



DOI: 10.22363/2312-9220-2024-29-4-664-672

EDN: QCHUDY

UDC 821.112.2

Research article / Научная статья

Magic as a tool to build rapport with new environment: *Herr Röslein* trilogy by Silke Lambeck

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Abstract. The paper investigates how a literary character adapts to a new context in the debut trilogy of the German writer Silke Lambeck (*Herr Röslein*, 2007; *Herr Röslein kommt zurück*, 2008; *Wo bleibt Herr Röslein?* 2010). The aim is to look into the ways the child-character establishes rapport with the new environment backed by a wizard and his magical power and to define the distinctive features of the wizard and his young pupil. The analysis acknowledges that magic plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts and helps characters navigate and adapt to new foreign spaces and societies. Real life in the novels is not displaced by a fantasy world; the magician character just empowers others to become more confident in their own strength. A special focus is made on the process of Mr. Leopold Rosette's magic powers transformation. In the third book the wizard's responsibility to settle conflicts is passed on the child character Moritz. This makes magical powers modification: from now on magic is found in kind and courageous acts of the rescuer or wise decisions of the psychologist. Magic itself as seen by the child appears as an amazing and at the same time frightening thing. Yet, magic does not serve as the main reference point in the surrounding world but rather performs a supporting function.

Keywords: magic, wizard, child-character, social adjustment, one's own – other – alien, building rapport.

Conflicts of interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

Article history: submitted August 5, 2024; revised September 20, 2024; accepted October 1, 2024.

For citation: Krasovickaya, Yu.V. (2024). Magic as a Key to Build Rapport with New Environment: *Herr Röslein* trilogy by Silke Lambeck. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, 29(4), 664–672. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2024-29-4-664-672>

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Волшебство как ключ к освоению окружающего мира литературным героем: «Трилогия о господине Розочке» З. Ламбек

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Аннотация. Рассматривается проблема адаптации литературного героя в новом для себя пространстве и окружении в дебютной трилогии немецкой писательницы Зильке Ламбек «Господин Розочка», «Господин Розочка возвращается», «Куда пропал господин Розочка?» (*Herr Röslein*, 2007; *Herr Röslein kommt zurück*, 2008; *Wo bleibt Herr Röslein?* 2010). Цель – анализ взаимодействия литературного героя-ребенка с окружающим миром при помощи волшебства и при содействии волшебника. Задача – выделить характерные черты образов волшебника и его юного «подопечного». Доказывается общий тезис о том, что волшебство помогает решать конфликты и «осваивать» чужое неизведанное пространство и общество. На примере анализируемого материала формулируется следующее наблюдение: подмены реальной действительности не происходит, герой-волшебник лишь помогает другим персонажам поверить в собственные силы. Отдельное внимание уделяется рассмотрению процесса трансформации магических способностей чародея (господина Леопольда Розочки). В третьей книге, например, обязанности волшебника разрешать конфликты передаются герою-ребенку (Морицу). Этому сопутствует видоизменение магических сил: отныне они могут рассматриваться как доброта и храбрость спасателя или мудрость психолога. Герой-ребенок расценивает волшебство как удивительный и одновременно пугающий элемент. Оно не становится основным ориентиром в окружающем мире, но выполняет второстепенную вспомогательную функцию.

Ключевые слова: жанр, миромоделирование, волшебник, герой-ребенок, социализация, свой – иной – чужой, художественный конфликт

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 5 августа 2024 г.; отрецензирована 20 сентября 2024 г.; принята к публикации 1 октября 2024 г.

Для цитирования: Красовицкая Ю.В. Волшебство как ключ к освоению окружающего мира литературным героем: «Трилогия о господине Розочке» З. Ламбек // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Литературоведение. Журналистика. 2024. Т. 29. № 4. С. 664–672. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2024-29-4-664-672>

Introduction

Arrival of the debut trilogy by Silke Lambeck (born 1964): *Herr Röslein*, 2007; *Herr Röslein kommt zurück*, 2008; *Wo bleibt Herr Röslein*, 2010 became the highlight on the German children's literature landscape. The author builds in the trilogy a blend of the magical and the mundane enveloped in subtle psychological analysis.

Over the last 15 years these books have been translated into different languages and won the Prix Chronos Award. Yet, despite readers' growing interest, the books have received little attention from literary critics.

Magic in S. Lambeck's books makes the stories more exciting and appealing to children. But there are many more functions magic performs. Belief in magic forces comes to life in stressful situations which people have to adjust to ... it works in our mental space as a defense mechanism (Bairamova, Enikolopov, 2021, p. 5). Interest in magic and magical practice stems from reluctance or inability to handle problems with conventional means (Lobova, Titkova, 2015, p. 199). Remarkably, semantics of the words "magical", "fairy" is apparently motivating and positive (Zinkevich-Evstigneeva, 1998, p. 13).

The questions of to what extent magic contributes to conflict resolution, building rapport with an alien environment and whether it helps literary characters find their place in life deserve special attention.

The process of adaptation to a new environment might be really painful for a child. This is the problem the protagonist of the trilogy – eight-year-old Moritz – faces with. Attempts to find where he stands and what he is after result in encounters with new people and controversial situations. Internal and external conflicts arise, both implicit and explicit; the protagonist has to discriminate between my own and alien. The idea of other might serve as an intermediary link in this row. The books by S. Lambeck show how even a bit of magic (not always, which is important!) brings these categories closer, transforming hostility into compromise, preparing the character to accept the alien and get a chance to assimilate (Krasovitskaya, 2022, p. 6).

To clear up what is meant here, I will specify the major concepts. The process of self-identification materializes through perception of the other (person) (Neverovich, 2016, p. 35). The other does not pose a risk for the existence of our own, unlike the alien (Dubossarskaya, 2008, p. 170). Diversity of behaviour patterns indicates a variety of ways to reconcile one's own and alien; and in children's literature this triplet often loses the last element – alien (Krasovitskaya, 2024, p. 54). In S. Lambeck's trilogy, however, the last element is not lost but magically morphs into the category of the other when conflicts are resolved.

Discussion

Wizard in S. Lambeck's trilogy. Characteristic features

The role of Moritz's (and many other minor characters) aid and mentor in the trilogy is performed by Leopold Rosette. This image carries a lot of allusions to other, more famous stories for children: *Mary Poppins*, 1934;

Mary Poppins Comes Back, 1935; *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, 1943) by Pamela Lindon Traverse (1899–1996).

These two images (Leopold Rosette and Mary Poppins) show plenty of similar features, to name a few:

- extraordinary abilities (they both can fly, understand the language of animals, read your mind);
- distinctive style attributes (umbrellas, elegant clothes);
- miraculous dwelling (a home in a suitcase and desert tents inside a flat);
- keeping their extraordinary abilities in secret for “uninitiated” adults;
- making children’s fantasies real (flying, speaking with animals, eating exotic sweets).

Contemporary literary discourse is abundant in culture references (Afanasjeva, 2020, p. 1098). This paper does not aim to compare these two images in detail, but the similarities outlined above make the wizard in Lambeck’s trilogy a compelling three-dimensional image.

Mr. Rosette’s mission involves a great deal of responsibility: he makes lengthy journeys with secret and mysterious assignments. “I am sort of a trouble-shooter <...> I help those who need help,” this what he says about himself. Along with it, Mr. Rosette admits that even wizards are often far from being comfortable in an absolutely new environment. Further on he comes to understand that people are not that different (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 155). People are all endowed with positive qualities, but to a different extent: some of them have more of them, others – fewer. To build rapport with different people, go for an individualized approach – this is the main secret of magic.

Mr. Rosette never calls unpleasant people enemies or aliens. One of the main rules in these books is wishing people only good, never – evil. “My salt does not “delete” bad qualities,” explains Mr. Rosette. “It only enhances the good ones to eventually leave no room for the bad ones” (Lambeck, 2017, p. 52).

Another test for magic is sincerity. The wizard cannot force people to feel. “...sometimes I can push somebody a bit to become better. <...> But I cannot make anyone love” (Lambeck, 2018, p. 127). This idea is illustrated with the example of Lily’s parents in the last book. Understanding people’s behaviour along with the desire to help prompts Leopold Rosette to correct decisions. One of these decisions makes a difference in Lily’s life, helps the girl fight her restraint and cope with emotional upheaval.

Another special feature of the wizard in the trilogy is gradual decline in his magical abilities, which are far less displayed in the third book.

Mr. Rosette returns from the journey to Mali where he wanted to help children from the underprivileged background – absolutely exhausted and ill. Soon he marries Moritz’s grandmother – Lilo – and becomes a member of the family. In a conversation with the boy Leopold says, “It seems you also might have the makings (for magic)” (Lambeck, 2018, p. 252).

This evidence might be interpreted as passing magic power from the old magician down to the young one. Still there are some discrepancies at play in this situation.

Mr. Rosette does not try to impress his friend with magic; he turns to magic only in case of emergency and explains the act of magic with his ability to see the good in a person, see into the person’s problem. Miracles that the first book abounds in (a tiny tiger in the park, an article in the newspaper, a flight to Africa, conversations with animals, Pippa Cornelius’s ice cream and boss Huberich “taming”) leave Moritz fascinated, but in equal measure make him feel weary and even frightened. “Moritz has a lot of questions to Mr. Rosette. His mind was flooded with thoughts. Yet he was too tired to hold a long conversation” (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 102).

With magic the atmosphere of trust seems to be wearing thin: “He [Mr. Rosette] was hurrying towards a bus, mother and Moritz were looking at him. “There is something frightening in him, which makes me uncomfortable,” mum said. “Come on, it’ll fade away when you get to know him,” said Moritz. But he was secretly pleased to have this day behind” (Lambeck, 2017a, p.142).

The paradox is that magic is meant to help the child resolve his problems, yet magic itself “gives him the shivers”, as it belongs to a secret, “unexplored” sphere.

This evidence apparently makes a thoughtful reader wonder whether magic really is the major tool to handle conflicts.

Conflict analysis

As the plot unfolds, with every conflict characters in the trilogy get more dimension. In terms of literature studies conflict is defined as a mirror showing discrepancies in the world around that results in the new, unique defense system with the focus on the protagonist counteracting the outside circumstances or fighting with their cognitive dissonance (Nagapetova, 2008, p. 16). At the same time experiencing conflict situations facilitates social adjustment of an individual (Anikina, 2014, p. 3). In other words, conflicts help acquire certain behaviour patterns, attitudes, social norms and values, social skills (Gavrov, Nikandrov, 2008, p. 22).

Magician Mr. Rosette appears in the trilogy to resolve conflicts. V.V. Zenkovsky writes in “Childhood psychology” that handling a conflict is an important step in child socialization. The researcher argues that one of the main factors enabling to tackle social conflicts is awareness of the ideal (Zenkovsky, 1995, p. 53). For Moritz this ideal materializes as a next-door wizard.

In fiction a conflict often implies a deep-laid contradiction, specific of a certain period, the ideological message of this period, common character types. Thus, if first books on magic for children in the 19th century featured stories of seasoned wizards, the turn-of-the century (late 19th – early 20th centuries) saw a new trend how to make a magician gaining momentum (Lobova, 2015, p. 199). S. Lambeck’s books give a more realistic perspective on how this idea is implemented in practice.

All the troubles with the underlying social message are divided into two groups: adult conflicts affecting children and conflicts among children.

Tensions between Moritz’s mother and her boss Mr. Huberich (Chyort-poberich) relate to the first group. Mrs. Froidenreich feels exhausted, the conflict tells on her family: parents are having arguments. Moritz feels his family is in jeopardy, but does not know how to change the situation. “Mum and Dad would fight before, still recently tension has grown. ... Moritz felt relief only when he shut the door and ran to school” (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 43–44).

It is Mr. Rosette who comes to aid: he sprinkles the nasty boss with salt and the latter suddenly cancels his previous decisions infringing the employees’ rights. Mr. Huberich changes immediately, and this tyranny never returns.

Among other adult problems impacting children, is unemployment (the father of the boy – Silvio – vents his anger and frustration on his children); careerism (Stefan Rabentrout’s parents ignore their son, which fuels his animosity), family breakdown (Lyly’s parents get divorced). Mr. Rosette is working to resolve these conflicts with Moritz assisting. And gradually the abilities of the boy are increasing.

Another “adult” problem is the Grey Outskirt – a deprived area of the city. Everything in this place signals decay: people are poverty-stricken, suffer from diseases, houses are crumbling, street lights are dim. “The place is so unfriendly that even a wind and the sun avoid visiting it” (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 112). There is something ominous, delusive in its atmosphere.

The plot of the second book is built on this theme. The characters get to the Outskirt by bus – mysterious, sky-blue, with a broad silver strip (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 109). The driver is Timot – always in a hurry, gloomy,

wearing strange outfits. The bus appears an eerie bridge between two parts of the city. These details inject a mythological sense in the narrative, which does not diminish the urgency of the problem.

For Moritz journeys to this part of the city become quite an ordeal. First, he feels frightened: “I am feeling uneasy,” whispered Moritz” (Lambeck, 2017a, p. 112). Then the protagonist starts exploring the frightening alien space. The protagonist is driven by an unfathomable magic power and guided by a field glass – Mr. Rosette’s gift.

In the third part the boy finds himself in the Grey Outskirt alone, without his mentor. He can count only on himself. It is a gloomy rainy summer day, still the Outskirt looks like a place “suitable for living” (Lambeck, 2018, p. 188). The reason behind is financial flows: the rich criminal Karl Ditter Zonnernhut is designated the sponsor and benefactor of the Outskirt.

In each case magic steps in, honour and sacrifice come to the fore. These are distinguishing features of “magicians”. Mr. Rosette sets off for remote destinations across the world to rescue someone from a scrape. Pippa Cornelius voluntarily moves to the Grey Outskirts to help the disadvantaged. In the third book Timot the carrier and Pippa get married and are expecting a baby. The new family symbolizes the end of estrangement of the whole area in the city, discourse incorporates the family as a vital life meaning (Chupryna, 2022, p. 122).

There are other controversies in the trilogy: clashes with classmates and the teacher Moritz faces with at school. It is significant that the protagonist is a newcomer – both in the city and school. The unfamiliar environment makes the matters more complicated. Mrs. Meier tells the boy off in public for “unauthorized” fantasies in his essay. Stefan Rabentrout together with Martin Hoviler and later – Mirko Schulze mock Moritz, let him down. And magic helps again. Everything settles down as if by itself, nobody is confused or frightened: Mrs. Meier finds evidence to the tiny park tiger existence (which Moritz wrote about in his essay), Stefan Rabentrout is thrown off the football team.

In the first two books Mr. Rosette is actively involved in problem-solving. In the third book Moritz gets a wonderful gift – a blue ball, which rolls towards a person in trouble. This time the boy himself becomes a rescuer. He follows the ball as a prompt and has enough wit and a kind heart to cope with emerging difficulties on his own. Mr. Rosette assigns special significance to this level of mastery, it is desirable that the nature of the relationship be maximally favorable for both communication partners (Tareva, 2018, p. 1701). This is what his magical power rests on, along with in-depth knowledge of human psychology. This approach turns foes if not into friends but into inoffensive “others”, neutral characters. Moritz’s first success in this avenue is reaching peace with Stefan.

Conclusion

With events unfolding, most unwelcoming characters and objects in Lambeck's trilogy disclose their best qualities; positive and pleasant. Thus, a question arises – are those characters really “aliens” carrying potential threat? The analysis resulted in certain insights: magic, if coupled with kindness and wit, helps see the root of the problem, reasons for the controversy and even find arguments to excuse the guilty. Mr. Huberich, Stefan Rabetrout and Silvio's father do change for the better, the Grey Outskirt becomes a better place to live in, Karl Ditter Zonnenhut gets out of sight and simultaneously (against his will, though) takes on the role of a benefactor. Given all those transformations the characters are no longer seen as manifest or potential enemies, but as “others”, who are neutral or even friendly towards the protagonist.

Meeting Leopold Rosette becomes a special event in the life of Moritz. When he faces challenges – such as turmoil within his family, difficulties at school, and the need to navigate an unwelcoming new environment – he receives unexpected help in a magical way. Magic boosts the child's confidence, makes him believe in his forces and abilities. The blue ball, leading the way, is actually a deep metaphor. The protagonist learns to hear his inner voice to eventually become if not a wizard but a big-heart helping hand, a rescuer. Consequently, magic slackens, giving place to wisdom, sacrifice and mutual trust.

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