

## SEDUCING A CHILD INTO BETRAYAL

1. In 1829 Prosper Merimee published a small novella, *Mateo Falcone*, which he later inserted as the first one in his collection of novellas *Mosaïque*, published in 1833. He obviously liked it.

Mateo Falcone is a Corsican, living very simply and relatively well off, with a great reputation in the neighbourhood. He lives on the border of the ordered world, having his contact with both is world and the world of the Corsican underground, in the marquis. One day he leaves with his wife to look after sheep, leaving his only son, the only child still at home, ten years old, back. The boy hears during the day shooting and soon he sees a fugitive, a bandit, wounded, who obviously is chased by the local authorities. The bandit comes to the boy and with the help of persuasion and the boy hides him in a haystack. The boy is seduced, but it is to help a living person who, a far relative, belongs to the world of his father.

Very soon the pursuers appear. Then later, again a relative, a more important one, is very soon sure that the boy knows where the bandit is. In fact the precocious child is too proud not to show this, he plays games but he refuses to tell where the pursued man is. Then the leader shows a watch with a chain and promises the child to give it to him if he betrays the brigand. The seduction scene is painstakingly written. The watch touches the skin of the child, bringing the child into real contact with this other world, where the man is. He is captured and the child gets the watch. Before the man is carried away the parents show up. The father at first is delighted that the bandit is captured, anyhow he says so, but then he discovers that his son betrayed him. The bandit shows his contempt for the house where he was betrayed and is carried off. Then the father smashes the watch and goes with the child into the wood, to the border of a small ravine, orders him to say his prayers and shoots him. He cannot stand that his son is a traitor. He cannot live with it.

Of course we can see this story is fiction from a time long ago about people not exactly like us, only a curiosity, a story how ferocious people once were. But in that case a reader, who reads carefully, could not be so stricken by what is happening. In one manner or another it clearly is about us, what exactly is happening?

Certainly there is very much in this very important short story.

The following notes are only first impressions.

### 1. **The seduction of a child.**

The first impression reading the story could be that it is about the (old fashioned) honour of a father, living in a curious, backward country, the old Corsica, who kills his son so save his honour and who by doing this in fact destroys his life and the life of his wife. Nevertheless, the part about the seduction of the child by the relative, who chases the bandit, is very carefully written. So Merimee wishes to tell more.

The story gives the impression that the child is deduced by the watch. Nevertheless, that cannot be wholly true. The man who is seducing the child is equally carefully described in his doings. It is not the watch, which in the end seduces the child, destroying it by that

very fact, but it is the man. An important relative, an important man in society, who offers one of the symbols of his importance to the child. He is ruthless, because he can know or at least fear, which will in the end, be the consequences for the child. He puts himself outside of the law of the father, above that law. He shows that he is more important than the father and his law and all he has the symbols of this importance. One of these symbols he offers the child.

The child comes into the fascination of this being, of the sacred, coming from this man and it gives in to the fascination. In this watch he gets the token of belonging to this higher order, this more important being. He betrays not only the bandit. He betrays this father and the world of his father. So in the end the father finds a son who betrayed him and everything worthwhile for him. There cannot be a relationship between them any longer. The now exasperated child, who immediately understands what happened when he is again in the neighbourhood of his father, again in the mimesis with him, has to die.

Seduced into betraying. Very probably this happens nowadays much more than it happened in the first decades of the XIXth century. Children, seduced to betray their parents, in Nazi-Germany, in communist states, in all these totalitarian states all over the world. Children seduced into betrayal in criminal cases, often sending things which were or are not true at all, only saying them because in some manner they know that these mighty, very important, fear-imposing, blinding, sacred people wish them to say these things. Seduced in betrayal in the eternal powerfights of their parents and of all people around them.

Children are more in the mimesis with others than older people are, although of course many older people too are seduced into betrayal? They are more open. They are child, just to be in the mimesis and learn. But this means that children very easily “know”, without knowing, what is in the person who deduces them, they know their expectations and then they say what is expected or wished, just because it is expected and wished.

Maybe some remember in this context the investigations, by which is found out if children were abused at home or elsewhere. If they play with a doll in a certain manner, so is the theory of the investigators, then that is a clear indication that that is the case. The doctor or the social worker gives the doll to a child and the child knows already, that something special is on. It has already lost its freedom and is unable to do as normal. It plays already a game. It gives its attention to this person and it does what this person expects, just because it is expected, and the more the doctor or the social worker is excited because of all the abuse she or he discovers, the more she or he certainly discovers, because the more excited she or he is, the more the child obliges. It is ruthless, as the adjutant in the story is ruthless. People who use their place in society, persons who have sacred around them, who impose on the children, seduce them into their “truth”, their obsessions and use their power time and again, in fact against the children, letting them break their lifelines, making them objects of care, making them important in a manner which forever destroys the open-mindedness of the children and so the possibility really to learn, and it destroys the relationship of the child with its parents, if they are involved, and so the parents themselves. Relationships for the children never will bet he same again. Things are done which never can again be undone.

Off course professional child-seducers, the so-called caring people (I agree of course that this sounds very bitter indeed. These caring people are our victims as the children are, so

I certainly don't wish to make them bad people. Nevertheless and in the time it is necessary to be clear about what they in fact very often are doing..), will defend themselves by stating that it is necessary to "know". To know, e.g. if there was child-abuse, perpetrated on the child. Because of their mimetic power they certainly never really will know. Maybe more important still: How to do something about child-abuse, abusing these very children first of all? If children don't tell out of their own, they certainly don't wish anything to tell. That is the end of it. Instigating children, seducing them into betrayal, is death. The novella Mateo Falcone tells us that graphically.

The Gospel has its text for all this: "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me (which in this context is: who misuses the trust of the innocent child, betraying it), it is better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he were cast into the sea." (Mark 9,42 KJV).

## **2. The betrayal**

Mateo Falcone kills his son. He cannot live with his child who betrayed his house, his honour. But off course, that again is not the whole reality. Honour is more. Honour is identity. He could not live with a son, who wore his name, who would be the master of the house, and who was a betrayer. A betrayer of the values of his father and of the house of his father, a betrayer of the father himself.

Betrayal is something existential. In the case of the betrayal of the fatherland we all know that. The betrayer, the traitor puts himself, by the very act of the betrayal, outside of the community. In time of war he is killed and formerly he certainly was banned. He couldn't belong. Betrayal cuts the very lines of life.

Off course this is felt endlessly many times by betrayed parents in Nazi-Germany, in communist countries, in all countries where the state itself because terrorist, Argentina, Chile. The parents, when they loved their children, probably often understood that their child was seduced into the betrayal. Probably Falcone understood seeing the watch. But existentially this does not count; it does not make the end result better.

So seducing a child into betrayal breaks relationships, breaks persons who are betrayed. Merimee is clear about that too. So when a husband or wife does not trust his or her spouse and seduces a child into betrayal that in fact means that all real relationships have ended. It does not matter any more what happens with the marriage. It is lost, as the child, as the betrayed spouse, as the seducer is lost. Relationships might remain, full of unfreedom and unhappiness, as so many lives nowadays are.

What does it mean to seduce a child into betrayal when the doctor, the social worker use seducing means as a routine with innocent children? It just is crime. Ruthless and heartless. In this manner never the truth, which is what really happened, is found out and eventually families are destroyed only because the child says what the seducer wishes it to say.

But even when there really is child-abuse certainly the truth never is found out, only facts, never more. To get this fact, even if there was child-abuse, the child betrayed the father or whoever, seduced into the betraying. This breaks forever the real bond between the child and the other. The abuser, anyhow too a victim of life, is broken by the child,

by the authorities who first misused the child and then take the power over his or her life, the life of the abuser involved. Nothing good ever can come out of it.

Of course there are many other, important aspects of the investigation of child-abuse. This is only one of them, made very clear by a French novelist at the beginning of the last century, nearly two hundred years ago.