Candidate 1 evidence

Is the "et" in *No et Moi* inclusive or exclusive?

Delphine De Vigan's *No et Moi* is an insightful novel about a gifted teenager named Lou Bertignac, who meets a young homeless girl named No. They become friends, and Lou attempts to bring No into her world. However, No is unable to join this new world in a durable way and ends up leaving Lou, not without having made a huge impact on her family and life. Throughout the novel, there is a tension between the ideas of separation and inclusion, and it can be argued that this tension is epitomised by the connector "et" in the novel's title: Is this "et" showing the link between the two main characters Lou and No, or does it symbolise the wall separating their two different worlds? This essay will attempt to reveal how the analysis of the rich and ambiguous meaning of the connector "et" can enrich our understanding and interpretation of the text.

The novel presents several instances where it can be said that the meaning of "et" is exclusive, as the world to which No belongs is presented as outside the world of Lou. For example, when Lou and No are talking to other homeless people No knows, Lou asks her if they are her friends. But No retorts, *"Dehors, on n'a pas d'amis."* – p58. Even though No has people she spends time with on the streets, she claims that you don't have friends "out-there". 'Dehors' literally means outside. So, Lou is "inside" and naïve thinking that homeless people can have friends, but No is "outside" and knows that it is not possible to have friends when you're out there. This is underlined by Patrice Ruellan, who, in his analysis of the novel, refers to the world of the homeless as "Le monde du dehors." – p22. The division between No and Lou's worlds becomes even stronger when we see Lou refer to the 'homeless world' as not only separate from the world of people with homes but also as invisible to them, *"Il y a cette ville invisible, au cœur même de la ville. Cette femme qui dort chaque nuit au même endroit, avec son duvet et ses sacs. À même le trottoir. Ces hommes sous les ponts, dans les gares, ces gens allongés sur des cartons ou recroquevillés sur un blanc."* – p70. The metaphor of invisibility conveys the extent of the exclusion of the homeless. A hidden world exists, full of the homeless who cannot cross back into the world we know. Lou is being warned that No does not belong to the same world as her: *"tu ne devrais pas traîner avec une fille comme ça. Moi je l'aime bien Nolwenn, mais c'est une fille de la rue, une fille qui vit dans un autre monde que le tien."* – p74. This shows that many people consider that No and Lou belong to different worlds and that, No, due to her status as a "fille de la rue", should be avoided by someone like Lou. No herself is acutely aware of the division between them, as exemplified by her strong reaction when Lou finds her at a shelter to try and help her, *"C'est pas ta vie, ça, tu comprends, c'est pas ta vie !"* – p93. No's abrupt rejection of Lou demonstrates that she understands that the two of them lead separate lives in totally different worlds. This shows that "et" is exclusive as it stands as the barrier between Lou and No, as the world of Lou is not meant to be united with the world of No.

However, Lou strongly rejects the idea that separate worlds must coexist independently within society: *"Moi je m'en fous pas mal qu'il y ait plusieurs mondes dans le même monde et qu'il faille rester dans le sien. Je ne veux pas que mon monde soit un sous-ensemble A qui ne possède aucune intersection avec d'autres (B, C ou D)."* – p74. Thus, despite the instances of hopelessness and moments of doubt on their friendship, Lou and No form a strong bond. They do manage, at least momentarily, to be together and create a world to which they both belong. This is epitomised by their first meeting, as the strong connection between them is immediately clear in Lou's mind, *"Pourtant hier j'étais là, avec elle, on aurait pu j'en suis sûre dessiner un cercle autour de nous, un cercle dont je n'étais pas exclue, un cercle qui nous enveloppait, et qui, pour quelques minutes, nous protégeait du monde."* – p19. The two of them separately were excluded from society, however, together, they created an inclusive bubble in which they are both engulfed. The repetition of the metaphor 'circle' emphasises this togetherness, as it covers them both, combining the two worlds into one. The girls are able to create an unconventional link, which society is not ready to accept, and people question the friendship between Lou and No *"Elle me suit jusqu'au Bar Botté. Les gens nous regardent. Les gens nous regardent parce que No vit dans la rue et ça se voit comme le nez au milieu de la figure."* – p100. Even though people view them as incompatible, they are together. The use of the pronoun 'nous' twice emphasises this point. Lou and No have defied societal expectations and become united. The inclusive meaning of "et" is further demonstrated by the fact No seems to become part of the Bertignac family, as exemplified by the expression *"No est chez nous."* - p125. This short sentence conveys that No's presence has become a definite and absolute fact – No is part of the family. Ruellan comments on the togetherness of the pair by choosing the words 'couple' and 'entity' to describe them, *"Elles forment alors une sorte de couple, l'entité « No et moi »"* -p46. Lou later remarks how No's presence within the home and in the family is a constant, and that it seems to always have been the case: *"C'est comme si No avait toujours été là."* - p125.

However, ultimately, the book conveys that the world created by the two girls can only exist if it is separate from other people's worlds. They can only be together if Lou is in the world of the homeless with No, as illustrated when No and Lou decide to escape together, *"Je suis dehors, avec No."* p235. The fact that Lou needs to leave her whole world behind to stick with No shows that, ultimately, "et" can only be inclusive against the rest of society, as the two separate worlds cannot hold them together. As No couldn't stay in Lou's world, Lou decided to join No's world. However, at the end of the novel, No leaves Lou. Although no explicit reason is given for her departure, this action can be interpreted as a self-sacrifice by No to save Lou as she knows the danger of the homeless world and doesn't want Lou to experience it. The sacrificial nature of No's departure is expanded on by Ruellan, who says, *"Lou sera sauvée du monde et des autres par l'amour sacrificiel de No."* – p41. In parallel, Ruellan also comments on the

inevitability of No's downfall, as it is impossible to escape the world of the homeless – "*La faillite de la vie de No était inéluctable. Le monde de la rue génère ses victimes, il détruit les êtres, les corps et les consciences.*" – p30. However, despite No's departure from Lou's life, she has unequivocally altered Lou's vision of the world. The world of the homeless is not invisible to Lou anymore as her close friendship with No has revealed the possible connections that can be made between the two worlds despite the difficulty of changing the state of things, *"Les choses sont ce qu'elles sont. Mais moi je crois qu'il faut garder les yeux grands ouverts. Pour commencer."* – p70.

In conclusion, *No et Moi* is a novel that delves deeply into the issue of homelessness and the ideas of separation and inclusion. The analysis of both the exclusive and inclusive meaning of the connector "et" in the title embodies the tension between exclusion and inclusion between the two girls as well as the complex status of the world of the homeless in our society. Although, in the end, the two girls go back to their own worlds, they have shared, even temporarily, a life together and have therefore created a durable bond. Their friendship has broken the barrier between the world of Lou and the world of No. De Vigan's novel epitomises the tension between two completely different worlds and shows how these worlds are kept separate through society's actions and preconceptions. However, by the fact that these two girls from very different worlds are able to come together and make an impact that changes both of their lives, we can see how the novel is actually hopeful that connection between people from different worlds is possible and beneficial, as demonstrated by the fact that Lou's family is brought back together thanks to No. Her friendship with No allowed Lou's dream of uniting different worlds to come true, even for a short time, " *Moi je préférerais être ailleurs, suivre une droite qui mènerait dans un endroit où les mondes communiquent entre eux, se recouvrent, où les contours sont perméables, où la vie est linéaire, sans rupture.*" – p76.

Bibliography:

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