

## Complication of the Protagonist's Names and Naming

in *Sylvie Germain's Magnus* \*

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to study the complication of the protagonist's names and naming in *Sylvie Germain's Magnus*. The results of the study are as follows. First, given names that family members choose for the protagonist reveal Nazism and Christian belief of the family. Second, references of names of people in the Old Testament and the New Testament in those of the protagonist and his surroundings suggest the author's viewpoint on Christianity – each individual can interpret the Bible in a way that is different from the Church's intention. Third, the name "Magnus", which is mainly used by the protagonist, denies any social intervention on the protagonist's identity. It presents his identity as well as alienates it. Last, the fact of being nameless

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and in search of a name of the protagonist illustrates deception in life and the loneliness of Europeans after the Second World War.

**Keywords:** *Magnus*; Sylvie Germain; politics of names; politics of naming

## ความชับช้อนของชื่อและการตั้งชื่อของตัวละครเอก ในหนังสือฝรั่งเศสเรื่อง *Magnus* ของ ซิลวี แแวร์แมง \*

จิรภุษิ กิจการณ \*\*

### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มุ่งศึกษาการเมืองเรื่องชื่อและการตั้งชื่อของตัวละครเอกในหนังสือฝรั่งเศสเรื่อง *Magnus* ของ ซิลวี แแวร์แมง ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ประการแรก ชื่อชั่ง สามารถครอบครัวบังคับหรือกีงบังคับตั้งให้แก่ตัวละครเอกนำเสนอความคิดผังใจ นาซีและความเชื่อในคริสต์ศาสนาของครอบครัว ประการที่สอง การเปรียบเทียบอ้างอิง ตัวละครเอกและตัวละครรอบข้างกับบุคคลในคัมภีร์ไปเบิลหั้งในพันธะสัญญาเดิมและ พันธะสัญญาใหม่อย่างชัดเจนผ่านชื่อตัวละคร เสนอความคิดว่าเราสามารถตีความ พระคัมภีร์ได้หลายแบบ ขึ้นอยู่กับความเข้าใจของแต่ละบุคคล โดยในหนังสือเรื่องนี้ ผู้แต่งนำเสนอการสมมติฐานของลักษณะของบุคคลสำคัญในคริสต์ศาสนาและลักษณะ ของผู้ต่อต้านคริสต์ศาสนาไว้ภายใต้ตัวละครเดียว ประการที่สาม ชื่อ *Magnus* แสดงออก ถึงการปฏิเสธการแทรกแซงของสังคมต่อการประกอบสร้างตัวตนของตัวละครเอก ชื่อนี้ แสดงถึงตัวตนและความเปลกแยกของตัวละครเอกในเวลาเดียวกัน ประการสุดท้าย

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ภาวะไร้ชื่อและการแสวงหาชื่อของตัวละครเอกแสดงถึงความผิดหวังในชีวิตและการไร้ที่พึ่งพิงทางใจของคนยุโรปสมัยหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง

**คำสำคัญ:** *Magnus; Sylvie Germain; การเมืองเรื่องชื่อ; การเมืองเรื่องการตั้งชื่อ*

## Introduction

Sylvie Germain (1954- ) is a prolific contemporary French novelist. She produces tales, short stories, novels, religious and philosophical writings and also photo albums. Her favorite themes are childhood, travel and Christianity.

The novel *Magnus* recounts the life of a European orphan who lost his mother, the only member of his family, in the Allied's Operation Gomorrah during World War II. All he had with him was only a teddy bear named Magnus. Shocked by the death of his mother in front of his eye, he lost his memory and became so silent that people thought that he could not speak. Thus, they called him Magnus, the only name available on the doll's scarf. Later, Clemens and Thea Dunkeltal adopted him but they could not live peacefully because of wartime and the status of the Dunkeltals as Nazi supporters. They fled from place to place and changed their names every now and then. Magnus or Franz-Georg Dunkeltal became Franz Keller. The father had gone to Mexico and died there. The mother could not accept this; she mourned and died soon after. The protagonist was sent to live in London with Thea's brother, Lothar Schmalker, who convinced him to change his name to Adam Schmalker. The uncle revealed that the ruin of the Dunkeltals corresponded to the fall of Nazi, that the protagonist should not fully believe in Thea's narratives. In England, Adam entered a university and learned many European languages. When he decided to travel to Mexico, he found Terence and Mary Gleanerstones and befriended them. Mary lent him a book, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, which urged him to look for his father. During the trip, he fainted and became mentally ill before recovering his consciousness and determined to change his name back to Magnus. Back in England, he discovered that the Dunkeltals were

not his real parents. He decided to go back to America again to live with Mary who, unfortunately, would die soon. The protagonist had to come back to London and lived alone for a while before he met Peggy Bell or Margaret Maclane, his friend and his first love since childhood who was then a widow. They had a good relationship and lived as a couple in Vienna. There Magnus met his adoptive father, who should have been dead, with his new son. His new name was Walter Döhrlich. They had some conflicts later. Walter drove a car and intentionally hit the protagonist, causing a partial disability to Magnus's body and death to Peggy and Walter's new son. Magnus could not accept the situation; when he got out of the hospital, he chose to go on exile in a forest in France, where he met a hermit-priest John (Jean in French). During this time, the protagonist forgot his name. When he could call back this part of memory, he unconsciously wrote it on the ground. Surprisingly, the name was neither spelt nor read as Magnus; it contained the letter L. He did not know this mysterious name and reassured himself that he was Magnus. At the end of the story, John invited him to visit his cave but Magnus went to John's abbey, learned his strange habits from other priests and laughed together with them. Returning to his own cave, Magnus let all his belongings, including the teddy bear, float away in a river.

We see that the protagonist has many names throughout his life. Although there are many interesting points in the novel, this paper will only focus on the protagonist's names which seem to be a means of political expression of characters as well as the author. We will study the complication of names and naming in three angles: family ideologies, Christianity and existence.

## Objective of the study

To study the complication of the protagonist's names and naming.

## Hypothesis

The protagonist's names are, in the first part of the novel, products of Nazi ideology and Christian ideology of his adoptive family. Then, his names and those of other characters are used by the author to create a new interpretation of the Bible. At the end, the protagonist's name is omitted to show his solitary existence. The change of the protagonist's names reflects a life of Europeans with traumas of World War II.

## Names and Family Ideologies

Names are normally created for a purpose. Since the name sticks to a person until his death unless the bearer decides to change it, the importance of names cannot be ignored. Names of the protagonist are not used only for calling but also for portraying family ideologies. Some of them come from an elder or an ancestor who is respected as a family hero.

Les prénoms d'une famille ne sont pas donnés par hasard, ou si rarement, ils appartiennent à une lignée dans laquelle chaque enfant qui naît est un maillon dans la chaîne des générations et est destiné à remplacer ses grands-parents

dont il porte souvent le prénom. Le prénom précède l'enfant et déjà l'informe.

In a family, surnames are rarely given by accident. Each person belongs to a lineage in which every child is a link in the chain of generations and is destined to replace his grandparents whose name he often bears. The surname precedes the child and instructs him.<sup>1</sup>

(Chareyron, 2013, p. 503)

Hélène Chareyron discusses in her doctoral thesis entitled *Échos de l'enfance: les territoires de l'enfance dans l'œuvre de Sylvie Germain* that a function of naming in Germain's novels is to reproduce the ancestry of the family. This kind of naming helps the family transmit selected values accepted by family members to a newborn in one step. The child whose name is already designated must learn the history of his name from family narratives and must gradually adapt himself to be worthy of it; he has a mission to prove that he has gained all the preferable values attached to his name. In the novel, the protagonist also had a mission. It is observed that the protagonist's adoptive family cherishes two ideologies: Nazism and Christianity. Nazi ideology was illustrated when Thea Dunkeltal decided to adopt the protagonist.

Une femme [Thea] se présente dans le centre, elle passe les enfants en revue. Une femme encore jeune, élégante,

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<sup>1</sup> Every translation from French to English in this paper is done by the researcher. The researcher would like to thank Mister Xavier Galland who kindly checked the correctness of the translation. Should there be any mistake, the researcher takes a full responsibility.

mais le visage durci par un deuil récent. L'histoire de ce petit garçon, non pas sourd-muet mais vierge de tout souvenir, l'intéresse. Elle l'observe longuement, le trouve joli, placide, et le devine intelligent. C'est un garçonnet bouclé, aux yeux noisette, au crâne en parfaite conformité avec les normes aryennes, au sexe non circoncis. Sain de corps et de race ; quant à l'esprit, il est nu, page gommée prête à être réécrite. La femme se chargera de la blanchir à fond avant d'y écrire à sa guise, elle dispose d'un texte de rechange. Un texte de revanche sur la mort.

A woman [Thea] appears at the centre, she inspects the children as she passes by them. She is a young, elegant woman, her face hardened by a recent mourning. The story of this little boy, not deaf-and-dumb but with a loss of memory, interests her. She observes him for a long time, finds that he is pretty, placid, and guesses that he is intelligent. He is a young boy with curly hair and hazel eyes; his skull is in perfect accordance with Aryan norms; his penis is not circumcised. Healthy body and race; his mind is naked, erased, and ready to be rewritten. The woman will take care of fully deleting it before writing on it as she pleases, she already has a replacement text. A text of revenge upon death.

(Germain, 2012, pp. 96-97)

It is evident that all the affection Thea had for the child came from his physical appearance which was in accordance with Aryan characteristics and his blank memory. She intended to write a new memory for him. In other

words, she cared about her plan to do with the child more than the child himself. We can guess that the sign of sadness on her face may refer to the death of her brothers Franz Johann Schmalker and Georg Felix Schmalker, who were members of Hitler's party and died in a war field in 1942. Thus, when Thea met the boy, she might think of her dead brothers. That was the reason why she named the protagonist Franz-Georg: the boy was chosen to carry the traits of Franz and Georg, to be their heir. Thus, the name Franz-Georg conveys a Nazi ideology because Franz Johann Schmalker and Georg Felix Schmalker are Nazi heroes. Since naming highly depends more on the name giver than the one who is named and that the child was totally naive, Thea could freely transfer her feeling and political ideology to the child without his consent.

Table 1.

*Change of the names of the protagonist and his adoptive parents*

Story line	Protagonist	Protagonist's adoptive mother	Protagonist's adoptive father
Beginning ↓ End	???	-	-
	Magnus	-	-
	Franz-Georg Dunkeltal	Thea Dunkeltal	Clemens Dunkeltal
	Franz Keller	Augusta Keller	Otto Keller
	-	-	Helmut Schwalbenkopf
	-	-	Felipe Gómez Herrara
	Adam Schmalker	-	-
	Magnus	-	Walter Döhrlich
	???	-	-

During the war, names were used as a shield. The Dunkeltals changed their names to conceal their identity. First, they became the Kellers. Then, the mother (Augusta Keller) and the protagonist (Franz Keller) settled down and kept these names. On the contrary, the father (Otto Keller) decided to go to Mexico and must find new names (Helmut Schwalbenkopf and Felipe Gómez Herrara). Compared to his parents' surname, that of the protagonist was quite constant. He just shortened it, from Franz-Georg to Franz, while his parents changed their name completely, from Thea to Augusta and from Clemens to Otto, Helmut and Felipe Gómez respectively. However, although the protagonist had a new name, the family expectation (Nazism) was still stuck with him. He could get rid of Georg Felix Schmalker but Franz Johann Schmalker was always there.

After the death of his parents, the situation seemed to be better. The protagonist moved to live with the uncle Lothar Schmalker and was asked to change his name. Franz could start a new life, free from the Nazi shadow (p. 53-54). The intention of the uncle suggesting the boy to change the name was undeniably good, however, his choice seemed to be ironic. Lothar thought that the surname and the last name of the protagonist, Franz Keller, were attached to the image of Nazi but the new surname he chose – Felix – was not less Nazistic. Although the word itself means “happiness”, it was already used as a second name of the protagonist's uncle, Georg Felix Schmalker, one of a Nazi hero. Since Lothar ignored this fact, the protagonist chose “Adam” just because of its ordinariness in the Christian sense. It is possible to say that this name was not exactly freely chosen. Lothar was a clergyman and the protagonist may want to finish the business by making his uncle pleased, so he chose one name out of the Bible. This action showed that the protagonist cared about his uncle. Hence, in this view, the protagonist

was still stuck in the family ideology. He was led this time to a religious side, not a political one.

Even though Christianity is one ideology cherished by the protagonist's family, the novel also treats it separately. Biblical references are visible and tend to carry implicit meanings more than being a mere allusion.

## **Names and Christianity**

The novel contains, in the second part of the story, characters named Adam, Mary and John and talks about Abraham and the Operation Gomorrah. It is then highly probable that biblical references are meaningful. If we analyze the protagonist's life and his relation with other characters, we will see that in each step of life, the protagonist represents a Christian hero. He is presented as Adam, Abraham and Jesus. Interestingly, he somehow turns to be an anti-Christian later. Here is a list of comparisons between the protagonist and his surroundings and biblical people.

### **1. Adam Schmalker and Mary (May) Gleanerstones = Adam and Eve**

In Mexico, Adam Schmalker saved a woman from being hit by a car. Her name was Mary Gleanerstones. She felt grateful and invited him to have a dinner at her house. After dinner, she gave him a book.

A la fin du dîner, May fouille dans son sac à main et en sort un livre enveloppé dans une pochette en papier. « C'est un roman d'un auteur mexicain paru il y a deux ou trois ans, dont on m'a parlé avec enthousiasme, explique-telle. Je l'ai

acheté aujourd’hui, mais mon niveau d’espagnol est bien plus faible que le vôtre, aussi je préfère vous offrir ce livre. Quand vous l’aurez lu, vous me direz s’il mérite vraiment que je fasse l’effort de me lancer dans le texte original, comme on me l’a conseillé. »

At the end of dinner, May rummages in her handbag and takes out a book wrapped in a paper envelope. “This is a novel written by a Mexican author that was published two or three years ago, of which people talk to me with enthusiasm, she explains. I bought it today, but my proficiency in Spanish is lower than yours, so I prefer to give this book to you. When you have finished it, you will tell me if it is really worth that I make the effort to try and read the original text, like people have suggested me.”

(pp. 81-82)

Mary, whose nickname was May, gave a book which she had got recommended to Adam. According to “people”, this book was good. Moreover, we know later that this book encouraged Adam to look for his father. It also led him to encounter a vision of a mysterious woman dancing in the fire. All these experiences convinced him that his true origin was not that of the Dunkeltals, nor that of the Schmalkers. The scene of giving an object and the awakening as a result of this action reminds us of the story of the forbidden fruit in Eden.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.<sup>2</sup>

(Genesis 3, pp. 4-7)

We can see that the novel reproduces this story from the Old Testament. The serpent which tempted Eve becomes people who suggested the book to Mary; the fruit of knowledge becomes the book, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. After reading the book, Adam Schmalker did not see himself in the same way. That he recognized that he had an unclear origin and must find something to hide this shame is comparable to Adam using leaves as clothes in order to hide their shameful naked body. In the novel, those leaves are nothing but the name Magnus. We will discuss about this topic later.

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<sup>2</sup> The researcher does not change neither emphasize any word in the quotation. The text is typed as it is appeared in the Holy Bible, King James Version, Seventh Printing Hendrickson Publishers Edition, 2011. Some words are normal; some are italicized; some are capitalized.

## 2. The child protagonist in Hamburg = Abraham and Lot's wife in Sodom and Gomorrah

At the beginning of the story, the child protagonist lost his mother before his eyes. The scene was described as follows.

L'enfant n'est pas Abraham, juste un tout petit garçon qui serre très fort son ours en peluche contre sa poitrine, et son regard se brise. Il meurt tout vif, là, face à la fournaise, il meurt à sa mémoire, à sa langue, à son nom. Son esprit se pétrifie, son cœur se condense en un bloc de sel.

The child is not Abraham, just a little boy who hugs his teddy bear very tightly against his chest, and his eyes wander. He dies while he is still alive, there, before the furnace, his memory, his language and his name die with him. His spirit is petrified, his heart is condensed into a block of salt.

(Germain, 2012, p. 94)

Historically, during World War II, the Allied bombed the city of Hamburg, Germany, in July 1943. This attack was called the Operation Gomorrah because it compared Hamburg under Nazi to biblical cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. In the Old Testament, angels visited Lot and stayed at his house. Men in these two cities gathered in front of Lot's house and asked him to let them have a sexual intercourse with the newcomers. Lot protected his guests; they were untouched. Nonetheless, God was angry against this lack of respect and decided to destroy the cities. Before doing that, He sent a message to Abraham and his fellows to flee and never look back. Abraham who fully believed in God left the place with determination. On the contrary, Lot's wife,

one of Abraham's fellows, had a deep connection with the cities and their people. This attachment caused her to look back, to cry, and to be transformed into a pillar of salt flowing with water.

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing *them* rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

[...]

But before they lay down, the men of the city, *even* the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,

And said, I pray you, brethren do not so wickedly.

[...]

And the men [angels] said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place:

For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it.

[...]

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

(Genesis, 19, pp. 1-26)

In the novel, the inhabitants of Hamburg supporting Nazi were compared to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah who tried to abuse Lot's guests. They were sinful and should be punished. The protagonist witnessed the fall of Hamburg. He lost his beloved one. As a little child, he could not stay calm and strong like Abraham. His mother was an important part of his life. Losing her was comparable to his own death. Thus he lost his memory, his language and his name. He could not say anything and stayed silent like a rock, a painful rock with inexpressible sadness.

### **3. The protagonist (Adam Schmalker/Magnus) and the Gleanerstones = Jesus, Joseph and Mary the Virgin**

When the protagonist recovered from the faint after his adventure in Comala, Mexico, he determined to change his name from Adam to Magnus and discarded the family name Schmalker by not finding any replacement. This scene occurred when he was in bed with the presence of Terence and Mary Gleanerstones. We know later that Terence was homosexual and had a male partner, Scott. However, this sexual orientation did not cause any problem with Mary, his wife. The couple had a good relationship, or rather friendship,

between each other. (Germain, 2012, p. 119) In this point of view, Mary Gleanerstones was comparable to virgin. Since the Gleanerstones had no child, that the protagonist started a new life under a new name in the Gleanerstones' house created an image of a family: a newborn male, a virgin woman and her husband. This was an allusion to the birth of Jesus Christ. Characters had the same qualities as the biblical ones: there are Mary in two texts, and the name Magnus, meaning "the great one" in Latin, in Christian view designates no one else but Jesus.

#### **4. Magnus and Margeret Maclane = Jesus and Mary Magdalene**

Another female character who played an important role on the protagonist's life is Margaret Maclane. She was his friend since childhood and also his first love. The two did not meet each other for long time; each person had his/her own life. While the protagonist had an adventure in Mexico. Margaret was married to a man. When they met again, Margaret was already a widow. They had a quite good relationship and became a couple later, with no legal actions. Having this story in mind, we may think of the relation between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, a probable and only "wife" of Jesus, in the New Testament according to some interpretations. Although the Bible only indicates scenes that Jesus and Mary appeared together, many people, e.g. Dan Brown in his *The Da Vinci Code*, interpret them as a presence of Jesus's marital love. This novel suggests this idea as well. Margaret Maclane was obviously presented as Magnus's lover and if Magnus was designated the role of Jesus, Margaret was designated the role of Mary. The fact that Margaret was not virgin can be compared to Mary Magdalene who was a prostitute. Moreover, the last names "Maclane" and "Magdalene" have almost the same pronunciation in

the first syllable, /mæk/ and /mæg/, and have a partial rhyme in the ending particle of the word, “lane” and “lene”.

## 5. The protagonist in exile and Brother John = Jesus, Lucifer and John the Baptist

Along the story, the protagonist was linked with the image of Christian heroes: Adam, Abraham, and Jesus. At the end of the story, when he excluded himself from society and lived alone in the forest, he was still linked to Jesus by meeting Brother John who asked his name and invited him to go to his cave. A certain John who would like to change the protagonist's identity (p 246-247) can be referred to John the Baptist who baptized Jesus, blessing him under the gracious light of God. However, Brother John in this story was presented as a parody. He was described as an old woman rather than a man (*Ibid.*, pp. 235); he was even mocked by the protagonist and other priests.

Il rappelle ce jour où frère Jean est arrivé très agité à l'abbaye pour dire que quelqu'un avait volé la statuette de la Vierge. [...] ce vol l'avait affligé, puis il avait réfléchi et était arrivé à la conclusion que, finalement, le vide lui allait bien [...] il avait décidé que l'absence de statuette célébrerait dorénavant Notre-Dame du Vide; réjoui par cette idée, il était venu demander à l'abbé de bien vouloir aller bénir cette non-statue. A l'évocation de cet incident survenu peu de mois auparavant, toute l'assemblée s'esclaffe, et Magnus se joint à ce fou rire qui résonne longuement dans l'église.

He remembers the day when Brother John, restless, arrived at the abbey to inform that someone had stolen the statuette of the Virgin. [...] this theft had grieved him, then he had pondered and come to the conclusion that, finally, emptiness suited him well [...] he had decided that the absence of the statuette would, from now on, celebrate Our Lady of the Void; delighted by this idea, he had come to ask the abbot to bless this non-statue. Upon hearing of this incident that had occurred a few months before, all the assembly bursts into laugh, and Magnus joins in the laughter which resonates in the church for a long time.

(p. 263)

Brother John was described like an insane person. Magnus and other priests laughed at his craziness. People who insulted a Christian saint can be considered as anti-Christians. Magnus, or a fictive character of Jesus in the story, turned to be one of them. If we read the text closely, the author even suggested that the protagonist discovered his dark side while he was not fully conscious. When he remembered his name during the dawn, he immediately wrote it on the ground. Surprisingly, the written name could not be read as Magnus. He fell asleep, woke up and noticed that the name written last night was mostly wiped out. Only one letter remained legible, the letter L.

Un jet de lumière blanche. Une lactation. Et son doigt n'écrivit pas les lettres de « Magnus », mais celles d'un autre nom qui lui est totalement étranger.

Il regarde ce nom, et doucement se couche à ses côtés ; il s'endort aussitôt, hébété de fatigue et d'incompréhension.

[...]

Pour se relever, il prend appui sur le sol, mais ce faisant, ses mains effacent le nom qu'il avait écrit au point du jour dans la coulée d'une lactation du lumière. [...] il est trop tard, la signature est illisible. Il ne distingue plus qu'une lettre: un *l*.

A burst of white light. A lactation. And his finger does not write the letters of "Magnus", but those of another name which is totally unknown to him.

He looks at this name, and gently lies next to it; he falls asleep immediately, dazed by fatigue and incomprehension.

[...]

He props himself on the soil to get up but in doing this, his hands wipe off the name he had written at daybreak in the flow of a milky light. [...] it is too late, the signature is illegible. He can only see one letter: an *l*.

(pp. 240-243)

It is highly possible that an anti-Christian starting the name with *L* designates Lucifer. Lucifer, sometimes mixed with Satan, was a fallen angel who planned to fight against God. If we analyze that accepting or following Brother John is a way to show our respect to God, Magnus's actions illustrate that he was on another side. He mocked John and refused his intervention many times. (pp. 246-247) Ironically, in the end, Magnus's life was not really different from John's life. After some fun at the abbey, he went back to his cave and let his belongings, including the teddy bear Magnus, go with the river. He possessed less things and became more alone, but with calmness and selflessness this time. We can interpret that, apart from his explicit refusal, his spirit was somehow instructed by John and he followed John's way of living. John lost the statue of Our Lady. He cherished then the non-statue

Our Lady of the Void. In the same way, Magnus lost all his supposed identities/origins. He only had himself and nothingness. What he should do was to accept this emptiness and tried to live happily with what he had.

The author revised the Bible through her novel: she recreated some stories and changed other stories. Even though she treated John the Baptist and Jesus different from the standard, we cannot say categorically that she intended to show the bad point of view on Christianity. She may just want to illustrate another interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is a source of cultures and ideas. The author may suggest us to use it the way it suits us.

In the novel, the names are not limited the border of meaning of only through political and religious views, not can also treat them as a revelation of the protagonist's physical and mental status in a certain existing situation.

### **(Name) and Existence**

We will now focus on the name Magnus and the protagonist's state of being unnamed. On the one hand, the name Magnus is undeniably essential to the protagonist. It is first used when he was a nameless child in the ruins of Hamburg. He lost his mother, the only family member, and was so shocked that he could not think, say or react to those who tried to help him. So they called him Magnus after the name on the doll's scarf. The protagonist used this name again when he awoke from his adoptive family's illusions. To understand the protagonist's decision, it is convenient to review the scene of a supernatural encounter of the protagonist.

In Mexico, Adam Schmalker had a chance to read the novel *Pedro Páramo* which pushed him to retrace the path of his father, Clemens Dunkeltal. He went to Comala at noon. It was a sunny day. He felt being followed by unidentified spirits; he heard a song and saw a vision coming with the sunlight. The vision was sometimes concrete, sometimes blurred. It only took a short period of time but the protagonist saw many things and heard noises. The most important thing was that he saw a woman dancing and singing on fire. (« il voit une femme se couvrir de flammèches safran des cheveux jusqu'aux pieds, danser une valse solitaire, frénétique, en poussant des cris suraigus. Il la voit s'écrouler, se tordre encore quelques secondes et... Et—plus rien. », *Ibid.*, p. 89) The impact of this vision altogether with natural heat at that place was so strong that Adam fainted and must be sent to the hospital. During that time, he repeatedly murmured “Magnus”. Once his health got better, he explained as follows.

« Puisque vous [May] avez lu le roman, vous savez que Juan Preciado en fait est déjà mort quand l'histoire commence. Eh bien, moi aussi j'étais mort, à ma manière. Adam Schmalker était un leurre, il est normal qu'il se soit écroulé au bord d'un talus, dissipé par le soleil. Cela n'avait que trop duré. » [...] Pour l'heure, il [Adam] sait seulement qui il n'est pas, qui il n'aura jamais été et ne croira plus jamais être : le fils des Dunkeltal. Une délivrance. Mais il se sent un défroqué – de son nom d'emprunt, de sa fausse filiation –, avec, pour toute identité de remplacement, le nom d'un ours en peluche. Un nom que, faute de mieux, comme dans le passé, il se réapproprie.

Magnus. Alias Magnus. Sous ce vocable fantaisiste, il décide d'entrer enfin dans l'âge d'homme.

"Since you [May] have read the novel, you know that Juan Preciado is in fact already dead when the story begins. Well, me too, I was dead, in my own way. Adam Schmalker was an illusion, it is normal that it was destroyed by a river bank, dispersed by the sun. It had only lasted for too long." [...] At the moment, he [Adam] only knows who he is not, who he will never have been and will never believe to be again: the son of the Dunkeltals. A liberation. He feels stripped – stripped of his borrowed name, stripped of his false filiation – with the name of a teddy bear as sole identity. A name that, for lack of anything better, like in the past, he takes over one more time.

Magnus. Alias Magnus. It is under this trivial name that he decides at last to become a man.

(pp. 105-106)

It is not clear whether the woman in the supernatural scene was his mother. However, it is possible to link the two women together. The novel places the story of the death of the protagonist's mother just after the story of a mysterious woman on fire. This juxtaposition might suggest that they were the same person because Adam's mother was dead in front of his very own eye. (« il voit la femme qui lui tenait la main se mettre à valser dans la boue, les gravats, avec un gros oiseau de feu accroché à ses reins. La rapace déploie ses ailes lumineuses et en enveloppe la femme, des cheveux aux talons. », p. 4) Moreover, the way the text described the two women was quite similar: they screamed, their bodies moved and they were circled with

fire. This vision must hurt the protagonist so much that he fainted and, after recovery, determined to change his name. We might interpret that the vision gave him a sign, an inexplicable feeling, that he was not a biological child of the Dunkeltals, that he belonged to someone else – who only God knew. Thus, it was unbearable for him to live as Adam Schmalker, Franz Keller or Franz-Georg Dunkeltal again because he did not belong to these families. He did not want to live in someone else's shoes anymore. He desired to be himself though he did not know who he was. He desired to be himself whether his identity was blurred and blank. The name Magnus served him well in such a condition. Sure enough, this choice was kind of absurd. Anyway, since absurdity seemed to fit him best, there was no reason to deny this nonsense. He used this name to exist, to live as a man. This standpoint created his rejected and exploited life as a valuable existence. Using Magnus as his name underlined his self-acceptance and his passion to live and fight with an unreasonable world. Still, he could not totally claim that he was Magnus and that Magnus was him. It may be the doll's name or someone else's name in the first place. The name presented absurdity in his life as well as alienated him from his real identity, which might somehow exist.

On the other hand, the fact of being nameless in the beginning and being unable to name oneself in the end depicts the protagonist's empty self. Obscurity shadows on his whole life. All information about him is more or less questionable. We may interpret that his obsession on searching for his real name throughout the story reflects anxiety and loneliness in life of the Europeans after World War II. We do not know his origin and he really traveled a lot. He grew up in Germany and nearby countries during childhood; he studied in England; he went to Mexico for a short vacation; he had a couple life in Austria; he ended up living alone in a French forest. Since he spent most of his life in

Europe, his life may represent that of the Europeans. Consequently, his problems portray Europeans' common problems at that moment: deception in life and no expectation for the future.

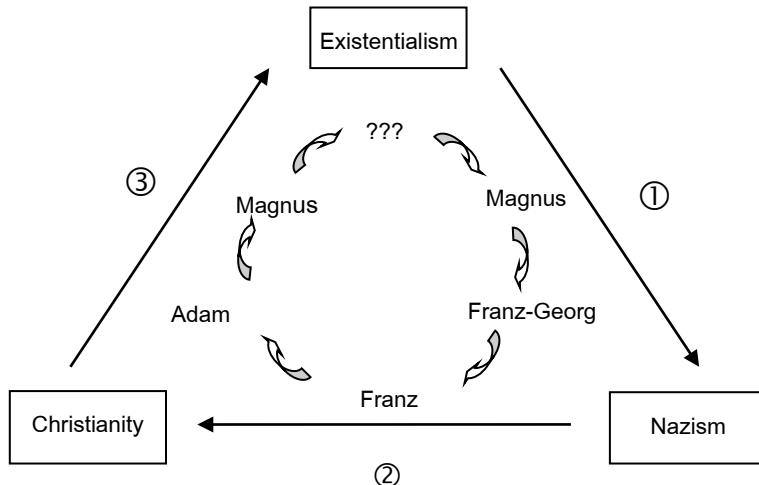


Diagram 1. Cycle of the protagonist's names and identities

The diagram above shows the cycle of the protagonist's names and identities. His identity started with existentialist one, Magnus, before changing to correspond to family ideologies, which were Nazism – Franz-Georg Dunkeltal and Franz Keller – and Christianity – Adam Schmalkler. After the awakening, he freed himself from others' expectation and tried to be himself; that is, he accepted to be nobody. Since he knew very little about himself, he decided first to be an absurd Magnus again. Then, even the name Magnus weighed too much for him, he refused this identity by taking the teddy bear and other belongings away. He chose to live peacefully by being nobody, somebody who could not be named and was relatively pleased not to be named. He just existed and lived as such.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The novel *Magnus* presents the life of an orphan who lost his mother, his only family member, in Germany before the end of World War II. He was adopted by the Dunkeltals who were Nazi supporters and who had to get a way to survive in Hitler's falling empire. At one point, the adoptive father left the family and disappeared. The heartbroken adoptive mother sent the protagonist to live with her brother in England. The protagonist grew up and took a trip to Mexico where he accidentally had a supernatural encounter and had a clue about his false identity. He stayed in America and England for a while before living in several European countries with Peggy, his lover. He met his adoptive father by chance in Austria. They had a psychological warfare which ended up in death of their loved ones and loss of their own physical abilities. The protagonist chose to live alone in a forest in France, where he met Brother John who tried to guide him a new way of living. The protagonist did not trust him and made fun of him with others. In every turning point of his life, the protagonist changed his name. Anyway, he was sometimes nameless and was determined to be like that in the end of the story when he took away all his belongings.

The protagonist uses the surnames Franz-Georg, Franz and Adam to satisfy his family members. He uses the name Magnus to be himself, free from any intervention, even though the origin of this name is absurd. Having no name or always searching for a proper name reflects mental disorders of the protagonist who represents Europeans because of his past torn by World War II, his questionable Icelandic origin, and the places he visited throughout the story. As for biblical references, the author presents the protagonist as Christian heroes as well as Lucifer. Germain may suggest that her own version

of interpretation is possible because the richness of the Bible allows her to do so. Sylvie Germain is French but she decides to narrate the story of a maybe German boy during World War II. As we know, France and Germany were not on the same side in this war. This novel is thus interesting and risky at the same time. However, it is quite evident that the author had a good intention while composing this work. Although the protagonist was the victim of the war and had no one to trust, he somehow incarnated Christian heroes and managed his life better from the past. It is noteworthy that this book was awarded the Prix Goncourt des lycéens (a prize voted on by French high school students) in 2005. This prize shows that the novel touched the French students' heart. Hence, it is not too much to say that French adolescents can feel the pain of Germans as a war loser/victim and have a pity on them. Furthermore, since Magnus's identity could not be framed into one nation and victims of World War II were not only in Germany, the idea of European common wound is inevitably raised up. As a consequence, this book explores the life and mental suffering of Europeans at the end of World War II.

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