Multiple Worlds in Juvenile Fiction: Lewis Carroll, Michael Ende, Jostein Gaarder

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'The only thing we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder.' This is one sententiously illuminating thought delivered, with a certain dramatic flair, by a mysterious *guru* to a fourteen-year-old girl named none other than *Sofie* (or Sophie, in the English version); this is also the analytical subtitle of *Chapter 2: The Top Hat* of *Sofies verden*, Jostein Gaarder's best-selling book, that has quickly become a cult classic among the snobbish teenagers all over the world, desperate to comprehend philosophy at once, with the least effort possible. Sophie is told that all children have an exquisite sense of wonder: they see miracles and wonders almost everywhere, 'but as they grow up, the faculty of wonder seems to diminish' (Gaarder 1994: 14) and most adults end up by experiencing world as something quite ordinary. It is thus strongly implied that, on the threshold of her adulthood, Sophie needs competent guidance and counselling in order not to waste her magical gift, in order not to stray from the righteous path of productive wonder. The treatise unexpectedly sent to her in installments is a thorough (and rather tedious) historical (only occasionally thematical) survey of philosophy, meant to educate and, at the same time, help her to discover her true self.

Judging by its heroine's predicament and by the stakes involved in her adventure, it is understandable why *Sophie's World* has been dubbed 'something like a modern-day version of *Through the Looking Glass*.' (Elson) Well, it is more like a pretentious (and less funny) version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* hybridized with *Looking-Glass* motifs, but there are indeed similarities between Sophie and Alice. Though of different ages, both girls are suddenly confronted with an extremely challenging question: 'Who are you?' While Alice is a curious and perky seven-year-old, willing to make herself accepted as an equal in the glittering adults' world, without having any notions about that world, apart from certain elements of daily etiquette and an inflated illusion of grown-up power and grandeur, Sophie is a circumspect adolescent who seems to have been and returned (long ago) from where Alice is still wandering (and wondering). Sophie is much less inclined to hastily engage in an obscure (though very tempting) quest, she feels uneasy and even frightened at times, until she eventually gets to enjoy the thrill and comes to control the adventure (or, at least, to have this impression).

Also reluctant 'to take the bait', eleven-year-old Bastian Balthasar Bux, the (anti-)hero of Michael Ende's *Neverending Story*, as much as he is captivated by his reading, keeps to himself almost halfway through his fantasy journey, until he suddenly feels the urge *to act*. This happens when the Childlike Empress decides that the one meant to save Fantastica from destruction *must* make up his mind and intervene, at last.

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She commands the Old Man of Wandering Mountain, the ultimate scribe of the universe, to read 'from the beginning, word for word,' the whole story he is writing and, at the same time, making to happen: 'Everything that I write down happens… It's all a reflection of a reflection. I am able to read it while I write it. And I know it because I am reading it. And I write it because it is happening. The Neverending Story writes itself by my hand.' (Ende 1983: 172) Going back to the beginning, trying to alter or influence the story, says the Old Man, are not allowed, since any intervention in this mysterious process would result in disaster, it would mean entering a vicious cycle that will never end: 'If I do that [reading the story from the beginning], I shall have to write everything all over again. And what I write will happen again ... If the Neverending Story contains itself, then the world will end with this book ... We shall enter the Circle of Eternal Return.' (Ende 1983: 174). The Child Empress insists, because she knows that the virtual saviour 'can make a fresh start; new life can be born.' (Ende 1983: 175)

Eventually, Bastian *understands*, he gets the message and starts to act, but only when confronted with the gloomy perspective of seeing himself as 'a character in the book, which, until now, he thought he was reading'. Moreover, he has a chilling vision of someone else reading the story that he, Bastian, is in – another naïve reader unsuspecting that s/he is just a character him/herself in a story that someone else is reading, also unaware of his/her own being a character and so on. Bastian wants to break the circular story that 'begins all over again, unchanged and unchangeable', he tries to fight Ouroboros, he tries to escape the automatic, nonsensical return to an empty space and the recurrent leap to another level of reality: 'He doesn't want to read anymore; he wants to stop.' (Ende 1983: 177) He wants to get a life, he is willing to prove to himself that he exists beyond any reasonable doubt. He does not dare question the existence of God, he does not make attempts to explore 'upwards', but he endorses the responsibility to make sense of his life, to give significance to his acts, so he starts to search *inwards* for answers, for inspiration. Bastian (and implicitly Michael Ende) does not want his *unendliche* story to be *ohne Ende*, without a closure, unfinished, incomplete; he wants it to be made/said properly, constantly renewed and restored by one Ende or another. By using three font colours, the original German version might be indicative of what Bastian's choice really is: in a zoom-out movement (see the opening of the book, with the inscription reversely read from *the inside* of the bookshop), he leaves the dull, unsympathetic real world (text rendered in red fonts), then turns to Fantastica (suggested by green fonts) and after a while plunges into it; finally, he 'returns', he seems to come back to the ordinary world, but, in fact, he creates another space, a world of his own (text rendered in blue fonts), he builds a comfortable *home* for his inner self.

Absorbed in her obsession with what she calls 'the Looking-Glass house', engrossed in her intense, tantalizing desire to search it (and whatever may lie beyond), Alice never seems to really perceive the catoptric space as a mere reflection of the world she lives in. To her, the two worlds may look very much alike (only reversed in image), but they are distinct from each other and equally material, equally *real*. Perhaps that is why she never meets a reversed double of herself. Through the bizarre Looking-Glass country, as well as previously through Wonderland, Alice travels all alone, with no companion whatsoever. When each (dream-)voyage is over, she is more than reluctant to accept that in fact she never left her home, that the space she explored was her own

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self. Always very good at *pretending*[1], she keeps telling herself that she has just come back from afar. Each time, the expedition seems to overwhelm her: sick to be dependent, sick to be a helpless child, she ventures away from the familiar safe (and boring) places, but she is all too happy to return to them when playing an adult role turns out to be too strenuous, too uncomfortable, too disquieting for her. She simply cannot deal with the discoveries that she is making on the way, so she defensively chooses to consider them just ghastly delusions of dreams. The most disturbing revelation (that she vigorously denies on the spot and resumes to dismiss as preposterous after she wakes up) is triumphantly brought to her by Tweedledum and Tweedledee, at the sight of the Red King asleep – and supposedly dreaming of her[2]:

> 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?'
> 'Where I am now, of course,' said Alice.
> 'Not you!' Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. 'You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!'
> 'If that there King was to wake', added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out – bang! – just like a candle!'. . . . 'You're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real.'
> 'I *am* real!' said Alice and began to cry.
> 'You won't make yourself a bit realler by crying,' Tweedledee remarked: 'there's nothing to cry about.'
> 'If I wasn't real,' Alice said – half-laughing though her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous – 'I shouldn't be able to cry.'
> 'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?' Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt.
> 'I know they're talking nonsense,' Alice thought to herself: 'and it's foolish to cry about it.' So she brushed away her tears.
>
> (Carroll 1996: 173-174)

Determined to have it *her* way, Alice makes a strange stunt in her dream and claims she is awake, that everything around her is real and palpable and the menacing statement of the twins was just a nightmarish delusion: 'So I wasn't dreaming, after all,' she said to herself, 'unless – unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's *my* dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream …' (Carroll 1996: 214) In the end, Alice tries to settle the thorny question of the primary dreamer by inviting her beloved kitten to advance an opinion on that, and by suggesting it to fully support her (self-serving) supposition:

> 'Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear … You see, Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red

[1] "I wish I could tell you half the things Alice used to say, beginning with her favourite phrase 'Let's pretend'." (Carroll 1996: 132)

[2] Intriguingly enough, Alice feels she is dreaming, but she doesn't quite endorse her dream state, possibly because she doesn't want her dream to end (cf. Novalis' view: 'We are near waking when we dream that we are dreaming.'). So she projects the dream state onto someone else, which she will come to bitterly regret afterwards.

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> King. He was part of my dream, of course – but then I was part of his dream, too! *Was* it the Red King, Kitty?'
>
> (Carroll 1996: 249)

Alice's dilemma is then forwarded to the reader of the book. The last line in *Through the Looking-Glass* reads: 'Which [i.e. Alice or the Red King] do *you* [i.e. the reader(s)] think it was [the real dreamer]?' The question is not so simple and innocent. The two dreamers placed in front of each other, like two parallel mirrors, initiate two infinite series of reciprocal reflections. It is like in Zhuangzi's dream about a butterfly, referred to in *Sophie's World* (see Gaarder 1994: 91), a very popular motif with the Baroque and Romantic writers: 'that proud butterfly was really Zhuangzi who dreamed he was a butterfly, or was it a butterfly who dreamed he was Zhuangzi?' This extremely confusing labyrinth of projections may seriously endanger the reader's sense of security, since there is no *solid* warrant that it does not encompass the whole world, beyond the margins of the book. Who would be the primary (or the ultimate) dreamer, then? Or, even more alarming, is there any ultimate dreamer? Is the universe a cosmos taken care of and ruled (i.e. sustained and guided) by anyone or anything?

This happens to become Sophie's greatest concern too. Gradually, she learns a lot (maybe too much in such a short span of time) about the history of philosophy (which may make an excellent impression – *or* not! – on the reader set to follow a *fictional* narrative, since the book cover promises that the author is about to deliver a *novel*), but she also learns of something very troubling indeed and of greatest consequence on her: *the other girl*, Hilde Møller Knag, whose life so strangely intertwines with hers, doesn't seem to belong to the same world as she does. At a certain point, after a string of odd coincidences and absurd incidents, an *outrageous* thought – 'Is there any Hilde?' (Gaarder 1994: 154) – flashes through Sophie's mind. This easy way out (of the dilemma) is immediately cancelled, as Sophie receives more and more signs that not only Hilde exists, but she (Hilde) seems to know about her (Sophie) and, moreover, is very likely *to observe* her. Sophie's sensation of being watched (at) is correct. Eventually, after meeting in person numerous biblical, literary and cartoon characters, from Noah, Adam and Eve (*Chapter 30: Darwin*) to Little Red Riding Hood, Winnie the Pooh (*Chapter 25: Kant*), Aladdin (*Chapter 26: Romanticism*), Alice (*Chapter 28: Kierkegaard*), Scrooge and Andersen's little matchgirl (*Chapter 29: Marx*), Martin[3], Nils Holgersson's gander *(Chapter 32: Our Own Time*), and Disney figures (*Chapter 31: Freud*), she realizes chances are that she is just a fictional being (and Alberto Knox, her personal philosophy teacher, too[4]), invented by Major Albert Knag, who tries to guide from a distance[5] his daughter Hilde (still living in their native Norway) while she approaches her fifteen birthday (date considered, in many parts of the world, an initiation threshold).

Hilde too is perplexed at the situation created by the major's intricate and mysterious game. She is not so sure either whether Sophie is a real person or just a

[3] Martin the gander tells Sophie how he and Nils once met an old lady who was writing a book for children, which was strange, because they already were in that book [*Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* / *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*] (see Gaarder 1994: 374).

[4] 'You and I have the same author,' Alberto Knox tells her (see Gaarder 1994: 333).

[5] He is serving with the United Nations forces in Lebanon.

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fantasy character. At first, she thinks that Sophie is no more than a textual convention, a fictional 'sister' sent to her by her absent father, a messenger of love (that is an angel) and a companion meant to assist her with the transition to adulthood. Gradually, she feels that things are changing, that Sophie gets substance and becomes real. Meanwhile, *Sophie* (not Hilde!) is the one who is revealed the deep meaning of the book written by Albert Knag, when she comes across the lesson about Sophia as the Feminine Aspect of God in Judaism (Hokhmah, 'the Wisdom of God') and non-Gnostic Christianity. 'Sophia appeared to her [Hildegard von Bingen] in a vision' (Gaarder 1994: 155), Alberto Knox tells her; 'maybe I (Sophie) will appear to her (Hilde) too,' she thinks (and hopes for) right away, all the more so when *she* sees Hilde in the mirror (Gaarder 1994: 159). But, once again, she might be just a reflection more aware of the exact situation than the *real* girl. Significantly enough, when he meets Sophie, Winnie the Pooh is carrying a letter for a certain Hilde-through-the-Looking-Glass (Gaarder 1994: 282) – or for a Looking-Glass-Hilde? Is the letter addressed to Hilde really meant for her or for Sophie?

As she reads in the manuscript how her fictional friend is already witnessing events still lying ahead in the future, Hilde becomes convinced that somehow Sophie is *real* (Gaarder 1994: 249) – or, in case she is not, she should be. No wonder the trapped characters reach her (Hilde) for help. In the pivotal *Chapter 22*: *Berkeley*, that locks together with the next one, on *Bjerkely*, the hiding place surrounded by birches, where the Knags' idyllic cabin is situated, while discussing Berkeley's view of God as communicator, Alberto says that, in the image of the omnipresent Supreme Spirit, there may be a spirit superior to them (Alberto and Sophie) that called them into being; this Godlike will or spirit that puts everything in motion in *their* world may be Hilde's father; the major is *some kind* of God for them. To Sophie's utter and total dismay, Alberto calls her 'Hilde', insisting that this is her real name. She feels that her mind 'is going round and round' and he replies that 'everything is going round and round . . . Like a giddy planet round a burning sun.' (Gaarder 1994: 237) To them, he implies, this sun may very well be Albert Knag. At that point, *Hilde* is identified by Alberto as an angel to whom Albert Knag's fantasy world is dedicated to – and to whom Sophie is turning for help in her (and Alberto's) attempt to escape from the book.

Just like Alice (or Bastian, for that matters), Sophie doesn't like at all the idea of belonging to someone else's fantasy. She wants to break free, she needs proofs that she exists independently of the major's will. 'If what you say is true,' she says, 'I'm going to run away' (Gaarder 1994: 296). Where to? To the next level of reality. She sets to go into the next world. 'Isn't it just possible that he [the major], too, is part of a higher mind?' He, too, might be 'a helpless shadow' (Gaarder 1994: 298), because somewhere there may be an author (a sort of *Deus absconditus*, in Alberto's opinion) who writes a book about a major Albert Knag that writes a book for his daughter Hilde, about a certain Albert Knox who, apparently out of the blue, starts to teach philosophy to a girl named Sophie. And, some day, Sophie the character enters a bookshop and she sees a certain book on a remote shelf: 'Sophie gasped as she read the title: *Sophie's World*' (Gaarder 1994: 390). And the title of the book where all these can be found is…

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Sophie's World.[6] It might be the reader's turn now to gasp at the thought that… *maybe*… it is time to find out the title (and the author) of the book *s/he* is in.

The lengthy lectures about the history of philosophy let aside (one may wish to have them discarded or, at least, drastically abridged[7]), *Sophie's World* makes a delightful (though still not easy) and stimulating reading for all audiences. Even if the philosophical digressions are skipped, the conundrum of the existence and nature of God/the 'ultimate reality' is by no means alleviated or trivialized. Only Gaarder chooses to leave it unsolved, as Lewis Carroll does in *Through the Looking-Glass*, as Michael Ende also does in his *Neverending Story*. All three authors are preoccupied with exposing the mystery of concurrent/intersecting perspectives on existence: Alice and the Red King seem to dream of each other; Bastian is literally caught up in the magic book he is reading, because its characters desperately need him to save their world; Sophie reads some messages sent to a certain Hilde (a complete stranger to her) and inexplicably arrived to *her* mailbox, while Hilde reads a manuscript book about an unknown girl called Sophie – both teenagers get to finally catch a glimpse of each other by the intermediacy of an old-fashioned mirror. Each of these characters fights to free him/herself from the entanglement, each of them hopes s/he can dominate (or control) *the other one(s)*. Seen from the outside, from where the reader stands, none of them indisputably qualifies for the higher position, although, in the beginning, some of them (Alice, Bastian, Sophie) may be presented as unquestionably *real*. The mesmerized witness of such never settled competition can only contemplate (with growing apprehension) the perfect way the two views interwave – and may wonder whether *s/he* is completely safe.

As long as he keeps it simple, Lewis Carroll does a great job. His Alice books are enjoyed by children and sophisticated adults, too. But when he sets to produce what he genuinely regards as the crowning work of his life, when he decides to mix 'acceptable nonsense for children' and 'some of the graver thoughts of human life' (Carroll 1996: 260), wit and preaching, an ironical view of human nature and melodrama, he writes a monumental (in terms of physical dimensions) book in two volumes, where a story about two endearing fairy children, Sylvie and Bruno, mysteriously (to say the truth, quite awkwardly and most unfortunately) overlaps with the romance about three honest, well-meaning and idealist people caught in a love triangle.

The contrapuntal technique[8] used in the Sylvie and Bruno novel is a simplified, but inflated, flamboyant and much less effective variation of the aporistic intersection of Alice's and the Red King's respective views in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Faerie and the ordinary world of humans seem to quietly coexist. Only at times, *under some*

[6] The motif of the embedded text frequently occurs in juvenile literature – see, for instance, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Hobbit*, Michael Ende's *Neverending Story* or Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

[7] I maintain that one could not care less for the *entire* history of philosophy presented in detail in a fiction book.

[8] As commented on in *Sophie's World*: 'Contrapuntal form operates on two dimensions … There will always be two or more melodies sounding together… The melodies combine in such a way that they develop as much as possible, independently of how they sound against each other. But they have to be concordant. Actually it's note against note [counterpoint].' (Gaarder 1994: 405)

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specific circumstances (delicately, but humorously detailed in the book)[9], the two worlds meet – but again, not everyone can *sense* it. Mister Sir, the (otherwise unnamed) narrator in *Sylvie and Bruno* and in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, seems to be one of the few people living on earth able to have 'elfish experiences' or to daydream[10] – which of the two, he cannot and has no incentive to decide: 'I missed the companionship of the two Fairies – or Dream-Children, for I had not yet solved the problem as to who or what they were – whose sweet playfulness had shed a magic radiance over my life.' (Carroll 1996: 473) Paradoxically (since he nurtures the story a long time and wants it complex and fully ripened, he wants it *complete* and perfect), Carroll's interest for (maybe also his control over) once cherished textualist manoeuvres, as well as his spontaneity and nonchalant inventiveness, are obviously in decline in the Sylvie and Bruno books. Alas, he seems to have become a serious writer, after all. But, luckily, he still may have moments when he goes frantic and behaves erratically compared to his tidy (and stiff) programme. The best parts of Carroll's later fiction work are those where he either relapses into old habits and 'indulges' in puns and jocular demonstrations of logic[11] or reveals a little known (because fiercely disguised before) side of himself: a flair for careful, minute and humorously sympathetic descriptions of little fragile beings and their environment. Many times along the unfolding of the vast and complicate Sylvie and Bruno narrative, Carroll's simple heart and really sweet nature, his common sense and creative instinct save him from his own erroneous goals.

Lewis Carroll's ultimate ambition (confessed as such) is to counterbalance (and to oppose somehow) what he calls 'an increasing tendency to irreverent treatment of the name of God and of subjects connected with religion' (Carroll 1996: 471). His Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (written in 1893, around Christmas time) closes with a message of hope (indirectly) addressed to his prospective readers: 'I think that, among them, some will be found ready to sympathize with the views I have put forwards, and ready to help, with their prayers and their example, the revival, in Society, of the waning spirit of reverence.' (Carroll 1996: 472) No doubt, the Sylvie and Bruno story is theologically-biased – as much so as one may expect it to be coming from an author (a former reverend-to-be!) so frank about his intentions. No doubt, more than once, the text gets preachy or gushy or annoyingly tedious. No doubt, many references to faith and God are excessive or simply out of place there. Nevertheless, Lewis Carroll finally succeeds in finding himself again (although his self may have changed throughout the years), he seems to find his peace of mind. The last chapter in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* not only states (through the mouth of an unbeliever!) that 'There is a God that answers prayer' (Carroll 1996: 672), but acknowledges that God is Love and God's purpose never fails – as Mister Sir, an *intelligent* traveller through the world, grasps when Lady Muriel's dignified grieving of her beloved husband and her unfailing faith make him echo Prince Hamlet's words: there are 'more things in heaven and earth than

[9] See Carroll 1996: 354-355 (to see a fairy, "you ought to feel a little… 'fairyish' – the Scotch call it 'eerie' "); for the description of various 'abnormal' psychic states, see Carroll 1996: 463-465.

[10] On one occasion, the narrator in *Sylvie and Bruno* mentions he might have had a *noon-dream* (see Carroll 1996: 623).

[11] Or he merrily engages in thoroughly demonstrating absurd/uncanny logic – see the Outlandish watch episode (Carroll 1996: 432-437), where he develops the 'living backwards' theory, first advanced by the White Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

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are dreamt of in our philosophy.'[12] (Carroll 1996: 617) The two-way inscription on the Jewel that the Warden of Outland once gave to his daughter Sylvie ('SYLVIE WILL LOVE ALL – ALL WILL LOVE SYLVIE' – Carroll 1996: 674) reveals how mortals can (in Carroll's view) communicate with God: by wholeheartedly loving His creation – be it material, like our visible body, or 'immaterial and invisible', like

> our own immaterial essence – call it 'soul', or 'spirit', or what you will. Why should not other similar essences [fairies or angels, for instance] exist around us, *not* linked on to a visible and *material* body? Did not God make this swarm of happy insects, to dance in this sunbeam for one hour of bliss, for no other object, that we can imagine, than to swell the sum of conscious happiness? And where shall we dare to draw the line, and say 'He has made all these and no more'?
>
> (Carroll 1996: 622)

The Sylvie and Bruno books are Lewis Carroll's (ambitious – and noble in intention) way of attempting to build a bridge over troubled waters, to congruously bring together the one-world perspective (originating in Aristotle's philosophy and shared by some monotheistic beliefs, among which Christianity) and the many-worlds one (professed by the ancient atomists and the quantum physicists alike). That is what scientists and artists and philosophers of our times are trying to achieve *together*, given the indispensable need nowadays for links between various Levels of Reality, for bridges between different disciplines, between various directions and fields of knowledge.[13] Multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and, most of all, transdisciplinarity (see Basarab Nicolescu's *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*) are keywords for this ample general effort to build the much longed for 'unity of human knowledge'[14], to the foundation of which the Oxford don of mathematics and logic Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a.k.a. Lewis Carroll, the (once) professional actor and playwright Michael Ende and the philosophy teacher Jostein Gaarder, all of them converted to writing (*juvenile*) fiction, brought their contributions in a maybe discreet, but most effective way.

[12] In fact, Mister Sir *paraphrases* two lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 5: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

[13] See *http://nicol.club.fr/ciret/index.htm* (in French) / *http://nicol.club.fr/ciret/indexen.html* (in English), the site of the International Centre for Transdisciplinary Research (Le Centre International de Recherches et Etudes Transdisciplinaires – CIRET) located in Paris and founded by Basarab Nicolescu in 1987.

[14] See: « La Charte de la transdisciplinarité » / 'The Charter of Transdisciplinarity', adopted at the First World Congress of Trandisciplinarity, Convento da Arrábida, Portugal, November 2-6, 1994 (available at *http://nicol.club.fr/ciret/chartfr.htm* in French and at *http://nicol.club.fr/ciret/english/charten.htm* in English); Basarab Nicolescu's works, mainly *La transdisciplinarité. Manifeste* (1996) and one of his newest articles, 'New Vision of the World – Transdisciplinarity', in *The Design and Delivery of Inter- and Pluridisciplinary Research* (2002).

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Mondes multiples dans la fiction pour les jeunes: Lewis Carroll, Michael Ende, Jostein Gaarder

Les univers parallèles imaginés (dans des contextes culturels et historiques différents) par des auteurs d'œuvres de fiction « pour les jeunes », tels que Lewis Carroll (dans *Les Aventures d'Alice au Pays des Merveilles*, *De l'autre côté du miroir et ce qu'Alice y trouva* ou *Sylvie et Bruno*), Michael Ende (dans *L'Histoire sans fin*) et Jostein Gaarder (dans *Le Monde de Sophie. Roman sur l'histoire de la philosophie*), présentent une similarité troublante: tôt ou tard, le plaisir du merveilleux tourne en angoisse, car tous ces mondes imaginaires s'entrecroisent et se mélangent, jusqu'à la confusion, avec le monde réel; par conséquent, le/la protagoniste de l'aventure spirituelle se sent perdu(e) dans un vrai labyrinthe de projections et de reflets. Alice, Bastian, Sophie et les autres héros ainsi déroutés, tout à fait plongés dans l'absurde, n'ont qu'un seul espoir de se sauver de ce gouffre béant: chercher (et trouver) un sens *intégrateur*, *à travers* et *au-delà* de toutes les perspectives ontologiques qu'ils arrivent à connaître ou entrevoir.

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