

Five Characters in Search of a Paedophile

Garbage on the Moon is a psychological drama not unlike those we have known since Naturalism, with conflicts among the protagonists and inside of them. It is original in its approach to paedophilia, both in the character of the presumed victim's mother, which is frequent in the literary-documentary genres about this topic, and the character of the possible perpetrator. A paedophile, this contemporary allegory of evil, must first be incarnated so that he can be confronted. Just as not every non-paedophile is a protector of children, not every paedophile abuses them. Every person can become a "child merchant" in a particular situation, even the one who most strives to protect the child. Evil is camouflaged with the finery of goodness and it is not always easy to tell whether good or bad was done, or if evil came from others or maybe from ourselves. *rokgre* (Rok Vilčnik's *nom de plume*) continues where Edward Albee and Tennessee Williams left off; his portrait is not of a loser by choice, but of an *a priori* loser, one who knows he will never be able to realise his love.

In his article *The dilemma of the male pedophile*¹ Gunter Schmidt defines paedophiles as persons whose sexual wishes and desires for relationship bonds and love are focused either primarily or exclusively on children who have not reached puberty. The intensity of these desires – sexuality, relationship, and love – may vary, as it does with other people as well. In contemporary Western societies paedophilia represents a form of sexuality that cannot be lived out, since it is in conflict with a central social covenant based upon sexual self-determination and consensual sexuality. This is the dilemma of a male paedophile, and it is a tragic dilemma, for a paedophile's sexual orientation is deeply rooted in the basic structure of his identity. Paedophilia is as much a part of him as is love for the same or opposite sex for the homosexual or heterosexual man or woman, the difference being that the latter is accepted, while the former is categorically forbidden and virtually impossible to realise. Schmidt concludes that by denying himself the experience of love and sexuality, a paedophile deserves respect, rather than contempt.

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Individual themes from *Garbage on the Moon* can be observed in rokgre's previous work: the childlike man who has never grown up and a child who represents not only innocence but is also capable of lying, deception and seduction, although without any hidden agendas; the lack of human closeness because of striving for success as defined by others (*That*); the analogy of the unconscious and the space, the sameness of life and entity (*A Star*); love and hate of one's other half (*The Eleventh Wonder*); ostracism (*Ten Years of Pondering*); self-murder (*Kleist's letter*). The text itself is more precisely structured this time, the word of one protagonist is a quote of the other, each thought announces, expects and connects the narrative into a full circle, the circle of the best among all the possible worlds, or the circle of violence as the harbinger and purveyor of the highest form of pleasure. Such structure is known from the works of Drago Jančar (for example, *The Great Brilliant Waltz*, *Klement's Fall*). The rich allusions to literature, mythology and religion through intimate stories reveal the history of modern civilisation. The protagonists' personal motives are the expression of the dilemma of knowledge and existence. Their names recall literary characters, just like how behavioural patterns pass from parents to children.

Lawrence, the astronomer, who only has a first name that sounds more like a surname, the surname of the writer D. H. Lawrence (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*), the pioneer of literary treatment of sex and desires, female sexuality and homosexuality, who was aware of the importance of his writing, although in his time he was often accused of writing lurid trash. T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, who fought for Arab national self-determination in accordance with the British intelligence, which used self-determination as a military strategy to fight the Ottoman Empire in World War I, had an affair with an Arab teenager. Westerners see the exoticism of the Orient in the shape of harems and handsome boys (André Gide, Roland Barthes). St. Lawrence brings the poor to the Emperor Valerianus as the Church's treasure and is martyred on an iron grill over a slow fire.

Martha Singer, the mother, a psychologist is divided between a dreamy futurologist and a potent football player, just like Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, who – divided between a humanist and a scientist, an asthenic and an athlete – seduces her never born adolescent son. St. Martha, a sister to Lazarus and Mary is a patron saint of hosts, housewives, cooks, servants, labourers, washers and hinds.

Paul, the father, an engine driver creates the Kafkaesque-criminal atmosphere of Paul Auster with his premonitions of secrets. The converted apostle Paul's sins are all forgiven.

Vasilka, the daughter, a darling, Twinkle Sleepyhead whom Uncle Moon sent down to Earth until she manages to reform a pervert, Alice in Wonderland who slides down a rabbit hole and discovers the underground labyrinths of adults, a lonely little Lolita.

Film Operator, the observer, the righteous, the tempter; the Wild West guarantees a happy ending.

This succinct story of a family falling apart discloses different layers and traps of love between adults and children, in both, the attitude of parents towards the children and the relationship of a supposed paedophile and a child. The main protagonists are a little girl and a paedophile, the beauty and the beast, each with their own desires, fears and feelings of guilt. He, disenchanted with the world, so quickly bored by monumental goals, believes in childlike purity; she, lonely, curious, looking for other people's affection. Something fairytale-like, something like the antagonism between the good and the evil echoes in the search for the bad man; the bad one we all know, the bad one who still manages to evade our search and nest inside us, in a part from which we project our fear and guilt onto others. The relationship between an adult and a child can only be one of protection; however, only those who have their own interest in it judge it. Do spectators take sides, too? The author thwarts our expectations while he is creating them. The protagonists shift the surmise of guilt from one character to the other throughout the play, until finally guilt itself is established as a question.

Lawrence, a “moon-walker”, an idealist from a trailer parked behind a graveyard, is – with his struggle between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, between ratio and passion – linked to Gustav von Aschenbach from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Lawrence is a good paedophile, he likes children, their innocence, smile, beauty, purity; to him children are the Platonic ideal of the unity of good, just and beautiful. Vasilka grows to like him because he is kind, because he shares her interests and her loneliness. He is a substitute for her absent father, he does her no harm, there is no sexual relationship – or is there? Can he love her without hurting her?

But then who should I love, Martha? Who? Everyone is so filthy, so dirty, so stained! We're garbage to this world, garbage! ... We leave nothing good behind us, only garbage. And we're going to teach everyone out there how to have things and then throw them away. That's what we do to each other, that's what we do to things, that's what we do to ourselves!

One giant leap for mankind was followed by a great disappointment: people on the moon are garbage. He wants to die, because there is no hope for him: *people need that: to mean something to someone else*. He transforms himself from a criminal into a victim of an absurd murder, but just before he dies, he acquiesces to life, he realises that garbage is also human. *Whatever it is, only that it's not nothing. ... Without us, they're just a pile of dust.*

Are Vasilka's asthma attacks the consequence of excitement or of a traumatic memory that she articulates in this way in order to not lose love and remain even more lonesome? If so, the cause lies not with the eccentric scientist who projects a better world to the barren Moon, but in the family. Vasilka had an asthma attack when her father left the family, another one a year later when she first slept over in her father's new home, and another one when she and Lawrence are in a sleeping bag together. Did the father leave the family for a blonde, or because of his daughter who – unlike her mother, who is superior in her relations with others, but submissive in the search for a man – recognises him as the authority? The father is at first repulsed by the registered paedophile, but later talks to him to get his family back. Does he appear as Mephistopheles? Vasilka has two names for her father: the good *daddy*, who is hers and the bad *father*, who is her mothers.

Could the film operator, expressing his desires through the others, be the evil one? He surveils the spectators through the opening in the wall of his booth and invites the little girl to *come up to the booth and watch how the film is projected*. Does his anger conceal some interest or does he simply want to protect children from pain? He did not prohibit Lawrence from entering his cinema, like the multiplex cinemas did. Is he tried by Dionysus? Are we projecting – onto him, also – the remains of the absolute evil, about which we will agree after God is dead? To prevent a crime, we commit a crime.

Martha in her strength and weakness combines many human controversies when many of her good intentions fail because of her unfulfilled emotional needs. Burdened with the responsibilities of a newly-single mother she tries to harmonise the care of her daughter and her interests with her own need for personal realisation and intimate relationship. She met Lawrence when he was accused of molesting her daughter and he charmed her with his dignity. Martha does not judge by generalising or without evidence; she trusts her daughter without monitoring her obsessively; is she maybe looking for a man through her daughter?

But ... you would get weary of her too; when she grew up ...

Experience, education and information in emotional relationships do not give us so much a head start as to not be beginners when entering a relationship with someone new. Martha plays a double game: she is profiling a suspected paedophile for the police while falling for him, and tries to convince him – after she's recognised the good in him – that she is first a lover and second a psychologist. Does she want to study him because she loves him, or does she love him, because she's studied him? Separating the professional and the private is becoming more and more difficult: in therapy, in business, in conspiratorial societies, in family. Do parents protect their children even when they endanger them?

In this materialised world, the child does not hide her need for tenderness and she also returns it. Vasilka carries the burden of adult phantasms: eternally pure soul, innocence, lost ideals, sincerity, genuine relationships, natural state. The child as the origin, image and end of good, projected onto her by those never grown-ups, projecting onto her their own inabilities and missed opportunities that maybe never were, just as there isn't such a thing as a person's natural state. A child, like anybody else, wants to be loved, a child is also a sexual being, only angels have no sex; a child cannot bear the failed projects of the adults that are passed down through the generations just so that the weakness need not be acknowledged.

... up there, is our only chance to do something right. It's too late down here. Everything has become too complicated.

A child is constantly bound to the world of exchange, be it as a merchandise of others, or offering herself as merchandise, exchanging gifts and kisses. To remain in favour of other, Vasilka returns hers the way she was taught: with hugs and kisses. The favour which turns into desire is manifested in psychosomatic attacks. Vasilka

gives herself as a sweet, not as a sexual object, as she is not yet aware that one form of desire can be replaced by the other: *Do you want to kiss me? Like grown-ups kiss. ... I wouldn't mind. As long as I'm with you.*

The world of transactions where we offer ourselves as commodity is the realisation of civilisation's transformation in which ideals, principles and hope have become merchandise with a sell-by date, subject to lifestyle trends. A micro story of a family with all its hidden details is a carbon copy of the macro story of capitalism of services, where every tender relationship is a market one. The contemporary society, which feels the borders of its expansion, is turning towards itself with the help of hyper-consumerism. Conquering the Moon, which *is getting farther away*, landing on it and marking it with our garbage was the final stretch of the expansion. After the goal was reached, the only people who remained interested in it were anachronistic characters, independent measurers of celestial distances, the representatives of youthful, utopian ideals they would wish for their children – or maybe in their beds. Colonising other planets cannot rally the masses the way they were rallied by colonialism in the times of the industrial revolution. The space expansion, which is looking for something that nobody needs, is replaced by the expansion of psychotherapy, focused on the most intimate relationships. A tragicomical ending points to the contradiction of the society of progress, when it touches its own outer limits. A lonely demon passes on into the silence among atoms and the reunited family will live happily ever after. Is the hero of our time the good evil?