense of being intrigued by it; they appreciate having transcended the well-known, having reached a kind of conniving understanding with the text even if sometimes they say they did not like reading it (having experienced a certain frustration at the indeterminacy of the story).
- They willingly agree to take other paths, where their reception takes a form of creative activity, playing in the register of the imaginary a game that has appropriate if unconventional rules.
- Is not the acceptance of incomprehension, like the suspension of disbelief, a sign of reflexivity and a means at each stage to generalize experiences and transcend immediate sensations, the key to an objectified esthetic emotion?

Conclusion

Let us begin this conclusion with two observations. First of all, the quantity of emotional reactions which were provoked by the “Negress and the Chief of Avalanches” leads one to think that the choice of texts likely to bring an esthetic emotion involves taking into account the contradictory feelings observed. Likewise, it shows the interest of working on resistant texts and working in just those areas of uncertainty present in the various strata of the text in terms of style as well as content. Orienting students to the imaginary helps the child with distinctions between literary texts and reality, from which follow finer distinctions subject to possible contradictions found in the reality effect of literary fiction (plausibility and implausibility) and the effects of realism (the way in which readers receive the work).

The second observation is that the summoning of imagination can serve as a tool not to create mental images of reality that we will call “representations” of the world, but to expand the reality to other worlds, including unknown, uncertain or improbable ones. Like nonsense literature for smaller children, this may

offer additional space, additional freedom, and additional play in the constraining realities of life in the construction of the personality. These detour, via games of language, can offer both progress and a kind of anchorage in the very destabilizing effects of reality, which is, of course, also notoriously unstable. Such language games offer the experience of thinking without destabilizing the formal aspect of the sign; as Wittgenstein said, this allows the distinction between certainty, belief, and knowledge. Any detour via these language games toward making better progress, or toward anchoring oneself in the very destabilizing effects of reality (which is also not stable), serves as an exemplary anchor in the destabilizing effects of reality (which has nothing stable either), exemplifying nonsense for children. As in Wittgenstein, language games are thought experiments. However, the game does not deal with the formal aspect of the sign. We distinguish certainty, belief and knowledge, for knowledge in literature does not follow from the certainty of facts but rather from the use of words in context, as Wittgenstein wrote. The game of language is, therefore a question of rules, of the learning and application of patterns, and the creation of new instructions (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 97).

The stories of Lovay seems initially to shake up the habits of pupils and of teachers, to push them to go further and to find new modalities for their work. Students accept a certain defamiliarization, staying intrigued by the story, appreciating that they are being taken beyond the familiar even if at times they conclude that they did not enjoy the experience. In all three classes, there were activities which were relevant to the construction of esthetic *expérience vécue*: both literacy and oracy, transitions from personal utterance to collective speaking. Polemics around racism were held at arm's length – enabling emotion and imagination to be put to work in relation to the text, carried out through voice, body, and writing. In this way, it appears that like thinking and speech, esthetic *expérience vécue* also knows the zone of proximal development, for a key way in which esthetic *expérience vécue* appears to develop is from spontaneity to a *distanciation* which does not kill the emotion.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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