

## Architecture in Literature *Stupor & Tremor* by Amélie Nothomb

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### Abstract

In the postmodern society, where the financial system encourages consummation, huge companies which dominate productions, even artistic products, qualify them as “best sellers”. The “best seller” artistic is originated in consumer societies, in other words, societies identified by their towers. Towers like “Yumimoto” in *Stupor & Tremor*, by Amélie Nothomb. The architecture of these towers coincides with the postmodern development leading to industrial development of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Towers which represent contemporary urbanization, have turned into symbols of the commercial hold on the urban life. The Far East, where the story takes place, with the fast industrial development succeeding the World War II, owns huge towers. Meanwhile, the relationships between the story and its towers are not limited to “commercial gender”. While reading the story, we realize that the architecture of the tower has a direct relationship with the story narrative structure and its writing, which results in a systematic “text-structure”.

Architecture, as the best identity revealing any thought structure and therefore any social structure will be the center of our interest. According to our research, the presence of architecture in this novel has not been studied yet, so in order to support our ideas, we are going to resort to Philippe Boudon and Emile-Auguste Chartier (the philosopher called Alain) to find some definitions for the notion of space and architecture.

As for *Stupor & Tremor*, the tower as a symbol of masculinity, and the tower hierarchy, encompassing misogyny, are the most dominant relationships among all the elements of this novel: precisely like in a tower, where the upper stages are occupied by wealthier and most powerful ones, the same hierarchy will form the relationship among company staff. Regarding the connection between architecture and literature, we are going to restudy the theories put forward by Philippe Hamon

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and Marc Augé, and then, analyze *Stupor & Tremor* and the acting roles of the architectural elements in this text.

Since we have to look for any signs, significant words, sentences, mimics or behaviors to prove the presence of the same hierarchy in the structure of the novel, we will opt for discourse analysis as the most suitable methodology for our research. The same analysis will be applied to lexical field, sentence structure and grammatical elements in order to highlight the relationship mentioned above, throughout the novel.

All through our analysis, we will see that the hierarchy which has conditioned the tower structure, dominates different spaces, in particular, the communication: the one between employees, no matter its type –oral expression, body language, mimic or look. Tower, in spite of being a symbol of progress and development in the world, is still considered as advocating masculine power: only five percent of employees in Yumimoto are women; among these five percent, the only woman who has got a remarkable promotion, has a masculine behavior, in spite of her original beauty. In order to make progress, she has to be hard-working, without a heart, resistant and ambitious. If not, she has to accept the destiny of all the other Japanese women reluctantly: to be an obedient wife and mother, to be silent and to have no wish for herself. So, if a woman in this hierarchical system wishes to make progress, she has to be single and to behave like a man towards women employees who are inferior to her.

The novel is, to some extent, autobiographical because Amélie Nothomb, the author, was born in Belgium and passed her childhood in Japan till the age of five. She returned to Japan to work in Tokyo. Her experience of that period provides the necessary elements to write this novel, in which, the principal character is also named “Amélie”. She was first known as the author of a type of novel known as “Roman de la gare” by French readers, which means an easy novel to read that could be bought at any train station and be read in a short time while the reader is traveling. However, with *Stupor and Tremor*, Amélie Nothomb obtained the most important price of the French Academy and gained a different status.

Amélie, the principal character of *Stupor and Tremor*, is Belgian; Japan is her childhood land. She admires Japanese art and style and always dreams of returning there. Therefore, having obtained her Master’s degree in Japanese language, she restarts her life in this country as a translator. We gradually follow Amélie from her entrance in Yumimoto as a Japanese/French language translator, through her progressive fall and ultimately we find her as a toilet cleaner: Yumimoto ate her like a digestive system and threw out the rest of her; that is why we will find her at the end of her professional life in Yumimoto, as the person in charge of toilet cleanliness. Yet resigning and getting free from this system and this tower, she will get over her fall and failure and make progress quickly.

There is a saying from Aristotle mentioning that nothing will equalize literature: as the first novel of Amélie is published and sent to her ex-superior, she can finally obtain the approval of those who did not tolerate her as a member of Yumimoto.

**Keywords:** Architecture, Tower, Hierarchy, Space, Narrator, Fall