

## *Haven't you ever felt like there has to be more?*

# Identity, space and embodied cognition in young adult fiction

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### ABSTRACT

*The first part of title of the paper is a quotation from a young adult novel by Patrick Ness, More Than This (2013), in which the protagonist awakens, presumably after death, in a new place where he does not know the rules. Through exploring the unfamiliar space, the character gradually comes to insights about his true identity. The paper, based on recent studies in spatiality and cognitive narratology, focuses on the ways fiction for young readers evokes the sense of place and space that supports identity formation. Through a close reading of selected passages from texts describing characters' perception of unfamiliar space, the paper argues that fiction offers readers embodied experience of space and therefore of space-related identity.*

**Keywords:** *Cognitive narratology – Place-related identity – Embodied cognition – Spatiality – Young Adult fiction.*

### ***Hai mai avuto la sensazione che dovesse esserci qualcosa di più? Identità, spazio e cognizione incarnata nella letteratura per giovani adulti***

*La prima parte del titolo di questo contributo è una citazione tratta dal romanzo per giovani adulti More Than This, di Patrick Ness (2013). Nel romanzo il protagonista si risveglia, presumibilmente dopo la morte, in un luogo ignoto di cui non conosce le regole. Nell'esplorare questo spazio sconosciuto, il protagonista inizia gradualmente a prendere confidenza con la sua vera identità. Basato su recenti studi dedicati alla spazialità e alla narratologia cognitiva, il contributo si focalizza sulle modalità attraverso cui la fiction per ragazzi evoca il senso dello spazio che sostiene la formazione del processo identitario. Attraverso la lettura attenta di alcuni passaggi narrativi in romanzi per ragazzi, che descrivono la percezione dello spazio sconosciuto da parte dei protagonisti, il saggio dimostra come la fiction sia in grado di offrire al lettore esperienze incarnate di spazialità che concorrono alla formazione dell'identità.*

**Parole chiave:** *Narratologia cognitiva – Identità correlata al luogo – Cognizione incarnata – Spazialità – Fiction giovani adulti*

The argument of this article is based on two mutually complementary theoretical frameworks: spatiality and cognitive narratology. As Robert Tally (2013) observes in his overview, spatiality has become a prominent interdisciplinary field encompassing human geography, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, ecocriticism, and more. Literary studies of fictional places, for instance, Lawrence Buell (2005), explore representations of space and place, paying attention to historical, social and cultural context, as well as to fictional characters' interaction with fictional space. Children's literature scholars have recently explored various aspects of space and place, with Jane Carroll's *Landscape in Children's Literature* (2012) as a pioneer work, followed by a collection of essays *Space and Place in Children's Literature* (Cecire, Field, Finn & Roy, 2015). Spatiality studies emphasise both space as an abstract concept and place as a concrete environment with which individuals can interact physically and emotionally. This distinction, proposed by human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), is particularly relevant in literary studies, since it offers models for examining fictional characters' existence within and experience of fictional places, in addition to analysing space as setting.

Cognitive narratology is a direction of literary studies that explores how fictional texts, through various narrative devices, appeal to readers cognitively and emotionally. In his overview of the field, Peter Stockwell describes cognitive narratology as “a *way of thinking* about literature” (Stockwell, 2002, p. 6; original emphasis). Critics such as Suzanne Keen (2007), Blackie Vermeule (2010) and Patrick Hogan (2011, 2012) have examined how and why readers can empathise with literary characters, although these do not exist. Within children's literature research, cognitive approaches have been steadily expanding in the past five years (see e.g. Nikolajeva, 2014a; Trites, 2014). As recent studies demonstrate, mirror neurons in our brains respond to fictional events, as well as to fictional characters' thoughts and feelings in the same way they respond to real events and real people. In terms of fictional characters' engagement with space, cognitive narratology, particularly its direction dubbed corporeal narratology as developed by David Punday (2003), emphasises that cognition and emotion are embodied, in real life and in fiction. The latter implies that cognitive and emotional states of fictional characters are conveyed to the reader through representation of spatiality, including characters' position in space, movement, interaction and understanding. While the concept of embodied cognition is by no means new, since it was proposed already in the early works by psychologists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (see Johnson, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), it has been developed in recent literary studies to theorise how readers potentially respond to fictional space and how fiction, through representation of spatiality, stimulates readers' engagement.

In the following, I offer some examples of how representations of fictional space can potentially trigger embodied response by the reader. I say “potentially” since it does not necessarily happen to every actual reader; however, text affordances create a favourable condition for such an intense vicarious spatial experience to occur. Thus, when referring to readers, I mean a projected reader who is invited by the text to share fictional characters' interaction with space and place.

Let me start with a simple example from a classic children's novel, probably not directly associated with intricate embodiment. This is the first description of the big manor house to which four children from war-torn London are evacuated. Spatial dislocation is one of the most common initial situations in children's novels, and big mysterious country houses are a gratifying setting. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1959), the countryside provides a safe space, and the house itself, as in many other books, offers opportunities for adventure. Even without the prospects of magical journeys, the interior looks promising:

It was the sort of house that you never seem to come to the end of, and it was full of unexpected places. The first few doors they tried led only into spare bedrooms, as everyone had expected that they would; but soon they came to a very long room full of pictures and there they found a suit of armour; and after that was a room all hung with green, with a harp in one corner; and then came three steps down and five steps up, and then a kind of little upstairs hall and a door that led out to a balcony, and then a whole series of rooms that led into each other and were lined with books – most of them very old books and some bigger than a Bible in a church. (*ibid.*, p. 11)

This may seem a straightforward description coming from an external observer, but on closer consideration it is profoundly embodied. The first sentence, for instance, is not the omniscient “view from nowhere”, but a concrete, tangible character-tied perception, emphasised by the deeply personal impression “you never seem to come to the end of”. “Unexpected places” is also a personal view, external and internal. The description is dynamic, since the characters do not simply observe the space, but move through it, passing through doors, looking into spare bedrooms, as they expect; then a long room, then a green room – note that the characteristics of the various rooms appeal to different senses: empty, long and green, the latter most probably, in combination with a harp, alluding to Ireland, the land of Celtic lore that has inspired much of the Narnia environment. Parallel clause construction with the repeated temporal adverb “then” suggests a sequence of movements in time and space. There is also movement up, down and sideways. The description is reminiscent of a video game in which the gamer, through an avatar, explores room after room in a house or a castle. Each room has its specific object; again, much like various treasures in a game. The objects are exciting as they are, but they also hint at the imminent adventures in a magical world: a suit of armour, a harp – which is the traditional attribute of storytellers; old books suggesting old stories; the text doesn't specify what the paintings look like, but it is easy to imagine that they portray scenes from mythology. And finally the children come to a room

that was quite empty except for one big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking-glass in the door. There was nothing else in the room at all except a dead blue-bottle on the window sill. (*ibid.*)

The most important object of the story, featured in the title, is introduced in a casual manner during the children's exploration of the new setting, alongside a dead insect. It is easy to miss this description among the more exciting and exotic experiences in Narnia; yet the purpose of this spatial exploration in a realist setting is to prepare the characters – and thus the reader – for looking carefully, absorbing details that may be salient afterwards.

The passage from Patrick Ness' novel *More Than This* (Ness, 2013), which I would like to discuss in detail, is significantly more complex, although it also portrays a character finding himself in an unfamiliar place. The episode occurs early in the novel, after we have been told that the protagonist has drowned and died, and then awakens in a world that he does not recognise; a post-apocalyptic world with abandoned and decaying buildings, streets covered by weeds and no signs of life. The passage comes soon after the protagonist has taken the first view of desolation and heads toward the closest house to see whether he can find any indications of where he is and why.

He steps inside the house [...]. Hands on either wall to keep himself steady, he moves slowly forward, every second thinking he's going to be stopped, that he's going to hear a voice demanding to know what he's doing trespassing in a strange house. As he stumbles into the shadows, though, his eyes not adjusting to the change in light as fast as they should, he can feel dust under his feet so thick it seems inconceivable that anyone has been here for a long, long time.

It gets darker the further in he goes, and this seems wrong somehow, the blast of the sun through the open door not illuminating anything, just making the shadows heavier and more threatening to his bleary eyes. He fumbles on, seeing less and less, reaching the bottom of the stairs but turning from them, still hearing nothing, no sounds of habitation, no sound of anything at all except himself. (loc. 194)

Let us take a close look at what is going on in these two paragraphs. The boy has already registered some strange things through his senses: the setting is unfamiliar, the light is weird, there are no sounds. Now he goes indoors, just to go anywhere, to explore, to try to understand where he is. This is a situation that most readers will probably not recognise from their own experience, apart from dreams; but we may recognise it from previous reading: entering an unfamiliar space where nothing is predictable – a game in which you don't know the rules.

**Hands on either wall to keep himself steady,**

Firstly, the character is positioned in space, in relation to the architecture; the text clearly suggests that he is in restricted space, and since he can touch either wall with his hands,

he is probably in a narrow corridor or hallway. The situatedness conveyed by this detail immediately triggers readers' emotional memory, since even if we haven't been in a xenotopic world like the one described, we probably know what it means to be in tightly enclosed spaces, either from own or mediated experience, including fictional. Further, the text appeals to two senses: touch and balance. Balance is not typically counted as a sense, alongside sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch; however, in discussing embodied perception, we definitely need to extend the repertoire of senses to include gravity, balance, distance, direction, speed, duration, that are all connected to our perception of space and spatiality, also known as exteroception. Moreover, we can also make use of the concept of proprioception: the sense of the relative position of neighbouring parts of the body and strength of effort being employed in movement.

The character's exact tactile experience is not described in detail, but the description activates a set of stored schemas, such as: walls are vertical; walls are solid; therefore our embodied cognition, through mirror neurons, signals a tangible experience of touching walls. Moreover, the walls are used to keep balance, something that we may take for granted, but the boy has just woken up lying flat on the ground, in shock, and the command of his limbs is far from self-evident. The description evokes a sense of physical confusion.

**he moves slowly forward,**

Here, we are faced with several embodied experiences. Firstly, movement; again something we do automatically, but the text forces us to consider the implication of movement: what does it mean to move through space? As cognitive narratology shows, through mirror neurons our brains react to description of a character's movement in exactly the same way they react to watching real people moving, that is, activating motoric function in our bodies as if we were moving ourselves. And not simply as if: we are moving ourselves together with the character because the brain simulates the body's response to real movement. Our experience of the character's movement is totally physical, or proprioceptive. Movement implies direction: forward; and speed: slowly; which also suggests duration, as we know that slow movement takes longer than quick movement, and while neither the duration nor distance are indicated, we assume that some time has passed and some distance is covered.

**As he stumbles into the shadows,**

The action verb “stumbles” provides a contrast to the slow and repetitive movement of the previous sentence. Stumbling is a singular movement and presumably a quick one, also suggesting a sudden change from light to darkness.

**his eyes not adjusting to the change in light as fast as they should,**

Here perception switches from touch and movement to sight, and the character, focalised internally, notes that his sight does not function normally, as expected. This experience is both familiar and unfamiliar for the reader. We probably know how it feels to step from light into shadow, and we know that it takes some moments for our eyes to adjust, but we now need to imagine what it feels like when the eyes do not adjust. The familiar embodied script is disrupted, which demands attention and needs to be remembered in case it proves significant later in the narrative.

**he can feel dust under his feet so thick it seems inconceivable that anyone has been here for a long, long time.**

The focus of perception shifts back to touch, but we need to remember that the boy is still moving slowly forward, and his eyes have not adjusted to darkness yet. The feeling of the thick dust under his feet allows him, and thus the reader, to infer that the house has been abandoned for a long time. The embodied perception now conveys both factual information: the house is empty; and an emotional state: a sense of loneliness and possibly danger. Evolutionarily, human beings were programmed to be significantly more dependent on their senses than we are today: shadows could conceal enemies or predators, while footprints on dirt or dust could reveal them. In this case, the boy is literally “reading” the environment with his bare feet.

**It gets darker the further in he goes, and this seems wrong somehow, the blast of the sun through the open door not illuminating anything, just making the shadows heavier and more threatening to his bleary eyes.**

We are back to visual perception – note how quickly senses alternate and complement each other. But this time, again, the physical perception leads to inference: the light does not seem familiar and natural, which amplifies the feeling of xenotopia, otherworldliness. The word “threatening” is used for the first time, transforming the physical perception into an emotional state, which confirms the sense of danger already suggested in the previous sentence.

**He fumbles on,**

Back to movement, emphasising the slow progress accompanied by touch.

**seeing less and less,**

Touch is now the boy's only way of orienting in space, and he has to rely on it. The reader needs to keep in mind that the character is moving slowly along a narrow corridor, supporting himself on the walls. The sense of abandonment and danger increases.

**hearing nothing, no sounds of habitation, no sound of anything at all except himself.**

In the wide range of embodied perception, there is one information source conspicuously absent in this unfamiliar world: the aural. Unless we are hearing-impaired, we are used to space carrying sounds, and the absence of sound is a powerful script disruption that stimulates curiosity (why is there no sound?), but also contributes to the overall apprehension. Something is wrong with this place that has no traces of life.

Obviously, I have spent substantial time analysing something that only takes a few seconds to read, and when we read for pleasure, we do not pause to consider all the implications as I have done for academic purposes. However, our brain has performed all these complicated operations without our awareness of them, and our body and our senses have experienced, in simulation mode, everything that the character has been exposed to. Our motoric, cognitive and affective responses are genuine.

For the rest of the novel, the character keeps exploring his environment, venturing further and further away from his starting point, all the time trying to make meaning of this alien space and understand himself as a part of it. It is easy, with our conventional training in hermeneutics, to fall into the same trap, that is, endeavour to understand the meaning of the text, for instance, through viewing the external space as a metaphor for interiority and the character's exploration of the strange world as identity quest. However, this strategy is exactly the opposite of what cognitive narratology and embodied cognition propose. In real life, we move through space without necessarily trying to interpret it all the time; we may at some point wonder where we are and where we are going, physically or symbolically, but this is not the typical way of experiencing the perceptible world; instead, we simply let our senses feed information to our brain which then performs sorting and storing, deciding which

information is salient and therefore worth saving in memory for future use. Very little information in our daily life is salient, and although we see, hear, touch, perceive movement, distance and direction, the information is too trivial to be of any use. In fiction, all information is salient, because it has already been deliberately selected and arranged.

Cognitive narratology suggests attempting to abandon interpretation, instead engaging with the text cognitively and emotionally, experiencing the character's interaction with space through his concrete perception and proprioception. This may seem alien to many of us, once again because as literary scholars we have been trained to predominantly engage with interpretation; yet this is precisely what makes cognitive approaches so radically different from everything else. Reading fiction becomes more like listening to music, enjoying it with multiple senses in real time, rather than stopping to search for meaning. Whether intentionally or not, texts such as *More Than This* stimulate reading with such an approach. The quotation I have used for the title of my paper suggests that there is more than interpretation: you have to allow the text to engage you cognitively and emotionally to enjoy it.

My next example comes from Frances Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* (Hardinge, 2015), a historical thriller with supernatural elements which can possibly be characterised as magical realism. The action takes place on a remote island, in itself a fascinating setting since it limits the physical movement of the character, but offers plenty of uncontrived opportunities to interact with landscape, with man-made environment and with other people. The protagonist's exploration of the island takes the main part of the narrative, not least because the thriller plot necessitates this exploration, which includes the house, the village, the shops, the mansion, the church, the cemetery, and archaeological sites. In each instance, the protagonist's keen eye is crucial for her investigation.

The passage I am going to analyse occurs halfway into the novel, when the fourteen-year-old Faith discovers a cave where her father has hidden an enigmatic plant, the Lie Tree of the title. Earlier in the novel, Faith helps her father row out to the cave during a storm, but isn't allowed to follow him inside. Later, the father is found dead beneath a cliff, and while the official version is that he has committed suicide, Faith is certain that he has been killed. She has read her father's journal, and she knows she has to go to the cave to solve the mystery.

It is a lengthy quotation, but I will reproduce all of it, because every word should be considered in its full context.

Faith clambered out on the slithering rock, half deafened by the echo of the water, and tethered the boat to the same column as before. She took up the lantern, hitched her skirts and scrambled up on to the rocky platform beyond the boat, then through the rough, triangular hole into a larger cave beyond. Here the light was dim, only a little leaking in from the cave mouth behind her.

Remembering her father's warning about the plant's 'violent reaction' to light, she kept her lantern almost entirely covered, allowing only a sliver of radiance to play across her surroundings.

The cave was roughly domed, cracks and streaks running down the ceiling like vaulting. Here and there she could see shadowy fissures and openings leading to other caves.

On the far side of the cave, on a jutting oblong shelf of rock, stood a shrouded shape, the terracotta pot just visible beneath the cloth.

There was something strange in the echoes of the vaulted cave. The roar of the nearby sea had been softened and twisted, so that the air seemed full of sighs. Faith could not help glancing over her shoulder, thinking that somebody had just let out a long breath immediately behind her. The cold smell was bitter here, making her eyes sting.

Slowly Faith slithered her way up the sloping stone floor. When she stood by the rocky shelf, she reached up and slowly pulled at the cloth. She felt resistance, the tug of thorns, and then the oilskin came away, revealing a black, indistinct tangle that spilt over the edges of the pot, a scribble of shadow on shadow.

The not-noises in the cave became louder, as if the breathers had drawn closer. Gingerly she raised her lantern, letting a little bar of quivering light fall upon the plant. (loc. 2056-2064)

Caves are among the favourite archetypes in psychoanalytical approaches to fiction, alongside forests. It is tempting to view the cave as a symbol of Faith's unconscious, and of course searching for the father adds to this Jungian interpretation. Yet just as with *More Than This*, I suggest that we try to liberate ourselves from the compulsion to find meaning, instead connecting to the text through our mirror neurons.

I will again consider the passage phrase by phrase, to see how particularly the choice of verbs and adjectives conveys the character's embodied perception of space. The cave is not an outlandish space, unlike the setting in *More Than This*. It is doubtless exotic, but similar to many settings in adventure stories. The only difference is that Faith knows that the plant waiting inside the cave has supernatural powers. Her perception of space as she moves toward the plant is coloured by her apprehension. The definitions are taken from *Cambridge Dictionary*.

**Faith clambered out on the slithering rock,**

**clamber** (v) climb or move in an awkward and laborious way, typically using both hands and feet.

The verb used here is a concentration of physicality, amplified by the adjectival participle “slithering”, that on the one hand, is synonymous with “slippery” or “sliding”, but is more frequently used about reptile-like movement, as in the phrase further down in the passage: “Faith slithered her way up”. “Slithering” ascribes the rock animacy, almost agency; the rock is moving and sliding under Faith as she climbs, and our brain registers Faith's body gliding against it. Recent cultural geography studies, for instance, Doreen Massey (2005), claim that all objects and organisms are following their own trajectories through time and space, at various pace and in various directions. It is, therefore, not too far-fetched to suggest that the moment captures the intersection of Faith's human-scale trajectory with the rock's slow geological trajectory, from which both continue at slightly different angles. Since the rock is a part of a tidal cave, it is likely to be wet and slimy with algae. We also know that the cave is cold and dark. The emotions evoked by this phrase are fear and disgust: two basic emotions that are evolutionarily wired in the brain to prevent us from doing dangerous things. Faith is acting against common sense because her goal is to reach the plant at any cost. If we are emotionally investing in Faith, this is where our empathy needs activation. We may not approve of her actions, but we understand them.

**half deafened by the echo of the water,**

Here again the sense of touch and movement is enhanced by hearing that also is adverse, since being “half deafened” may prevent Faith from discovering warning signals about something potentially dangerous. One of her senses is partially incapacitated, in addition to limited vision in the darkness.

**She [...] scrambled up on to the rocky platform beyond the boat, then through the rough, triangular hole into a larger cave beyond.**

**scramble** (v) make one's way quickly or awkwardly up a steep gradient or over rough ground by using one's hands as well as one's feet. Synonyms: clamber, climb, crawl.

A different verb is used in this sentence, that half-rhymes with “clamber” in the previous one, as well as shares its nuance of “awkwardly” and using hands and feet, but unlike “laboriously” it suggests “quickly”, as if Faith is now hurrying to reach her destination. The verb also refers to two consecutive actions: climbing on the rock (vertically, and running the danger of falling down) and crawling through a tight hole (horizontally, and running the risk of getting stuck or injured by the rough rock).

**Here the light was dim, only a little leaking in from the cave mouth behind her.**

This sentence is reminiscent of the passage in *More Than This* when the boy steps into the shadows, and his eyes need to adjust to dimmed light. Here the adjustment is implicit, but the combination of enclosed space, rough surfaces, restricted hearing and dim light creates a strong sense of discomfort and anxiety. Through mirror neurons, the readers experience this claustrophobic sensation tangibly.

**The cave was roughly domed, cracks and streaks running down the ceiling like vaulting. Here and there she could see shadowy fissures and openings leading to other caves.**

Although Faith's vision is limited to “a sliver of radiance” from her almost covered lantern, the text now focuses on her visual perception. While only the second sentence uses the verb “see”, both are focalised, conveying the character's literal point of view. The description employs the stylistic device of parallel construction: “cracks and streaks”, “fissures and openings”, further amplified by “here and there”. The duration of the passage is undetermined: on the one hand, Faith is eager to detect the plant, on the other, she needs to gain some orientation in the hostile space.

**There was something strange in the echoes of the vaulted cave. The roar of the nearby sea had been softened and twisted, so that the air seemed full of sighs.**

Perception is once more switched to hearing; then to a quick succession of vision and hearing:

**Faith could not help glancing over her shoulder, thinking that somebody had just let out a long breath immediately behind her.**

And as if it were not enough, a short, but intense, multisensory addition:

**The cold smell was bitter here, making her eyes sting.**

Obviously, in a linear written narrative it is impossible to convey several senses at the same time as might be achieved in a multimodal narrative. A cinematic rendition of this passage might include an alternation of objective and subjective point of view, zooming in details, sound effects, movement, changes in light; it would also have a fixed duration. The verbal text encourages the reader to assemble the multisensory perception from segments of information, which requires cognitive functions of attention and memory. The reward is an all-round, powerful embodied experience.

The passage is concluded by a further set of movements, during which the reader is expected to remember the strong sensation of the previous sentences, conveying Faith's physical and mental state: cold, probably covered in slime, probably with scratched knees and palms, in a closed space and in semi-darkness.

**Slowly Faith slithered her way up the sloping stone floor.**

Here the verb “slithered” repeats the adjective “slithering” from the beginning of the passage, but now it is not the slithering rock, but Faith slithers, following her earlier cautious movements, “clamber” and “scramble”. As already mentioned, “slither” is most frequently collocated with reptiles, particularly snakes. The verb suggests that Faith is either crawling on her stomach or at best climbing on all four. “Slowly” and the alliterating “sloping” emphasise the strenuous progress. “Slowly” is then picked up in the next sentence:

**she reached up and slowly pulled at the cloth. She felt resistance, the tug of thorns,**

There is no reason why Faith should pull off the cloth slowly rather than rip it off in one swift motion. The slow movement reflects her hesitation, as she both knows and doesn't

know what to expect. The resistance may simply indicate that the cloth has been firmly tied around the pot, but “the tug of thorns” also suggests that the plant itself is reluctant to be disclosed. Again, the spatio-temporal trajectories of the human and the non-human intersect. The plant has travelled from far away, causing death and devastation. Faith has come to the cave to solve a mystery. Faith's father has determined both trajectories. This is the turning point of the story, and it is firmly anchored in space.

**and then the oilskin came away, revealing a black, indistinct tangle that spilt over the edges of the pot, a scribble of shadow on shadow.**

Focalisation is used in this passage, allowing the reader to see what Faith sees, without any verbs of seeing employed. “Indistinct” emphasises the hesitation from the previous sentence. Faith has seen sketches of the plant, made by her father, and yet she doesn't quite know what to expect, and the darkness of the cave does not make it easier. “Shadow on shadow” is a powerful way to convey this blurred perception. Shadow is both a physical phenomenon and a metaphor for fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The horror of the moment is amplified by yet another aural perception:

**The not-noises in the cave became louder, as if the breathers had drawn closer.**

Both the character and the reader are still prevented from seeing the plant clearly. Again, it is not indicated how long Faith stands there in front of the pot, terrified. As we know, the sense of duration is significantly affected by our mental state, and seconds may feel like hours. The text allows the reader to pause and contemplate the situation or to hurry and discover what happens next:

**Gingerly she raised her lantern, letting a little bar of quivering light fall upon the plant.**

The final revelation of the plant demands that Faith moves and raises her hand with the lantern. This is the culmination of the scene and the beginning of Faith's long and complicated relationship with the Lie Tree.

The passage is just one example of many in the novel where a detailed embodied perception is employed. It is frequently claimed that young readers favour actions over

descriptions, and this may be true for some genres and kinds of fiction, but in novels such as *The Lie Tree* there is very little action, yet an incredible amount of suspense, frequently conveyed through prolonged scenes involving embodiment. Such novels force readers to read slowly and deeply, allowing themselves to connect to protagonists emotionally. This is a good training for subsequent transition to still more complex, character-oriented novels.

In the subtitle of this article I also have the word “identity”, and while it may appear that I have not discussed identity at all, this is because cognitive narratology does not consider identity within the constructivist paradigm, as a set of socially determined qualities that emerge in an individual's interaction with society. Instead, identity is understood as a complex network of cognitive-affective capacities, of which memory is the most essential. Suzanne Nalbantian has explored literary representation of memory in her work *Memory in Literature from Rousseau to Neuroscience* (2003). In young adult fiction, as I argue elsewhere (Nikolajeva, 2014b), memory is a particularly efficient narrative device, precisely because it contributes strongly to identity formation of adolescent characters. The protagonist of *More Than This* has been stripped of his memories, and the only way to recover them is through exploration of unfamiliar places, looking for tiny connectors to his past. Moreover, as it eventually turns out, the recovered memories are false, and the character must start his exploration all over again, now with the knowledge that the alien space is part of his original life. This recognition – re-cognition, re-memorying – leads him to the identity that, doubtless, also has a social context, but is to a high degree dependent on his material, spatial existence. Like other cognitive functions, memory is firmly anchored in the body, and bodies exist in space; thus the protagonist's exploration of embodied memory becomes a more powerful path to recovered identity than could be provided by a social construction.

In *The Lie Tree*, one of the narrative premises is that lies become true, that is, material, embodied, spatially and temporally anchored. Thus, from a cognitive-affective viewpoint, Faith's identity is not a sum of her age, gender, class, religion – or rather absence of religion – education and other socially constructed elements. Instead, her identity is formed through her emotional engagement with the tree.

I am not suggesting that the constructivist approach to identity is irrelevant, but it can be fruitfully complemented by embodied cognition. Moreover, understanding identity as a social construction detaches the reader from the character, while embodied cognition, based on mirror neurons, stimulates empathy and makes encounter with fiction a more immediate experience.

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