OSCAR'S LETTERS, HYPOSTASES OF THE PRAYER

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Motto: "The God that you say you don't believe, He believes in you". (our trans., Nicolae Steinhardt)

Abstract*: In the present article we set forth to decipher Oscar's letters in which the main stages of life are described, on the one hand, (the first thrills of love and the unavoidable problems of adolescence, marriage, the family life, marriage problems etc.), and on the other hand, God's calling and getting close to Him (the heart's opening, the birth of prayer, God's calling and Oscar's answer, abolishing selfishness, existential searches, the mysterious encounter with God).*

Keywords*: God, faith, prayer.*

Oscar and the Lady in Pink (2002) is a part of "The Cycle of the Invisible" alongside with the volumes *Milarepa* (1997), *M. Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Coran* (2001), *Noah's Child* (2004), *The Sumo Wrestler Who Could Not Gain Weight* (2009) and *Ten Children Ms. Ming Never Had* (2012). As per Josiane Grinfas-Bouchbti's remarks, *Oscar and the Lady in Pink* « pose, une fois encore, les questions métaphysiques et il propose une réflexion sur le rapport entre soin et amour, sur la capacité à rencontre l'autre, à l'accueillir et à le soulager » (Grinfas-Bouchibti 2006: 6).

On his official web site[1], Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt reveals to his readers the way in which the volume *Oscar and the Lady in Pink* was born. The book has its roots in the author's childhood when, from an early age, he got familiar with both fear and hospitals, while accompanying his father who was a physiotherapist that took care of the children. This life experience made him see illness and death as everyday realities and also made him meditate over his own passing. In the suffering and illness of these children, he distinguished between loneliness expressed either by the absence of one of the parents (even by their final passing), by their weakness to keep in touch with their own sick child, or by their incapability to carry a normal dialogue. Even though these behaviours seemed irrational, his father tried to demonstrate their reasoning, which later on helped him become a writer. In his adult age, when returning into hospitals, he thought about letting go of those issues that be healed. This led to the birth of the book *Oscar and the Lady in Pink* which dwells on such a sensitive subject – the sick child – and which does not insist on the idea of healing but rather on that of acceptance of illness and death.

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt dedicates his book to the French actress Danielle Darrieux who in 2002 performed for the first time the role of "Mamie Rose" on the stage of Champs-Élysées Theatre. In 2009 Schmitt directed the movie "Oscar et la dame rose" having

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[1] Available at: http://www.eric-emmanuel-schmitt.com/literature.cfm?nomenclatureId=1772&catalogid=811 (consulted on 10.07.2017).

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Michèle Laroque, Amir Ben Abdelmoumen, Amira Casar, Mylène Demongeot, Max von Sydow, Mathilde Goffart as main actors and with the soundtrack signed by Michel Legrand.

Oscar and the Lady in Pink is made out of fourteen letters, out of which thirteen are written by Oscar and the last by Mamie Rose.

The first letter: the heart's opening towards God and the birth of prayer

Oscar[1] is a 10 years old little boy who suffers from leukemia. He is being hospitalized and is very conscious of the gravity of his illness. Being extremely lucid and intelligent, he knows that the operation did not succeed and that he is about to die. Being advised by Mamie Rose, he starts writing to God – and uses throughout his entire letters the same form of addressing « Cher Dieu » – , although he hates this pursuit: « [...] écrire c'est guirlande, pompon, risette, ruban, et cetera. Écrire, c'est rien qu'un mensonge qui enjolive. Un truc d'adultes » (Schmitt 2006: 11). The child sincerely explains to God the reality of his existence and confesses that he does not believe He exists: « On m'appelle Crâne d'Œuf, j'ai l'air d'avoir sept ans, je vis à l'hôpital à cause de mon cancer et je ne t'ai jamais adressé la parole parce que je crois même pas que tu existes » (*Ibidem*). Oscar also offers God other informations regarding his life from the hospital in a very colloquial way: he made friends (Yves, alias Bacon – very serious burns, Einstein – hydroencephalitis, Pop Corn – obesity), he went through the operation of bone marrow transplant well (« Pourtant je me suis appliqué, moi, à l'opèration ; j'ai été sage, je me suis laissé endormir, j'ai eu mal sans crier, j'ai pris tous les médicaments » – *Ibidem*: 12) and also went through chemotherapy, but Düsseldorf, his doctor, is still silent and sad. Out of the multitude of pink ladies and toys, Oscar is getting attached to the Lady in Pink. Who are these ladies dressed in pink? The answer comes by accessing the web site www.lesblousesroses.asso.fr: « Elles organisent des animations sous forme de loisirs créatifs (travaux manuels, peinture, dessin, jeux de société...), de loisirs ludiques (spectacles de clown, marionnettes, déguisement). Tous ces jeux et animations rompent la monotonie des enfants à l'hôpital et apportent sourires et joie ».[2] On the page of the same web site, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt links the success of his own book, *Oscar and the Lady in Pink*, to the one of the "Les Blouses Roses Association": « Le succès d'Oscar et la dame rose est aussi le succès du cœur et de la compassion. Et donc celui des Blouses Roses. Je soutiens avec passion l'action de l'association qui consiste à apporter un sourire, du temps et de la joie de vivre aux malades et personnes âgées. Peut-être avais-je, moi-même, enfilé une blouse rose les jours où j'écrivis Oscar ».[3]

But let's get back to Mamie Rose. She refuses to let Oscar know her real age, made out of « treize chiffres » (*Ibidem*: 13), because if someone from the hospital would find out about this matter, she would be fired: « Je suis là en contrebande. Il y a un âge limite pour être dame rose. Et je l'ai largement dépassé » (*Ibidem*). Despite all this, nothing stops Oscar from finding out her secrets which will certainly help God identify the lady with the « la vie

[1] Available at:https://www.behindthename.com/name/oscar (consulted on 11.07.2017).
[2] Available at: http://www.lesblousesroses.asso.fr/notre-action/#combattre-la-solitude-et-la-maladie (consulted on 12.07.2017).
[3] Available at: http://www.lesblousesroses.asso.fr/presentation-blouses-roses/ (consulted on 12.07.2017).

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en rose » blouse. The lady uses words and trivial expressions such as « merde » (*Ibidem*: 14), « le môme » (*Ibidem*), « lâche-moi la grappe » (*Ibidem*), « bouge-toi le cul » (*Ibidem*). These are nothing else than professional deformations. These are excusable, since Mamie Rose poses as a fearless warrior, nicknamed from a young age as « l'Étrangleuse du Languedoc », who won 165 out of 165 competitions, 43 of them with a K.O. Her stories about the battles fought and won give Oscar courage and make him stronger: « Je deviens le plus fort. Je me venge » (*Ibidem*: 15). Oscar is reassured that now God must know who is Mamie Rose: « Bon, si avec tous ces indices, Mamie-Rose ou l'Étrangleuse du Languedoc, tu ne repères pas qui est Mamie-Rose, Dieu, alors, il faut arrêter d'être Dieu et prendre ta retraite » (*Ibidem*: 15-16). The word that triggers the heart's opening towards God and the birth of prayer is the word "death". This word is a forbidden one, since everyone in the hospital are pretending not to hear it. They do hear it, but they dissimulate, they keep silent because they themselves fear death and are incapable to see beyond it. The only one who hears and sees life beyond death is Mamie Rose. Her sense of life – « Nous oublions que la vie est fragile, friable, éphémère. Nous faisons tous semblant d'être immortels » (*Ibidem*: 17) – encloses a hidden meaning. She refers to the real life, the after death, with which Mamie Rose wants to make Oscar get used to. In order to do this, Mamie Rose invites the little boy to write to God, even though nobody has ever spoken to him about God, reassuring him that there is no connection between Him and Santa Claus, setting herself as an example of faith. Mamie Rose ensures Oscar that he is not going to feel so lonely, if he writes to God. Moreover, if he puts his faith in Him, He will show up and help. She also advises him to write down everything he is thinking and worrying about in order to relieve his soul and, at the same time, to ask Him every day only one thing relating to his heart. The providential words of Mamie Rose take roots in Oscar's soul considering, that he starts to write to God and speak with Him, meaning to pray, as The Saint Silouan the Athonite affirms: "Whoever loves the Lord remembers Him always, and this memory of the Lord gives birth to prayer" (our trans., Siluan Athonitul 2001: 75). The first prayer that Oscar addresses to God is an extremely simple on – « est-ce que je vais guérir ? » (*Ibidem*: 20) – and it is followed by a suggestion of how to reply the long awaited answer: « Tu réponds oui ou non. C'est pas bien compliqué. Oui ou non. Tu barres la mention inutile » (*Ibidem*). Saying farewell to God is made in the same childish way: « À demain, bisous, Oscar[1] » (*Ibidem*). The postscript brings forth a quasi-rhetorically question – « Je n'ai pas ton adresse : comment je fais ? » (*Ibidem*) – the answer of which lays hidden, in our opinion, in the first words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, Who art in heaven..." Therefore, in the first letter we, the readers, are invited through Oscar to pray. It is the only way we can get near God.

The second letter: God's calling and Oscar's answer

Oscar thanks God for the returned answer: « Bravo ! Tu es très fort. Avant même que j'aie posté la lettre, tu me donnes la réponse. Comment fais-tu ? » (*Ibidem*: 21). The unexpected visit of his parents – they came to visit him once a week, on Sunday – bewilders

[1] Except for the tenth and thirteenth letter which are simply signed "Oscar" , the other eleven letters contain the same closing formula.

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him. Sneaking behind Doctor Düsseldorf's door, the child finds out that he is going to die. The parents' refuse to hug their child upon finding out the news is seen by Oscar as a proof of cowardice. Having his body paralyzed from the shock, Oscar shuts himself in the broom closet and stays there for the rest of the morning. Oscar's reaction is an absolutely normal one from the psychologically point of view, because he is irritated, panicked, furious, nervous and confused. Towards lunch, when he is exposed by the cleaning lady, he refuses any kind of communication with the medical personnel. The only exception is Mamie Rose to whom Oscar discolses the cause of his sadness. She advises him not to hate his parents, because only by letting go of hate, he can make room for the God's love. It does not just appear, more over it comes only when desired from the bottom of the heart. As Oscar longs for God, Mamie Rose teaches Oscar how to ask God to come and reveal to him. The dialogue that grows between them is a spiritual one and can be compared with a catechization. Since Oscar refuses to write to God, if Mamie Rose will not visit him every day, she succeeds in receiving Doctor Düsseldorf's approval to be with him daily for twelve days. Oscar bursts into tears which says that, even though he is only a child, he understands how severe the illness is, its imminence and also his need of being helped: « Je ne m'étais pas rendu compte, avant, combien j'étais vraiment malade. À l'idée de ne plus voir Mamie-Rose, je comprenais tout ça et voilà que ça me coulait en larmes qui brûlaient mes joues » (*Ibidem*: 30). In a spiritual sense, Oscar's crying is the expression of the sadness of the soul which seeks out God, as Saint John Climacus says: "The crying over God is the sadness of the soul and the aching of the heart that is always and feverishly in search of the beloved One" (our trans., Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2004: 140). Having understood this matter, Mamie Rose suggests Oscar to play a game through which to look at the last twelve days of the year as being the reflection of the twelve months of the following year – « Le 19 décembre représente le mois de janvier, le 20 décembre le mois de février, etc., jusqu'au 31 décembre qui préfigure le mois de décembre suivant » (*Ibidem*: 31) – , where each day lived by the child shall be equal to ten years: « C'est une légende. La légende des douze jours divinatoires. Je voudrais qu'on y joue, toi et moi. Enfin surtout toi. À partir d'aujourd'hui, tu observas chaque jour en te disant que ce jour compte pour dix ans » (*Ibidem*). We notice that, only in the second and forth letter, as we shall see, the author mentions the day, which is 19th and respectively 21st of December, without stating the year. This atemporality is not a casual event, because it makes us understand that, from this moment, Oscar steps into a different kind of Time, responding to God's love, writing letters to Him, therefore praying. An explanation with regards to time is offered by the Priest Dumitru Stăniloae: "Time is the space thatunfolds between God's calling addressed to our love and our answer to the love of God. It is the time of the man's response" (our. trans., Costa de Beauregard, Stăniloae 2007: 178). The postscript of the second letter emphasizes Oscar's wish that God would accompany him in his thought: « Je serais d'accord pour une petite visite. Une visite en esprit. Je trouve ça très fort. J'aimerais bien que tu m'en fasses une » (*Ibidem*: 33).

The third letter: the first thrills of love and the unavoidable problems of adolescence

Oscar is reproaching God for not coming again event his day: « D'abord, Dieu, je te signale que tu n'es pas venu. J'ai très peu dormi aujourd'hui vu les problèmes de puberté

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que j'ai eus, donc je n'aurais pas dû te rater. Et puis, je te le répète, si je roupille, secoue-moi » (*Ibidem*: 34). Being in his teen-age, the boy confesses to Mamie Rose that he is in love with Peggy Blue. She is suffering from « la maladie bleue, un problème de sang qui devrait aller aux poumons et qui n'y va pas et qui, du coup, rend toute la peau leutée » (*Ibidem*: 35). This blue disease is known as "cardiomyopathy" or "Eisenmenger's syndrome". The way in which Oscar describes Peggy Blue is filled with theology as it gravitates around the word "church": « Elle sourit gentiment mais ele ne parle presque pas. [...]. Il y a plein de lumière et de silence autour d'elle, on a l'impression de rentrer dans une chapelle quand on s'approche » (*Ibidem*). This comparison between Peggy Blue and the church reveals Saint Paul the Apostle's advice that men love their women, just like Christ loved his church: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy […]"[1] (Ephesians 5, 25-26). With Mamie Rose's encouragement, Oscar tells Peggy Blue that he will protect her from ghosts every evening. Oscar's decision is instantly shattered, when Pop Corn confesses that he is Peggy Blue's boyfriend. His love life gets complicated when, trying to restore his self-respect, Oscar kisses Sandrine, nicknamed the Chinese girl (she wears a black coloured wig to cover the traces of chemotherapy). Oscar's fury gets bigger the more is fed also by the shame of having been seen by his own parents. To get back on them for the cowardice displayed when they had found out Doctor's Düsseldorf's verdict, he listens to the *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* CD many times, right in front of them. Although he feels good that they are suffering, his mother's hug and declaration of love totally confuses him: « J'avais envie de résister mais au dernier moment je l'ai laissée faire, ça me rappelait le temps d'avant, le temps de gros câlins tout simples, le temps où elle n'avait pas un ton angoissé pour me dire qu'elle m'aimait » (*Ibidem*: 41). When everything seemed to end, Mamie Rose restored Oscar's self-respect and at the same time his ability to love, advising the young adolescent to tell Peggy Blue about his feelings for her: « Toi, mon petit Oscar, tu as l'ossature légère et tu n'as pas beaucoup de bifteck, c'est certain, mais la séduction, ça ne tient pas qu'à l'os qu'à la viande, ça tient aussi aux qualités de cœur. Et ça, des qualités de cœur, tu en as plein » (*Ibidem*: 43). Starting from this moment, we are faced with a change of identities, which can be interpreted with reference to *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*[2] written by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Hearing Mamie Rose's words, Oscar / The Nutcracker – a heartless *doll*, which did not feel love –, although ill, he is fighting ghosts / mice and, in the end, accepts to be healed by Peggy Blue / Marie Stahlbaum and become her friend / prince (« [...] c'est vrai que ça m'a fait chaud, à moi aussi, de l'embrasser » – *Ibidem*: 44), meaning a *man* with a heart, who felt love. The entire atmosphere unfolds on the notes of "The Waltz of the Snowflakes" (« Peggy a écouté « La Valse des flocons ». Elle souriait comme si e'etait une vieille copine, la valse, qui lui racontait des choses drôles à l'oreille » – *Ibidem*: 43), composed by Piotr Ilitch Tchaïkovski[3]. At the end of the letter, Oscar confesses to God that he would like to get married with Peggy Blue, but he does not know if such interests are part

[1] Available at: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5&version=NIV (consulted on 13.07.2017).
[2] Available at: http://springhole.net/writing/the_nutcracker_and_the_mouse_king/index.html (consulted on 13.07.2017).
[3] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcxixZjeulE (consulted on 13.07.2017)

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of His area of interest: « Sans vouloir te presser, je te signale que je n'ai pas beaucoup de temps. Donc : mariage d'Oscar et Peggy Blue. Oui ou non. Vois si tu fais, ça m'arrangerait » (*Ibidem*: 44-45). The postscript contains the same question without an answer, which was previously addressed to God in the first letter: « Au fait, c'est quoi, finalment, ton adresse ? » (*Ibidem*: 45)

The forth letter: marriage and the visit made to God

Oscar continues his confessions in front of God. He is almost thirty years old and is a married man: « [...] je suis monté dans son lit. On était un peu serrés mais on a passé une nuit formidable. [...]. On a beaucoup dormi, beaucoup rêvé, on s'est tenus tout contre, on s'est raconté nos vies » (*Ibidem*: 47-48). As far as children are concerned, he thought to wait some time, because his « wife » is not ready yet. No doubt that this thing bears a great responsibility : « C'est vrai, c'est pas tout d'avoir des gosses, faut encore avoir le temps de les élever » (*Ibidem*: 54). The life that Oscar assumed is not free from obstacles: madam Gommete, the nurse manager, finds out that Oscar and Peggy spent the night together. As usual, Mamie Rose's rescue intervention calms down the spirits and brings the two friends even closer. In the name of their friendship, Mamie Rose takes Oscar to the hospital's chapel to get to know their Friend, Jesus Christ. In this way, the child receives the answer to the questions that kept tormenting him: « Je n'ai pas ton adresse : comment je fais ? » (*Ibidem*: 20); « Au fait, c'est quoi, finalment, ton adresse ? » (*Ibidem*: 45). Inside the chapel, in front of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, Oscar sees his own suffering: « Ça m'a fait un choc quand j'ai vu ta statue, enfin, quand j'ai vu l'état dans lequel tu étais, presque tout nu, tout maigre sur ta croix, avec de blessures partout, le crâne qui saigne sous les épines et la tête qui ne tenait plus sur le cou. Ça m'a fait penser à moi. Ç'a m'a révolté » (*Ibidem*: 50). Just like a true teacher, Mamie Rose, being gentle and full of love, continues to take Oscar closer to God. She tells him that nobody can avoid suffering, because not even God did that. Mamie Rose tells him that there are two types of sufferings: the physical suffering (must be endured) and the moral suffering (is chosen by each person). Slowly and tactfully, she connects suffering with the reality of death – « En revanche, à l'idée de mourir, tu n'es pas obligé d'avoir mal. Tu ne sais pas ce que c'est. Ça dépend donc de toi » (*Ibidem*: 52) – and teaches him not to be afraid of death, just like many people do so, because they are afraid of the unknown, but to have faith, when looking Christ on the Cross as He is a trustworthy model: « il subit la peine physique mais il n'éprouve pas de peine morale car il a confiance. Du coup les clous le font moins souffrir. Il se répète : ça me fait mail mais ça ne peut pas être un mal. Voilà! C'est ça, le bénéfice de la foi » (*Ibidem*: 53). When returning to the hospital, Oscar shows signs that the encounter with the unknown is close as he is feeling sleepier. When he wakes up, he confesses to Mamie Rose that he is not afraid of the unknown, meaning of death, but feels nervous for losing what he knows. The postscript of the letter shows us a very caring man and bound both to his wife who is about to undergo a surgery intervention, and especially to the spiritual matters, which demonstrates that the lesson offered by Mamie Rose has been fully learnt: « Les opérations, ce ne sont pas des choses de l'esprit, tu n'as peut-être pas ça en magasin. Alors fais en sorte que, quel que soit le résultat de l'opération, Peggy Blue le prenne bien. Je compte sur toi » (*Ibidem*: 55).

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Therefore, Oscar succeeds in making the first step towards faith which is, as Saint Paul the Apostle says, "[...] confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see"[1] (Hebrews 11, 1).

The fifth letter: the family life

Oscar is dealing with the real problems of the family life, when his wife is operated. Just like a genuine and fond husband, he arranges the room with chocolate candies and flowers and watches over her together with his parents-in-law. Oscar's joy is even greater when the operation is successful: Peggy becomes pink. Oscar's affirmation – « Peggy, ma femme, pouvait avoir la couleur qu'elle voulait, je l'aimerais pareil » (*Ibidem*: 58) – shows us that true love can overcome any kind of barrier. Once more, Mamie Rose teaches Oscar another life lesson by making him understand that « la maladie c'est comme la mort. C'est un fait. C'est n'est pas une punition » (*Ibidem*: 56). So far Mamie Rose was the one who adopted Oscar, but starting with this moment, their relationship ratio reverses: Oscar, upon finding out that Mamie Rose has problems, he adopts her just like he did with his bear, Bernard. The postscript of the letter reveals the fact that Oscar is at peace with himself and with life: « Pas de vœu aujourd'hui. Ça te fera du repos » (*Ibidem*: 59).

The sixth letter: marriage problems

At 40 years old, Oscar has problems in his marriage which are nothing more than the consequences of the reckless deeds from his youth: following Pop Corn's advice, Sandrine denounces Oscar to Peggy by telling her that she was kissed by her husband. Unfortunately, things get really complicated and ugly: left by his wife, Oscar falls into the Brigitte's clutches, a girl suffering from trisomy. Einstein, being "very well intentioned", tells Peggy everything about the kiss scene of her clandestine husband. Mamie Rose succeeds in calming down Oscar again by reassuring him that it's about « le démon de midi, Oscar. Les hommes sont comme ça, entre quarante-cinq et cinquante ans, ils se rassurent, ils vérifient qu'ils peuvent plaire à d'autres femmes que celle qu'ils aiment » (*Ibidem*: 61). She comforts Oscar to go to Peggy and declare his love to her. At the end of the letter, Oscar asks God, Whose day will be tomorrow (The Christmas), to make up with Peggy. The postscript of the letter is particularly emotional, because it highlights the friendship born between the child and God: « Maintenant qu'on est copins, qu'est ce qut tu veux que je t'offre pour ton anniversiare ? » (*Ibidem*).

The seventh letter: abolishing selfishness

At the point of turning 50 years old, Oscar truly understands the importance of love as a bond for keeping harmony within the family: « Ce matin, à huit heures, j'ai dit à Peggy Blue que je l'aimais, que je n'aimais qu'elle et que je pouvais pas concevoir ma vie sans elle

[1] Available at: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+11&version=NIV (consulted on 13.07.2017)

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» (*Ibidem*: 62). Not being able to stand the idea of spending Christmas with his parents, Oscar escapes from the hospital with the help of Pop Corn, Einstein and Bacon and sneaks in Mamie Rose's car. When she finds him crashed on the entrance small carpet, she tries to explain his parents' behaviour by making him understand that they are not afraid of him, by all means they are afraid of the disease. More over, Mamie Rose mentions again the idea of death as something that happens naturally to each man – « [...] tu n'as pas compris qu'il n'y a pas que toi qui meurs. Tout le monde meurt. Tes parents, un jour. Moi, un jour » (*Ibidem*: 66) – which makes Oscar give up his selfishness. This releases the child's need to make up with his own self, with his parents and also with the imminence of death. Upon closing the letter Oscar receives from Mamie Rose the answer to the question he addressed to God: making up with his parents is the perfect gift for God. The postscript of the letter underlines Oscar's desire to perpetuate love through time and time through love: « [...] mes parents restent toujours comme ce soir. Et moi aussi » (*Ibidem*: 68).

The eighth letter: the Virgin Mary

As of this moment, the letters become shorter. At the age of 60, Oscar feels more tired. Back in the hospital, he sees himself as old and without stamina. The child confesses to God that he met His Mother, the Virgin Mary, Whom he mistakenly took Her for Peggy. This confusion is not at all a casual event, because Oscar understands that the love he has for Peggy has been inspired by the Mother of God, a model of faith, humbleness and obedience for all women. In the same ward, Oscar gets close to Peggy holding hands and listening to *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, a song which reminds them of the young age. At the end of the letter, Oscar admits that he write too much because the pen seems kind of heavy and ends the letter by asking God to stop by.

The ninth and tenth letter: existential searches

At the age of 70, Oscar ponders over life most of the time, looking at the gift received for Christmas from Mamie Rose, a flower from Sahara, which lives all its life in a single day: « Sitôt que la graine reçoit de l'eau, elle bourgeonne, elle devient tige, elle prend des feuilles, elle fait une fleur, elle fabrique des graines, elle se fane, elle se raplatit et, hop, le soir c'est fini » (*Ibidem*: 71). Oscar tries to descipher the mystery of the faith, of the life and of the death, which helps him draw the following conclusion: « [...] il n'y a pas de solution à la vie sinon vivre » (*Ibidem*: 73). Having reached the age related sageness, Oscar offers Doctor Düsseldorf both the most friendly and useful advice and a real life lesson, that makes him calm down: « Ce n'est pas de votre faute si vous êtes obligé d'annoncer des mauvaises nouvelles aux gens, des maladies aux noms latins et des guérisons impossibles. Faut vous détendre. Vous décontracter. Vous n'êtes pas Dieu le Père. Ce n'est pas vous qui commandez à la nature » (*Ibidem*). Peggy's departure from the hospital is the undeniable proof of the final break-up from the beloved one, but also of his being old: « [...] maintenant je me retrouve seul, chauve, ramolli, et fatigué dans mon lit » (*Ibidem*: 75). All these things confuses and determines him to tell God that he does not love Him anymore. Oscar ends his

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letter by asking God to pay him a visit: « Voilà, Dieu. Toi, par contre, j'attends toujours ta visite. Viens. N'hésite pas. [...]. Ça me ferait vraiment plaisir » (*Ibidem*: 74).

The eleventh letter: the mysterious encounter with God

Being at the age of 90, Oscar meets God, Who opens both his body and soul's eyes so as to see the entire creation which He has given to him. The discovery takes place little by little, starting with the passing of the night and the break of light and of the morning, continuing with the contemplation of the light, colours, trees, birds and animals and ending with the awakening of the senses: « Je contemplais la lumière, les couleurs, les arbres, les oiseaux, les animaux. Je sentais l'air passer dans mes narines et me faire respirer. J'entendais les voix qui montaient dans le couloir comme dans la voûte d'une cathédrale » (*Ibidem*: 76-77). This quote reminds us of the interpretation that Antony Bloom gives to the encounter. He speaks about the encounter between the human with the God's creation as a moment of "joy of being" and of the "mutual love" (our trans., Antonie de Suroj 2007: 7) and about the encounter of the man with God as a moment in which "He Himself is looking for us" (*Ibidem*: 17). Therefore, we can say that, previously to Oscar being in search of God, He was in search of him. Following to this double encounter, Oscar is convinced that God had revealed His own secret – « [...] regarde chaque jour le monde comme si c'était la première fois » (Schmitt, *op. cit.*,: 76) – and had offered him the happiness of being alive – « Je me trouvais vivant. Je frissonais de pure joie. Le bonheur d'exister » (*Ibidem*: 77). Oscar shows signs of thankfulness and gratitude for everything: « Merci, Dieu, d'avoir ça pour moi. J'avais l'impression que tu me prenais par la main et que tu m'emmenais au cœur du mystère contempler le mystère. Merci » (*Ibidem*). The postscript of the letter reveals Oscar's desire that his parents and Peggy be part of the same discovery: « Mon vœu : est-ce que tu peux refaire le coup de la première fois à mes parents ? [...] Et puis Peggy, aussi, si tu as le temps... » (*Ibidem*).

The twelfth and thirteenth letter: the life, God's gift

Reaching 100 years old, Oscar tries to explain to his parents that life is a gift, that even though we overestimate it and sometimes underestimate it, is offered on loan: « [...] la vie c'etait un drole de cadeau. Au départ, on le surestime, ce cadeau : on croit avoir reçu la vie éternelle. Après, on le sous-estime, on le trouve pourri, trop court, on serait presque prêt à le jeter. Enfin, on se rend compte que ce n'était pas un cadeau, mais juste un prêt » (*Ibidem*: 78). The child was able to explain this idea to them, because he himself understood that life, being on loan, must be merited and appreciated as a God's gift. Oscar asks God to visit his parents too because he is tired. The thirteen words of the thirteenth letter and written *in crescendo*: « Cent dix ans. Ça fait beaucoup. Je crois que je commence à mourir » (*Ibidem*: 79).

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The fourteenth letter: Mamie Rose

This final letter is written by Mamie Rose. It is in fact the book's epilogue from which we find out that Oscar died alone in order to avoid the suffering of the dear ones. Although they were under the impression that they were protecting him, in fact Oscar was the one to do this. Mamie Rose, overwhelmed by grief, finds the strength to thank God for faith, love and all the joys she lived near Oscar: « Merci de m'avoir fait connaître Oscar. Grâce à lui, j'étais drôle, j'inventais des légendes, je m'y connaissais même en catch. Grâce à lui, j'ai ri et j'ai connu la joie. Il m'a aidée à croire en toi. Je suis pleine d'amour, ça me brûle, il m'en a tant donné que j'en ai pour toutes les années à venir » (*Ibidem*: 80). The postscript of the letter clearly states that the true sense of the christian faith is the resurrection: « Les trois derniers jours, Oscar avait posé une pancarte sur sa table de chevet. Je crois que cela te concerne. Il y avait écrit :*« Seul Dieu a le droit de me réveiller. »* » (*Ibidem*: 81).

Conclusion

Without doubt that the true character of this story is God. Although unseen, He becomes seen, present in Oscar's life and, implicitly, in our lives, the readers, and He reveals Himself as the God of endless love and mercy, of patience and kindness. Through omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience and omnisapience, God asks Oscar not to be afraid of the encounter with Him. The preparation for this mysterious yet eternal encounter starts over here, on earth, when Oscar is praying. Understanding that without God he do anything, Oscar puts into practice Christ's advice – "But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12, 31) – and succeeds in going to Heaven, where only God is entitled to wake him up.

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