

The Metamorphosis of the Heroes – An Intertextual Discourse
Analysis of Meg Cabot's *Abandon* Trilogy

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Introduction

Literature, whether we talk about universal literature or divide it into certain periods, languages, cultures etc., is a big, discursive system with both traditional and inherited elements. According to Cohen, literature is based on continuity, from the very start until nowadays it appears as an endless line, maybe curved in some places, as some habits disappeared with time and/or might have reappeared later. (2017, 1-3) Thus, talking about the literature of a certain group while trying to isolate it from the others seems to be nearly impossible as we cannot disbar all the external, cross-cultural factors that might have influenced it throughout the different periods. This idea is underlined by T. S. Eliot as well; in his view literature always comes with a kind of “historical sense” and “timelessness,” it

involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (1982, 37)

The past influences artistic creation, and new works, in turn, alter the past, creating a dynamic, organic whole, where the standards of the past and present continually inform and shape each other.

In a previous research entitled *New Clothes, Old Habits. Recreating Persephone's, Hades' and Demeter's Figures in Meg Cabot's Abandon Trilogy*¹ I discussed how Greek culture still has a strong impact on modern culture. From psychology to the nowadays popular video games, music, animation etc. ancient Greece and – mostly – its famous myths have reappeared again and again, sometimes even in a whole new form. In the previously mentioned analysis, I talked about the changing phenomenon of possible interpretations and rewritings of Persephone's myth, e.g., a hymn born with a mainly agricultural meaning. The myth has been reinterpreted many times, becoming a moralizing story, then a love story, a narrative upon the birth of consciousness, gender roles, isolation, femininity etc. From 2010 and 2013 the American bestseller young-adult author, Meg Cabot was inspired by the myth, and wrote the trilogy *Abandon*, a contemporary version of the original narrative in a new, youngish form, meant primarily for teenage readers.

¹ The results of this paper can be found in appendix 2.

In the present paper, I would like to continue my previous research. This time I shall focus on the intertextual – or transtextual – features of Cabot's trilogy with reference to metamorphosis and stereotypy. I shall examine *Abandon* in connection with other texts, namely the Xth book from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the myth series called *The Song of Orpheus* and Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*.

Each chapter explores intertextual layers, drawing on Genette and Kristeva's theories, to analyse character recreations and parallels between Pierce/John and Orpheus/Eurydice, Dante/Beatrice. It examines language, behavioural patterns, and atmosphere to reveal similarities and differences, offering a new perspective on the world, society, time, and heroic roles in the trilogy. Furthermore, I shall attempt to explore Cabot's androgynous and ambiguous writing style, following Kristeva's ideas about semiotic and symbolic language.

The analysis of character metamorphosis draws on van Gennep's ritual concept, Campbell's heroic journey, and Jung's archetypes. The physical and spiritual journeys of John and Pierce represent their emotional and mental growth, leading to the birth of their identities. This paper explores the complex world offered by Cabot's trilogy.

I. Theoretical Background

I.1. Defining Transtextuality

Gerard Genette talks about *transtextuality* as a generic concept referring to all the possible connections literary works can have related to each other. As claimed by Genette, transtextuality is something transcendent, therefore it refers to an overt or covert relation appearing between two or more texts. He differentiates between five subcategories within transtextuality, namely para-, meta-, archi-, hyper/hypo-, and intertextuality. (1996, 1-7) Genette considers *paratextuality* an “explicit and more of a distant relation”² between the actual content and certain parts of the text, such as titles, subtitles, illustrations, mottos, footnotes, little commentaries at the beginning or at the end of the chapters, etc. They have a pragmatic function, thus, the author, editor or even the narrator can guide the readers into a particular direction for them to be able to interpret the text. (1996, 3)

Metatextuality is described by Genette as a “commentary,” it means that a text, be it an interpretation, analysis, recommendation, criticism, etc. describes another one. In other words, one text is built on the other. In this sense the “second” – given it was written later – identifies the “first” one as a text. A metatext (the “commentary”) connects itself to another written work by continuously (directly or indirectly) referring back to it and building a discourse around it.

Architextuality is similar to metatextuality, it also involves textual characteristics. However, it identifies the text based on its genre. There are certain rules regarding each genre established through previously existing traditions. (1996, 4)

The fourth subcategory is represented by *hyper- and hypotextuality*. In Genette’s representation there are two texts: A (the hypotext) and B (the hypertext). Similarly to metatextuality, text A was created before, it is the original, while text B appears as the “inheritor.” Thus, text B is the retold version of text A. The connection between a hypotext and a hypertext is a transformation through which the hypertext becomes the imitation of the hypotext. (1996, 7)

Joyce’s *Ulysses* is Genette’s example of intertextuality. Inspired by Homer’s *Odyssey*, with Leopold Bloom’s internal journey through Dublin mirroring Odysseus’

² Throughout the present paper all non-English sources will be translated by me.

journey, incorporating deformed elements from Homer's work, this modernist work is the "inheritor" of the great Homeric literature. Genette also talks about the *Aeneid* and brings up a similar analogy (also called symmetry) between Homer and Virgil. This connection between the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid* and *Ulysses* is what Eliot called a literary system, given that one text influenced the other, also, with the appearance of *Ulysses*, the previously existing discourse changed. Therefore, to return to the original idea, *Odyssey* is the hypotext while both the *Aeneas* and *Ulysses* can be considered hypertexts. (1996, 5-7) Cabot's trilogy is built up similarly. As a hypertext, *Abandon* is connected to several previous creations, which shall be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The fifth category, *intertextuality* is the most important from the standpoint of the present paper. According to Genette, intertextuality refers to the coexistence of two or more texts at the same time, which makes the phenomenon resemble hyper- and hypotextuality. "In other words, if part of a text (text 1) attends in the other text (text 2), the relationship between them is intertextual." (2015, 534) Intertextuality can appear in several forms: "implicit or explicit; covert or overt; hidden or open." (2015, 534) The most explicit case of intertextuality is by means of direct quotation, such as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which is a collage of quotations and misquotations from several other poems and narratives. The opposite of intertextuality is called plagiarism, taking someone's words and ideas and promoting them as our own, he says. (1996, 1-2)

Genette's definition of intertextuality is more limited than Julia Kristeva's, who constructed a whole complex discourse around these types of textual relations. (Minerayat and Soofastaei 2015, 534) Genette himself acknowledges Kristeva to be the "birthmother" of intertextuality, the first person to ever study it. Thus, the next chapter focuses on Kristeva's views on intertextuality.

I.2. Defining Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva denies the idea of text autonomy stated by the New Critics. (1966) Unlike New Criticism, which preached the uniqueness of every piece of art, saying that any concept was individual, independent and separate in its own existence, Kristeva emphasizes the togetherness of universal art, and in a more narrow sense, of literature, highlighting that while literary works are indeed original on their own, they are undeniably part of an aesthetic timeline. Literature represents a “dynamic dimension,” as the “literary word is an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), a dialogue among several writings, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.” (1986, 36) Echoing Bakhtin’s theory of the historical and social development of the “status of the word,” Kristeva states that throughout centuries words, then sentences, and then texts continuously built on each other. No writing should be treated as self-contained and delimited. In fact, language, as well as our whole perception of human speech is an infrastructural and intertextual category. In every word there is another word, in languages there is another language, in texts there are other texts, and so on. Therefore, it is essential to see literary works as the “predecessors and descendants” of one another. (1986, 36-37)

Similarly to Eliot, Kristeva believes that to write is to read and learn from previous creators. The canon, previously accepted traditions are there for everyone so as to guide them. How we, readers, interpret a literary work is based on an intertextual relation too. In the act of reading, there are two texts: the one that is written and the one that is being read and understood. These two are never the same. Behind the words of the author hide the words we take in, the meaning strongly relies on the way we interpret the message and shape our own truth and vice versa. In our interpretation, there is always the original text written by the “sender.” The writer relies on previously created expressions, used by others. Even without a concrete hypotext and a hypertext, literary language is still inherited and systematic. (1986, 36-37; Alfaro 1996, 268)

Poetic language has two levels: the text’s language and the reader’s interpretation. The author is inspired by society and writes for society, creating a dialogue between the two. The artist transmits the message, which requires an active reader to decode it. Kristeva suggests three semantic levels to consider, emphasizing the importance of subjectivity in understanding the message. The direct word is objective, denotative, and thus

monosemantic. Direct words have no symbolic references as signs, they represent only themselves. Object-oriented words are also univocal, but they are oriented by the writer into a certain direction, becoming the object of another denotative word. Therefore, their singular meaning is decided by the creator. The third case is much more complicated, it deals with the symbolic sense of a certain element or expression. The multivocal character of a given word is a conscious creation from part of the author. The denotative and connotative meanings of the linguistic element might not correlate. The symbol imitates the form of the original word but suggests another possible meaning. The active readers' task is to understand the intertextual nature of the elements and uncover the indirect message in the context of the created world. From Worton and Still's perspective, "the writer is a reader of texts (in the broadest sense) before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind." (1990, 1) The manuscript goes through a metamorphosis when it gets to the readers who are the ones to fill it with content. The author should always consider the subjectivity of the readers and their influence as the co-producers of the content, letting them discover and relativize the essence of the artistic language on their own. (Kristeva 1986, 42-44; Worton and Still 1990, 2)

Kristeva defines a text based on "productivity" as a "trans-linguistic apparatus." Every writing exists within a more general text, that is within culture itself. Literature is constructive and destructive at the same time: the writer decomposes the great narrative (culture) into smaller elements to create its own representation. While reading we also decompose the text transmitted by the lyrical I or narrator and put it back together according to our own understanding. (1980, 36)

Bakhtin introduces the term double-voiced discourse. This refers to the phenomenon when two (sometimes even more) voices crash dialogically in a text or simple word. In the case of double-voice, one's speech is repetitively interrupted or mixed with another's. Ambiguous language also has a dialogical character because of the coexistence of semantic layers. In intertextual discourse we always have to take this semantic symbiosis into consideration, whether s/he quotes something directly or simply suggests that there is a polyphonic corpus present. In his analysis entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin uses the term to define two or more speakers within the same frame. It is not the same as a multiple narrative, because here the voices are so correlated that one cannot exist without the other. Dialogism is not the same as dialogue. Dialogism, i.e.

double-voice can exist even if the poem or narrative is written in the form of a monologue. When we can differentiate between a sender and a receiver, the direct speech and the “translated” message that the receiver processes in a given “conversation,” dialogism appears. Each layer has unique characteristics that complement each other. Each layer provides an original worldview and ideologies. Once these different ideas meet, they change the way one or the other is construed. This two-way dissection of literary texts is the base of intertextual discourse. (qtd. in Allen 2011, 16-22)

In the following, I would like to put these quite abstract thoughts into practice. This paper attempts to gain insight into the development of the hero or heroine and the way they undergo growth throughout their journeys, while comparing it with the advancement of this metamorphic narrative throughout the different ages. From the start of European literacy up to now, the transformation of the protagonists shows traditional and peculiarly original elements, while focusing on how old and new meet in an intertextual (or transtextual) dialogue.

II. The Metamorphosis of the Heroes: Stages and Principles

Heroic epics, myths, legends, tales, etc. are part of national and cultural identity. The hero is the role model of the nation. He is someone to look up to and personifies the greatest values of the nation, setting up a behavioural pattern for everyone. His personality traits are to be followed by his people, as a “blueprint” for everyone. (Allison et al. 2019, 3)

From the beginning, heroes have been idolized by others. Their stories were told in a high mimetic style, depicting them as superior. They are those who conquer enemies, save the day, and help the helpless, undergoing trials to develop physically and morally with the aid of mentors and mates, ultimately becoming the greatest to ensure peace and safety for their society. This transformation is called the hero’s *metamorphosis*.

The term ‘metamorphosis’ refers to a changing phenomenon. According to the etymology offered by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word ‘metamorphosis’ first appears in Latin borrowed from Greek, and thence makes its way into all modern European languages, as the plural form used by Ovid in titling his grand compendium of ancient tales of transformation. The typical story in *Metamorphoses* is one in which a character performs some natural act and in response a god performs some supernatural act. These miracles may be divided into two prototypes “[...] metamorphic and the metagenetic (or, more simply, the genetic).” Each has psychological implications. (Rabkin 2017, 46)

Metamorphosis describes a natural process, which involves the “body” going from one form to another. (Allison et al. 2019) The word “body” has a loose meaning here: a singular human body, physical transformation, one’s mentality, intellectual or emotional shift, collective sense, cultural and/or national development or decay, but also, because it is natural, it can also apply to the ever-changing nature of our environment, such as the seasonal cycles, days and nights, growing plants and crops, etc. In a generic sense, our whole life is a series of continuous renewals. “Metamorphic change pervades the natural world, from the changing of the seasons to biological growth and decay.” (Allison et al. 2019, 1) From the smallest elements, the atoms, to the infinite galaxy, everything is in a constant conversion. “The universe itself is subject to immense transformation on both a microscopic scale as well as a trans-universal scale. [...] Life presents an ultimatum to all organisms: change as all phenomena in the universe must change, or fall.” (2019, 1-2)

As Richard Buxton believes, metamorphosis occurs when the individual comes into connection with the divine sphere. In Greek myths transformations of the mortal beings were usually caused by gods and goddesses. However, with time immortal forces have slowly been replaced, and metamorphosis has become an – either positive or negative – psychological turnover. (qtd. in Berényi 2013, 28)

Metamorphosis usually requires a setback, suffering and even death. The previous self must die. According to Bergman, people only have a limited knowledge of the world around, seeing everything “through a glass darkly.” (qtd. in Allison et al. 2019, 1). After literal or metaphorical death and resurrection, the individual breaks this glass, reaching the ultimate knowledge and abilities to look at things to their fullest, winning against his/her nemesis.

The initial self usually dies the moment the hero starts his voyage, often triggered by a dramatic shift happening in his life. In order for the hero to change, a change in the setting is necessary. The departure of the hero from home, from the safe place and his familiar setting represents his departure from his/her previous self.

Joseph Campbell proposes that the hero’s transformation is triggered by a profound emotion, like the feeling of newfound peace, captivity, generosity towards a community, happiness, jealousy or being part of something bigger. He also mentions that the hero needs to go through the following stages: a necessary mourning caused by something that is no longer there (e.g. a lost lover, a stolen treasure, a dead mate or parent), followed by the process of mentoring and suffering (which is the representation of the series of different probes and trials the hero goes through). (qtd. in Allison et al. 2019, 2) Campbell unfolded the ‘hero’ archetype, writing down all the typical characteristics that make him recognizable. According to him, the hero starts his journey because of an accidental situation that changes his life and makes him/her move towards the unknown. Sometimes these accidental situations happen because of a mistake of the unconscious or because of a call that invites the hero to enter the path. The hero accepts the invitation and leaves his/her home to discover the mysterious. He also has a great enemy (or more), called the hero’s nemesis. The last trial is to eliminate this nemesis, who is a bad character, trying everything to stop or destroy the hero. There are many examples we already know even from the simplest stories: witches, dragons, bad spirits, ghosts, the evil relatives (like the stepmother or stepsisters), the jealous mates, the friend who betrays the protagonist, the bullies, the rival, and so on. (2008, 15) “Transcending life’s challenges enables the hero to ‘undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness,’ requiring them ‘to think a different way.’ [...] This shift offers

a new ‘map or picture of the universe and allows us to see ourselves in relationship to nature’.” (qtd. in Allison et al. 2019, 3)

A hero's death might shock the readers/audience, however, Jones declares that it is sometimes necessary. Death is a picky theme to work with, although it is indispensable to learn about it from young ages as a natural part of a human being's life. Death is everywhere, it circulates around us and every time we get a peep of it, we learn a little more about our unconscious self. Losing a tooth, breaking an arm, finishing a book, ending kindergarten, then school, moving to another town, losing a friend, a relative, a pet etc., growing up is never easy. We have to say goodbye to someone or something from time to time. The fear of the unknown, of change, the fear of loss, the stages of grief and acceptance, drowning in the lake of our confusing emotions, learning how to let go or even learning about the power within us that we have never met before, make us stand up in our darkest moments, with everything that is buried in us, not used in our everyday lives, and which comes out from its hiding place when the ‘normal’ is gone. Times like this, when our safe room is burned to the ground, we learn how to restart. The metaphorical – or real – death teaches us to learn until the moment we ourselves become lessons for the next generations. Death is also the symbol of separation: the individual realises the fragility of life and starts focusing on herself/himself. (Jones 2008, 13-15)

Arnold van Gennep calls metamorphosis a ritual. He explains that social events are most of the times rituals, during which certain people are separated from and reintegrated into the community. These rituals always consist of three stages: separation, transition and incorporation. During the first stage, the individual is removed from his or her social environment, feeling intense grief over the loss of the familiar and ordinary. Then, the individual meets an elder person (mentor) who helps him/her through the trials. The elder shares the ultimate knowledge needed for the ritual to be performed. If the ritual is successful, the individual loses his/her previous identity and finds a new, wiser, stronger one. In the last stage, s/he returns to the community finding a new role: as an adult, a married person, a mother/father, a leader, or as a warrior/hero, etc. (qtd. Stainlav 2005: 38-40)

The hero's metamorphosis is a transformative journey fostering personal growth, healing, social unity, and spiritual understanding. It is similar to coming-of-age stories, where the hero must navigate collective conventions and traditions to become a true member of society. The journey involves overcoming emotional experiences, confronting inner fears, and developing a deeper understanding of the universe. (qtd. Stainlav 2005: 42-45) With the help of a mentor, the hero

transitions from ego- to sociocentrism, letting go of selfish desires for the greater good. This transformation leads to personal growth, healing, and a deeper connection with others, enabling the hero to shape and conduct their community. As mentioned by Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, society behaves as a collective mind. There is no community without collective conventions and traditions. Most of the time, these functions, rituals and schematic “movements” lie in the subconscious. Some are born with the necessary information, some need to learn them. Jung calls this the “second birth” of the human being, the spiritual and cerebral birth after a spiritual death. (1980b, 45; Hoffer 1992, 520-524) The hero’s newfound wisdom – the ultimate goal – is a cosmic knowledge, which makes him and his community understand and join the “rhythms of the universe.” (Freud 2020, 10-16; 2021, 9-13, 22-25; Allison et al. 2019, 4-6)

Eric S. Rabkin’s concept of “metagenesis” is explored in the context of myths and literature. Metamorphosis is seen in Narcissus and Echo, who undergo physical transformations reflecting their personalities. In contrast, Galatea’s “birth” and Pygmalion’s marriage are examples of metagenesis, revealing more about their creators, Venus, than themselves. This marriage is only possible because of the goddess’ kindness. She is the active agent of the myth. Similarly, in Hoffman’s *Sandman*, Olympia’s “coming to life” is metagenesis, while Nathanael’s transformation is a mix of metamorphosis and metagenesis. The author argues that metagenesis highlights the transformative power of external forces, whereas metamorphosis reveals internal characteristics. The distinction between these two concepts sheds light on the complexities of character development in literature. (Rabkin 2017, 47-53)

III. Do Texts Have Gender?

When talking about the best of one's personality, we tend to use the term 'hero' to describe a masculine character. Edmonds describes this phenomenon as a gender issue regarding historical texts. What he means by that is the male dominance of heroic narratives. (2004, 65) Thus, are texts – most importantly, heroic narratives – influenced by a certain gender? Are there factors that make texts have different “genders”?

If we return to the previous example, to the story of Pygmalion and Galatea, we can say that Pygmalion is obviously in focus. He is the sculptor; he falls in love with his own creation. He finds happiness in the end. However, as already stated, from the perspective of metamorphosis and metagenesis, Venus is much more important, because she is the one causing the miracle. Which of them dominates the myth? Rabkin's reasoning is that because Venus is the active agent, the myth is centred around her, thus, it is a female dominated narration. In the case of Narcissus and Echo, Narcissus is the dominant party, because the ultimate metamorphosis of Echo occurs after that of Narcissus, it stands for its cause. (2017, 49)

Edmonds builds a discussion around the underworld journeys, at some point analysing the heroes – travellers, as he calls them – by gender. His main focus is on the pronouns used to describe these characters. He concludes that the usage of female pronouns is quite problematic. It is rare to find women in these texts. The journeys have a strongly masculine voice and are written from the perspective of men. Scholars even say that the feminine form used in these tales might not indicate that the deceased was a female for sure; rather, it indicates that the birthplace of those buried had a feminine inflection. Furthermore, women were often referred to with an unmarked masculine form. Thus, the existence of women travellers is uncertain and rather hard to highlight. (2007, 65-66)

Heroic narratives build on patriarchal traditions. Thus, the existence of a possible heroine is very limited. Women have traditional roles in society. Their metamorphosis is also dictated by social norms: menstruation, getting married, becoming a housewife, labour, becoming a mother, and so on. They call these biological changes. A woman's metamorphosis is ultimately a change of persona. On the other hand, because these are cultural factors, girls reach adulthood easier, given that they are raised to respect their society. Their mentors are their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc. Boys, however, require a more special ritual to be able to transform into men. This shows how certain cultures were built on strict gender roles. Still, the highly transformative nature of women

and their ability to become leaders is indisputable. (Allison et al. 2019, 9) “Transformation is deeply embedded in feminine consciousness” and their humility, democratic and participatory style and more peaceful thinking proves that women should be seen as heroic role models just as much as men. (2019, 9-10)

Does it matter whether the narrator (and ultimately the author) is a man or a woman, or they can give an authentic and sensible representation of the changing soul, overlooking their own personal identity? Also, in the discourse of intertextuality, is it possible for a text to keep its familiar form if the gender of one or another participant is changed?

Language – and literature – should be able to make a distinction between the gender identity of the speaker and the text. The androgynous voice demands the “death” of the author, in other words, his/her personal identity should not affect the style of wording, language should be transparent. (qtd. in Butler 1989, 104-105) Even when this androgynous voice cannot be achieved, female and male authorship should not challenge one another. (Kristeva, 2004, 498-499) Yet, is it possible to completely silence the voice of the speaker? Does it influence the plot of the trilogy we are about to discuss?

Kristeva talks about poetic language while attempting to bring the speaking body into discussion. She writes about the semiotic and symbolic language, pointing out that while the first one refers to the preverbal and rhythmic aspects of communication, the latter is much stricter, relying on clear grammatical and syntactic rules we use for social interactions. Semiotic language is characterized by the non-linguistic forms of communication, such as gestures, body language, showing emotions, etc. She associates it with the realm of the unconscious, talking about the processes of creativity, artistic expression, and the irrational aspects of the psyche. Symbolic language, in contrast with semiotic language, is more rational, and is used in everyday communication, including verbal and written language, and it is necessary for participation in social, cultural or political systems. (2002, 109-115)

She also connects these types of language to male and female genders. She says that semiotic language belongs to the female side, to the mother, while symbolic language belongs to male identity, the father. However, they interact with each other in a complex way. Kristeva also says that the imbalance of this relationship can lead to serious psychological problems, such as schizophrenia. (2002, 114-117)

Poetic language (or artistic language in general), however, is able to break these rules. While it has a structure, like symbolic language, it is rather unconventional, it disrupts and subverts

the norms of everyday communication as well, it activates the semiotic realm and is driven by subconscious desires, artistic flows and irrational emotions, pushes boundaries and creates a whole new set of meaning. (2002, 117-127)

Thus, we can say that narratives most of the time have their own “gender.” However, rules can be broken, and with the right combination of semiotic and symbolic language an androgynous writing can be reached, which is situated above gender specificity. Even though society depicted (and sometimes still depicts) heroes as masculine figures, heroism can co-exist with femininity too. Moreover, heroines are also able to show the right way.

Finally, another interesting aspect of intertextuality connected to gender is that the main plot elements of a story are still present and could be identified in another, even after switching the gender of the characters or the narrator. Meg Cabot’s *Abandon* trilogy is a good example, with the heroes and heroines still both present in our world. Treating them as equal, Pierce Oliviera and John show how intertextuality can be seen as pretty flexible and diverse. Finding the similarities between the trilogy and other heroic stories, the trilogy provides us with a rich representation of metamorphosis, textual relations and gender issues.

IV. Metamorphosis in Cabot's Trilogy Discussed on Two Levels

IV.2. Level 1: The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice

The retelling of the myth of Demeter, Persephone and Hades within the trilogy, as discussed and analysed in a previous research, is something the author herself reveals at the end of the first book, *Abandon*. In the *Author's Note* she says: “It was while studying those afterworlds (when I was in high school) that I first became interested in death deities, in particular the myth of Hades and Persephone, and the roots of the story that would become *Abandon* began to dig in.” (2011, 307) Thus, the relation between Pierce and John and Persephone and Hades is provided for us from the beginning. However, is this the only intertextual layer we can discuss in connection with Cabot's mysterious world?

The motif of the traveller, the voyage, and the Underworld have returned repeatedly in literature. Well-known ancient figures, like Ulysses, Aeneas, or even Orpheus, went down to the world of the long-passed souls to achieve something that changed their personality and worldview completely. Persephone herself is a constant wayfarer between the surface level and the deepest of the world. The voyage itself is like a ritual, reshaping the individual. At the end of the circular road, they end up changing and growing, maturing to survive the threatening darkness of Hades' kingdom. While returning, they are “resurrected,” with the ability to see life and death as the two sides of the same coin. (Segal 1989, 19-23, Brown 2004)

One of the best-known myths about death and resurrection is that of Orpheus and Eurydice, two fated lovers, facing the fear of losing each other, constantly moving from one sphere to another in order to reunite. This is what happens to the protagonists in *Abandon* as well since they fight for one another in order to stay together. Thus, even though it is not as direct as with Persephone or Hades, I would dare to say that reinterpreted elements of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be found in Cabot's trilogy as well, further deepening the already complex narrative of death, desire, fate, and love.

Furthermore, I would like to bring in another piece of the great literary canon in relation to our lover-travellers. At the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*. In his epic poem Orpheus is a cultivator, an orator or a great shepherd, similar to David or even Jesus. He uses poetry and music to help people find the right way to God. Eszter Draskóczy believes that “Orpheus is the ‘wit,’ he can tame and humble those who are led

by something other than their conscience with the might of his words,” because he already experienced everything, both the bad and the good humankind can encounter in life. (2018, 37-46)

Tragic heroes and tragic lovers, the narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice has become relevant from time to time. Cabot’s trilogy is interesting because the presence of Orpheus and Eurydice is somewhat ambiguous, yet, a significant factor within the story, which I would like to refer to as the ‘*mirror-Orpheus effect*’ in what follows.

IV.2.1. Who is the Orpheus of the Trilogy? Who is Eurydice?

A narrative about a great poet and the power of his art: Is the myth of Orpheus another metatext? Based on Genette’s theory and our definition, it definitely is. In the case of the trilogy, we can see how the plotlines of the novels and the myth can be connected to each other.

Aside from his high literary value, Orpheus is the ultimate Underworld traveller. (Radcliffe 2004, 17) From the surface to the deep and back to light, his journey is a circular one. Both the beginning and the end of his route are overshadowed by death.

Orpheus and Eurydice’s characters differ, with Orpheus being determined and sensitive, while Eurydice is suspicious and obstinate, leading to her second disappearance due to her mistrust and Orpheus’ soft-heartedness. The myth of Orpheus typically revolves around the male protagonist’s experiences, but in Cabot’s work, both Pierce and John exhibit mixed personality traits inherited from Orpheus and Eurydice, deviating from the traditional focus on a single male character. This unique approach allows for a more complex exploration of the mythological themes and characters.

In the case of Pierce and John, it is not that easy to decide who is the victim and who is the sinner. Their personalities and growth show similar aspects. Nevertheless, their movements in-between the worlds are different.

Pierce Oliviera starts her journey from above – our world –, and constantly moves up and down – into the Underworld, as Orpheus does. Given the fact that she is thrown into the events without her knowledge, she is more humane than John is. Nevertheless, unlike Orpheus, in the first part of her voyage, she has no one to save from death but herself.

The cause of her death is the scarf she had got from her grandmother. Her grandmother takes up the role of the snake, planning and causing Pierce to drown in the pool. Similarly to

Eurydice, she passes away as the prey of a wild force, completely innocent and helpless. Going down to the Underworld, Pierce's soul is waiting for her final judgement. For John to become Pierce's saviour, he would need to return her soul to the mortal world. Even if his intentions are righteous and needed in his eyes, Pierce's soul screams for freedom, as a result, John in his primary attempt to save the soul of his beloved (according to his abilities) fails.

Neither Orpheus, nor John can resurrect the dead without conditions. While Hades orders Orpheus to do things in a certain way, John has to obey the rules set in the Underworld. In the sixth chapter of the first book, while arguing with Pierce about laws and free will, the girl asks "*Don't you make the rules?*" John responds by saying that he cannot give Pierce back her life without consequences. "*It's against the rules,*" he answers. "*Because of the Furies. [...] Trust me, they make sure that the consequences for breaking the rules around here are much worse than anything you could imagine.*" (Cabot 2011, 68) Later on, it is revealed that the Furies kill everyone who makes them angry, making sure that their souls disappear forever, similarly to what happens to Eurydice.

The fact that John's decisions are limited within his own kingdom makes him a rather ambiguous character. Since he is supposed to represent Hades, his word should be the law. Yet, he has to be careful with the Furies, which embody the ultimate order, the "arbitrary rule" in the Underworld. (2011, 69) These selfish, vindictive and overly aggressive creatures could remind the readers of two other figures from ancient mythology.

On the one hand, in Greek and Roman mythology the Furies (also called Erinyes) were the deities of vengeance. Living in the Underworld, they chased and fiercely punished those who had sinned before. These Erinyes were portrayed as women, another parallel between them and the Furies described in the trilogy. Cabot's Furies are also mostly women, Pierce's grandmother being one of the strongest ones.

On the other hand, because they have the ability to decide upon the fate of dead and living, the Furies resemble the Moirae, the three female goddesses (Fate; Klotho, Lachesis and Atropos), also living in the Underworld, spinning the threads of humanity. They have the ability to cut some of those threads, deciding upon one's life as they wish. (Brunel 2016, 848; 1061-1062)

Pierre Brunel mentions Orpheus' meeting the Furies and speaks about them as "relentless, bloodthirsty women," looking for any form of disturbance. (2016, 937) Pierce explains that the sole purpose of their ruthlessness is "causing John pain," suggesting that maybe he did anger these unstoppable forces before. (Cabot 2013, 12) Moreover, there is no escape from them, especially

when they want to take revenge on someone. Even in their well-protected castle, the enemy could still find the couple. Not even John and his deeply rooted powers are enough to stop them effectively.

The reason the Furies seem to hate John so much that they are constantly trying to cause him discomfort and even immense pain is connected to the concept of death and afterlife. It is necessary to note that before John's reign, there were others who took up the Hades persona. The Furies are told to be almost as old as the Underworld is. Being unhappy about their end and final destination, they come back to haunt the one being responsible for their misery. With that being said, John is haunted by them for his position as the ruler of Hades. Because "*not all the departed are dear,*" the Furies see him as a transgressor, and while connecting their own agony, sorrow to John's person, they "*come back [...] intent on vengeance...on the one who sent them there and on the one whom he loves.*" (2011, 311)

John and Orpheus share a similar goal: to save their loved ones from death. However, they both have a fatal flaw: they overlook the importance of trust. Orpheus defies natural order to reclaim Eurydice, while John refuses to let Pierce go. Despite their good intentions, they fail to establish trust with their partners. Eurydice is hesitant and stubborn, unable to recognize Orpheus, while Pierce is naive and scared, unaware of the consequences of her choice. Ultimately, both men lose their loved ones due to a lack of faith in their pure intentions, highlighting the crucial role of trust in relationships.

Pierce distances herself from John, who must prove his loyalty to win her back. However, the Furies target Pierce, forcing her to return to the Underworld. John's mistakes continue to mount as he revives Alex, Pierce's cousin, after the Furies kill him. This is John's third offense against the natural order, following his resurrection of a bird for Pierce and allowing her to escape. As punishment, John loses his power and becomes like Eurydice, mortal, somewhat of a bodiless, lost soul. His mistakes ultimately lead to his downfall and loss of status.

However, there is a significant difference between John and Eurydice, and that is the contrast of having and lacking the needed knowledge to survive the situation. John, given his position and history, accepts the limited amount of his choices; he is ready to sacrifice himself. It is a deliberate choice. Eurydice, however, is another maiden, naïve and still undeveloped, thus is incapable of realizing the weight of her actions. Her mistake costs her freedom. Could this be the reason why she fails while John can return to life once again? In my interpretation, the answer is a clear yes. As mentioned in the second chapter – quoting Campbell – sacrifice is necessary for a

complete metamorphosis. The price of the metamorphosis is their lives in both cases, yet, because Eurydice does not know about the rules, she cannot complete her transformation or get the ultimate reward, which is life itself. However, by the time he dies, John is more of a lover than a ruler, so his reward is resurrection and the opportunity to start everything over with Pierce.

Pierce's situation is also interesting and rather complicated. She is closer to Orpheus than to Eurydice. Pierce is an individual female force. She has her own faults, being too stubborn and naïve at the beginning, sensitive and reckless. Still, when hard times come, she is able to stand up and face danger in order to protect her people.

Pierce, like Orpheus, embarks on a journey to rescue John, balancing her fear and sadness, and seeking Thanatos, the embodiment of death, to revive him, mirroring the mythological theme. In Greek mythology, "Thanatos is the double of Eros" – the deity of love, lust and sexual desire. As people cannot control themselves under the spell of Eros, Thanatos is the embodiment of death, another unstoppable force, which drives human beings to their end, and often makes them commit murder or suicide. (Brunel 2016, 356) In the third book entitled *Awaken*, Thanatos appears to be the only creature that can help the group. Thus, Pierce and her mates start another voyage to save their king.

Orpheus is not just an artist, but a creator too. His songs make mountains move, flowers bloom, trees grow from the ground and animals gather around him. He creates his own world to hide from his own feelings and the surrounding world. John does the same. Orpheus' grove and John's castle serve as safe havens, reflecting their creators' emotions. Orpheus' grove is a vibrant, magical space, while John's castle is a protected paradise with symbolic trees representing love and grief. John's visits to Pierce are marked by withered trees and dark petals, mirroring his sorrow. In contrast, Pierce, like Orpheus, is a creator who transforms the Underworld into a welcoming space for souls, rewriting its rules. (Aczél 2009, 114-117)

Another important aspect is the repetitive appearance of certain colours and symbols. In Ovid's Orphic myth, these are the rocks, the spring flowers, the colour red and the shadows. (Aczél 2009, 115-116) All these elements are present in Cabot's trilogy as well. Rocks symbolize infertility, while flowers represent hope and new life. John's castle is initially gloomy, but his lily garden is his "Paradise". Red petals, which Pierce describes as little fire sparks or "dead poinciana" (Cabot 2011, 104), symbolizing love and heartache, are left behind by John, often followed by grey storm clouds, indicating his emotional state. Shadows and the colour black are also

significant, with John, the ruler of death, wearing black and following Pierce like a shadow, while she is his only source of light.

IV.2.2. The ‘Mirror-Orpheus Effect’

There is another interesting connection between John and Pierce, namely the way they seem to move similarly to each other, yet the directions they take are the opposite of one another, almost as if they were doubles. Nevertheless, we should not call them doubles in the conventional sense. If we accept the fact that they both do in fact have an Orphic attitude, then we should rather refer to them as Orpheus and Mirror-Orpheus. Moreover, to analyse this parallel between the two protagonists thoroughly, let us use the term ‘mirror-Orpheus effect.’

The fundamental idea of the ‘mirror-Orpheus effect’ is built on the mimicry we can observe between John and Pierce. We could say that one of them constantly reflects the movements and behaviour of the other. Just like in case of a mirror, there are two images: one of them is the “real Orpheus,” the other one is the mimicking person, the reversed double. Their role of being the mirrored and the reflection, continuously changes throughout the story. To explain this phenomenon further, we have to focus on some examples.

After dying and coming back to life, Pierce has a constant up and downward movement, coming from the Underworld to the surface and changing her persona³. She switches her roles repeatedly between a teenage girl and the queen of death. Pierce herself says: “*Everyone knows people who’ve died and come back return...well, a little off,*” and she even points out how people call her “*Zackary Oliviera’s half-crazy daughter.*” (Cabot 2012, 108) Using the expression “a little off” already suggests a change in her character, something that makes her an outcast, different. This is something that changes her persona as an everyday person, a child of two parents. The fact that she died and returned to life also means that Pierce is above the average. Furthermore, with John being next to her, she comes from and goes to the Underworld periodically.

At a certain point, Pierce starts thinking about what home means to her. It is an inner battle. At first, she says, “*as much as he [John] wanted to pretend that this place [the Underworld] was my home, it wasn’t.*” (Cabot 2013, 20) She describes her new environment the following way: “*Home? The Underworld? A gigantic underground cavern, where the sun never shone, wracked by perpetual damp, to which dead people showed up every five minutes?*” (2013, 15-16) It is

³ I dealt in detail with the different persona – as defined by Jung – in both Pierce and John’s case in my previous study.

obvious how Pierce, daughter of the living world is appalled at the sight of her new possible residence. Still, when John decides to take her back to her mom's house, saying, "*This is what you said you wanted,*" Pierce is surprised and unsure of herself, because "*Now that is was happening, however, I found myself wanting the exact opposite.*" (2013, 139-140)

Pierce's persona changes from an indecisive daughter to a possible partner of John. She wants to go away from him, yet, she wants to return to him each time. Consequently, this up and down movement becomes a recurring one, a cycle. She escapes John's castle. She has to go back to that place to protect her life. She returns to her home in order to save her family and friends, but she wants to be with John at the same time. He becomes her new idea of feeling home and being accepted. After John's "death," she resurfaces once again. Even her battles against the enemy are being fought in these two spheres.

John, on the other hand, has a stable down and upward movement. One can argue that John himself started his journey as a human being, nonetheless, John, the ruler was only "born" after his previous death as a human being and a sailor. After meeting Pierce, he returns to Key West (Cayo Hueso) from time to time, to save her, to take her with him, to join the war against the Furies. Just like Pierce, he starts living his life on two levels. The last chapter of *Awaken* concludes this idea, it finishes their whole story and shows us how their moving up and down will be an ongoing habit even in the future:

One. Two. Three.

Blink.

A girl meets a boy, full of sadness and longing. The boy takes that girl to another world, a dark world from which the girl cannot escape.

You don't need to worry about that girl, though, because she knows there is a way to escape, a way to break the curse, let sunlight into the world...

... or at least let the boy out for a vacation every now and then. (Cabot 2014, 326)

What makes them similar to a mirror is that one of them is always the catalyser of the events. It is either Pierce or John who moves the strings, and the other is oriented towards him/her. Pierce's going down to the deadly kingdom is caused by John. John's moving upwards is a direct consequence of Pierce's actions and behaviour. Similarly, because they have the perpetual need to protect one another from irreversibly losing their souls, they continuously mirror each other's Orphic traits.

What are these Orphic traits? When I use this expression, I refer to the following: Orphic travelling between worlds, saving loved ones, creation, and lonely love. John and Orpheus create

spaces from grief, while Pierce transforms the Underworld. Both Orpheus and John remain devoted to their loves, Eurydice and Pierce, despite losses and heartache.

John's overprotective nature is evident, as he uses brutality to defend Pierce, punishing those who harm her, including a teacher, Mr. Miller who assaulted her. John appears whenever she is in danger. However, he is not the only one to act like this. Pierce has a possessive side as well. From feeling jealous to putting herself into alarming situations and deciding to bring John back to life, she goes through similar stages. They both share the same Orphic desire to cater to the other's soul.

Pierce's returning dreams also emphasize her wish to care for her beloved. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams are the "guardians of sleeping," moreover, they reveal the individual's inner, most personal and passionate aspirations. (qtd. in Sayed 2011, 1) Consequently, Pierce has an underlying, subconscious devotion to free John, not to let him drown and go through the same experience as she did. Pierce's dreams foreshadow three important elements of the trilogy: John's childhood and background story, Pierce's love and fear of losing him: "*Still, when John said that thing in my dream about how he'd rather die than let me die, even though I knew that could never be, I realized something,*" she confesses. (Cabot 2012, 4-5)

I wanted to believe in the fairy tales too. My subconscious – just like all the doctors tried to reassure my mother – had worked out the resolution to a problem that had been bothering me for a long time. I'd actually wanted to be running towards John, not away from him, all this time. Only now that I'd realized it, he was about to drown. (2012, 5)

She then continues describing her dream, saying: "*I sounded like I was possessed. I was possessed, with the fear of watching the sea swallow him up before my eyes. It figured that the minute I finally admitted to myself how much I loved him I was about to lose him.*" (2012, 5)

Our characters undergo a metamorphosis, influenced by each other. John, once a ruler, becomes a lover, humanized and vulnerable. He has supernatural talents, but mortal limitations. Pierce, dehumanized, becomes the Underworld's queen, gaining insight into human existence. Through their transformations, they grow, John becoming more humane, Pierce mirroring the traveller. Together, they form a complete whole, each influencing the other's development. This is what the 'mirror-Orpheus effect' stands for.

IV.3. Level 2: Dante and the “Other Worlds”

The second layer we can observe in the analysis is represented by the connection between Cabot's trilogy and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, based on the 'other worlds.' Cabot makes this relationship obvious by directly quoting Dante at the beginning of each chapter, as a kind of short summary. This is what Genette calls paratextuality. Besides this function, through these quotes Cabot draws another parallel between our couple, John and Pierce and that of Dante and Beatrice's. However, this is not the only intertextual layer we can talk about here. Orpheus himself appears in Dante's story too. Dante retells the myth, and goes even further, showing the man as a creator and a great philosopher. Not only that, but he knowingly distinguishes “*between Orpheus the man and Orpheus the myth*,” concluding that there is a difference between how we see him in the Underworld and how he is as a mortal. (Schwebel 2005, 62-65) The polyphonic nature of textual connections is suggestive here. Even without directly mentioning him, through Dante, Cabot brings in Orpheus and Eurydice, while indirectly commenting on them as a metatext. With Dante, she makes this spider web even stronger. How does this layer influence the plotline and the metamorphosis of the two characters?

In line with Eszter Draskóczy's view, Dante's great epic poem resembles a Bildungsroman. As she claims, the whole *Comedy* is a narrative written about an existential transformation. This metamorphosis is triggered by love and a supernatural journey. (2014, 30)

In Hell, people go through both physical and mental changes. Sometimes even their punishment is a transformation. People who committed suicide turn into plants. In the Circle of Violence, thieves turn to dust or to snakes (as a direct association with the Bible), then transform back to human beings, this is an endless and unpredictable cycle. Others are either suffering from a sick body (Canto XIX-XXX), lose their ability to talk or are chopped into pieces, unable to find all the body parts. (Canto XVIII) However, the most important metamorphosis – the metamorphosis of the central hero who is the alter ego of Dante himself – is indirect, highly subjective and is written about in the first person. Thus, as Draskóczy concludes, the *Divine Comedy* is a story of a subconscious, mental transformation, of a much-needed purification. (2014, 30-31)

The same pattern can be found in Cabot's novels. Several quotations are taken from *The Inferno*, the first part of the great epic poem, as Cabot's Underworld is compared to Dante's Hell.

Similarly, Pierce's, but mostly John's voyage reflects that of Dante's. In the following, I shall use textual evidence to prove these ideas.

"*Through every city shall he hunt her down,/Until he shall have driven her back to Hell*" are the first two lines of the prologue in *Abandon*. (qtd. in Cabot 2012, 1) It does not only foreshadow Pierce's fate, but it can be linked to the myth of Persephone and Hades too. The use of the expression "*hunt her down*" suggests violence, a chase between man and woman. Hades did "hunt Persephone down" as he abducted her. John does not hunt Pierce, but chases her around, even when he tries to stop. Consequently, this exact quotation echoes the whole concept of the trilogy and creates a triangular relation between the myth, the trilogy and the epic poem.

Inferno starts with the lines "*Midway upon the journey of our life.*" (trans. Longfellow 1867, 1) In the context of Dante's work, this midway means that the protagonist is around 35 years old, another important aspect, which links his work to the Bible too. Norbert Mátyus and József Nagy say that Canto I. describes a failed journey, as the protagonist is lost in the forest. Virgil's figure appearing in front of Dante is allegorical. They think that the route taken by Dante is meant to represent humanity in some sort of a crisis. Since there is no specific time, Dante becomes the allegorical figure of each human being. Finding hope is connected to finding religion and eternal faith. (Mátyus and Nagy 2019, 17)

However, in connection with *Abandon*, this notion changes its meaning. Connecting back to Pierce's development from child to maiden, a mother and leader, and the idea of a Bildungsroman, her journey represents her becoming an adult woman. At the end of *Awaken*, her new role as a wife and mother is strongly suggested: "*maybe, after we get married we can have a baby.*" (Cabot 2014, 343) As a result, in the case of Pierce, middle way refers to the breaking point of her previous existence. Before truly meeting John, she was a child. After meeting John, she becomes more and more experienced and has to grow up. Her age is specified. Being a 17-year-old girl is her midway in life, the link between childhood and adulthood. The darkness of the woods and the loss of the "*straightforward path*" (line 3) could be also interpreted as Pierce losing her stability and safety usually offered by childhood.

Her death is also connected to a natural image. Cabot chose a part from Canto III., the metaphor of an autumn tree to describe how the soul leaves the body: "*As in the autumn-time the leaves fall off,/First one and then another, till the branch/ Unto the earth surrenders all its spoils.*" (qtd. in Cabot 2012, 3) Canto III. is the one in which our traveller reaches the Gate of Hell. Correspondingly, right after the quotation in Chapter 3, Pierce mentions how she died and

underwent a spiritual adventure. “*I cannot well repeat how there I entered,/So full was I of slumber at the moment/In which I had abandoned the true way,*” Dante continues his narration, and interestingly, the word ‘abandon’ appears in it too. Being the victim of a greater, murderous plot, Pierce herself does not know how she ended up in the middle of the events; she was abandoned by the parental figures, her father, mother and grandmother.

The image of Hell is terrifying on its own, full of tension, sorrow and disorder. With corpse-like creatures, “*their face irrigate with blood, [...] with their tears commingled,*” (1867, 17, lines 67-68) they are standing at a riverbank, trying to reach the other shore. The harbour in the Underworld looks almost identical: people standing all around, trying to push others away and get on the ships. For an outsider, such as Dante’s hero or Pierce, these riverbanks are the perfect representation of endless chaos.

Tihamér Tóth reckons that no human can survive Inferno without abandoning the human fear that ties him or her to the mortal realm. The description is shocking, as the human eyes are not meant to see such horrific images. The above-mentioned tree is a metaphor, which stands for the soul. As the leaves fall from the branches, the soul is slowly decaying in the body. The body might be covered in blood, but the soul cannot be seen by mortals. Thus, the leaf-soul parallel helps us see the invisible. (2019, 60-62)

In the Underworld, John gradually becomes the only one Pierce can rely on, but at first he is described as someone between “*a shade and a real man,*” mysterious and terrifying at the same time/ He is also like a beast “*with head uplifted and with ravenous hunger,/So that it seemed the air was afraid of him.*” (2012, 16; 30) John being compared to the hungry lion Dante met along his road deepens his persona as a scarily dominant creature, and frightens Pierce. In a promotional video that was uploaded on the YouTube channel, I read YA, Cabot discusses the character of John and says that he is the personification of everything mysterious, unknown and strongly masculine, something that the heroine is not familiar with. He is also surrounded by secrets and a dark, dangerous aura, looking almost sinful. For Pierce, it takes time to realize what John wants is not to kill her, and even though she connects disaster to him, he might not be the only source of destruction in her life. For him to lose Pierce completely would be fatal, but for him not to lose her, an internal transformation is indispensable. (Cabot 2011).

Draskóczy asks herself in her thesis paper, whether love is enough to change one’s character. What about passion? Can passion influence our sense of judgment? (2014, 19-20)

Borrowing these questions from her, I would like to focus more on John, and on how Pierce plays a similar part in his life as Beatrice does in Dante's.

Turning Pierce's "*fear to desire*" (2012, 252) is a trial that is significant for John's metamorphosis. For Dante, Beatrice is the muse, the compass and the goal, the ultimate bridge to salvation. Losing himself to an unholy life, Dante needs someone to "rehumanize" him, to help him find the right way. Her love does not only guide Dante's hero but also gives him the strength to go through the purifying fire in the Purgatory and reach Heaven.

Death, love, and art are intertwined in both relationships. Loss and recreation are key themes, with love serving as a muse and death sparking artistic awakening. For Dante, art is language, while for John, it is piecing together his life and environment. John's death and rebirth as a cold-hearted king are revealed through others' accounts. In Chapter 19, when Mr. Richards reveals the truth about himself and John, there are three lines from Canto II. that summarize the tragic end of his short human existence: "*Dost thou not hear the pity of his plaint?/Dost thou not see the death that combats him/ Beside that flood, where ocean has no vaunt?*" (2012, 221) Afterwards he lost his pathway, as Dante had. However, meeting Pierce sparks John's purification, making him more caring and gentle. His second "death" marks his progress, and ultimately, his sacrifices are worth the pain, as love rehumanizes him and completes his puzzle.

Pierce is often connected to doves. When John met her the first time, he resurrected a bird for her. While they live in his castle, he gives a dove to Pierce; this animal symbolizes their feelings for each other. He has a single wish and that is for Pierce to share his feelings. Dante talks about such passionate desires in Canto V:

*When as we read of the much-longed-for smile
Being by such a noble lover kissed,
This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided,
Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating.* (1867, 32, lines 133-136)

The loss of a loved person is a recurring theme in both works. John's metamorphosis requires sacrifice; only by giving up his previous life and love can he be reborn. Only then can he achieve humanity and reintegration into society as a new person.

Interestingly, while *Abandon* and *Awaken* borrow parts only from the *Inferno*, in *Awaken*, the last book of the trilogy, and the one, which describes John's conversion, other lines from *Purgatorio* appear as well. "*Wherefore, here where thou seest, I am lost*" is said after his passing, followed by an "*infernal hurricane*" (2014, 85; 99), which does not only refer to chaos coming,

but also to Pierce's inner battle and marginal emotions. After John's return a citation from *Paradiso* appears, concluding everything Pierce feels: "*And light I saw/ [...] Depicted with an admirable Spring.*" (2014, 207) The used fragments start to turn from dark and pessimistic to more pleasant and hopeful ones. After the great war against the Furies, with the conflict solved, the trilogy ends with yet another fragment taken from *Paradiso*: "*O joy! O gladness inexpressible!/O perfect life of love and peacefulness!*" (2014, 326)

What Genette says about paratextuality, thus, becomes very clear here. These quotations do not only function as mottos, but as small guidelines or even "early prophecies," with a clearly pragmatic role, each of them concluding the essence, main tone and atmosphere of the given chapter. As the danger disappears, Cabot borrows much more liberating lines from Dante. They also connect John and Pierce's ending to Dante and Beatrice's. Winning against the Furies is like reaching Paradise. Heaven is described in the trilogy not just as a concrete place, but as different feelings and states: freedom, purity, peace, certainty, love and a huge range of gained experience, as proved by the following fragments: With the Furies gone, Chloe, one of Pierce's friends "*I'll get to help people, and to me that seems like heaven.*" (Cabot 2014, 324) Pierce compares her newfound happiness to storms and flowers: "*We do need storms sometimes, because they clear away the bracken so that the sun can shine on flowers that might never otherwise have had a chance to bloom.*" (2014, 330) Her personal heaven is the mixture of countless battles, winning against the enemies and having the chance to see the world in a new light. The contrast between the starting and ending scenes is obvious. In the first chapter of the first book, she warns the readers not to blink, because anything can happen – she refers to her death. In the last book, she admits that bad things come together with good ones, thus closing and opening our eyes a few times might be necessary to see things differently. As for John, heaven means owning Pierce's love, as he "*showed [Pierce] what he thought about it [having a life together] by kissing me hard [...] He seemed to like the idea very, very much.*" (2014, 343)

IV.3.1. The Traveller and the Figure of the Mentor

The infernal Furies seem to be returning figures in literature, as they appear both in Orpheus' myth and Dante's *Inferno*. In Canto IX. they are told to be

*stained with blood,
Who had the limbs of women and their mien,
And with the greenest hydras were begirt;
Small serpents and cerastes were their tresses,
Where with their horrid temples were entwined.* (1867, 52, lines 39-42)

Dante's fellow mate, who warns him about the "fierce Erynnēs" (line 45), before Beatrice takes his place, is Vergil, the great Greek poet. Vergil seems to know a lot about Hell and has the necessary capacities to guide the young man. As already mentioned before, in the case of a ritual, or a journey in a Bildungsroman there always has to be a mentor, lest the metamorphosis cannot be finished.

Raymund V. Schoder's opinion is that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a "doctrinale opus, a poem whose purpose is to teach, convince, inspire, as well as to please." (1949, 413) Schoder further explains that the text was meant to have a didactic role, moreover, it was written with the artistic intention of leading humanity back to light by creating tension and happiness. How is Vergil connected to this? He fitted the purpose. It is important to note that Dante describes Vergil as one of the (if not the) greatest Roman poets. He was the envied muse, a role model. Dante even calls him "*my master and my author, from whom alone I learned that beauteous style which does me honor.*" (qtd. in 1949, 414). Vergil embodies human intelligence, possessing necromantic power and bridging mortality and immortality. He represents reason and hope, protecting Dante's sanity and sobriety in the face of fear and darkness.

It is also possible to assume that Vergil made this journey before; this is why he can guide the hero so easily, although János Kelemen mentions that the readers, just like the traveller, might face Virgil with distrust. (2019, 150) There are no clear evidences that Virgil was able to find his way out of Inferno. However, he somehow knows this place, and while treating him with enough empathy, Vergil lifts Dante's spirit and strengthens his will. Furthermore, as the symbolic representation of a spokesman, Vergil reflects Dante's subconscious desire not only to escape Hell, but to go around and preach the truth, setting his own experience as an extreme example. (1949, 414-417)

What Kelemen thinks is that Virgil has his own kind of Hell, which is the Underworld he created for Aeneas. As Virgil is shown as the poet he is, the poem becomes a metatext. The author reckons that the suggestion of the *Aeneid* in the *Divine Comedy* is indirect but relevant. Since Virgil knows the exact story of Aeneas and knows about his experience in the Underworld, he becomes someone who can lead others on a similar road. Inferno is not the same as the Underworld, but the parallel and the similarities of the two spheres make Virgil a worthy guider, a kind of magician who can always find the right direction. (2019, 150-151)

Kerényi points out another important, intertextual factor connected to Virgil, which is that the hero, Dante is basically a predecessor of Aeneas. Virgil can be his mentor because he is the indirect mentor of Aeneas as well. Both Aeneas and Dante are travellers, wayfarers and are looking for a godlike sign in life. While talking to Anchises, Aeneas has to climb to the top of a mountain. (1923, 42–43) According to Draskóczy, climbing the mountain is the symbol of ascension, the same image that appears in connection with Dante. (2022, 25)

Therefore, if we agree with Draskóczy on Dante's *Divine Comedy* containing elements of a Bildungsroman (initiation, Dante enters the supernatural world, transformation, final arrival and the prize, which is finding his way back to God and purity), then Vergil will become the much needed mentor. According to Campbell's journey of the hero, there is also a mentor to aid the protagonist. As a result, there has to be a mentor in Cabot's trilogy too.

The character of Mr. Richard Smith has already been interesting from the beginning, as he is the cemetery sexton. Being around dead bodies and returning souls, just like Vergil, he also belongs to both worlds. In the *List of characters and places*, he is said to be an "expert of death deities." (Cabot 2014, 348)

Mr. Smith is a strict, perceptive man who enforces cemetery rules and has a mysterious connection to John, recognizing the Persephone Diamond, a symbol of protection, which was

previously given to Pierce in the Underworld. It is basically the dialogue built around the found necklace which makes Sexton Smith's position in the narrative clear. He reveals his obsession with mythology and deities to Pierce, along with the fact that he knows about the power of the Persephone Diamond. "*What is interesting is that I, on the other hand, have seen it*", he says after Pierce tries to deny knowing about the jewellery. "*You see, in my spare time, when I'm not in here processing grave site reservation applications or out there trying to keep idiotic teenagers like you from desecrating hundred-year-old tombs, I read. Mostly about death deities...those who escort the newly deceased to the afterlife.*" (Cabot 2012, 206) Then, tension reaches its peak when he directly asks Pierce: "*How long have you known John?*" (2012, 220)

Cabot portrays Sexton Smith as an elderly, experienced man with a wide interest in myths and religion, but who is misunderstood by society. While introducing his new side to the readers, she uses a citation from Canto III.: "[...] *the courteous Master said to me.*" (qtd. in Cabot 2012, 205). Though his knowledge is limited, he is aware of the anger of the Furies and can easily recognize John's temper and emotions, and like Vergil, he is the one to guide the heroes.

Probably the most important discussion between Mr. Smith and Pierce is that of him telling her the story of John and the Furies. This scene brings a decisive turn into the narration, from this moment, Pierce's perspective changes drastically. The sexton is the one who opens her eyes and warns her about the danger of the outside world. He is a parental figure, patron, and teacher, helping Pierce and John throughout the trilogy. He provides guidance, saves Pierce, and offers advice, even willing to sacrifice himself. He plays a crucial role in their development, facilitating their understanding of each other and contributing to a positive outcome.

Conclusions

As we could see, death plays a significant role in the metamorphosis of the protagonists. Whether physical or symbolic, followed by resurrection, death is the main trigger of their transformations. Love and sexual attraction are only complementary components.

In the theoretical part, I offered a definition of transtextuality and of its different types, e.g., architextuality, meta- and intertextuality, paratextuality, hypo- and hypertextuality, and mapped the possible ways of a crosstextual analysis. I also tried to bring textual relations in connection with the genders of texts. I asked myself the question whether texts have genders. I followed Kristeva's idea about the symbolic and semiotic language. As we can find out, Kristeva herself links these types of language to different genders, saying that the semiotic language is more artistic, sensitive and feminine, while the symbolic language is strict and masculine. Nevertheless, poetic language is able to break these rules and create its own atmosphere. Androgynous language is free of restrictions.

While analysing the trilogy, although I have mainly focused on narrative perspectives, I found that Cabot uses a strong feminine language and uses Pierce's point of view to focus on things through a daughter's and a lover's/wife's eyes, while making John look very mysterious and possibly dangerous. However, John's development is just as important and followed as closely as Pierce's. The two are equal to each other. Since the discussed trilogy is meant to be read by young adults, I believe that the books require a special type of reading: the perspective of the sentimental, developing self. We, readers are only able to see John in his reality after Pierce, the woman learns about his depth as a person.

The next chapter focuses on the metamorphosis of the heroes. Following Campbell's map of the heroic path, I mentioned the different stages of the hero's journey. I connected his ideas to Arnold van Gennep's, who also talks about metamorphosis as a ritual. Lastly, I talked about the need of such a transformation and the role of the hero in a society as a role model, guider and saviour. While examining the trilogy, we could observe that Pierce's drowning was actually her being invited to a supernatural journey. She did not consent to being pushed into this situation; the choice was taken from her both times. On the first occasion, her grandmother took her decisiveness by forcing her on John (and vice versa). Killing her was part of a greater plan fabricated by the Furies to take revenge on their leader. The scarf wrapped itself around Pierce's legs and neck like a snake, taking her breath. Water is symbolic: it stands for both life and death. She drowned in the

family pool and found herself on the shore of a huge lake. The boat was supposed to take her to her final destination, which symbolizes an alternative state of “existence.” We might even call it the realm of nothingness as the soul cannot return anymore. John’s castle was on an island. This building was the main stage of Pierce’s transformation. The island and the surrounding rivers and lakes created the sensation of a womb, inside this protective husk the heroine was reborn and raised.

The metamorphosis of the heroes depicts the journey of two souls searching for their identity and life purpose. Each intertextual layer repeats the same motif, resulting in a narrative built upon life crises and finding order in chaos. I focused on the motifs of death and resurrection in connection with other texts handling the topic. Studying an ancient myth, the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, I tried to portray Pierce and John as the possible victims or saviours within the story. Here death and resurrection were doubled. John and Pierce’s characters are connected to this mythic couple. First, viewed as travellers and saviours. Both of them show signs of being active heroes trying to protect the lives of their loved ones. While John is overprotective of Pierce, she is also deeply possessive of John and does not want to let go of him. They go through fire and danger to take care of one another, just like Orpheus. However, since both of them died and returned from the dead during the plot of the trilogy, they share Eurydice’s fate as well. John is resurrected due to Pierce. Pierce is partially revived by John and partially by her own stubborn subconscious self. An interesting element here is the resemblance of their wishes and acts. Seeing how they behave almost the same way, I named the correlation of their movements using the expression ‘mirror-Orpheus effect.’ The concept tends to describe the way the lovers constantly mimic each other and share the same desire, namely to protect each other until the end.

The other and most obvious relation was that between Cabot’s trilogy and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. At the beginning of each chapter, there is a shorter or at times longer citation from the epic poem. These quotes help us realize the moral growth of the characters. Cabot’s Underworld can be associated with Dante’s Inferno. Dante’s journey is mostly an emotional and intellectual odyssey. He has lost the right way, and he has to find it again through exploring the transcendental. While Pierce also loses herself in the Underworld, I mostly talked about John in connection with Dante. Pierce appeared as a kind of reflection of Beatrice. Losing the loved woman is a significant part of both male characters’ metamorphosis and purification. Lastly, I tried to find the mentor figures in *the Divine Comedy* and *Abandon*, these figures are Vergil and Mr. Richard Smith

respectively. They guide our heroes on their way and share their knowledge in favour of their survival.

We could say that the trilogy is written from a female perspective, thus, it offers a young woman's perspective upon the world surrounding her. We hardly know anything about John in the first book, as Pierce is unable to focus on him as we, readers would like her to. Bringing in the question of gender, we could say that *Abandon* is more of a female series novel. However, interestingly, even though Dante or Ovid wrote from a male perspective, Cabot was able to create a link between her literature and theirs. This is in line with Kristeva's views according to which poetic language can break down built barriers, and move into an androgynous direction.

While Eurydice – Persephone too – and Beatrice are secondary characters in their stories, in the trilogy Pierce becomes one of the main characters. Cabot consciously built her story around a 17-year-old girl. She challenges the previous narratives while offering a new interpretation of the stories, that of female power and individuality. Still, she never neglects building up John's character, bringing him and Pierce up at the same time. They are treated as equals, they co-exist, making the other a whole person. This makes the analysis of the trilogy even more intriguing and suggests that there are obvious similarities between the four stories, providing us with a rich representation of metamorphosis, textual relations and gender identity of the role models.

Cabot's trilogy offers a new transtextual interpretation of the ancient myth of Orpheus – metatextual connections – and Dante's *Divine Comedy* – para-, meta- and intertextual links, as well. Thus, throughout the analysis the paper combined transtextuality and psychological aspects of growing up and developing as a person by relying on the various stages of a hero/heroine's journey. Paratextuality is shown through the direct quotations used in the novels. It is interesting how the story of Dante is connected to Pierce and John. In his own universe, the *Divine Comedy* is meant to be a guide for people going through different stages of a life crisis. In the trilogy, these fragments also guide the readers into a certain direction, suggesting the main themes, emotions and the atmosphere of the given chapter. Cabot knowingly connects her Underworld to Dante's Inferno. Both Pierce and Dante go through something traumatic and terrific, facing death, decay, madness, evil and the seemingly hopeless side of life. Just like Dante, Pierce is some sort of a guide. Virgil leads Dante to light. John leads Pierce to an understanding of the positive and negative sides of the world. Through Pierce's experience, the theme of the maturing body and identity is reflected to the readers.

Moreover, the link between Dante and John is also significant. They are sinners. John lives in his own Hell, and is in need of purification. Following Dante's path, John reaches "Heaven" because of a woman. Pierce and Beatrice are the seemingly unreachable, desired female figures, for whom both men go through different stages of a hellish trial.

Metatextuality and hypo- and hypertextuality are important from the perspective of polyphonic dialogism. With each layer built on the other, the trilogy creates a complex web of meanings. As a result, *Abandon* becomes a good example of using a seemingly simple story to create a complicated labyrinth built on art and the knowledge we have in everyday life. Literature in general and Cabot's literature are cross-cultural and complex, like puzzles of different, parallel worlds, one leaning on the other, with an imminent intertextuality always existing, which is worth being developed further in other upcoming studies.

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