



Alambique. Revista académica de  
ciencia ficción y fantasía / Jornal  
acadêmico de ficção científica e  
fantasia

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Volume 4  
Issue 2 *Manuel de Pedrolo's "Typescript  
of the Second Origin"*

Article 6

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## Educating Dídac: Mankind's New Father and the End of Patriarchy in Manuel de Pedrolo's "Typescript of the Second Origin"

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### Recommended Citation

Martín, Sara (2017) "Educating Dídac: Mankind's New Father and the End of Patriarchy in Manuel de Pedrolo's "Typescript of the Second Origin", " *Alambique. Revista académica de ciencia ficción y fantasía / Jornal acadêmico de ficção científica e fantasia*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

<https://www.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/2167-6577.4.2.6>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/alambique/vol4/iss2/6>

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## 1. Pedrolo's Atypical Choice: The New Adam and Catalan Masculinity

In the extremely popular Catalan science-fiction novel by Manuel de Pedrolo *Typescript of the Second Origin* (1974, English translation 2016) teenager Alba is presented as the woman with the right “mettle” (488) to become a new Eve, after a cruel extraterrestrial attack decimates Earth. However, her Adam—the child Dídac—remains unnamed and forgotten in the epilogue that, thousands of years later, celebrates her success in renewing humankind. Likewise, Dídac also tends to be unfairly overlooked by readers and critics, all seemingly captivated by plucky Alba. Here I wish to correct this neglect by considering the positive message about masculinity and the future which Pedrolo transmits with his portrayal of Dídac.

Dídac's characterization stresses, above all, his young age and his being a mixed-race person. Pedrolo may have conceived Dídac as a pliant Man Friday to Alba's sensible female Robinson Crusoe. Nonetheless, he radically rejects the racism of Daniel de Foe's 1719 classic, placing Alba and Dídac in a situation of equality, sealed by a romance which ultimately deletes the very idea of race from humankind's future. Oddly, Pedrolo never clarifies who Dídac's father is, complicating with this omission our understanding of the boy's unique positioning in his native 1970s Catalan society. Once his mother Margarida dies in the disaster that devastates Earth, Dídac becomes a blank slate on which Alba, as Pedrolo's delegate in the novel, inscribes her version of what future masculinity should be like. This is crucial since Dídac is not just the founding father of a new local, Catalan masculinity but of a new post-apocalyptic model to be extended world-wide.

Pedrolo's choice also signals a dismissal of all other possibilities available to him as a Catalan writer and man. Whereas Alba reads as a representative of resilient Catalan femininity—and an embodiment of Catalan ‘seny’ or pragmatic common sense—Dídac is an atypical 1970s Catalan man, beginning with his skin color. It is, then, important to discuss in the first place, as I do next, which factors condition Catalan masculinity and whether Dídac fits the model(s).

Catalan society is no doubt patriarchal, though Catalan patriarchy might be labeled moderate, or low-profile. Following social and legal arrangements prevalent since the Middle Ages, although the husband is the head of the traditional Catalan household this is regarded as a joint family enterprise; this means that the wife must always be consulted and her decisions respected. Customarily, Catalan families are organized on the principle of male primogeniture. Yet, another singularity of the Catalan system is that if there is no male heir (‘hereu’) the eldest daughter (‘pubilla’) automatically becomes the sole heiress.<sup>1</sup> The ‘hereu/pubilla’ system, thus, guarantees women a considerable share of power in Catalan society. This has resulted, as I am arguing, in a moderate patriarchy with a strong matriarchal (albeit complicit) component, which can be easily transformed into a feminist variant, as Alba's characterization as a hero shows.

The moderate patriarchal nature of Catalan masculinity is also conditioned by two factors: its pragmatism and its sense of victimization. Two articles in the key volume edited by Fernández and Chavarria, *Calçasses, gallines i maricons: Homes contra la masculinitat hegemònica* [*Wimps, Chickens and Faggots: Men against Hegemonic Masculinity*] illustrate these features. Bienve Moya discusses in his contribution how women have been progressively incorporated into the formerly hermetic male circles of popular Catalan culture. Focusing on the case of the ‘castells’, the phallic human towers that so many ‘colles’ (groups) all over Catalonia compete to erect, Moya explains that girls and women were welcomed only when it was understood that the towers could not grow taller without becoming lighter.<sup>2</sup> Turning the ‘castells’ into a metaphor for all Catalan society, Moya concludes that gender issues progress in this pragmatic way: in Catalonia, women make demands for equality and men respond “not for ideological reasons or political correctness, but out of necessity” (Moya 129).<sup>3</sup> Once integration is achieved, misogyny curbs down quite sharply, though not necessarily patriarchy itself.

As for the second factor, the national discourse on Catalan masculinity is obsessively fixated on Catalonia’s subordination to the Spanish state, hence, to Spanish patriarchal masculinity. This is why the victim card is insistently played by nationalist Catalan men. They are firmly convinced, as Joan Ramon Resina argues, that “The lack of a state is, in relation to the male imaginary, as decisive as the symbolic castration which, according to classic psychoanalysis, shapes femininity” (75). Typically, positive values such as the steadfast anti-militarism of Catalan men, their resistance to arbitrary state power, their rejection of dogmatism and a tendency to reach agreements rather than impose decisions are seen, rather, as symptoms of “a degree of feminization or, at least, an ambivalent feeling regarding the Iberian male prototype” which is “the culmination of centuries-long domination” (75). The current independentist movement—triggered in 2010 when the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal rejected the 2006 reform of the Catalan Constitution (the ‘Estatut’)—is, therefore, implicitly seen as a chance to remasculinize Catalonia.

Perhaps, however, Catalan men’s sense of victimization and the low intensity of Catalan patriarchy might turn out to be paradoxical advantages, for men who feel already disempowered are more willing to empower the disenfranchised.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, as American sociologist Michael Kimmel insists, the worst obstacle for women’s empowerment is men’s sense of entitlement to power, a diagnosis that applies to any patriarchal society in the world. Writing from an anti-patriarchal stance, Adrià Chavarria argues that Catalan men need to find, above all, “A new way to *love* which takes into account how *caring* will also be a new way of building the future” (30, original italics)—a new way which, arguably, Pedrolo’s Dídac personifies. Not without contradictions.

Pedrolo, who, incidentally, was an ardent independentist, often chose blatantly patriarchal male characters as protagonists in his other books, including science-fiction novels such as *Successimultani* [*Simultaneousevent*] (1979). *Typescript* is, then, exceptional in his production for the clarity of its

pro-feminist, anti-patriarchal ideology. Dídac, doubly disempowered as a Catalan black man, finds himself as a singular male survivor in a unique position to eschew subordination and victimization altogether. Pedrolo, nevertheless, preferred to empower Alba and end patriarchy rather than turn Dídac into the founder of a new patriarchal regime—which possibly explains why *Typescript* is so immensely popular in Catalonia.

Regarding the academic study of the representation of Catalan masculinity in fiction, Josep-Anton Fernández explains that Catalan Studies “largely ignores gender and sexuality (...) because the historicist paradigm around which it is methodologically structured depends heavily on the concept of national literature” (*Another Country* 1). Fernández’s diagnosis also explains why this kind of analysis is mainly produced abroad—for example, the feminist work by US women scholars on Caterina Albert (a.k.a Víctor Català), Mercè Rodoreda, Mercè Roig and Carme Riera—or by Catalan specialists conversant with other academic traditions, like Fernández himself. Trained in Britain, he is also the author of a groundbreaking study originally written in English, *Another Country: Sexuality and National Identity in Catalan Gay Fiction* (2000).<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that German Catalanist Horst Hina was the first specialist to offer a pioneering analysis of men in Catalan fiction (an article published in 1995), using Men’s Studies tenets. Focusing on novels by Carme Riera, Montserrat Roig and Joana Oliver, Hina claimed that the initial feminist radical critique of the early 1980s soon developed into a richer intertextual dialogue with men’s fiction; by the mid-1990s women writers felt confident enough to offer feminist representations of men as objects of desire (135). Warning that it is hard to generalize; Hina finds that, quite obviously, “one of the most outstanding changes in recent years [in Catalan fiction] is the redistribution of the values of masculinity between men and women” (135). From this point of view, *Typescript* appears to be a 1970s foretaste of this trend, since Pedrolo characterizes Alba as uncommonly resilient and pragmatic, and Dídac as a sensitive new man.

Despite these precedents, there are not yet any studies of the kind I offer here,<sup>6</sup> dealing with how Catalan male writers represent heterosexual masculinity. It is my contention that, whether intentionally or not, Pedrolo expresses in *Typescript* the idea that patriarchal masculinity needs to be drastically eliminated for humankind to be rebuilt by women. This is why his tale ultimately celebrates Alba’s titanic efforts to rebuild civilization. Dídac’s tragic end, however, becomes the biggest obstacle in this process of reconstruction. We must wonder why once Pedrolo managed to build an alternative, non-patriarchal model of successful masculinity with the acquiescent Dídac, he felt compelled to destroy it, leaving in Alba’s hands the sole responsibility for human regeneration. Beyond Pedrolo’s admiration for Alba, a dismal possibility looms in the horizon: Dídac’s untimely dismissal might reflect Pedrolo’s skepticism about masculinity—he may have worried that an adult Dídac would seek to fulfill his sense of entitlement to male power

and, thus, renew patriarchy. Safer, then, to eliminate him. Whatever Pedrolo intended, Dídac's death marks a new beginning precisely because it ends patriarchal masculinity as we know it today—both in Catalonia and far beyond it.

## 2. Dídac's Identity: Afro-Catalanism and the End of Racism

Dídac is the son of Margarida, a woman from the village of Benaura, who returns home pregnant by a black man, after some time away working as a servant. The boy never meets his father, nor does Margarida give her son any information about him. Alba's mother was Margarida's confidant (they were neighbors) but Alba herself was too young to share their private conversations. She seems, nonetheless, unaware of any gossip about the boy's father. We can only speculate, then, about the man providing Dídac with his African genes and black skin.

*Typescript* begins with a scene presenting Dídac as the victim of a murderous racist attack. Accidentally passing by, Alba

(...) stopped to scold two boys who were beating up a third, forcing him into the weir pool. She asked them:

'What's he done to you?'

And they replied:

'We don't want him near us because he's black.'

'And what if he drowns?'

They shrugged their shoulders, since both were boys raised in a cruel, prejudiced environment. (349)

Paradoxically, Dídac's immersion in the water saves him from the deadly extraterrestrial vibration that exterminates all mammals, both human and animal; Alba is also saved, precisely because she dives in to rescue him. The novel begins, therefore, with an anti-racist, anti-patriarchal statement that conditions Alba and Dídac's relationship, since she becomes the boy's rescuer in many ways.

Pedrolo, who died in 1990, could not have foreseen the 1990s migration waves that brought so many Africans—mainly from Senegal and Gambia—to Catalonia, particularly to the rural areas of the provinces of Girona and of Lleida, where *Typescript* is implicitly set (Benaura is clearly based on Pedrolo's hometown, Tàrrega). Whereas Dídac's presence in his native rural environment is absolutely exceptional for the early 1970s (the novel was written in 1973) this would not be the case today, when 'Afro-Catalan' is an identity label growing in acceptance and impact.

Dídac, of course, is not a migrant but a Catalan-born mixed-race boy, yet it is important to understand his own racial context. Before the 1980s, as Sagarra writes, Spain received very few foreign visitors, who mostly "came on a temporal basis, to spend a particular season, or as tourists. (...) Foreigners of

other races were 'rara avis' and they were generally either rich or from the most influential layers in the colonies and former colonies, such as Guinea, Santa-Isabel, Sidi-Ifni and Western Sahara" (122). Returning home from their trip to Italy, a happy Alba realizes that she and Dídac can freely cross borders. Dídac "didn't even understand her as he had never had any documentation yet; he was too young when there were authorities that issued official papers" (455). This allusion to the obsession of Franco's military dictatorial regime (1939-1975) to control Spanish citizens, perfectly mirrors current anxieties about the control of illegal migrants by supposedly democratic Western societies. Many young men like Dídac, whether migrants or Spanish-born, faced today the unpleasant experience of being stopped in the street by police demanding their papers. In Pedrolo's post-apocalyptic future this would never happen.

Alba constantly teaches Dídac her own views on racial issues, views that characterize her as a child of the hippy age. The following passage is worth quoting at length since it encapsulates a completely new post-racial ideology for future human civilization:

And by the end of the summer the girl was so tanned that, one day, Dídac told her:

'You're almost as black as me, now...'

'Well, you're not that black yourself.'

'And how come there are black people and white people?'

'It's a pigment in our skin. I read it's called melanin.'

'I wish I were whiter.'

'Why? Black is beautiful.'

'But the boys in the village mocked me. Some adults, too.'

'That will never happen again. Now it's only you and me, Dídac.'

'And you don't mind my being black?'

'You know I don't. Do you mind my being white?'

'Oh, not at all!'

'We're the last white and the last black, Dídac. After us, people will no longer think about their skin color.'

And she grew pensive, as it had not occurred to her until then that, if by chance no one else remained, the future world could be completely different. (374, original ellipsis)

Only when she eventually gets pregnant does Dídac, awestruck by Mendel's laws, ask her about his father. The boy, as he tells Alba, would like "the child to be the color you have in summer, when sunshine is so strong; dark olive without being black" but is concerned that the baby "will be white as, after all, just half my genes are black and perhaps they are even mixed!" (461). Dídac's anxiety is, however, unwarranted and baby Mar is the exact color he had wished for, "neither white nor black, but a lovely light brown as if suntanned" (469).

Despite the immense popularity of *Typescript* in Catalonia and the general praise that its post-racial utopian stance has received, no readers seem to have wondered who Dídac's father is, at least none who have left any written traces. Antoni Munné-Jordà, the main Catalan specialist on Pedrolo, was perplexed and intrigued when I asked him for his opinion on this matter. In our email exchange (6 July 2016), Munné-Jordà recalled having met as a child in 1950s Catalonia a few mixed-race married couples with children, composed of white wives and black husbands. The men were migrants from Cuba, the former Spanish colony lost in 1898, and from the Spanish Guinea, a colony until 1968. As an example of a prominent Afro-Catalan personality, Munné-Jordà named songwriter Guillem d'Efak (1930-95), born in Guinea to a Spanish 'Guardia Civil' (or policeman) employed in colonial service and an African mother.<sup>7</sup> Dídac's mother, Munné-Jordà explained, would not have migrated to Guinea, since local black women were employed there as servants, whereas Spanish migration to Cuba had stopped in the 1940s. As he argued, we must suppose that Margarida worked in Barcelona, where she could have met a black man from Cuba, Guinea—or, perhaps, the United States.

Historian Xavier Theros explains in his volume on the constant presence of the US Navy's Sixth Fleet in Barcelona—with two thousand ship arrivals between 1951 and 1987—that African-American Navy men were the first sight of a black man ever for many local children. Black men were also an object of intense erotic curiosity for many Barcelona women; remarkably, these sailors benefitted from an odd racist twist by which American black men were placed many cuts above the more abundant non-white Moroccans and Gypsies (240). Whereas middle and upper class Barcelona girls set their caps at the white US Navy officers, marrying many of them and then moving to the USA, servant girl Margarida may have well met Dídac's black father at Jazz Colón. This popular dancing club, frequented by working-class locals, became in the early 1960s, when Dídac is conceived, a favorite haunt for African-American Navy men fond of good music (both jazz and rock'n'roll were first introduced in Spain there). Munné-Jordà corroborated in our email exchange that Pedrolo knew Jazz Colón very well: he had even featured it in his masterpiece, the novel series *Temps Obert* [*Open Time*].<sup>8</sup>

This seemingly superfluous digression is actually quite relevant, for Pedrolo erases Dídac's father from *Typescript* while at the same time attaching enormous importance to his genetic legacy and its impact on future civilization. By presenting Dídac as the son of a single mother, Pedrolo also makes other fundamental choices. The boy is in a doubly vulnerable position in his patriarchal native 1970s Catalonia, full of racist prejudice and dominated by a sanctimonious aversion against sinning women and their bastard children. However, carrying his single mother's two surnames sensitizes Dídac to women's role in peopling Earth, which is why he proposes not only that his son carries the gender-neutral name Mar but also that he carries first Alba's surname, not his as customary. She is surprised but Dídac insists that "Children should be given their mother's surname" first (470), as

corresponds to their being pregnant for nine months and giving birth. Thus, going much farther than the legal change implemented in 1999 in Spain (by which the mother's surname could be placed first only if the father agreed) Mar's birth inaugurates a wholly new anti-patriarchal tradition, still respected in the distant future of the epilogue.<sup>9</sup>

His father's absence also leaves Dídac throughout his life in the hands of women—first Margarida, next Alba—for his education as a man. Margarida appears to have been a conventional parent, and it is even hinted that Dídac's regular church attendance might be a product of her anxiety about being a 'sinning' single mother. Following, arguably, the classic view of Catalan masculinity as victimized, Pedrolo characterizes the vulnerable, disempowered Dídac as a good boy, always willing to obey his rescuer Alba and be her pliable, apt pupil. If, in contrast, Pedrolo had chosen for Dídac the raging personality of the typically disempowered male teenager—who feels entitled to wielding patriarchal power but frustrated that he has none—then humankind would not have been regenerated in *Typescript*.

### 3. Educating Man: Dídac as Alba's Apt Pupil

Pedrolo makes, in short, with Alba and Dídac a convenient choice for his personal anti-patriarchal vision of the future. The protagonists of his utopian bildungsroman, are, however, somewhat controversial among readers. For Serrahima, Alba and Dídac's transition from childhood to adulthood is dominated by the "force of circumstances"; their mere survival and their Mediterranean initiation trip make demands far above their abilities, which is why it is "almost impossible that they can escape unscathed" (43). Serrahima accepts that Pedrolo's couple become exceptional because the circumstances are exceptional, judging this a strong point in the novel. In contrast, other readers are more reluctant to suspending their disbelief, criticizing how the extreme situation forces Pedrolo to "exaggerate in excess his heroes' qualities", particularly Dídac's uncanny mechanical abilities (Hernández Ripoll 8). When the boy explains that a ship with a shallow draft will be helpful to navigate the coastline without running aground, the narrator candidly remarks that Dídac "often seemed to have a mysterious knowledge of things he should by rights know nothing about" (434). Pedrolo, nonetheless, must play this trick, for no story of survival can work with characters of limited abilities. Most ordinary persons would die in Alba and Dídac's situation and, in fact, they do come across adults who have either committed suicide or gone insane. No doubt, their young age helps them to survive despite the terrible circumstances (also despite the debatable credibility of their characterization).

Pedrolo, at any rate, never attempts to justify Dídac's extraordinary mechanical skills beyond noting, in passing, that he learned them in his neighbor Josep's car shop. This makes perfect sense: the little fatherless boy would naturally seek the company of a kind older man, and mechanics would



provide a basis for their bonding. 14-year-old Alba, like most teenage girls, is not interested in mechanics, which is why she needs to learn from Dídac how to drive their vehicles (a tractor and, later, a jeep). The boy's passion for resurrecting the lost technology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reaches a climax when the couple visit El Prat's airport and he proposes the risky plan of teaching himself how to fly an airplane. Logically, Alba puts her foot down, finding that death lies that way. Dídac is frustrated but his mechanical skills guarantee later the success of their boat trip bordering the Mediterranean coast, from Barcelona to southern Italy. By the time he dies Dídac is considering how to use the engines of the stranded aircraft as a source of electricity. The point that Pedrolo is apparently making is that Dídac's twin roles as engineer and as provider—he is very efficient at finding food and seeds, and at covering his baby's needs—are fundamental. When Alba loses him, she loses not only a dearly loved companion but also human science and technology. This loss enormously complicates her own survival and forces us to assume that she teaches herself the mechanical skills lost with Dídac—unless their re-development depends on her children, perhaps even implicitly on his genetic legacy.

Although as Mathilde Bensoussan argues (78, 79), Pedrolo reverses the Adam and Eve myth by choosing a woman savior rather than a man—also by giving Alba the main role in the couple—Alba's mission depends on Dídac's steadfast assistance. If, instead of the victimized boy, one of the two bullies that harass Dídac at the beginning of the novel had survived, Alba would have failed. At one point, the girl celebrates how well Dídac and she suit each other and even tells herself that she loves the boy, “as if she herself and not sheer luck had chosen him” (428). As the past recedes into oblivion and trauma is overcome, Alba and Dídac realize that “in a certain way, they were happy” (414), which is why “they often told each other: ‘It was good luck that we two were left behind!’” (415). This mutual suitability is the boldest trick which Pedrolo plays, far more blatant than Dídac's uncanny mechanical skills, for their accidental survival together must of necessity blossom into romance—and fast. Dídac is soon seen by Alba as “a beautiful teenager” (415), although he's only 11 at the time. He quickly responds to her attraction, finding it extremely easy to accept her sexual advances in a smooth progression that, despite their young age, is very well handled by Pedrolo. Instead of the one-sided sexual scenes often found in his other novels, in which women's pleasure is often neglected, in *Typescript* Pedrolo offers sensuality over sexuality—another reason why this novel is enjoyed by so many Catalan children as young as Alba and even Dídac.

Obviously, not only the sinister lottery of the extraterrestrial extermination singles out Dídac for Alba, but also the author. Pedrolo gives her what many women lack in patriarchal society: a man willing to listen, who respects and trusts her, and who accepts being educated by a woman. Tellingly, Pedrolo christened the boy ‘Dídac’, a name derived from Greek ‘Didachos’ and Latinized as ‘Didacus’ (hence ‘didactic’). Although she is

herself scarcely educated, Alba (whose name, incidentally and fittingly, means 'dawn') assumes the role of Dídac's teacher during their four years together, finding him a most eager student.

When the extraterrestrial starships destroy human life on Earth, Alba is, as I have noted, just 14 and Dídac only 9. According to the 1970s Spanish school system, Alba should have completed her primary education (the E.G.B. certificate for 'basic general education'), whereas Dídac would have taken only three years of schooling, starting at age 6. Alba's study plan for the boy, who "could already read and write well" (369), is based on his reading about his favorite subject, mechanics, and on her oral lessons. These lessons also help Alba to retain in her memory the little she knows. Dídac's 'formal' education is complemented by Alba's lessons in ethics, based mostly on the critique of the official values provided by her dead father. Always careful to connect fantasy with the harsh reality of his contemporary Spain, Pedrolo narrates between the lines the story of how Alba's father—possibly a member of the Catalan nationalist clandestine resistance—was imprisoned by Franco's military regime for his political ideas, "despite never having murdered, robbed or swindled anyone" (361). Alba learns from her father a liberal outlook on religion, politics, and sex, based on a solid rationalism and pragmatism which constitute the core of her own pedagogy.

Alba's best pedagogical practice consists of allowing Dídac to ask any questions that cross his mind because she "had always got frank and honest answers at home" (365). She is initially wary of discussing their previous life, afraid that this may deepen Dídac's trauma. Alba remembers in detail her past existence but Dídac is young enough to eventually forget his, a circumstance which she prefers (and which also aids Pedrolo's decision to use the boy as a blank slate to radically rebuild masculinity). Like the author, Alba "could hardly conceal the ruins yet she wanted Dídac to see them as the materials for building a new world rather than as a sign of the old world's disintegration" (381). Pedrolo gives constant hints that Dídac's prior education was quite different from Alba's, while stressing that he had literally no time to understand what he was being taught. She takes advantage of her position as a teacher, then, to instill in him whatever values she chooses. Occasionally, Alba does wonder whether she is manipulating Dídac by making him "feel like a man perhaps before his time..." (460, original ellipsis) but she never truly questions their roles as teacher and student.

The only obstacle which Alba faces is Dídac's tendency to be superstitious and his budding religious feelings, which atheist Alba (another legacy of her father) soon quashes. When Dídac, having learned from the Catholic priest in Benaura that the village was full of sinners, asks whether the catastrophe is God's punishment, she is both indignant and adamant: "You and I just cannot be the only two just people left, Dídac" (362). The boy's penchant for religion flares up again during their boat trip, when they come across a cache of books on the occult. As the child he still is, Dídac asks

whether they can invoke the Devil, a chance that Alba takes to teach him why religion is wrong:

‘(...) you need to believe in him, and we don’t, do we?’

‘You mean he doesn’t exist?’

‘For the ones who believe in him he does exist. They make him up.’

‘That is not what I was told when I was little...’

‘But now you’re not little anymore, Dídac. All this was to scare people, to make them obey, be resigned...’

‘To what?’

‘To many things. The ones that were very poor, for instance, should accept that there were many rich people. Now this is not necessary. That world is gone and we live in a different one where, right now, there cannot be any injustice. Don’t you think it’s better to live with no superstitions rather than pass them on to our children? Would you like them to believe in the devil?’

Dídac did not hesitate:

‘No, of course not.’ (459)

Alba even considers burning the dangerous books to save humankind from superstition and religion. She, however, finally restrains this impulse: “she had no right to destroy anything for, if she did so, she would then fall into that category of fanatics often mentioned by her father”. She decides to keep the books, “pleased with the kind of father hers had been, for he had gone to prison so that she herself would be able to decide today” (459). Alba’s missing father, then, plays a major role in giving his daughter the anti-patriarchal values that she transmits to Dídac and that ultimately result in a wholly new, egalitarian, rational post-patriarchal society. She is fortunate, nonetheless, that Dídac is always willing to accept these values, without ever questioning them, as the apt pupil he is.

#### **4. Dídac’s Legacy: Fatherhood and the End of Patriarchal Sexism**

Alba is 17 by the time Mar is born, young to become a mother but not exceptionally so. Dídac, in contrast, is only 12, a very young age for a father under any circumstances and in any human society. Again, this situation helps Alba to shape his manliness as she wishes, for Dídac absolutely trusts her gender views. From the beginning of their odyssey, Alba is aware of her womanhood and comfortable with her gender, which is what she wants for the boy. When seeing her naked, as they both are often, Dídac asks:

‘How come girls are different?’

Alba regarded him amused, realizing that he felt embarrassed by his own words, and replied:

‘If we were all the same there would be no men and women.’

‘And do you like being a girl?’

She laughed.

‘Yes, Dídac, as you will like being a man.’ (364)

Alba not only determines that Dídac will enjoy manhood, but also declares that he will enjoy being a father, leaving him no room to resist her decision. A funny sign of Dídac's childishness—and of his inability to oppose Alba—is his reaction to her announcement that they will have as many children as possible:

‘It'll be nice having other children around...’

And she laughed:

‘But by then you won't be a child any more.’

‘Will I play with them?’

‘Oh, yes, but as a father.’

The boy mulled this over:

‘It's odd to think I'll be a father...’ (382)

The five-year age difference is here crucial. Alba, who is extremely mature for her age, pushes Dídac to confront his future fatherhood when he's just a child; that the boy reacts comfortably is her merit but also a result of his easygoing, flexible masculinity.

Alba's pregnancy is eventually received by Dídac with fascination: he is “anxious” but also “amazed, almost stunned” (452). As he tells an amused Alba, “It's just that now it's real, I can't imagine I've given you a child” (452). Pedrolo uses here a clichéd view of pregnancy, with Dídac hoping that he will ‘give her’ many more babies, despite the boy's awareness that women are mainly responsible for the gestation of new life. The boy is also proud of having made the girl pregnant aged just 12, one of the very few signs of sexual possessiveness that he ever displays. In quite a festive tone, when Alba explains that no two roosters can be kept together as they will fight each other for the hens, a pensive Dídac declares that “I also enjoy being the only rooster” (479), absolutely the only sign he gives that he might feel ever sexual jealousy.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Dídac's feelings never develop into any attempt to control or overpower Alba. His innocent comment, of course, also hints at an alternative plot in which Dídac would be the only man left and in which Alba would only bear daughters. Incest is, as every reader of *Typescript* knows, embedded in the novel—as it is, covertly, in the Bible's myth of Adam and Eve:

‘(...) If we have one child every year and a half, we could have twenty. What do you say?’

Dídac laughed.

‘Well, when we have the last ones, the first ones will have started on their own...’ (437, original ellipsis)

Like any modern man expected to share pregnancy and attend his baby's birth, the boy Dídac takes great pains to understand the process and to prepare for the role of midwife. Although Pedrolo is sexist (or just conventional) in his exaggeration of pregnant Alba's mood swings, Dídac stands by her side, never complaining, always supportive. He is naturally afraid of hurting her when labor starts, fearing that surgical intervention will be needed, yet she transmits well to him her confidence that birth is a natural process that mostly goes well. When the time comes, Dídac behaves wonderfully, in a neat manly way, helping Alba to deliver the baby. Pedrolo adds a nice touch by having the boy burst into tears at the sight of the crying baby, "as if he felt envious" (468). Unlike many patriarchal fathers, however, Dídac never feels envy; his crying is, rather, relief and also a sign that, after all, he is just another child.

It is perhaps tempting to read Alba and Dídac's attitude to pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing as an easy return to a primitive lifestyle, closer to the natural cycles of human life than these processes are today. Yet, it is important to note that if the couple approach these developments with confidence this is because they have educated themselves into understanding human physiology. Neither Alba's nor Dídac's response to their role as parents is, then, merely instinctive and biological; it is actually based on rejecting old fears and practices grounded on a sociologically conditioned view of parenthood, which no longer makes sense under the new circumstances. In this sense, Dídac is simply less well informed than Alba (he believes, for instance that she should not swim in the sea while pregnant) but he struggles to catch up, never disputing her views and decisions.

All through *Typescript*, Alba and Dídac are distressed by the idea that their unexpected happiness is built on the foundation of a colossal disaster. Alba, in particular, worries about who she would have been in a normal world and what an adult Dídac would have been, "an ordinary wage earner, perhaps a car mechanic (...)" (445). She believes that they would never have become a couple and, sensing this, Dídac does worry that "if all this hadn't happened, you would not be my wife..." (476, original ellipsis). He is understandably torn between the horror he feels at the catastrophe and his happiness in being Alba's man:

'You must think I'm a monster, right?'

'No, Dídac... Rather, if you're a monster then we both are.' (476, original ellipsis)

Alba, nonetheless, hesitates to accept as normal their circumstances, particularly after she realizes that all signs of past normality are gone:

'(...) Then... Normal people, there's only us two?'

The girl, in a prickly mood, replied:

‘No, not even us. Do you find it normal that you, at twelve, are sleeping with a woman? And that I want to sleep with you?’

Dídac answered back with no hesitation:

‘Yes, absolutely! Age does not matter, Alba.’

And the girl had to agree; after all, it was just the same conclusion she had reached. (450, original ellipsis)

Having, then, placed his characters in a successful romantic relationship which makes the most of the terrible situation, Pedrolo decided to avoid a happy ending by eliminating Dídac in a freak accident. Death, inevitably, is a most visible presence in Dídac and Alba's world, not only because they are surrounded by millions of unburied dead bodies but also because the collapsed, ruined buildings are a source of immediate danger. Dídac is saved by Alba from his racist tormentors, from the alien attack and from measles but she cannot save him when a wall falls on him during a banal errand to find a gas bottle; to judge from the state of his body, at least he dies instantly.

Alba's rescuing Dídac from the racist aggression has no emotional consequences other than becoming the beginning of their association as survivors. By the time he gets measles, however, the situation is quite different. Sensing that he might die and delirious because of his fever, Dídac declares his love for her and begs Alba to never leave him. Alba grants that she does love him, which is why, realizing that she might actually lose her only friend; she implores Dídac, “almost hysterical” (392), not to die. The couple finds later the body of a woman who has committed suicide rather than endure her terrible loneliness (this is narrated in her diary, the text which may have inspired Alba to write her notebooks). Alba herself is only saved from that sad fate possibly because she has Mar to raise. The poignant scenes when she finds Dídac's body covered in rubble and when she finally buries him hint between the lines what her life will be like as a single mother. They are doubly sad because Dídac is gone and also because she faces her complicated future alone.

We cannot know why Pedrolo gave Dídac such a tragic ending after taking so many pains to turn him into a desirable model of post-apocalyptic masculinity. The issue of incest may have been at the back of his mind, though his death does not prevent Alba from having to commit incest in the future with Mar and, if age allows it, with their sons. A reversal of the ending, in which Dídac survives and fathers children from Mar (a girl in this alternative version) verges too dangerously on the patriarchal and possibly Pedrolo did not even contemplate it. Alba could have easily rescued Dídac once more and survived with him, whether whole or crippled. It is, simply, very hard to guess why exactly Pedrolo killed Dídac. Was this an act of pure authorial cruelty, a way to show his natural pessimism, or a strategy to clear Alba's path from any possible patriarchal leanings that an adult Dídac could have entertained? Oddly, none of the many enthusiastic readers of *Typescript* has discussed Dídac's death—if it has been mentioned at all—with anything but pity,

paradoxically, for Alba. This general lack of comment on Dídac's death is, I believe, in stark contrast with the immense achievement that his characterization as an anti-patriarchal man was for the 1970s Catalonia that welcomed him. Indeed, Dídac is still extraordinary today in the context of Catalan fiction. And even of the whole planet Earth.

### **Conclusions: An Unsung Hero**

Science fiction is a powerful laboratory of ideas to explore new directions for the future of humankind. As I have (hopefully), shown, Catalan author Manuel de Pedrolo turned his singular novel *Typescript of the Second Origin* into a moving rewriting of the Adam and Eve myth. In the process, he broke many barriers: he placed the responsibility for the survival of the human species in the hands of characters living in Catalonia, a region very far from the centers of world power in the 1970s and still today. He chose, in addition, two children as protagonists of his simultaneously dystopian and utopian tale, giving the girl Alba the role of savior and turning her and the boy Dídac into the parents of a radically new post-racial humankind. It is easy to see, then, why Pedrolo's novel is the best-selling Catalan novel ever: it gave Catalan readers not only a heartwarming, poignant story but also the confidence that, if required, we Catalans could rebuild the world.

Although Alba embodies the nationalist and feminist message inserted in Pedrolo's powerful text, and although through Dídac Pedrolo also sends a straightforward anti-patriarchal, anti-racist message, it is ultimately impossible to reach a conclusion about why the author chose to eliminate the boy. Here I have analyzed the strategy followed both by the author and by the female protagonist to educate Dídac into being the new man needed for a new future. My suggestion is that the only possible motivation for Pedrolo to have Dídac die is a secret fear that the boy might reclaim his lost patriarchal power as an adult, despite the scant evidence in the text, if any at all, that he might be tempted to do so.

It might even be the case that Dídac's death, which ends tragically an extraordinary romance among children of different races, unique for its time and even in our 21<sup>st</sup> century present, is the real reason behind *Typescript's* amazing popularity—not so much because readers love the boy but because they sympathize even more profoundly with Alba in her bereavement. I share this sympathy but I also wish to stress how special the personality of the man she loves is, and to call readers' attention to the fact that Dídac should be much better valued as the splendid anti-patriarchal creation he is. May he be remembered by future readers, as he is not in the world where he lives and dies.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In, for instance, traditional English society property was often entailed to the male line, as Jane Austen narrates in *Pride and Prejudice*: the five Bennet sisters must accept that their father's inheritance passes to the insufferable Mr. Collins, a distant cousin. On the 'hereu/pubilla' system, see Iszaevich, To Figueras and Borrell.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Minyons de Terrassa' were the first 'colla' to include women regularly from 1981 onwards, even having their own separate female 'colla'. Josep Maria Falcato, the Minyons' first head, explains that 90% of the new 'colla' members in the 1980s were under 20 and it seemed logical to welcome the girls as much as the boys (in Serra).

<sup>3</sup> All translations from quotations originally in Spanish or Catalan are mine.

<sup>4</sup> The work of Catalan sociologist Paco Abril—a key figure in 'Homes Igualitaris' [Men for Equality], the association which is part of Spanish AHIGE (Asociación de hombres por la igualdad de género) [Men's Society for Gender Equality]—is fundamental to understand the firm, though slow, evolution of Catalan men. See <<https://homesigualitaris.wordpress.com/>> and <<http://ahige.es/>>. See also my blog post "Of Men...: Masculinity Studies and the Grassroots Reality" for a quick overview of the resistance to anti-patriarchal positions in Catalonia (28 March 2016, *The Joys of Teaching Literature*, <http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2016/03/28/of-men-masculinities-studies-and-the-grassroots-reality/>).

<sup>5</sup> Fernández coordinates the elective course 'Gènere i sexualitat en la cultura catalana' [Gender and sexuality in Catalan culture] within the BA in 'Catalan Language and Literature', Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. The eponymous handbook (only available to course students) by Louise P. Johnson et al. (2013), includes a module by Jaume Martí-Olivella on masculinities in Catalan cinema.

<sup>6</sup> My own contribution here reads Dídac mainly through the lens of the Anglo-American Masculinities Studies that I practice, as part of my work in English Studies. I do not wish, however, to impose its bibliographical apparatus on the study of Dídac, as he is a specifically Catalan character created by a Catalan writer.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Efak's son by a white Catalan woman, also called Guillem d'Efak, played the child Dídac in Catalan TV3's 1986 adaptation of *Typescript* (Busquets 2015), the first TV series ever produced by TV3. In contrast, for the casting of the film adaptation directed by Carles Porta, *Segon origen*, the producers could take their pick among the many Afro-Catalans of Lleida. Dídac was played by Andrés Batista (as a child) and Ibrahim Mané (as a teenager), both local boys (Busquets "Segon origen: Claqueta i acció!").

<sup>8</sup> As a second option, Munné-Jordà mentions Saló Cibeles, frequented by servant girls and also by migrant Guinean men.

<sup>9</sup> The law was modified in 2010. Nonetheless, few Spanish couples invoke Dídac's feminist principles; surname order is mainly reversed for euphonic reasons or to guarantee the survival of particular surnames.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps of his own son Mar, for no other men are part of their world. The couple encounter a trio of violent men bent on raping Alba, whom she kills. It is implicitly suggested that no other trustworthy men have survived. These three men might even be the only male survivors, apart from Dídac.



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