

## ***Mamáland***

Word Count: 2000

25th February 1991. Monday, 8:00h. Hospital Son Dureta, Majorca, Balearic Islands, Spain, Mediterranean Sea, Europe, Planet Earth. A specific place and time for a universal truth.

A new baby is born. Her mother's temple has been breeding her for 9 months with food, classical music, and her tongue. Her mother's soft voice, the sounds articulated in her mouth, the changing speed of her mussels, the high and low pitch, and the implicit meaning between voiced and unvoiced sounds was the baby's first refuge. Her mother's mood, emotions, and feelings were expressed in the limen between the said and the unsaid. The sound of intelligible words awakened the baby's senses. She was conceived, born, and grown in words. She will later be defined in words and, in turn, she will learn how to create new life with them. Like the first pilgrims who travelled to America and settled in the land, words were the unknown land waiting to be discovered and populated by a new personal meaning.

'Click.' The doctor cuts the umbilical cord. An impersonal, clean, and cold cut, without drama, nor pain. Yet so cruel. Although the baby's dependence from her mother persists, the physical bridge between the bodies is lost forever. A motherland divided by an ocean of new foreign sounds. The doctor's cruel but necessary scissors open the doors of perception and experience to the newborn.

**9 years later**

**'Children see magic because they look for it'**

**Christian Moore**

On her way home after school, the dynamism of the serpent-like road invited her to dream big. Schooling was never enough to learn passionately about ancient history, mythical figures, remote countries and distant traditions. Words printed in books fossilized any real chance for a meaningful learning experience. Why was reality limited by so many restrictions? Pictures were even worse... they paralised the driving force of mental activity.

Uphill roads led her mother's red Corsa towards the Eden of a new world. Although she knew every curve and sight of the way by heart, her imagination was so powerful that imagined nations were conceived in a fifteen-minute car drive.

The powerful image of San Francisco bridge was a recurring image throughout her life. Where did she take such a precise representation from? She had never studied American history at school. She was too young for it. Her English lessons were about singing and dancing songs she barely understood. She had never been very good at English language, let alone the imposed dancing that accompanied the lyrics. Her classmates seemed to enjoy the dance steps, which they exaggerated in a Spice Girls' style. The students created a new song by imitating the teacher's perfect English, but theirs was a bit more archaic, just built from the sounds they were familiar with, raising their voice only when they were sure of the sound that came next. But the image was so precise, so rich and acute in detail that it made her wonder. Probably, Punky Brewster and the world projected on TV had had an influence on her perception of America. San Francisco was the representation of the American dream.

The shining sun. A sky without wandering clouds. The infinite blue ocean. The red magnificent bridge. The silhouette of land at the end of the bridge's spectrum. The golden light offered her an exciting and inviting prospect of a future full of opportunities and experiences that were waiting for her. She was determined to discover, settle in and conquer the land of dreams, even if in bridgeland the language was an impediment. What would she discover at the other side of the bridge? She was thirsty for her own destiny. At the age of 9, she knew it. The image was one of revelation and desire, of power and strength. She wanted not only to see it in real life, but to create her own self within the frames of her illusion.

'Look girls!' My mother enthusiastically awakened her three daughter's attention. She always pointed to the Cathedral at the same spot on our way home. 'Can you see it?'

The Gothic Cathedral dominated the coast, but it seemed so venerable but useless. While my mother engaged in an Art History lecture about Gothic art, I played with the Cathedral's size with my little fingers. From the distance, the Cathedral seemed as insignificant as my own existence. How such a magnificent and everlasting building could be so grandiose and yet so small? The historical metanarrative behind the magnificent sepulchral could not be compared to the dynamism and excitement of the San Francisco bridge. Luckily, I could live in the realm of the imagination. But why couldn't I appreciate its beauty as my mother did?

Her desire to drink from experience was too big to fit within the realms of her school, her town, her house, her home, her island, and even her family. She always felt like an outsider. She learnt how to swim in the margins, in a sea of dislocated and displaced experience. The island had grown little to satisfy her desires and expectations. When she finished her higher education, she decided to enrol in the Degree of English Studies

**9 years later**

**'When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion;. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else'**

**Margaret Atwood**

San Francisco State University.

I reached the age of majority on the other side of the Atlantic ocean. I became the personification of the American dream: with effort and persistence I mastered English language, I spent hours in front of the mirror imitating an 'American accent', I read the classics voraciously, and my knowledge about American history was impressive. The more independent I wanted to grow, the more difficult was the relationship with my mother. I denied her as much as I rejected my heritage. My manifest destiny wanted 'to redeem the

Old World by high example' and discover 'the potentialities of a new earth for building a new heaven.'<sup>1</sup> My American War of Independence was fierce, gritty, selfish. I burnt my mother in the Salem Witch Trials. I put a scarlet letter on her. Hester Prynne and Pearl had been separated. The Liberty Bell's sound was my morning alarm. My politics of isolationism allowed me to confine myself to the newfound me.

While American history was a utopian path from which to mirror my own future, English language became my new refuge. When I argued with my mum and her painful words aimed at limiting my freedom, learning the never ending list of Civil War battles would heal the wounds of my soul. I felt like Walter Raleigh founding Virginia when I discovered new words. The more American they sounded, the more challenging the enterprise of conquering them was. I populated the language with new personal meanings when I read the words in a language that was not my mother('s) tongue. Shaping their sounds with my voice and relating the letter's shape to its correct pronunciation gave me a sense of time and place. Tracing the perfect combination of remote and random letters to create words with a clear signified gave me the strength and power to project myself in a new identity. Learning English was a real Declaration of Independence to the motherland. The more words were given flesh, the stronger my desire to embrace diversity was. I was giving life to a new language within me.

But a striking fact turned my blood to ice when in a course on historical American and British relationships, the teacher explained: 'And, as you all know, independence is in fact born out of dependence.' What did he mean by 'As you all know?' I didn't know it! I wasn't prepared to listen to it. He continued with his brutal and unscrupulous speech: 'The Queen of England as Head of the Commonwealth is a symbol of colonial reconciliation. A complete independence, hence, is a mere illusion. Think about America and Great Britain as two countries separated by a common language and a common heritage.' During those

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<sup>1</sup> Merk, Frederick (1694) *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*. Harvard: Harvard Uni. Press

years, I had a recurring dream that would later become a nightmare: the San Francisco bridge had been broken into two parts. Not a 'click' but a 'frightening echo.'

### **Present**

**'I call people rich when they are able to meet the requirements of their imagination'**

### **Henry James**

High School, Palma, Majorca, Balearic Islands.

Sometimes, I indulge myself in rereading my students' writings. I can notice that they become better writers as they grow more self-conscious. I keep their writings in separate folders, so at the end of the course they can check their evolution from novice to proficient writers. For them, to participate in their learning is a moment of revelation. Going through their writings is a journey of self-discovery.

'Don't worry about the final product.' I keep telling them. 'The perfect final writing does not exist. Rather than a product, writing should be conceived as a never-ending process. Your writing will always be a draft. You can include the self-assessment and peer-assessment corrections for as they reflect what others perceive from your words, as well as the teacher's feedback. Think of your writing as a public domain.'

A student raises her hand. 'Yes, Rose.'

'I don't know how to explain it but... It feels like I have abandoned my writings. I'm not saying that I don't like them anymore. I just feel I can't improve them. I have already given them everything they need: a skeleton (structure), the flesh (words), the appearance (register and style). And when I revise and edit my piece of writing with feedback, it loses its personal voice. The meaning is infused in external echoes. Part of myself is lost in a vacuum of the different eyes and voices I have to reconcile. It is not mine anymore, but the mirror of another eye's judgement.'

At this very precise moment, my student's profound reflection on the nature of writing evoked many ghosts from my personal past. I had a *deja vu*. I felt exactly as I had

felt in a history class years ago. I couldn't betray my own theory. Writers are healers. Their stories are almost magical in its power to bridge the disparities between imagination and reality, perception and projection.

My heart was nearly bursting. Sickening thoughts threatened my illusory and apparently well-grounded identity. Why had I spent my life haunting unattainable ideals? Why did I aspire to become a perfect American final product? Was I a permanent 'draft' in the never-ending process of becoming? Was abandoning my linguistic, cultural, and spatial heritage a necessary evil to achieve the so desired independence? Was it an initial momentum? Could I be reconciled with my motherland and my mother tongue, with that part of myself I had cruelly abandoned? Could the umbilical cord be reunited? Was it too late?

When I arrived home, I immediately took my diaries. Looking back over years of trying to attain an apparently ideal life, my agony and doubts suddenly disappeared, for as my goal had been successfully achieved. For the first time in my life, I understood that I had become a character in the middle of San Francisco Bridge. After spending 5 years in America, I decided to come back to my motherland to become a teacher of English as a foreign language. I was the personification of the bridge, a third space where my two mother tongues -one imposed, the other chosen- had been reconciled for a much better purpose: to help my students navigate and explore the unlimited power of their imagination and enable them to create their own lighthouse vision. I helped my students to reconnect their umbilical cords.

I took my phone and dialed the numbers I hadn't pressed for too long:

'Mum, I need you.'

'I need you too.'

*The End*