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From Transition to Transformation: Liminality, Mask, and Identity in R. J. Palacio «Wonder» / От перехода к трансформации: ограниченность, маска и идентичность в «Чуде» Р. Дж. Паласио

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Аннотация: В статье исследуется отделение главного героя Августа Пуллмана в романе «Чудо», написанном Р.Дж.Паласио, от его предыдущего мира, который является его домом, и реинтеграция в его общество. Это исследование выполнено в русле литературной критики. Она посвящена прослеживанию функций лиминальности и психологического развития в вымышленном постмодернистском романе "Чудо". Как и почти все постмодернистские детские романы, «Чудо» в основном вращается вокруг смены личности главного героя и проливает свет на нее. Используя психоаналитический подход и теорию Карла Юнга об интроверсии и экстраверсии, в статье анализируется, как Августу удается преодолеть разрыв между тем, каким человеком он себя чувствует, и тем, каким его видят остальной мир. В ней изображено его путешествие в поисках своей настоящей личности. Новизна данного исследования заключается в использовании концепции лиминальности, взаимосвязанной с психоаналитической теорией, при изучении романа. Цель статьи - изобразить путешествие героя, переступающего порог в поисках социального признания. Кроме того, в романе показано развитие личности героя от интроверта к ребенку-экстраверту. Результаты исследования показывают, что роман является примером ограниченности и интроверсии/экстраверсии посредством применения антропологической концепции ритуалов перехода и ограниченности параллельно с использованием теоретического подхода К.Г. Юнга к психоанализу интроверсии и экстраверсии. В конечном счете, личность главного героя развивается на протяжении всей истории параллельно с его реинтеграцией в свое общество.

Ключевые слова:

обряды посвящения, лиминальность, порог, экстраверт, интроверт, идентичность, маска, Carl Jung, Turner, Van Gennep

Introduction:

Relevance of the study. Wonder (2014) is one of R. J. Palacio's noticeable novels that shed light on the theme of "Coming of Age" in the liminal phase. Since the protagonist, Auggie, is only around ten and eleven years old, "Arriving at Adolescence" would be a more accurate definition of this particular work [1, p. 34]. Despite not quite being adult yet, the hero is going through a significant change from childhood to adolescence. This transgression is depicted in Auggie's shift from the extremely warm, safe shell of his family to the cruel

hallways of middle school.

The concept of liminality and thresholds has been a theme of discussion in contemporary children's literature. This threshold denotes the moment in children's literature when a character is confronted with a situation (when in the liminal state) where he must decide whether to advance to a new threshold or reintegrate to a familiar location. This concept in children's literature is well explained in the article written by Jill May entitled *Theory and Textual Interpretation: Children's Literature and Literary Criticism*. In this article, May described the various methods of crossing thresholds stating "the common motif found in children's literature – including gates, doors, roads, tones of light and dark signify thresholds of experience and imply social change for the real and literary child" [2, p. 83]. Usually crossing the threshold is accompanied with a type of change and liminality "is such a concept—a prism through which to understand transformations" [3, p. 11]. The concept of liminality is frequently used in literature, most prominently when characters develop, evolve, and discover new things about themselves or their surroundings. Based on the background above, the aim of this research is to investigate the three phases of the Rites of passage by depicting the separation of the protagonist from his previous world (home); surviving in liminality, then his successful reintegration in society.

On the other hand, the development psychology of man's life stages has repeatedly examined adolescence and adulthood. Psychological concepts like initiation, identity change, and developmental crisis all overlap in descriptions of various life phases [4, p. 95]. Out of all the stages of human existence, in children's literature, the two stages of adulthood that are most popular among readers are adolescence and initiation. "Rites of passage accompany changes that occur in the lives of individuals" [4, p. 95]. Thus, this research investigates and discusses the psychological changes that accompany crossing the three phases of rites of passage that the protagonist witnessed throughout the novel. In this sense, this article aims to integrate the Rites of Passage structure proposed by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner with psychological theory of introversion and extroversion introduced by Carl Jung.

Research objectives: This article intends to study the structure of the Rites of passage, with paying close attention to second phase of liminality. Also, it traces in parallel the psychological transformation while crossing the three phases of the rites of passage. Furthermore, the study investigates school as liminal place. Plus, it explores the idea of the mask as a motif that emphasizes liminality and implies psychological transformation from introversion to extroversion.

Methods. In order to explore these tasks, the theory of Rites of Passage is applied—particularly the concept of liminality as defined by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner—to the psychological theory of extroversion and introversion that is conducted by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung.

Research materials. Fundamental literary works of considerable writers, which are devoted to the study of liminality and psychology, have been used to achieve this study (Anfara, 2015; Armstrong, 2012 Cain, Segnini, Langley, 2012; Tzanelli, 2014, Eldiasty, 2020. Horvath, 2018).

Practical significance. Discussing how crossing phases of Rites of Passage is accompanied with psychological change in the novel of Wonder. The article contributes to children's literature criticism, in the sense that it sheds light on children's anthropological and psychological development in parallel.

Since the study is made in the lence of literary criticism, research materials can be used in different academic spheres. Also, the acquired results can be used in anthropological studies, psychoanalytical criticism. It benefits scientists in the literary field and future young researchers of English literature.

Discussion of the results:

The concept of "Rites of Passage" appeared for the first time in the book written by the French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep "Les rites de passage" (1909). Van Gennep states three main stages of the rites of passage: "pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal" [\[5, p. 21\]](#). Influenced by Gennep's theory, Victor Turner, the British cultural anthropologist, popularized the second phase of liminality in his essay: "Between and Betwixt: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1967). According to Turner, individuals crossing the threshold "find themselves thrust into what is known as the liminal space — the 'precarious in-between' place that bridges 'what is' and 'what can or will be'" [\[6, p. 159\]](#). As an analytical tool, liminality implies a threshold between two areas, an anteroom separate from that of "which could be said to be definitely inside or outside, here and there. The term ambiguity literally refers to 'both ways', and one who is located in the space of the liminal must be ever at tuned to the presence of adverse or conflicting possibilities" [\[7, p. 13\]](#). This article investigates the protagonist crossing the phase of liminality in the novel *Wonder* (2012) written by R. J. Palacio. Psychologically speaking, wonder is a Bildungsrom a novel, which is a novel that "focuses on the development of a character moving from childhood to maturity" [\[8, p. 53\]](#). Also, it is defined as "a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character" [\[9, p. 26\]](#). This study depicts the protagonist's development of personality from an introvert to an extrovert throughout the novel.

According to McCallum, "The consciousness or identity formation is an ongoing process, shaped through dialogue with society, language, culture, and is subject to rapid and radical changes" [\[10, p. 31\]](#). *Wonder* (2012) is about a ten-year-old boy, who is going to witness a drastic, social, and psychological change by going to school for the first time in his life. Since his birth, August Pullman, nicknamed Auggie, suffers from a genetic disorder (craniofacial) that caused him a facial deformity. Because "of all the surgeries [he has] had. Twenty-seven since [he] was born" [\[11, p. 4\]](#). Auggie has never been to school before; instead he was home-schooled by his mother.

Despite the deformity, Auggie considers himself a normal kid. However, for his parents, he is "extraordinary" [\[11, p. 31\]](#). It is common that Parents of disabled kids possess specific characteristics like "[h]ostility, denial, grief, guilt, defense mechanisms of all types, and a positive goal of acceptance" [\[12, p. 381\]](#). His sister Via considers him as "[...]the Sun. Me and Mom and Dad are planets orbiting the Sun. The rest of our family and friends are asteroids and comets floating around the planets orbiting the Sun" [\[11, p. 82\]](#). Overprotected and over loved is how Auggie has been living. However, his parents realize that their child is growing and they "can't keep protecting him" [\[11, p. 10\]](#) anymore. So, they decided to send him to an ordinary school, marking the seperation of Auggie's past life. In anthropology, the term "Rite of Passage" was coined "to encapsulate rituals that symbolize the transition of an individual or a group from one status to another" [\[13, p. 3932\]](#). According to

Thomas Armstrong, "the concept of rites of passage is a useful one in comprehending the broad picture of the human life cycle. It helps articulate the underlying psychological forces,

and the overt socio-cultural forces, that help an individual make the transition from one stage of development to the next" [14, p. 7]. Besides, it represents the "ceremonies that mark personal or collective changes of identity" [13, p. 3932]. Van Gennep identified three main phases, which are in the following sequence: "(1) separation, (2) a transitional period with gradual removal of barriers, and (3) reintegration into ordinary life" [5, p. 44]. The first phase, or the spatial isolation of separate group or individual, according to Van Gennep, is one of the characteristic of social structure [5: 192]. In the preliminal rite, the participant experiences a "separation from previous surroundings" [5, p. 20]. Auggie is on the edge of separation, even though sending him to school, after all these years, is like "sending a lamb to the slaughter[...]not knowing that something unpleasant is going to happen" [11, p. 43]. However, Auggie requires more than his mother's teaching.

Auggie has nothing against going to school, on the contrary, he wants "to go to school, but only if [he] could be like every other kid going to school" [11, p. 4]. He is just afraid to be judged and rejected from the other kids in school, as he has always been in society. "YA literature abounds with novels that address identity as a literary theme" [15, p. 2], and *Wonder* is no exception. Because of his facial deformity, Auggie is suffering physically and emotionally to accept himself and make others accept him as well. "Self-acceptance can be a hard-fought battle for many teens and YA characters. Their circumstances at home, school, or in certain relationships can make it difficult for them to share their traumatic pasts [...]. Protagonists who suffer from depression, social anxiety, and other mental health disorders may also isolate themselves for fear of rejection despite their craving for connection" [15, p. 4]. His deformity lies at the heart of his self-identification, however, Auggie is aware that "ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. [He knows that] ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go" [15, p. 11]. Eventually, he could not confront this inconsolable grief and dull suffering, and he ended up completely isolated.

In the preliminal phase, Auggie's personality is characterized with internalizing issues such as: shyness, sadness, and introversion; in addition to externalizing issues such as: fits of rage and little disruptive behavior. In his *Personality Types* (1921), C.G.Jung, the German psychologist, formulates his famous theory of extraversion and introversion: "Introversion or extraversion, as a typical attitude, means an essential bias which conditions the whole psychic process, establishes the habitual mode of reaction, and thus determines not only the style of behaviour but also the quality of subjective experience" [16, p. 508]. Jung makes a distinction between introvert and extravert as "less impassioned and more active" type describes the extravert, and the "more impassioned and less

active" type the introvert" [16, p. 158]. The introvert possesses specific distinguishing features concerning his overall attitude, personal relationships, and even the course of his life. Moreover, Jung claims that "[A] tense attitude is in general characteristic of the introvert" [16, p. 268]; which definitely applies to Auggie. Generally, "[T]he introvert shuts himself up with his complexes until he ends in complete isolation" [16, p. 524]. Auggie isolates himself from the outside world, because he is battling a relentless emotions of inferiority to other kids, and this "feeling of inferiority that is characteristic of the introvert" [16, p. 84]. "The great inner uneasiness inspired in man by the phenomena of the external world" [16, p. 273] is nothing other than the introvert's fear of all stimuli and change, occasioned by his deeper sensitivity and powers of realization. His abstractions serve the

avowed purpose of confining the irregular and changeable within fixed limits. Not only Auggie is petrified to quit his "former identities" [\[11, p. 3932\]](#); even his mom "seemed more scared than [he] was" [\[11, p. 23\]](#).

Going to school means that, Auggie crosses the liminal phase hoping for social change and acceptance. Le Tourneau explains how difficult and challenging this period of transition is, because of the pressure of responsibility, and seeking for freedom and respect is getting higher. However, "at the heart of this transition stage between childhood and adulthood lies an existential dilemma: figuring out who you are" [\[15, p. 11\]](#). "Murphy and his colleagues have suggested that, the study of ritual provides a powerful metaphor for the study of the status of persons with disabilities" [\[17, p. 235\]](#). These disabled may usefully be described as living in a liminal state, in Victor Turner's words, "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" [\[6, p. 95\]](#). As a result, the disabled is trapped in a situation of transition between social emergence and isolation. Auggie feels "liminal" and rejected from the official social system until he proves himself capable of acceptance. For the ritual participant, the liminal period is characterized with ambiguity. Turner considers "liminality as centred on the idea of the threshold and the enactment of rites that offer the possibility of passage from anxiety to social integration and even to domestic perfection" [\[7, p. 72\]](#).

School is a "purposeful social cooperation" [\[18, p. 92\]](#). Giroux claims that "School culture is really a battleground on which meanings are defined, knowledge is legitimated, and futures are sometimes created and destroyed" [\[19, p. 133\]](#). It is a foreign place, a dislocation which creates a sense of the liminal, a mental state of confusion and disorientation that is both uncomfortable and productive. Grimes referred to this social state as one of "social limbo" [\[20, p. 149\]](#). Schools prepare kids for life by teaching them what occurs when rules are broken. They can learn about the "risks" of questioning what the school (and society) values. The consequences of one's actions and struggles during this transition time may not be as serious or harmful as they would be in the actual world.

These teachings are carried over into adulthood. In fact, as Miron and Lauria points out that, students may obtain the most valuable information of all, and most importantly they obtain "self-knowledge and knowledge of social identity" [\[21, p. 41\]](#).

Those who are in a liminal state, according to Turner, are referred to as "threshold people" [\[6, p. 95\]](#). The title of a "student", economically speaking, indicates marginality, until he is able to embrace his social status and position [\[22, p. 198\]](#). When a student's formal education is accomplished, he or she is expected to be capable of contributing to society. Sergiovanni noted, in his recent book, that schools are "special places" that stand between the subjective and protective environment of the family and the objective and exposed environment of the outside world" [\[23, p. Xii\]](#). Features like Safety, nurturing, and caring can characterise Sergiovanni's "special place". He rather compares school to 'community' than to consider it as an organization. The placement of school between the subjective and objective worlds has been referred to as "betwixt and between" in anthropological literature [\[24, p. 21\]](#). Thus, school can be referred to as a liminal place, and a period that occurs between the end of childhood and the start of adulthood.

Anfara claims that "where I would find the most evidence of student resistance I would also find the most evidence of liminality" [\[24, p. 7\]](#). Palacio portrays to what extent Auggie's

experience was not easy at school, and how hard he endures and workstoprovetoothersthatheis anormalkid. Auggie is rejected from almost all the kids in school: "Kids came in laughing and talking in little groups but I didn't look up. Basically, the same thing that happened in homeroom happened again: no one sat next to me except for Jack" [11, p. 53]. He even receives notes which say: "Freak! And another that said: Get out of our school, or!" [11, p. 212]. They even consider him as a 'plague' and feared to come across him to the extent that if anyone "who accidentally touches August has only thirty seconds to wash their hands or find hand sanitizer before they catch the Plague" [11, p. 127]. Even more, he was deceived by the only person who thought he was his only friend "Jack". He heard him talking badly behind his back saying that: "I can't imagine looking in the mirror every day and seeing myself like that. It would be too awful. And getting stared at all the time" [11, p. 85]. However, Auggie proves how smart and serious student he is, despite his deformity and suffering. This phase gives the opportunity to expand his knowledge in different classes like: "English, history, computer, music, and science" [11, p. 71]. For a boy who has never to school before, he could help other kids with their home works and different projects. Jack says that: "I was doing okay in science because August sat next to me and always let me copy his notes. August has the neatest handwriting of anybody I've ever seen" [11, p. 157].

Auggie experienced an intensified isolation, and he yearns for privacy and equality. He declares that: "If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look-away thing" [11, p. 3].

In *Wonder*, Auggie's isolation is manifested through the repeated motif of the mask. The Japanese word for "mask" is kamen, which is composed of two characters; "ka meaning" temporary, "or" provisional, "and men meaning" surface, " "front" or "face" [20, p. 67]. The use of the mask depends on the situation. However, simply meaning, it is meant for "disguise", and "to protect against thinking too hard about how others think of us" [25, p. 16]. The mask Auggie puts is the one "dictated by fears and insecurities, which suffocate and weight on the human being" [26, p. 3]. Since Auggie cannot change the way he looks, he tries to hide his face by wearing an astronaut helmet almost all the time: "When I was little, I used to wear an astronaut helmet everywhere I went. To the playground. To the supermarket. To pick Via up from school. Even in the middle of summer, though it was so hot my face would sweat. I think I wore it for a couple of years" [11, p. 73]. Auggie is not aiming at hiding who he is. Rather, his story is about the struggle to accept himself and make other accept him as well. The mask for him veils his face and exposed the real identity, which justifies his love for all events and holidays that require masks and costumes. They put him on the same level with others: "I get to go around like every other kid with a mask and nobody thinks I look weird" [11, p. 73]. "Costumes are liberating. [...] Anonymity makes people act differently or more extremely than usual. It creates disinhibition" [27: 62-63]. Auggie only dares to stand tall and risk being seen while hiding: "Everything was different now. I was different. Where I usually walked with my head down, trying to avoid being seen, today I walked with my head up, looking around. I wanted to be seen" [11, p. 76]. He feels free from all social rules, shame, and insecurities; in addition, social pressure is easily endured.

The mask, like any uncanny phenomenon, represents in relationship to the self both familiarity and strangeness [28, p. 24]. While people didn't stare at Auggie, they also didn't speak to him. Auggie cannot wear a mask all the time to school; he tries to find another

way to cover his face by growing his hair: "Why is your hair so long?" Julian said to me. He sounded like he was annoyed" [\[11, p. 36\]](#). Auggie gives the answer that "One of the reasons I grew my hair long last year was that I like how my bangs cover my eyes: it helps me block out things I don't want to see" [\[11, p. 21\]](#). These masks effectively cut Auggie off from the rest of the world as if he is in space. Auggie finds himself wondering between two different worlds and identities. His liminality is highly emphasized; being partly isolated and partly integrated, which is somehow problematic. Stern states that, "To translate man back into nature is, he says, to attack the masks that we naturally wear, the masks which we hide behind and which afford us protection and security" [\[25, p. 20\]](#). In Star Wars, Padawan's cut their

braids off when they became actual Jedi knights. Eventually, Auggie decides to cut his braid off: "That night I cut off the little braid on the back of my head. [...] 'That took [...] years to grow!'" [\[11, p. 65\]](#). In fact, what is called "the sacrifice of the hair" includes two distinct operations: cutting the hair, and dedicating, consecrating, or sacrificing it. To cut the hair is to separate oneself from the previous world" [\[5, p. 166\]](#). This incident implies that Auggie does not want to stay in the liminal.

Auggie's personality is developing throughout the novel. Jung states that "If the social function of the introvert concentrates mainly on individuals, it is usually true that the extravert promotes the life of the community, which also has a right to exist. For this extraversion is needed, because it is first and foremost the bridge to one's neighbor" [\[16, p. 168\]](#). He, also, adds that, "the extravert appears more mobile, more full of life and activity" [\[16, p. 158\]](#). Auggie's extroversion is emphasized in the text. "[T]he archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong" [\[29, p. 17\]](#). Auggie became a risk taker: first, when he decided to go to the camp; it was the first time in his life that he travels without his family and sleeps outside the house. And Second, when he disobeyed the principle's orders and decided to take a walk in the dark away from the camp. In this incident, Auggie puts himself into risk when he had a fight with older kids from other school. However, it marked the beginning for Auggie's acceptance and integration; kids from his school defended him like he was their best friend: "Amos, Henry, and Miles---protected me [...] I was different to them. It was like I was one of them" [\[11, p. 282\]](#).

Conclusion:

Wonder by R.J. Palacio proves to be an instance of Arnold van Gennep Rites of Passage and Victor Turner's liminality. The protagonist separated from his old world, which is his home in the novel, where he was completely isolated. This separation represents the pre-liminal phase in van Gennep rites. After the separation, August enters the transitional phase where he tried to survive both psychological and environmental conflicts. The threshold space between permanent phases is represented by liminality. School in the novel proves to be a liminal place where the possibility of societal and self-transformation is provided. However, it represents an ambiguous place for Auggie who has never been to school in his life. **As a result of this study;** Crossing this threshold embraces significant challenge, it also present a significant potential for growth and transformation. While experiencing liminality, what is first taken as certain, is challenged and thrown into doubt. However these doubts free and open doors for different possibilities and opportunities. Liminal people have a distinctive way of mobility in the world: the flexibility to travel beyond social boundaries. Auggie is

successfully reintegrated into society through a separation from the sacred transitory phase. After a long struggle to fit in school, Auggie eventually is reintegrated into society after a long period of intensified isolation. This physical ritual: pre-liminal, liminal, and post liminality is accompanied with a psychological transformation. The pre-liminal phase that the hero witnessed is characterized with introverted identity. The liminal phase is characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty and intensified isolation; where the hero tried to isolate himself using different ways in order to mask his face. Getting rid of all kind of masks symbolizes reintegration or the post-liminal that is characterized with extroversion. The protagonist did not only separate from his old world but also from his old identity as being an introverted insecure kid and integrated in society with a whole new confident extroverted identity. Crucial questions needed to get answers. **The prospects for further research:** This research opens the door for further researches to focus on the criticism of children's liminality and the changes that accompany this phase not only in American postmodern novels, but also in the field of comparative literature in order to compare the changes between different world's postmodern literatures.

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Результаты процедуры рецензирования статьи

В связи с политикой двойного слепого рецензирования личность рецензента не раскрывается.

Со списком рецензентов издательства можно ознакомиться [здесь](#).

Представленная на рассмотрение статья «От перехода к трансформации: ограниченность, маска и идентичность в «Чуде» Р. Дж. Паласио», предлагаемая к публикации в журнале «Филология: научные исследования», несомненно, является актуальной. Актуальность исследования определяется сформировавшейся в постмодернистской литературе потребностью в осмыслении новых литературных теорий и критики, применяемых в романе, представленном в постмодернистской прозе в целом и в творчестве Р. Дж. Паласио в частности.

Исследование нарушает общепринятые научные подходы, а именно структуру работы, которая традиционно состоит из введения, содержащего постановку проблемы, что отсутствует в рецензируемой статье. В связи с чем возникает вопрос об используемой, глубокоуважаемой автором, методологии, целях и задачах исследования. Ввиду неясных задач, невозможно проанализировать заключительную часть исследования, традиционно содержащую выводы, которые, собственно говоря, фактически отсутствуют. По нашему мнению, логично начать статью с обзора разработанности как теоретических вопросов, рассматриваемых автором, так и собственно работ, посвященных изучению данного вопроса, что позволило бы выделить научную лакуну и показать новизну исследования. Из вводной части неясны задачи исследования. В основной части, традиционно начинающейся с обзора теоретических источников и научных направлений, данная информация отсутствует, ввиду чего напрашивается вывод 1) насколько широко изучена проблематика вопроса, 2) какая научная лакуна была выявлена, и какая проблема решается в рамках рецензируемой работы. Считаем, что необходимо усиление данной части с позиции изучения истории вопроса. Собственно статья не представляет научного интереса, так как является сугубо авторской интерпретацией действительности и не решает научной задачи.

Библиография статьи насчитывает 27 источников, среди которых представлены исключительно зарубежные труды. Однако, как и любая крупная работа, данная статья не лишена недостатков. Обратим внимание на качество библиографического списка. Так, статья представлена на английском языке, однако удивление вызывает библиографический список, который не включает ни одной работы на русском языке. Возникает вопрос – какой цели хотел достичь глубокоуважаемый автор, публикующаяся на английском языке, пересказать зарубежные теории зарубежным лингвистам? Или в отечественной филологии не были проведены исследования рассматриваемой темы или смежной тематики? Так, в статье отсутствуют ссылки на фундаментальные работы, такие как монографии, кандидатские и докторские диссертации. Большее количество ссылок на авторитетные работы, такие как монографии, докторские и/или кандидатские диссертации по смежным тематикам, которые могли бы усилить теоретическую составляющую работы в русле отечественной научной школы.

Статья, несомненно, будет полезна широкому кругу лиц, филологам, магистрантам и аспирантам профильных вузов. Статья «От перехода к трансформации: ограниченность, маска и идентичность в «Чуде» Р. Дж. Паласио» может быть рекомендована к публикации несмотря на несколько замечаний.