SELF/IDENTITY AND OTHERNESS THROUGH SPECULATIVE-FICTION: RAY BRADBURY, ALL SUMMER IN A DAY

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Abstract: Spoken and written language is a phenomenon that came on earth along with the human being. It is a diversity that developed during centuries and it is also an ongoing evolution. There are so many languages on the globe but there is one thing that connects them: the fact that they are produced by the human brain and their power to express the human self, thoughts, feelings and most of his inner anxieties.

Words are associated in essays, speeches, writings such as poems or novels, but very interesting is the case of short stories. Unlike the other narrations, a short story is less extended but it comprises the depth of the message in just a few pages. Stories in general are a fascination for anyone because they approach the most touching issues through fantasy and fiction.

This paper aims to describe such a short story and to follow the way in which it reveals the identity related to the otherness. The main objectives are to explain the chronology of the story, to find its underneath striking details through the lens of speculative fiction. Not only a research for literature lovers, but also a useful reading for anyone who wants to know himself better, this study is a mirage of reality through fiction. It shows that each experience changes something within us, being it a positive or a negative one.

Keywords: identity, otherness, nature, 'speculative fiction', reality, summer, day

Speculative-fiction literature review

The term "speculative fiction" is directly associated to Robert A. Heinlein because he is among the first who used and defined it: "There are at least two principal ways to write speculative fiction--write about people, or write about gadgets [...] I will chuck the gadget story aside, dust off my hands, and confine myself to the human-interest story" (Heinlein, 1947). He prioritizes the human and his experiences. *All summer in a day* portrays exactly this aspect. The reader is lead to discover what happens to Margot.

Another important author who proposes an interesting difference between science-fiction and speculative fiction is a contemporary author, Margaret Atwood. She states that: "Science fiction, usually we think of other galaxies, other planets, other sorts of things entirely. [...]If you're interested in writing speculative fiction or even science fiction, look around you at what's happening in the world. Read some newspapers." (Atwood, n.d.). She, again, points out how speculative fiction deals much more with mundane aspects and how it is a way of becoming conscious about the real world.

The short story analyzed takes place on Venus, an entirely new space, but the subject is not about "other sorts of things entirely" (as cited previously). The subject is connected straight to the most essential aspects that psychologically define the human being. It is a very subtle study of psychological reactions of people placed in unusual circumstances.

Science-fiction as a genre is very complex and SF short stories are very much discussed by linguists and writers because they are much more complex than they may seem. *All summer in a day* appears simple and strange, but that first awe is almost disappearing: "…the author has done everything he could to make the reader feel familiar. The emotions of the characters; sadness, resentment, struggle, happiness, bliss – everything is portrayed in a very nice way without making the setting look unusual or weird" (Vishwas, 2018). The

attention of the reader is guided to track what happens with Margot, the protagonist of the story. Nature and its perception is the background of the events.

This analysis brings a new perspective regarding the understanding of the story because it shows the manifestations of the self related to the outer influential elements such as weather conditions and how these outer agents, the school community being also included here, alter the inner formation of judgments, decisions and thus identity. It is like a game of words but it depends on the reader whether he is a winner or not.

What follows is an attempt to clarify the structure, the chronology, and the essential meanings of the story. The most important part describing this research is the fact that it once again proves the complexity of language and the power of words, words that shoot like an arrow, exactly where the consciousness evolves.

About the story-the Modernist theme of identity

All Summer in a Day is a short story published by Ray Bradbury, American writer, in 1954. The first half of the 20th century is defined by Modernism in literature because the emphasis is not anymore the outer world but becomes centered on the consciousness of the human being and it tries to depict the ongoing psychological process, human thinking. Science fiction is a genre that widens the understanding of man because it appears as unrealistic stories with worlds defined by fantasy but in fact, all these stories are symbolically or metaphorically presenting issues belonging to the real world.

This is a science fiction story that takes place on Venus. The events are projected in this outer space and the most striking fact is that here "it has been raining for seven years" (Bradbury, p. 68). The main character is Margot, a girl who came to live with her parents on this planet. The reason is not clearly stated. Only the fact of her possible departure back on Earth is mentioned: "There was talk that her father and mother were taking her back to Earth […] though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars to her family" (p. 71). It is not clear whether her family accepted to come on Venus due to financial rewards or if they just enrolled in such an experiment but they also have the resources to return to their lives whenever they wanted. A thing is certain: all the other children are avoiding Margot and are treating her badly whenever they have the chance because she is different. She came from Earth and she could remember the warmth of the Sun and its shape. The others could just talk about it. On Venus, the Sun came out only once at seven years for a very short span of an hour and they were just too small to recall any memory of it. The story is about the eager awaiting of the Sun on Venus and how Margot misses the moment due to her colleagues.

The brief outline of this story raises some questions and it gives the reader the possibility to understand the meaning or the meanings. Margot is "the other" and she keeps being isolated because she is new in the already formed existing community. Someone becomes conscious of his person through education, but there are many more elements that play a major role such as the country you were born in, the family, the environment surrounding the child all through his life. Then identity becomes a term that cannot have only one definition. It is directly associated with the self, that voice that comes from the inside and it leads to action. For children, it is quite difficult to come to realize who they are and they usually tend to act according to their instincts. They react mostly as they see, as they are taught, following the rules of the society they live in.

Due to the specificity and complexity of the genre, it is necessary to highlight the elements that differentiate this SF story from other short stories. It is projected in another space, on planet Venus and it is describing a strange world but it is neither dystopian nor utopian fiction. It is created a sort of frightening atmosphere, but the emphasis is not on descriptive passages, only in so far as they are relevant for the atmosphere and especially for the psychological portrait of the characters. The dialogues between the children are the main

focus. They are bringing to surface the psychological side, therefore, the story can be classified as speculative fiction.

The story gives answers to the following main questions: What is identity? What is otherness? Which is the role of nature or how does nature influence life, be it on Earth or other planets?

All summer in a day announces the presence of nature from the very beginning. The title itself has two nouns: summer and day. Summer is a season associated with most people with holiday, warmth, sun, light, joy, and every word that has most of the time a positive image projected by the mind. A day means twenty-four hours, twelve with light and twelve with darkness, but people tend to think only of the first half because daylight marks the activities of any person: getting up, going to school, to work, practicing a sport or doing whatever implies active participation. Night is that time of the day when people rest and recharge their bodies with energy.

"All" means everyone, readers, and characters alike. So, everyone is involved in the story. The reader understands from the title the mechanisms of this writing: all the events should be put under the symbol of the summer, the sun, which occurs in one day, the day to be described in the following rows.

Having explained the title, one can lead one's thoughts to the structure. The beginning starts with a dialogue: "Ready? Ready? Now? Soon." (p. 68) and the ending is an open-meditative narration: "Behind the closet door was only silence. They unlocked the door, even more slowly, and let Margot out" (p. 74).

The content proper is dominated by arguments between children and a 3rd person narration which clarifies the reason of the issue: "the biggest crime of all was that she had come here only five years ago from Earth" (p. 71), the background of the events: "And this was the way life was forever on the planet Venus" (p. 68) and the main place of the action: "this was the schoolroom of the children of the rocket men and women who had come to a raining world to set up civilization" (p. 68).

The structure leads the attention to the characters. Margot is the main character because she is new in the classroom and she has to adapt to that society. William, one of her colleagues, is the one who judges her from the first moments and treats her according to that bad bias. The other children are not much individualized, but they act like a flock of sheep and they do what the others do. The teacher is there but her presence is a sort of ghost-like one because she does not influence the core of the events.

The community-definition; description; the role of nature

This story presents a small community living on Venus and trying to adapt their everyday life as weather conditions allow them to. This planet is quite different because rain is a daily view for the citizens. The term "community" is describing here a group of children and their teacher who guides them because the parents and all the other possible adults living on Venus are just not present in the story. Most of the events take place in their classroom at school.

It is interesting to discover that the teacher plays a secondary role. Her presence is barely noticed by the reader. The children appear as very reluctant and the explanation for all these unusual things is the weather. Nature cannot be controlled by anybody and throughout the story, one can realize how blessed one is to have the four seasons, to enjoy the green of the grass, the yellow of the sun, the blue of the sky. Those children have nothing but one season, the rainy one and even if water means life it seems that the effect is the opposite. Too much water leads to drowning, a physical drowning which causes the locking of everyone in rooms and buildings, and the psychological drowning which leads to negative attitudes and feelings. The characters allow the waters of their thinking to enter their most inner depths, producing chaos and altering their identities just because the lack of sun is associated with

lack of light, warmth, life, and love. Both light and water mean life but the core principle is balance. When there is too much water like in this case or too much heat the result is either flood or drought. This parallel is symbolical for the psychological balance necessary to man for a reconciled sense of self.

Nature is associated with air and beauty by the readers' minds but the story reveals the harsh side of it which tends to be forgotten and left somewhere in one little corner of the soul. Nature is most of the time a cure for the soul and the effect of it is the same in this story. All the rain and all the days "filled with the drum and gush of water" (p. 68) teach everyone to praise the Sun, to praise life itself and the evolution of the children is built on parallels that appear as a paradox, but they are just elements that could not exist one without the other and would not have any effect one without the other.

Subject, the role of complementary elements

The subject of the story can be identified only at the end of it. Some themes give sense to a strange story at a first read. The beginning is very important. It names the place of the action, Venus. This planet is described as wet, rainy, stormy. It comes as the opposite of Earth because the Sun is a rare phenomenon, very much expected and desired. Therefore, rain is the symbol for Venus, and Sun becomes the symbol for Earth. The places of the planets are reversed because in the real world the Earth has a predominant blue and white color and studies show that Venus is something like orange almost red. As for size, they are known to be approximately the same but the difference is that Venus is so close to the Sun and the heat is so high that it would not be bearable for a living existence.

Therefore, the imagination of the present reader is challenged because back at the beginning of the 20th century when the story appeared there was not much information about the color or the landscapes of Venus. Only later on, towards the end of the 20th century, the first real images with this planet appeared. Nonetheless, this contrast between Earth and Venus has a great visual and emotional impact. Showing that things can be different or that things change even if no one expects them to is a way of telling that who you are and what you are should not be changed by the environment. Trusting in your 'self' and being satisfied with what you have is a quality that leads to happiness. Waiting for the Sun is longing for happiness. The paradox is that it turns out from the story that it is naive and immature to place all your hopes on one fleeting moment because it cannot lead to any solid purpose, but at the same time, considering the circumstances, the event, this is a very human thing to do. It refers to a longing that is inscribed deep in human nature.

Margot vs. the others

Margot is the main character of the story because she proves not to let herself be intimidated by the others. She enjoys her memory of the warmth and tries to explain to the others what it is like but they forbid her the right to speak: "if she spoke at all her voice would be a ghost" (p. 70). She had the chance to see Earth, a chance that is her fault for the other children: "the biggest crime of all was that she had come from Earth, and she remembered the sun and the way the sun was" (71). Despite their behavior, Margot does not give up. She would not respond to their bad treatment: "Margot said nothing […] she did not move" (p. 70). She would not give up just to be like the others because she had hope, they had a purposeless hatred.

Darkness vs. light

Due to the never stopping rain children could not play outside. The solution was the underground: "the echoing tunnels of the underground city" (p. 71). All that could have been seen as artificial light and the rest was just dark. Even in the real world, when it is raining everything becomes darker and there are no clear images outside because the sky is full of clouds, the streets are grey and wet, the whole nature becomes a nest of drops. Nobody goes walking when it rains and the first feeling and thought crossing the mind is a kind of sadness

and lack of energy mostly for physical activities. Within the story, the teacher and the students talk and sing about happiness, about summer but these words are not completely understood. Things change only when the moment of real light becomes a reality. It lasts only two hours, but it is enough for them to make the difference. They feel alive for the first time: "They looked at everything and savored everything" (p. 73). Those two hours had the greatest impact on their lives. The light which meant a breath of fresh air at the surface was slowly diminished by the return of the rain. The strong contrast can be noticed at the visual level and then felt inside. What begins with laughter and excitement: "The children lay out, laughing" (p. 73) ends with disappointment: "They started to walk back toward the underground house, […] their smiles vanishing away" (p. 74).

Rain vs. drought, coldness vs. warmth

So much rain caused the unchaining of the nature: "A thousand forests had been crushed under the rain and grown up a thousand times to be crushed again" (p. 68). The air seems to be humidity and coldness. This climate produces fear and insecurity. The children need protection. They need love and light, the Sun which comes to dry their skin, to give them colors and hope and freedom. Everything is strange and mysterious and they cannot trust an outsider, Margot. She is the Sun. She comes as a new identity with new roots and other ways of thinking. Her light is covered by the darkness of the others up to the end.

Moon vs. Sun, color vs. lack of color

Throughout the story, Venus is described as the moon. It is well known that the moon appears only when the night comes and it is predominantly grey. Interesting is the fact that the characters can realize this only after the Sun appears with its light. Venus is covered by nature which "has the color of rubber and ash" (p. 73). The lack of color comes as the counterpart of the sun, which is yellow and so, the children can discover the blue of the sky. It is also known that the Sun comes out during the day. Thus, the night cannot be separated from the day because they are two halves of a whole. Venus, the moon, and Earth, the Sun, are vital elements in this story.

Identity vs. otherness, boy vs. girl

She has that extra experience that generates envy. They are supposed to be equal but the principle of equality is this time applied at the level of the community. Every community has to develop but in order to develop it has to accept new members and it has to follow open ways of thinking. Margot is new but she is misunderstood because she is different. She is "the other" because she can describe the Sun, the warmth felt on her skin and the joy that fills the soul in such moments. Her identity is associated with her origin, earthly and the one who keeps on doubting is a boy, William. He is a sort of leader for the class because he is the one who talks and acts against Margot directly: "What are you looking at? said William […] He gave her a shove" (pp. 70-71). The others seem to be in a sort of uncertainty about her and they do not dare to act by themselves. They are driven by the words of the leader: "Hey, everyone, let's put her in a closet before the teacher comes!" (p. 72). Once again the myth of superiority is quite obvious for the reader. Only because he is a boy and he is physically stronger, William challenges Margot without success: "Speak when you are spoken to" (p. 71). He identifies that different things that she can see and they cannot but this is everything that he can discover up to the appearance of the Sun.

Locking vs. unlocking

Locking Margot meant locking their fears for a moment and trying to hide their identities from the world. They lived for two hours in a dream, a dream that could be seen and felt. Then, their dream became awakening. Unlocking Margot meant the consciousness of their minds brought by the author in very real circumstances. "They could not meet each other's glances" (p. 74) due to their deed. They stole to Margot the chance to see the Sun once again. They have done a terrible thing.

The title *All summer in a day* has a great significance that is complementary to the ending of the story. The Sun is the symbol of summer and the reader is acquainted with the fact that on Venus it can be seen once at seven years. It is a unique moment and what makes it so special can be understood only in the end. The children come to realize what kind of persons they want to become and how important it is to look around, to observe that one is not alone wherever one is and that they should be careful with the other.

What defines someone as a human is his or her behaviour and decisions when things are changing and the world encounters different realities. Words are just a means of communication but the real fight is with the self, with the inner voice that generates a lot of thoughts and ideas. "All" means unity and the opposites explained above are meant to show that the world is built from halves that cannot exist one without the other: bad without good, black without white, moon without sun, dark without light, etc. These parallels are essential for the brain. A healthy evolution of a person involves both sides because having an identity means choosing one side, being entirely conscious about the existence of the other one. The structure of the story presents mostly dialogues that are supposed to highlight the evolution of the children. The ultimate silence that is present when Margot is let out drives the reader into the children's minds. Selfishness caused great damage that cannot be replaced. Margot is forever changed by that traumatic experience.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reader can choose whether Margot is accepted or not by the community. One thing is sure: a lesson has been taught to everyone. The identity proves to be something gained through education but more than that, it evolves in the best way when it meets different persons and different circumstances.

The fact that the main characters are children is a signal with encrypted message for the real reader. The message could be that children are the purpose of this life. They can be the light suppressing the darkness of all the problems as long as love, attention and careful explanations are directed towards them.

On a whole, this story is like a magic stone placed in fiction but very relevant for the 20th-century post-war reality and also for the present world. The fact that Margot was not well-received and accepted by her new colleagues marks the loss of trust in others. From a 20th-century citizens' perspective, here 'others' may refer to those who have other nationality, mother-tongue, homeland, and who fought against their countryman during the war.

When referring to contemporary society, this story marks the importance of school for children, mainly for their healthy psychological development and it presents the dangers of aggression. Nothing compares to the interaction between same-aged students within classrooms. The child's way of approaching things is shaped from the very first years of education, the community formed at school being so decisive for the future self-evolution of him or her. The sense of identity and the care towards other humans are born due to lessons learned through senses. This means experiencing and the role of the teacher was not highlighted maybe because this story is a message or a warning for parents who should be next to their children and guide them wisely, first of all through presence. Otherwise, the result is the one from the story: misjudging and unjustly harm the others. One of the main features of Modernism in terms of sustained ideas were experiencing and focusing on the individual rather than on the crowd, the purpose being the awareness of the psychological processes of man. Here, the target category was children because they represent the future civilization.

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