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Introduction

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# Character Migration in Anglophone Literature

## Introduction

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- 1 This collection of essays is part of an ongoing project dealing with the elusive question of the ending or, as Frank Kermode once put it, “*the sense of an ending*” (our italics) in literary texts. Following on from two previous studies on *Happy Endings* and the *Unfinished*,<sup>1</sup> the aim is now to deal with these characters that “live on” beyond the endings written by their authors and who overstep the limits of the work in which they were created.
- 2 “Characters migrate,” Umberto Eco famously wrote, explaining that some characters (by no means all of them<sup>2</sup>) leave the text in which they were “born” to migrate to a space in a universe which is very difficult to delineate. Thus Little Red Riding-Hood, d’Artagnan, Ulysses or, as Nick Tucker makes abundantly clear in his article<sup>3</sup>, Sherlock Holmes, “become individuals with a life apart from their original scores” and “even those who have never read the archetypal score can claim to make true statements about them.” (9) They have become “true for the collective imagination because over the course of centuries we have made emotional investments in them” (10). However, in Eco’s view, some form of fixity is the condition for these migrating characters who then become “role models for our life” (10) whether we have actually read their stories or not. It is because of what they are that they migrate and this migration is significant. They are invested by collective memory because they migrate unchanged. The same fixity is implied in the postmodern novel studied by Brian McHale, where character transposition is a writing strategy: borrowing a character is used for breaking the realist framework and highlighting the intertextual dimension of a text (McHale 57). For Eco and McHale, these migrations do not – and must not – alter the literary entities since their very characteristics, known by everyone (Sherlock’s briar pipe and deer-stalker hat, for example<sup>4</sup>), inform the text and/or the reader of the values attached to the character. Undeniably, as Uri Margolin tells us, taking the example of Faust or Don Juan, “such stereotypes are based on a set core of properties ascribed to the figure in all

the works in which it occurs and considered essential to it.” (70) But the fact is that in the contemporary English-speaking novel that foregrounds intertextuality and often takes up pre-existing figures, characters may evolve as they migrate from one text to the other and a number of them do.<sup>5</sup> The topic of this collection is precisely this: to examine the modes and means of the transformation when a fictional character is revisited or rewritten. This process has been studied at length in francophone studies, notably by Richard Saint-Gelais who in his critical essay *Fictions transfuges. La transfictionnalité et ses enjeux* (2011) termed it “transfictionality.”<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the scholars and critics above-mentioned, Saint-Gelais however considers as we do that transformation is a feature of migration.<sup>7</sup>

- 3 Our purpose here is not only to propose a different set of wide-ranging case studies of character migrations, but also to provide a reflexive theoretical background to the phenomenon. In the opening essay of this collection, “Neo-Characterization in the Neo-Victorian Novel,” Georges Letissier establishes the centrality of the concept of character in the novels known as “neo-Victorian,” which encompass “contemporary fiction set in the nineteenth century, or that which mimics the Victorian novel.” (Carroll 172) Laura Hadley, remarking on the ever-growing popularity of this kind of fiction, both among the critics and the reading public, previously noted that “the sense that characters in Victorian novels have, in some way, an existence beyond the confines of the novel spurs the desire for adaptation and sequels of classic Victorian texts.” (Hadley 32) Georges Letissier concentrates however on texts set in the Victorian period that attempt not to develop or prolong the lives of existing fictional figures but “which desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, new histories of sexuality, post-colonial viewpoints and other generally ‘different’ versions of the Victorian.” (Llewellyn 165) If the choice of characters is unorthodox, Georges Letissier observes that the manner in which they are depicted is not and his paper aims “to establish the centrality of character as crucial to the definition of the neo-Victorian novel.” (infra) To do so, he offers a survey of neo-Victorian characters, with a special emphasis on Will Self’s reprisal of Wilde’s hero in *Dorian*. In “Dans le creux de l’écrit se crée la créature,” Sophie Barrère for her part makes use of psychoanalytical constructs, and in particular Derrida’s “signature” and “differance” and Freud’s “*Unheimlich*,” to examine in depth the phenomenon of recurring characters. Using as a testing ground the works of Bret Easton Ellis and *The Book With No Name* by “Anonymous,” she endeavours to question the writing process itself as well as the complex relationship between the author, the (unreliable) narrator, who is also often the recurring character, and the reader.
- 4 Detective fiction as a genre and sleuth characters in particular seem to call for rewritings, perhaps because detective stories are at heart studies of human behaviour and motivation in general. Isn’t Oedipus after all the first literary detective? Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes is undoubtedly one of the most enduring examples of a migrating character, with over two thousand re-creations so far. Such is the magnitude of the phenomenon that Richard Saint-Gelais created the neologism “holmesology” to account for it.<sup>8</sup> In his article “Character Migration: The Case of Sherlock Holmes,” Nick Tucker offers a taxonomy of holmesology, dividing the rewrites into four categories, for even if “common to all re-writers is the desire to write a gripping, self-contained detective story involving ingenious twists and examples of Holmes’s amazing skill at deducing facts from clues invisible to anyone else,” (Tucker *supra*) each nonetheless develops particular aspects of Holmes according to his or her own main interests.

Detective fiction is also a staple of television programmes. In “The Sleuth’s Migrations in Recent British and American series (2000-2014),” Dominique Sipièrè, instead of focusing on one specific character like Sherlock Holmes, proposes his own typology of the television detective, and examines the migrations of the ever-present figure of the Sleuth in recent TV series on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Using as a theoretical tool the rhetorical figure of *antanaclasis* (the same word or name pointing to a different referent, as in the sentence “the King is dead, long live the King,” or as in “Lewis,” who is both Morse’s sergeant in the *Inspector Morse* series and then the hero of his own eponymous series), he propounds a more general definition of the television sleuth’s migrations based on functions, status and expected events.

- 5 Going back to literature, character migration features in numerous autographic texts. In France, Balzac with *La Comédie Humaine* and Zola with the *Rougon-Macquart* saga, or James Fenimore Cooper in the United States with his *Leatherstocking Tales*, are typical examples of nineteenth century writers whose reappearing characters bind together otherwise unconnected novels and short-stories. The phenomenon may be marginal, as is the case for Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp, the main protagonists in *Changing Places*, who reappear in a minor role in *Small World, a Romance* and *Nice Work* by David Lodge. It may contribute to a larger portrait as some characters move from the foreground to the background or vice versa as in Jane Gardam’s *Old Filth* trilogy, where each character of a trio becomes the hero of his or her own narrative in a different volume,<sup>9</sup> providing very relevant examples of Richard Saint-Gelais’s category of non-hypertextual transfixions.<sup>10</sup> Migrant characters can also appear in another text by the same author at another stage of their fictional lives, like Federica Potter in the universe invented by A. S. Byatt in her tetralogy.<sup>11</sup> Such is also the case of a number of Munro heroines. The appearance and reappearance of Del Jordan in Alice Munro’s second collection of stories – often marketed as a novel – exemplifies, Jacob Hovind tells us, Munro’s disruptive narrative strategies. In “The Uses and the Limits of the Short Story: The Function of Character Migration in Alice Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women: Making and Losing Connections*,” Jacob Hovind shows that Del “living on” from one story to another problematises the question of the epiphany, presented as a staple feature of the genre of the short story. In these early stories, closure brings about the expected sudden clarity of vision and understanding but this very finality is dismantled by the fact that Del migrates to another story. Likewise, in the collection *Runaway*, Christine Lorre-Johnston purports to look at character migration through the prism of a later short story cycle by Munro, where the protagonist named Juliet appears in three different stories. Christine Lorre-Johnston notably examines how the form of the trilogy definitely informs and structures the Juliet stories considered as a whole. When following migrating Juliet through different ages of life and confronted to different characters in her female lineage, the reader is invited to establish connections and meaning between the stories yet the absence of a narrative voice supporting these connections leaves the text open to interpretation.
- 6 According to Gérard Genette, the function of sequels is to exploit the success of a work often considered as complete when it was first published, and to set it going again with new episodes (*Palimpsestes* 223). Even though, as critic Mark Lawson noted, “the carry-on factory” has been going on since at least the seventeenth century,<sup>12</sup> sequels (as well as prequels and coquels) to the adventures of a famous character take up endless pages of contemporary novels. Emma Tennant, for one, seems to specialise in all sorts of sequels and even in sequels of sequels.<sup>13</sup> All the sub-genres of the novel are concerned,

from children's literature, with for example Geraldine McCaughrean's *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006), marketed as the official sequel to J. M. Barrie's 1911 *Peter and Wendy*, to detective fiction with the late crime-writer P.D. James, whose last published work is *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011). In an interview, she explains with unexpected literary naivety as she falls prey to character fallacy<sup>14</sup> why she decided to write yet another sequel to such a famous novel as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: "When we finish a well-loved book it is inevitable that we want to know more and learn something of what happens to the characters who have become as familiar to us as real people." (James 45) Mark Lawson puts forward a less sentimental and more realistic explanation to the phenomenon: "the justifications for the genre have remained fairly constant since the seventeenth century: demand and finance. Readers and theatre-goers often make more investment in a particular person or plot-line than the creator is willing (boredom, other ideas) or able (death) to pay out. Commercial canniness is also an important factor." (Lawson n.p.) In "Daphné du Maurier's characters in *Rebecca* living on in *Mrs de Winter* by Susan Hill," Armelle Parey, using the theoretical framework of transfictionality, suggests other, less worldly, explanations. While tracing the relationship of Hill's sequel to du Maurier's original text, she touches on the balance between homage and novelty in sequels, the centrality of the characters of hypotexts to any sequel, and the process through which an author might choose which aspects of the original text to develop or use as jumping-off points. For Armelle Parey, Hill's choice not to fill in the gaps created in *Rebecca* results in a certain subservience to the original. In that particular case as, unfortunately, in many others, Chantal Zabus' assertion that "the sequel is generally understood as 'coming after' an original (in time), 'coming second' in quality" (Zabus 194) proves to be true. Some characters have a particularly rich afterlife and go on evolving within and without their own narrative universes both in autographic and allographic texts. Mrs Dalloway is yet another good instance of this kind of transfictional (in Saint Gelais' definition of the term) character, as Monica Latham shows in "Clarissa Dalloway's itinerary: narrative identity across texts." After tracing the itinerary of Mrs Dalloway within Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, Monica Latham chooses to focus on two contemporary novels: first, the 1999 novella *Mr Dalloway* by Robin Lippincott, who considers his text as a creative response to Woolf's story; then the more complex and to a large extent more problematic case of John Lanchester's *Mr Phillips* (2000). Indeed, Clarissa Dalloway is neither explicitly or implicitly mentioned nor even alluded to in his text. In the absence of any textual reference to its illustrious predecessor, can it be considered as another example of character migration? It seems that the limits of a recognisable migration of a clearly identifiable character are reached in this novel.

- 7 Filmic adaptations of literary works is another way in which characters migrate from page to screen and, most of the time, much wider audiences who have not necessarily read the book they originate from. Within the framework of this intermedial praxis, as director Patricia Rozema said in an interview about her *Mansfield Park*, "interpretation is impossible to avoid. It must be openly declared by the filmmaker (writer and director) but 'imposing meaning' is impossible to avoid." (Moussa 256) Directors and screenwriters however do not always acknowledge their own particular reading of the novels they are adapting, as Isabelle Roblin points out in "Run, Forrest, run! ... or not? The Remarkable Migration of Forrest Gump from Winston Groom's 1986 Novel to Robert Zemeckis' 1994 Film." Given that, when filmed, the characters' literary entity is necessarily altered to fit in with the technical and financial requirements of the new

medium, changes are bound to happen, but in the case of *Forrest Gump* Isabelle Roblin shows that these alterations were quite extreme, and that the nice, kind, Candide-like idiot of the film is radically different from the Forrest of the novel, as is his childhood sweetheart Jenny. She also offers potential explanations for the identified changes made by director Robert Zemeckis and screenwriter Eric Roth to the endings of the film and the novel, which differ considerably, the bitter-sweet and conventional filmic closure (after all, there is a wedding) fundamentally departing from the rather sad, open ending of the picaresque novel. In recent years, another force has emerged, challenging directors, producers and screenwriters' so far fairly exclusive hold on the treatment of filmic or televised adaptations and their characters: fandoms. Fandoms encourage ordinary people to create content based on their favourite characters and design an alternative narrative or universe for them. In "Fanpower and Characters' Migration," Maria Dicieanu provides insight on the ways in which the new social medias (blogs, forums, etc.) – to a certain extent – enable readers and viewers to dictate the way in which characters and their stories are adapted from one medium to another. In his 2000 essay, Umberto Eco was already aware of the phenomenon: "on the internet you can find programs that let you write stories as a group, joining in narratives whose denouement one can change at infinitum," (11) he writes, but while he acknowledges that "hypertextual narrative has much to teach us about freedom and creativity," for him they cannot replace the true educational function of literature: "the function of 'unchangeable' stories is precisely this: against all our desires to change destiny, they make tangible the impossibility of changing it," and "one of the principle functions of literature lies in these lessons about fate and death." (14-15)

- 8 This collection of essays examines the ways in which characters migrate, with or without major transformations, within the same medium from one allographic or autographic novel or short-story to another, or to a different medium altogether (cinema, television). But what about the numerous ones (the vast majority in fact) who do *not* migrate and sometimes consequently fall into oblivion? In "Fiction's afterlives: Character Migration and Reading Memory," Ivan Callus considers the *non*-migration of characters across literary and paraliterary texts and contexts and examines some of these characters who, having failed to effect any kind of migration, eventually fall away from our individual and collective reading memory. He then reflects on the relevance of our concern with literary character in an age dominated by talk about avatars and digital platforms, in an effort to bring together questions concerning reading memory, literary character, and fictions' afterlives. Those characters who have migrated bear witness to the extraordinary plasticity of the various forms of story-telling as well as the readers' and the spectators' inexhaustible "need to know the outcome" and "desire to know more" (Jacob and Apple ix) about their favourite characters' fate.

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## NOTES

1. A. Parey, I. Roblin and D. Sipièrre (eds.), *Happy Endings and Films*, Paris: Houdiard, 2010; A. Parey and I. Roblin (eds.), *Literary Happy Endings, Closure for Sunny Imaginations*, Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2012; F. Gallix, A. Parey and I. Roblin (eds.), *L'Inachevé ou l'ère des possibles dans la littérature anglophone, récits ouverts et incomplets*, Caen : Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2014.
2. See below Ivan Callus' article on non-migrating characters.
3. See below, in "Character Migration : The Case of Sherlock Holmes".
4. Nick Tucker however points out "that the image of Holmes began to migrate from the original text at the point at which it was first illustrated" (see supra).

5. We are not the first ones to divert Eco's words from their original meaning: David Lloyd Jones used the same words as epigraph to his novel *Mister Pip* (2006) in which the character created by Dickens is definitely transformed.
  6. "Le phénomène par lequel au moins deux textes, du même auteur ou non, se rapportent conjointement à une même fiction, que ce soit par reprise de personnages, prolongement d'une intrigue préalable ou partage d'univers fictionnel" (7).
  7. "La transfictionnalité, une relation de migration (avec la modification qui en résulte immanquablement) de données diégétiques" (Saint-Gelais 10-11).
  8. "L'holmésologie [...] consiste à faire des récits de Conan Doyle le point de départ d'un jeu sophistiqué qui multiplie les inférences, les corrélations et les tentatives d'établissement d'une continuité diégétique entre les textes composant la série" (462).
  9. The main protagonist in *Old Filth* becomes secondary in *The Man in the Wooden Hat* that takes the vantage point of his wife while *Last Friends* tends to focus on the thirst character, the other two receding in the background.
  10. "Une série est clairement transfictionnelle sans que l'on puisse dire du premier épisode qu'il serait l'hypotexte dont tous les autres seraient dérivés" (10). The fact that one can or cannot trace a hierarchy of precedence between hypotext and hypertext is for Saint Gelais the main difference between Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextuality and his own transfictionality.
  11. *The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, Babel Tower and A Whistling Woman*
  12. He mentions for example that in 1633, *The Taming of the Shrew*, "Shakespeare's story of the subjugation of the feisty Kate by the opportunistic Petruchio was performed at court alongside *The Woman's Prize or the Tamer* by John Fletcher, in which the widowed Petruchio remarries and suffers from his second wife a mirroring of the domination he imposed on the first." (Lawson, n.p). Chantal Zabus also mentions *The Virgin Queen* (1797) by Francis Godolphin ("a reputedly bad dramatist"), subtitled "A Sequel to Shakespeare's *Tempest*." (Zabus 194, our italics)
  13. See for instance her *Pemberley, or Pride and Prejudice Continued* (1993), followed by *An Unequal Marriage, Or, Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later* (1995).
  14. In the first article of this collection, Georges Letissier classically defines character fallacy as "the confusion between real life people and fictional constructs" (*supra*).
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## INDEX

**Keywords:** Eco, Saint-Gelais, transfictional characters, sequels, neo-Victorianism, cinematic and TV adaptations, fanfiction, transfiction

**Mots-clés:** Eco, Saint-Gelais, personnages transfictionaux, suites, neo-victorianisme, adaptations cinématographiques et télévisuelles, fanfiction, transfiction

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