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GIORGIO SALE

The University of Sassari, Italy

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5166-7249>

e-mail: [giosale@uniss.it](mailto:giosale@uniss.it)

Wordplay with Names and Onomaturgic Constructions  
in *L'enfant léopard* (1999) by Daniel Picouly

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Gra słów w nazwiskach i konstrukcjach onomaturgicznych  
w *L'enfant léopard* (1999) Daniela Picouly'ego

The captivating adventures told in Daniel Picouly's (1999) novel, *L'enfant léopard*,<sup>1</sup> revolve around an enigma concerning the eponymous hero: "a mulatto boy whose face and body are covered with large light-colored spots"<sup>2</sup> which justifies the name: "Men, we call this a leopard boy!"<sup>3</sup> In the fictional universe of the novel, the child turns out to be the illegitimate son from a casual affair between Queen Marie-Antoinette and "black Zamor" [*nègre Zamor*], page of the Countess du Barry. The Queen of France is said to have conceived him during a carnival evening when she concealed her identity under a mask and most of the ball participants

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<sup>1</sup> The novel won the 1999 Renaudot Prize. [All further French citations from the novel are direct quotes by the author of the article from this edition of the novel, as referenced thereafter. All text in square brackets has been added by the translator of the article].

<sup>2</sup> "un enfant mulâtre, le corps et le visage maculés, de larges tâches claires" (Picouly, 1999, p. 53). [All further English citations from the novel are direct quotes by the translator of the article from the English translation of the novel, by Jeanne Garane, published in 2016 by the University of Virginia Press under the title: *The Leopard Boy*.]

<sup>3</sup> "c'est ce qu'on appelle un enfant léopard !" (Picouly, 1999, p. 53).

remained ignorant of her mistake.<sup>4</sup> At his birth, the leopard boy was taken away from his mother, hidden from everyone, and secretly raised by the Princess of Lamballe. During the revolutionary unrest, many characters for various reasons go in search of queen's own son. Thus, after being sentenced to death, and before her execution, Marie Antoinette wishes to see her secret child for the last time. While some people seek to kill him, others would like to take advantage of him to pursue their messianic projects.<sup>5</sup>

The fictional plot of the novel is interwoven with historical events. Both the incredible actions of the characters and the characters themselves, most of whom are in fact historical figures, are located in a very exact and strictly defined time period and setting: October 16, 1793, that is 24 Vendémiaire (the first month), Year II according to the French revolutionary calendar, in Paris, therefore, in the middle of the French Revolution. The high number of characters involved in the elaborate plot of the novel explains a wide range of anthroponyms used. Those names could be divided into three main categories: names with historical references, names of characters taken from other fictional universes in literature and, finally, names of fictional entities whose origin must be looked for in the imagination of the author.

In the case of some of the characters, identifying them with specific historical figures does not raise any doubts. Names with real historical referents entail associating them with their actual historical representations on the part of the reader. The names of Robespierre, Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, or such toponyms as the Conciergerie, the court of Versailles and many others, convey representations associated with these onymic forms. They require a certain amount of knowledge about the characters or places in question, which makes them fulfill a function of

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<sup>4</sup> Zamor himself was not aware of what had happened in the evening of 1778 when the Countess du Barry, the last mistress of Louis XV, had pushed him to avenge the Queen's contempt for her. Much later, in 1793, Zamor learns through a message from the Countess du Barry about the events on that evening, originally veiled in mystery: "*I got my revenge while I watched as with your virility, you honored a mysterious woman in a blue domino mask [...]. From this union were born two children: a boy and a girl [...]. That mysterious woman was Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France*" ("*Devant moi, et pour ma vengeance, tu as honoré de ta vigueur une inconnue en domino bleu [...]. De cette union sont nés deux enfants: un garçon et une fille [...]. L'inconnue en domino bleu était Marie-Antoinette, reine de France*") (Picouly, 1999, p. 53). The quotes are italicized in the novel.

<sup>5</sup> According to the owner of a popular tavern, the leopard boy would be "a kid who heals all, brings about peace and brotherhood, and reveals the winning numbers for the Pont-Neuf lottery if you add a coin to the mix" ("*Un gosse qui guérit de tout, apporte la paix, la fraternité et te donne les numéros de la loterie du Pont-Neuf si tu ajoutes une pièce*") (Picouly, 1999, p. 99). The men who worship the leopard boy as deity address him by a name made up of a contraction. This onymic form alludes to his dual nature, of a man and of a leopard: "Lého, child of man and child of leopard. You whose skin bears the variegated colors of humanity" ("*Lého, enfant de l'homme et du léopard. Toi qui as réunis les couleurs des hommes sur ta peau*") (Picouly, 1999, p. 338).

anchoring the historical and geographical references, thereby of authenticating the narrative. As for others, their successful reception by the reader requires extensive research and levels of competence that may be found more easily in a cultured audience than in a non-professional reader.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes, what the most curious and tenacious readers might discover thanks to reviving the names from the everyday onomastic repertoire is that certain seemingly simple names attributed to some minor characters who, at most, could fulfill a function of the reality effect originate from history. Let us take an example of a woman called “Rosalie”, whose first name is provided in the text without any additional onymic details regarding her. This name encourages the reader to recognize in her the historical character, who very few know, i.e. Rosalie Lamorlière (1768–1848). The young woman served the Queen Marie Antoinette during her imprisonment at the Conciergerie.

For interpretation of similar onomastic forms in a referential way to be possible, the text calls for a great deal of interpretative cooperation of the reader and an efficient mobilization of his knowledge, without which the identification of the historical references would remain ineffective. However, at the same time, this onomastic specificity of the text does not constitute a barrier preventing access to the fictional universe by a reader who does not recognize the relevant references in a number of anthroponyms and toponyms derived from the historical reality. In fact, the novel’s onomastic repertoire opens up the possibility to read the text on many different levels. The failure to identify the characters in the novel with their historical counterparts, and particularly with characters whose historical significance is after all marginal, does not pose an obstacle to the reader’s fictional immersion. What is different in the case of the audience able to recognize the references to the characters from a historical referential universe is their awareness of the stakes of the novelistic creation as well as the feeling of a closer rapport with the author, with whom the ideal reader shares some common cultural reference points.

I do not intend to discuss in detail names with historical referents. It suffices to remember that most of the anthroponyms and toponyms that abound in the fictional world contribute to the anchoring of the events told in a defined setting any reader can easily recognize, namely the Paris during the Reign of Terror. In this case, the historically referenced onomastics assures a deictic function as the nouns refer to real historical characters defined also based on spatio-temporal categories.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the case of such characters as Zamor and Doctor Seiffert, who are probably unknown to the general public not necessarily interested in historical details of 18<sup>th</sup>-century France, but traces of whom could be found in historical documents. The former (1762–1820) was a slave of Indian origin offered by Louis XV to his last mistress, Jeanne Bécu de Cantigny, who then became Countess du Barry. Jean-Geoffroy Seiffert (1747–1811), born in Leipzig, was a doctor of Xavier de Saxe, the Princess de Lamballe (Marie-Thérèse-Louise of Savoie-Carignan) and of the Orleans family.

Nevertheless, in addition to the onymic forms with an obvious referential value which is historical in nature, there are others which hide or reveal, depending on the cultural level of the audience, an intertextual reference to other fictional worlds. Thus, during their wanderings in Paris in pursuit of the leopard boy, different characters involved in the search arrive in places absent from the actual topography of Paris and which the reader could know from his own personal experience or could recognize on the map of Paris.

One of the areas where the search for the leopard boy takes place is strangely named “Haarlem”.<sup>7</sup> The narrator situates this neighborhood according to the real city coordinates: “New Haarlem, in the neighborhood located behind the gardens of the Luxembourg Palace, in the triangle formed by the Rue de Vaugirard, the Rue de l’Enfer and the boulevard du Montparnasse [...] also called Hell, the Negro Neighborhood, or the Black Ward”.<sup>8</sup> The district that in the fictional universe is located in Paris is honeycombed by large straight avenues designated by ordinal numbers (Fifth Avenue leading to Notre-Dame-des-Champs, 110<sup>th</sup> Street, 115<sup>th</sup>, 121<sup>st</sup> Street, 125<sup>th</sup> Street) and sometimes by toponyms (“Lenox Avenue”, alias Malcolm X Boulevard in New York, whose name is even explained by paronymy: “formerly Les Noix Avenue, and 125<sup>th</sup>!”<sup>9</sup>). Although these toponyms and the choronym of Haarlem refer to a referential reality, it is situated at the other end of the world and, as far as the New York district is concerned, at a time prior to the period when the action of the novel takes place. The fictional geography does not correspond precisely to the topography of the referential universe and the names of the streets contribute to creation of a space where a New York district is unexpectedly superimposed on the Parisian urban fabric.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly as with the disruption of space, the novelist introduces obvious anachronisms, albeit skillfully disguised by their adaptation to the setting where the action of the novel takes place. A good example here is the presence in revolutionary Paris

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<sup>7</sup> From the name that the first Dutch settlers gave to this place: *Nieuw Haarlem*. It was not until 1664 that after taking over the Dutch colony, the English introduced the current spelling of “Harlem”.

<sup>8</sup> “la Nouvelle Haarlem, ce quartier situé derrière le jardin du palais du Luxembourg, dans le triangle de la rue de Vaugirard, de la rue d’Enfer et du boulevard du Montparnasse [...] aussi appelé l’Enfer, le Quartier Nègre ou le Clos des Noirs” (Picouly, 1999, p. 52).

<sup>9</sup> “anciennement Les Noix Avenue, 125<sup>e</sup>” (Picouly, 1999, p. 122).

<sup>10</sup> In an interview given to Jérôme Bégulé, the author explained his choice: “It’s a ghetto portrayed without miserabilism, à la Chester Himes. Instead of dispersing my blacks around Paris, I decided to group them in a neighborhood with reference clear to everyone: Haarlem, [...] and I realized that there was a no-man’s land behind the Luxembourg Gardens, near rue Denfert, where I situated my neighborhood. The area was organized like Harlem, with rectilinear avenues. This allowed me to number my streets and avenues as in New York” (Bégulé, 1999, p. 4).

of the first fast-food restaurants, one of which displays “an enormous red lantern” which reads in yellow letters “King Mac’s Burger City...”.<sup>11</sup> This is the “Mac’s restaurant”<sup>12</sup> where minced meat dishes are served. By the evocative power of the name subject to an abbreviation mechanism, every reader should recognize behind it an allusion to the McDonald’s fast food chain.<sup>13</sup> Behind the *en-bourgeois*<sup>14</sup> one has no difficulty in recognizing a distorted variant of a hamburger.

Similarly, some characters do not easily blend in with the Parisian milieu of the revolutionary period where the narrative takes place; however, they do fit perfectly in the named New York district, and at a later time. Hence, for example, the two black policemen coming from the islands, and with odd names, cause some perplexity as they present themselves to the Marquis d’Anderçon, their former commander in the army, by stating their military rank: “Corporal Edmond Coffin” and “Corporal Jonathan Gravedigger”.<sup>15</sup> The two inspectors call themselves Ed and Jones, based on the formation of hypocoristic aphereses with typically Anglo-Saxon assonance to them. The full anthroponyms designating them prove, in fact, to be nicknames whose meaning the characters explain themselves: “Jonathan digs graves that are already full before he has even dug up the first shovel full of dirt. [Edmond] cobbles together measly little coffins for five-foot-tall citizens whose heads have already been removed and placed between their legs”.<sup>16</sup>

Those bizarre anthropomorphic forms do not have the same degree of credibility or onomastic likelihood as in other characters’ case. The nicknames alone make the reader anticipate the particularity of the two characters, namely the fact that we deal with two policemen who tend to resort to violence when carrying out their investigations.

Their parallel stories [are reconstructed by retrospective accounts presenting them as soldiers of 126<sup>th</sup> French regiment which fought in the American War of Independence against the British in 1777. What we learn is that Ed and Jones fought in the “Legion of the Chevalier de Saint-Georges [...] the only unit of black men in the Republican Army”<sup>17</sup> composed of the West Indians. The narrator manages

<sup>11</sup> “Mac, le roi de l’en-bourgeois...” (Picouly, 1999, p. 122).

<sup>12</sup> “restaurant du Mac” (Picouly, 1999, p. 122).

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the fast-food chain logo used from 1968 to 2006 displayed a large capital *M* letter in yellow standing out against a red background.

<sup>14</sup> *en-bourgeois* used in the French original becomes a “burger” in translation.

<sup>15</sup> “Brigadier-chef Edmond Cercueil” and “Brigadier Jonathan Fossoyeur” (Picouly, 1999, p. 35).

<sup>16</sup> “Jonathan creuse des fosses qui sont déjà pleines avant le premier coup de pelle. [Edmond] cloue et rabote des cercueils croupions de cinq pieds, pour des citoyens qui ont la tête entre les jambes” (Picouly, 1999, p. 35).

<sup>17</sup> “légion Saint-Georges [...] la seule unité d’hommes de couleur de l’armée républicaine” (Picouly, 1999, p. 40).

then to insert these strange characters into a historical framework in accordance with other fictional entities. However, the names of the two police officers leave no doubt about their actual origins: they are characters Picouly takes from other literary worlds. In fact, we find the same protagonists, named in the same way, in the novels from the “Harlem Cycle” by the American writer, Chester Himes, where in the original the two inspectors form “the famous Harlem detective-team of Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones”.<sup>18</sup>

In the novels by the American author, the two detectives do tend to resort to somewhat strong means to obtain the information they need. They also have unusual pistols: “there was nothing ordinary about their pistols. They carried specially made long-barreled nickel-plated .38-calibre revolvers”.<sup>19</sup> In *L'enfant léopard*, Picouly borrows this detail concerning their weapons to play with the reader's various competences, such as his knowledge both of the real world and of other fictional worlds. While constructing his imaginary etymology, Picouly reuses the name of the pistols' model, but he redefines its origin to veil any anachronism that would be too obvious. The weapons that Marquis d'Anderçon provides to the two former soldiers of his regiment are “two véritable long-barreled silver fire sticks dressed with ebony handles [...], this model was only made in 1738 [...] They're called .38s”.<sup>20</sup> The alteration of the origin of the pistols' name is another way of the author playing with the reader's competence to encourage their involvement. The required competences are then both fictional and historical as the author plays with both repertoires.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the onymic forms involving the reader's identification of a historical or a literary referent, there are other ones by means of which the author's imagination develops subsequent playful relations with his audience. They include

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<sup>18</sup> The “Harlem Cycle” by Chester Himes (1909–1984) consists of several books. The American novelist inserts there a couple of policemen with unsettling names. Picouly revives Himes's characters (cf. Garane, 2014). Picouly refers to the American author in the dedication he included at the begging of his novel: “to Christian Mounier, who spoke with such elegance of Chester Himes's elegant style”.

<sup>19</sup> “leurs armes n'avaient rien d'ordinaire : c'étaient des calibres 38, de fabrication spéciale, nickelés et à canon long” (Himes, 1958, French trans. [2007, pp. 83–84]).

<sup>20</sup> “Deux véritables porte-foudre à canon argentés, habillés de crosses d'ébène [...] un modèle unique de 1738 [...] on dit simplement ... des 38!” (Picouly, 1999, p. 51).

<sup>21</sup> Even Marquis d'Anderçon's name refers to Himes's novels, where Lieutenant Anderson is in charge of Coffin Ed and Grave Digger. Picouly modified slightly the spelling of the character's name but preserved the homophony. In fact, the patronymic form conformed already to the phonetic model of French onomastics. What is more, the character's name, as Garane suggests (2014, p. 84), could refer to René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, Marquis d'Argenson (1694–1757), son of a police lieutenant, as lieutenant Anderson from the novel by Himes. Both novelists could have been inspired by that 18<sup>th</sup>-century politician and a writer himself, who was related to Enlightenment philosophers.

a vast range of names created by deformation and through different linguistic and rhetorical strategies such as alliteration, assonance, agglutination, onomasiological processes, and paremyologies and anthroponymical (cratylic) structures, according to the definition of Roland Barthes (1972), where names are loaded with further semantic information referring to particular characteristics of the characters who carry them. The Mac restaurant has been already mentioned, but there are other onomastic constructions obtained by deformation of well-known names that might put a smile on the reader's face and cause him amusement.

Hence, the play with the knowledge of the readers through the names of the Mac fast-food restaurant based on the same rhetorical processes continues with reference to a famous drink that is served there. The drink is called the "Special Wicked Delicious Elixir" [*le Coquin*] by the owner of the restaurant when he presents it to his customers explaining at the same time the following origins of the ergonym:

[...] King Mac's Special Wicked Delicious Elixir is a distillation of rare plants from the Americas whose medicinal qualities are known to combat stomach afflictions and phlegm. It has a pleasant flavor and is pleasing to the palate. Hence the name. Behold! My special Wicked Delicious Elixir is so good it can return the shine to gemstones and the polish to silverware and pewter cups.<sup>22</sup>

In the restaurant, the drink is normally served in paper goblets and looks like "blackish liquid".<sup>23</sup> The allusion is thus sufficiently clear and the assonance of the two ergonyms helps the original reader to grasp the suggested association between "le Coquin" and Coke.

Some examples of assonance give rise to playing with onomastic deformations that may be perceived as trivial. Let us consider, for example, the historical figure of Prince de Lamballe who,<sup>24</sup> according to the fictional universe, lost his virility following an operation. This provided an opportunity for the Countess du Barry to propose a treacherous revision of the character's name: "after zis operation, 'e was called ... Ze Prince Sans Balls!"<sup>25</sup>

One of the characters the story focuses on most often is another mixed-raced child, strangely called "Groundhog". The "little nigger" [*négrillon*] who bears such a name and the rodent to which the name refers they both share the child's skin color and the animal's brown, black or brown hair. As the groundhogs take refuge

<sup>22</sup> "le Coquin du Mac est à base de plantes des Amériques, aux vertus médicinales reconnues sur les embarras de la digestion et le mal de flegme. Il est agréable au goût et coquine au palais. D'où son nom. En outre, le Coquin peut régénérer l'éclat des bijoux, timbales, couverts en argent" (Picouly, 1999, p. 126).

<sup>23</sup> "jus noirâtre" (Picouly, 1999, p. 133).

<sup>24</sup> Louis-Alexandre-Joseph-Stanislas de Bourbon (1747–1768).

<sup>25</sup> "après cette opération on l'appelait ... Le Prince-sans-balles !" (Picouly, 1999, p. 223).

in their burrows, the child's shelter is a hut located "Between the Tuileries Gardens and the Place Vendôme, in the old Capuchin church".<sup>26</sup> Like a bookworm, another not-so-pleasant animal that one finds in an idiomatic expression, Groundhog's place has been "turned into a book depository".<sup>27</sup> Those images seem to suggest a certain degree of animality of the child, but also his capacity for the intertextual referral. On the one hand, what evokes his animality is his behavior dictated by instinct, his ability to get by on his own and to enter into empathetic relationships with others without being prejudiced, whether they are humans, animals or even inanimate objects;<sup>28</sup> on the other hand, the child's name might hide a later allusion to the novel by Himes,<sup>29</sup> but the assonances of the name also encourage other possible associations.

This "orphan [...] who has always been one"<sup>30</sup> and who, despite his young age, already bears the marks of suffering, is characterized by deep sadness and painful loneliness. The strange name given to him by the author could also announce his sorrowful character, with him always *muttering* and grumbling, as the anthroponym suggests, revealing then the psychological condition of this melancholic and lonely child.<sup>31</sup>

In the story, Groundhog is of vital importance to the onomaturgic processes, him being its principal source. For example, when he is supposed to come to a secret rendez-vous with a person whose name he is not allowed to reveal, Groundhog refers to that person by repeating a periphrastic name used by his mandator in order to hide the identity of the mysterious person. What we learn is that the kid has a meeting at a Parisian café with You-Know-Who [*avec Qui-tu-sais*].<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> "Entre le jardin des Tuileries et place de Vendôme, dans l'ancienne église des Capucins" (Picouly, 1999, p. 82).

<sup>27</sup> "a été transform[é] en dépôt de livres" (Picouly, 1999, p. 82).

<sup>28</sup> The child takes a liking to a woman who is kind to him, which makes Groundhog coin a compound name for her: the woman's name is Sidonie, but for the child she becomes "Pretty Sidonie" (*Sidonie-c'est-joli*) (Picouly, 1999, p. 67 and *passim*). As for Sidonie's name, the author might have been inspired by a cartoon from the late sixties, *Aglaé et Sidonie*, in which the character of Sidonie is a kind goose. Groundhog's intuitive abilities allow him to converse with the queen's dog, Coco, and even with the guillotine, which he names informally "Louissette", in an attempt to humanize this instrument of death.

<sup>29</sup> *All Shot Up*. As in the case of the American novel, *L'enfant léopard* has a complicated plot in which the skin color of the protagonists plays a crucial role (cf. Garane, 2014, p. 84).

<sup>30</sup> "orphelin [...] depuis toujours" (Picouly, 1999, p. 27).

<sup>31</sup> The name "Marmotte" (Groundhog) is a derivative of "marmotter" and means "to mutter", "to grumble", "to mumble". As a nickname, it refers to someone who "has a disgruntled nature" (cf. Dauzat, 1980, a supplement by M.-Th. Morlet) S.V. *Marmotte*.

<sup>32</sup> The expression that functions as a name could be an allusion to the character of the wicked wizard from the *Harry Potter* saga, Lord Voldemort, whom some characters call "You-Know-Who".



The periphrastic expression is used by Doctor Seiffert when he entrusts Groundhog with the mission; the child reinterprets it, however, according to a mechanism of agglutination and transforms it into a proper name, whose first capital letter helps to identify it as such. Therefore, in the part of the narrative devoted to reporting events with the main focus on Groundhog, the agglutinated periphrasis replaces the name. What the reader discovers is that, in fact, You-Know-Who tries to kill Groundhog on the instructions of yet another entity whom the kid identifies by another agglutinated onomastic term. The instruction to kill Groundhog comes from “those people on Rue des Moineaux” [*ceux-des-Moineaux*], that is a group of rebels who meet at rue des Moineaux.

A similar denominative strategy underlies the formation of another character’s name: Moka. The anthroponym is formed based on a motivated relationship which is metonymic in nature, between the cause and effect of a physical characteristic of the character in question. The onomastic choice is made following an equivalent relationship between the name *Moka* and the common noun *moka* [*mocha*]. As we know, the common name refers to a type of coffee. The character who bears this anthroponym has physical characteristics that indeed relate him to coffee beans by a cause-and-effect relationship. Moka is black and his face and hands are pock-marked following a tragic event that his wife Félicité recalls: Moka “got cannoned on a slave ship”.<sup>33</sup> The narrator explains that in case of a mutiny aboard slave-trading ships, the crew was ordered to open fire on the insurgents so as not to damage the goods. Moka recounts that his skin is pockmarked from “rotten coffee beans shot from loaded cannons” at him while he was on “the Apollo, a slave ship, under the command of René Auguste de Chateaubriand”.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the anthroponym of the Moka character refers to the name of the coffee type which he got all over his body and which was the cause of the marks later visible on his skin. Moreover, as it might be expected, Moka is the owner of a coffee house that obviously bears his name. The inscription on his car which is at the same time his business’ sign reads: “Moka rex Arabica Company, Founded in 1632”.<sup>35</sup> The date of foundation of his company could suggest an old family

<sup>33</sup> “a été cannoné sur un bateau négrier” (Picouly, 1999, p. 151).

<sup>34</sup> “l’Apollon, un navire négrier, commandé par René Auguste de Chateaubriand” (Picouly, 1999, p. 160). The captain of the ship bears the name of a famous writer’s father and the text indeed identifies him with this character. Moka provides precise information in this respect: “René Auguste de Chateaubriand? He’s dead. And his son, François René, is starving in London. One of these days he’ll come back here and write about things that he don’t know nothin’ about” (“René Auguste de Chateaubriand ? Il est mort, et aujourd’hui, son fils, François René, crève de faim à Londres, avant de revenir dans ses terres, pour raconter ce qu’il n’a pas vécu”) (Picouly, 1999, p. 161).

<sup>35</sup> “Moka rex arabica Maison fondée en 1632...” (Picouly, 1999, p. 171). *Moka rex* used to be a brand of a French decaffeinated coffee. To get publicity, the company started placing plastic historical figurines representing soldiers in its packages of coffee.

business. This hypothesis, however, would involve an obvious anachronism since the character only received his name after the mutiny on the Apollo! Moka justifies this infringed chronology by a well-known today marketing gimmick: "People like to think that what they eat and drink is old-style, so..."<sup>36</sup>

Another case of an anthroponymic construction based on paronomasia concerns a minor character: the guard of the Conciergerie where Marie-Antoinette is confined. The gendarme constantly threatens to report the exchanges, however insignificant they are, between Marie-Antoinette and her servant, Rosalie, to his superiors. He intervenes several times to silence the two women: "Ho there, Citizens! No talking, or I'll have to report you!"<sup>37</sup> which pushes the queen into onomastic wordplay, intended to steal a smile from the reader: "Mr. Reportyou. That's a perfect name for a gendarme"<sup>38</sup>

Even certain onomastic creations based on the false etymology mechanism contribute to playfulness of the text. One might consider, for example, the supposed etymology of the ergonym "Post-it", which the author traces back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from his coffee business, Moka prints papers with biographies of famous personages and his contemporaries; a form of transposition of historical toy figurines placed in his *Moka rex* coffee packages. The fictional characters call these papers "Posterities" [*Postérités*] as they are designed to pass down the memory of famous people to posterity. To make the sheets more manageable, the Countess du Barry proposes to fold them into a fan; Moka points out that although indeed the presentation of the papers offered by the countess makes them easier to handle, it also hinders the linear reading of the text, especially of the title: "They truly are easier to handle. But the title no longer reads «Posterities». Now all you can see is «Post it»"<sup>39</sup> Moka's objection does not dampen, however, the enthusiasm of the Countess, but, quite the opposite, she gets excited about this great coinage: "Post-it! Zat's perfect! And it even sounds like an English word, doesn't it? Post-it!"<sup>40</sup>

All the above onymic creations and various naming expressions, which the author introduces in his novel, entail playing with the knowledge of the reader, from whom the text demands relevant historical, literary, cultural and rhetorical competence to unveil the onomaturgic mechanisms whose purpose is often humorous. If

<sup>36</sup> "les gens aiment bien que ce qu'ils mangent ou qu'ils boivent soit ancien. Alors..." (Picouly, 1999, p. 171).

<sup>37</sup> "Hé, citoyennes ! Pas de colloque ou j'en réfère" (Picouly, 1999, p. 218).

<sup>38</sup> "Jean Réfère ! En voilà un nom trouvé pour un gendarme" (Picouly, 1999, p. 218).

<sup>39</sup> "C'est vrai, c'est mieux en main. Mais dessus on ne lit plus «Postérités». On ne voit que «Post it»" (Picouly, 1999, p. 240).

<sup>40</sup> "Post-it ! Voilà qui est merveilleux ! Et qui sonne anglais à souhait, n'est-il pas? Post-it" (Picouly, 1999, p. 240).

the reader manages to recognize the multicultural allusions hidden behind a variety of anthroponyms, toponyms, choronyms and ergonyms, he thus participates in a ludic activity the author associates with literary onomastics. Therefore, it can be stated that discovery of the wordplay with names contributes, to a large extent, to taking pleasure in the text thanks to linguistic manipulations, different references and distortions introduced by the author for the reader's entertainment.

*Translated into English by Agnieszka Stawecka-Kotula*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to verify in what way the onomastic devices found in the French novel *L'enfant leopard* [*The Leopard Boy*] (1999) by Daniel Picouly determine a potentially plural reception of the text referring to one's historical, fictional, and rhetorical competence. Devoted primarily to the literary onomastics, the analysis focuses on identifying various contexts reused by the author of the novel and from which he draws the names of the characters and places of his fictional universe. Proper names can be understood as historical references which fulfil the function of authenticating the

story, serve as referential anchoring of the narrative, and include intertextual references only a reader of deep literary awareness can grasp. And finally, proper names can be understood as imaginary onomasturgic constructions devised by the author, who employs linguistic and rhetorical strategies to achieve the ludic character of the text. The study reveals the story-building process and by following the onomastic traces, it captures the very method of literary creation adopted by the author.

**Keywords:** onomastics, the French novel, *L'enfant leopard* [*The Leopard Boy*], rhetorical strategies

### ABSTRAKT

Celem badań jest sprawdzenie, w jaki sposób onomastyczne narzędzia wykryte we francuskiej powieści *L'enfant leopard* [*The Leopard Boy*] (1999) Daniela Picouly'ego determinują potencjalnie pluralistyczny odbiór tekstu odwołującego się do własnej kompetencji historycznej, fikcyjnej i retorycznej. Poświęcona przede wszystkim literackiej onomastyce analiza skupia się na identyfikacji różnych kontekstów ponownie użytych przez autora powieści, z których czerpie nazwiska postaci i miejsca swojego fikcyjnego uniwersum. Nazwy własne można rozumieć jako odniesienia historyczne, które pełnią funkcję uautentyczniającą opowieść – służą jako referencyjne zakotwiczenie narracji – i zawierają odniesienia intertekstualne, które może uchwycić jedynie czytelnik o głębokiej świadomości literackiej. Nazwy własne można także rozumieć jako wyimaginowane konstrukcje onomasturgiczne opracowane przez autora, który wykorzystuje strategie językowe i retoryczne, aby osiągnąć ludyczny charakter tekstu. Studium ujawnia proces budowania opowieści oraz tropiąc ślady onomastyczne, oddaje przyjętą przez autora metodę kreacji literackiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** onomastyka, francuska powieść, *L'enfant leopard* [*The Leopard Boy*], strategie retoryczne

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