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AIRING *THE JADE CABINET*:  
AERIAL IMAGINATION IN RIKKI DUCORNET'S  
FOURTH ELEMENTAL NOVEL

Wind inspires courage of soul, and is also the imaginal point  
of interaction between the world soul and the individual soul. . . .

In pure silence, in pure air, we lose the boundary  
and cannot tell where we end and the cosmos begins.

—Sardello 8

**Abstract:** In the article, I analyze Rikki Ducornet's *The Jade Cabinet* and argue in favor of it being a novel of aerial imagination and airy imagery. To this end, I highlight the main character's, Etheria's, status as the book's uncontained element and contrast imagination and logic, closed and open spaces, gravity and surreality, elaborating thus on Etheria's impossible marriage of polarities and showing how various attributes of air correspond to people's traits of character. Subsequently, I introduce the concept of aerial imagination, and investigate the transient nature of magic and illusions. As I proceed to explore the strange affinity existing between air and light on the one side and language and memory on the other, I endeavor to show that in *The Jade Cabinet* air is seen as the universal carrier of voice and as such it is equated with the divine language, which grants enlightenment and has creative powers. Finally, drawing on such airy qualities as ubiquity, restlessness, and changeability, I argue that in the novel, human memory is equated with a magical act of ongoing reconstruction, essential for the translation of perceptions into words, but also responsible for the subjectivity, and hence the volatility, that is the lack of fixedness, of the narrative itself.

**Key words:** Rikki Ducornet; *The Jade Cabinet*; aerial imagination; elemental novel; Tetralogy of Elements.

Published first in 1993, *The Jade Cabinet* acts both as the conclusion to an American writer, poet, and painter Rikki Ducornet's "Books of Nature," or the "Tetralogy of Elements,"<sup>1</sup> and as the author's personal commentary on the inherent plasticity and volatility of imagination, memory, and speech. Describing the tragedy of a mute girl traded for a piece of jade, the novel elaborates on Franz Kafka's belief that "[a]ll language is but a poor translation," and echoes Gaston Bachelard's almost Freudian conviction about the primacy of imagination, whose fancies are invariably coextensive with the emergence of the tangible world (Jager et al. 10).

In this article, I argue that Rikki Ducornet's *The Jade Cabinet* is a novel of aerial imagination and airy imagery. To this end, I first highlight the book's protagonist's, Etheria's, status as the uncontained element characterized by freedom, esoteric beauty, and the lightness of mind. Subsequently, I contrast imagination and logic, closed and open spaces, gravity and surrealism, elaborating thus on Etheria's impossible marriage of polarities, and showing the ways in which various attributes of air correspond to people's traits of character. Describing Etheria's inclination to fantasize, and analyzing her almost evaporative disappearance and ensuing transformation into a mysterious sorcerer, I introduce the concept of aerial imagination and investigate the transient nature of magic and illusions. As I explore the strange affinity between air and light on the one side and language and memory on the other, I endeavor to show that in *The Jade Cabinet* air is seen as the universal carrier of voice and as such it is equated with the divine language, which grants enlightenment and possesses creative powers. Finally, drawing on such airy qualities as ubiquity, restlessness, and changeability, I argue that in the novel, human memory is equated with a magical act of ongoing reconstruction, essential for the translation of perceptions into words, but also responsible for the subjectivity, and hence the volatility, that is the lack of fixedness, of the narrative itself.

Written in the form of a randomly structured memoir, the story in *The Jade Cabinet* defies chronology, meanders, moves backwards, and frequently wanders in circles. Narrated by the protagonist's sister, Memory, the story recounts the life of Etheria, the eldest daughter of Professor Angus Sphery, an Oxford nobleman fascinated with natural languages. In the introductory chapters of the novel, Professor Angus Sphery refuses to teach his daughter

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from *The Jade Cabinet*, Ducornet's elemental series comprises also *The Stain* (1984), *Entering Fire* (1986), and *The Fountains of Neptune* (1989); all four novels attempt to interpret reality in accordance with Gaston Bachelard's theory of the four elements.

Etheria to speak, believing that without his interference she will eventually manifest her innate linguistic potential. As a result, Etheria grows up speechless, capable of communicating with the world only through writing and her sister's interpretation. Despite her infirmity and her mother's mental illness, Etheria grows up clever and full of wonder, feeding her imagination with the stories and riddles told by Charles Dodgson, a family's friend and the book's representation of Lewis Carroll. At times, a natural illusionist that she is, Etheria resorts to magic and juggles reality and illusions in order to entertain her family and soothe her sick mother's nerves. At a certain point in their lives, Etheria and Memory come in contact with an industrialist Radulph Tubbs. Fascinated with Etheria's esoteric beauty, Tubbs begins his long courtship, impatiently waiting for Etheria to be old enough for him to propose. When Etheria is fourteen, the moment finally comes and despite the girl's protests, Angus Sphery gives Etheria to Tubbs, all the doubts he might have had about Tubbs's suitability for a husband dispelled by a beautiful present he is offered. Right after the wedding, Tubbs takes Etheria to his house, the New Age, and almost instantly, the austere, windowless mansion turns into the girl's golden cage. Jealous of his wife's devotion to Dodgson and to her own imaginary world, Tubbs attempts, Ducornet writes, "to reduce [Etheria] to a quantifiable lump of reality he could paw at his leisure" (*Jade* 133). Imprisoned, Etheria finds recompense and consolation in the cabinet full of beautiful jade figures she admires, as well as in the New Age garden and in the magic she starts to practice. When, driven by his industrial frenzy, Tubbs destroys the garden, and then, possessive and violent, rapes Etheria with a jade phallus, she, unable to stand any more abuse, simply disappears. All of Tubbs's attempts to find Etheria prove futile; desperate, he marries the Hungerkünstler, an anorexic con artist who reminds him of his previous wife. One day though, during a magical performance in a local theater, Tubbs encounters Zephyra, an illusionist whom both he and Memory intuitively know to be Etheria. Tubbs does not, however, have time to rejoice in Etheria's presence, for in an act of jealousy and insanity the Hungerkünstler publicly shoots and kills Zephyra. She is arrested, charged, convicted, and subsequently sentenced. As Memory prepares Zephyra's body for the funeral, she discovers her to be a man but chooses to keep this to herself. After the burial, driven by compassion, Memory first gets to know and then marries Tubbs, with whom, due to the change of character he experiences, she leads a calm and happy life. When Tubbs dies, he is buried beside Zephyra, and Memory begins writing down Etheria's story, wondering

where her sister is and closely following the news about a certain Carmen Khamsin, a new, extraordinary magician touring North America.

In her long memoir, Memory describes Etheria as “a creature of air and light” (Ducornet, *Jade* 41). In *The Jade Cabinet*, Etheria’s luminosity and lightness are both literal and figurative, manifesting themselves in the girl’s appearance, manners, and love of the outdoors, but even more importantly, in the clarity of the girl’s mind and in her imagination. From the moment of her birth, Etheria was “very blonde; her skin, too, was blonde. . . . Her eyes were set wide apart; violet, they were enormous, oval” (Ducornet, *Jade* 14). When Tubbs meets her, oblivious of ceremony and etiquette, she rejects corsets and bustles, choosing to roam freely wearing pants and bloomers, so incorporeal, “so delicate and dreamy she appear[s] to levitate an inch or two above the ground” (Ducornet, *Jade* 17). Craving open spaces, never still and always inhabiting a world of her own, she moves “about the house, as a wind moves above the land, restlessly searching for a distant horizon where to settle and repose” (Ducornet, *Jade* 71). If Etheria’s figure is light, her mind is radiant. Exceptionally observant, “an avid listener, clever [and] clairvoyant in spirit” (Gregory 122), “[h]er dumbness g[ives] her a certain poise and an uncanny quality; it seal[s] her off and thus ma[kes] her self-contained” (Ducornet, *Jade* 14). Although her thinking is reasonable and sound, which is best seen when she deciphers Dodgson’s riddles, Etheria’s mind is not governed by logic, but rather by limitless curiosity and shrewdness and by what Stephen Connor calls the “yearning . . . , *longing* of the imagination, stretching to go beyond itself.”

In the novel, almost every reference to Etheria is packed with air-bound metaphors. What is more, Etheria’s introvert silence and her ability to communicate with her inner self make her *The Jade Cabinet*’s main carrier of what Robert Sardello calls aerial imagination. In his discussion of Gaston Bachelard’s philosophy, Roch C. Smith observes that imagination is a “superhuman faculty” which enables a person to go beyond everyday perceptions. “Imagination,” Smith writes, “must act upon material reality in order to translate it into a particularly human surreality” (88). Simultaneously, in “The Resonant Soul: Gaston Bachelard and the Magical Surface of Air,” Robert Sardello explains that “the aerial imagination concerns the primordial desire of the soul to ascend” (3), and to thus come to know both the heights and the depths of experience. It is through imagination, Sardello remarks, that “the things of the world show . . . their animation, their soul, . . . qualities that are missed in ordinary perceptual consciousness—the fluidity of wonder [and] . . . the

light of wisdom in which things find their place within the whole" (5). Aerial imagination is also the imagination of preliminary and preparatory silence. At first muffled, the aerial dreamer is gradually led towards imaginal contemplation, where what is essential is not the subject matter of thinking, but rather "the vibrations, the resonances, the tones, the overtones and undertones [this thinking] sets off as it swoops swiftly by" (Sardello 4).

It is such "vibrations and resonances" that fill Etheria's daytime reveries. Mute, and therefore unable to fully express herself, Etheria turns inward, searching "within herself for those infinite spaces where her soul might freely wander" (Ducornet, *Jade* 49). Usually inaccessible to others, Etheria's inner world reveals itself whenever she chooses to conjure an illusion in order to calm down her sick mother. As Etheria translates fantasy into magic, Ducornet writes, "a certain flavour of unreality permeat[es] everything. . . . [T]he real space . . . [i]s transformed into an imaginary space," and the imaginary imposes itself onto the real world to such a degree that it becomes impossible to distinguish between "what [i]s 'in' or 'out,' 'here' or 'there,' 'up' or 'down'" (*Jade* 62).

After Etheria marries Tubbs, her longing to reach beyond the "ordinary perceptual consciousness" begins to converge with her desire to completely reject corporeality and simply disappear. The longer she lives in the New Age, the more she implodes and the more vivid her aerial reveries become—"trapped in the New Age," Memory writes, Etheria "dreamed of making herself lighter. She dreamed of air, of vanishing in thin air; she dreamed of evaporating. She dreamed of levitating, of growing wings, of transforming herself into a cobweb, an angel, a volatile gas" (Ducornet, *Jade* 74). The keys to Etheria's world of imagination are the New Age garden where she frequently daydreams and the jade cabinet she is fascinated with. Both the garden and the jade are controlled and violently misused by Radulph Tubbs.

Viewed in the context of elemental imagery, Etheria personifies all the positive or nurturing characteristics of air. Lightness, clarity, constant agitation or attraction to open spaces—all of these translate into the girl's looks and spirit, but most of all into her inclination to fantasize. Whereas Etheria is the breeze, her husband Radulph Tubbs is the personification of the possessive and brutal wind capable of destroying everything it encounters in its way. Unlike Etheria, Tubbs is a man of no imagination and as such he functions as "the novel's 'heavy,' . . . someone who is desperately fearful of everything he can't dominate and reduce to the abstractions of logic" (Gregory 122)—a wind that rather than lift, pushes to the ground. As

Warlick observes in “An Alchemy of Dreams and Desires,” it is “Tubbs’s blustery hot air [that] evaporates Etheria’s spirit. The larger he becomes the more her presence shrinks” (31).

Tubbs’s sole proximity makes the air dense. He drones and buzzes making people fall asleep (Ducornet, *Jade* 18). Everything he says and plans to do is “real, robust [and] impart[s] the transient world with a palpable gravity” (Ducornet, *Jade* 131). Thus, he could not be more different from Etheria who lives in the surreal landscapes of imagination. The most conspicuous symbol of Tubbs’s heaviness is one of the presents he offers Etheria during his courtship:

A large volume bound in dark brown leather, published at his own expense and containing photographs of all his manufactures: spinning factories, mills, bleach and dye-works. Imposing edifices all, solid and stately, always of the same tedious brick, the ‘felicitous turgescence’ . . . of the blackened chimneys rising as ‘puissant obelisks’ in the air. A weighty volume, saddeningly thick. (Ducornet, *Jade* 30)

Showing what Tubbs really holds precious, the bulky, grim book reveals also Tubbs’s views upon everything immaterial, and especially upon beauty and the surreal, of which Etheria is the embodiment. “I was born a man of sense; a rational man,” Tubbs says. “Of this I am not ashamed. Why should I be ashamed? I continue: Beauty must and will be subordinate to the demands of logic” (Ducornet, *Jade* 28). It is this belief in the inferiority of everything Tubbs fails to understand and hence fears that leads him to first jail, and then violently dominate and thus destroy Etheria. Incapable of understanding the nature of Etheria’s wandering spirit, Tubbs confines her to the ascetic, windowless rooms of the New Age, where the only light is artificial. Then, in spite of Etheria’s protests, he razes her beloved garden and crowds it with cranes, hammers and diggers. As a result, “[t]he air about the house [become]s so thick with dust that looking out the window Etheria c[an]not see the street [but only the] impressive cumulations of granite . . . towered in the mud of the future courtyard” (Ducornet, *Jade* 54). It is, however, Tubbs’s unimaginable violence that results in the final confrontation between the married opposites. Unable to control himself, Tubbs commits marital rape. The most violent act involves a jade phallus which Tubbs “thrusts . . . into the very depths” of Etheria (Guttmann 193), thus not only crashing her but also desecrating a mineral she holds dear and turning it into a weapon that instead of the freedom of wonder offers only pain and humiliation. “I in-

vaded her as she had never dreamed possible," Tubbs writes in his journals describing the rape, "possessed her so unnaturally that had it lasted a moment longer, surely her heart would have broken. Spent, I kneeled, then stood. Etheria lay in ruins at my feet" (Ducornet, *Jade* 55–56). After this incident, her spirit no longer capable of tolerating confinement, Etheria devotes her days only to dreaming and practising magic. "The more she dream[s] of air the lighter she bec[omes] and the clearer d[oes] she perceive the irrelevant phantasmagoria which [i]s her married life" (Ducornet, *Jade* 74). A couple of months later, she abandons Tubbs for his act of brutality and sacrilege and "vanishe[s] forever in thin air like a puff of smoke" (Ducornet, *Jade* 56).

Etheria's evaporation introduces into Rikki Ducornet's *The Jade Cabinet* the idea of the qualitative kinship between air and magic. What is more, it also brings about Tubbs's realization of his intellectual and emotional opacity and results in the appearance of the air-eating Hungerkünstler who destroys Tubbs just like he destroys Etheria and thus unconsciously restores justice in the novel.

In "Waking to Eden," Rikki Ducornet explains that "[i]n *The Jade Cabinet* Etheria metamorphoses from victim—a creature in the jar—to a magician, an animating air, a vital breath" (157). The wondrous nature of magic lies in the fact that, just like air, it can be neither seen nor touched. Moreover, similar to wind when it enlivens leaves and plant stems, magic stirs the human mind, enabling it to generate images which *are*, although their existence seems more than doubtful. In the context of aerial imagination, the metamorphosis Etheria undergoes seems to designate her advance from the estranged tangible world to the elusive realm of illusions and innuendos, where as Zephyra she is little more than spirit, finally capable of ultimate ascension, that is, of being free to traverse, as well as create space. "When Etheria set about to do her act," Memory remembers,

she gave herself over to it utterly. She was so completely a part and particle of what she was doing that on stage she was a woman no longer but impalpable spirit. To use Dodgson's phrase, all that remained of her was her smile and the illusion of a miracle. You see: famished for space Etheria became a master at creating its illusion. (Ducornet, *Jade* 75)

Etheria becomes so proficient a magician that she is able to not only magically construe reality, but also to lose herself in it, "remaining like the air, invisible" (Warlick 31). It is Etheria's invisibility that enrages Tubbs, mak-

ing him inundate the private investigators he hires to look for her with letters full of frustration and disbelief:

I am paying you, and famously, to solve a tangible affair, in other words: a worldly matter. My wife, Sirs, is not spirit but flesh, she exists in space and time; her feet touch the ground when she walks . . . My wife does not float through the air. Therefore she has left traces. Why have you still not found them?

My wife is a woman, Sirs, not an angel, not a bird, nor is she a dream moment of the mind. Surely she has not volatalised. My wife is no gas, Sirs, nor is she vapour. (Ducornet, *Jade* 105)

[M]y wife has feet and somewhere, *somewhere* she is resting. My wife is no dove, Sirs; no creature of cloud! But flesh and bone! And so must leave substantial evidence after her wherever she wanders. I am paying you to gather clues, not rents in infinity . . . To find a perfume, a pattern, *a person*. And this person is my *wife*. FIND HER. (Ducornet, *Jade* 110)

In the light of the whole novel, it seems almost self-evident that every one of Tubbs's negations confirms, in fact, everything he is trying to deem impossible. From the moment of her disappearance, Etheria's presence in the world is intangible, to say the least. Whereas it remains unsure whether or not she could truly dematerialize, she definitely appears much closer in character to gas or vapor than to a worldly creature of flesh.

In *The Jade Cabinet*, Etheria's disappearance serves both as the demonstration of the protagonist's illusionist prowess and as the realization of the ultimate fancy of her (aerial) imagination. Apart from that, the disappearance constitutes also a life-changing event for Radulph Tubbs. The more remote Etheria's memory becomes, the more Tubbs suffocates—"he was . . . plagued by my sister's absence," Memory writes, "[t]hat absence, . . . w[as] the very air that scorched his lungs" (Ducornet, *Jade* 95). Abandoned and frustrated, Tubbs finally comes to understand that Etheria was the only delight he has ever experienced and that for him losing her equates to being "banished forever to the land of opacity. . . . He had never felt heavier, weightier, and yet paradoxically, he had never felt more insubstantial" (Ducornet, *Jade* 106), Memory writes. Tubbs's desire to find a substitute for his absent wife leads him straight into the arms of the anorectic Hungerkünstler. Similar to Etheria in nothing but weight, the Hungerkünstler turns out to be a starved and hence allegedly "air-eating, albino circus freak," who marries Tubbs and then "grows to enormous proportions driven by greed and jealousy over her husband's continued devotion to his former wife" (Warlick



31). Loud and capricious, the Hungerkünstler sucks life out of Tubbs. Thus, the situation is reversed—once the oppressor, Tubbs becomes the one overwhelmed and gasping for breath, the victim.

In addition to serving as the repository of metaphors for the lightness of spirit and mind, the power of imagination or the impalpability of magic, in *The Jade Cabinet* air imagery appears also in connection with language, voice, and the subjectivity of memory. Through the process of naming, language once brought the world into being. Over the years, however, it lost its purpose and began to redefine its relationship with reality. Through recollection and recounting, it now translates the world and the past into perceptions and memories, lending its qualities of plasticity and changeability to the narrative it construes and therefore increasing this narrative's subjectivism and decreasing its reliability.

Language and voice resemble air both in their ubiquity and invisibility and in their potential for change. Just like air, too, they are the carriers of light, that is of the knowledge about the world. According to Angus Sphery, endowing people with the ability to speak, God revealed to them His own "language of pure and unadulterated light" (Ducornet, *Jade* 12). "In Eden, to see a thing Yahweh had dreamed and to say its name aloud was [enough] to bring it surging into the real" (Ducornet, "Waking to Eden" 155). Everything that was thus created, existed and had its own purpose, it was good. Nevertheless, just like air can become infested with locust, over the years, "the language of languages" (Ducornet, *Jade* 10) became polluted with human nonsense. "[F]lies and mosquitoes are the materialization of vowels and consonants uttered by fools" (Ducornet 15), Mr. Dodgson says once in *The Jade Cabinet*. "[T]his explains why there are so many of them" (Ducornet 15), he adds. In Ducornet's fourth elemental novel, language's departure from clarity and purposefulness seems best exemplified by the Hungerkünstler, who has a real "genius for jibberish, obscurum per obscuris; one ha[s] to ventilate the room after her departure as there [a]re so many hooks and horns of shattered consonants cluttering the air it [i]s hazardous to breathe" (Ducornet, *Jade* 73). It is the speechless Etheria who constitutes *The Jade Cabinet's* synonym for clarity and enlightenment. Using imagination to communicate the desires of her mind, Etheria brings things into being through her silent acts of magic. Thus, while at first seemingly essential, in *The Jade Cabinet* language finds itself almost on the verge of becoming redundant.

Language's gradual loss both of clarity and of its status as the constitutive element of the world results in it adapting itself to the multiplicity

and variety of speakers it has. As Angus Sphery believes, at a certain point in its development, divine language simply splits into a number of impoverished, individualized translations—the languages of men—and, losing its direct connection with reality, begins to function as a subjective medium, rather than as an impartial source of truth. In *The Jade Cabinet*, this change of character is, however, symptomatic of a much deeper transition, namely the advent of general multivocality, which influences not only language, but also such language-related processes as remembering and narrating.

Relying on subjective perceptions, every mind recounts the past differently. Hence, in the story of Etheria there are no objective facts, only memories which convey her presence indirectly, thus making the narrative resemble a translucent cobweb, delicate and woven from many different threads. Commenting on *The Jade Cabinet*, Rikki Ducornet explains that Etheria's story is veiled in mystery and highly porous; in the novel, the protagonist "takes form through scraps of letter, journals, phrases, and memories. She is volatile, a spirit or inspiriting presence" (Gregory, McCaffery 143). Due to her speechlessness, from the very beginning Etheria exists in the novel only in translation. Furthermore, when she finally disappears, she can be found nowhere but in the minds of the book's narrators (Covi 214). Just like no mind is impartial, no act of remembering is fully true to reality. At a certain point in her narrative, pondering the nature of human memory, Etheria's sister writes:

Not long before he died, Dodgson proposed 'Doctrine of Mist:' that things exist only because we perceive them (and we exist only because we are capable of perception!). It occurs to me now as I write that if all is idea than nowhere is the inherent contradiction of corporeality more evident than during the act of remembering.

Memory, I think, is an act of magic. In other words, we transform the outer world of facts . . . into those things we wish to keep, for whatever reason. (Ducornet, *Jade* 126)

Just as it is difficult to see clearly through misty air, confronted with a number of points of view, it is hard to discern what is and what is not the truth. Hence, examined with reference to remembering, Dodgson's "Doctrine of Mist" points towards the selective character of memory which, based upon subjective perceptions, always reflects what somebody wants and does not want to remember. Just like air, too, memory is also restless. It is not "like a collector's cabinet where souvenirs are tucked away as moths or tiny shells

intact. . . . [F]or each performance of the mind [the] souvenirs reconstruct themselves. . . . [M]emory is like an act of magic” (Ducornet, *Jade* 15) and as such it is based on its own illusions – emotions, prejudices, and lies. Therefore, it is impossible to know what Etheria’s story is really like, for just as Memory says at one point, in *The Jade Cabinet* there appear to be “as many ways to tell a story as there are ways to remember it” (Ducornet 92). The story of Etheria is never conclusive or definitive. Memory’s childhood recollections are verified by Tubbs’s journals. And Tubbs’s accounts are, in turn, stripped of pretenses by Memory’s intuition. “The story ebbs and nets about. It is a fabric, not a simple thread” (Ducornet, *Jade* 63).

Sometimes it is the invisible that carries meaning. Just like air is necessary for breathing, imagination, magic, language, and memory are essential for the full understanding of the world. In Rikki Ducornet’s *The Jade Cabinet* the various qualities of air metaphorically reflect the intricacies of human personality – it is fresh air that lifts Etheria into surreality, but it is also air, stormy and destructive, that inflates Tubbs with possessiveness, pride, and vanity. Moreover, volatile and full of resonances, in the book air becomes the synonym for the fancies of human imagination as well as for the spirit’s longing to escape, go beyond the possible and straight into the realm of magic and illusions. Finally, it is also through air imagery that *The Jade Cabinet* develops into a meditation on language and remembering. Subjective in its nature, “language is not simply a mimetic device, something to depict or describe. It is, rather, something that stirs things up, that enlivens and evokes, something both profoundly creative and profoundly affective” (Evenson), a wind which airs the past and scatters memories on a page.

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WIETRZĄC „JADEITOWĄ GABLOTE”.  
WYOBRAŹNIA POWIETRZNA W CZWARTEJ POWIEŚCI ELEMENTARNEJ  
RIKKI DUCORNET

Streszczenie

Autorka artykułu poddaje analizie powieść Rikki Ducornet *The Jade Cabinet* („Jadeitowa Gablota”), stawiając tezę, iż jest ona powieścią elementarną („novel of elements”), w której żywioł powietrza leży u podstaw zarówno wyobraźni literackiej, jak i sposobu obrazowania i narracji. W pierwszej kolejności artykuł prezentuje główną bohaterkę powieści, Etherię, jako niepokromiony żywioł, uosobienie wolności, piękna i lekkości umysłu, a w oparciu o przeciwieństwa charakteryzujące małżeństwo Etherii — wyobraźnia i logika, otwarte i zamknięte przestrzenie, grawitacja i nadrealność — wskazuje na paralele między właściwościami powietrza a ludzkimi cechami charakteru. Następnie wprowadzone zostaje pojęcie wyobraźni powietrznej; artykuł skupia się na pokrewieństwie między powietrzem i światłem oraz językiem i pamięcią. W *The Jade Cabinet* powietrze funkcjonuje jako uniwersalny nośnik głosu i jako takie uosabia tzw. język bogów, niosący oświecenie i przejawiający moce twórcze. Pamięć zaś to magiczny proces odtwarzania, niezbędny do przełożenia wrażeń w słowa, ale także odpowiedzialny za subiektywność, a tym samym ulotność samej narracji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Rikki Ducornet; *The Jade Cabinet*; wyobraźnia powietrzna; powieść elementarna; Tetralogia Żywiołów.