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'Curiouser and curiouser': Childhood Figures to Live By, in Writings in French (Lydia Flem and Philippe Forest).

Abstract

The article analyses selected writings in French by Lydia Flem and Philippe Forest, with a focus on the intertextual presence of literary figures from well-known sources, identifications with figures from imaginary worlds, and their relationship to the writing project. The authors' curiosity about the place of storytelling in understanding selves and lives extends to how literature connects with experiences that otherwise remain inaccessible, or elude conscious awareness. The formal and thematic functions of Lewis Carroll's Alice and J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan are examined in Flem's *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* and Forest's *L'Enfant éternel*. It is argued that via the perspectives of the (parental) narrators in both texts, the literary figures mobilise the creative expression of experiences of change and loss. The [re]turn to literature is not because it saves, or consoles, these writers insist; they describe the compelling and paradoxically sustaining functions of reading and writing, as they precisely fail to offer up any certain resolution. Literature's capacity to enliven curiosity about human experience means that writing *is* life; literary figures *live with* and *in* them. In a similar spirit to Deborah Levy's description of 'living autobiography', it is argued that the authors here attest to the need and desire to write in an engaged way, characteristic of a writing practice that encompasses concrete and imaginary worlds, reality and fantasy. From explorations of transition and loss, Flem's 'bébé de papier' and Forest's 'être de papier' emerge.

Key words

Lydia Flem, Philippe Forest, children's literature, Peter Pan, Alice in Wonderland, loss, curiosity, creativity.

‘Curiouser and curiouser’: Childhood Figures to Live By, in Writings in French (Lydia Flem and Philippe Forest).

‘Une enfantine curiosité nous possède. Elle porte sur les choses essentielles de la vie, de l’amour, de la mort. Je dis pour ma part: du désir et deuil. Et elle sublime du côté de l’art, de la science, de la culture’ (Philippe Forest).¹

‘La vie ne nous oblige jamais à quitter nos héros littéraires’ (Lydia Flem).²

In his recent book, *How to Live. What to Do: In Search of Ourselves and Literature* (2021), the academic and psychoanalyst Josh Cohen explores the impact of the stories we read on our sense of ourselves throughout different life stages, from early childhood to school, time spent in educational institutions, and beyond.³ He explores relationships, and managing love, loss and, ultimately, facing death. Using examples from literature (and the consulting room), Cohen illustrates the ways in which the search for meaning and understanding can emerge from the stories we read and those we (re)tell. How do fictional lives help us to understand our own? His book includes examples from memorable characters in literature in works by Lewis Carroll (Alice), Charlotte Brontë (Jane Eyre), Harper Lee (Scout Finch), James Baldwin (John Grimes), George Eliot (Dorothea Brooke), and Virginia Woolf (Mrs Dalloway), amongst others.

My focus here is on some selected writings in French by Lydia Flem and Philippe Forest that also engage with particular literary figures associated with certain stages of life, and especially childhood. These figures (Alice and Peter Pan) appear in writings that foreground change and loss. Likewise the selected authors are also curious about the place of storytelling and literature more generally, in our understanding of ourselves and our lives; and how literature offers ways to make contact with experiences that might otherwise remain inaccessible, or elude conscious awareness. These connecting threads to unconscious psychic life are discernible in their writings via references to narrative selves, often a younger self, or an imagined alter ego, or through identifications with a childhood literary figure.

In francophone Belgian author and psychoanalyst Lydia Flem’s writings, there are references to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Alice features in two of Flem’s publications: *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* (2009), and *La Reine Alice* (2011).⁴ The former is focused on the experience (for parents) of grown-up children leaving home; the latter on an anxiety-provoking and disorientating journey through diagnosis and treatment for cancer.⁵ In the former, the narrator explores the experience commonly known as the ‘empty nest’, in the context of a child growing up. The French academic, critic and author, Philippe Forest, writes about the more extreme experience of loss arising from the premature death of a child. He has written about the ways in which the death of his daughter in 1996 affected his writing trajectory, and the subject matter and style of the books that followed.⁶ Her death was the catalyst for the publication of *L’Enfant éternel* (1997), winner of the *Prix Fémina du premier roman*. In this work, selected figures from childhood, notably Peter Pan, appear, and the epigraph is taken from J. M. Barrie’s tale: ‘There were odd stories about him: as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened’. Echoes of the world of Neverland reverberate in his subsequent publications, *Toute la nuit* (1999), sub-titled ‘roman’, and his essay, *Tous les enfants sauf un* (2007), the latter title reprising Barrie’s eternal figure, the boy who never grows up.⁷

The focus of this analysis is on Flem’s *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* and Forest’s *L’Enfant éternel*. Particular to both Flem and Forest’s writings is the iterative quality of their repeated returns to Alice and Peter Pan respectively, and to the key roles they play within their imaginative landscapes. Flem’s inclusion of Alice, and Forest’s referencing of Peter Pan, appear as both thematic and structuring features of their writings. This also extends to geographical connections: just as Flem’s text brings in Oxford links, Forest’s contains connecting threads with

London, including the hospital (Great Ormond Street) where Barrie gifted the copyright to Peter Pan (EE 370).

The reimaginings (and hauntings) of these childhood literary figures in *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* and *L'Enfant éternel* intertwine well-known stories with personal experience, alongside a particular interest in the act and experience of writing itself, as a lived reality. This latter emphasis recalls Deborah Levy's description of her trilogy of autobiographical texts (*Things I Don't Want To Know*, *The Cost of Living*, and *Real Estate*), as a 'living autobiography', in its capacity to encompass wide-ranging reflections on literature and life.⁸ Levy's description of her writing as 'a depiction of life in practice' resonates for the selected authors here.⁹ I will highlight how the use of these well-known figures (Alice and Peter Pan) offers imaginative bridges for readers to engage with and reflect on their own experiences. The connections with these formative literary figures, via a 'living autobiography' practice, prompts consideration firstly, of the ways in which the English-language original works, dating from the late 19th century (for Alice) and early 20th century (for Peter Pan), and their subsequent transformations, might have inspired the likes of Flem and Forest.

There are numerous ways in which the stories and their famous characters have become known to a French-speaking audience.¹⁰ We could consider, for example, the numerous translations of Carroll's works into French.¹¹ Rickard's comparative analysis of these translations highlights a common thread in all of them, which is that, despite the many translation challenges, he argues that, 'curiosity is kept alive, the French reader is intrigued and delighted'.¹² Since then, Isabelle Nières-Chevrel has focused on the ways in which Breton and Aragon also brought Carroll's works to a French-speaking audience. She analyses the appeal of Alice, and highlights how the parallel emergence of both a child and adult readership was informed and shaped in French-speaking contexts by the Surrealists.¹³ In a series of three recorded lectures on Alice, Peter Pan and *Le Petit Prince*, delivered at the University of Nantes, Philippe Forest also considers these influences alongside other francophone contexts and connections to Barrie's texts (with reference to Maeterlinck, for example).¹⁴

More broadly, the reach of both Alice and Peter Pan has been heavily influenced by various film and other adaptations over the years. As Monique Chassagnol observes in the Preface to a co-edited study of Peter Pan:

Sans même avoir vu la pièce, lu le récit ou vu l'un des nombreux films ou comédies musicales qu'il a inspirés, on connaît Peter Pan, apparu sur la scène londonienne en 1904 [...]. Tout comme la petite Alice de Lewis Carroll, Mary Poppins de P.L. Travers, Winnie l'ourson d'A.A. Milne, Bilbo, le hobbit de J.R.R Tolkien, ou Harry Potter de J.K.Rowling, il est parmi les personnages de la littérature de jeunesse britannique devenus célèbres aux quatre coins du monde.¹⁵

Well-known adaptations include Walt Disney's film animation, *Peter Pan* (1953), and its later Disney sequel, *Return to Neverland* (2002), as well as Steven Spielberg's *Hook* (1991), P. J. Hogan's *Peter Pan* (2003), Marc Forster's *Finding Neverland* (2004), and David Lowery's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2022). Likewise for Alice, Disney presented the animated film, *Alice in Wonderland* in 1951, the same year that a French TV film was also broadcast. Numerous television adaptations have been made, including the animated film, *Alice, de l'autre côté du miroir* (2003).¹⁶ Subsequent film adaptations include the fantasy films by Tim Burton, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), and its follow up, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016). The stories remain available widely in book form via the series, *Les Grands Classiques*, published by Disney Hachette. To this survey we could add the presence of the Disneyland Paris amusement park (opened in 1992) which features the ride, 'Peter Pan's Flight' and the maze, 'Alice's Curious Labyrinth'. Finally, the publication of the Pléiade collected

works of Carroll in 1990 represents a significant moment in terms of a formal recognition of his œuvre in France.¹⁷

Thus, by taking into account the influence and reach of these iconic stories beyond Victorian and Edwardian Britain, it is possible to trace their evolving transformations and impact in France and Belgium, via film, television and *bande dessinée*. Forest has commented on the fact that J. M. Barrie is not well-known in France, yet the story of Peter Pan itself is a familiar one.¹⁸ He also notes the ways in which Carroll's writings emerged from a specific Victorian context but at the same time transcended it by dint of the mythical associations. Valerie Krips notes that Philippe Ariès had laid the foundations of thinking about the emergence of childhood as a construction, informed by family reorganisation around the child and educational changes through the 19th century, in his landmark study, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*.¹⁹ She highlights the ways in which children's literature as a genre was developing then in connection with the rise of children's formal education. She writes that, 'The scene was set for a consolidation of the imaginary child that children's literature had helped to construct'.²⁰

If UK-based readers might think nowadays of pantomime or the Disney films in relation to the story of Peter Pan, their French counterparts might have in mind the comic artist Régis Loisel's retelling of Peter Pan, published as six albums between 1990 and 2004.²¹ His graphic novels underline the transformations of these stories for an older audience, as observed by Chassagnol.²² Indeed, prior to Loisel's publication Jacqueline Rose's landmark study of Peter Pan had already opened up the whole question of readership and reach.²³ Rose argued that we should consider the genre of children's fiction to be itself a kind of fiction. Her book represented a shift in focus with an analysis that considered above all the pursuit and fulfilment of *adult* desires via the genre of children's literature. Her emphasis was on the extent to which these desires could be tracked to reveal the multiple meanings and functions of the child figure in the text. Her argument highlighted especially the extent to which the child figure served the adult's purpose, in relation to managing, or obscuring, broader realms of experience (including birth, death, sexuality, trauma, repression and the return of the repressed).

What is it about the figures of Peter Pan and Alice that proves so compelling for the narrators in Flem's *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* and Forest's *L'Enfant éternel*? Forest drew attention in his aforementioned lecture series to the adult perspective on children's literature and to the revisiting of childhood via these imaginary worlds. He refers to these literary landscapes in terms of the retrospective contours of the 'paradis perdu', and to Peter Pan as a 'figure de deuil'. Like Rose, his emphasis on the adult reader's experience, in particular relating to connections to nostalgia and melancholy, provide pertinent pointers in which to situate this analysis.

Philippe Forest and Lydia Flem's Personal, Literary Engagements: Alice, Peter Pan, Curiosity and Childhood

Gavin Bowd writes in his review of the collected volume, *Philippe Forest: une vie à écrire*, that the author 'could be considered one of the most important French practitioners of autofiction since Serge Doubrovsky', noting the particular emphasis placed by Forest on his dualistic 'roman vrai' stance, conceived by Forest in terms of 'réalisme'. Bowd's observation that Forest 'may not be an *écrivain engagé* as represented by Aragon but, [...], [he is] very much on the side of the ill and the dying', brings his encounters with death to the fore.²⁴ More specifically on this latter sombre aspect of his œuvre, Maité Snauwaert connects in her analysis of the writing life, the enduring taboo surrounding depictions of the death of a child.²⁵ She includes Forest's conceptualisation of the 'roman vrai' as part of his negotiation of this living and writing experience within her corpus of authors (Adler, Chambaz, Darrieussecq, Laurens) who all endorse the reality of 'ce constat d'une mort scandaleuse'.²⁶ At the interface of stories and histories, the figure of Peter Pan connects personal experience to the writing act.

The familiar childhood figures of Peter Pan and Alice operate as transitional, identificatory objects through which to (re)connect with selves and others via an intermediate space. These intertextual processes stage interconnected personal and public engagements. In a 2007 interview in *Le Monde*, Forest makes a direct link to committed literature when he reflects on *L'Enfant éternel*, published ten years earlier, as follows: '*L'Enfant éternel* avait été reçu comme une sorte de tombeau, alors que dans mon esprit c'était un roman engagé'.²⁷ The subsequent reference to a 'littérature révoltée' (also the title of the article), in addition to the 'roman engagé' reference, serves to reinforce such a lineage. Forest remarked: 'Il faut une littérature révoltée. Une grande partie de la littérature française d'aujourd'hui semble avoir congédié le réel'.²⁸ If this latter statement suggests Forest's affiliation to a literature anchored in reality, as 'le réel', an earlier comment in the same interview suggests that this statement might also be read with an eye to a more Lacanian understanding of 'le réel' (in relation to Lacan's conceptualisation of an early primitive space which eludes language and symbolisation, but whose longings make themselves known throughout life). Here, it is not so far to connect unconscious longings, and their influence (and impossibility), on material reality.²⁹ Forest stated in the same interview that:

Tout roman, pour moi, s'écrit implicitement ou explicitement à la première personne du singulier. Et, en même temps, ce qui me différencie des auteurs de l'autofiction, c'est que je refuse d'être considéré comme le héros de mes livres. Le 'je' est nécessaire, mais il doit se dissoudre.³⁰

When Forest refers to the refusal to be considered the hero of his books here, and to the necessity of a dissolution of the first-person, one might speculate whether intertextual strategies, such as the use of the Peter Pan figure, involve an imaginative exploration of aspects of self via an imaginary (childhood) other? The use of a fantasied *literary figure*, connected with childhood, connects the adult narrator with both external and internal worlds, with lived experience and imaginative exploration. It is this dynamic relationship of adult reader to childhood text that Rose had emphasised in her landmark study.³¹

In a different but related exploration of psychic life, the narrator of Flem's *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* refers to accessing aspects of self by connecting hitherto inaccessible preverbal early experience with later literary experiments:

Archaïque spirale émotionnelle inscrite, tapie en nous, dans cette part qui demeurera pour toujours largement mystérieuse, obscure, presque inaccessible. Notre énigme la plus secrète, enfouie en deçà des mots.

Toute une vie pour essayer de la résoudre. Pour devenir l'auteur, non pas de ses jours, mais de son propre récit. Raconter l'histoire à sa manière (CSF 33-34).

The narrator here describes the possibility to access early sensation-based experience, and suggests fleeting moments of connection with precarious but powerful spaces of fusion and/or dissolution:

Quelquefois pourtant, emportés par une musique, une voix, un trouble naît, on replonge dans ce monde archaïque; tel un derviche tourneur, le temps aboli, on s'enivre jusqu'à l'absence, jusqu'à la fusion, jusqu'à la dissolution (CSF 34-35).

Like Forest, she too links the writing act with early states, and non-states, of being.

For both authors, writing, creativity and the means to access spaces of curiosity, fantasy and play, interconnect. Forest touches on the link between a curiosity sparked in childhood and its bearing on all aspects of life, encompassing creative endeavours across the realms of art, science and culture (as the quotation from Forest's recent publication, cited at the beginning of this essay, suggests). In an interview with Karin Schwerdtner in 2020, Flem has also highlighted the importance of storytelling as a fundamental part of her life from childhood onwards.³² Flem's choice of extract

for the epigraph to *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils*, from Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé*, also foregrounds her interest in introspective processes, intertextuality and literary identifications:

Mais, pour en revenir à moi-même, je pensais plus modestement à mon livre, et ce serait même inexact que de dire en pensant à ceux qui le liraient, à mes lecteurs. Car ils ne seraient pas, comme je l'ai déjà montré, mes lecteurs, mais les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes, mon livre n'étant qu'une sorte de ces verres grossissants comme ceux que tendait à un acheteur l'opticien de Combray, mon livre, grâce auquel je leur fournirais le moyen de lire en eux-mêmes', Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé* (240), in *Flem* (CSF 7).

Proust's narrator posits that readers will become more fully readers of themselves, rather than him, via the book, comparing it to a pair of magnifying glasses which would enable them to reflect more clearly on themselves. Flem echoes this perspective when she considers the potential readers of her book: she highlights the fundamental role of curiosity in any creative enterprise. For Flem and Forest, the use of well-known childhood literary figures such as Alice and Peter Pan is suggested as a fertile source of inspiration for both author and reader alike.

Why does Alice, as potential literary heroine in particular, hold such an appeal?³³ Cohen, referenced earlier, offers an explanation by way of his own memories of Carroll's story:

No sooner was I following the White Rabbit down the hole with Alice than I knew she and I would be lifelong companions. While the adult world was sending me the message that I needed to place truth above fiction, the real above the imaginary, *Alice* was showing me that, in the words of Picasso, 'Everything we can imagine is real'.³⁴

He highlights the crucial function of stories and storytelling and suggests why certain childhood figures remain alive in our imagination: '[...] they help us reach the child still lurking in us, whose playfulness hasn't been entirely crushed by the demands of the adult world [...]'.³⁵ He also draws attention to the endless creative possibilities of play, arguing specifically that '*Alice* also draws a vivid symbolic landscape of what we might call the ordinary madness of childhood'.³⁶ Alice remains a symbol of childhood adventures allied with playfulness, daydreaming, humour, curiosity and subversion, including a challenge to adult rules and norms. These well-known stories highlight the potential enjoyment to be found from playing with words, sounds, and their meanings, or indeed, non-meanings as (non-)sense.³⁷ The figure of Alice and the image of the looking glass have also been inspirations for psychoanalysts. Ignês Sodr  uses the literary example to explore the function of disavowal in a case 'about a patient who was simultaneously attached to reality and addicted to switching into a world of unreality which protected her from delusional beliefs originating from traumatic experiences in early childhood'.³⁸ The use of the Alice stories is used to highlight the difficulties and pain involved in coming to terms with psychic reality by way of a familiar story.

The challenge to adult norms and the demands of reality also apply to the figure of Peter Pan, who embodies the rejection of the facts of life (ageing and facing mortality; accepting the existence of others, notably siblings), for an invented world in which children make up the rules.³⁹ As Forest's narrator comments:

Si elle d siraient tant partir en r ve pour le Pays Imaginaire, c'est que l'intelligence de Barrie est d'avoir invent  l  un monde o  les enfants ont raison, o  on ne leur enseigne pas   renoncer   ce qu'ils sont, o  ils vivent la vraie vie f roce de l'enfance' (*EE* 372).

These are the childhoods usually left behind through the natural, if turbulent, course of development and life events: 'We too have been there, we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more' (*Peter Pan*, cited in *EE* 60). Cohen highlights the way in which our attachment to these literary figures from childhood is potentially less connected with an overtly pedagogical function than with how they spark the imagination and set a process of discovery in

motion that is particular to each reader. He writes: 'It shows us how to live not by instruction but by the example of the generous, expansive curiosity it extends to people and things alike'.⁴⁰ We could compare this perspective with that of the likes of Louise Joy, who emphasises the extent to which children's literature functions as an escape from the disappointments and challenges of adult life, or Ignês Sodr , for whom the return to fantasy worlds may function as psychic retreat.⁴¹

Comment je me suis s par e de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils: Alice as Mirror and Guide

Cohen's reference to curiosity, and Sodr  and Joy's references to the disappointments and challenges of reality, are all fitting for analysis of Flem's *Comment je me suis s par e de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils*. In this text, the Alice stories act as the framing structure in which the narrator explores experiences of transformation, change and loss; they also incorporate the playful aspects of Alice's explorations. Each of the sixteen chapters begins with an introductory quotation from *Alice in Wonderland* or its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (followed by the French translation). These extracts include some of the most well-known scenes and descriptions from Carroll's imaginary worlds: from the giddy and disorienting experience of falling down the rabbit hole which opens the first chapter; to the many plays on words, descriptions of animals, objects and body parts changing shape, expanding and collapsing, alongside the many conversations with animals and objects (whether cats, or caterpillars, cups or playing cards).⁴² Storytelling is highlighted as a central part of human experience, with Carroll's *Alice* explicitly mentioned:

Il  tait une fois... La litt rature permet d' chapper   la vie – celle qu'on croit,   tort, la vraie – pour en inventer une autre, bien plus exaltante. Il suffit de s'engouffrer dans les pages d'un livre comme Alice dans le terrier du Lapin blanc pour que s'ouvre un monde inconnu o  les situations et les  motions les plus inattendues, les plus bouleversantes, toute la palette des passions, d filent et s'exp rimentent: peur,  tonnement, excitation, tristesse, d ception, joie, rage, r volte, d tresse, incompr hension, non-sens, doute, nostalgie, fiert ... (CSF 17-18).⁴³

Alice, 'la petite h ro ne d'Oxford', is presented as 'notre guide, notre miroir' (CSF 20), to explore and name experiences of wonder, anxiety, surprise, and self-questioning.

The narrator identifies both her daughter and herself with the figure of Alice: 'Allions-nous l'une et l'autre, comme Alice, tomber, tomber, tomber, dans un puits sans fin?' (CSF 20). Alice's self-questioning serves as a cipher for the narrator's questions about separation and identity: 'Nos questions  taient les siennes: suis-je celle que je crois  tre? qui  tais-je? qui serai-je? Suis-je la m me malgr  les transformations? [...]' (CSF 20-21). Indeed, one chapter entitled 'S paration' opens with the Alice quotation: 'I do wonder what *can* have happened to me!' (CSF 69).⁴⁴ The questioning forms part of the exploration of a particular period of transition: when her daughter leaves home to begin life as a student in Oxford. This experience of separation revives an earlier, painful memory of separation (this time the narrator from her mother) experienced as an abandonment, which further links the narrator's child self to the writing act:

Entre ma m re et moi, il y avait toujours eu la maladie, l'h pital, la douleur. J'avais essay  d' tre 'grande', d' tre 'sage', de fuir le chagrin dans la lecture, les r veries, de m'inventer un ailleurs. Demeurait une blessure, une b ance. Depuis je cherchais les mots qui feraient suture (CSF 57).

Via the Alice intertext, the threads connecting daughters and mothers, separations and transformations, weave new iterations of the narrator's experience, both as a mother, and as a daughter. A child self infused with memories and dreams is brought into contact with the narrator's lived present: 'Fille, j'ai fini de l' tre. Mais cesse-t-on jamais d' tre l'enfant de ses parents? Notre enfance s'inscrit dans nos souvenirs, nos r ves, nos choix, nos silences; elle survit en coulisses' (CSF 63).

Experiences of transition and change, linked to identity and changing roles, are also linked to the Carroll quotation, cited at the beginning of the chapter in English and followed by the French translation): 'I'm not myself you see. [...] I can't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing' (CSF 149). The emphasis on physical transformation could be suggestive of different life experiences, whether puberty, pregnancy, illness, or old age, all pertinent topoi in Flem's text.

The transition to the empty nest is analysed with parent and (grown up) child in mind, and an awareness of the different feelings the separation engenders: 'Le pays des merveilles est évidemment pour les enfants un monde sans parents, mais pour les parents est-il un monde sans enfants?' (CSF 99). Shortly after the daughter's departure, the narrator describes a telephone conversation with the doctor who alerts her to medical irregularities requiring follow-up investigations. Here, the reference to Alice links with an experience of fear of the unknown, in a chapter entitled 'Dans la mare aux larmes'. The image connects with the scene in which Alice fears drowning in her own pool of tears: 'J'avais peur, j'avais mal. Comme Alice, j'étais tombée dans un trou; j'allais me noyer dans la mare de mes larmes' (CSF 79). The presence of Alice here is used to convey an upsetting experience that threatens the sense of a secure world, and the scene captures the confrontation with uncertainty about what lies ahead.

The chapter entitled 'L'écriture du présent' opens up a further metatextual space, with a quotation from *Alice* about writing a book: 'There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one' (CSF 101). On the decision to write specifically about the separation, the narrator states:

J'y revenais pour tenter de saisir quelque chose de l'expérience que j'étais en train de vivre, des évocations, des interrogations qu'elle suscitait. Qu'est-ce que la séparation, qu'est-ce qui lie les parents aux enfants, les enfants aux parents, pourquoi cet amour se teint-t-il d'ambivalence, de conflits, de blessures narcissiques? (CSF 102).

Attempts to gather together notes and feelings are described as a chaotic and disturbing process, part of an 'écriture contaminée' (CSF 103). Neither novel nor personal journal, the closest the narrator finds to describe her newfound hybrid genre is a '*non-fiction novel*, un roman qui ne serait pas une fiction, une vérité qui serait de la littérature' (CSF 103). The writing of the text in the narrative present, the 'bébé de papier' (CSF 108), is juxtaposed with the journal kept by both parents when daughter Sophie was a baby. In essence the book demonstrates its narrator's central line of argument: 'L'art nous transforme' (CSF 19). The dynamic interconnections of the stories of Alice with the narrator's experiences strike a parallel here with Cohen's analysis, to speak to multi-layered internal and external realities, in imaginative ways. Forest's *L'Enfant éternel* has affinities with Flem's 'non-fiction novel' genre, and the exploration of figures from childhood literature and popular culture in his work is also extensive.⁴⁵ It is to his text that this analysis now turns.

***L'Enfant éternel*: Peter Pan, Endings and Beginnings**

Forest's text adopts a similar structure to Flem's narrative: each chapter of the book is prefaced by a quotation, in this case taken from Barrie's novel. The epigraph consists of an extract from the latter, and it announces Peter Pan as central figure: 'There were odd stories about him; as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened' (EE 10). Likewise the epigraph to the first chapter – 'Two is the beginning of the end' – also underpins the presence of this intertext by introducing Wendy and her thoughts as they appear at the start of Barrie's story, which begins:

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked

rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, 'Oh, why can't you remain like this for ever!' This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.⁴⁶

Wendy articulates the fact that with the passage of time usually comes separation by way of growing up, except for a few. Barrie's opening sentence, 'All children, except one, grow up' features early on in Forest's narrator's reflections on family life. It announces the central narrative, in which he and his family face the terrible knowledge that their young daughter, Pauline, will share the same fate as Peter, never to grow up, following diagnosis of a cancerous tumour. Loss is to be found at the heart of both narratives.⁴⁷

The narrator introduces his perspective on this devastating experience amidst reflections on stories and storytelling, and within the familiar frames of stories, beginnings (and endings):

Notre histoire est un conte semblable de terreur et de tendresse qui se dit à l'envers et commence par la fin: ils étaient mariés, ils vivaient heureux, ils avaient une enfant... Et tout commence encore, écoute-moi, puisqu'il était une fois... (EE 14).

In his story, the expectation of older generations being succeeded by younger ones is challenged by the fact that the parents will outlive their child, and this fact dramatically subverts a more familiar life course. The *Peter Pan* story runs in parallel with Pauline's; like Peter Pan, she is destined to remain a child who never grows up. Through *Peter Pan*, she learns about the realities of birth and death in terms of exceptions to the rule, in a way that anticipates her own unusual trajectory (EE 168), as the narrator confirms: 'Dans la vraie vie, les enfants meurent rarement. Dans les livres, l'événement est plus improbable encore' (EE 193).

In addition to Peter, there are references to Wendy, Captain Hook, the pirates, and the ticking crocodile ('le tic-tac glouton du temps' (EE 374)).⁴⁸ These intertextual references run alongside the narrator's depiction of the family's experiences of medical investigations, the diagnosis, and subsequent treatments and interventions. The latter prove to be ultimately unsuccessful and the narrator depicts his daughter's premature death in a text which highlights the upturning of expected norms. Descriptions of ordinary family routines and events – school, work, bedtimes, excursions and holidays –, take on new meaning and significance when they are juxtaposed with the increased presence, and intrusion, of hospital environments. Narratives of daily life are also interspersed with reflections on reading and writing, with thoughts and associations made to a range of authors, including Shakespeare, Zola, Hugo, Mallarmé and Joyce. There is an emphasis on these writers' capacities as parents, including of children who die young. The narrator explores literature more broadly, also precisely to examine living and dying, beginnings and endings.

References to *Peter Pan* in particular provide ways of connecting the concrete and the metaphysical to broach existential questions through a familiar *children's* story. These questions include, for example, the facing of mortality, and in particular here, the processing of the unwelcome and unexpected intrusion of death in early life:

La mort est ce par quoi nous découvrons le temps. L'anticipation de cet instant est ce par quoi prend forme sous nos yeux la conscience que nous avons d'exister. Alors, nous nous retournons et nous comprenons que c'est par la naissance que la mort est entrée déjà dans notre vie (EE 139).

These painful confrontations are broached through references to Barrie's story, not least the aforementioned crocodile with its repeated reminders of time passing. The narrator refers to the voice of the child who cries, 'L'enfant qui crie règne dans ce domaine où l'on ne grandira plus' (EE 26), in the context of Peter Pan, but also in relation to the narrator's memories of childhood. Implicit is the carving out of a symbolic child space in the text, via the reference to a fantasised eternal status

– ‘où l’on ne grandit pas’ (EE 30). The reader is invited to take in the landscape of Barrie’s island and to hold in mind both dream states and nightmares.⁴⁹ Both daughter and father connect to the imaginary figures via related stories and dreams. From Pauline’s dreams, the narrator then connects to his own: ‘Revant son rêve, je prends Pauline par la main et l’emmène jusque dans les jardins de Kensington, un peu plus loin. Là où Peter, une nuit [...] est entré [...]’ (EE 30). He links the story of Peter Pan with imaginings of other worlds. These include his own internal world which figures in the detours in the text in which he rejoins his own child self. ‘On imagine’ (EE 63), the narrator writes of his and his daughter’s storytimes as a shared experience of co-construction arising out of the familiar retellings of Neverland:

[...] Pauline nous demande [...] de lui parler du Pays Imaginaire. Elle nous demande de lui redire encore l’histoire de Peter. Nous inventons de nouveaux récits mais nous avons du mal à lui faire le portrait de l’enfant qui ne grandit pas’ (EE 151); ‘J’aime que Pauline aime celui des livres qu’il y a longtemps je préférais’ (EE 176).

As father and daughter replay scenes from the story (EE 332), Pauline chooses fearless Wendy, who is not afraid to die (‘n’a pas peur de mourir’ (EE 333)). Pauline’s identification opens up a space in which containment of anxieties, about living and dying, might be possible: ‘Pauline ne s’identifiait pas à Peter. Elle était Wendy [...]. Elle était l’enfant calme et gracieuse qui découvre, émerveillée, la farce absurde de vivre’ (EE 372). Pauline is described as becoming increasingly attached to the story of Peter Pan: ‘Pauline n’abandonne plus son livre de Peter Pan’ (EE 374). Like Cohen’s description of the significance of childhood literature, the story of Peter Pan, and the physical object of the book itself, are seen to anchor its reader through difficult moments to offer an accompanying and sustaining presence through challenging realities. The story offers both father and daughter a means to tell their own story in the company of familiar literary figures, and to make sense of their experience (EE 370). It also offers a place of collective belonging, through the precision that ‘Peter Pan appartient aux enfants malades’ (EE 370).

The passages describing family life thus foreground storytelling and imaginative space as important opportunities for connecting and making meaning (EE 194). Poignantly, from the stories of Peter, the narrator describes the emergence of his own story for Pauline as one way to attempt to capture in words an internal presence:

Il [le conte] contient en lui tous les livres que nous lisons. J’écris. L’enfant a laissé son ombre dans ma chambre. Je l’ai rangée dans le tiroir où dort le manuscrit que je sors à la nuit tombée. Elle quitte le Pays Imaginaire et vole jusqu’à moi (EE 152).⁵⁰

In the narrator’s description of Pauline’s last hours, this image of a figure in flight returns in the text to speak to the experience of transition from one realm to another, holding a narrative tension between concrete and symbolic. A shared story (referenced in the extract below through a shared ‘nous’), with its familiar narrative features, contrasts with an unknown and uncertain reality ahead. The narrator calls to the image of a guiding star in the night sky, in the face of separation, loss, and the thought of oblivion:

Rappelle-toi ce dont nos livres te parlaient à mi-voix. [...] Et ce lit est une barque de fête, glissant entre les pierres, les nénuphars, les étoiles reflétées. Je n’ai pas su trouver de lanterne qui soit à la mesure de ta nuit. Il n’y en a pas. Pardonne-moi... Alors, prends tout ce qui brille et se détache sur le fond bleu sombre de l’oubli. [...] La deuxième étoile allumée dans le ciel puis tout droit jusqu’au prochain matin... Mais que le matin est loin et incertain pour nous qui vivons cette douloureuse traversée de tristesse (EE 390).⁵¹

Following this description of a grieving process underway, the final paragraph of the book then presents a vision of both the child and a literary creation, ‘un être de papier’, whose possible

recreation through words is both affirmed and disavowed: 'J'ai fait de ma fille un être de papier. [...] Le point final est posé. J'ai rangé le livre avec les autres. Les mots ne sont d'aucun secours' (EE 399).

Ten years later, the publication of subsequent writings (*Tous les enfants sauf un*, *Le nouvel amour*, and a collection of essays entitled *Le Roman, Le Réel, et Autres Essais*), brought forth further reflections by Forest on his lived experience and its relationship to the writing project.⁵² Forest commented in this volume, *Le Roman*, that following the death of his daughter in 1996 it had taken ten years to come to understand the process of his coming to writing as both an essayist and a novelist. In the Preface, he writes:

Je n'ai le sentiment d'avoir fait aucune vraie découverte dont je puisse me prévaloir. Mais il faut un vrai travail pour *s'en revenir à l'évidence*. Je l'ai accompli pour moi mais je ne désespère pas qu'il puisse servir à autrui. En littérature comme en n'importe quel autre domaine, chacun doit refaire pour lui-même et en son nom propre la même démonstration. Elle le reconduit devant la vérité à laquelle l'appelle *l'expérience partagée de l'impossible* qui inexplicablement exige à chaque fois d'être dite. C'est fait [my emphasis].⁵³

Forest emphasises here, as he does in the aforementioned lines from the last section of *L'Enfant éternel*, the importance of a shared experience with the reader, and of an impossible endeavour, one which is never fully satisfied. This implication of the reader in a shared experience is a recurring feature in Forest's writing, as is his conviction that although literature cannot cure, it remains necessary all the same. In *L'Enfant éternel* the narrator expresses this sentiment with specific reference to the loss of his child. Again, there is a challenge to the assumption that literature necessarily carries a redemptive function:

La poésie ne sauve pas. Elle tue quand elle prétend sauver. Elle fait mourir à nouveau l'enfant quand elle consent à son cadavre, prétendant pouvoir la ressusciter sur la page. Les mots n'ont de pouvoir véritable qu'à condition de mettre à nu leur fondamentale impuissance à réparer quoi que ce soit du désastre du monde (EE 219).⁵⁴

Forest also returned to these ideas in the publication, *Après tout*, in which he restated his scepticism about any reparative function associated with literature:

La doxa d'aujourd'hui nous dit que la littérature est là pour réparer le monde, réparer les vivants, soigner les plaies, sécher les pleurs. Elle a tort! [...] Pour moi, la littérature n'est pas là pour réparer la réalité mais pour porter témoignage de la part d'irréparable, d'irréparable que comporte l'existence et à laquelle il nous faut rester fidèles si nous voulons demeurer humains.⁵⁵

Writing, he argues, emerges from an experience of longing, and literature cannot save by offering any final definitive satisfaction:

On écrit toujours avec le désir de trouver le dernier mot et c'est parce que ce dernier mot manque et manquera sans fin que l'on recommence. [...] Quelque chose cloche que l'on voudrait changer – tout en sachant bien sûr que l'on n'y parviendra pas.⁵⁶

In the aforementioned 2007 interview in *Le Monde*, 'Il faut une littérature révoltée', Forest had also captured this state of affairs: if literature could cure, you would only write one book and then move on:

Je crois que la littérature ne sauve pas. Elle est un des modes possibles de la survie pour un individu qui traverse une épreuve. On écrit pour se souvenir et ne pas oublier. [...] Vous savez, si la littérature avait des vertus vraiment thérapeutiques, on écrirait un livre et puis après on passerait à autre chose.⁵⁷

Flem's 'bébé de papier' and Forest's 'être de papier'

In Flem's and Forest's selected writings, the narrators explore their experiences as parents, as well as remembering and examining their child selves. These various encounters open up imaginative spaces that emerge through their repeated engagements with Alice and Peter (for example, via the stories they read with their children, and those they remember reading when they were children). The harnessing of a creative curiosity produces texts in which the childhood literary figures, and the stories with which they are associated, provide a means to engage with longing, loss and grief. Psychoanalytically-oriented studies by the likes of Josh Cohen and Jacqueline Rose help to flag up the dynamic tensions between the adult and child perspectives. These might include, for example, the different ways in which the adult narrators find inspiration through the literary figures of Alice and Peter Pan. For Lydia Flem, as we have seen, literature and living are intimately interlinked; memories come alive through the act of reading, understood as a dialogue with absent significant others, as she confirmed in an interview with Karin Schwerdtner: 'Lire une histoire, c'est un peu comme découvrir de vieilles correspondances: c'est dialoguer avec des absents qui sont tout de même encore présents, par leurs mots et leur écriture'.⁵⁸

From these experiences, Flem's 'bébé de papier' and Forest's 'être de papier' emerge. In a process similar to Freud's *après coup*, an experience in which events are reviewed retrospectively and through a belated process, new insights are gained, and hitherto unknown connections can be made between childhood, literary figures and familiar stories, and the self who (re)turns to writing. Via imaginative writing, it is possible to find out, belatedly, in the *après coup*, what you didn't (consciously) know you knew. As Forest observed in one of the quotations cited earlier: 'Mais il faut un vrai travail pour s'en revenir à l'évidence' [my emphasis].⁵⁹ Forest alludes here to the required resources necessary for the task. The quality of perseverance that is demanded for the business of writing is further echoed in a comment from an essay in *Le Roman, Le Réel, et Autres Essais*:

Chacun écrit le roman de sa vie et, devant l'irréversible, ce roman – sans rédemption ou rémission, ni parole de pardon ni parole de salut –, je l'imagine à la manière d'une sorte d'accommodement ému et amusé avec l'impossible, un encouragement ironique à persévérer encore un peu parmi les mots.⁶⁰

In this quotation, his wry observation highlights a hopefulness associated with the paradoxically impossible task he describes. Likewise, towards the end of Flem's *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils*, the narrator's reference to experiences of farewells and departures also includes the prospect of possible new beginnings: 'Pivoter sur soi-même, faire demi-tour. Mettre un pied devant l'autre. Poursuivre. Commencer' (CSF 169). From the concrete experience described a more symbolic meaning could also be inferred which speaks to the process of beginnings, endings, and new beginnings, of the writing project, and to the repeated returns to childhood figures more generally. Flem and Forest explore the possibilities and inherent limits of literature understood as consolation, alongside a paradoxical acknowledgement of the creative project as a valued, necessary, aspect of living.⁶¹ Against the background of a critique of a normative 'travail de deuil' which Forest equates to an unquestioned received idea, he presents his own understanding of the novel's capacity to express something of the human condition in terms of grief and loss. Referring to *L'Enfant éternel* specifically, he writes:

A cette superstition triomphante, le roman oppose comme une contre-parole [...]: dans le cas de mon premier livre, cette contre-parole est une parole enfantine qui [...] fait entendre ses ressources d'innocence et d'ironie, de révolte et de poésie: aux mythes qui la condamnent, la petite fille de *L'Enfant éternel* oppose ses propres fables façonnées à partir d'un folklore puéril, féeries où la souffrance et l'angoisse viennent se dire dans les mots des contes. Cette parole d'enfance guérit-elle? Non, elle ne guérit pas. Elle laisse juste opérer sur

l'horreur un charme de tendresse et de douceur, provisoire et mélancolique. À la fois, cette parole se tait. Et c'est son silence même qui détermine l'écriture du roman, en un geste de transmission par lequel c'est tout l'horizon généalogique qui se trouve paradoxalement renversé, *la parole paternelle* venant prendre la suite de la parole enfantine afin de ne pas consentir tout à fait à ce silence auquel elle se rend [my emphasis].⁶²

The 'parole enfantine' is presented as a key figurative and symbolic space within the writing project, offering the possibility for the generation of words as well as allowing a space for silence, against which a 'parole paternelle' finds voice. The process is shadowed by Rose's reminder of the place of the adult's memory and desire. This analysis has sought to bring into focus, for both authors here, the place of the childhood literary figure in informing, enlivening and enriching that process of dialogue and transmission.

The [re]turn to literature, in particular here via the childhood literary figures of Alice and Peter Pan, is not because it saves, or consoles, these writers insist; they each describe the compelling and paradoxically sustaining functions of reading and writing, as they precisely fail to offer up any certain resolution; literature's capacity to sustain a curiosity about human experience means that writing, for these writers, *is* life; literary figures *live with* and *in* us. In a similar spirit to Deborah Levy's 'living autobiography', the authors here attest in their autobiographically-inspired works to the need and desire to write in an engaged way, characteristic of a writing practice that encompasses both concrete and imaginary worlds, reality and fantasy, and which promotes new spaces for the universal experiences of transition and loss to be expressed.⁶³

¹ *Après tout*, Philippe Forest avec Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: PUF, 2021), p. 10.

² 'Sur le divan. Dernière séance' (1992), Lydia Flem website: <<https://lydia-flem.com/2015/12/27/sur-le-divan>> [accessed June 2021]. In this short text, a narrator recounts the last session of a long psychoanalytic treatment. Reference is made to the enduring appeal of fictional characters from childhood reading, and to the lifelong attachment that figures from childhood might hold.

³ Josh Cohen, *How to Live. What to Do: In Search of Ourselves and Literature* (London: Ebury, 2021).

⁴ *Comment je me suis séparée de ma fille et de mon quasi-fils* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), hereafter *CSF*, and *La Reine Alice* (Paris: Seuil, 2011). For analysis of the latter, see Valérie Dusailant-Fernandes, 'Le cancer au pays d'Alice: Lydia Flem et son conte à ne pas mourir debout', *Interférences littéraires*, 18 (mai 2016), 251-267, and Karin Schwerdtner, 'Lydia Flem: "L'imagination est ma seule maison". Entretien autour des lettres (et) objets', *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada*, 13 (2020), 1-9.

⁵ A book of photographs, entitled *Journal implicite* (La Martinière: Maison européenne de la Photographie, 2013), complements *La Reine Alice* in terms of the subject matter, with further emphasis on visual perspectives via photo montages.

⁶ Three fairly recent French-language publications present an overview of Forest's œuvre to date: Maïté Snauwaert, *Philippe Forest, la littérature à contretemps* (Nantes: Éditions nouvelles Cécile Defaut, 2012); Sophie Jaussi, *Philippe Forest, l'autre côté du savoir* (Paris: Kimé, 2022); and the publication arising out of the 2016 Paris conference proceedings, *Philippe Forest: une vie à écrire*, ed. by Aurélie Foglia, Catherine Mayaux, Anne-Gaëlle Saliot and Laurent Zimmermann. *Les Cahiers de la NRF* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018). See also the series of interviews by Jacques Henric and Anne-Gaëlle Saliot, *Philippe Forest* (Paris: Artpress, 2016).

⁷ *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, was first produced and staged as a play in 1904 at the Duke of York's Theatre, London (and first published by Penguin in book form as *Peter Pan* in 1928). Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* was first published in 1865, followed by *Through the Looking Glass* in 1871.

⁸ In these works she explores art, philosophy, identity and relationships. Discussions of literature intersect with the more concrete details of lived realities, including experiences of change and loss. See her reference to 'living autobiography' in *The Guardian* interview with Lisa Allardice, 'The New Generation of Young Women Can Change the World', 7 April 2018, accessible via the Guardian website: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/07/deborah-levy-memoir-interview-cost-of-living>> [Accessed 17 January 2022].

⁹ Sam Parker, 'Deborah Levy on the Art of Living', Penguin Books website, 14 May 2021: <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2021/may/deborah-levy-real-estate-living-autobiography-interview.html>> [accessed 18 March 2022].

- ¹⁰ Nathalie Prince analyses in more detail the question of transmediation of children's literature across languages, genre conventions and cultural/academic contexts, in 'Introduction', *La Littérature de jeunesse en question(s)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009), pp. 9-24.
- ¹¹ See Peter Rickard, 'Alice in France or Can Lewis Carroll Be Translated?', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 12, 1 (1975), 45-66.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ¹³ Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, 'Alice dans la mythologie surréaliste', in *Lewis Carroll et les mythologies de l'enfance*, ed. by Pascale Renaud-Grosbras, Lawrence Gasquet, Sophie Marret (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), pp. 153-65.
- ¹⁴ Lecture series on the theme of childhood entitled, 'L'enfance et son imaginaire'. See Philippe Forest, 'Autour de Lewis Carroll', Recorded lecture, University of Nantes, 16 January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72-wePCKHJs> [accessed 6 August 2022]; Philippe Forest, 'Autour du Peter Pan de James Barrie', Recorded lecture, University of Nantes, 5 February 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zgQmedGanI> [accessed 6 August 2022].
- ¹⁵ Monique Chassagnol, Nathalie Prince, Isabelle Cani, *Peter Pan, figure mythique* (Éditions Autremets, 2010), p. 6. The genre called 'littérature de jeunesse' in French contexts has been increasingly studied within an academic context. See, for example, *Stories for Children, Histories of Childhood. Vol. II*, ed. by Rosie Findlay and Sébastien Salbayre (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2007); *La Littérature de jeunesse en question(s)*, op. cit.; and Nathalie Prince and Sylvie Servoise, *Les personnages mythiques dans la littérature de jeunesse* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015). In Jutta Fortin's *Camille Laurens, le kaléidoscope d'une écriture hantée* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2017), she connects the imagery of Barrie's Peter Pan as eternal child, to Forest's novel and the writings of Laurens, focusing on *Philippe* (Paris: POL, 1995) and *Romance nerveuse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).
- ¹⁶ *Alice, de l'autre côté du miroir* (2003), directed by Dominique Debar, produced by Storimages.
- ¹⁷ Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Gattégno with Véronique Béghain, Alexandre Révérend and Jean-Pierre Richard (Paris: Gallimard Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1990). Note also the more recent publication on Lewis Carroll, *Lewis Carroll et les mythologies de l'enfance*, op. cit.
- ¹⁸ Philippe Forest, 'Autour du Peter Pan de James Barrie', Recorded lecture, op. cit.
- ¹⁹ Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1973 [1960]), in Valerie Krips, 'Imaginary Childhoods: Memory and Children's Literature', *Critical Quarterly*, 39, 3 (1997), 42-50.
- ²⁰ Krips, *ibid.*, p. 44.
- ²¹ Régis Loisel, *Peter Pan*, 6 vols. (Issy-les-Moulineaux: Vents d'Ouest, 1990-2004). See also the recent interview with Nathalie Prince and Régis Loisel on the Radio France programme, 'Les ombres de Peter Pan', Radio France, 14 February 2021 <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/barbartruc/les-ombres-de-peter-pan-1901900> [accessed 8 August 2022].
- ²² See Chassagnol, 'Le dieu et l'oiseau: Peter Pan dans tous ses états', in *La Littérature de jeunesse en question(s)*, op. cit., p. 112.
- ²³ See Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984). The critical literature in English on the significance of childhood literary figures also includes the following: Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Daniel Hahn's 2nd edition of the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Kiera Vaclavik, *Fashioning Alice: The Career of Lewis Carroll's Icon, 1860-1901* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
- ²⁴ Gavin Bowd, Review of *Philippe Forest: une vie à écrire*, op. cit., in *French studies*, 73, 1 (2019), 144-145 (p. 145).
- ²⁵ Maïté Snauwaert, 'D'une infamie l'autre: la mort de l'enfant en régime de fiction', *Captures* (2019), 4, 1, 1-16. Snauwaert notes Forest's earlier research on the representation of the figure of the dead child in his study, *Le Roman infanticide: Dostoïevski, Faulkner, Camus. Essais sur la littérature et le deuil* (Nantes: Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2010), cited in Snauwaert, *ibid.*, p. 13.
- ²⁶ Maïté Snauwaert, *ibid.*, p. 1.
- ²⁷ Philippe Forest, 'Il faut une littérature révoltée', Interview with Franck Nouchi, *Le Monde*, 8th March 2007, p. 12: <https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/08/philippe-forest-il-faut-une-litterature-revoltee_880518_3260.html> [accessed 8 February 2022].
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Lacan describes the relationship between three states, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. Dylan Evans presents a brief summary of Lacan's tripartite structure as follows: 'It is not until 1953 that Lacan

elevates the real to the status of a fundamental category of psychoanalytic theory; the real is henceforth one of the three ORDERS according to which all psychoanalytic phenomena may be described, the other two being the symbolic order and the imaginary order; '[...] the real emerges as that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolisation', in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 162-63.

³⁰ Philippe Forest, 'Il faut une littérature révoltée', op. cit., p. 12.

³¹ Rose precisely challenges the idea of 'children's literature as something self-contained' in order to examine the interconnecting impact of historical, social and cultural narratives, and the display (and concealment) of child and adult perspectives, *The Case of Peter Pan*, op. cit., p. 143.

³² Karin Schwerdtner, 'Lydia Flem: "L'imagination est ma seule maison"', op. cit., p. 1.

³³ Flem also draws upon other characters from well-known stories including Goldilocks, Little Red Riding Hood, Tom Thumb, Hansel and Gretel, Ali Baba and Scheherazade from the *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

³⁴ Cohen, *How to Live*, op. cit., p. 2.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁷ This enduring appeal of Alice is confirmed by the recent exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum in London. The exhibition ran from 22 May to 31 December 2021. See website link: <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/alice-curiouser-and-curiouser>> [accessed 17 June 2021].

³⁸ Ignês Sodr , 'Through the Looking Glass: On Trauma and Unreality', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 100, 6 (2019), 1171-1183 (p. 1171).

³⁹ See the National Trust for Scotland website entry on J. M. Barrie: <<https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/a-glimpse-into-the-life-of-j-m-barrie>> [accessed 7 March 2022]. Barrie, the ninth of ten children, experienced the loss of his older brother when he was six. In later life and he and his wife would become guardians to the five boys of the Llewelyn Davies family after their parents died. These losses informed his creation of the Peter Pan story.

⁴⁰ Cohen, *How to Live*, op. cit., p. 337.

⁴¹ See Louise Joy, 'Children's literature: an escape from the adult world', 24 September 2011, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/childrens-literature-an-escape-from-the-adult-world> [accessed 30 August 2022]. See also her study, *Literature's Children: The Critical Child and the Art of Idealization* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁴² See, for example, *CSF*, p. 61, p. 89.

⁴³ See also, on storytelling, *CSF*, pp. 103-5.

⁴⁴ The narrator also muses on the etymology of the word 's paration' in relation to 'parent' (chapter 6).

⁴⁵ Note also the references to Casimir and the French children's TV programme *L' le aux enfants*, an adaptation inspired by the American show *Sesame Street* (*EE* 180).

⁴⁶ *Peter Pan* (London: Penguin Classics, 2018; first published 1928), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Monique Chassagnol notes that Barrie's life history involved the death of his older brother, and that his story of Peter Pan would remain infused with death by way of multiple motifs and events, including the originating experience of abandonment for Peter of his mother, upon the arrival of a younger brother. See 'De l'enfant mort   l' ternel enfant. L'histoire sans fin de J.M. Barrie', in *Stories for Children, Histories of Childhood*, op. cit., pp. 353-67 (p. 353).

⁴⁸ See further references to the ticking clock (*EE* 75, 128, 166). Carroll's Mad Hatter also provides a link to the theme of time, its relentless nature and the desire to have control over its passing.

⁴⁹ Dreams that connect the narrator to his own childhood landscapes are described (*EE* 247).

⁵⁰ See also the reference to a dream in which he carries his daughter downstairs, and registers her embrace. At this moment he articulates a feeling of belonging and presence: 'Me tenant   la rampe, la portant, je l'emm ne avec moi' (*EE* 399).

⁵¹ The image of the stars also appears in the context of the medical environment, with its 'clignotement fou d' toiles des appareils' (*EE* 391).

⁵² *Le Roman, Le R el, et Autres Essais* (Nantes: Editions C cile Default, 2007); *Tous les enfants sauf un* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

⁵³ *Le Roman, Le R el, et Autres Essais*, ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁴ See also the reference: 'Ecrire ne rend pas la vie aux morts, ne les fait pas se dresser hors des tombes ouvertes' (*EE* 229).

⁵⁵ *Apr s tout*, with Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: PUF, 2021), p. 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁷ 'Il faut une littérature révoltée', op. cit., p. 12. See also Forest's comments in *Après tout: 'On écrit parce que quelque chose manque au monde'*, op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁸ Karin Schwerdtner, 'Lydia Flem: L'imagination est ma seule maison', op. cit., p. 6.

⁵⁹ *Le Roman, Le Réel, et Autres Essais*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶⁰ 'Le Roman entre Irrédimable et Irrémissible', in Part III, 'Douceur et douleur', *Le Roman, Le Réel, et Autres Essais*, ibid., pp. 221-231 (p. 232).

⁶¹ Lydia Flem has also written about moments in her life when she has turned to images, rather than words, for self-expression: 'Quand, dépossédée de tout, je me sens hors du monde, anéantie [...], alors je n'aspire ni à la parole ni à l'écriture, mais seulement à la composition d'images', *La Reine Alice* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), p. 160.

⁶² 'Le Roman entre Irrédimable et Irrémissible', op. cit., pp. 226-27.

⁶³ See also the commentary by Forest in his lecture series, op. cit., on the creation of the Alice and Peter Pan books in relation to their authors' lives and relationships (in particular, ways in which to consider the potentially problematic dynamics) with the uses of sublimation, seduction and subversion of relationships in operation through their respective writings.