The Cultural and Linguistic Impact of Gothic Literature on the Identity of Algerian Teenagers : A Metamorphosis

التأثير الثقافي واللغوي للأدب القوطي على هوية المراهقين الجزائريين: تحول

L'impact culturel et linguistique de la littérature gothique sur l'identité des adolescents algériens : une métamorphose

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Introduction

Trends in literature reflect tendencies in life. All the literary productions that enjoy a wide popularity manifest what Stuart Hall (2000, 211) calls "cultural identity," a multiple-dimensions image of the "true self". The darkness or the light of the image mostly depends on the historical, social, cultural and linguistic circumstances that produced it, and its aesthetic value reveals the tastes and aspirations of the age. Literature, both in print and on screen addresses society's cultural anxieties and helps measuring the degree of change in its cultural identity. Kyle William Bishop argues that this cultural function of literature works to an even greater degree in Gothic fiction. Gothic narratives proliferated in many parts of the world, and Algeria is no exception. J. K. Rowling Harry Potter series in its seven novels and eight films has left an indelible mark on the lives of many Algerian youngsters. Through Harry Potter series, I ultimately want to argue that Gothic fiction affects the cultural and linguistic identity of Algerian teenagers.

1. The Appeal for Horror in Children's Literature

In children's literature today, the Gothic is main-stream. Decades earlier, children were expected to covet books representing morally-righteous characters giving sound moral instructions. The traditional texts targeting children sought wisdom, rigid morality, reason and emotional control. Yet, interest in such stories used to come to an end as adolescence begins, bringing with it a new set of interests, tastes and appreciations. Adolescence is the natural point

in which children's and adults' literatures cross. As one generation grows into adulthood, interest shifts from didactic literature with educational ends to romances. The changing literary preferences are not radical because the maturing child used to keep within the frame of the normal, ordinary, "human" characters.

In the 1990s, the winds of change started blowing. It is noticeable that nowadays, young Algerian teenagers are less likely to enjoy the same type of stories their counterparts previously used to covet. The fictive preferences of teenagers gradually took a totally different dimension as they no longer seek the "ordinary" but are rather fascinated by the supernatural. The appeal for horror in children's literature stems from the sharp contrast between didactic and Gothic stories. The former sought to rigidly inculcate ethics whereas the latter allowed excess and exaggeration. Adolescents are so fond of stories representing different worlds and alien beings. This interest started with "Robin Hood" and "Alice's Adventure in the Wonder Land" and reached its peak with a fondness of vampires, zombies, werewolves, ghosts, elves and all sorts of monstrous creatures. One of the reasons for the persistence of the Gothic is the easy identification of Gothic settings and characters with the mind. This point is relevant to and significant for our purpose and warrants further amplification in relation to Algerian teenager's identity.

Delving into the folkloric origins of the Gothic in the imagination of Algerian teenagers, it becomes apparent that this tradition is not only the outcome of social media, films, books and video games. The Gothic traces its origins deeper in Algerian folklore. The existence of supernatural beings in children's literature dates back to the ancient stories belonging to the Algerian oral tradition. Stories of ghosts were orally transmitted from one generation to another through grandparents. They were both horrifying and exciting. This interest in the terrifying and horrifying was fuelled by the noticeable presence of such stories in the life of almost every child, because fear was likely to secure docile behaviour. The desire to have an obedient child resulted in Gothic preferences. Accordingly, the titles children would pick up first are almost of a Gothic flavour.

Yet, the Gothic was not always a welcomed guest. Children's Gothic literature has been saddled with fallacies that have denied its literary value. Critics constantly evoked issues of morality when addressing Gothicism in fiction. The books and films depicting alien worlds and monstrous beings were viewed as unsuitable for children. Moral stories were rather preferred because they were designed to form the mind to truth and goodness. They were also seasoned

with instructions aiming at orienting children and forming their world view. The first wave of Gothic narratives faced hostility and rejection. Many critical works on Gothicism focused on the way Gothic narratives represent a distorted version of reality. However, the way Gothicism shapes and changes identity was almost neglected. Despite all attempts to conceal them, Gothic stories succeeded to have their place in the hearts of Algerian children. Critical negativity did not prevent the Gothic's wide popularity.

Fascinated by both the longevity and singularity of the narrative, Harry Potter series enjoyed an unprecedented popularity among teenagers, compared to all other Gothic stories. In a cybernetic era characterized by an increasing participation in cyberspaces, teenagers became a captivated audience of Gothic narratives, mainly in their film adaptations. The reasons are both historical and psychological. The advent of horror fiction in Algeria can be explained by the political, historical, social and cultural upheavals that the country witnessed during and after the civil war. The psychological repercussions of such a bloody decade were translated into literature.

1.1. Historical Perspective

Algeria is not a country unfamiliar with trauma. It is widely known for its bloody struggle against colonialism and subsequent civil war. Inevitably, historical trauma both determines and surfaces in literary preferences. Literary choices can be viewed as a site of reflection of a decade of violence and highly charged emotions. As such, much of the books and films Algerian teenagers enjoyed after the bloody decade were Gothic.

The recent interest in Gothic narratives can be read in the light of the historical trauma Algerian teenagers experienced. Violence, torture, rape and murder are all events that Algerians were exposed to during the civil war. Inevitably, innocent children were not only mere witnesses of violence but even victims of terrorist atrocities. The prevailing pessimism, scepticism and struggle between religious fundamentalism and secularism all intensified and justified interest in the Gothic. They made the Gothic more timely and affecting. Escaping into an alien world through art provides children with a safe outlet to express thoughts and emotions and facilitate the process of coping and even recovering from trauma. Leslie G. Eaton (2007,256) confirms the therapeutic power of art. She states that "art was used as a successful treatment regimen for traumatized children". Entrapped by historical circumstances, Algerian children sought healing and refuge in Gothic narratives.

Gothicism has the potential to ease traumatic experiences because it invokes trauma-related themes with excess and exaggeration. The Civil War and its subsequent violence and political unrest led to the realization that Algerians are not as safe and secure as they might seem. Similarly, Gothic literature is coloured by the fears of other attacks from aliens. Insecurity, expecting attacks at any time, and the fear of a strong villain enemy are the themes that Gothic narratives project. The scenes of deserted places, abandoned human corpses, bloody murders and morbid fears became more common than ever. They appeared in the news on daily basis reducing the shocking capacity of death and the destructive power of violence. The wide popularity of Gothic narrative in the aftermath of the Civil War can be attributed to the fact that they present similar scenarios.

1.2. Psychological Perspective

The black decade produced large waves of paranoia in teenagers' psyche. Grim historical realities led to a shift in cultural consciousness. The scenes of unexpected attacks, murder, torture, kidnaps and verbal violence aroused strong emotional responses. Suffering from a debilitating trauma resulted in deep-seated psychopathic impulses. The Gothic genre became a valuable and complex manifestation of contemporary concerns and repressed anxieties.

Viewed from a psychoanalytical perspective, interest the Gothic is a means of coping with trauma. Viewed from a psychoanalytical perspective, interest the Gothic is a means of coping with trauma. Freud (1919.09) defines the uncanny as "the 'non-homely', ambiguous and ambivalent object which has been toned down in the higher strata of the mind into an unambiguous feeling of piety". The uncanny can be employed to describe "animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex" (Freud, 10). As such, the uncanny in literature can be an appropriate means to examine the audience's qualities of feeling and reflect their subdued emotional impulses. Besides, the Gothic uncovers the dark side of desires. Authors of Gothic books used elements of the uncanny and sublime to express the fears and apprehensions of traumatized youth. Children accordingly, make mental analogies between Gothic conventions and everyday life.

2. The Cultural Impact of Gothic Fiction on Algerian Teenagers

The literary preferences of teenagers are the most appropriate vehicle with which to explore their cultural consciousness. Among all the Gothic narratives

that enjoy a wide popularity, Harry Potter series continues to reign supreme. The series crossed the boundaries of children literature and turned to a cultural phenomenon. The captivating crafting of the story and the sublime fictional universe it creates contributed to its unprecedented spread. The story of the Boy Wizard had a sound impact on popular culture and succeeded to attract academic attention. This increasing attention the series receives in Algeria had an undeniable cultural impact on teenagers.

2.1 The Implicit Ideology and Cultural Functions of the Gothic

The intense interest in Harry Potter series primarily stems from its representation of a fictional world in which teenagers are the major characters. Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley are adolescent figures that children admired. Rowling puts these three friends at the centre of the story as she gives them the mission of saving the world from Voldemort and his Death Eaters. From a psychological perspective, adolescence is a transitional phase characterised by confusion and doubts about self-worth. Such a dangerous and honourable mission raises issues about acceptance and participation of the adolescent in society. The appearance of the adolescent as a heroic character in fiction made adolescents the perfect audience of this type of works.

Identity issues in Harry Potter series are more apparent in the social hierarchy and power structures it represents. The division of the world into Wizards endued with intelligence, wit and supernatural powers and Muggles portrayed as too weak and less clever to seek power raises issues of superiority, inferiority and privileges in society. Through the representation of superior Wizard-born students, inferior Muggle students and Half-bloods torn between the two contrasting identities, the series gives implicit examples of prejudice and inequality. Tom Riddle, the Half-blood price is the typical embodiment of identity struggles. Torn between his witch mother and low-born Muggle father, Tom manifests severe psychic disorders and ends up changing his name to Voldemort and assuming an evil identity. Because of the "double existence" or "fragmented life" of the major characters, the concept of unstable identity is inculcated in teenagers' collective consciousness. Identity shifted from being singular to have a pluralist dimension. Having several, sometimes opposing selves is normalized in the series. This form of cultural paranoia disturbs psychological harmony and shakes the once firm ground of beliefs, convictions, values and ideals.

The idea of social hierarchy is quite relevant to the Algerian context. The existence of privileges related to birth draws attention to the social divisions

resulting from the possession of financial power as well. Besides, differences based on race, gender and intellectual capacities reflect the social realities Algerian teenagers experience. Harry Potter series brings to the surface certain deep, sometimes neglected issues in the formation of Algerian teenagers' identity. Social prejudice resulting from regional or ethnic belonging and the impact of inter-marriage between people from different social and ethnic backgrounds on children are the two major points relevant to Algerian teenagers' cultural awareness and identity formation.

The cultural encounter with the Other in Harry Potter series both deconstructs and reconstructs teenagers' self-portrait. Stryker (2012,112) advances a theory that links emotions and identity. He argues that shared feelings help forming similar identities. The creation of the villain Voldemort who seeks to use his wizardry power to control world and murder Harry; the innocent heir of the Wizards' state demonstrates the huge capacity for evil human beings might have. On the other hand, Harry Potter; portrayed as a brave, self-scarifying child epitomizes the values of goodness, participation and triumph over evil impulses. The binary opposition between good and evil through the characters of Harry and Voldemort influences the worldview of teenagers. Characters embodying utterly good traits or evil characteristics represent the antithesis of human nature as a mixture between good and evil. This opposition creates a new version of self-consciousness.

Harry Potter series also revisits family dynamics. Images of the tyrannical aunt haunting the innocent child generate pity and cause teenagers to sympathise, and even identify with the child. Besides oppression, Vernon and Petunia Dursley; Harry's uncle and aunt did not reveal to him the truth about his parents. As such, attitudes of rebellion, doubting the intentions of adults and even questioning their authority were an inevitable and justifiable outcome. Questioning the authority of adults and their moral righteousness evokes ambivalent feelings. It reverses the long-standing conception of adults' moral superiority and legitimate right of supervising teenagers' conduct. Moreover, the series treats issues of ancestry, inheritance and transmission of property. Children in the series inherit their parents' supernatural power and social prestige. This might suggest that identity is largely inherited and transmitted rather than acquired and constructed.

Character development is another significant theme in the series. The moral and sexual evolution of the wizard protagonist elicits both excitement and fear. His victory over evil forces represents the triumph of the cultural metaphor he embodies. The opposite set of characters possesses the contradictory qualities

of being both sensitive and liable to faint from terror but at the same time having the strength to endure danger. The series offers deeper insights into human nature and a path to self-understanding. At first sight, the series seems to draw a clear-cut moral distinction between good and evil. Yet, analysis reveals that the novels are morally ambiguous. They make no suggestion that evil might be forgivable or used as a positive force.

Though Rowling declared that she had never quoted any specific religion in her books, the implicit presence of religious themes in the series is noticeable. Harry Potter novels treat themes of incarnation and witchcraft. They constantly employ spiritual Gothic elements such as religious mystery, allegory, symbolism, witchcraft, damnation, Satanism, magic and mystic rituals. Representing magic as power and confirming the capacity of human beings to curse is closely linked to Judeo-Christian culture. For example, when visiting his parents' graves, Harry reads on the tombstone: "The only enemy still to defeat is death". Far from being a simple statement symbolizing the parents' courage, attempting to defeat death is a deep theological theme that may create doubts and confusion when evoked in children's literature.

2.2 Teenagers' Aesthetic Values and the Rise of New Paradigms

Peter Burke (2011,175) states that identities are arranged in hierarchical control systems. The changing output of a higher level of identity leads to a change in the lower. The symbols used in Gothic fiction make part of the lower level of identity. First, there is a process of adjusting the perception of these symbols to bring them into alignment with the higher ones. By time, even the references change. This occurs at a very slow pace. For Burke, the presence of the Other is an important factor enhancing identity change. The self thus negotiates, questions, and altered its shared standards. Burke's identity theory can be used to measure the impact of Harry Potter series on the aesthetic values of Algerian youngsters.

Surprisingly, due to Gothic films' fandom, aesthetic tastes shifted from appreciating the ordinary to seeking the alien. The mysterious that was once frightening became attractive. Harry Potter series reduced the terrifying impact of meteorological gothic elements such as mist, crania, gloom, darkness and dim colours. They are rather enjoyed by teenagers and accepted with much delight as signs of their individual mystery and progress towards maturity. Teenagers believe that admiring the material associations of the Gothic such as masks, veils, disguises means that the child is no longer a "child" who can faint from

terror but rather an adult who finds pleasure in facing danger; even if this happen only on screen. Physical traits are also believed to make the person distinct, mysterious, holding secrets, and making group membership. Accordingly, tattooing snakes; the signs of "Death Eaters" are fashionable among teenagers. The desire to have a sign of difference on the body as the one Potter has turned to a phenomenon in teen culture. Owing to the popularity of the Gothic, teenagers even came to associate some physical traits such as dark complexion, heavy eyebrows and dark eyes with evil because Gothic monsters are recurrently represented as such.

With the change in teenagers' aesthetic values, the new paradigms rose. Language self-defines society. When society undergoes phases of transformation such as historical, political, or economic upheavals, language is also influenced. As a result, new items are added and others get replaced or disappear. The linguistic composition of Algeria nowadays is characterized by diglossia, bilingualism, code-switching and borrowing. This linguistic miniature is however dynamic. Linguistic innovation is a process that takes place in all societies and the youth are the agents of this change. As a result of new cultural tendencies, the verbal repertoire of Algerian youngsters is undergoing considerable changes.

On the lexico-semantic level, the youth contribute to linguistic change by introducing a new lexicon. Teenagers usually opt for the vocabulary they are exposed to on TV and social networks to express feelings and emotions and share life experiences. Being a devoted audience to Gothic series, violent lexicon becomes an inevitable alternative. This is not to claim that Gothic literature is the reason behind the language of violence. The major factor is certainly teenagers' readiness to adopt and adapt. Yet, Gothicism, mainly the widely popular Harry Potter series is one among the other factors enhancing the change in teenagers' verbal behaviour.

Contact with the Gothic could induce Algerian youth to import linguistic forms and usages from other cultures. It resulted in neologism; introducing new words related mainly to English popular culture. Language thus evolves to meet the requirements of a globalized world in a digital era because young people like to be linguistically updated in order to cope with today's globalized world. The influence of English culture through Harry Potter series is manifested in the growing interest in English language. Many words were adopted and new meanings were attributed to some already exiting words. It is worth mentioning that this change occurs primarily at the level of the dialect.

The textual elements of the Gothic jargon are manifested in fragmented speech, secrets, linguistic codes, hate-speech and violent words. The presence

of linguistic violence in the series has an impact on the way teen fans communicate and express thoughts. Anna McFarlane states that Harry Potter novels expose a connection between physical and linguistic vulnerability. She discusses the power of naming and citation to shape the future of linguistic communities and illustrates the impact of the speech of hate and violence on the audience. McFarlane's findings are relevant to the Algerian case. The series is based on the assumption that language is power. For instance, the moral boundaries between characters are based on the power of language and naming as the power of cursing is exercised using a verbal means.

Besides, linguistic belonging helps in Harry Potter series constructing the social self. As Harry enters the wizardry world for the first time, he feels distanced due to the linguistic codes he does not manage to use and remember. Linguistic complicity within the wizarding community is a sign of membership. They all refer to Harry's enemy Lord Voldemort as "you-know-who" and never mention his name. These codes strengthen the identification and refer to the members' shared history. As such, verbal codes exist in groups of teenagers and these latter show pride in using words and expressions particularly limited to the group members and exclusively understood by them.

The series also draws attention to the power of names. Names stand not only as verbal codes of identification but also as reflections of identity. For instance, a name reflecting low social belongings is viewed as an insult. Tom Riddle, the half-blood prince changes his name to cut all connection with his low-born Muggle father. In The Sorcerer's Stone, he says: "You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins run the blood of Salazar Slytherin himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Harry. I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!" . As he fashions himself a name, Tom Riddle certainly fashions himself an identity too.

Conclusion

When the boy appeared first on screen, he seemed so insignificant. No one could predict the significant impact he will have on the world. Harry Potter turned to a cultural phenomenon proving that fiction not only reflects but even shapes culture. Considering the themes Harry Potter series treats answers questions about the extent to which they may influence character development. The series advances the qualities of being self-assertive and not abusing in the use

of power in teenagers' psyche. Yet, it presents a challenge to some basic pillars of Algerian identity through addressing deep Christian theological issues, changing aesthetic values, and contributing to the language of violence teenagers use nowadays.

Questioning the impact of Harry Potter series on the cultural and linguistic identity of teenagers leads to questioning the way Gothicism affects behaviour and identity. When children murder and commit suicide due to their fandom of Gothic films and video games, when they take weapons to schools, when they post sexy pictures on their social Media accounts, we have to revise our sense of what they know and even who they are. The Gothic fictional universe undoubtedly affects the community of its dedicated fans and followers.

This cultural and linguistic effect of Gothic narratives warrants more critical attention. Gothic fiction and its impact on identity have yet to be plumbed to its depths by critics and scholars. The interest in this paper was to contribute in altering the rigid resistance of including themes of popular culture from the traditional quarters of academia. Gothic creatures were born in the depth of our folk tales. Through time, they passed from folklore to the screen. They owe their unprecedented success to their ability to change and adapt to the cultural concerns and social anxieties of teenagers.

Through Harry Potter series, Rowling indeed enabled a crossing of cultural and linguistic borders. It is a gradual cumulative change that be noticed over long periods of time. The process of gaining maturity through working on the self is perhaps the most significant lesson teenagers learn from the series. Identity struggles in Harry Potter novels are a healthy sign of maturity. Being torn between the capacity for evil and good nature provides teenagers with deep insights into human nature.

This paper attempted to put the fictive preferences of adolescents and their impact on identity under trial because it is finally the adolescent who becomes an adult. Questioning the role Gothic literature plays in shaping teenagers' cultural and linguistic identity is vital to understanding the aesthetic tastes, cultural colours, and linguistic tools employed in drawing the future Algerian self-portrait. That is to say that it no longer takes a whole village to raise a child but actually a whole world in this age of globalization.

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Abstract

The last decade has witnessed an increasing interest in Gothic fiction among Algerian teenagers. This paper attempts to explain why fear has become a dominant mode of enjoyment in art and literature and demonstrate the cultural and linguistic impact of Harry Potter series on Algerian teenagers' identity. Considering the cultural and historical specificities of Algeria, the paper first addresses the traumatic influence of Algeria's civil war on the growing popularity of gothic fiction. Entrapped by the circumstances of history, teenagers are attracted by Gothic stories as a means of coping with trauma and a site of reflection of the tensions, fears and aspirations of the age. The paper then investigates how this interest affected the cultural and linguistic identity of Algerian teenagers. On the cultural level, Harry Potter series addresses issues of character development, family relations, and religious doubts. Using a psychoanalytical approach, the paper examines the impact of the uncanny on the world view of Algerian teenagers. Moreover, the frightening and funny nature of Harry Potter series led to a shift in the perception of monsters from dread to admiration. This change in aesthetic values is reflected in the presence of Gothic elements in teenagers' clothes and jewellery. On the linguistic level, the paper correlates the popularity of Gothic narratives and the language of violence in teenagers' conversational exchange.

Keywords

Gothic fiction, children's literature, identity,civil war.

مستخلص

شـهد العقـد الماضي اهتمامًا متزايدًا بـأدب الخيـال العلـمي بين المراهقـين الجزائريـين. تحـاول هـذه الدراسـة شـرح سـبب تحـول الخـوف إلى نمـط مهيمـن للتمتـع بالفـن والأدب وإظهـار التأثيـر الثقافي واللغـوي لسلسـلة هـاري بوتر على هويـة المراهقـين الجزائريـين. بالنظرإلى الخصائص الثقافيـة والتاريخيـة للجزائـر، تتنـاول الورقـة أولاً تأثيرللحـرب الأهليـة الجزائريـة على تزايـد شـعبية أدب الخيـال العلـمي حيـث سـاهمت الظروف التاريخيـة في ارتفـاع شـعبية هـذا اللـون الادبي كوسـيلة للتغلـب على الصدمـات والتوتـرات و اظهـار

مخاوف العصر. ثم تبحث الدراسة كيفية تأثير هذا الاهتمام على الهوية الثقافية واللغوية للمراهقين الجزائريين. على المستوى الثقافي ، تتناول سلسلة هاري بوتر قضايا تنمية الشخصية والعلاقات الأسرية والشكوك الدينية. باستخدام مقاربة تحليلية نفسية، تبرز الدراسة تأثير أدب الخيال العلمي على نظرة المراهقين الجزائريين للعالم. علاوة على ذلك، أدت الطبيعة المخيفة والمضحكة لسلسلة هاري بوتر إلى تحول في تصور الوحوش من الفزع إلى الإعجاب. ينعكس هذا التغيير في القيم الجمالية في وجود عناصر قوطية في ملابس ومجوهرات المراهقين. على المستوى اللغوي ، تربط الورقة بين شعبية روايات الخيال العلمي ولغة العنف في احاديث المراهقين.

كلمات مفتاحيّة

الحرب الأهلية، ادب الخيال العلمي، أدب الأطفال، الهوية

Résumé

La dernière décennie a vu un intérêt croissant pour la fiction gothique chez les adolescents Algériens. Cet article tente d'expliquer pourquoi la peur est devenue un mode de jouissance dominant dans l'art et la littérature et démontre l'impact culturel et linguistique de la série Harry Potter sur l'identité des adolescents Algériens. Compte tenu des spécificités culturelles et historiques de l'Algérie, l'article aborde d'abord l'influence traumatique de la guerre civile Algérienne sur la popularité croissante de la fiction gothique. Pris au piège des circonstances de l'histoire, les adolescents sont attirés par les histoires gothiques comme moyen de faire face aux traumatismes et comme lieu de réflexion sur les tensions, les peurs et les aspirations de l'époque. Le papier examine ensuite comment cet intérêt a affecté l'identité culturelle et linguistique des adolescents Algériens. Au niveau culturel, la série Harry Potter aborde les questions de développement du caractère, les relations familiales et les doutes religieux. En utilisant une approche psychanalytique, l'article examine l'impact de l'étrange sur la vision du monde des adolescents algériens. De plus, la nature effrayante et drôle de la série Harry Potter a entraîné un changement dans la perception des monstres de la peur à l'admiration. Cette évolution des valeurs esthétiques se traduit par la présence d'éléments gothiques dans les vêtements et bijoux des adolescents. Sur le plan linguistique, l'article met en corrélation la popularité des récits gothiques et le langage de la violence dans les échanges conversationnels des adolescents.

Mots-clés

Fiction gothique, littérature pour enfants, identité, guerre civile.