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When the Silent Child Speaks: Identity and Subversion in Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park*

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ABSTRACT

By examining the subversive discourse of both children, Charles and Smudge, this paper will focus on the child's identity in Anthony Browne's postmodern picture book Voices in the Park. Drawing on the postmodern theory and mainly on Lyotard's perception of childhood as a time of intense creativity and imagination, where the child is free to explore the world in a way that is not bound by the adult's rationality and logic, this paper will analyse how Charles's and Smudge's discourses dare to go against the normative discourse of their parents. Smudge manages to change her father's discourse, while Charles deconstructs his mother's discourse by exposing its flaws and creating the possibility for resistance. By analysing the underlying tensions between the normative discourses of the parents and that of the children, which Lyotard calls the 'other of all discourse', this study offers some insights into the identity of the child Browne presents to his readers. This paper highlights the nature of the agency the children manage to construct through their encounters in the park. It will conclude that although children are an integral part of the parents' normative power structure, they manage to become a disruptive force of change from within the system itself.

Keywords: Voices in the Park; Anthony Browne; child's identity; Lyotard

INTRODUCTION

Since Anthony Browne's picturebook *Voices in the Park* was published in 1999, it was acclaimed by critics as one of the most significant postmodern picturebooks. The story is simple on the surface but more complex on its deeper level. It is made up of four different narratives: two narratives of the children, Charles and Smudge, and two others of Charles's mother and Smudge's father. In the park, Charles meets Smudge, who accompanies her fed-up and unemployed father to the park. The four narratives converge and diverge at different points to allow different meanings to merge and others to submerge. Browne gives the opportunity to each character to voice their narratives, and the readers are constantly engaged in a shift of alliances and allegiances with the characters. As a result, some discourses are undermined, and others are given more credibility. As the narratives unfold, some of the voices become more privileged and credible to the readers than others. This paper will focus on the underlying tension between the four narratives to examine the way the child's identity is constructed in Browne's book by exploring the dynamics of the children's interaction with each other and with the adults. In spite of the critical acclaim and popularity of Browne's *Voices in the Park*, there is a lack of academic attention given to the significance of the child's identity in the story. Not much critical focus was given to the child in the criticism written in Browne's book; the child is often mentioned as a subordinate entity to the parents. This study aims to explore the child's subversive identity portrayed in the book and to examine how this identity shapes the overall meaning of the text. Through this analysis, the study seeks to explain how the silent child is a subversive element in the power dynamics in *Voices in the Park*.

Voices in the Park is a collage not only of different texts but also of many images and allusions. Written and visual texts are placed against each other; icons meet other icons, and allusions encounter other allusions; the fictive meets the real to form a narrative that crosses the boundaries of time and space; and challenges the familiar as well. Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa breaks the limitations of time and space to meet and dance with Frans Hals' "Laughing Cavalier"; Edvard Munch's "The Scream" makes it to the front page of Smudge's father's newspaper, Mary Poppins meets a homeless in the park while King Kong is towering the buildings of the city overseeing Santa Claus dancing down the street. The mother's recurring motif of the hat recalls the Surrealist painter Rene Magritte's painting 'Man in a Bowler Hat'. As the painting challenges us to re-think the surrounding world as we know it, the mother's hat begs us to question her assumptions and her relationship with her son. In such a postmodern texture of collages and allusions, Browne finds the proper space where the child's subversive discourse merges to challenge and destabilise the voice of their parent's authority.

LITERATURE REVIEW: *VOICES IN THE PARK* IN ITS POSTMODERN CONTEXT

A few years after the publication of *Voices in the Park*, it became a major milestone in a new surge of children's picturebooks at the beginning of the century. *Voices in the Park* became part of 'an ever-growing segment of contemporary children's literature… transgressing its own boundaries… exhibiting the most prominent features of postmodernism' (Nikolajeva, 1998, p. 222). Browne does not present a classic view of childhood similar to that of Locke or Rousseau, who portrayed childhood in a universalised manner with an idealised sense of freedom, joy and carefree of all the troubles and pains of the adult world. Elkind (1998) argues that "It is our new postmodern attention to differences that have led us to 'reinvent' childhood, to include children of all social classes, of colour, of varying ethnic background and abilities" (p. 13). Smudge and Charles are different individuals, and their parents' troubles and concerns are part of their everyday lives. Browne represents childhood as a social and cultural construct partially determined by gender, social class and the background of their parents, but largely exerting their power to change and to be different. For Browne, childhood is a liminal space, a threshold of transition to adulthood that can be stressful, uneasy and even traumatic, but never short of the power or the desire to change.

Much of the critical interest in Browne's *Voices in the Park* focuses on its postmodern metafictive elements. The narrative of the book is polyphonic; each character narrates the story from their own perspective. The readers are invited to engage with multiple perspectives and construct meaning based on the subjective tale of each character. Readers are offered a space to draw their own conclusions based on this collage of different signs and the constantly-engaging dialogue between the written and the visual texts of the narrative. Atken (2007) argues that "with several seemingly disconnected threads of text or stories, with ambiguous plot lines that invite the reader to be the co-author," the traditional linearity of narratives and plots is suspended and disrupted in *Voices in the Park* (p. 2). The book was published without page numbers as a clear indication that linearity was dispensed with, and the readers are presented with a patched narrative and a collage of events that make sense only in their connection and disconnection with each other. In addition to the use of a multiplicity of narrative voices, Browne uses parody, irony and intertextuality to disrupt the linearity of actions and events in his book. He questions objective reality, tells his narrative in fragmented voices, and leaves his narrative with indeterminate endings. The narrative is in flux and left hanging between the characters, who are all narrators; the

ultimate effect is that the overall narrative remains loose, inconclusive and unsettled. To borrow Ihab Hassan's terms (1986), Anthony Browne, like many postmodernists, prefers the "openness of brokenness" and "the unjustified margins" (p. 505). Browne challenges the literal norms of children's books and offers a "multivalence of perspectives [of] the plural nature of human experience and unbound reading possibilities" (Wyile, 2006, p. 189).

The relationship between the pictorial and the written text in *Voices in the Park* is the focus of other critics. Nikolajeva (2003) informs us about the interaction between the visual and the written texts in picturebooks: "images take the narrative in the opposite direction from the words," and the visual and the written texts work in dialogue here, highlighting meanings and dimming others (p. 241). Texts collapse against texts, and other texts branch out and overlap to suggest new meanings and undermine others altogether. The ultimate effect is ironic. Indeed, 'the strongest irony [of the book] is structural and romantic and results from the intertextual references between the four stories and their cumulative effect' (Wyile, 2006, p. 189). In *Voices in the Park*, texts negate and debunk texts, and others engage in a dialogue to complete each other. Similarly, in her essay 'The Drama of Potentiality in Metafictive Picturebooks,' Wyile (2006) examines the relationship between words and pictures in Browne's book. Wyile concludes that the combination of the written and visual texts "encourages, permits, or prohibits our alignment with and allegiance to characters in the drama of potentiality constructed by the picturebook's narrator and pictorialist and realised by its reader(s)" (p. 176). *Voices in the Park* is a postmodern text par excellence, and even though the book is geared toward children, Browne manages to explore a simple storyline with enough depth to challenge the readers' many conventional and traditional literary and cultural maxims.

Although the criticism about *Voices in the Park* is informative for understanding the book in its postmodern context, many critics neglect the subversive nature of the child's identity in the book. Sylvia Pantaleo (2004) and Frank Serafini (2005) focus on the pedagogical implications of the book for young readers. Pantaleo and Serafini discuss Browne's use of metafictive devices and their effects on children's understanding of the book. Applying the reader-response theory, Serafini explores how intermediate-grade readers construct meaning in their interaction with such texts and how they handle the unconventional elements of picturebooks, including their non-linear structure and the relationship between words and images. He suggests that "in order to help readers construct meaning in transaction with these postmodern picturebooks, we need to support readers' ability to entertain ambiguity" and to find pleasure in the challenges such books present them with (p. 60). Like Serafini, Sylvia Pantaleo explores similar research questions and examines first-grade students' responses to the metafictive devices used in *Voices in the Park*; and concludes that "texts with meta-fictive devices can provide the kinds of reading experiences that develop readers' abilities to critically analyse, construct and deconstruct an array of texts and representational forms that incorporate a range of linguistic, discursive, and semiotic systems" (p. 17). Both Serafini and Pantaleo examine *Voices in the Park* for its educational worth to young readers.

Sue Saltmarsh (2007) and Vanessa Joosen (2015) focus on the metafictive elements in the book to study other thematic aspects of *Voices in the Park*. Joosen discusses the ideology operating in the construction of motherhood and concludes that Browne's book challenges the traditional representation of motherhood. Joosen examines Charles only as a subordinate entity to his mother. Similarly, Saltmarch fails to see Charles' significance to the meaning of the narrative and argues that his "insignificance deprives him of agentive capacity" (p. 107). Saltmarsh interrogates how Browne's Voices in the Park 'construct[s] children and childhood in economic terms' (Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 95) and concludes that "in Browne's text social class location is an inevitability that

constrains and limits both children and adults" (p. 110). Arsenio Moya-Guijarro (2019) takes a multimodel approach to study the textual functions of metonymies in *Voices in the Park*. Moya-Guijarro argues that visual metonymies are used in *Voices in the Park* mainly to emphasise or undermine a character's position (p. 389) and concludes that most of the metonymies used in *Voices in the Park* ' minimise Charles' status,' 'highlight his lack of personality' and 'reinforce Charles's mother's influence and power over her son" (p. 396). The voice of the child is toned down by many critics who have attempted to study Browne's book, and Charles is perceived as a submissive entity with no agency of his own. This study will challenge this reading by demonstrating that the children may be dependent on their parents, yet they manage to negotiate the gender and class boundaries and construct an identity of their own that may impact their growing up experience beyond the temporality of their visit to the park.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this paper involves a close analysis of the discourse of the characters in Browne's *Voices in the Park*, demonstrating how the discourses of Charles and Smudge subvert the normative discourse of their parents. This study will pay close attention to the language and dialogue used by the characters and the visual texts that represent them. Additionally, both the written and visual texts will be read either in tandem or in juxtaposition, revealing the underlying tensions between the children's and the adults' discourses. The analysis is informed by postmodernism and mainly Jean-Francois Lyotard's ideas on childhood and discourse, which provide a framework for understanding how discourse operates within power structures and how it can be used to construct agency. Lyotard emphasises that despite childhood being a period of vulnerability, anxiety, and submission to adults, children are capable of experiencing the world without the misconceived preconceptions of the adult mind. Children's discourse can serve as a source of resistance that challenges and undermines the dominant discourse of the adult world. Lyotard asserts, 'Children have a unique perspective on the world that can challenge and disrupt the dominant ways of thinking and speaking' (Lyotard, 1991b, p. 60). This study's analysis is also informed by previous research on children's agency and subversion in literature. This methodology facilitates a deep understanding of how the discourse of both Smudge and Charles can serve as a form of resistance and a space where a child's identity is shaped and asserted.

DISCUSSION

Having situated *Voices in the Park* in its postmodern context, this paper will now argue that both Charles and Smudge can shape a discourse of their own, breaking away from the normative discourse of their parents in which they are often portrayed as submissive subordinates. Charles and Smudge challenge many of the assumptions tied to their class status, constructing their own identities by collectively negotiating their social and class boundaries. Although Browne's children are economically and socially determined, they manage to break away from this determination and create a voice of their own. While both children's fates are strongly influenced by their parents' social classes, they demonstrate that they can challenge and disrupt existing compartments to evolve and mature. They are both capable of opening up new spaces and exploring new potentials. Charles and Smudge are initially depicted as objects of subordination in

their parents' realities, but over the course of the book, they manage to position themselves as subjects in a new reality of their own creation rather than remaining objects in their parents' reality. Both children demonstrate a "capacity to overlook and disrupt socio-economically based prejudice [and] offer a way forward in the negotiation of social class boundaries" (Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 105). As Lyotard argues, infancy cannot be determined by its social, political and parental conditions; it is rather "a zone of indeterminacy inherent to the body that is open to affect, eludes and escapes the determinations and certainties of the adult laws from which it emerges" (as cited in Locke, 2012, p. 3). For Lyotard, the child eludes determination and is not fully shaped by the social and adult norms imposed on them. The child is a space where new forms of subjectivity and expression can merge beyond the constraints and the norms of the parents. Charles and Smudge are not passive entities that can be fully subsumed under their parents' socioeconomic conditions. Instead, they are engaged in a dynamic tension with the forces that seek to regulate them—a tension which ultimately will create new discourses and reinvented identities.

In *Voices in the Park*, Browne's children, Smudge and Charles, affirm a potency of a new beginning in spite of being largely determined by their parents' socioeconomic conditions, i.e. Smudge's father's unemployment and Charles's mother's upper middle class. In the space of the park, both Charles and Smudge find an opportunity to escape their parents' prejudice and limitations; they forge a connection that will impact both of them and may last beyond the moment of their short encounter. They manage to escape, though temporarily, the dysfunctionality of their everyday life and find meaning in their relationship with each other. Both Smudge and Charles escape the restraints of their fate and assert their own individual agency to become discursive and subversive agents of change. Both children are positioned as part of the socioeconomic conditions of their parents in the narrative of Charles's mother and Smudge's father. However, when the children speak in their own voices, they both reposition themselves and reconstruct their own reality. By the end of the book Smudge and Charles manage "to develop subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to the ways in which others choose to position them" (Saltmarsh, p. 98).

THE SILENT CHILD: A SUBORDINATE IDENTITY

Childhood is portrayed in *Voices in the Park* as not always an ideal period of innocence and purity but rather as a period that has its own fears and anxieties. Charles is portrayed not only as a subordinate child to his mother but also painfully disconnected from her. He is presented to the reader as a character who is suffering from what Barbara Collins (1993) calls a "diminished sense of well-being" (p. 473). The mother narrates: "it was time to take Victoria, our pedigree Labrador and Charles our son for a walk" (Browne, 2000, unpaginated). Charles is secondary to the family's dog, for his mother's primary concern is the family's pet. The whole family is, in fact, dwarfed in the first picture of the mother's voice by a huge mansion that dominates the picture, and Charles even more so by his mother and her dog, which is leading the family to the park. Charles is barely seen next to his mother. Moreover, when the mother notices Charles playing with Smudge, the "rough-looking child", as she calls her, she orders: "Charles, come here. At once!" in juxtaposition to her rather polite tone to the dog, "…come here please Victoria" (Browne, unpaginated). In an ironic reversal of status, the mother expresses harshness towards her son and politeness towards the dog. She fails to see that her son is enjoying the moment with Smudge, interrupting his joy, resulting in both of them "walking home in silence" (Browne, unpaginated). Charles is by no means a representation of the stereotypical privileged child of a happy-go-lucky middle-class

child. Although financially privileged, he is deeply distressed and controlled by his dominating mother.

Charles is emotionally disconnected and physically distant from his mother; his narrative begins as follows: “I was at home on my own again. It’s so boring. Then Mummy said that it was time for our walk” (Browne, unpaginated). Charles's opening lines are rather dramatically ironic because the mother fails to see the boredom and loneliness of her son, and Charles is not aware of his subordination to his mother and his status as secondary to the family’s dog. This sense of irony is deeper when Smudge says: “I got talking to this boy. I thought he was a bit of a wimp at first, but he is Okay” (Browne, unpaginated). Smudge obviously sees what the mother fails to see. She sees his sadness, his fear and his lack of self-confidence. Smudge’s comment deepens the emotional gap that isolates him from his mother. Smudge informs us with the closing of her narrative: "Then his mum called him, and he had to go. He looked sad” (Browne, unpaginated). Ironically, the mother not only fails to see the sadness of her son, but she also thwarts his attempt to engage and participate in what Miller (2008) calls a "mutually responsive and mutually enhancing relationship” with Smudge (p. 372).

The visual text in Browne’s *Voices in the Park* communicates covertly what the written text conveys overtly. Much of Charles's subordination and emotional disconnection is pictorially implied. Charles and his mother share the same bench in the park, but they are not actually together. Twice in the book, they are shown sitting next to each other hand-folded, and each one of them is looking in the opposite direction from the other. The dysfunctional relationship between Charles and his mother is further highlighted. The mother’s hat, symbolic of her dominance and control over her son Charles, haunts him even when he is far away from her. He walks in her shadow in the park; he sees many of the trees, the clouds and the light posts shaped after her hat. On the slide with Smudge, the fear of his mother still haunts him, and the far lamp posts are shaped after her hat. Charles’s fear and anxiety are clearly seen as he is holding with a strong grip on both sides of the slide. His face reflected between his feet, recalling Edvard Munch’s painting ‘Scream’ is an incident of intertextuality that reflects Charles’s distress, panic and trauma. The broken plane on the ground does not leave the readers indifferent to the possible symbolic connection between such detail and Charles's identity in distress; the ultimate effect is that of a trapped child who has no identity nor a voice of his own.

Charles’s discourse is also partly trapped within his mother’s. When he talks, it is not his voice that we hear but rather that of his mother with all her assumptions and presumptions. He is not very happy at the beginning when Smudge initiates a conversation with him because “it was a girl, unfortunately, but I went anyway” (Browne, unpaginated). The third picture of Charles’s voice accompanying the quoted above text is framed from Charles’ side but not from Smudge's. The light post dividing the picture into two parts produces a picture of two different small compartments reflecting Charles’s gender assumptions that still separate him from Smudge and which he must have inherited from his mother. Generally speaking, Charles’s illustrations are often bordered, and only the last picture of his voice is a full-bleed page in sharp contrast to the opening picture of his voice that is framed and with inside sharp lines that give the impression that the house is a labyrinth where Charles is trapped with no possible escape. Charles is the silent child who has no voice of his own, for his perception of the world is framed by what his mother teaches him to see. As he gets closer to Smudge, Charles’s perception changes, and he shows more appreciation to the newly-befriended companion. “She was brilliant on the slide; she went really fast. I was amazed” (Browne, unpaginated). At this moment, Charles realises the truth of Smudge's character on his own terms. Truly, Charles is implicated in an oppressive system of power and

abuse, but in spite of being trapped, he dares to speak and move toward what Collins (1993) calls "a system based on mutual empowerment" (p. 474). Charles's encounter with Smudge marks the beginning of his growing up and empowerment. This encounter marks the moment "when the mother can no longer be the answer to everything" (Lyotard, 2013, p. 96) and the time to explore new beginnings. By formulating his own perception of Smudge, Charles is taking his first steps towards autonomy and independence from his mother in thought and action. At the end of the book, Charles returns home haunted by the shadow of his mother's hat still looming ahead of him, but looking forward to another time that he may see Smudge again. Charles, although dominated and traumatised, undergoes a partial transformation over the course of the book as he dares to speak.

SHAPING A NEW IDENTITY: MUTUAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY

With Smudge, Charles experiences what Lyotard calls "the condition of being affected [by otherness]" (Lyotard, 1992a., p. 420). Without such openness to otherness and without breaking the rigid attachments to what he already knows from his mother, Charles would not have been able to experience a smooth and more fulfilling relationship such as the one he forges with Smudge. Meeting Smudge ushers Charles into a process of transformation and growth. Through his encounter with Smudge, Charles is moving beyond the limited perspectives of his mother and discovering new ways of being and experiencing the world. The two dogs, Charles's and Smudge's, becoming one dog in the third picture of his voice and exchanging tails in the fifth picture of the same voice, symbolise the new bond the two children establish with each other. As Jones (2012) mentions: "The potency of infancy thus stems from its vulnerable openness, which allows new beginnings to erupt and to interrupt the course of everyday life" (p. 140). She adds, "Infancy makes it possible to question all that already is and begins (to think) again…" (p. 151). Lyotard further explains the nature and the source of the child's paradoxical potency: "Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human" (Lyotard, 1991b., p. 10).

Smudge and Charles on the see-saw are symbolic and metaphorically capture the nature of the new bond they manage to forge. Their relationship is that of co-dependency and intersubjectivity, where each one contributes and even creates the joy of the other. Without one of them, the game is not possible, and it is totally meaningless. Jordan (1986) defines this relationship of co-dependency as a connection of "mutual intersubjectivity" where "there is openness to influence, emotional availability, and constantly changing pattern of responding to and affecting the other's state. There is both receptivity and active initiative toward the other" (p. 2). Smudge and Charles take a genuine interest in each other and manage to accept their differences because they realise how each one is important to the joy and happiness of the other. The see-saw game is symbolic of their mutual sharing, their common joy and the validation of one's identity through connecting with the other. Charles offers Smudge the companion she needs, and Smudge triggers in him the courage to reclaim his identity and to write a narrative of his own voice. With Smudge, Charles is able to forge his own identity, shape his own narrative, and explore other potentials he never thought he had. Differentness is to be valued, it does not undermine or threaten one's identity, but it rather enhances and creates individuality, as is the case of Charles and Smudge.

With Smudge, Charles is no longer doomed to separation and loneliness as he is in his relationship with his mother. Charles's relationship with Smudge brings him what he misses in his

relationship with his mother. It allows him to participate in what Collins calls "a mutually responsive and mutually enhancing relationship", which he was deprived of in his relationship with his mother (Collins, p. 473). While his relationship with his mother was that of power, dominance and control, his connection with Smudge values mutuality, co-dependence and self-enhancement. The discourse in Smudges' voice shifts from "I" to "we", and the contours of the self are no longer the singular "I" but the plural and inclusive "we". Smudge informs the reader: "We both burst out laughing when we saw Albert having a swim." She adds, "then we all played on the bandstand …" (Browne, unpaginated). Just as the two dogs merge as one dog in some pictures, the "I" and "you" merge to create a discourse of 'we-ness'. With Smudge, he escapes this determinacy in order to reposition himself in a healthier relationship of co-dependent self-assertion and "active initiative toward the other [where] there is a sense of expanding participation, engagement, and openness between the people involved" (Jordan, 1995, p. 56).

The closing pictures of Charles's and Smudge's voices explicitly illustrate the transformation that both children and especially Charles went through. By the end of the book, Charles performs an identity beyond the limitations and constraints of the dominant authority of his mother. Charles's voice closes on a full-bleed picture of him going home with his mother. The full bleed implies that all restraints and restrictions imposed by his mother are removed from his perception. Charles no longer sees the shadows of his mother's hat everywhere; the park looks neat and unspoilt by the mother's power and anger. The trees are leafed and ready to blossom, Charles is not walking in the shadow of his mother, nor is he hidden behind her dark coat and leading dog. However, what is most significant in this picture is the presence of Eros, the symbol of love and desire, pointing his arrow at Charles. Charles is going home, looking back and wondering, "Maybe Smudge will be there next time?" (Browne, unpaginated). Smudge obviously leaves an impact on Charles—an impact which redeems the park of any signs of dominance, power and abuse. Charles, who is returning home, is not the same one who walked to the park with his mother and sadly wished he was having a great time like Victoria. He shapes a new identity in the park—an identity triggered by Smudge, with whom he can connect authentically and be himself. Jones notices that "Lyotard explicitly parallels the potency of infancy with the fecundity of Eros." She continues to elaborate further on this metaphor:

> Lyotard's description of infancy recalls Diotima's… Eros is born from a drunken coupling between Poverty and Plenty and inherits qualities from both parents: thanks to his mother, Eros is poor, unkempt, shoeless, and homeless, a wanderer who sleeps under the stars; thanks to his father, he is inventive, bold, always weaving some stratagem, a sophist, and a sorcerer. Likewise, Lyotard aligns infancy with unkept promises, disappointments, and abandonment but also with daydreams, memories, and love, an openness to stories and a questioning inventiveness. (Jones, p. 151)

The child is fertile, self-resourceful, defiant and a drifter. Infancy is capable of imagining and generating life even when controlled by her father's unemployment, like Smudge or like Charles, by a dominating and angry mother who leaves behind her trees on fire as she exits the park. As Lyotard affirms, infancy speaks of "the miracle of what is not yet there, of what is not yet identified" (Lyotard, 1991a., p.70). Charles is able to experience love with Smudge in spite of his dysfunctional relationship with his mother. He is able to experience a new reality different from the reality created for him by his own mother. Jones argues: infancy "remains open to the unfamiliar and unknown, thereby allowing for the initiation of something new, something singular and unforeseen" (Jones, p. 140). Before Charles leaves the park, "he picked a flower and gave it to [Smudge]" (Browne, unpaginated). Smudge took it home and nurtured it in a symbolic gesture

of love, care and in memory of the significant moment they shared together in the park. Smudge's voice ends with such an affirmation and recognition of love and tenderness.

Charles's empowerment is questioned when Smudge comments: "then his mum called and had to go. He looked sad" (Browne, unpaginated). The pattern of Charles's relationship with the dominating matriarch seems to be unbreakable; the mother orders, and the child obeys. Does Charles regress to the same passive and submissive identity again? Foucault (1999) posits, "the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination" (p. 162). Charles fashions himself not by overthrowing the system of coercion and subjection he is dominated by but by finding his own voice within this system. The mother looks like she is pushing him in the direction of her house, and she fails to create a home. However, Charles is more visible in this picture in spite of his mother's dominance. Unlike in the first picture of the mother's voice, the reader can see him and his shadow side by side with hers. His facial expressions are clearly seen, and he is not second to the family's pet any more. The family's pet is represented in a metonymy that undermines its importance. Charles is pushed in by his mother, but his looks suggest that he belongs somewhere else. All the details of his expression, his shadow and the space he occupies in the picture suggest that Charles is beginning now to perform an identity of his own. The identity Charles performs at the beginning of the book is not the same identity performed by the closure of the book. This does not come as a result of a change in the mother's attitude but rather as a result of the moment he shares with Smudge and the intensity of the emotions he experiences with her. The last picture does not take away any of Charles's agency and empowerment he gains during his visit to the park.

THE DISCOURSE OF A SUBVERSIVE IDENTITY

When the silent child speaks, the discourse of the adult is undermined and even deconstructed in Browne's picture book. Charles undermines his mother's presumptuous discourse and points to its shallowness and how ungrounded it is. The mother's attitude about Smudge and her dog is negated and even contradicted by Charles. The mother informs the reader that as soon as she "let Victoria off her lead… some scruffy mongrel appeared and started bothering her." She called Smudge's dog a "horrible thing" (Browne, unpaginated). However, Charles challenges such a negative attitude, though indirectly, when he claims: "the two dogs raced round like old friends" (Browne, unpaginated) and, therefore, widens the gap between his mother and the readers because of her judgmental attitude and lack of credibility. Moreover, while the mother describes Smudge as "a rough-looking child" and sees her as one of the "frightful types in the park", Charles thinks she is a "brilliant" and a "quite nice" girl (Browne, unpaginated). Again, Charles refutes his mother's judgement and proves it to be flawed. The discourse that Charles constructs is more inclusive and accommodating than the dismissive and arrogant discourse of his mother. By negating her discourse, he is pointing to its flaws and limitations. Charles manages to construct a sounder discourse based on understanding, mutuality and appreciation of the other, as Locke confirms: "Infancy, as the quality of human negation, is precisely what makes us human" (Locke, p. 18). The child in Browne's *Voices in the Park* is a force of negation that subverts the voice of the adult to unmask all assumptions and presumptions upon which such a discourse is constructed. Browne reinforces the child's perception and undermines the mother's discourse. Foucault's understanding of the dual nature of the discourse is informative here. He informs: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart" (Foucault, 1990, pp. 1-100). If the mother's discourse generates and produces

power, Charles's discourse is a negation of her authority and control and an indirect assertion of his own identity.

Smudge's discourse is equally subversive of the adult authority; her comments are even more destabilising and challenging than Charles's. Her discourse deconstructs Charles's mother's voice; her comments are more direct and heavily ridden with irony targeted at the mother. Smudge is critical of the mother's behaviour and attitude even though she does not interact with her directly. She realises that the mother is a "silly twit" when she is fuming at her son for playing with her. The picture that comes with the comment is rather ironic. The mother is caricatured in the second picture of Smudge's voice as a very angry woman; the dogs give the impression that they are running through her head, and the flowers are standing up off her scarf in alarm because of her anger. Smudge's voice "ironically… deconstructs the very views and certainties that inform [the mother's] 'correct' behaviour" (Wyile, p. 188). The mother's self-inflicted irony at the beginning of her voice is not lost on the readers, for they cannot help noticing her incongruity when she chooses to go to the park formally dressed up in a coat, a scarf and a hat and dubbed with a pearl necklace and matching earrings; a casual walk in the park with her son and her pet does not necessarily call for such formalities. By the time the readers hear all the different voices, they will have accumulated enough details to position themselves vis-a-vis the text. The readers' allegiance can never be granted to the mother any more, and they start aligning themselves, most likely with the voice of both Charles and Smudge. A feeling of understanding may develop between the readers and the children, and they become even accomplices in the irony played out in the book at the mother's expense. The readers' alignment and allegiance with both children give their discourse more credibility and thus endorse and validate the children's identities.

The pictorial discourse in Smudge's voice minimises the presence of the adults as well and therefore undermines them as authority figures. In his study of the textual functions of metonymies in *Voices in the Park*, Moya-Guijarro (2019) argues that in many pictures, metonymies are used to give prominence and status (p. 397). However, the status is not granted to the adults but rather to the children. The readers can see only the forearms of both parents when Smudge and Charles meet since the focus is fully on both children in their first encounter. Both Smudge and Charles are given "power and prominence" at the expense of the authoritative voice of their parents. The children in this picture are able to accomplish what the parents fail to initiate, i.e. to establish a sort of human communication and reach out to each other; "the infant reminds the adult world of all it lacks" (Locke, p. 2). The parents exert no power or control over the children at this moment in spite of the gaze from the light post in front of the children. Childhood is perceived as a sort of creative energy that "no system or apparatus of the law can harness… precisely because this mute infancy lies outside the adult world of articulation" (p.3).

Smudge's father's socioeconomic condition is taking a toll on him. His narrative starts with a tone of frustration and discontent: "I need to get out of the house" (Browne, Unpaginated). From the onset of his narrative, he recognises that his connection with Smudge may alter the pensive and concerned air he is absorbed in. Therefore, he decides to go with Smudge to the park. We are later informed on his way home that "Smudge cheered [him] up" and "she chatted happily to [him] all the way home" (Browne, Unpaginated). Browne captures pictorially Smudge's ability to change her father's perception and his discourse. On the way to the park, the father sees the city as a sad place to live. The scene is dark and gloomy with dark brick walls, high wire fences, black block apartments, a Mona Lisa side by side with a Laughing Cavalier crying over the state of the city, and a Santa Claus begging for his wife and the millions of children in the world he has to support. The trees are leafless, and the streets are littered with much garbage a rat is feeding on.

This is the picture which reflects the father's perception and frames his discourse. The father's mood changes on his way back home with Smudge—much of this change is communicated through the juxtaposition of the third and last picture of his narrative.

Their perception of the city as so ugly and dismal is transformed into a more cheerful and uplifting image of the same city, as if his visit to the park in the companionship of his daughter has totally changed his reality. Coming back with Smudge, her father sees the same place with a different perception; the place has drastically changed. The wire fence is removed, and the brick wall is much more colourful and cheerful. The Mona Lisa is dancing happily with the Laughing Cavalier, and Santa Claus is free of all the worries and concerns that have worn him off before. The buildings are dotted with red hearts and shining stars, and the street trees are decorated with fine and delicate Christmas lights. Smudge changes her father's perception and alters his discourse. For now, he sees a more optimistic reality than the reality he was clinging to on his way to the park. Smudge's pictorial narrative is characterised in a surreal manner with cheerful colours and an abundance of plums, strawberries, apples, oranges, pears and peaches in the park in sharp contrast to the bare and gloomy perception of the park that the other characters hold. Her subjective reality is different from all the subjective realities of the other characters. She is a cause for empowerment; she is able to change her father's reality in the same way as she offers Charles another perspective on his world, different from the one constructed by his mother. Within the child lies an ability to create a new reality by breaking through the old moulds and opening up spaces for new possibilities and new potentials. In spite of the child's vulnerability and total dependence on the adult for shelter and survival, the child is capable of shaking the grounds of the adult world. Paradoxically, the child can live and be validated only under the authority of the adult, yet the child manages to undermine, challenge and even deconstruct the adult's discourse to grow up and bring change. In Childhood Lectures (Lyotard, 1991a.), Lyotard refers to the childhood that "haunts the discourse", curbs it from within and disrupts it to create a better alternative to the "regulated structure" (Lyotard, p. 9).

In Browne's *Voices in the Park*, the voice of the child, usually voiceless and inarticulate, has become articulate enough to question and challenge the traditional power dynamics held by the parents in order to formulate an identity of their own. Browne's *Voices in the Park* subverts the traditional power structures by challenging the stereotypical authority of the parents and presents the child as the voice that destabilises the adult discourse. Through the postmodern features of his book, such as the multiple narrators and perspectives, the non-linearity of the narrative, the visual metonymies and the collage of the written and the pictorial texts, Browne opens up a space for a new empowering child's discourse and creates for the child a space to perform their subversive identity in a way that is unique and particular to Browne's children in his picture book. Browne's children are Lyotardian in the way they challenge the system and secure for themselves within a system of submission a space for subversion. "The infantile body appears as the radical heterogeneity disrupting the system, not by simply oppressing itself to it as another regulated structure, but as a constitutive indeterminacy within it" (Sarikartal, 2019 p. 91). The child is always implicated in the adults' systematic discourse—not necessarily by choice but by default—yet "to listen to the inarticulate voice of childhood would be a way of disrupting the identity of the system, to put it in movement" (Sarikartal, 2019 p. 95). Overall, *Voices in the Park* demonstrates Browne's ability to manipulate postmodern narrative techniques to communicate complex issues, such as identity and subversion, to no less complex and sophisticated young readers.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study highlights the paradoxical nature of the relationship of the child to the parents and to the very social system that defines the child. The child is a constituent part of the social texture without which their identity remains undefined and underdetermined. In spite of being heavily embedded in the system, the child is a driving force that questions, scrutinises and points to what this system lacks. Therefore, in Browne's picturebook, the voice of the child is a voice that thwarts the normative and authoritarian discourse of the adult, points to its limitations and dysfunctionality and creates a fissure within this discourse. When the child speaks in *Voices in the Park* as Charles and Smudge do, they reposition themselves in a new reality they reconstruct—a reality different from the one contoured by their parents. In doing so, they claim agency and an identity of their own that do not necessarily intend to overthrow the very cornerstones of the reality where they were initially positioned but rather to reinvent this reality into a new one that speaks more to their nature and aspirations. Anthony Browne's children in *Voices in the Park* may be trapped in their socioeconomic conditions or emotionally broken, but they are able to be empowered and create a reality that speaks to their hopes—a reality that is largely their own.

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