Thackeray's Children: Laughter, Childhood, and Disenchanting The Fairy Tale

Thackeray'in Çocukları:
Gülme, Çocukluk ve Peri Masalının Büyü Bozumuna Uğratılışı

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Abstract
This paper aims at excavating the use(s) of mid-nineteenth century English laughter in relation to the conception of Victorian childhood in William Makepeace Thackeray's rarely studied fairy-tale, *The Rose and The Ring* (1854). Defining the cultural coordinates of Thackeray's Victorian sensibility towards children and locating the root of this sensibility in its contemporary novelistic discourse, this paper assumes a connection between the Victorian child as a narrative chess-piece and her/his involvement in the development of novelistic strategies. This connection, it is contended, naturally results in the 'employment' of the child as a narrative explorer of narrational possibilities in *TRTR*, which builds up an argument against the *fairy-tailisation* of fairy-tales. It is argued that the child herself/himself and ideas pertaining to childhood in *TRTR* function as sources and manufacturers of laughter/ humour which tarnishes the conventional magicality of a fairy-tale. In this context, not only does the child's laughter relocate her/him as a narrative auxiliary in accordance with Thackeray's realist mission, but also it centralises the child's laughter and the child herself/himself as a narrative wanderer. In this context, it will be argued that Thackeray's child's encounter with laughter and her/his involvement in laughter-evoking instances further both the mission of novelistic realism *contra* fairy-tale magicality and emerge as directors of the narrative tone and course. In conclusion, it will be maintained that although Thackeray's children are formally at service of the author's inner strategies, the narrational attitude empowers them.
Keywords: *The Rose and The Ring*, Victorian laughter, 19th century childhood, realism, fairy-tale, Dickensian laughter

Öz
Bu çalışma Viktorya dönemi çocukluk anlayışı bağlamında on dokuzuncu yüzyıl ortalarında İngiliz gülmecesinin kullanım alanı / alanlarını, William Makepeace Thackeray'in pek az çalışılan peri masalı *The Rose and The Ring* (1854) örneğinde bulmayı amaçlar. Thackeray'in çocuklara olan yaklaşımının altındaki Viktoryan eğilimin kültürel yaşamdaki yerini tespit ederek ve bu yaklaşımının kendi çağının roman söylemi içerisindeki karşılığını bularak, bu çalışma Viktorya dönemi çocuğunun/çocukluğunun anlatısal bir araç oluşu ile aynı zamanda romansal anlatım stratejilerinin de bir geliştiricisi oluşu arasında bir bağlantı kuracaktır. Bu bağlantının ise doğal olarak, çocuğu yazınsal olanakların bir keşfedicisi olarak konumlandırararak peri masalı türünün *peri-masallaştırılmasına* karşı duran bir argümanın geliştirdiği fikri savunulacaktır. *TRTR*'da, çocuğun/çocukluğun gülme/ mizah odağı olarak kullanıldığı ve bu yolla peri masalının alışılagelmiş büyüselliğinin

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bilinçli şekilde yıkılmaya çalışıldığı ifade edilecektir. Çocuğun gülmesinin ya da çocuk tarafından başlatılan gülmenin Thackeray'in realist ajandasının bir yansıması olarak onu hem bir anlatısal araç olarak kullandığı ve hem de çocuğun gülmesinin Thackeray tarafından anlatının merkezine konulduğu ifade edilecektir. Bu bağlamda, Thackeray'in çocuklarının gülmesi hem yazarın romansal realizm yoluyla peri masalının büyüselliğini bozmasına yardım ettiği hem de romanın edebi büyüselliğe karşı olan pozisyon alışının sınırlarını belirlediği tezi sunulacaktır. Sonuç olarak, Thackeray'in çocuklarının bir yandan yazarın anlatısal stratejilerinin hizmetine sokulmasına rağmen; diğer yandan da anlatısal tavrın onları güçlendirdiği fikri savunulacaktır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: *The Rose and The Ring*, Viktorya döneminde gülme, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda çocukluk, realizm, peri masalı, Dickenscı gülmece

"Laughter grew so fashionable that even Mihailo and Jakov were forced to take it up. They didn't do it very well but they practised at it conscientiously. Whenever people talked about Stefan, they always pushed forward importantly and said:
"Ho! Ho! Ho! Do you mean Stefan, the Laughing Prince? Ha! Ha! Ha! Why, do you know, he's our own brother!"
As for Militza, the Princess had her come to the castle and said to her:
"I owe all my happiness to you, my dear, for you it was who knew that of course I would laugh at Stefan's nonsense! What sensible girl wouldn't?"
-*The Laughing Prince: A Book of Jugoslav Fairy Tales and Folk Tales* (1921)

Introduction: Unexpected Leaps of Laughter and the Child

Humour theory has traditionally identified laughter as a declaration of superiority, as an assertion of incongruity, and as an expression of psychological relief. However, the Slavic folktale *The Laughing Prince* introduces its reader to an alarming narrative turn which is of great shock value. The protagonist, Stefan, does not give a conventional true love's kiss in hope of curing the Princess. Instead, he tells a non-sensical story which makes her roll in tears. This unexpected narrative turn presents the reader with a two-fold argument: the first argument is built on the idea of the loss of *eudaimonia.*[1] "I want to laugh!" (Filmore 9) she says and threatens her father by starving herself to death. Upon Stefan's arrival, however, she recovers tremendously and acquires her well-being. From this point of view, the laughter invoked by the non-sensical tale functions as a *eudaimonic* force which relates itself to the cathartic function of laughter. The second argument, on the other hand, is unconventionally built on the premise that the child's laughter possesses the power of disenchantment. Initially, Stefan's joviality makes him an object of scorn and the tone of the narrative underlines that any

[1] I use the term in a definitively Aristotelian sense as defined in *Nichomachean Ethics* esp. XIII, 1102a-b where *eudaimonia* (well-being; sometimes translated as happiness) is a matter of virtuous activity which contributes to proper human functioning. Since the Ancient Greek form fully captures the meaning of well-being, I took a Nussbaumian position here. For this discussion see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

hilarious enterprise is deemed as superfluous in the eyes of an agrarian society which naturally seeks to perpetuate the estate. Ironically enough, though, it is Stefan's laughter which breathes life into the usualness of the story which functions as a disillusioning force. In a fairy-tale context, this could seem peculiar since in Formalist terms laughter in folktales has been solely conceived as a rejuvenating force. In *Theory and History of Folklore*, Propp maintains that laughter "is endowed not only with the power to accompany life but also with the power to call it forth" (131). The Roman festival of the Lupercalia which, he informs us, dictated the young to dip their knives in sacrificial blood and touch their foreheads required them to laugh afterwards while the Greco-Eyptian creation myth of Psyche's birth occurred after god's seventh and final laughter (133), suggesting the role of laughter in rebirth and creation. These two stories can explain why the Princess laughs at Stefan's foolish tale. However, they barely explain how the tale positions child's laughter as non-typical in nature. It is certainly remedial in that it rejuvenates the object of laughter. The subject of laughter, on the other hand, emerges as a narrative anomaly as he skilfully defies readerly expectations. He does not rush for help with a kiss such as in *Snow White* or *Sleeping Beauty*. He rushes for help with his unusual laughter which manages to break with the rules of hereditary succession and weakens magicality's inordinate claim to the narrative structure of the wonder tale (Tatar 31). Contrary to expectation,[2] *The Laughing Prince* unprecedentedly employs child's laughter as a realist force which unmasks the artificiality of fairy-tale magic. In other words, the child's laughter does not subvert reality but it rescripts our epistemological categorisation of truth and transcendence. By way of doing so, the child subject offers a unique study in narrative disenchantment which laughs off the traditional balderdash surrounding the genre.

It is noteworthy to mention that the disenchanting force of child's laughter in fairy-tales has been more extensively broached in fiction—one only needs to think of another prominent folk tale protagonist Gingerbread Man's derisive "run, run, as fast as you can" who runs away from his pursuers by humorously mocking the societal need for child protection although he is doomed to be the bait of his own story and is eaten by a fox—and scarcely in literary criticism due to a handful of reasons. First, it appears that the non-canonical status of the fairy-tale facilitates a self-evolvement due to "the entanglement of fairy tales and literary self-consciousness" which "goes beyond the coincidental" ("Underdog in the Vanguard" 6-7). Since the fairy-tale has been approached as an intellectually irreproachable subject for fear of tampering with its magicality, its content has managed to self-evolve with the help of the literary self-consciousness that produces it. This can be observed in the transition from medieval fairies who are interruptive, ironically grotesque, and abnormal

[2] In this context, I do not necessarily assign a certain subversive role to fairy-tale imagination in the manner contemporary fairy-tale criticism in general appears to do so. I prefer to imagine the tarnishing effect of laughter as an epistemological shift in understanding which need not necessarily imply a topsy-turviness since an epistemic shift may not have to imply a revolting sort of a speech act and can suggest instead a new ontology.

figures to the Victorian fairy tale which does not often include an actual fairy but borrows from the Middle Ages the narrative scheme so as to create "the self-conscious *Kunstmärchen* (an authored and imitative fairy tale)" (Newton xii). Thus, while the medieval fairy was put forward as the obtuse anti-hero (Lewis 134-38), the Victorian fairy-tale makes a passing reference to the marginality of the fairy although it preserves its contemporary mission of didacticism. Second, since it has been considered that the fairy-tale genre has suffered from a non-history which implies a literary history stripped from literary canonisation (Zipes 1), the production and transmission of the fairy-tale "is preserved by constantly re-creating it" ensuring that "a culture of silence cannot descend on us" ("Introduction" 29-30). The fairy-tale genre, then, derives its power from its openness to embracing forms of textual experimentation.

Because the narrative body of the fairy-tale itself allows "formal suitability for reflexibility and experimentation" ("Underdog in the Vanguard" 7), it should be only natural that it appears to have benefited more from its literary creators than it has had from its critics in consolidating its position as an exploratory genre. This, in return, could explain why the child is of central importance in fairy-tales since the child herself/himself is often situated as a surrogate explorer for the searchful adult author. In this sense, it is assumed here that *The Laughing Prince* works within the genre's culture of embracing textual mutation, alternativity, and resurgence by concentrating on the disenchanting force of childhood laughter. In accordance, this paper acquires from the non-English context of *LP* the sense of fictional re-negotiation which re-negotiates the standards of the genre via the child's laughter. In this respect, it aims at looking into the narratorial adult desire imposed on the child in the Victorian period which marked "the arrival of a golden age for the literary British fairy tale" (Hearn xix) characterised by a growing literary interest in the child.[3] For, it is quite interesting to find out that the Victorian literary imagination which considered the child both as a model of purity and an untidy piece of clay awaiting to be moulded showed a considerable amount of interest in fairy-tales.[4] Moreover, since the Victorian fairy-tale borrows much from the Lockean eighteenth-century children's literature which with its drive for secular story-telling differentiated itself from Puritan tales of *a priori* experience ("Rise of

[3] It could also be considered that the emergence of children's literature invoked an alignment between the child heroine/hero and the fairy-tale as Peter Hunt maintains that "children's literature in its modern form is largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon. For example, at the end of the eighteenth century in the Netherlands there was a rapid growth in fiction for children; whereas in Spain, despite translations of Grimm, Andersen, and Perrault, 'true' children's books did not emerge until the end of the nineteenth century" ("Introduction" 5).

[4] For instance, Lydia Murdoch refers to Lewis Carroll's opposition to the Victorian ideal of childhood which emphasised "work, discipline, and essential sinfulness" and the introduction of "education, play, and innocence" which points towards a new "child agency" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. See Murdoch, *The Age of Alice: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Nonsense in Victorian England*, Vassar College Libraries, 2015, p.17. In addition, Ronald Patkus considers the Victorian era as "The Age of Alice" since it "witnessed a great outpouring of fairy-tales" with "increasing success and impact". See Patkus, *The Age of Alice*, 21.

the Moral Tale" 464), it suggests the possibility for *a posteriori* literary experience even if it diverted the child's attention to a desired morale. In this sense, the Victorian literary conscious may not have particularly valued an experimenting child as Sarah Fielding vaguely suggested in *The Governess* a hundred years earlier, but it will be implied that it had inherited the notion of the child as a literary experimenter. To put it more clearly, as the fairy-tale genre was beginning to be considered an appropriate site of literary experimentation, the child became the nucleus of this sort of writing during the nineteenth-century.[5] In accordance, this paper aims at exploring the disenchanting force of child's laughter in W.M. Thackeray's fairy-tale *The Rose and The Ring* as a means of narrative experimentation. To this end, I will pay specific attention to the tale's main subjects of laughter, Rosalba and Giglio who humour the reader by exposing incongruities in human nature and also re-negotiate the literary standards of the genre. The anticipated conclusion draws on the point that since these two missions run parallel to each other, the text not only empowers the child but also uses the child's laughter as an instrument of fictional unveiling.

The Unexpected Laughter of the Child in *The Rose and The Ring*

W. M. Thackeray's only fairy-tale, *The Rose and The Ring* which is "one of the best loved literary fairy tales of the last century" ("Novelist's Fairy Tale" 37) emerges as part of an experimental enterprise built around the child. It narrates the inter-linked fortunes of four young royal cousins, Princesses Angelica and Rosalba, and Princes Giglio and Bulbo in the semi-imaginary kingdoms of Paflagonia and Crim Tartary. It narrates a fairy-tale where the child protagonists later grow into young adulthood towards the end of the story. In its entirety, the form of the tale responds to the changing outlook of children's play in the nineteenth-century which "changed with the appearance of mass education" (Jordan 196). For, in an age where "toys became less ambiguous and more representational, which was probably a loss for creativity and imagination" (Jordan 196), Thackeray's tale serves as a site of poetic creativity for the fictional child where playfulness rather than formality reigns. While allowing the child to play a literary game, the narration also employs the child as a disenchanter of fairy-tale magic. For if *TRTR* is "decidedly not a traditional fairy tale and instead the handiwork of Thackeray the novelist" ("Novelist's Fairy Tale" 37) who rejects "all anti-realistic tendencies" (Stommel 36) in fiction, the tale responds to the disenchanting force of the novel as well; a genre which in Terry Eagleton's words, "has nothing to learn about baffled desires and recalcitrant realities" although it is possible to find "vestiges of 'premodern' forms such as myth, fable, folk-tale and romance" (Eagleton 9). In

[5] Charles Dickens in his *Frauds on the Fairies* defended the view that fairy-tales were "nurseries of fancy" and they "should be preserved in their simplicity" directly seeking for the continuation of the experimentalised fairy-tale. But it is clear that the fairy-tale and the child were not only used for literary causes but were also used so as to further the political convictions of the nineteenth-century media. For a detailed analysis of the relation between the fairy-tale and the press see Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

addition, it involves an onto-ethical response to contemporary novelistic strategies which in Thackeray's opinion were built around the notion of a *prima facie* statement of truth "employed to credit as truth material that was in fact romantic rubbish, false to the realities of life" ("Truth and Authenticity" 56). The novelistic realism of *TRTR*, then, embodies its author's objection to the idea of representing the absurd and the grotesque as playing along the line of realist verisimilitude. In doing so, it veers away from the progressive undertones of the nineteenth-century narratorial attitude promoting instead what might be called a Victorian Swiftism. In this regard, it exposes the Victorian reader's illusory expectation of juvenile amusement in fairy-tale discourse. For as early as in the preface, Thackeray "the undersigned" author warns the reader against a fairy-tale interpretation of the story (9). From this point onwards, the author directly blocks the pleasure the reader could possibly acquire from a fairy-tale by reminding us that it is designed to be a "fireside pantomime" (10) for a group of English children in Rome. This is highly reminiscent of the "Author's own candles" (ix) which illuminates the performance before the curtain in *Vanity Fair* and he takes "the reader into his confidence about his characters" which in E.M. Forster's view leads to "a drop in the temperature, to intellectual and emotional laxity" (Forster 84). But the unfairy-tale like fairy-tale still emerges as a powerful experiment where the literary façade is capacitated to unmask its own genre-related absurdities. In an effort to "convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality" (Thackeray *English Humourists* 772-73), then, the narrator builds a microcosm of common human experience without undermining the virtues of realist representation.

The tale stands as an acerbic take on thinking too well of one's own self, which the author believes is "the fault of people of all ages and both sexes" (38). In accordance, the shape of the narration functions as a fictive apparatus of fictional levelling by faithfully describing the scandalous events in the ancient Paflagonian and Crim Tartarian royal courts to expose human follies. The narrator constantly reminds us of the non-magicality of the story and his obligation "to tell the truth" (19) where the single figure of wondrousness is a Fairy Blackstick, daughter of a necromancer (20). Not only is she capable of conjuring but also of blessing or cursing royal children with a magic wand. But even the fairy is a rationalist-ethicist. She refuses to bless the royal children of King Savio, the former monarch of Paflagonia who had been overthrown by the current monarch King Valoroso XXIV and Duke Padella of Crim Tartary. She finds it inconceivable that their wives have become "ill-humoured, absurdly vain" (21) although she had protected them as their godmother. In the end, she allows things "to take their natural course" (21) and declines to perform further magic by finally sending Prince Giglio of Paflagonia and Princess Rosalba of Crim Tartary a little misfortune and not attending their christenings. It later turns out that the rose and the ring which she had entrusted to the care of Mrs. V and the Duke's lady function as magical devices which suddenly beautify their possessors in the eyes of their beholders. As a result, Prince Bulbo, heir to the Padellan throne, owns his mother's magical rose and Prince Giglio owns the ring. The exchange of the ring between Giglio

and Angelica, Giglio and Angelica's governess, Mrs. Gruffanuff, and the exchange of the rose between Bulbo and Angelica, humorously create false impressions of physical allure. Funnily enough, the loss of the magical object does not marvellously unmask its possessor's vanity; the reader and the fictional members of the two dynasties are already knowingly aware of these vanities. Similarly, obtaining these objects does not guarantee ever-lasting beauty since nearly all of the characters fail in acquiring immortal beauty. In this manner, the magical object is denied a good amount of other-worldliness. It is particularly emphasised that the so-called object of magic is nothing but a physical object stripped off its magicality while complaints of ugliness in the absence of the object become instant markers of short-sightedness. Therefore, in offering an amusing story for his juvenile listeners, the narrator offers a scornful fable of foolhardiness in which a little portion of other-worldliness is involved. In doing this, the tale enforces a sense of realism and the author openly plays with the limits of representability of fairy-tale magic.

The child in *TRTR* lies at the heart of this literary play. S/he is instrumentalised in Thackeray's non-preternatural survey of the fairy-tale genre which adds up to the narrative's realist mission. Not only that but also the tale shows "a high level of critical self-consciousness about the whole problem of representing, writing for, looking at, interacting with, and adoring children" (Gubar viii). Accordingly, the child subject is dealt with at two interconnected levels. Firstly, the preface acknowledges that the story is intended for "the amusement of our young people" while the narrator also expects them to "learn everything that is useful, and the under eyes of careful ushers continue the business of their little lives" (10). It makes a major claim for the attention of the child reader under the pretence of demanding the attention of the elderly reader. But it is also interesting to find out that the fairy-tale does not treat childhood as a distinct category. It claims to appeal to the readerly expectations of the elderly although it also aims at speaking to the child's infant mind. Secondly, however, the child is minified, almost robbed of her/his childhood "since anything which falls outside the realm of functionality seems to a utilitarian to fall outside the domain of morality too" (Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* 258). Therefore, the child is situated almost as a sinister being "because they are uncanny, very like adults but not at all like them" (258). In accordance, Angelica emerges as a facetious young lady who is the living embodiment of "absurd pretensions" (18) and the reader is warned that Bulbo is a fraudulent public figure whose image is the making of an unfaithful artist, Tomaso Lorenzo and his only aim is to flatter his commissioner.[6] For reasons as such, the child characters are usually crammed with adult biases and the vainness of adult society is projected unto the child, commonising or universalising human fallacy. Therefore, the tale's

[6] Lorenzo's false pictorial representation of Bulbo insinuates a Platonic scepticism with regards to art's representation of truth and reality. Later, Angelica is so impressed with Bulbo's painting that after Bulbo arrives at the Paflagonian court, she immediately falls in love with him although Giglio instantly spots the discordance between representation and reality and "from behind the throne" he bursts out "into a roar of contemptuous laughter" (52).

commitment to poetic truthfulness assigns a subsidiary role to the child which overlooks physiological differences but also its realist persistence opens up the fictional child as a major point of Thackerayean art criticism.

Since Thackeray carefully locates the nature of his textual politics in the designated nature of the Victorian child, s/he remains a subject. In this respect, s/he is represented as "inside and outside the book as a literate, educated subject who is fully conversant with the values, conventions, and cultural artifacts of the civilized world" (Gubar 6). However, s/he is the subject of a literary genre which solidifies its position by virtue of its textual mutability. In this respect, it can be argued that Thackeray knowingly makes a distinction between two different types of children: the ordinary and the laughing child. While the ordinary child and the fairy-tale is soaked with realist underpinnings, the laughing child in *TRTR* triumphs in the matter of experimenting with (or deconstructing) genre-related myth-making as the laughing child exposes the macrocosmic sense of incongruity between reality and appearance. The ordinary child, however, makes only a fantasised claim to reality. In one sense, the laughing child seems on par with the ordinary child in tarnishing the magicality of the fairy-tale and introducing an argument contra the so-called nineteenth-century realist's use of phantasmal elements. However, the ordinary child is not a narrative wanderer; s/he has a cardboard cut-out identity which is evocative of the stock characters of the European medieval morality play. As a reflection on that point, Angelica emerges as an emblematic representation of the frivolous female while Bulbo is the mock-heroic cavalier yearning for romantic love under false pretences. Even more so, the ordinary child's laughter appears to be derisive as a result of her/his genericness. When King Cavalfiore of Crim Tartary is overthrown by Duke Padella and his only daughter Rosalba's life is spared under the false assumption that she must have died already, she toddles from room to room "and thence into the wilderness" (24) only to arrive at Valoroso's court where she meets Angelica. Out of habitual mental blindness, Angelica already feels superior to the little Princess whose true identity is not revealed until Rosalba is banished from the Paflagonian court and fate crowns her the rightful Queen of Crim Tartary. Angelica cannot help but laugh at Rosalba's worn-out garments and later takes her "as a pet" (32). She renames her Betsinda and appoints Rosalba as her handmaiden to take advantage of her intellectual brilliance. Giglio's fate does not appear to be any different than Rosalba's as the niece of Valoroso who has overthrown the late Savio. He is silenced by the ordinary child since Angelica mocks him occasionally and scorns him for being stupid (39). Here, Angelica's blind laughter magnifies the satirical impact of Angelica's counterfeited superlative talents which unveils the fact that her laughter unmasks her blindness. The superlative but blind laughter of the ordinary child, then, supports the realistic mission of unmasking the ordinary child's mental myopia. However, the laughing child is put forward as a narrative explorer whose mission is to promote the adult novelist's realist trajectory in a conventionally 'unrealist' literary genre through the laughter s/he produces outside and inside the text. The laughing child, in a sense, does

not simply promise a faithful representation of reality as the ordinary child does. S/he tests the limits of realist representation of the fairy-tale if s/he does not condescendingly sneer at it and re-negotiates the mimetic value of *fairy-tailisation*. But to make this point clearer, I would like to turn to the incongruity theory of laughter.

According to a long tradition which John Morreall traces back to a passage in Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* 3.2 (11), overcoming the boundaries of the logical has been considered as naturally evocative of laughter although the amusement derived from such incongruity has been defined as an impossible one at the *fin de siècle*.[7] However impossible it might seem to the analytic philosopher of early nineteenth-century, the Scottish common-sense philosopher James Beattie had earlier stressed the function of laughter as a semi-corporal response to two or more irreconcilable mental and physical assets in 1764. In his *Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition*, Beattie offers an extensive overview of the Aristotelian, Hobbesian, and Hutchesonian understandings of laughter. Initially referring to the fifth passage of *Poetics*, he considers Aristotle's definition of comedy as directed towards the representation of "vices or meanness only which partake of the ridiculous" (590) while Thomas Hobbes's views on laughter, in his opinion, "would hardly have deserved notice" (591) were it not for the nod given to him in Joseph Addison's articles in the *Spectator*. Obviously, he does not approve of Hobbes's theory which draws on the prideful comparison a human being makes with his fellow companions and gives way to sudden glory upon finding that he is superior to them. Beattie does not understand why a person should laugh upon a discovery of this sort as in that case "one would never recollect the transactions of one's childhood, or the absurdity of one's dreams, without merriment" (594). On top of this, he is even suspicious of his contemporary, Francis Hutcheson's notion of risibility as an aspect of "the contrast and opposition of dignity and meanness" (597) on the grounds that Sir Toby in *Twelfth Night*, Dr. Harrison in *Amelia*, or Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* "mimic the peculiarities of a fellow as significant as himself, and displays no opposition of dignity and meanness" (598). However, he concludes that the jocular aspect of the incongruous unite these theories of laughter since

> [a]ll these accounts agree in this, that the cause of laughter is something compounded; or something that disposes the mind to form a comparison, by passing from one object or idea to another. That is in fact the case, cannot be proved *a priori*; but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that "Laughter arises from the view of two or more objects or ideas, disposing the mind to form a comparison? (601)

Beattie's approach to laughter is a common-sensical one and is typical of his overall tendency to ascribe almost Judeo-Christian principles to philosophical

[7] For this point see George Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty*, Scribner's, 1896.

observation which allegedly infuriated Hume.[8] He openly favours common-sense over reason and believes it points at self-evident truth. His conception of laughter as a reaction to the incongruous is also a common-sensical one which simply proposes to draw comparisons between commonplace incompatibilities. From this perspective, his method is heir to Horace's laughter-provokingly incongruous fish which has an incompatible human head in *Satires*. However, Beattie's common-sensical incongruity leaves his reader with a logico-literary dilemma: how is it that people find the inconsistent humorous? What makes the discordant laughable in the eyes of the observer?

In the Victorian context, this dilemma is an easy one to solve since the literary function of laughter appears not to have flown far away from Beattie's late eighteenth-century conception of risible incongruities. Also, it appears that what made the discordant laughable for the Victorians was related with its eccentricity. Although "the most prevalent kinds of Victorian laughter did not intend and require judgement" ("Uses" 148), in Donald J. Gray's words, the nineteenth-century novelist usually made use of "the humours of eccentric characters, odd settings, and whimsically simple motivation" ("Uses of Victorian Laughter" 145) which is to say that instances of eccentricity, oddity, and whimsicality were not only suggestive of logico-literary incompatibilities but were also entangled with textual fits of laughter. If so, Thackeray's laughing child in *TRTR* is assigned with the task of exposing the eccentricities of the Victorians and of the universal human character. For instance, after Rosalba crawls into the Paflagonian court as a survivor, Angelica asks her whether she is a pretty girl or not and Rosalba replies "Oh, pooty, pooty!" (30). Her response is suggestive of a baby's prosodic modifications of adult language and contains a hidden insult to Angelica's constant yearning for flattery as there is not a single reference to Angelica's beauty in the text. Rosalba's act of laughing, dancing, and munching in the presence of the King and Queen even further contribute to this point to the extent that her mocking laughter makes her a substitute for the royal parrot so that she can amuse Angelica. Funnily enough, after Rosalba becomes a handmaiden to the Paflagonian Princess and becomes the newly named Betsinda, she invents new ways to amuse her at a daily basis until a monkey, a little dog, and a doll is presented to her pretentious master and she refuses to care for Betsinda any longer. However, Betsinda does not fall into despair and instead amuses herself by listening "to the wise professors when Angelica was yawning or thinking of the next ball" (33). At this point, Betsinda's laughing strategies lay bare the dissonance between the ideals of royal mannerism and Angelica's unroyal nature. It is not a mere coincidence that Angelica's drawing of a warrior's head almost caricaturises a traditionally heroic model while Betsinda's drawing is fully true to it:

[8] Hume responded to Beattie's *Essay on Truth* as the writing of "that bigoted silly fellow". Beattie not only challenged Hume on the matter of racism but also on his epistemological views. For the reception of Beattie's *Essay* in Britain, see R.J.W Mills, "The Reception of 'That Bigotted Silly Fellow' James Beattie's *Essay on Truth* in 1770-1830," *History of European Ideas*, vol. 41, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1049-1079.

Fig.1. Angelica's drawing of a head of a warrior (p.33)

Fig.2. Betsinda's drawing of a head of a warrior (p.34)

Betsinda's drawing not only 'laughs at' Angelica's eccentricity which stems from her incongruent nature (and drawing) but also it prevents the reader from perceiving her as the princess of a fairy-tale land. Does Betsinda's laughter provoking experiment with Angelica also help the narrator in testing the limits of fantastic representation? It can be said that it does since the laughing child amuses herself at the other's (and the genre's) expense and the ordinary child's laughter gradually grows futile and ingenuine towards the end of the tale. In addition, the stereotypical fairy-tale amusement which the elder sister draws from the younger sister's so-called state of 'petness,' ridicules the fairy-tale-like distress stemming from idleness. Moreover, it implies that the logical inconsistency of Angelica, i.e., the discordance between theoretical virtue and its everyday application, is a humorous one. Thus, the tale asserts that the disharmony between form and function creates a humorous instance. In other words, while Betsinda experiments with the stereotypical fairy-tale princess, the narrator allows her to laugh off the very stereotypicality of fairy-tale characterisation. As a further point of comparison, this tale of disharmony is later weighed against Betsinda's coronation scene. After she is expelled from the Paflagonian court on false accusations of seducing Bulbo and Valoroso, she is portrayed as a fully human character who displays genuine feelings of unhappiness. Not knowing where she is headed to, she is "very cold and melancholy" (81). She meets an old carter who turns out to be Marquis Degli Spinachi, a nobleman loyal to the late Cavolfiore and after he realises that she is the long-lost Princess Rosalba, he immediately holds a coronation ceremony with his fellow nobleman. The "the party of Fidelity" (86) quickly cuts out "a little crown of gilt paper, a robe of cotton velvet" (87) for their liege and the following scene is tremendously humorous: the rightful Queen of Crim Tartary starts knighting the members of the party and even when she has no sword to knight them properly, she uses "the pewter spoon with which she had been taking her bread-and-milk" (84). The coronation is lacking in grandeur and the former lords, earls, and marquises receive a comical accolade. Still, however funny the circumstances and her regal ornaments might seem to be, "the army of Fidelity" (90) remains true to the mission of taking the throne back from the usurper Padella. Rosalba does not indeed need the consecrated royal garment to assert her heirship; she has every moral claim to the throne. The humorousness of the coronation and knighting scenes, on the other hand, strengthen the idea that Angelica may be in constant need of someone to remind her of her royal status, but Rosalba already possesses the royal attire. Thus, it appears that she is indeed full of fun but also is "the blushing sun of

perfection" (103) as Giglio thinks to himself reading about what has befallen to Rosalba in the *Bosforo Chronicle*. Not only is she proven to be free of eccentricities and risible incongruities, but also her capability to feel genuine sorrow secures the genuineness of her laughter inasmuch as Angelica fails to do so.

It should be noted that laughing off incongruities does not necessarily mean that the narrative force in *TRTR* offers a piercing satire. However, the laughter which the laughing child evokes in the reader throughout the text is reminiscent of Swift's acquaintance with human nature "both in the highest, and in the lowest scenes of life" (131). From this perspective, the laughing child tends to be useful in exposing the incongruities of human characters from different walks of life. For instance, through Giglio—and his name already promises a phonological guffaw—the reader is invited to peep at the humorous consequences of human inconsistencies. He is mostly represented as a silent boy who does not regret the fact that Valoroso has usurped the throne since he does not "envy his uncle [for] the royal robes and sceptre, the great hot uncomfortable throne of state, and the enormous cumbersome crown" (15). It appears that his silence is a deliberate act as the voice-over admits he "shouldn't like to sit in that stifling robe with such a thing as that on my head" (16) pointing out the absurdity of Valoroso's royal manners. As the story advances and Angelica occasionally scolds at him for his ignorance (47), Giglio understands that he is "played only second fiddle" (48). His ignorance emerges as an authentic one unlike Valoroso's or Angelica's but he makes a genuine attempt to intellectually train himself at the university town of Bosforo. It is little surprise that towards the end of the story, he is even presented with a cautionary note hidden in a magical bag provided by Fairy Blackstick which reads: "Clothes for the back, books for the head: / Read and remember them when they are read" (98-9). He is aware of his own ignorance and is determined to excel in all the classes he takes. However, since Angelica's ignorance belongs with the species of inauthenticity and Giglio cannot tolerate her, he grows resentful of the fake manners of Angelica and the Paflagonian court. Eventually, his meek attitude in the face of condescending behaviour is transformed into a rather powerful one. Once he finds in himself the courage to laugh at the absurdities of the Paflagonian nobility, he manages to unmask its intellectual inanity. At this very moment, Giglio starts acting out the role of a "satirical prince" (56) as the old and ugly Mrs. Gruffanuff remarks, responding to his fake compliments "from behind the throne," bursting into "a roar of contemptuous laughter" (52). As Bulbo makes his way into the court during a visit, he instantly spots the incongruity between Lorenzo's false depiction of an exceedingly good-looking prince and the real person. Not a single soul understands why he laughs at Bulbo for which he brings to the others' attention the inconsistency between representation and reality. While Bulbo's almost Gargantuan table manners and flippant giggles are constantly "out of place" (57), Giglio's laughter stands out as a cognizant one. In the end, the narrator awakens the reader to the fact that it is this cognizant laughter which will prevail. For not only does Giglio's laughter defame Bulbo but also in a

romantic competition to win Betsinda's heart, Giglio calls her an "artless maiden" (63) while Bulbo pretentiously cries out and says "You peri, let me be thy bulbul" (60). Betsinda "who was full of fun" (61) shuts up Bulbo with the touch of a pan with the intention to marry Giglio, her guileless companion. In the end, the non-magical Fairy Blackstick arrives and stops the wedding ceremony into which Mrs. Gruffanuff has tricked Giglio. The 'artless' Giglio and Rosalba sign the church book, joining hands in a poetically just matrimony with the aid of an ethereal creature who defeats the seemingly logical arguments of the opposers with the power of words and not of magic. Having defeated the purpose of a fairy, she is heard of no more while the marriage of true minds frees the traditional fairy-tale reader's mind from the societal illusion of an ideal marriage.

Conclusion

In viewing the laughing child as not "immune to their environments" and beings "shaped-often warped-by their environments" ("Angelic, Atavistic, Human" 120), Thackeray shares with other nineteenth-century realists the notion of child as a modelling clay. In accordance, both Rosalba and Giglio in *TRTR* emerge as grand laughers laughing at the 'royal' throwback's claim to social and political superiority. Thus, they do not seem to "provide promised escape from the seamy and degrading materialism of their era" using the "mystical and irrational genre of fantasy" ("Angelic, Atavistic, Human" 120). Instead, by the hand of the narrator, they often seem to escape from the 'irrationality' -or unreality- of fantasy. They are instrumentalised as narrative chess-pieces in search for a rational route for the fairy-tale. However, they are not designated as mythical heroes of a normative character as well. The mutability of the child aids the author in bringing down the curtain of magicality so as to re-structure the child as "the fairy-tale hero, a *normal* one" (Moretti 189). In exposing oddities, eccentricities, and logical incongruities of the genre through the child's laughter, the body of the text anneals the traditional fairy-tale hero who is destined for a supernaturally mythologised end. The tarnishing impact of the child's laughter, then, could be argued to have a charitable function in the sense Thackeray defines it in his "Charity and Humour":

> I am sure, at any rate, that the best humour is that which contains most humanity, that which is flavoured throughout with tenderness and kindness. This love does not demand constant utterance or actual expression, as a good father, in conversation with his children or wife, is not perpetually embracing them, or making protestations of his love, […] That collision of ideas, which provokes the one or the other, must be occasional. They must be lie papa's embraces, which I spoke of anon, who only delivers them now and again, and can't be expected to go on kissing the children all night. And so the writer's jokes and sentiment, his ebullitions of feeling, his outbreaks of high spirits must not be too frequent. (196-7)

Tying the fates of Rosalba and Giglio at the end of the tale while distancing them from the overarching sense of royal inauthenticity stands as a charitable act. The laughter evoked by the child experimenter uncloaks both the traditional narrative's and ordinary characters' incongruity. It is not a stingy projection on human follies nor a 'realistic' representation; it is rather full of humanity. It puts to display the commonality of human short-comings and also the short-comings of fairy-tale discourse. What is left to Rosalba and Giglio is to examine them in the manner of a logico-ethical explorer. But at this point it could be asked: should this mean that Thackeray's laughing child is empowered although s/he largely remains a narrative wanderer at the service of her/his adult author?

The laughter of Thackeray's children is vitally important in the sense that Thackeray does what the anonymous narrator does for Stefan. His late nineteenth-century English fairy-tale marginalises the magical and turns to reality for wonder-seekers as *The Laughing Prince* does for its eighteenth-century Yugoslavian audience. The reader is caught unawares as the fairy-tale no longer fulfils the reader's traditional expectations nor is it any longer a site of subversive expression. Instead, it becomes an inflammatory expression of the fairy-tale's pointless, unrepresentable wondrousness. The genre in which the story is delivered, then, becomes an ironically self-destructive literary medium. But more importantly than that it is the laughing child who sets this tone of insurgence which does not suggest a ludic revolt but a charitable Beattian reformation at whose core lies a protestation of the risible incompatibility between appearance and reality. In conclusion, the child becomes the cup-bearer, the apparatus of joy while exploring for the adult reader the hilarity of this odd contrast. S/he uses laughter as a confounding force to the effect of exposing the *ad nauseam* argument of the traditional conception of the fairy-tale. It might be traditionally acceptable that the "fairy tales depict magical or marvellous events or phenomena as a valid part of human experience" (Jones 9). However, in the novelistic context of Thackerayan realism the fairy-tale creates a disillusionment with regards to the readerly tendency to perceive a larger-than-life situation as a property of the fantastic. Therefore, *TRTR* does not validate the magical as a component of common human experience. Instead, it humanises the marvellous so that the marvellous can be understood at a rational basis. This does not mean that Thackeray's technique robs the fairy-tale of its magicality. Instead, it revises the underlying assumptions of the genre and discusses the possibility to consider it as a habitual phenomenon people often live by. For, if ordinary life includes a great deal of perceptive illusion, why not consider the possibility that fairy-tales offer a misrepresentation of reality itself? If illusions of perception are ordinary occurrences, why not make a literary joke of the separate chapter devoted to the wonder tale in literary history? Does this also foreshadow a secularly empowering mission by implication? Thackeray hides the answer in "the sweet confiding smiles" (qtd. in Andrews 16) of the laughing child. For it is the confiding smile of the child which laughs off the cult of generic narrative convention by means of a mock *fairy-tailisation*.

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