

# **Unmasking the constructed nature of reality: plurality, diversity and world views in *The Slap*, by Christos Tsiolkas.**

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Cita:

Sandra Zapata (2019). *Unmasking the constructed nature of reality: plurality, diversity and world views in The Slap, by Christos Tsiolkas*. Primer congreso internacional de ciencias humanas. Escuela de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires.

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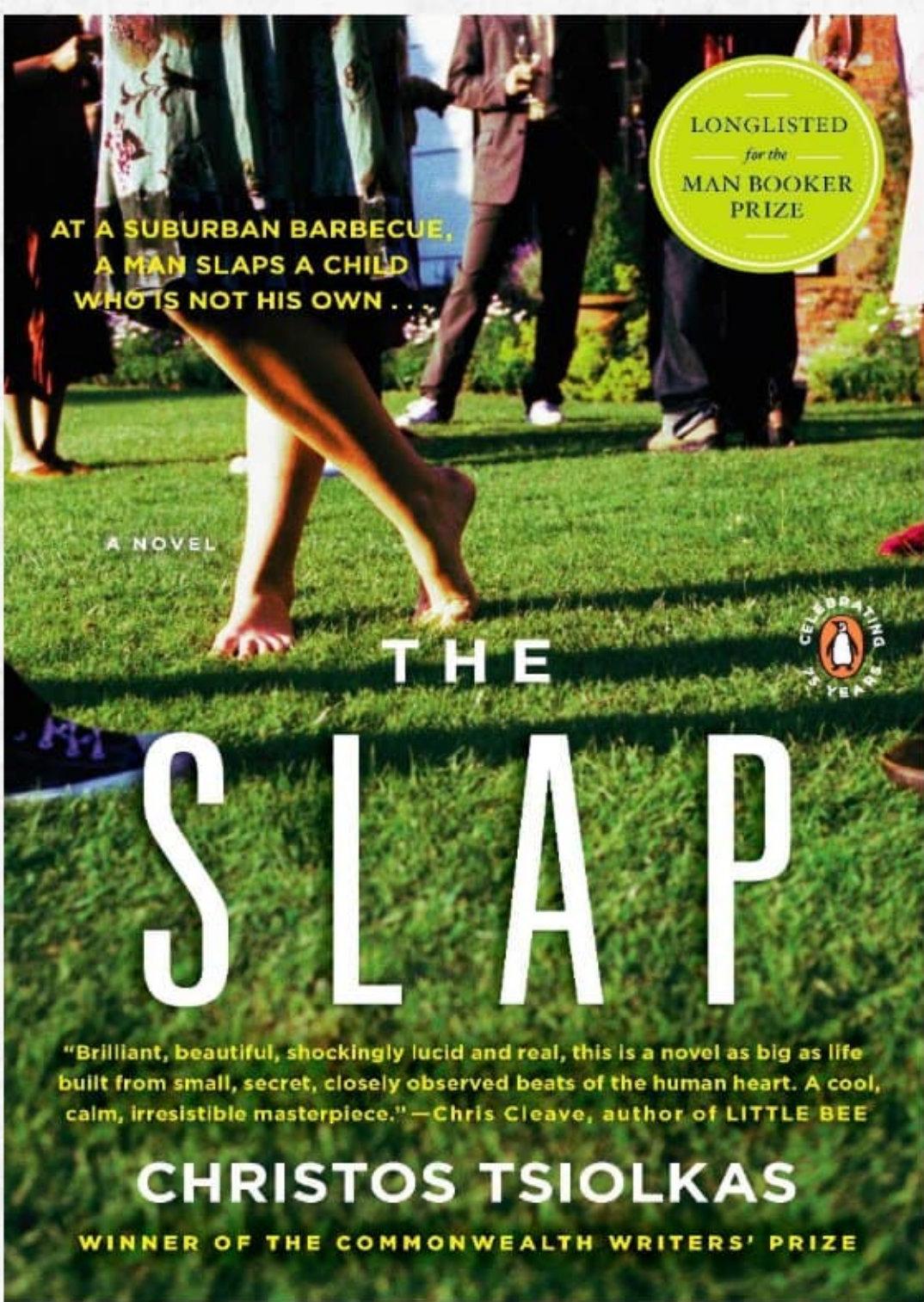




# UNMASKING THE CONSTRUCTED NATURE OF REALITY:

PLURALITY, DIVERSITY AND WORLD VIEWS IN *THE SLAP*  
(2008), BY CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS

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#1 Front cover (2010)

The proliferation of readily distinguishable differences, valued and promoted in contemporary public discourse, creates a tension which is evident in *The Slap*. As a postmodern text, this novel is not organized around a perceiving subject; rather it juxtaposes worlds of incompatible structure, while overlapping and colliding subjectivities are the norm.

The aim of this work is to investigate the discourses, ideologies, and identity negotiation experiences of different characters, as well as to explore the ways in which the novel interrogates conventional representations of reality and truth through a plurality of discourse (which in turn foregrounds ontic dimensions with a focus on power relations).



#2 Harry slapping Hugo

At a middle class family and friends's reunion, a man slaps a child. This raises not only the moral question of whether any adult is ever justified in hitting a kid, but also at stake are the values and lifestyles of the accusers. The novel is told from a prism of different perspectives, which allows for multiple voices -each of the characters offering his or her own version of the truth, tinted by his or her own motives and feelings. This forces the reader to constantly shift their identification, and to question their conclusions.

Given the multi-national and multi-lingual biography of the author, Christos Tsiolkas - an Australian born in Melbourne from Greek parents - the novel can be considered as an ontological variant on the *roman-à-clef*.

Effective communication between the characters is hindered owing to ideological disparities which stem from cultural, religious, class, gender, ethnic and generational differences. Discursive orders mingle promiscuously without gelling into any sort of overarching "superorder". The uneasy juxtaposition of discourses confronts the characters with the unthinkable "other," leading the participants to engage in negotiations as a primary pursuit in their relationship. As well as the centrifugal forces, centripetal forces within a procrustean unitary language become evident in the novel.

The leading question was answered by means of the analysis of each character (a heterogeneous assemblage) and their position with respect to central issues in the novel, their thoughts and beliefs, and how these thoughts and beliefs were linguistically conveyed. The study was informed by critical discourse studies and the analysis of ideological polyphony. The structure of the novel – eight Nouvelles, each from a different standpoint - adds to the overall disruptive effect.

Diversity, ideology, identity, truth, reality, power, register/discourse, ontic dimensions, ideological polyphony heteroglossia and heterotopia are terms considered in this study.

## ANOUK

At a meeting with her friends Aisha and Rosie, Anouk disagrees with Rosie as regards child raising. "I saw Harry slap Hugo. And I saw that Hugo deserved it.(...) We're raising a generation of moral imbeciles, kids who have no sense of responsibility. (...) She wanted her words to be knives, to hurt Rosie. She felt as if she had never detested anything in her life with more passion than her friend's self-righteous conviction." Anouk's and Rosie's perspectives of the situation are conveyed in colliding worlds of discourse, which will eventually draw them apart. (p. 76-77)



#3 Different characters' different versions of the story

## Conclusion

The main conclusion of this research asserts the conflicting nature of the characters' speech in *The Slap* as regards their conveyance of truth and reality owing to ideological differences - which highlights the wide breach (in terms of ideology and discourse) between each of them - Any conventional representation of the novel is disclaimed given its ontological dominant. This study has implications for researchers studying discourse, power, and identity through a critical lens.

## BILAL

By asking for his help, Rosie forces Bilal to act in a way which he had wanted to conceal in the depth of his past. "It happened suddenly. (...) Bilal had become Terry again. (...) I don't want you or your husband or your son in my life. You remind me of a life I don't ever want to go back to." While Bilal buries Terry back, his words foreground Rosie's and his own detached worlds.

(p. 285-287)

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• Tsiolkas, Christos. *The Slap*. New York: Penguin, 2010. (printed)  
• McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1987 (printed)