

PRIMO LEVI

THE PRINCESS IN THE FRIDGE

VALENTINA ZUCCHI

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

Abstract. The paper discusses the similarities between Primo Levi's documentary novel *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) and his short science fiction story *La bella addormentata nel frigo* from the collection *Storie naturali* (1966), on the basis of the themes of the novel. The concentration camps form an element of continuity between the novel, which bears witness to the horrors Levi experienced, and the superficially light-hearted story. There are many similarities between human perversion and the grotesque experiment of the 'Laboratory of evil'. The story is almost a parody of Auschwitz; dreadful seriousness is converted to comedy. Patricia, the protagonist of the story, is Levi's *alter ego* and a parody of the archetype of the Sleeping Beauty of the traditional fairy tale.

Keywords: Levi, Sleeping Beauty, concentration camp, fridge, parody.

La Bella addormentata nel frigo (Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge) belongs to the collection of stories *Storie naturali (Natural Histories)* (1966) which together with *Vizio di forma, (Defect of Form) Il sistema periodico, (The Periodic Table) Lilít and altri racconti (Moments of Reprieve)* and *L'ultimo Natale di guerra, (The Last Christmas of the War)* comprise the volume *Tutti i racconti (Complete Stories)* by Primo Levi edited by Marco Belpoliti, published by Einaudi in 2005 and reprinted in 2015.

It is a science fiction story set for the stage in a single act, with about eight characters, and is the ironic tale of the Sleeping Beauty in the fridge. It is set in Berlin in 2115 in the middle-class family household of the Thörls, who for many years have given a home to a beautiful young girl, Patricia, who has chosen to hibernate, and whose life is thus a long series of freezings and defrostings, in and out of the fridge.

It is Lotte Thörl who opens the play by announcing the event of Patricia's defrosting, in other words, the thawing out of the Sleeping Beauty in the fridge. With the fourth wall broken down, as is typical of bourgeois theatreⁱ, the portentous narrative theme, the *raison d'être* of the story, reveals its complications. To celebrate the occasion, Lotte and Peter Thörl and their little daughter Margareta throw a party with some of their friends. Guests are Maria and Robert Lutzer, and Ilse and Baldur, a young couple who are in love. Everyone is keen to see the fantastic event of Patricia defrosting.

The hilarious questions and answers between hosts and guests immediately reveal Patricia's story. It is told quickly and effectively, and Levi's pen outlines her backstory deftly and with skill.

The story recounted is that on the strength of her great intelligence and beauty, Patricia won a contest in 1975 in Berlin, in which numerous volunteers put themselves forward for hibernation to be able to live eternally.

Patricia is 163 years old, and spent her first 23 years living normally and the next 140 in the fridge. Over this period, she has spent a total of about three hundred days in a state of consciousness. As a Sleeping Beauty living in the fridge in the kitchen of the Thörl family, she is thawed out only on special occasions. Twice a year she undergoes a medical check-up, goes to the dentist or goes shopping with Lotte, or she acts as a witness of facts significant enough to be passed on into the distant future, such as the wedding of a sovereign or an important expedition to another planet. It is on one of these special occasions, her birthday on 19 December, that the story begins.

Not much happens at the party, except the thawing of Patricia and the guests excitedly asking the Sleeping Beauty about herself. As Patricia's story unfolds, the pieces fall into place so that the audience becomes fully aware of her unique nature. One of the guests, Baldur, moved and fascinated by her contemporaneous youth and eternity, immediately falls madly in love with her. In his eyes, Patricia is the symbol of a supreme ideal, of whatever type it may be, unapproachable, unreachable and mythical.

Baldur falling in love is the predictable outcome of a clever plan Patricia has long devised with calculated detachment. Together, the two now plan for Patricia's inevitable escape from the Thörls.

Levi favored the short story format; even *Se questo è un uomo (If This is a Man)* is made up of separate stories in a non-chronological order. The collection *Storie naturali* was published under the pseudonym Damiano Malabaila almost as though Levi was "ashamed" of writing in a light-hearted literary genre so different from the harsh reports of a Holocaust survivor. Belpoliti asks:

[...] How could the narration of his dreadful experience, his memories of the concentration camp and his pain be reconciled with the unreal flights of fancy and bizarre wanderings of his mind, worlds outside the real world and time, which seemed very much to be science fiction? Science fiction was a fad, and was a completely different matter from the concentration camps (Belpoliti, 2015: XI).

Levi however claimed his stories in reality "are not science fiction stories, if science fiction means futurism or cheap futuristic fantasy" (Belpoliti, 2015: XI). The later writing in fact represents an escape from the narrow confines of bearing witness, but there is in fact a sort of continuity or bridge between these lighter stories and the concentration camps. The question here is whether the bridge is actually science fiction.

The story of *La bella addormentata nel frigo (Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge)* appears at first sight to be simple, funny and ironic. Closer reading, however, of the austere, precise and polished dialogue and the light and humorous tone gradually allows the almost unaware reader to infer a terrible complexity of meanings. In fact the story is a sort of "game" which Levi secretly invites us to play, and his deliberate reluctance to offer easy truths to support any syllogisms is a poetic act which has the aim of making readers repeatedly ask themselves "Is this really true?", "Is there anything else?", or "Have I understood this correctly?", in baffled amusement.

Is there in fact continuity between the theme of the “frivolous” comic story and the anguish and compact darkness of the Holocaust barbarousness? In reality the story suggests analogies, parallels and evocations from other worlds. In the stitches of the linguistic and narrative structure sewn together in a perfect web, the skillful spider-architect (Levi-author) inserts in the text continuous and subtle references to Nazism, concentrated in the characters of the Thörl house, in their coldness, in their emotional detachment, in their imperturbable inhumanity.

In the story, the Thörl house is the Lager of *Se questo è un uomo* and those who live there, Peter and Lotte, the sadistic executioners, the masters of evil whose object is Patricia, the victim who becomes the target to be hit, to annihilate, just as the Nazis of the Third Reich annihilated Primo Levi and all the Jewish victims with him. In this game of mirrors the Thörls, therefore, represent the wickedness of Auschwitz and Patricia turns out to be the *alter ego* of the Jewish Primo Levi. It should be added that in *Se questo è un uomo*, the identification between Levi the writer and Levi the man-character and witness of the holocaust is absolute, they are one; we are in fact in front of an autobiographical text written in the first person, a diary-document that narrates the terrible experience of the Lager experienced by the author. Levi the writer speaks of Levi as a man; life and art therefore come together in an inseparable binomial: the novel becomes the testimony of his life and his life allows his novel to exist.

Bringing to life the myth of the Sleeping Beauty in his postmodern version, Levi wants to reveal once again the horror of what is possible, just as he had recounted it in his previous work on the concentration camps, *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*) (1947). But he does it twenty years later through a story which, abandoning the real and harsh literature of witnessing, becomes even more disconcerting: its opposite, or rather, its parody.

Levi’s writing is moralistic and sometimes even pedagogic, it aims not just to *delectare* (delight) but to *docere* (teach). Underneath the immediate appeal of the ironic and sarcastic dialogue, and the comical universe of the characters, there are bitter and critical references to humankind, deep and disillusioned:

Così anche quest’anno è passato, siamo di nuovo al 19 di dicembre, e stiamo aspettando ospiti per la solita festicciola [...] D’altronde noi Thörl non riceviamo spesso: due, tre volte all’anno, e raramente accettiamo inviti. È naturale: nessuno può offrire ai propri ospiti quello che possiamo offrire noi. C’è chi ha dei bei quadri antichi, Renoir, Picasso, Caravaggio [...] ma noi abbiamo Patricia [...] (sospiro) Patricia! (Levi 2015: 86)².

The meanness of human behavior bubbles beneath the propensity to laugh throughout the story, and in the folds of the complex fabric, the paradox culminates in parody. This reveals the true nature of the narrator; his meticulous acuity and analysis create a literary universe on various different thematic levels.

Agamben writes that perfect understanding of a phenomenon is its parody:

[...] It will be necessary to clarify what particular form of comprehension parody makes possible, since parodying is specifically “renouncing direct representation of the object” (Agamben, 2005: 43) and the presupposition of “inaccessibility” (Ivi, 50) of parody is essential, so that it is literally “unrepresentable” (Ivi, 52). Parody is a remote literary definition and can only be ‘related to song’, in other words it is not the same as the object of parody, and can never exist alone (Dell’Aia, 2012: 24).

Unlike fiction, which can even exclude reality, parody, very close to prose itself,³ exaggerates reality like a magnifying glass; without casting doubt, it adheres and emphasizes reality taking it to its paroxysm, “over the top, too much”. It is the reverse side of literary genres, and reveals the gap between them and reality, from the serious to the comical.

Levi’s parody is pervaded by an air of mystery and is peculiarly odd. It is weird, ambiguous and indefinable, entertaining as well as disturbing, and will affirm something only to deny it immediately. The dual level of the construction of the story is surprising, because although each level is opposed, each level justifies the other, and makes a statement which is then denied. In fact, if one of the actualities were presented in its paradoxical version, it would not succeed in expressing anything unless it were accompanied and counterpointed by the other. There is not only one world or exclusive line or level in *Storie naturali*, but there is a dual tension. It is like a separation, which corresponds to the mythical figure of the Centaur, half man and half horse. Levi had a fervent interest in this, and in fact one of the stories in the collection *Storie naturali*, *Quaestio de centauris*, is actually about the idea of the Centaur.

Also in another story, *Il servo (The servant)*, which belongs to the collection of tales titled *Vizio di forma (Defect of Form)*, the Centaur reappears in the figure of the Golem: a giant that had a human figure from the waist up, while below it was a beast. The belt is a frontier, above the man is made in the image of God, while below he is a beast.

The Centaur can be seen as a custodian of Levi’s parody, and the most appropriate key to the interpretation of his stories aiming to express the duality of two universes running in parallel. The story unfurls following the dual existential itinerary of the protagonist. The analogy between Patricia and Levi is summarized perfectly in the Centaur, in its polarity, in the dual element, in fact Patricia

constantly slips between two dimensions: reality and dream, in and out of the fridge, in and out of reality, activity and passivity, and consciousness and unconsciousness, in a continuous tension of conflicting desires. So, Levi himself here becomes like a Centaur for the story, a hybrid in two parts and two natures, like the mythological beast Levi was in fact half Jewish and half Italian, a scientist of chemistry and a writer, as well as a man who witnessed the Holocaust and also wrote science fiction stories.

At first the stories give just an impression, but as the reader proceeds, it becomes a certainty; there is continuity between the themes present in the concentration camp and in *La Bella addormentata nel frigo* (*Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*). In this story too, Levi recounts the horror of what is possible, the evil of the world, the upended world of Auschwitz where rationality and irrationality changed places to create a horrendous reality. In *La bella addormentata nel frigo* (*Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*) there is a strong and urgent intention to go back, in memory, to the mad ideological principles which underpinned the perverted evil universe of the extermination camps. Rather than fiction, it is parody which is the ideal stylistic tool to recall, albeit in a different way, something which can never be forgotten.

Numerous passages in the concise prose of the stories recall the pages of *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*). There are continuous links with the concentration camps. One chapter of *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*), *I sommersi and i salvati* (*The Drowned and the Saved*), contains the premise also found in the story *La bella addormentata nel frigo*, (*Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*) that Levi lived the theme of the concentration camp in first person as a “Laboratory of evil”, or a gigantic biological and social experiment. The house of the Thörls is also a stage for the spectacle of evil, recalling Dante’s *Inferno*, a theatre of horrors and the grotesque. Everything in the house recalls, between the lines, the atmosphere of the concentration camp, but it is muted and tempered to fit a story which superficially does not appear to have anything to do with deep existential issues. What seems an amusing tale however soon begins to give itself away and cleverly sows seeds of worry, at first not too deeply. From the start we know that we are in Berlin, which is not chosen by chance. It is cold, and the cold is the same thick compact cold as in the concentration camp. The story is in fact subtitled *Racconto d’inverno* (*A Winter’s Tale*). Furthermore, the only thing described in the scene of the Thörls’ house is a fridge. This can be a metaphor of the frozen impotence of Auschwitz deportees, unaware of the lines their immense suffering has traced on their faces, and of the sadistic cruelty of the Thörls who take the experiment into their home: Patricia in the fridge. Everything recalls the Third Reich.

In *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*), his book on the horrors of the extermination camp, Levi describes a merciless process of natural selection whereby only the biologically and socially strong

can be saved. Those who prove physically and socially weak, because they lack culture and the skills through which some are saved, succumb and inevitably go the gas chamber, at first a threatening specter and later the dramatic and irrefutable certainty of death.

Levi however was biologically strong and able to withstand the terrible cold and hunger and the exhausting and dehumanizing forced labor. Socially he was even stronger; as an educated and acute young man he had learnt German and could thus glean the meaning of some of the infernal tangle of laws and restrictions, and understand, albeit only in general terms, what was happening in the concentration camp. Being forewarned he could act with intelligence. He was also a brilliant chemist, and this meant that he was very useful in the laboratory to all concentration camp overseers. In the natural selection process, Levi met all the requirements to be “saved”. Those who were “drowned”, the anonymous mass of those who disappeared without anyone noticing, turned to ashes, leaving no trace in the memory of anyone at all, were referred to as *Muselmänner*⁴ They were destined to perish because they were inept and without any sort of capacity, and therefore through the agency of evil were deserving only of a cruel death:

[...] Qui la lotta per sopravvivere è senza remissione, perché ognuno è disperatamente ferocemente solo [...] perché nessuno ha interesse a che un “mussulmano” si trascini ogni giorno al lavoro; e se qualcuno, con un miracolo di selvaggia pazienza e astuzia, troverà una nuova combinazione per defilarsi dal lavoro più duro, una nuova arte che gli frutti qualche grammo di pane, cercherà di tenerne segreto il modo, e di questo sarà stimato e rispettato, e ne trarrà un suo esclusivo personale giovamento; diventerà più forte, e perciò sarà temuto, e chi è temuto è, ipso facto, un candidato a sopravvivere (Levi 2014: 84-85).⁵

In fact, Levi himself was “saved”, like Patricia. The Sleeping Beauty of the story appears to be carefully constructed by the author to mirror a legend which has come down over the ages in various versions, but Patricia is also Levi’s *alter ego*. Both witnessed the horror and evil of their time, Levi the barbarous abomination of the concentration camps and Patricia the devastating domination mechanisms of her host family, as well as past and present historical events which she is chosen to report to posterity as she is thawed and frozen again for the duration of eternity.

Patricia is selected as winner of the contest to hibernate as she is physically strong and has superior physique and intelligence. Peter Thörl describes her as follows:

Possedeva tutti i requisiti, cuore, polmoni, reni ecc., in perfetto ordine; un sistema nervoso da pilota spaziale; un carattere imperturbabile e risoluto, una emotività limitata, ed infine una buona cultura e intelligenza. Non che la cultura e l’intelligenza siano indispensabili per sopportare la ibernazione, ma, a

parità di condizioni, furono preferiti soggetti di alto livello intellettuale, per evidenti ragioni di prestigio nei confronti nostri e dei nostri successori (Levi 2015: 90).⁶

The words of Lotte Thörl spoken to the audience also show that Patricia is unparalleled socially:

Comunque è bella nessuno lo nega. E anche coltissima, educatissima, intelligentissima, audacissima, è superlativa da tutte le parti, e a me fa paura, mi mette a disagio e mi fa venire i complessi. (Si è lasciata trascinare; tace imbarazzata, poi con sforzo) ... ma le voglio molto bene lo stesso. Specialmente quando è congelata (Levi 2015: 89)⁷.

In this perverted domestic laboratory experiment, Patricia is exhibited as a beautiful statue, an unusual and precious object. The amazed guests invited by the Thörls to the important event of her thaw look at her like a circus animal. To them she is a freak phenomenon to be bombarded with questions, as they stare with wide ravenous eyes anxious to be inebriated on the voluptuous first night of this opera, the most eagerly awaited spectacle of the season. It is a very unusual performance with just one immense character, a sort of gigantic and omnipotent “Fire-eater” whose very appearance arouses wonder when she is fed to the indiscrete and insistent sadistic curiosity of the audience, before the happy ending.

The curtain goes up on Patricia’s re-awakening⁸ and the ferocious and ironic spectacle of the experiment:

Così stasera c’è lo scongelamento? Che bellezza! [...] Il momento del risveglio è il piú interessante: è così graziosa quando apre gli occhi! [...] Soffre durante lo scongelamento? No, di regola no. Ma appunto bisogna fare le cose bene, seguire esattamente le prescrizioni. Anche durante il soggiorno in frigo, è indispensabile che la temperatura sia mantenuta costante entro limiti molto stretti. Certo: basta qualche grado piú giú, che addio, ho letto che si coagula non so cosa nei centri nervosi, e allora non si svegliano piú, o si svegliano scemi e smemorati; qualche grado piú su e riprendono coscienza, e allora soffrono tremendamente. [...] È bellissima, mi hanno detto: è vero? Uno splendore. L’ho vista l’anno scorso da vicino: una carnagione come oggi non se ne vedono piú. [...] Ha una pelle da neonata: per me, è effetto del supercongelamento, però. Non ha un colore naturale, è troppo rosa e troppo bianca, sembra...sí, sembra un gelato (Levi 2015: 87-88).⁹

Human baseness and the small-minded meanness of the universe of the Thörl house take us back to the moral debris of the concentration camp which dehumanizes man to the point of reducing him to less than an animal; to a thing:

Noi giacevamo in un mondo di morti e di larve. L'ultima traccia di civiltà era sparita intorno a noi e dentro di noi. L'opera di bestializzazione, intrapresa dai tedeschi trionfanti, era stata portata a compimento dai tedeschi disfatti [...] Parte del nostro esistere ha sede nelle anime di chi ci accosta: ecco perché è non-umana l'esperienza di chi ha vissuto giorni in cui l'uomo è stato una cosa agli occhi dell'uomo (Levi 2014: 169).¹⁰

Patricia as a thing, in this inordinately mad universe, becomes a sexual object which the Thörls hand down from father to son, from generation to generation. Sexual violence fulfills their most sinister fleshly desires and here again *La bella addormentata nel frigo* (*Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*) recounts the horror of what is possible and the horrendous reality of the very middle class Thörls, the concentration camps and humanity.

In the last pages of the story, Patricia tells Baldur, the guest who falls in love with her and with whom she plans her imminent escape, about the secret sexual intercourse with the men of the family during the hundred and forty years in the fridge. Speaking about the father of Peter Thörl, she says:

Mi faceva la corte, in quel modo buffo che usava allora: per otto disgeli, mi fece la corte...si direbbe che i Thörl ce l'abbiano nel sangue, in questo, posso dirlo, si rassomigliano tutti. Non hanno...come dire? Non hanno un'idea molto seria del rapporto di tutela...pensi che perfino il Capostipite, il Patriarca... (Levi 2015: 95-96).¹¹

It is Lotte Thörl, Peter's wife, who insinuates that there was something between her husband and Patricia:

Era roba da scorticarla! E poi, e poi...non sono mai riuscita ad avere delle prove, a coglierli sul fatto, ma siete proprio sicuri, voi, che tra il tutore e la ragazza tutto si sia sempre svolto alla luce del sole? In altre parole, (con forza) che tutti gli scongelamenti siano stati regolarmente registrati sul libretto personale? Io no. Io non ne sono sicura (Levi 2015: 96)¹².

Before running away with Baldur, Patricia confesses to him: "Other things, yes. His visits, in the night. At thirty-three degrees, just warm, when I couldn't defend myself at all. And as I didn't speak, of course! He perhaps imagined ..." (Levi, 2015: 101).

This heroine, endowed with coldness and rationality, will be able to escape from de Lager-Thörl. In order to succeed, she manipulates the unfortunate Baldur, making him believe she will escape with

him, whereas in reality she is only using him to escape from the nightmare and freeze of the Thörls. She wishes to go to America to save one of her male peers who is frozen in another fridge.

Even Levi, albeit in a different way, manages to save himself, but not through a clever plan as in the case of Patricia (it should not be forgotten that 'Sleeping beauty in the fridge' is a science fiction story built outside the boundaries of reality and as an overcoming of itself, like its parody) but because he was as strong as a man can be, in spirit and flesh. Levi is "the Golem who was a servant who did not want to be a servant" (Levi 2015: 337). This extraordinary example of strength and physical and moral endurance enabled him to return home, to write *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*) and to publish it. He was 'saved'. After twenty years, which was the length of time between the Holocaust novel and *Storie naturali* (*Natural Histories*), the character of Patricia breathes new life into him. Patricia too is to be 'saved'; she goes to America and records her role in history in an intimate diary telling of the horrors she lived through. She tells Baldur that she wants to publish it once she has left the Thörls' concentration camp. So Levi and Patricia are both victims who are saved, the heroes of the evil in the story, and their writing bears the harshest witness to the evil of the Third Reich.

Patricia enacts a story which is a parody of Auschwitz and at the same time an archetype of the Sleeping Beauty of traditional tales.

In the three versions of the Sleeping Beauty discussed by Bruno Bettelheim in his influential essay *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, the version by Giambattista Basile, *Sole, Luna e Talia* in *Il Pentamerone/Pentamerón. El cuento de los Cuentos* (1634 [2019]), the version by Charles Perrault in *Mother Goose Tales/I racconti di Mamma oca* (1697 [2016]) and that by the Grimm brothers in *Children's and Household Tales/Tutte le Fiabe* (1812[2015]), the protagonist is always shown as a beautiful maiden, passive, unconscious, unaware, sweet and vulnerable. She is saved by the prince's kiss after a long period of death-like slumber. The narrative encapsulates the complete passivity of the female character; in Patricia's case it is represented by more than a hundred years' hibernation in fridge and in the traditional tale by the hundred years' slumber. But this lethargy or torpor alternates with frenetic activity, outside the fridge for Patricia, and with re-awakening for the Sleeping Beauties before her. Bettelheim's essay notes the theme of the necessary, prolonged and intense concentration of the young girl on herself. Lethargy is necessary for her to get to know herself, rediscover her femininity and gather the strength she needs for the adventures in the period of activity once the right of passage from adolescence to adulthood is completed. This long period of introspection, rest and contemplation makes great conquests a possibility for the girl, once her own identity has been constructed by understanding and dominating the external and internal world. Hibernation is in some way a preparation for sexual maturity and

union with the other sex (Bettelheim, 1977: 311), but the traditional tales show a beautiful girl who is a victim of a destiny which only the love of a man can overcome. Levi, on the other hand, reverses or parodies the myth. Patricia is a postmodern heroine, a superwoman with a super-ego, a Sleeping Beauty who is calculating, sentimentally frigid, strong, rational and without empathy. As soon as she is ready, she decides to leave her frozen hibernation and chooses to live her new life independently. She devises a plan to reach her objectives, saves herself and escapes. The eternal myth of the Sleeping Beauty in the wood, saved by the prince's kiss, in Levi's story becomes the story of a Princess Charming who runs away to an unknown and distant land to save a Sleeping Prince from the fridge.¹³

Notes

¹. See Ibsen, *Casa de muñecas (The Doll's house)* (2007). Breaking down the fourth wall is typical of bourgeois theatre and defines Ibsen's theatre. It is a technical innovation which makes it possible for the audience to know about the past of a character. The playwright creates another character often of no intrinsic interest, serving only as a confidant to the protagonist and the audience in order to convey information, emotions and clarifications necessary to the story. Ibsen endows this functional character with their own personality, so that the character becomes the hero / heroine of an independent mini-tragedy. This becomes additional to the main plot and thus weakens the verisimilitude of the play. In *The Doll's House*, Cristina Linde, a friend of Nora Helmer, the protagonist, is the character charged with telling the audience about Nora's past. Levi, in *Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*, also uses this expedient and has Lotte Thörl interact as our confidant, creating complicity between the two worlds of the stage and the audience. We find out almost everything about Patricia, the main character, through the secrets that Lotte reveals.

2. So this year too has passed, we are again on December 19th, and we are waiting for guests for the usual little party [...] On the other hand we Thörl do not receive often: two, three times a year, and we rarely accept invitations. That is obvious: no one can offer their guests what we can offer. There are those who have beautiful old paintings, Renoir, Picasso, Caravaggio [...] but we have Patricia ... (sigh) Patricia! (Levi 2015: 86). (My translation from the Italian).

3. The Greek etymology «*παρα ὄδη*» of the word parody shows that its meaning is close to song, or dissolving of the very words of the song (Belpoliti, 2015: X).

4. "*Muselmann*" was the term used to refer to the weak, inept "overwhelmed" by the selection in the extermination camp where Primo Levi was deported.

5. [...] Here the struggle to survive is without remission, because everyone is desperately, ferociously alone [...] because it is in no-one's interest to have a "*Muselmann*" drag themselves to work every day; and if with a miracle of savage patience and cunning, one of them finds a new way of escaping from the hardest work, a new skill that yields a few grams of bread, they will try to keep it secret, and will be esteemed and respected, and will derive exclusive personal benefit; they will grow stronger, and will thus be feared, and one who is feared is, *ipso facto*, a candidate for survival (Levi, 2014: 84-85). (My translation from the Italian).

⁶ She had all the requisites; heart, lungs, kidneys, etc., in perfect order; the nervous system of a space pilot; an imperturbable and resolute character, limited emotionality, and finally a good level of culture and intelligence. Not that culture and intelligence are essential for enduring hibernation, but all things being equal, subjects of a high intellectual level were preferred, for obvious reasons of prestige for us and our successors (Levi, 2015: 90). (My translation from the Italian).

⁷ But she's beautiful and no one can deny it, and she's also very well educated, polite, intelligent, audacious; she is wonderful in every way, and she frightens me, she makes me uncomfortable and gives me a complex. (Getting carried away; she falls silent, embarrassed, then making an effort, goes on) ... but I love her very much anyway. Especially when she's frozen (Levi, 2015: 89). (My translation from the Italian).

⁸. See M. Zambrano (1988). Philosophical reflections on the nightmare of the moment of awakening can be found in Levi in both *If This is a Man* and in the story of *Sleeping Beauty*. Zambrano finds “the first instant of awakening to be the most fraught with danger, as the reader moves from feeling the weight of the nightmare monster to emptiness. It is an instant of uncertainty which precedes consciousness and forces it to arise. It is an instant of turmoil because nothing is as frightening as meeting oneself”. (My translation from the Spanish.)

9. So, is there a defrosting tonight? How wonderful! [...] The moment of awakening is the most interesting: she is so pretty when she opens her eyes! [...] Does she suffer when she thaws out? No, not as a rule. But you have to do things properly, follow the directions exactly. And while she is in the fridge, the temperature absolutely has to be kept constant within very tight limits. Of course: just a few degrees too cold and that’s the end, I read that something, I don’t know what, coagulates in the nerve centers, and then they won’t wake up anymore, or they wake up stupid and forgetful; a few degrees higher and they regain consciousness, and suffer dreadfully. [...] she is beautiful, I have heard: is it true? A splendor. I saw her up close last year: the sort of complexion you never see any more today. [...] Her skin is like a baby’s, I think it’s the effect of the freezing, though. Her color isn’t natural, it is too pink and too white, it looks ... yes, it looks like ice cream (Levi, 2015: 87-88). (My translation from the Italian).

10. We lay in a world of dead and larvae. The last trace of civilization had disappeared around us and inside us. The work of bestializing undertaken by the triumphant Germans had been completed by the defeated Germans [...]. Part of our existence lies in the souls of those who are near us: this is why the experience of those who lived days when man was a thing in the eyes of man is non-human experience (Levi, 2014: 169). (My translation from the Italian).

11. He flirted with me, in that funny way people did then: for eight thaws, he courted me ... you could say that the Thörls have it in their blood, and in this, I can say, they are all alike. They don’t have ... how can I put it? They don’t take the role of a guardian very seriously ... just think that even the head of the family, the Patriarch ... (Levi, 2015: 95-96). (My translation from the Italian).

12. She should have been flogged! Over and over again! ... I have never found any real evidence, or caught them in the act, but are you really sure that everything between the tutor and the girl happened in the full light of day? In other words, (emphatically) that all defrostings were properly recorded in the book? I’m not. I’m not sure (Levi, 2015: 96). (My translation from the Italian).

13. On *Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* of the traditional tales, regarding which Primo Levi makes an interesting reversal in his postmodern version of *Sleeping Beauty in the Fridge*, I intend to work more deeply in the future, thus expanding the interpretative perspectives of this archetypal female character.

REFERENCES

- Agamben G (2005) *Profanazioni*. Roma: Nottetempo.
- Basile G (2019) *Pentamerón. El Cuento de los Cuentos*. Madrid: Siruela.
- Belpoliti M (2015) *Primo Levi di Fronte e di Profilo*. Milano: Guanda.
- Bettelheim B (1977) *Psicoanálisis de los Cuentos de Hadas*. Barcelona : Editorial Crítica.
- Dell’Aia L (2012) Parodia e profanazione. In: Dell’Aia L (ed) *Studi su Agamben*. Milano: Ledizioni, pp. 24-32.
- Grimm J and Grimm W (2015) *Tutte le Fiabe*, ed. C. Miglio. Roma: Donzelli Editore.
- Ibsen H (2007) *Casa de muñecas*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra.
- Levi P (1994) *Il sistema Periodico*. Torino: Einaudi.

Levi P (2014) *Se questo è un Uomo*. Torino: Einaudi.

Levi P (2015) *Tutti i Racconti*, ed. M. Belpoliti. Torino: Einaudi.

Perrault C (2016) *I Racconti di Mamma oca*. Milano: RLI.
