

*Summary*

The aim of this doctoral thesis was to reflect on the influence of the Romance tradition on the work of Peter Handke (1942-).

An extremely cultured author with a multifaceted and versatile writing style, Handke exploits myths and themes traditionally connected to Weltliteratur in order to describe the present, with the aid of topoi and tools linked to the most disparate literary traditions and with the aim of reflecting, consequently, on his own biographical experience in an original and in-depth fashion.

Four texts, a theatrical work and three novels, were selected as the corpus of the thesis: *Immer noch Sturm* (2010), *Don Juan (erzählt von ihm selbst)* (2004), *Die Obstdiebin* (2017) and *Das zweite Schwert* (2020). In these works, the influence of the mystical-medieval Romance tradition presents itself in a particularly original and innovative way.

In order to analyse the influence of the Romance cultural dimension on Handke's work, three macro-topics were therefore selected: the first is the influence of the medieval-chivalric tradition, the second is the revival of the Latin hagiographic dimension, while the third macro-topic focuses instead on the re-interpretation, through a modern lens, of the Spanish mystical tradition.

As regards the medieval context, we chose to focus mainly on Handke's references to the tradition of the Grail and the figure of Parzival, the legendary Arthurian knight. Traditionally described as a traveller deprived of a father, as well as deprived of a mother, Parzival is linked to the constant search for one's place in the world and for a definition of oneself which, inevitably, goes through initiatory tests of different nature: love initiation, the knightly initiation, the acceptance into Arthur's court. Utilising the Welsh knight, Handke therefore shares essential traits of his biographical past: the pain for the loss of his mother, the affliction caused by the premature death, or absence, of his father figure, his Slovenian origins. These aspects, more than others, therefore make Parzival a complex and fascinating figure, as well as a metaphor for Handke's search for a defined national identity, for his own Slovenian roots and for a maternal figure to be discovered and rediscovered through his imagination and, therefore, through literary fiction.

In regards to the theme of Parzival and the topoi connected to said figure, three fundamental themes have been analysed and studied in this dissertation, themes also appearing in Handke's work: the theme of 'Vaterlosigkeit', the image of 'drops of blood on the snow' and, finally, the topos of the 'unasked question'.

Regarding Handke's approach to the Latin hagiographic tradition, we focused instead on the explicit reference to the figure of Saint Alexius.

The image of the 'staircase', so closely connected to the legend of the Roman saint, finds its place among Handke's prose as an object inextricably connected to the biography of Alexius, as it was delivered to us through Jacopo da Varazze's *Legenda Aurea*.

Finally, with respect to the third area of study – that is, the Spanish mystical dimension – special focus was given to the elements of 'music' and 'snow'; each of these themes is connected to a mystique that emerges through sensorial connections, implicit erotic allusions and a secular re-interpretation of topoi, elements and phrases traditionally associated with the 'legend' and the 'sacred'. However, Handke's 'secular spirituality' reaches its peak, as underlined in the final sections of the dissertation, through the use of themes such as 'eros', 'time' and the 'inner universe'. The aforementioned themes appear in fact connected, especially in *Die Obstdiebin*, to the mystical-theological reflections of Teresa of Ávila and Juan de la Cruz.

Although the themes relating to the three macro-sections appear in many of Handke's theatrical and narrative texts, it seemed preferable to concentrate on the four aforementioned texts since both the plots of *Don Juan* and *Die Obstdiebin* take place in locations present in France, yet translated into a dimension located halfway between what's real and what's imaginary and with strong dreamlike nuances, in which evident references to the 'mystical' dimension often appear.

In a France with strong dreamlike contours, however – and this is one of the points of greatest interest, when it comes to Handke's work – explicit references to the Spanish tradition also emerge.

These references do not belong, however, to the literary dimension alone – think of the case of 'Don Juan' – but to mystical tradition itself, as is evident in the scene where *Obstdiebin* spends a night of introspection, reflection and initiatory bursts in a hotel room in Cergy-Pontoise, which is very reminiscent of the 'Morada' described by Teresa of Ávila. In this same hotel room, in fact, the young woman is 'initiated' to the dimension of an eros deeply connected, in turn, to the unconscious and the unknown.

The legend of Saint Alexius, which also appears in *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* and in other prose texts by Handke, takes on a particularly original meaning in *Die Obstdiebin*, in which the protagonist herself is in fact renamed, by the narrator, 'Alexia': this choice contributes to make the girl the double and alter ego of the Roman saint. The element of the 'staircase' appears in this text, not surprisingly, in a scene where Alexia reflects on the reason behind the search for her mother; this is an existential question that the young woman asks herself in her hotel room while looking in the mirror and while thinking about her little brother, a child with a singular and emblematic name: 'Wolfram'.

The work was structured, as a whole, in the following manner: in the first macro-section we mainly dealt with the methodology and the Status Quaestionis. Furthermore, in this section, general-theoretical considerations regarding Handke's biography, as well as the general features of his work, were thoroughly explored.

In the second macro-section, which chapters two and three belong to, we focused in particular on the analysis of the four texts taken into consideration here.

In the second chapter of the thesis, the relationship between 'eros' and 'dream' was then examined, as it appears in the France described by Handke. In order to analyse the peculiar traits of this 'singular' France, we then focused on the textual passages in which explicit references to the Grail and, in particular, to the Parzival tradition, appear. The novels *Don Juan* and *Die Obstdiebin* were therefore taken into consideration with reference to the theme of 'Vaterlosigkeit'. In order to study the re-interpretation of the topos of the 'drops of blood on the snow', we focused on a passage extrapolated from *Die Obstdiebin*. In this same novel, as in *Das zweite Schwert*, the theme of the 'question' appears in an original way, closely connected to the Parzival tradition, in a context linked to modernity and contemporary knowledge. A brief discussion concerning the themes of 'dream' and 'memory' within the two novels then left space, in the final part of the second chapter, to a digression on the topos of 'legends', as it appears in *Die Obstdiebin*; a novel in which, as previously mentioned, the reference to the legend of Saint Alexius is explicit and significant.

The third chapter is also part of the same macro-section, pertaining precisely to textual analysis, in which some of the salient reasons for Handke's revival of the Spanish mystical tradition were specifically examined. Particularly in the second part of the chapter, we focused on the influence of mysticism as it emerges in *Die Obstdiebin*, where the references to the topoi of 'eros', 'time' and the 'inner universe' are explicit.

The theme of 'eros', specifically, was treated with greater attention in the third macro-section of the dissertation; which corresponds, in fact, to the fourth chapter and is dedicated to the concluding considerations of the present work.

In this same chapter, the difference between 'physical' love and 'spiritual' love was specifically analysed; both types of love are present in *Die Obstdiebin* as well as in *Das zweite Schwert*.

The objective of this dissertation was, in conclusion, to demonstrate how the influence of the chivalric-medieval tradition and the mystical dimension are linked, in Handke's work, to the mechanism of deconstruction and reconstruction of literary myth.

In fact, Handke's work aims – as underlined several times in the first chapter of the thesis – to exploit the myth and the Grail-Parzival tradition in order to reinterpret the present through images

given by literary traditions apparently distant from the contemporary age, yet inextricably connected to it.

Just like the image of the 'bench' in the garden of Port-Royal – on which the protagonist-traveller sits, in *Das zweite Schwert*, alongside the enigmatic 'judge' –, the 'hotel room' in Cergy - Pontoise, in which Alexia metaphorically makes love to her 'double', must be similarly considered a place apparently born of chance but chosen, actually, to describe the state of mind and internal impulses of characters who, despite living in present time, live and act in contexts strongly linked to the highest spheres of the mystical-medieval tradition.

Literature therefore becomes, in Handke's work, a continuous source of reflection regarding the present, as well as a useful tool to think and rethink one's own biographical past.

## *Biography and List of Publications*

Alessandro Pulimanti is a Ph.D. student in “Germanic and Slavic Studies” (“La Sapienza”, University of Rome; “Charles University” in Prague).

He obtained his Bachelor’s Degree in “Languages, Cultures, Literature, Translation” (La Sapienza) in 2016 with a thesis concerning a correlation between the concept of “dream” in Ancient Greek literature and in the contemporary Austrian one, with the title: “Il sogno nella letteratura tedesca contemporanea: Il caso Handke”; supervisor: Antonella Gargano.

He earned his master degree in “Linguistics, Literary and Translation Studies” (La Sapienza) in 2019 with a thesis investigating the presence of courtly Franco-Provençal literature in modern and contemporary German production. The title was: “Traditio medievale e scrittura poetica tedesca tra Otto e Novecento: Il sogno” (supervisor: Camilla Miglio; co-supervisor: Paolo Canettieri).

His present Ph.D. project investigates the influence of the topics of ‘Holy Grail’ and ‘Percival’ as well as the influence of the Spanish mysticism on contemporary German-language production, focusing on Peter Handke’s novels and plays.

To take on his studies, Pulimanti proposes an approach that embraces a comparative and a textual analysis method. He will also include ethno-anthropological studies centred on German folklore.

### **Research products**

- [11573/1656342](#) - 2022 - “denk an Pasolinis »verzweifelte Leere von Casarsa«”: Considerations on the Influence of Spanish Mysticism and of Pasolini’s »Friulian« Poems on Peter Handke’s ‘Noch einmal für Thukydides’ and ‘Versuch über die Jukebox’ (01a Articolo in rivista)  
ALESSANDRO PULIMANTI
- [11573/1532403](#) - 2021 – “Chanson douce” (13c Pubblicazione su portale)  
ALESSANDRO PULIMANTI
- [11573/1605016](#) - 2021 – ‘Il cavaliere dei cavalieri’: Il ruolo di Parzival nel teatro di Peter Handke. Riflessioni su un esempio moderno di ‘Vaterloser’ (04b Atto di convegno in volume)  
ALESSANDRO PULIMANTI