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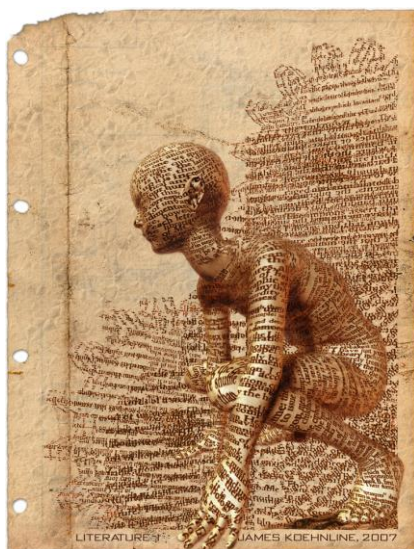
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*Be great in act,
as you have been
in thought.
(W. Shakespeare)*



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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the peculiar phenomenon of the farcical *femme fatale* from the point of view of the female grotesque. Primarily Mary Russo's ideas concerning the female grotesque and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival and the carnivalesque are relied on while examining this type of *femme fatale*. Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject and Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender performativity are also central in the analysis of the unique appearance of this carnivalesque, yet, satirical *femme fatale*. Both the tragic and the comic aspects of these *femmes fatales* are scrutinized thus presenting why and how they are outstanding examples of the female grotesque.

KEY WORDS

femme fatale, carnivalesque, comic, grotesque

In this paper, I intend to examine this specific and unique grotesque phenomenon: the figure of the *farcical femme fatale*. My discussion aims to reveal how the comic-grotesque, *carnivalesque*, yet, satirical *femmes fatales* of *Chicago* subvert the *femme fatale* imagery through the use of the comic thus creating a doubly grotesque image, since here, we encounter not only the grotesque figure of the *femme fatale* who is a combination of Eros and Thanatos in one but all this is given a twist by the use of the comic. By mainly focusing on Bakhtin's theory of the *carnivalesque* and Mary Russo's ideas about the female grotesque my aim is to present this complex, ambiguous and contradictory female figure in minute detail. Maurine Dallas Watkins created these *farcical femmes fatales* in her 1927 drama which figures were later elaborated on in the subsequent adaptations either made for the stage or to the screen.

Chicago's uniqueness lies in its specificity that it handles an issue, which is rather contradictory to its genre. The issues treated are female murderers, women's violence and criminality while their (re)presentation and discussion are carried out through the elaborate use of the comic. The themes handled already belong to the realm of the female grotesque but their treatment as comic subject matters even more strengthens their ties with the study of the female grotesque. The figure of the *femme fatale* is primarily connected to tragedy and tragic desire as defined and theorized, for example, by Elisabeth Bronfen but here it is contrasted with the comic. Thus *Chicago* can be analyzed as a very unique work of art since it subverts and reinvents the modes of (re)presenting *femmes fatales* through the subversive power of humor and *carnivalesque* cavalcade.

According to Mary Russo, the image of a female murderer or a *femme fatale* is grotesque, but in her realm of thinking it is not primarily the murderous aspect which makes these women (seem) grotesque but their female existence. Russo's basic concepts about the grotesque are mostly centred on the "female as such" as grotesque. Thus, when thinking about a murderer as female being grotesque or not, first, one has to face that that person as a female is already considered to be grotesque. This is basically due to the meaning of the word itself since the word *grotesque* derives from 'the cave – grotto-esque [which is something] [I]ow, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent [and] visceral. As bodily metaphor, the grotesque cave tends to look like (and in the most gross metaphorical sense be identified with) the cavernous anatomical female body' (Russo 1995, 1).

When this term (grotesque) emerged, it was viewed 'as a repository of unnatural, frivolous, and irrational connections between things which nature and classical art kept scrupulously apart' as opposed to the classical style which was linked with the natural order; to put it other way, it was defined solely in relation to the norms it exceeded (Russo 1995, 3). Hence, we are already given two basic and principal aspects of the grotesque that it is related to the female and also to the "opposing, transgressing, in-between," in one word, to the "unruly." This might imply that the image of a female murderer, or a *femme fatale*, can be nothing but grotesque, also because '[...] often the grotesque has deepened into the criminal' (Russo 1995, 7). Of course here, criminal does not refer to exclusively murderous acts, but that aspect of crime is also included. With much probability, here

criminal indicates all kinds of fallacies, erroneous actions, mistakes, blunders, sins and the like certainly including criminal acts in a juridical sense, as well. Although evidently, all these kinds of crime spring from the same source, and thus, can be interconnected or often interwoven since something foolish or morally wrong can be (and frequently is) very close to an actual offence which is punished by the law (or frequently, it concretely is a criminal offence).

Russo also points out 'that the grotesque in each case is only recognizable in relation to a norm and that exceeding the norm involves serious risk' (Russo 1995, 10). In spite of this risk, the female murderers, the (*farcical*) *femmes fatales* in *Chicago* commit (almost) all kinds of exceeding or transgression of norms and rules, and still can get away with them. It is also added later on that '[...] the grotesque, particularly as a bodily category, emerges as a deviation from the norm. [...] It might follow that the expression "female grotesque" threatens to become a tautology, since the female is always defined against the male norm' (Russo 1995, 11-2). With this, the "femaleness" of the grotesque is emphasized again not only because it is "cavernous" but also because it is "the Other." Consequently, this involves double risk to transgress as "an Other," since transgressing is dangerous for everyone but if the transgressor is "an outsider" already, then, the crime is double. If the woman as a female and "an Other" dares exceed her limits that is already dangerous, but if she also exceeds her only possible roles as part of the society, it is even more outrageous since the only roles "offered" to a woman for being integrated into society is the role of the mother, or the daughter, or the wife. All of these are strictly part of the parenthood structure. (Kristeva 1992, 169) If a woman decides to be outside of the parental-paternal structure, she still has a possibility, she can remain a virgin, i.e.: a nun. During Victorianism, the nun was a powerful image, and a female role that embodied feminine ideals of chastity, religious confinement and womanly service and 'superfluous women' were endorsed to choose this life, however, it also has to be added that the nun, at the same time, 'became a popular and compelling figure of sexual fantasy' (Showalter 1993, xxi). These are the sole options. All of these roles presuppose a certain kind of innocence, purity, simplicity, obedience and so on and so forth, therefore, if a woman "breaks the spell" and acts out of her role, for example, murders someone when she is supposed to be the giver of life, then, she is considered to be even more guilty than a man acting the same way. That is why, the female murderers, and their literary-cinematic representations: the *femmes fatales*, are usually severely punished.

Russo cites Žižek's ideas about the *femme fatale* asserting that the greatest danger of this female figure is that she wholeheartedly embraces the death drive and not primarily her irresistibility.

What is so menacing about the femme fatale is not the boundless enjoyment that overwhelms the man and makes him woman's plaything or slave. It is not Woman as object of fascination that causes us to lose our sense of judgement and moral attitude but, on the contrary, that which remains hidden beneath this fascinating mask and which appears once the mask fall off: the dimension of the pure subject fully assuming the death drive. (Russo 1995, 47)

This opinion fairly depicts an experience of/with the *femme fatale*. In my view, it is an excellent elaboration on the most expressive characteristic feature of the lethal woman in general. It clearly explains what is so amazing, capturing and interesting about this deadly woman. She is attractive, she is inviting, she promises abundant joy, and as someone is approaching, s/he has to realize that it was only the mask, the cover, the appearance which produced this effect; and actually what that person gets is not overwhelming joy at all; and the mask always falls down revealing the lurking truth under the nice cover, what, as it is mentioned, the person also feels or knows already unconsciously. In this excerpt, another important factor is mentioned which is quite much significant in the case of a *femme fatale* (and generally in the case of women): the mask – the mask which is hiding, which is concealing the truth. The mask is connected to masquerade, and masquerade to the carnival, the *carnavalesque*, and the *carnavalesque* to the grotesque.

In connection with the grotesque and the *femme fatale*, there is the issue of the *abject* to be discussed, as well. Kristeva, in her work on abjection, attempts to give an explanation of crime and criminals, as well, in the realm of abject which is also related to the grotesque. When trying to define and explain abject, Kristeva also lists the killers and mentions that abject is something from which we do not protect ourselves as from an object. (Kristeva 1982, 4) It is in accordance with the ideas expressed by Žižek about the *femme fatale* as she goes on defining abject as '[i]maginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us' (Kristeva 1982, 4). It is phrasing similar ideas to Zoltán Dragon when he is saying (rephrasing Mary Ann Doane) that there is a dual game of showing – hiding and inviting – threatening in the case of the *femme fatale* and that the lethal woman promises omniscience while ensures only "non-knowledge" in the form of death (Dragon 2003, 16).

Kristeva's term, *abject*, aptly depicts and presents what the *femmes fatales* of *Chicago* are like:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the

shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law. Is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (Kristeva 1982, 4)

Abject just like *femme fatales* disturb identity, system and order. They signal disturbance, they point to the fissures and gaps of the system. They raise awareness about its weaknesses as well as the fallibility of the rules and order. They do so since they “live” and “hide” in these fissures and gaps, out of which they come time to time and exhibit the inconsistencies and the fragility of the system. They cannot be grasped, they evade clear categories, they are the “in-between” and this creates unease, uncertainty and incapability.

Kristeva claims in the excerpt that any crime is abject since it draws the attention to the fragility of the law, and the revenge even more does so. If we have a look at the murder cases in *Chicago* all resemble this and all of them are committed because of revenge or as revenge. All of these crimes remind us of the fallibility of the law, and the trial even more does so as it highlights all of its weaknesses and how it can be tricked, twisted and abused. It is actually the trial scene, which makes this fallacy and fallibility even more obvious, probably that is why this scene is presented as a circus evening, as a carnival. With this *carnavalesque* representation of the trial it is evident that the trial is grotesque and this also implies that the law and the whole system are grotesque likewise. What happens in the courtroom is exactly what Kristeva describes as follows:

The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life – a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death. [...] Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject. (Kristeva 1982, 15-6)

In the courtroom, every kind of prohibition, rule or law is swept aside or if not, it is only to be able to turn them inside out under the “aegis” of corruption. Corruption as the socialized form of the abject is prevalent in *Chicago* in all fields of life with the purpose to point out that everything is corrupt, abject and grotesque, not only the murderers, but also the system and the law. ‘Schneegans sees precisely in this fact the basic nature of the grotesque: it exaggerates and caricatures the negative, the inappropriate’ (Bakhtin 306). In Watkins’ work, this can be traced. The (successive) author(s) of *Chicago* employed this style to be able to present and depict the awkwardness, the grotesqueness and the corruption of the whole system, not only the specific persons, in this case the female murderers. Another outstanding aspect of the grotesque is ‘[...] the extreme incongruity associated with the grotesque is itself ambivalent in that it is both comic and monstrous’ (Thomson 1972). It is also true in the case of *Chicago*, it is comic and monstrous at the same time.

Still considering the grotesque style of presentation in *Chicago*, a really valid and apt citation is to be made that describes the grotesque as a mode of (re)presentation that, in fact, is a rather realistic and non-distorting mode of representation:

Chesterton asserts, as Clayborough puts it, ‘that the grotesque may be employed as a means of presenting the world in a new light without falsifying it’, i.e. that it may be a function of the grotesque to make us see the (real) world anew, from fresh perspective which, though it be strange and disturbing one, is nevertheless valid and realistic. This is a notion which gains importance in the twentieth century and one which will bear examination when we come to the concept of alienation. (Thomson 1972)

It is talking about a new and unusual way of depicting the “real world.” Maybe, it is really the grotesque, which is able to grasp the truth and the real, and it is the only one which is able to present it/them us in its entirety. It might happen that this strange and disturbing mode of representation turns out to be the most capable of presenting the issues of the world in a valid and realistic way.

Wolfgang Kayser summarizes the most important aspects of the grotesque in three sentences which all find their realization in *Chicago*:

Its nature could be summed up in a phrase that has repeatedly suggested itself to us: THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WOLRD (Kayser 184). The works we have studied clearly testify that THE GROTESQUE IS A PLAY WITH THE ABSURD (Kayser 187). And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD (Kayser 1963, 188).

Hence, the grotesque realization in *Chicago* is about the estranged world and all its awkwardness; it is a play with the absurd because of its choice of subject (female murderers) and also because of its handling (comic-grotesque, *carnavalesque* treatment); and it is about the demonic aspect of the world, as well, because this story really presents how demonic and grotesque events take place and how people behave in the world (of *Chicago*). Therefore, perhaps, it is not exclusively the female murderers or their image that is grotesque but the world itself, and these women are only part of this “vast grotesqueness.” They are neither more nor less grotesque than anything or anybody else in the big estranged, grotesque world – proposes *Chicago*.

To be able to get away with murder and achieve acquittal and freedom by the end of the story, these *femmes fatales* have to emphasize their femininity, even in the Doanian sense of a mask. (Doane 1997, 185) All they do is only the illusion of compulsory heterosexuality and the existing order that is hidden under the mask of innocence. Everything happening during the trial is only an act; even in the Butlerian sense, an act of gender roles. Everyone is parading, they present how to behave according to the prescribed roles. ‘[G]ender is an “act” which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” itself carries the double-meaning of “dramatic” and “non-referential”’ (Butler 1997, 404). Gender is done, it is ‘a kind of imitation for which there is no original,’ (Butler 2001, 722, also *Gender Trouble* 6) a performance, a theatricality. ‘[I]t can become an occasion for a subversive and proliferating parody of gender norms,’ (Butler 1997, 724) thus a masquerade. Actually, a masquerade is what takes place in that courtroom, but with the help of it everyone is able to convince him/herself that nothing has changed and everything is all right, thus, the (*farfical*) *femmes fatales* can walk free.

Both the musical vaudeville (1976) and the latest film adaptation (2002) close with triumphant pictures of Velma and Roxie as rich, famous and admired vaudeville performers.¹ They present to everyone how to handle the problems, how to survive in this grotesque world. They say thank you to everyone for their kind help and cooperation, because without “the audience” they would not be there: ‘ROXIE. [...] Believe us, we could not have done it without you’ (Ebb and Fosse 1976, 91). Society and the people take part eagerly in their own deceit, and by doing so, in this story, it actually gets realised what Zoltán Dragon called the intertwining of death, sexuality and the female body through the fate of the *femmes fatales* (Dragon 2003, 16).

The actual background of the story of *Chicago* and the creation of these specific comic-grotesque-satirical *femmes fatales*, *farfical femmes fatales*, dates back to the 1920s. Maurine Dallas Watkins as a reporter wrote the series of articles covering the two murder cases of Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner during this time, which was later turned into her drama entitled *Chicago* in 1927. ‘No sweetheart is worth killing,’ so started the (ill-)famed utterance of Belva Gaertner, and thus continued, ‘—especially when you have had a flock of them—and the world knows it’ (Pauly 1997, 121). The next thoughts expressed by Mrs Gaertner which hit the headlines was: ‘[w]hy, it’s silly to say I murdered Walter [...] I liked him and he loved me—but no woman can love a man enough to kill him. They aren’t worth it, because there are always plenty more [...]’ (Pauly 1997, 121-2). She did not take her own advice, however, if she had done so, the story of *Chicago* might not have been born due to lack of incentive. In 1924, March and April, two murder cases took place in the city of Chicago the coverage of which was the duty of a young reporter, Maurine Dallas Watkins, who did an excellent job that resulted in great success (Pauly 1997, xiii-xix). Through her story-weaving *Chicago* started to unfold itself first as a string of newspaper articles which proved to be a great source of delight for many people, and later, in the form of a drama to be written in 1927 for the delight of even more people.

Watkins did not approach the subject matters treated (and experienced during the real murder cases): the injustice of the judiciary process, media manipulation, corruption etc. in a tragic way. She decided to evoke the comic to help in expressing her stance, although, she did not turn the story into a total comedy without edge, thus, she wrote a satire to provide a critique, as well. Watkins already set the tone in her original articles covering the real murder cases on which *Chicago* is based with her witty-humorous deliverance of the events. Later, in her play written in 1927, Watkins reworked all these happenings and her reflections on them and elaborated on her view of all this as court-turned-farce. Thus, the spirit of the marketplace with its *carnavalesque cavalcade* was set and delivered on and on in the ensuing reworkings of the story throughout the century and the next

The comic has a disrupting force in a way which is acceptable to people. It can critique issues by pointing out the problems and by subverting existing systems while evading punishment. Thus, its presence in *Chicago* is paramount in the development of the story and the presentation of the characters, and which enable them to evade punishment. An interesting feature about the connection between vice and the comic is that it has roots in the morality plays where the character who was the allegorical representation of *Vice* was to be played ‘in a fashion both sinister and comic’ and some literary historians regarded this figure ‘as a precursor both of the cynical, ironic villain and of some of the comic figures in Elizabethan drama [...]’ (Abrams 1999, 166). Thus, it

¹ Although, it has to be mentioned that, in the original drama, Velma is released much earlier than Roxie and they do not meet any more. There is only an allusion to what Roxie’s plans are i.e.: becoming a vaudeville star, but there is not a promise or proof that she succeeds.

is evident that there is a longstanding tradition behind the relation between vice and the comic, however, this has rarely been elaborated in the case of *femmes fatales*.

It is a very interesting aspect of *Chicago* how it deals with the *femme fatale* imagery, since it is not the conventional way. The *femme fatale* image is originally connected to fate, to tragedy, however, in *Chicago* this *femme fatale* imagery is also subverted through the use of the comic. The image of the *femme fatale* is generally that of a very serious, humorless, ambitious, aggressive, sensual etc. woman who destroys the men whom she uses in reaching her aim(s) through the use of her sexuality. In *Chicago*, by mixing all these images, the ideal female imagery, and the *femme fatale* imagery, the typical “good girl” and the typical “bad girl” images; and while emphasizing that the “good girl” performances are only acts while these women are *femmes fatales* the whole picture turns out to be a travesty of itself: a grotesque, monstrous, *carnavalesque* playing and faking of wolf in sheep’s clothing. This way, it is not only the ideal femininity that is subverted and parodied but also the non-ideal femininity.

In *Chicago*, the ‘eternal types’ of women the ‘angel’ and the ‘monster’ (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, 17) that is the *femme fatale* are both mocked. The good and bad girl images are used and abused, they are mixed, turned upside down and inside out, and in fact, the comic – also including the musical as genre and a mode of representation, plus, the satiric mode of story-telling originated in the first drama written by Watkins – takes it all. Humor wins it all within and outside of *Chicago*, as well. Through the ironic performance of the characters within the story everybody is mocked and parodied, even the *femmes fatales*. By acting out the *angel in the house image*, Roxie subverts her own *femme fatale*-ness and since it is evident throughout that all this is only an act there is a double twist to the play of feminine images. For the sake of her acquittal, she internalizes, and at the same time, produces the ‘eternal feminine’ image: submissive, modest, self-less, graceful, pure, delicate, civil, compliant, reticent, chaste, affable, polite, ‘slim, pale, passive,’ snowy and immobile in a porcelain-like manner (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, 23-5), this way, she subverts her own *femme fatale*-ness, yet, it is also true that the ‘angel-woman’ is not only the memento of otherness (as being woman) but also a *memento mori*, the ‘Angel of Death’ (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, 24-5) in herself, which again turns the image back to death, fate and tragedy.

Hence, the image is quite dual and through the use of the comic both are contested and subverted while they collapse into each other, death-in-life and life-in-death. As Susanne Langer is cited by Elisabeth Bronfen: “Tragedy is the image of Fate, as comedy is of Fortune” (Bronfen 2004, 103). In *Chicago*, Fortuna is present while Justitia allied with the Fates who would bring death and tragedy is missing in her “proper” form. So, as opposed to Elisabeth Bronfen’s claim – who by discussing the prototypical *femmes fatales* of *film noir* – (although contrary to the previous stance that these *femmes fatales* are passive entities and not active, self-defining agents and subjects of their own fate) that the *film noir femme fatale* by recognizing that there is a choice to be made takes responsibility for her actions and accepts the fate of death as a mode of salvation (Bronfen 2004, 103-16), the *femmes fatales* of *Chicago* avoid this fate. Although, it is true that they also face their fate and go through the same process as described by Bronfen, they make a choice open to them to redeem themselves without accepting death and that is the use of the comic. On all levels, with the genre in which the story is told and the mode of telling it through the elaborate use of irony, in addition, the comic performance provided by the characters, all contribute to the subversion of the fate of the *femmes fatales* in *Chicago*. Their salvation is not through Fate, death and tragedy but through a coquettish encounter with Fortune as they sing and dance themselves out of their own fate.

In spite of all this, law and order are reinstated through the enforcement of the images of ideal femininity. It does not concern anybody whether these women are not “ideal females” since they acted out the ideal “good girl” images. The saint girl is placed next to Justitia, for example in the 2002 version: Lady Justice is elevated and raised up into the ceiling of the court room at the beginning of the scene. When taking the stand, Roxie is placed in the same position elevated into the sky like a saint even having a “halo,” this performance is bordering the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. By performing this role, the saint, the little angel, she presents that Justitia is with her, thus, law and order is secured. It is nobody’s concern if this is only a performance because they enjoy themselves and the entertainment is fine. As Billy Flynn states this is all show business, and if you give them the razzle-dazzle they will be asking for more. He also adds that no one will see clearly with sequins in their eyes (Marshall 1 h 16-19 min) and they do not but it is not a problem for anybody. The audience gets what it wants (entertainment), so, the performers can go free because they provide prime entertainment. Hence, maybe, the ideal woman and the fallen woman images are used and abused, they are mixed, turned upside down and inside out, but the comic takes it all. Humor wins it all within and outside of *Chicago*, as well. As it is presented in the original drama:

He [Billy Flynn]’s fighting, gentlemen, fighting, with every drop of his blood, for the life of that little brave woman. The Jury hypnotized, enthralled, hangs on each word and follows every gesture. The Press watch benignly; they know his whole bag of tricks, but BILLY’s always worth watching. Even the JUDGE listens. / And ROXIE – ? This scene is really the

close of an hour's duel between ROXIE and FLYNN. When the curtain goes up, honors are even and she is faithfully registering the emotions outlined for her in rehearsal. Gradually, however, she extends her field; deeper emotion, gesture, writhing. She works for her audience – the Jury; and they, fascinated, are torn between her contortions and the fervid orator. (Watkins 1927, 103)

There are the usual figures of the law, of course, such as the judge, the jury, the policemen, the bailiff, the attorneys etc., and it is set in the symbolic space of law and order, i.e.: the courtroom, however, what reinstates law and order is the figure of an angel-like woman in the hands of a devilish man. The whole trial scene, and in fact, the whole story is only the *danse macabre* orchestrated by Billy Flynn who manages to free the two devilish women, Roxie and Velma (besides many other similar women) dressed up as angels, although, it is true that the hoof of the devil is constantly present and it is continuously evident that everything is an act and everybody knows this but they accept it because they want the razzle-dazzle, they want to be part of the *danse macabre*.

Abrams, when defining wit and humor, links them to the comic as 'both "wit" and "humor" designate species of the comic: any element in a work of literature, whether a character, event, or utterance, which is designed to amuse or to excite mirth in the reader or audience' (Abrams 1999, 329). He goes on defining humor as being 'ascribed either to a comic utterance or to a comic appearance or mode of behavior' (Abrams 1999, 331). According to Abrams, humor in its general use is considered to be entirely comic which induces positive laughter or laughter itself is the chief aim of humor: '[I]n the normal use, the term "humor" refers to what is purely comic: it evokes as it is sometimes said, sympathetic laughter, or else laughter which is an end in itself' (Abrams 1999, 331). This interpretation of humor and its relation to laughter is in opposition to satire where 'the laughter is derisive, with some elements of contempt or malice, and serves as a weapon against its subject' (Abrams 1999, 331).

Möser highlights the connection between humor and the grotesque pointing out that the principle of humor is to be found in the grotesque and that laughter originates in people's need for joy and gaiety. (Bakhtin 1968, 35) Later Bakhtin adds citing Bonaventura that the best and most potent mode of resisting all the mockeries of life, of fate and of the world is laughter. It is the liberating power of the laughter that is emphasized in the philosophical treatises. There is not really a better mode of resisting and defying the mockeries and the dangers of life and the world but to laugh at them. Laughter is powerful through its liberating capacity and its fearlessness. Laughter frees the human mind and consciousness and opens new ways for thought and imagination. Bakhtin declares that for the same reason great changes are usually preceded by some kind of carnival consciousness. (Bakhtin 1968, 49)

Jean Paul also understands entirely the universality of laughter and its possibly destructive aspects. He claims that "[d]estructive humor" is not directed against isolated negative aspects of reality but against all reality, against the finite world as a whole. All that is finite is per se destroyed by humor.' (Bakhtin 1968, 42) Jean Paul also points out the radicalism of humor. Through the use of humor the whole world turns upside down and we lose stability due to its dizzying effect. All moral and social stability is destructed via the universal and radical features of the humor in such occasions as the medieval comic rituals or spectacles. (Bakhtin 1968, 42) In *Chicago*, this is apparent – most vividly when Billy Flynn (during his comic-devilish trial performance) sings that

'What if your hinges all are rusting? / What if, in fact, you're just disgusting? / Razzle dazzle 'em / And they'll never catch wise! [...] Give'em the old razzle-dazzle [...] Daze and Dizzy 'em [...] Stun and stagger'em [...] Keep 'em way off balance' (Ebb and Fosse 1976, 75-76, Marshall 1h 16-21m).

All he sings about is realized in *Chicago* through the comic-humorous dizziness presented in the story. We as readers and viewers are kept way off balance and in our daze do not catch wise (first).

In order to understand the *farcical femmes fatales* of *Chicago* Bakhtin's concept of the *carnavalesque* is to be defined:

In *Rabelais and His World* (trans., 1984), Bakhtin proposed his widely cited concept of the **carnavalesque** in certain literary works. This literary mode parallels the flouting of authority and inversion of social hierarchies that, in many cultures, are permitted in a season of carnival. It does so by introducing a mingling of voices from diverse social levels that are free to mock and subvert authority, to flout social norms by ribaldry, and to exhibit various ways of profaning what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct. Bakhtin traces the occurrence of the carnivalesque in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance writers (especially in Rabelais); he also asserts that the mode recurs later, especially in the play of irreverent, parodic, and subversive

voices in the novels of Dostoevsky, which are both dialogic and carnivalesque. (Abrams 1999, 63)

Cuddon adds to this that the *carnavalesque* element is typically characteristic of parody, personal satire and burlesque (early literary examples are Socartic dialogues and Menippean satire). He also states that the *carnavalesque* through its subverting nature has a liberating influence while it disrupts authority and introduces alternatives. (Cuddon 1999, 111) In the case of the various versions of *Chicago*, these can be encountered. The story of *Chicago* is about a spectacular modern-day *carnival* in an urban setting displaying most of the features of the *carnivals* of ancient times and the Middle Ages. It is irreverent, parodic and subversive; it flouts social norms, profanes what is sacrosanct and subverts authority, order and the legal system. In the world of *Chicago* everything is turned upside-down and inside-out just like during a *carnival*. All the rules, laws, norms and the customary order are disrupted just like in the case of a *carnival*. *Chicago*, in all its versions, is the storehouse of what could be termed as “low entertainment,” and in fact, it is so on purpose. It criticizes the (often) performative and manipulative features of the (American) legal system as public entertainment. It aims to show that what happens in the name of justice in *Chicago* is *panem et circenses*, it is a gladiator fight, it is a circus, it is a carnival and not that rightful and justified process of truth. Here, the innocent is executed, the guilty is glorified and set free through the carnivalesque cavalcade.

The protocol and the ritual of the original carnivals were based on laughter and they were consecrated by tradition. These carnivals were the double life, the double world of the people, actually legitimized by the existing system. (Bakhtin 1968, 5-6)

They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all mediaval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. (Bakhtin 1968, 6)

The carnival time was a special, suspended, unique period when everything worked and happened with a specific and out of the ordinary logic. People actively participated in this unique event. This is exactly what can be said about *Chicago*. Everything that happens within the story and to the people is the result of a unique *carnavalesque* situation and that is why the violent women, the *femmes fatales* can get away with what they had done. All the people actively participate in the events and willingly live this double life. As the 2002 film closes, for example (similarly to the 1976 version that has been quoted), Roxie and Velma thank the people’s active participation in this carnival that enabled Roxie and Velma’s freedom and success as follows: ‘VELMA. Me and Roxie, we just would like to say thank you. / ROXIE. Thank you. Believe us, we could not have done it without you.’ (Marshall 1 h 40 min) This double aspect of the world, the coupling of the serious cults and myths with the comic and the abusive ones as equals and equally “official” was made possible through the functioning of the carnival. (Bakhtin 1968, 6) It was the carnival time when everything that was valid in the “serious world” – where the female murderers would have got their “due” end – got parodied and ridiculed in a legitimized way within the “comic world” – where these *femme fatale* figures, the *farical femmes fatales*, walk free and even become celebrities and successful people.

The carnival, this all-popular festivity is closely linked with grotesque realism and “[t]he essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 1968, 19-20). This lowering and degradation of everything ideal, high or valuable are central to *Chicago* – with a comic twist. All versions treat this issue and most of them were produced in comic genres of the “lower order” such as vaudeville, musical, screwball comedy or satire bordering on the burlesque. Certainly, grotesque realism is a feature likewise. In *Chicago*, another important source of humor is how grotesque realism sheds light on the artfulness and artificiality of the performances of the perfect ideals. In *Chicago*, everything is ruthlessly on the material level, is down-to-earth, and in a grotesque-realist way, is dragged down into the mud where step-dance takes place. During the Middle Ages, it was the function of the clown to bring down to earth, to transfer to the material level the high ceremonial rituals and gestures. (Bakhtin 1968, 20) It was the comic element, so to speak, that created the connection between the higher and lower levels and was capable of bringing down the higher circles to the lower one to connect it to the people, to make it accessible. This is what happens in *Chicago*, too.

Chicago by adopting the carnival spirit means to provide a new outlook, to make people realize the relativity of existing things and to offer a passage into an entirely new order of things. (Bakhtin 1968, 34) *Chicago* by adapting the spirit of the carnival manages to work the same way as the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, i.e.: it ‘liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all the fears and is

therefore completely gay and bright' (Bakhtin 1968, 47). In the same vein, *Chicago* turns the frightening or terrifying features, figures and events of ordinary life 'into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities' (Bakhtin 1968, 47)

To the death-life ambivalence of the *femme(s) fatale(s)*, in *Chicago*, music and dance are also added. Thus, a singing-dancing death-life ambivalence is presented in the figures of the *farcical femmes fatales* of *Chicago*. There is a truly comic-grotesque *danse macabre* with a satirical undertone. According to Bakhtin, within the medieval and Renaissance grotesque the image of death – just as in Holbein's or Dürer's paintings the 'dance of death' – 'is a more or less funny monstrosity' (Bakhtin 1968, 51). Bakhtin claims that during the ages that followed these ones it was entirely forgotten that the macabre images usually included the principle of laughter. Within the comic-grotesque world of the carnival death as renewal, the combination of death and life/birth and pictures of gay death are prevalent themes and images (just as in Rabelais' novel). (Bakhtin 1968, 51) In *Chicago*, we witness how the dancing and jolly death sings and dances herself merrily out of her own fate. The merry murderers get away with their actions in their comic-grotesque carnivalesque world and performance within.

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ABSTRACT

John Major once defined Englishness as ‘warm beer, cricket on the green, and spinster ladies cycling to early morning Communion through the mist.’ A British detective drama *Midsomer Murders* exploits these and other commonly held stereotypes about the English and the English country life, reinforcing some of them while turning the others upside down. This paper explores the portrayal of the clergy and believers in this well known TV drama that reflects the contemporary position of religion, particularly the Church of England, as a traditional part of the English identity.

KEY WORDS

Church of England, religion, television, stereotype, *Midsomer Murders*

England stands for Church of England, eccentric incumbents, oil-lit churches, Women’s Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow parsley on the altar, the noise of mowing machines on Sunday afternoons, local newspapers, local auctions, the poetry of Tennyson, Crabbe, Hardy and Matthew Arnold, local talent, local concerts, a visit to the cinema, branch line trains, light railways, leaning on gates and looking across fields. John Betjeman (in Bryant 2006, 174)

Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. T. S. Eliot (in Bryant 2006, 174)

...warm beer, cricket on the green, and spinster ladies cycling to early morning Communion through the mist.” John Major (in Desira 2003)

In his book *Nations of Britain*, Bryant proposes several alternative ways of constructing and representing England and Englishness that serve as a source of national identification. One of them, ‘England: The Green and Pleasant Land’ tries, he believes, to define England as distinct from Britain, the two terms being frequently confused, by means of ‘the institutions or practices that are truly the peculiarities of the English ... the Church of England, public schools, pubs, cricket and foxhunting...’ (Bryant 2006, 170) set in the scenery of romantic English rural landscape. This construction echoes most of the images listed in the above quotations. In addition to offering an image of typically English life by presenting England as essentially a rural country, there are several other features they share.

None of these statements reflect the everyday experience of a majority of English population but are based, as Taylor points out, on ‘a presumption that everything good about England is rural’ (Taylor 2001, 134). This, he believes, ‘is the great irony of the Englishness constructed a century ago: a rural make-over for the most urbanized country in the world’ (Ibid.). All in some way include religion, specifically the Church of England, as one of the essential features of Englishness, set in the rural landscape. Finally, all of these statements are so well known and frequently used that this alone would be a sufficient reason for considering them stereotypical.

A popular television detective drama *Midsomer Murders* draws heavily on the stereotypes of English village, Southern English, to be more precise, as it is the rural life of this particular English region that has come to stand for England as a whole (Howkins 2001, 151). Many of the above listed images are present continuously throughout the series. The inns, churches, thatched cottages, ancient manors holding many secrets, village greens, even the cricket, foxhunting, local newspapers, auctions, concerts and village fairs, spinster ladies, often cycling, to Communion and elsewhere and occasionally the mist, too. The images of Southern English rural life are, as Howkins observes, widely used with an aim ‘to add purity, decency and ‘Englishness’ to the product or

the idea evoked' (Ibid., 155). However, in the *Midsomer Murders*, the familiar picture of idyllic English country life is twisted, even grotesque.

Village communities are often bitterly divided, ancient manors are sites of crimes resulting from the decay and corruption of once great English aristocratic families, village fairs provide settings for murder scenes, respectable spinster ladies are often not so respectable but cruel, hiding secrets or withholding evidence, involved in blackmail or even murder. Even though Storry and Childs believe that, like many other popular television series exploiting this rural myth, *Midsomer Murders* 'are essentially about restoring order and calm to an idyllic place whose waters have been ruffled by the odd murder or two' (Storry and Childs 2002, 21), the fact that the crime rate in this fictitious county of England is so abnormally high it is considered by some 'the murder capital of the world' (Jefferies 2008) does not correspond with the peaceful, idealized stereotype of 'the Green and Pleasant Land'. Allegedly, the Queen herself observed: 'A lot of people die in Midsomer. I wouldn't like to live there' (Ibid.).

This paper focuses on the stereotypical presentation of the Church of England, which 'remains a significant part of village life, and its churches and cathedrals are often much loved buildings and the focal points of villages' (Bryant 2006, 171), in this television series. It argues that this presentation is twofold. On one hand, the most general depiction of the Church of England copies the trends prevalent in English society – declining religious observance, secularisation, gradual shrinking of the space religion is allocated in everyday life. It is, however, the people defying these trends and supposedly adhering to a more orthodox understanding of religious life that are stereotypically depicted in a very negative way, usually as downright insincere in their declared beliefs, engaging in actions that are in direct opposition to Christian morality and therefore hypocritical or fanatical and dangerous.

The English today, Bruce says, 'have a nostalgic attachment to their great cathedrals and expect to be able to hear choirs singing Latin masses at Christmas but complain when cathedrals introduce charges to fund their enormous maintenance costs and maintain their choir schools. They have a nostalgic attachment to a Constablesque vision of Anglo-Saxon church towers rising up from fields of corn and mourn the closure of parish churches which they never attend' (Bruce 2001, 198). This points to two important facts. Firstly, the church itself seems to be historically more closely associated with the countryside and small towns rather than industrial areas. Paxman claims that 'when people speak of the Church of England being "the established Church", they have only ever really been referring to its constitutional privileges, to the monarchy and to its position in the shires. Most of the time, in most of the cities and suburbs, where most of the English people live, the Church of England is almost absent' (Paxman 1999, 106). He refers to a survey from 1851, according to which, even at that time, two thirds of Londoners did not go to church and the church attendance rate in east and south London was the lowest in the country (Ibid.).

Second, the above quoted statement reveals the prevalent perception of the Church as a cultural institution, responsible for preserving ancient buildings and traditions but without the need for any personal involvement of most of the society. According to a 2003 poll, in Britain as a whole, 60% of people said they believe in God but only 18% claimed to be practicing members of an organised religion (Ipsos MORI). Similar trends, of course, prevail in most of the contemporary Western world. The Church of England being an established church – a situation described by Paxman as 'profound integration of sect and state' (Paxman 1999, 98), however, places it into a slightly different position. As mentioned already, it is one of the institutions that can be seen as exclusively English. The foundation of the Church, though a reformation from above, experienced "as obedience rather than conversion" (Haigh 1993, 21), is considered one of the crucial impulses for the formation of English national awareness (Bryant 2006, 169). Even though nowadays religious uniformity is no longer required by law, the Church of England remains an established, national church, serving for many as 'a source of social identity' (Bruce 2001, 197).

Bryant describes the current position of the Church of England in the following way:

It has today few worshippers but its clergy are still visible on many public occasions such as commemorations of the war dead and they do perform rites of passage, especially weddings and funerals, for the many non-churchgoing English who declare a belief in God and tick 'C of E' when asked their religion on forms (such as on admission to hospital). Its theology is unimportant to most, including, it sometimes seems, its bishops and parish priests (Bryant 2006, 170).

At the same time, the national Church is, on occasions, still expected to act as the conscience of the nation and is 'regularly called upon by political leaders ... to provide a lead on matters of morality', yet criticised for being unable to offer the guidance the nation needs (Bruce 2001, 198).

All of the above mentioned trends are reflected in *Midsomer Murders* where the Church features rather frequently, being an inseparable part of rural England, chiefly through cultural events and rituals. The former include choir singing or bell ringing competitions, much appreciated by the local villagers, village fairs the organization of which is the responsibility of a parish council and involves the clergyman and his wife, trying to

raise some money needed to save the church, since the parishioners who hardly ever visit it, show no interest in paying the cost (*Death's Shadow*).

The latter, given the topic of this television drama, are most frequently funerals of murder victims, even if the audience knows that the deceased was hardly religious, as is the case of a man who reportedly had an affair with practically every woman that appeared in the episode, all of whom also attended his funeral (*Dark Autumn*). Weddings, too, frequently take place at church, including the wedding of the inspector's daughter (*Blood Wedding*) and his own planned renewal of marriage vows even though, as he and his wife admit, they hardly ever go to church (*Death's Shadow*).

Baptism, on the other hand, is not so commonly depicted. When mentioned at all, it is an event causing major controversy, around which the plot of the episode evolves. A very rare event, it shall mark a turning point in the life of a parish known for a particularly strong lack of interest in religion and the young couple who wish to have their new-born child baptised find themselves under strong pressure from both the families since, as the mother says, they feel it would put the baby out of their reach (*Second Sight*).

According to the official Church of England website, more than a quarter of couples in England get married in a traditional Church of England ceremony, as it is available to everyone, including those who are not baptised. Recently, a controversy has been sparked by a proposition to include the baptism of children as a part of their parent's wedding service, if they so wish, as a reaction to the changing marriage and family patterns in society and to the fact that more children are born outside wedlock and less are baptised. The advocates of this measure see it as a chance to 'respond pastorally to our changing world' while for its critics, such as the bishop who observed that 'it is a pity they have not put in a funeral for grandma as well' (Weaver 2009), it represents a failure of the Church to stand by its moral principles and not to conform to the expectations of a largely secular society.

This supposed failure of the Church representatives to live according to the values they profess and certain moral relativism is somehow always present in the presentation of the clergy in *Midsomer Murders*. Even if we exclude the priests directly involved in murder, we can see failed marriages of the clergy, marital infidelity and illegitimate children (*A Tale of Two Hamlets*) and negative attitudes towards women – seen by the misogynist vicar as 'the root of all evil' (*Four Funerals and a Wedding*), including the female priests, ordained in England since 1992 – a decision which caused the resignation of many Anglican clergymen (Chapman 2006, 136). Even a young and enthusiastic female vicar who appears to be genuinely dedicated to her profession, always seen wearing T-shirts such as 'Shopping with Jesus' or 'Jogging with Jesus' is in the end revealed to be having an affair with a married man and trying to conceal this fact from the police (*County Matters*). Personal life presents a problem for gay vicars too, whether it is the fear of having a past affair disclosed to the members of their new congregation (*Four Funerals and a Wedding*) or the displeasure of some of the parishioners at the relationship between their priest and curate (*Straw Woman*). The ordination of gay priests and bishops has been another issue recently causing major controversy not only in the Church of England, but within the worldwide Anglican Communion as a whole (Chapman 2006, 138-143).

As stated earlier, we can distinguish the two levels of the presentation of Church of England in *Midsomer Murders*. The more general one reflects the basic contemporary trends and the understanding of the Church as a cultural institution and a certain source of social identity. The Church, its rituals and buildings, merely provide the background and the setting for the story to unfold. On a more specific level, however, it is the people seen as more personally involved in the Church, that is the clergy and the believers, who, if presented, are generally assigned negative roles and are subject to negative stereotyping. The already discussed depiction of clergy can therefore be considered a part of the second level. In their case, it is either the failure to adhere to moral principles or excessive devotion, even fanaticism that leads to lies, deaths and, in some cases, even to murders.

In the episode entitled *Death's Shadow* the vicar is driven to crimes and eventually to suicide by the tragedy of his personal life. Reverend Wentworth is treated with contempt by his overambitious wife who resents him for his lack of ambition and unsatisfactory career. Years ago, as it is later revealed, he had an affair and an illegitimate son. However, the boy died tragically, which eventually caused the premature death of his mother, too. The vicar is unable to reveal his secret and his true emotions for the sake of his career. Finally, having discovered the identities of the men who as children accidentally killed his son, he murders them all and in the end jumps to his death from the roof of the church, crying out: 'Of course, I'm going to do it. I should have done it years ago.'

Religious fanaticism, on the other hand, is the reason for the murders committed by Reverend Pete Kubatski in the already mentioned episode *Second Sight*. In his determination to bring 'real religion ... instead of false religion of scientific reason or just plain paganism' to his parish, he murders all that he believes stand in his way and tells the young woman who wishes to have her child baptised, that her murdered brothers and father were in fact taken by the devil for their lack of faith and their opposition to the baptism. Even though his beliefs are in direct conflict with Christian principles, he fails to recognise this and, when arrested, prays for the forgiveness not for himself but for those who stand in the way of God's work that he believes he has been doing.

The inability to adhere to the principles of Christian faith in their personal lives and fanaticism bordering on the hatred of anyone not sharing their beliefs often go hand in hand in the presentation of the clergy in *Midsomer Murders*. Reverend Wallace Stone, described by one of the characters as ‘a bit of a hellfire and damnation man’, devotes all his energy to fighting superstition in his parish and prides himself on the ‘strength of his belief’, yet at the same time he treats his own wife as a mere servant and is rather surprised at her leaving him in the end (*Talking to the Dead*).

Similar patterns of stereotypisation are employed in the portrayal of lay believers, who openly declare themselves as Christians and therefore set themselves apart from the majority of the population, however, their real actions reveal their hypocrisy. Colin and Christine Cooper are only too willing to cooperate with the police and bring whatever information about their neighbours they have since, as they emphasise, as born again Christians, it is impossible for them not to tell the truth. However, when witnessing a fatal accident of their elderly neighbour, instead of calling for help, they take the opportunity of breaking into her house and stealing a valuable coin from her collection (*Dead Man’s Eleven*). Another couple, a village doctor John Cole and Harriet Hopkins, the Justice of Peace, repeatedly claim to be Christians whenever their trustworthiness is being called into question but their understanding of faith leads them to hatred of those who disagree with them and does not prevent Doctor Cole from trying to seduce his teenage patient while engaged to Hopkins (*Straw Woman*). In the end, it is their opponents who, despite their obvious flaws, appear more positive by comparison.

The conflict between the Church and the ‘others’ – the scientists, the alternative medicine enthusiasts, those allegedly possessing the ‘second sight’ or simply the non-believers – is often employed and exaggerated to underline the hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness of the former. In the above mentioned episode entitled ‘Straw Woman’, the conflict is twofold, with the Church being at odds with the owner of the local manor house and the practitioners of alternative medicine. Alan Clifford, though dying of cancer, keeps organising wild parties in the manor house and the chapel, which understandably angers the village priests and their congregation. When compared with his most outspoken critics who waste no opportunity to increase the hatred of the villagers towards him, Clifford still emerges as morally superior, deciding in his last will to turn his manor house into a hospice for the dying. His doctor, who practices alternative medicine, admires his positive attitude towards the approaching death, in her opinion so markedly different from the attitude of the Church. She is depicted as an open-minded and tolerant woman, despite the fact that one of her ancestors was accused of witchcraft and killed by fanatical villagers. Her counterpart, the supposedly Christian Doctor Cole, on the other hand hates her for her methods that he finds incompatible with Christianity and tries to turn the public opinion against her.

The English, in Paxman’s words, like their religion ‘pragmatic, comfortable and unobtrusive’ ... ‘a church built on the conviction that anything can be settled over a cup of tea’ (Paxman 1999, 98). This comfortable version of church as a part of the national history and cultural heritage, entering people’s lives on major holidays, weddings and funerals, is always present in *Midsomer Murders*. Any active personal involvement in the Church, in spreading the belief and adherence to the orthodox principles and morality is, however, closely tied with hypocrisy and fanaticism. The pattern of negative stereotypisation outlined above can be observed throughout the series that has already reached its 12th season. One might therefore ask whether it is simply the personal attitudes of the script writers, the dramatic potential of having a clergyman involved in a murder or a reflection of a more widespread attitude towards the Church of England and religion in general.

In Bruce’s opinion, the British society, which encourages displays of multiculturalism in every aspect of life, tries at the same time to avoid ‘the exercise of religiously inspired values in the public arena,’ encouraging ‘only the most general ethnical consequences of a conservative religion, not the religion itself’ (Bruce 2001, 200). The reason, he believes, lies in ‘the British preference for religion to be confined to the private hearth and not taken too seriously’ (Ibid., 205) and the close association between orthodox religion and ‘problems’ – violence, ethnic tensions, threats – in Britain as well as abroad (Ibid.). This fear of religious fanaticism, intolerance and hypocrisy seen as inherent in orthodox religious faith, which has in recent years come to be associated primarily with Islam, does not exclude other religions and denomination, including the English national Church, which is reflected in the negative stereotypisation of the Church of England in *Midsomer Murders*. The answer to the question posed in the title of this paper, a paraphrase of the famous statement expressing the conviction that the English were chosen by God to accomplish great things, might therefore perhaps be answered by ‘an inevitable English preface’ that the Bishop of Oxford used to start his answer to Paxman’s question what one needed to believe to be a member of his Church – ‘Well, it rather depends’ (Paxman 1999, 95).

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Grotesqueness of Women in Martin Amis's and Will Self's novels

(*Grotesknost' žien v románoch Martina Amisa a Willa Selfa*)

JARMILA KOJDECKÁ

ABSTRACT

There is often something rotten in behaviour not only of men, but also women in novels of the contemporary era. The paper will deal with women, who are depicted grotesquely by the British writers Martin Amis and Will Self. The first novel *Cock and Bulls* (1992) by Will Self is a nice example of postmodernism, absurdity and satire.

Strange images of women appear also in Martin Amis's novel *Other People: A Mystery Story* (1985). Motifs of absurdity of women's lives are present in both novels. The women are depicted as vulnerable inasmuch that they have to pretend cynicism and an unswerving status. The depiction of the grotesque, such as absurdity or ugliness, is the way the writers depict reality. That is why they are not afraid to mock the bizzareries of the human society. The paper will examine grotesque images of female characters in the mentioned novels.

KEY WORDS

masculinity, absurdity, grotesque, women, men, identity, gender

Strange images of women appear in Martin Amis's and Will Self's novels. The paper focuses on two novels, *Cock and Bull* by Will Self and *Other People: A Mystery Story* by Martin Amis. Both of them depict bizzare and freakish female characters.

There are struggles between masculinity and femininity, but not always exactly between men and women. Various Western culture stereotypes are embodied in the examined works in which masculinity becomes dominant in the middle class society. Masculinity in this society often symbolizes power and privileges and certain superiority. Masculinity¹, or manhood, is a set of characteristic features, which are ascribed to the male. The opposite to it is femininity. These qualities refer to the differences between the two genders. A view of masculinity varies from culture to culture and is dependent also on time. Regarding Amis's and Self's work, we will consider the traditional concept of Western culture, which means certain superiority of men and rather stereotypical patriarchal approach.

There have been established norms, which can be either inward, it means male/female thinking and the outward, which are the consequences of the thinking, i.e. deep-rooted male/female behaviour. Metaphorically, men's fulfilment or achievement of all parts of masculinity would be the man, who is tough enough to win every war. Judith Lorber states, "sociology assumes that each person has one sex, one sexuality, one gender, which are congruent and fixed for life....A woman is assumed to be a feminine female; a man a masculine male. Heterosexuality is the uninterrogated norm"². But is there a pure man or a pure woman? As Judith Halberstan states:

"Why do we still operate in a world that assumes that people who are not male are female, and people who are not female are male (and even that people who are not male are not people!)"³

The problem of gender identity appears in *Cock and Bull* as well as in *Other People: A Mystery Story*. Will Self has created an ambiguous gender in the satirical *Cock and Bull*. The paper puts emphasis on the first

² Judith Lorber. "Beyond the binaries: Depolarizing the categories of sex, sexuality, and gender". *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 66, no. 2 (May 1996): 149.

³ Judith Halberstam, "Female Masculinity" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 948 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

part *Cock*, which suggests the reader the assumption of the double-gendered woman. The book is full of fictional fantasy and follows Self's words "All my books are fantastical because I don't believe in the real"⁴. There is no wonder that the book is fraught with bizzarries, because the name itself, *Cock and Bull*, is used in a collocation "a cock and bull story", which is a synonym of an absurd story.

One might consider the novelette a scandalous work full of violence and eroticism. Although Self destabilizes all conventions, he alerts to the predicaments of our generation. Moreover, he affords to show excessive male behaviour. It is a grotesque comedy of what happens, if there is not the binary system of the genders.

Carol, quite insipid character of the *Cock*, marries her schoolmate Dan and their marriage seems to be in accordance with traditional domestic arrangement. She married Dan after an ecstatic sexual experience, which she called "a fluke". When she sobers up from her infatuation, her perception of Dan changes: "She felt less of a woman when Dan was around"⁵, which aptly symbolizes her later metamorphosis into the "male female". Her body with its needs and physical functions started to revolt as well as her mind. And there were more than one turning point that had initiated the change.

"Dan had always drunk and always got drunk. It was just another of those things that in the beginning had made him endearing to Carol. He lost himself charmingly and entirely like a Dervish in a whirl or a swami in a trance, and then he would recover himself the next morning at breakfast, pulling on his identity like a woolly."⁶

Self is a master of metaphors and unpredictability of the plot. According to psychoanalysis desire and sexuality have to be in equilibrium to form the most regimented social conformity. Usually we never have what we desire and it leads to longing, which causes, to some extent, excessive behaviour and obsessions. Carol did not have what she desired thus the consequences of her frustration are absurd and bizzare. Nevertheless, it symbolises hidden warning for whole society. Self and Amis have a lot of in common. Both authors draw certain parallel between conventional gender characteristics, either they are physical or mental, and their protagonists. While Carol is physically transforming, her personality is rapidly changing. Self deliberately attributes her the deep-rooted male features such as aggressivity: "When a plasterer set aside his hawk and praised her svelve figure-in demonic terms-as she passed along Fortune Green Road, she turned back and spat at him"⁷.

Her hermaphroditism might suggest that femininity, or to be a woman, lowers the social value, so it is better to bear masculine features. But Carol could not know where her transformation was leading to. Despite her newly growing genitals she did not consider herself to be a man, "Carol knew that her penis didn't make her a man but it did free her a little bit more from being anything else"⁸. She lost her identity and was scared that her clothes might be too transparent that someone could recognise her "obsidian rod"⁹, the symbol of her new self.

Unpredictable ending follows metaphorical depictions of her growing genitalia and increasing belligerence. The principal source of her aggression lies in her subconscious desire for revenge. Although Dan swears off drinking and becomes a member of Alcoholics Anonymousⁱⁱ, Carol commits her revenge on him by getting him drunk and raping him anally. She beats him so much that she kills him. In her frenzy and by coincidence she also brutally killed Dan's mentor Dave 2, whom he had met in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Self tends to cross boundaries of what is acceptable. He transgresses social, sexual and moral conventions. His harsh vocabulary is often chastened by metaphorical descriptions of sex, which is said to be "climbing on the board"¹⁰ or funny organography of the penis depicted as "a pupa" with "a pinky-brown roll of flesh [that] could be pulled back from its tip to reveal a little mushroom, in the centre of which was a dry eye"¹¹.

The *Cock* is concerned with gender identity. However, there is another sophisticated issue. Seemingly, there is an omniscient narrator that tells the majority of the novelette. The narration is interrupted with increasing frequency by italicized first-person narrator, who is actually the listener of the whole story narrated on the train from Oxford to London by a middle-aged don. The climax of the story reveals that the don is Carol, when he/she carries out another violent anal rape, this time of the external narrator/listener, who described the don as follows:

"He was one of those women with the body of a middle-aged male sedentary. Flat white dishes of breast-piecrusts on the kitchen table-came to a head, sort of, with nipples that threatened to invert if you pressed upon them. His un-thighs, his bent shanks, they were travesty of shapeliness. He

⁴ Jan Moir, "Interview", *Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1996.

⁵ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 9.

⁶ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 2.

⁷ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 45.

⁸ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 56.

⁹ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 74.

¹⁰ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 8.

¹¹ Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 54.

sat again and parting his knees, brought me face to face with the heart of the matter. It was a huge, brown jewel lying on the velvety plush”¹².

The normative alignment of the binary oppositions such as being a man and be masculine and being a woman and be feminine does not fit fully in the real world. In other words, should androgynous people, or to put it better, feminine men and masculine women masquerade themselves to hide their identities? Carol finally did. She played a role, which was required by society. Her masculinity suppressed her femininity. It is worth pointing out here that Self exaggerates the theme of looking for identity. Although *Cock* is a fictional and grotesque fable, it can be applied to the problem of identity of homosexuals, who are often inevitably transformed into deviants, third people, of blurred versions of men and women.

Similar theme appears in *Other People: A Mystery Story* by Martin Amis. But this time, the novel depicts looking for not only sexual but also social identity of the protagonist. Mary, who is a weird character of the novel, undergoes even weirder development throughout the book. The reader learns retrospectively that Mary, the amnesiac woman, who has experienced a murderous attempt, is in fact Amy, who led a strange wild life. She becomes a girl without identity and the world assumes her to be dead. Her amnesia returns her chastity, but at the same time she becomes a victim of the wicked world which seems to be always represented by man.

Amis's preoccupation with masculinity often determines the gender of the protagonist. Although the male character of the novels prevails, Amis does not omit the female one. A woman appears as the main character in the novel *Other People: A Mystery Story* and the female character of the book significantly influences the lives of the men and vice versa. Due to the general critical approach to women, their unflattering body depictions or even their victimization, Amis has been often accused of misogyny. Although there is no admiration for extreme womanly beauty, similarly to Self, it does not mean necessarily that the book presents the hatred of women. Amis is trying to respond to what has happened to relationship between man and woman, because almost none of the relationships works properly. The concept of new or forgotten identity is similar to Self's *Cock and Bull*. Here it is Mary, who encounters the cruelty, which she did not know before, such as infidelity, murders, rapes, and humiliation. It is the way Amis satirizes not only relationship between man and woman, but also the falseness among people. He says “you can't shy away from the things. It's meant to cushion you from the unpleasantness”¹³. That is why he is not afraid to mock paedophilia, incest, pornography, alcoholism, drug addiction and other deviations in the society. All the nastiness is embodied in the protagonists of *Other People* except for Mary, who does not remember any of these cruelties due to her amnesia. The obsessions, fears and phobias can be seen as a consequence of their past or present frustrating situations. Mary does not know her past and thanks to it she is innocent.

At the beginning of the book the reader realizes that the mysterious narrator of the story is her “murderer”. He opens the book with a scene, when a woman, Mary (she does not know her own name) escapes from a hospital. She is confused and puzzled, because she knows that she does not know who she is. Only the reader knows that she underwent something terrible, near to death. The narrator often expresses his guilt and at the same time tells us that he would be able to do it once again, but the reader does not know what the narrator did and why: “I didn't want to have to do it to her. I would have infinitely preferred some other solution. Still, there we are. It makes sense, really, given the rules of life on earth; and she asked for it”¹⁴. And even if Mary survived, he killed the woman she used to be, and created a new innocent but harmful person. Mary Lamb, as she named herself, is directed to discover her previous self. During this process she meets various types of men of various social classes, who are shaping her back to her pre-amnesia state.

Firstly, she meets the brutality of Trev, the nasty violator and primitive human being, who is only obsessed with violence, drunken brawls and sex. Mary is not only alienated from her memories but also from her own body and its functions. She does not know what sex is, what it is good for, what she should feel.

According to queer theoryⁱⁱⁱ sexual behaviours, all concepts linking sexual behaviours and sexual identities, and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities, are social constructs, sets of signifiers which create certain type of social meaning.

In the novel *Other People* Amy/Mary is in every part of her story under the control of a man, who determines her future identity and sexuality. The only man who is willing to help her is Gavin, who is a homosexual. After the brutal rape by Trev he was the only man whose touch was acceptable for her. That was perhaps caused by the fact that she subconsciously knew that he had no ill intention towards her. His

¹² Will Self, *Cock and Bull* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 97.

¹³ David Weich, “Interview with Martin Amis”. *Powells*. 25 December 25, 2009, <www.powells.com/authors/amis.html>.

¹⁴ Martin Amis, *Other People: A Mystery Story* (London: Vintage, 1985), 9.

attitude to her was purely fraternal. He showed her way to literature and thanks to him she somewhat regained confidence in people.

She was still, however, pursued by strange Prince, who directed her to restore her memories. He is tenacious with his intention and at the same time a mystical figure for the reader. We do not know anything about him, the only thing we can deduce is that he must have had something to do with Mary's /Amy's mystical past. Mary knows this as well but is at the same time scared of him and curious about her past. She tells him: "Stop playing with me. Why don't you leave me alone? Whatever I was, I'm *me* now"¹⁵.

As she is exploring her past she comes to know that Amy (i.e. her) was a tart and quite self-centred person, who led a wild life full of drinking parties. Now, when she is a pure and innocent person, she is surprised about these facts, which people say about Amy. She is shocked that she was able to break the heart of her former lover, Michael Shane, in the past. History repeats itself, however, and she is annoyed when she is forced to let down Alan, her current lover. She is probably aware of the inevitability of the forthcoming moment, when she becomes Amy again, the hellish being.

Amis shows that seemingly innocent people such as this woman are the victims of people's madness. At first Mary Lamb/Amy Hide, who had experienced attempted murder was later victimized if not murdered again. The reader learns retrospectively that Amy has lived a very strange and wild life in the role of Mary, the amnesiac woman and has turned again to innocence. In spite of this fact she is once again the victim of men. It looks as if Amis sides with women more than with men. He does not want women to conform to masculine norms and in connection with this he reveals topics such as violence in partnerships, rape, sexual harassment, pornography, contraception, sexual oppression, etc.

Both *Cock and Bull* and *Other People: A Mystery Story* depict excessive rottenness of the protagonists. The novels are satirical and the portrayals of the characters are often exaggerated and caricatured. At times lecherous descriptions of bodies and sexual acts make the books disgusting. However, Amis wanted to accentuate the possibility of the existence of the nastiness among people. Many male characters describe women and their behaviour as something awful. All protagonists of *Other People* are grotesque caricatures, who are unable to cope with their lives. It seems to be a rule that people in Amis's and Self's novels are either predators or victims. Alan from *Other People* became the latter one. Totally depressed after the break up with Mary, he committed suicide. Mary was a victim of Mr. Wrong/Prince, while Carol, victimized by her drunken husband, turned to be a predator. Besides the similarities in the themes presented, the authors use similar style with a lot of features of postmodernism. They skilfully follow the patterns of the postmodern novel. Generally, postmodern texts bear special formal and stylistic signs. The language is often shocking but sophisticated. Both writers use colloquial and even vulgar expressions in order to stress the environment of his characters they live in. Besides neologisms and original metaphors, they have implemented another feature of the postmodern writing, which is the alternating narrator. Amis's omniscient narrator is cynical and even if he is sometimes exaggerating the reality he does not allow the reader to identify with any of the characters. Amis intends to leave the evaluation and decision strictly up to the reader. He does not reveal his opinions and just tries to hint the problem and suggest questions concerning morality, responsibility and guilt, which should be finally answered by the reader. While Amis attempts to mystify the reader, Self wants to point out the danger of the loss of one's identity and inability to find it. Many critics have said that his novels are immoral and pernicious, but Amis is aware where the boundaries of morality are. He often says: "It is what the modern world looks like"¹⁶.

¹ According to the sociologist of gender Janet Chafetz, masculinity can be generally described in seven areas (and it is necessary to add that the following definition is from a view of Western concepts of masculinity):

- 1) Physical-virile, athletic, strog, brave. Unconcern about appearance and aging;
- 2) Functional-breadwinner, provider;
- 3) Sexual-sexually aggressive, experienced. Single status acceptable;
- 4) Emotional-unemotional, stoic;
- 5) Intellectual-logical, practical, objective;

¹⁵ Martin Amis, *Other People: A Mystery Story* (London: Vintage, 1985), 49.

¹⁶ David Weich, "Interview with Martin Amis", Powell's Books, <www.powells.com/authors/amis.html>.

- 6) Interpersonal-leader, dominating; disciplinarian; independent, individualist;
- 7) Other personal characteristics: success-oriented, ambitious, proud, egoistical, moral, trustworthy, decisive, competitive, uninhibited, adventurous

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous is a society that helps people with a desire to stop drinking alcohol.

¹ The word “queer” has a primary meaning “odd”, “peculiar” or “out of the ordinary”. Queer theory concerns itself with any form of sexuality and emerges from gay/lesbian studies. The theory, which is sometimes considered a by-product of third-wave feminism, is a stream that analyzes and categorizes gender and sexuality. Theorists claim that identities are not fixed, so they can not be categorized, because they consist of many varied components. For example, a woman can be a woman without being labeled a lesbian or feminist, and she may have a different race from the dominant culture. She should, queer theorists argue, be classed as possessing an individual identity. This theory works to understand how individual categories of normal and deviant are constructed and how they operate.

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Tensions of Current Literary Criticism, or Is There a Meaning in this Work?

*(Napätie v súčasnej literárnej kritike alebo Má táto práca
nejaký zmysel?)*

ANTON POKRIVČÁK

ABSTRAKT

The paper discusses the two most striking approaches to literary criticism emerging in the twentieth century: a) the approach to literature as text b) the approach to literature as a symptom of something else. In the former case the aim is to show what it takes to move on “textual grounds” by pointing to some famous New Critical analyses of the ambiguities of language. This is contrasted with the latter approach subsumed under the heading of “political” or “ideological” criticism, prevalent in cultural studies.

In addition to differences and contrasts, some parallels are provided as well. There is no doubt that New Criticism shares with current theories the fascination for close reading, though the object and results of this reading may markedly differ. While for the New Critics the close reading means close concentration on a text, for many current critical approaches it is the scrutinising of a text in order to find its extra-textual values.

The paper concludes by suggesting that, drawing on the reading of Cormac McCarthy’s work *The Road*, both above aspects of criticism should constitute only one part of a good work’s meaning. It seems that after the unnatural extremities of the past perhaps the only way out of critical impasse is to reconnect literary theory to the universals. This can be achieved by the return to the exploration of the ontological aspects of literary works, especially because the category of the ontological has not been seriously “shaken” by postmodern tendencies.

KEY WORDS

literary criticism, literary theory, meaning and literature, cultural studies

Since the times of Aristotle literary critics have used different ways to identify the meaning of literary works, seeing it as a result of the operation of various phenomena - philosophies, religions, contexts, etc. This is quite natural, since no work of art has ever originated in a void, but always in a world appreciating certain values, and influenced by many other factors conditioning its form and meaning, which are usually very complex and ambiguous phenomena. However, literary history also provides us with many examples when the complexity of form and meaning has been „underestimated“, either on behalf of a one-sided didactizing, or absolute aesthetizing (art for art’s sake). My aim is to point out to such “underestimation” in the late twentieth century American literary criticism, to a “culture war” waged between, to put it in a slightly more updated terminology, “art” and “ideology”. By doing this I would like to ask a fundamental question: Where is literary studies heading?

The beginning of the twentieth century is characterised by an onslaught of modernism accompanied by an acceleration of science and technology, resulting in a “compression” of time and space as well as fragmentation and relativity of the perception unable to perceive new life conditions in their extension and intensity. There emerged new works of art as well as, naturally, new attempts to capture them by means of new critical language. Protagonists of new critical approaches sought, first of all, to look at a literary work differently, to use other perspective than what was usual and expected. In England new literary criticism had to tackle the Victorian trends with their characteristic historicity, with the putting of emphasis on literary characters and using of critical value judgments (of an essayistic nature) based on fine taste and ethical-philosophical reflections (Hilský, 1976).

One of the first new and modern critics in English literary criticism revolting against the Victorian understanding of critical practice was I. A. Richards and his psychologically determined theories of meaning (see, for example, his *The Meaning of Meaning* and *Practical Criticism*). New critical language can also be

found in the work of Richards's disciple W. Empson, especially in his famous *7 Types of Ambiguity*. In addition to Richards and Empson, new ways of looking at a literary work appear in the work of one of the greatest personalities of the Anglo-American criticism in the first half of the twentieth century – T. S. Eliot, who is often considered to have been the most important intellectual “initiator” of what was later to become the new trend in Anglo-American criticism, the so-called New Criticism. In spite of the fact that Eliot himself expressed doubts about the “formational” influence of his work on other critics, it is impossible not to see direct connections between his early work and what later crystallised as main principles of American New Criticism – understanding the text as an objective artefact living its own life, independent from the author or the recipient, and generating its meaning primarily through the analysis of its compositional elements. As he claims in his famous essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, “honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry” (p. 78), and further, “[poetry] is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (p. 80). In the same essay he speaks about the combination of positive and negative emotions and their balance, which is in fact a foreshadowing of the New Critics’ “ambiguity” of an artwork’s linguistic structures. However, the Eliot’s work is not just a source of the objectivistic program for the early twentieth century literary study, but one can find in it, especially in the essays written in the later stages of author’s life, also warning tones, a finger raised against dangers involved in such form of criticism.

As we can see, the Eliot’s critical language was a direct response to the exaggerations of the ruling critical practice. The same holds true for those American critics who were later labelled New Critics. Cleanth Brooks in his *Community, Religion, and Literature* (1995) describes the origin of one of the “manifestoes” of new Criticism (*Understanding Poetry*):

One of the courses we had to teach was a course designed to introduce students to literature. Our students were bright enough young men and women, but very few of them had the slightest conception of how to read a short story, let alone a poem. Out of this urgent problem grew our first textbooks, for the current textbooks simply did not address themselves to the real issues. They printed the text, gave some brief account of the poet’s life, supplied notes for allusions or difficult words, and usually topped it all off with a dollop of impressionistic criticism (p. 3).

Instead of discussing such extra-literary facts, Brooks and Warren decided to teach students how to read the texts themselves, for “if poetry is worth teaching at all it is worth teaching as poetry” (p. 3).

Such strong statement requires that one has a clear idea of what poetry is and where to look for the meaning of the poems. For Brooks (and New Critics in general), as the previous quotation suggests, the meaning of poems is no longer in extraliterary spheres (life of the author, historical events, the reader’s feelings), it is, first of all, in a specific language constituting a particular poem. New Critics thus maintain that the poem is, first of all, an aesthetic object, not a historical document. Critics (as well as readers) should concentrate on the elements which participate, each in its own right and extent, in the creation of the poem’s meaning. The meaning is not understood as given, stable, something which is there, hidden and waiting to be revealed by a critic, but complex, elusive, difficult to pin down. The reason for that is the fact that the meaning is produced by words. And the words, the building materials, of a good literary work are always ambiguous, paradoxical, ironic – because they are not denotations, but mostly connotations. A hypothetical “New Critic” would look in the text for the words “producing” such effects. Apart from searching for individual words, our “New Critic” would also try to identify mechanisms through which the effects are achieved.

One of the most important of such mechanisms would be the combination, arrangement of linguistic and thematic elements, i.e. the composition of a work. In a good literary work individual parts are connected to certain wholes, they to larger wholes, then to even larger ones, until a certain building, structure with a complex sense, is arrived at. The identification and presentation of the sense based on the correlation between individual elements is supposed to be the final goal of a critical activity. Such interpretation of meaning is possible, however, only when we accept the opinion that the essence of art does not, in fact, change, that in the whole history of literature there are certain invariables characterising a specifically artistic way of portraying the world (and the New Critics did believe in this). Without them it would not be possible to understand and enjoy great works of the past. However, these works are typical also for their ever new manifestations of a constant sense. It is always possible to find there something what preceding generations of critics have not noticed, a new element or a combination of them. René Wellek attributes the ability of a literary work to generate new meanings to its special ontological status. In his classic *Theory of Literature* (1985) he sees the work of art as “an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status”, derived from the work’s mode of existence which is “neither real (physical, like a statue), nor mental (psychological, like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle)” but “[it is] a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective” (p. 156). Because of the intersubjectivity, as Wellek further implies, the work’s meaning can never be objectively identified, whether in terms of its location (in the consciousness of the writer or the reader) or values (being absolutely objective or

relative). Thus the most natural way for a critic to approach it is through a concept of *perspectivism*, which is defined as "a process of getting to know the object from different points of view" (p. 156).

It is the issue of the existence of the universal, the objective, in art which Cleanth Brooks puts under a critical scrutiny in his perhaps best-known work *The Well Wrought Urn* (1974) in which he claims to want to discover "what residuum, if any, is left after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix" (p. x).

In the seminal study "The Language of Paradox", drawing on the interpretation of a well-known poem of John Donne "The Canonisation", Brooks claims that the essence of the poem is paradox. It is the main device through which the "Canonisation" reaches its efficient effect: the lovers refuse the world only to find much richer world in each other, "they are willing to forego the ponderous and stately chronicle and to accept the trifling and insubstantial 'sonnet' instead", to choose a well-wrought urn rather than "half-acre tombes" (p. 14).

Through his close analysis (or reading) of the poem's language, Brooks locates the paradox in the poem's creation of two worlds – the world of lovers and the world of reality. This is exactly in accordance with the statement made at the beginning of the essay, i.e. that the poet has to work by analogies and use metaphors to express his/her state of mind. Through metaphors, Brooks also discusses tone and the building of the theme, arriving at the conclusion that "the poem is an instance of the doctrine which it asserts" (p. 17). The statement of the poem's final effect is elaborated even further:

The poet has actually before our eyes built within the song the "pretty room" with which he says the lovers can be content. The poem itself is the well-wrought urn which can hold the lovers' ashes and which will not suffer in comparison with the prince's 'half-acre tomb' (p. 17).

The Well-Wrought Urn (especially "The Language of Paradox") is, in my opinion, one of those books which best characterise the critical method of New Criticism (this is not to underestimate other New Critical works which also significantly contributed to the development of the text-based approach to literature), but also one of those which elicited much response and became a "case study" for the opponents of New Criticism. Brooks himself is aware of this when he complains that it has been misunderstood:

The book apparently confirmed the notions generated by Understanding Poetry that the New Criticism was fixated on "close reading" through "analyses" of poems, and it took no account of the biographical and historical matrix out of which every poem comes (p. 4).

Undoubtedly the most significant responses to New Criticism in American literary studies include the "literary attacks" made by deconstructionists and the ones coming from the "cultural studies" camp. In a way it is quite natural, for deconstructionists share with the new critics their interest in the "close reading" of the text and, the cultural studies scholars seem to be most outraged by this interest in the text. Let me first mention what deconstructionists have to say. For this purpose I will not deal with a well-known essay of Paul de Man "The Form and Intent in the American New Criticism", but with Jonathan Culler's argumentation published in his book *On Deconstruction* (1992). He takes up Brooks' assertion that "the poem is an instance of the doctrine which it asserts" and claims that such assertion is not possible since, mathematically, no statement can be about itself – every statement about an X must be in a logical category higher than X. Similarly, "an assertion about poems is decreed to be a different logical type from the poems it is about" (p. 202). This relatively understandable sentence was further developed by Culler – following the deconstructionists' practice to find a weak point in a text and then jump onto it and take it apart *ad absurdum* – into speculative logical operations from which it follows, he says, that the poem is an example of infinite self-referential aberrations.

Here we can see that both approaches are basically concerned with the text, but while New Criticism approaches the language from a more conventional, rather structuralist aspect, deconstruction in its essence hunts for examples of, often illogical, incongruities and makes far-fetched generalisations on human destiny, forgetting of course that language does not have to be taken only mathematically, but also symbolically, metaphorically, etc. Ambiguity in poetry is definitely not the same as ambiguity in mathematics or physics. According to R. V. Young (1993), Culler clearly did not understand here the difference between the literal and the metaphorical (since for Brooks the urn was not a material artefact, but a metaphor – long before Culler noticed it). Moreover, Young maintains that also the concept of self-referentiality is imposed on Brooks without any justification, since the Brooks' sentence that

the poem is 'both the assertion and the realization of the assertion' does not entail 'self-reference' or 'self-reflexivity.' 'The Canonization' refers not to itself, but to what it represents: the speech of a fictive character, whose attitudes and ideas doubtless had their origin in the consciousness of John Donne, but who is certainly not identical with that poet.

Finally, Young concluded his arguments with the following statement:

The deconstructionists are quite the cleverest people around the English department these days, but occasionally they resemble the dumbest undergraduates in their inability to distinguish between figurative and literal language-or between poetry and pottery.

Deconstruction, however, was not the only danger facing New Criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result of postmodern trends, it seems that there has been a complete change of values and principles in literary studies. And because of that, in current literary studies it is quite common to associate New Criticism with what is already old-fashioned, surpassed, and rigorous. It is usually claimed that although the New Critics may have been useful in the past for their directing of the literary scholars' attention to texts, instead of historical and sociological aspects, at present their theories seem funny, for texts are always only signals of more important ideological issues – which, supposedly, should be a primary focus of criticism. Instead of textual matters, current critical theory is expected to deal with linking literature to the class struggle, reflection of historical inequalities done to women, gays, lesbians, or, for example, non-Western cultures, and, consequently, with literature's task to serve as a tool to "mend" them. In the light of these developments, the New Critical association of literary texts with a text-based meaning necessarily made them seem, as their current opponents claim, to pretend "that a busy warehouse is a monastic cell" (Kincaid, 1977). They were accused of "esoteric aestheticism" (revival of art for art's sake), formalism, unhistorical approach to literature, attempts to make literary study scientific, and, last but not least, of doing not more than just introducing a pedagogical method to teach students how to read literature.

Yet if we take a closer, deeper, and most importantly, unbiased look at the principles governing current critical discourses, we cannot avoid a feeling that they actually seem familiar to us. This sense of similarity was best captured by Daniel Green (2003):

After almost two decades of tumult and transformation in university departments that still claim literature as part of their disciplinary domain, what is most remarkable about literary study at the beginning of the twenty-first century is how similar it is to what passed for such study at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like philology one hundred years ago, academic literary study today—at least at the most eminent universities and in the most prestigious journals—is a highly esoteric activity, unlikely to appeal to anyone outside its own "professional" boundaries, anyone whose foremost interest in works of literature is simply to read them. It is, therefore, an endeavor that could hardly exist outside the university's institutional protection, and it is most strikingly concerned not with the appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of literature but with the historical and cultural "knowledge" that can be acquired from works of literature through a special kind of analysis (p. 62).

Green considers such development unhappy, but, paradoxically, made possible by New Criticism, namely by their entrusting the study of literature to universities. New Critics, he goes on to say, made literature become Literature with capital L, a scholarly subject ready for close scrutiny, or "close reading". But this New Critical elevation of literature to a high pedestal of academic scrutiny had, paradoxically, a very negative effect for literary study.

And here is where New Criticism is itself perhaps most culpable for creating the institutional conditions that would breed academic critics and scholars whose agenda was to displace the study of literature with the study of anything but (p. 72).

One of the reasons for this displacement was the stress put on the universities, making them to justify their existence in the global economic and technological environment. Heinz Ickstadt in his essay "American Studies in an Age of Globalization" (2002) discusses contemporary developments in American studies and, among other things, says that in a changing academic context "the humanities – and especially literary studies – have been steadily de-emphasised since they come under increasing pressure to prove their usefulness". He quotes J. Hillis Miller's rhetorical question "What good is literary study now in this new university without idea?" [a university based on excellence dominated by technological training, AP] and continues with the questioning:

Can literary study still be defended as a socially useful part of college and university research and teaching, or is it just a vestigial remnant that will vanish as other media become more and more dominant in the new global society that is rapidly taking shape?

I think the answer to this question, by the way asked back in 1998, is now more than evident. Literary studies has really almost vanished, destroyed themselves by shifting to cultural studies.

This is not to imply, however, that the victory of cultural studies was only a result of the processes taking place within universities, their restructuring and accommodation to changed economic pressures. It is undeniably also a result of the rise of global culture which, paradoxically, has created more favourable conditions for the spread of local cultures. It goes without saying that globalisation has been changing all areas of our life, including literature and literary theory. This is also not to imply that the strong emergence of local cultures is something negative either. What I simply want to say is that this should not result in the ignorance of the nature and function of literature and literary study.

But what is the nature and function of literature? Naturally, with the current proliferation of the approaches to the study of literature there would be a proliferation of answers, each of them stressing one's own particularistic view. Thus instead of going for some new and modern approach, I would like to quote a theoretician who has never been part of any particular approach, but has always tried to work within the field of literature, from an "intrinsic" aspect – René Wellek (1985):

the question concerning the function of literature has a long history – in the Western world, from Plato down to the present. It is not a question instinctively raised by the poet or by those who like poetry; for such, 'Beauty is its own excuse for being', as Emerson was once drawn into saying. The question is put, rather, by utilitarians and moralists, or by statesmen and philosophers, that is, by the representatives of other special values or the speculative arbiters of all values (p. 37).

And the answer to such question is, according to Wellek, that literature's prime and chief function is "fidelity to its own nature". If Wellek is not taken as a respectable authority for this type of literary study, which is almost unquestionably so in the case of current cultural studies scholars, let me elaborate on the relationship of literature to "other special values" by quoting a more acceptable person. That "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" has been, surprisingly, acknowledged by the "great" Jonathan Culler himself when in his recent book *The Literary in Theory* (2007) he admits that he himself contributed to the neglect of the literary:

Busy talking about race and gender, identity and agency, distracted by the notoriety of Knapp and Michaels's now largely forgotten antitheory theory, I inadvertently forgot the theory of literature. I think it is essential not to forget it: narrative theory, for example, is crucial for the analysis of texts of all sorts. These days, beginning graduate students often have little acquaintance with basic narratology (They have read Foucault but not Barthes or Genette, much less Wayne Booth). They may not know about identifying narrative point of view or the analysis of implied readers or narratees, despite the centrality of such matters to questions that do [emphasised by Miller] concern them, such as the analysis of what is taken for granted by the text (p. 5).

Although Culler refers to the so-called *theory*, his statement of the *status quo* can be applied to cultural studies as well (after all, in recent years they heavily draw on theoretical discourses). Current students definitely know much more about exploitation, suppression, power structures, undecidability, opaqueness of languages, etc. than about the composition of literary works, development of plot, themes, etc. This brings about an inevitable (the Brooks') question: What does, in fact, literature communicate?

Of different attempts to answer it in a post-relativistic and, hopefully, post-ideological literary criticism, the most natural ones may be those which would re-connect the meaning of a literary work to human universals, which would return to the exploration of ontological aspects of literary works from an intrinsic point of view. This ontological would neither be a formal philosophical category, nor a postmodern response to the anxieties of modernist being in the form of a largely superficial play of indeterminacy, but an analysis of a point of contact with *the (literary) other*. For as Steiner points out, the "meaning, the existential modes of art, music and literature are functional within the experience of our meeting with the other". The other, otherness, also govern the work's form and composition: "The unbounded diversities of formal articulation and stylistic construct correspond to the unbounded diversities of the modes of our meeting with the other" (p. 138).

One of such modes permeates the whole of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, a story of a man and his son walking on the road in a post-apocalyptic world, searching for their way to survive. The world in which they move is barren and destroyed, stripped of every humanity and culture. What remains is just dead bodies, desolate sunless weather, and the cannibals exercising Darwinian fight for survival. Walking and hiding along the road, the man and his son are trying to get to "the other" of what they find themselves in. What is it that they are trying to get to? One might say - an escape from the totality of death. For total death is incompatible with humanity. It is the state of the "existence" of things surrounding them, not of humans. The author here portrays a world very nearly threatened with falling into non-existence, total death, when there will be no one to "carry the fire". He depicts a horrible truth of what it is to be human amidst the dead nature.

Let me conclude by saying that the emphasis on the ontological nature of aesthetic phenomena gets to the forefront especially in the recent years. It results in a kind of sobering from the obsessions of postmodernism and

from its extravagant manifestations, as well as in an attempt to put literary studies on more meaningful foundations than the worn-out statements about parallelism of a number of individual truths. After the rule of the “theory” it is clear that we cannot get back to traditional modernistic ideas of progress and objective truth. It is also clear, however, that going in the direction of supplanting the study of literature with the study of culture will only lead to the loss of the ability to appreciate beautiful products, from whatever culture or social class they may come. So where else can we go? Where is the meaning of a literary work? I think the question can only be answered by an ever present truth. The meaning of a literary work lies in its ability, as Poe would have said, to elevate our soul, to enrich our being – through the sense of pleasure and beauty, which is also the sense of truth and knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

Barbara Gowdy's novel *Mister Sandman* from 1995 depicts a cluster of original characters who despite their (or rather because of their) ludicrous behaviour and deeds result in being intriguing if not entirely lovable for the reader. The novel set in Toronto in the mid-20th century is a skilfully combined mixture of realism, magic realism and the grotesque. In a traditional point of view, the Canary family could easily be described as dysfunctional, as each of its members partly leads a life secret to one another. Joan Canary, as an enigma and common denominator, unites them through a complicated and rather freakish project. The question whether their confession to Joan is necessarily deliberating as well as the ways of how various characters in the confessional prose reveal truth about their sexuality are to be examined. The aim of the article is to present queer as an argument against certain normativity and categorization in the world of medialized sexuality and binary stereotypes of masculinity and/or femininity.

KEY WORDS

grotesque; queer; gay/lesbian; identity; gender; sexuality; representation

Decades ago rather few people would have imagined (and, above all, desired) a world in which the mainstream media such as magazines, television, etc. feature images of lesbian or gay, show transgendered individuals' mono- or polygamy, same-sex weddings, pregnancies and co-parenting (or possibly also infertility), communication patterns, intergenerational conflicts, split loyalties, break-ups, family secrets and so on. What is more, transgendered people's struggle to navigate for recognition, rights and resources as well as to legalize their behaviour is so massive and commonplace that their status itself of *queer* might be even threatened.

With certain amount of exaggeration and irony it would be appropriate to call the Canaries dealt with in the article a queer family in the very sense of the word, the only difference being that after many years spent living together they find themselves in homoeroticism, i.e. Gordon is a gay and his wife Doris is a lesbian.

Identity used to be understood as a relatively fixed and stable issue, especially when it came to homosexuals. This article's concern, however, is to destabilize those previously unquestionable categories like homo- and/or heterosexuality, which basically became the basic focus of the queer, a significant theory located firmly in the humanities and contributing to them in departments of sociology, literature, film, cultural studies, etc. since the early 1990s. Instead, a particular example of several alternative lifestyles is offered within the perfectly purposeful Canary family in the novel *Mister Sandman* by Barbara Gowdy which—despite the fact that it might seem totally dysfunctional at the first sight—as soon as a reader uncovers its members' secrets, perfectly corresponds with the recent emphasis on multiple subjectivities in order to reframe the focus of study from *gay and lesbian* to *queer*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Queer definitely has something to say to gay and lesbian studies; however, a clear distinction between these terms should be made: Meanwhile the latter term bases its definition strictly on homoeroticism, queer, in fact, destabilizes the integrity of gay and lesbian as a distinct category. Queer, therefore, is to rethink what some scholars believe to be limitations of the identity-based categories *gay* and *lesbian*.

Gender and Queer

“Are you exotic or what?”¹⁸

Once, the term *queer* was not just a slang expression for a homosexual but mainly a term of homophobic abuse. Over the past two decades, however, it has developed at an astonishing pace, having come to be used differently, especially in politer academic discourses, as Jagose observes, as a term suggesting a rupture of traditional models as well as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications sometimes¹⁹ and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. To define what queer means the same scholar’s words can be cited: ‘Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire.’²⁰ To put it in a different way, queer theory is interested in the borders of sexual identities, communities and politics.

Similarly, Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble* published in 1990 calls for a new way of looking at gender and sex. As a point of departure, she suggests that feminism incorrectly sees women as a homogenous group with common characteristics and interests. In her opinion, such an approach performed ‘an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations,’²¹ i.e. reinforcing a binary view of gender relations in which human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups, women and men. Therefore, rather than opening up possibilities for a person to form and choose his/her own individual identity, feminism closed the options down. Instead, Butler prefers and suggests ‘those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts.’²² In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute of a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times.

Speaking about gender, Butler doubts the traditional sex-gender-desire link, arguing that sex (i.e. male and female) is not a cultural representation of gender (feminine and masculine) and that one gender does not cause desire towards the other one in a continuum.²³ On the contrary, gender and desire are flexible and also not caused by stable factors, on which she comments: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; (...) identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.’²⁴ That is to say that, as a matter of fact, gender is a performance and representation; it has to do with what one does at particular times, rather than implies a universal who one is. It is, subsequently, not a question of whether human beings do a gender performance, but what particular form does the performance take, which, without any doubt whatsoever, also has to do with how sexuality is represented in the society.²⁵

As a result, queer theory favours the idea that identity is not fixed and does not determine who we are. Therefore, it results meaningless to talk in general about any groups such as women and men, hetero- or homosexuals, etc., for identity consists of so many elements that it prevents us from looking at people collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic. Consequently, queer negotiates all notions of fixed identity in many and usually non-predictable ways. Some scholars, according to Jagose, understand the queer project as a critique of identity, a promotion of non-identity or even anti-identity politics, seeing queer not as liberal pluralism but as a negotiation of the very concept of identity itself, basing their opinion on the view of identity as arbitrary and fictitious.²⁶ Nevertheless, it is logical that queer must necessarily have no interest whatsoever in consolidating or stabilizing itself due to its nature of rejecting false universality and homogeneity of the lesbian and gay movements, for queer primarily crosses the border imposed by them. To put it briefly, in general, Butler

¹⁸ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Sommerville House Publishing, 1996), 18.

¹⁹ Annamarie Jagose, “Queer Theory,” *Australian Humanities Review* (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

²⁰ Annamarie Jagose, “Queer Theory,” *Australian Humanities Review* (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 19.

²² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 15.

²³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 10.

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 25.

²⁵ Butler comments on the subject matter more specifically in the following way: ‘Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.’ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 11.

²⁶ Annamarie Jagose, “Queer Theory,” *Australian Humanities Review* (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

calls for a subversive action in order to resolve the *gender trouble*; she calls for a mobilization of identity and proliferation of genders.

At the same time, the queer theory is heavily influenced by poststructuralism and therefore it is associated with the writings and thoughts of the French theorists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In *The History of Sexuality* (1980), Foucault examines the way sexuality is organized in the West where it is seen as a taboo nothing could be said about in the past but still it was spoken about very often.

To be precise and accurate, several possible reservations and limitations the theory has should be mentioned briefly. Butler and other scholars representing queer²⁷ are often accused of putting too much emphasis on sex and the visual. It is to say that, in their opinion, it serves as a shorthand for the lesbian and gay, playing the role of a means of a new solidification of identity based purely on sexual essentialism. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the questioning of normative exclusionary regime enables the queer to celebrate diversity and variety in these terms, as it retains a unique unfixed potential. Second, Butler and her followers are often criticised for vagueness of her terms and thoughts, which has to do with the third reservation. Last, as e.g. Jagose points out, Butler does even not attempt to anticipate exactly how queer will continue to challenge normative structures and discourses. Butler's argument explained by Jagose is that 'what makes queer so efficacious is the way in which it understands the effects of its interventions are not singular and therefore cannot be anticipated in advance.'²⁸ The explanation is simpler than it might be expected: if we consider that the nature of queer is to avoid replicating strictly given categories, it becomes clear that it must be conceived as a flexible and responsive category in instant formation and under construction. In Butler's words, in the future the term will be rightly 'revised, dispelled, rendered obsolete to the extent that it yields to the demands which resist the term precisely because of the exclusions by which it is mobilized.'²⁹ Against the grain of the above mentioned objections the article aims to demonstrate how useful and significant this theory can be in practice or at least in a piece of postmodern fiction.

'Truth is only a version.'

Joan's face articulated into gorgeousness, especially around the eyes, whose expression was so intent and focused that combined with her astonishing ability to mimic sounds and to hum (...) it seemed obvious that the family had a genius on its hands.³⁰

In order to make the article graspable for the audience it is absolutely necessary to outline the plot in brief. Joan Canary, a daughter of Sonja and a granddaughter of Doris and Gordon Canary, who is presented as their third daughter due to Sonja's age³¹ and the intricacy of the child's father, is born in Vancouver in 1956 and returns back home to the Toronto-Buffalo region with Sonja and Doris. There Doris gradually takes the role of Joan's mother, which causes Sonja's latent but profound pain, and later also of her home teacher.³² For years, the Canaries' lives go on without any profound changes on the surface; narrow-minded and slow-witted³³ but

²⁷ In this respect, mainly David M. Halperin, an [American theorist](#) in the fields of [gender studies](#), [queer theory](#), [critical theory](#), material culture and visual culture and his book *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* printed in New York by Routledge in 1990 should be referred to.

²⁸ Annamarie Jagose, "Queer Theory," *Australian Humanities Review* (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

²⁹ Judith Butler qtd. in Annamarie Jagose, "Queer Theory," *Australian Humanities Review* (December 1996), <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

³⁰ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 61.

³¹ Ironically enough, Sonja's first intercourse results in pregnancy with a man who asked her to call him Yours and whom she met on her way to school in a local café. 'But Sonja was innocent. In all of those fifteen years, maybe ten minutes had been devoted to thinking about sex and another minute to so to having it.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 4.

³² Joan is unable to speak and write; on the other hand, she is capable of writing digits and reading. As Doris, who becomes her home teacher, comments, she has a feeling she 'never taught that kid a single thing she didn't already know.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 278.

³³ To illustrate how deeply the stereotypes of homosexuality as a mental disorder are rooted in people's minds, Gordon's doubts about Sonja's insufficient intellectual development should be cited. Grotesquely enough, Gordon suddenly wonders whether he himself, 'a queer father, by unconsciously failing to emit certain normal masculine impulses, plays havoc with his daughter's temperamental development. Her intellectual development! Jesus, what if she's slow because he's queer?' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 144.

hardworking and efficient Sonja never returns back to school and finds a job as a pin-clipper; bright Marcy,³⁴ their younger daughter, graduates and moves house and becomes an independent young woman. One day, however, Joan uncovers what has been hidden to all of them, as it will be demonstrated in the following subchapter.

In the first chapters of the novel, the topic of the matter of truth is introduced. Joan, an ephemeral and ghost-like being with pale green eyes and nearly white skin—which makes her look ‘flawless. Another way of saying not like any of them [the Canary family]’³⁵—is born in very mysterious circumstances as the ‘Reincarnation Baby’³⁶ to whose uncommon birth in a home for elderly people various stories are related: ‘[she] was that newborn who supposedly screamed “Oh, no, not again!” at a pitch so shrill that one of the old women attending the birth clawed out her hearing aid. The other old woman fainted. She was the one who grabbed the umbilical cord and pulled Joan head-first onto the floor.’³⁷ The relativity of truth favoured generally by postmodernism becomes even more obvious, as there are constant attempts to define Joan’s very existence³⁸ and rationalize or attribute her bizarre appearance and behaviour either to a brain damage caused by dropping her when being given birth (e.g. by Doris) or by possible reincarnation³⁹ (by Sonja, her real mother) and a consequent suffering because of some sins in her previous life.⁴⁰ What else makes Joan so dissimilar from the rest of the other children of her age is that she hardly sleeps at all and there is ‘her extreme sensitivity to light and noise’⁴¹ as well as inability to bear the sight of anyone except the immediate family⁴² and other behaviour patterns typical of agoraphobic behaviour, which condemn her to spend nearly her entire life inside the house with a pair of sunglasses on her eyes and covering her ears.

The book owes its dreamy atmosphere to several factors. First of all, there is the uncanny ghost-like character of pale Joan with her ability to reproduce and imitate any sound but inability to vocalize words and/or articulate herself by means of language. Yet, she ‘suffer[s] all the family’s attentions—patiently and without reciprocation.’⁴³ Second, the novel oscillates between dream and reality. Dreams play a significant role in the plot, for they not only reflect the intricacies of the Canaries but mainly foreshadow what is to happen. Even reality and truth are not clearly unrecognizable, as one of Gordon’s maxims says, ‘Truth is only a version,’⁴⁴ which is misheard and, above all, misinterpreted and frequently quoted by Sonja as ‘Truth is only aversion.’⁴⁵ Moreover, the title of the novel is based on a 1950s popular song Mr. Sandman (sometimes rendered as Mister Sandman) written by [Pat Ballard](#) which was published in [1954](#) and first recorded and performed in the same year by [The Chordettes](#)⁴⁶ two years before the fictitious character of Joan was born in the book.⁴⁷ The song’s lyrics⁴⁸ convey a request to Mr. Sandman, a [folkloric](#) figure, the [sandman](#), traditionally associated with sleep, to ‘bring [a

³⁴ As her independence and self-confidence gradually grow, Marcy makes a decision to change her name to Marcia.

³⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 2.

³⁶ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 1.

³⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 1.

³⁸ For instance Sonja says her daughter is ‘not of this world,’ which results in disquieting the rest of the Canaries for many years. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 2.

³⁹ To be more precise, ‘Sonja was *there* for Joan’s famous first cry, and it’s true she had thought it was one of the old women screaming “Flo! Flo! She’s insane!”’ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 2.

⁴⁰ Here a critical reader comes to the first paradox connected with categorization: Joan, a child, is to suffer just because of the fact that she is different; she represents Otherness, differing not only from other children but also from the rest of the family.

⁴¹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 28.

⁴² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 64.

⁴³ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 82.

⁴⁴ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 3.

⁴⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 3.

⁴⁶ Singers.com, “The Chordettes,” <http://www.singers.com/jazz/vintage/chordettes.html>.

⁴⁷ Traditionally, Mr. Sandman is a character in many children's stories, invoked to help (or lull) them to sleep. He is said to sprinkle sand or dust on or into the eyes of the child at night to bring on dreams and sleep. The grit or ‘sleep’ ([rheum](#)) in one's eyes upon waking is supposed to be the result of the Sandman’s work the previous evening. [E.T.A. Hoffmann](#) (1776-1822) wrote an inverse depiction of the lovable character into a nightmarish sinister creature in a story called *Der Sandmann*, which showed how sinister such a character could be made. According to the protagonist's nurse, he ‘threw sand in the eyes of children who would not sleep, with the result of those eyes falling out and being collected by the Sandman, who then takes the eyes to his iron nest on the moon, and uses them to feed his children.’ AllExperts, ‘sandman,’ ([http://en.allexperts.com/e/s/sa/sandman_\(folklore\).htm](http://en.allexperts.com/e/s/sa/sandman_(folklore).htm)).

⁴⁸ For the complete lyrics see <http://www.stlyrics.com/songs/c/chordettes5853/mistersandman232910.html>.

person] a dream,' the word dream ambiguously referring to a real [significant other](#) as well as to a sleeping dream. Interestingly enough, the [pronoun](#) used to refer to the desired dream ('Make *him* the cutest that I've ever seen') is often changed depending on the sex of the singer or group performing the song, which has a great significance if we consider Doris and Gordon's fluid sexual orientation.

Gender, Identity and Sexuality: To Feel Normal.

Anyway, Gordon wasn't Harmony, even if you drank too many rum-and-Cokes and kept your eyes shut. By the same token, Harmony wasn't Gordon. Nobody was anybody else, although people resembled each other and linked hands like paper dolls.⁴⁹

For most people, their sexual identity is not particularly fluid. This, however, is only partly the case of Doris and Gordon whose is not really constant or stable,⁵⁰ i.e. it, as Cindy Patton puts it, 'operates performatively in a practical and temporal space, a situation, if you will.'⁵¹ How both Doris and Gordon finally learn not to conceal their preferences is to be discussed in this part of the article.

Our view of how the perception of the term queer changed within the second half of the 20th century is enabled by several passages in the novel proving the medialization of sexuality in that period.

Both Doris and her husband show day-dreaming as a valid response to the systematic refusal of the society to accept their lesbian or gay desires and queer lives. Doris even has 'night-time dreams about making love with strange women in public places'⁵² as well as '[v]isions of beautiful women doing housework in their underwear and nightgowns, (...) women on the bus, receptionists, nurses, women she spotted as she tore through magazines for coupons.'⁵³ What is more, she cannot suppress these tendencies even when having sex with her husband: 'Yet there it was, sideswiping her during sex with Gordon, springing up in her dreams where *nine dreams out of ten the kisses was a woman*.'⁵⁴ Furthermore, despite the shame she is tormented with the climaxes she dreams and day-dreams about (the latter one being worse from her point of view, for she might be able to control them) 'make the ones she had with Gordon feel like minor aftershocks.'⁵⁵ In the 1950s and the previous decades, the characters' sexual orientation discussed in the novel is obviously not about the freedom of being public, on the contrary, it is even not about the right to privacy.

At the age of 18, Gordon Canary himself being a virgin untouched by sex and innocent not just about 'the choreography of sex,'⁵⁶ but being aware of his abnormality, he perceives as sickness, studies books about 'his "affliction,"'⁵⁷ that means homosexuality in particular.⁵⁸ At that time he could not come across more than several articles in leading psychological, medical and psychoanalytic journals describing the etiology and pathology of sexual inversion and being dominated by clinical concern, or several books 'catalogued under "Mental Disorders" and "Sexual Deviance"'⁵⁹ placed not on the open shelves. Gordon's main reason for coming to a library is his thirst for information but mainly his longing for 'a kind of punishing reassurance that it was true. He *was* sick. He was un-grown, unmanly.'⁶⁰ What he comes across there after everyone goes to bed are—from out contemporary point of view, of course—stereotypes and prejudices; he finds pieces of advice of how to become more masculine (play football, change the timber of his voice, how to walk and sit, discuss one's

⁴⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 206.

⁵⁰ In the end, the couple discusses what would have happened if Joan had not performed her experiment: "'I think I'd have kept it under wraps," she says, "you know, in fantasy land, and let me tell you there were a lot of dry years before I took the plunge. But who knows what I'd have done if we'd have a normal sex life? I'm no saint, I found that out.'" Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 319.

⁵¹ Cindy Patton, *Fear Of A Queer Planet: Queer Politics And Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993), 148.

⁵² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 76.

⁵³ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 203.

⁵⁴ Italics added. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 202.

⁵⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 202.

⁵⁶ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 87.

⁵⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 85.

⁵⁸ One of the most significant aspects of Foucault's research centres around the production of the homosexual. As Namaste says, '[t]he proliferation of discourses on sexuality gave rise to the category "homosexual." Originally a taxonomic device employed within sexology, the term subsequently gained currency in judicial and psychiatric fields of knowledge.' Ki Namaste, "The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (July 1994): 221.

⁵⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 85.

⁶⁰ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 85.

problem with the priest etc.),⁶¹ which reflects the performative character of masculinity, i.e. it is not necessary seen as something biological or inherent. His reaction to such findings is 'frustration, off and on, towards the doctors who had written the books' and the axiom 'the best you could do was the only decent thing you could do: *keep your affliction under wraps, live with it.*'⁶² Consequently, having given up, the gay man marries Doris with whom he has two daughters.

In the 1950s, almost thirty years after Gordon was born, however, these books are not longer hidden away but move to the ordinary shelves in the library. In the subsequent decades, i.e. in the 1960s and 70s,⁶³ the issue is further shifted on from psychoanalytic diseases to an examination of sexuality as a social product or construct with historical specific practices.⁶⁴ As Namaste observes, not only gender but also sexuality is produced by discourse. (At this point it should be stressed that one of the basic focuses of the queer theory is to examine the discursive production of homosexual-subject positions.) More important, from the rise of sexology to juridical institutions, sexuality has become a 'profusely discussed and regulated entity.'⁶⁵ Therefore, the question of silence, as the title of this article suggests, must necessarily be considered.⁶⁶

Before the Canary couple is able to *come out*, however, there is an only place in which their sexuality becomes articulated. Joan, who remains 'frozen in a six-year-old's body'⁶⁷ for good, is very susceptible to daylight and loud sounds. Most of her life is spent either in her sister Marcia's closet⁶⁸ or a laundry they later call 'her office;' even when she steps out of it, her ghostliness is accentuated by the quiet silent movement around the house. The motif of the windowless closet to which Joan retreats is used in a symbolic and metaphorical way, since it serves as a place of confession where the secrets of all the members of the Canary family are revealed.⁶⁹ Unable to speak or write and in order not to be misunderstood, Joan uses other forms of communication, including piano playing and imitation of all the sounds surrounding her. Paradoxically, it is her who eventually breaks the silence in the Canary family.

The 1960s and 70s liberationist movement reflected in the book⁷⁰ and the civil rights one put a solid base for the 1990s rethinking of cultural, sexual and other marginal groups and publishing novels such as the one discussed in this article. These profound changes make it possible for the Canary couple to unwrap their sexuality—at least within the family—in the end. Being certain predecessors of queer, Doris and Gordon push their sexuality in the early 70s against the binary model (i.e. hetero- or homosexual), for queer locates, exploits and destabilizes the incoherencies in heterosexuality; it does not refer to one specific sexuality⁷¹ and therefore does

⁶¹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 86.

⁶² Furthermore, even before reading those books Gordon has a feeling that they would not change anything: 'hide it, live with it, he was already weathered by what he would end up doing.' Italics added. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 86-87.

⁶³ It might be of some interest that the first journal devoted exclusively to research on homosexuality was *The Journal of Homosexuality* published first in 1974.

⁶⁴ Such a notion takes for granted the fact that what defines sexuality and how it operates is historically and culturally specific. In the article the idea that sexuality, whether hetero- or homosexuality (the latter one specifically), is socially constructed proves to be a crucial one. Therefore, social constructivism becomes the theoretical cornerstone of this field of research which rather shifts from the etiology of sexuality to its etology.

⁶⁵ Ki Namaste, "The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (July 1994): 221.

⁶⁶ The title is a paraphrase of the English proverb Look before you leap.

⁶⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 277.

⁶⁸ Instead of forcing Joan to adapt, Gordon makes the room more hospitable for her: 'If she must hide, they preferred her to be upstairs where it was warm and dry.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 66.

⁶⁹ Diane Fuss elaborates on the questions concerning the emerging of homosexuality suggested by Foucault in the introduction to *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. According to her, the production of homosexuality in legal and medical discourse engendered a paradox: although the adoption of homosexual identity allowed for the guarantee of civil rights, it brought with it 'the notion of the closet—that is, the idea that some people are 'visible' about their sexualities while others remain silent.' Consequently, the emergence of homosexuality was paradoxically accompanied with its simultaneous disappearance. Diane Fuss, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Michael Warner (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4.

⁷⁰ The loose manners of the two decades, especially the 1960s, are explicitly described by Marcy, herself having two stable boyfriends and a third one available, as it follows: 'Everybody seems to be drugged out. Her mother tie-dyes T-shirts for the whole family, wears hers without a bra (...). Her father grows sideburns and starts doing exercises in front of the TV before breakfast' and 'possessiveness is nowhere.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 257-259.

⁷¹ 'So I must be what they call bisexual,' claims Doris being herself unsure about what these categories mean precisely. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 319.

not put any limits to it. This enables them not to get divorced not for the sake of their reputation but the mutual respect and human affection they have been sharing for all those years.

'A pair of Old Lucky Homo-'

"Between you and me I'm not cut out for married life."⁷²

Gowdy's ability to write about sex in a completely unabashed way, secrets and what lies beneath the surface, and the ostensibly abnormal is surprising. She presents uneasy absurdities and comic dialogues with an enormous ease. To give a particular example, Gordon has a boyfriend named Al Yothers who later turns out to be Joan's father;⁷³ similarly, Doris simultaneously falls in love with an African American nurse⁷⁴ in Vancouver five months before Sonja gives birth, to which Doris, the respectable housewife, herself initially reacts with the feeling of 'faint from embarrassment.'⁷⁵ In this respect, it is worth saying that in *Mister Sandman*, Gowdy gently but firmly dispels the stereotypic reason for becoming a lesbian, i.e. that women choosing other women as lovers must be, in fact, previously disappointed in men. Doris tries to explain her new sensations to herself:

Oh, who knows? 'You haven't touched me in over ten years' was what she intended to throw at Gordon if he ever found out, and you bet it was a good excuse but it wasn't the reason. Her yearning for Gordon and her yearning for women ran on two separate tracks. That much she had always felt, and occasionally she felt the delicacy and the imperiousness of the division (...). The only other thing she was sure of was that loving women was dangerous. (76)

At the same time, however, she 'can't get used to Gordon not being beside her.'⁷⁶

Similarly to Gordon, his wife first tends to accuse herself and her being a lesbian of the Canary's misfortunes and second engages herself in numerous might-have-been reflections: 'What has happened to [her] that she wouldn't have happen again and gladly? Would she marry Gordon?'⁷⁷ and comes to the conclusion that she definitely would.

Likewise, there is 'an orange-haired giant' swaggering into his office and '[a]t the first sight Gordon is in love' although he does not know yet.⁷⁸ Comparably to his wife, he is amazed not just by 'how far he let his imagination go, it's the sense of nostalgia that's edging on him, as if in some life, and it isn't this one, he has actually danced this dance.'⁷⁹ Despite his attempts to 'call for some show of resistance, however counterfeit'⁸⁰ he gets erections as he did in his childhood when playing with his friend Tony and keeps on wondering 'if he has ever been half this aroused with [his wife]. He doubts it, although he remembers the first few years of their marriage as a time of perfect happiness.'⁸¹ Finally, on the way to a place they 'can go to' with Al⁸² he finds himself 'having crossed a point of no return. Another one. He wonders if what an affair amounts to is a series of points of no return,⁸³ i.e. a series of regular meetings with the man without Doris' having a foggiest idea about that. What he inevitably experiences anyway is a mixture of 'fear, guilt, misery, humiliation,'⁸⁴ which is to a large extent caused also by the split loyalties he feels toward his wife: 'part of him wants her to know. Craves her permission, or just to come clean'⁸⁵ and feel *normal* at last.

⁷² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 68.

⁷³ Another features making the novel *Mister Sandman* a perfect example of a complex grotesque is the fact that only after years Gordon Canary realizes that it was his own lover, Al Yothers, who seduced Sonja and is therefore also Joan's real father. Going further, he finds out that there was 'an interval of not more than five hours between penetrations—Al's of her, and his of Al.' Despite that, in his opinion, Joan means a blessing for the family. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 152-153.

⁷⁴ The crucial role the woman plays in Doris' sexual awakening can easily be deduced from these words: 'Until she met Harmony she would have said that she was more likely to win a million bucks than she was to kiss another woman or even on the lips let alone below the neck. So Harmony was a miracle. The absence of shame and guilt was a miracle. There was fear, but only afterwards and only of being discovered. (...) Sex was something else together. Slithery, equatorial. For Doris it almost restored her belief in God.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 204-205.

⁷⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 21.

⁷⁶ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 190.

⁷⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 191.

⁷⁸ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 32.

⁷⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 34.

⁸⁰ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 39.

⁸¹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 37.

⁸² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 44.

⁸³ Italics added. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 41.

⁸⁴ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 104.

⁸⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 108.

In the collection of essays titled *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* Michael Warner, the editor and author of one of the essays, starts the introduction with the question ‘What do queer want?’⁸⁶ The answer to this intricate question becomes more than obvious when we point at Gordon’s wrong attitude to it in the first years of his marriage to Doris: “‘Act normal,’ he has to keep warning himself. Meaning, ‘Act how you used to act before you screwed Al Yothers and *for the first time in your life felt normal.*’” Although the feeling of normalcy lasts only *while* he is screwing Al. Those fifteen minutes or so.⁸⁷ It does take Gordon as well as Doris pains and many years of a double life before he stops considering ‘if Doris could only see [him] now’ and dares to realize he “‘was made for this’” wondering how, when they’re *not* having sex, he can forget the immense relief. Screwing Al is the breakthrough cure. It’s worship.⁸⁸ It, however, would not be possible without the enigma’s intervention as it is to be pointed out in the following paragraph.

Despite the fact that Joan is unable to articulate herself, as it was previously said, she engages herself in a very specific project based on her alternative communication with the family. Again, the closet becomes crucial for it, for she suffers its door to remain open during visits from the family: ‘[a]nd there were a lot of these, a regular pilgrimage throughout the day—Doris always racing in, Sonja dropping by whenever she felt like taking a break from pin-clipping, Marcy joining her before and after school and Gordon going straight there as soon as he arrived home from work.’⁸⁹ What is more important, all of them confess to the unusually gifted ‘tiny, magical, celestial ... not entirely real’ child.⁹⁰ Gordon speaks to her in a by-the-way manner, revealing his most intimate secrets without even realizing so: to his horror, Gordon, ‘a private person tormented by almost everything he felt,’⁹¹ finds himself several times ‘spilling his guts to a toddler. It was eerie, inconceivable. Sometimes the words he’d just said would boomerang back to him and he’d come to as if out of a coma. Aghast, but refreshed as well, he had to admit—and usually assuring himself he’d only imagined he’d spoken out loud.’⁹²

But the man is not alone in confessing to Joan or using her as a sounding board;⁹³ they all do it, although maybe not so involuntarily.⁹⁴ E.g. Doris reads out part of her letters received from her lover from Vancouver to Joan or makes hints to her affairs with other town’s respectable ladies; Sonja reads out from old TV guides and magazines, and last but not least, Marcy’s confessions are the ‘most intimate (...) and the raciest.’⁹⁵ (Interestingly enough, if Marcy wants to tell something very personal to Joan, she communicates with her by means of telepathy.) It is only Gordon who has an idea that one day ‘she will, she’ll summon the whole family and all of them together will listen to selections from the tapes [she edits in the laundry] in their entirety.’⁹⁶ But it would never come to his mind that the in the composition of her own Joan will employ both his favourite song Mr. Sandman as well as the voices of ‘all her darlings’⁹⁷ in the music. A few weeks after the whole family ‘has given up wondering when [Joan] will finish her composition,’⁹⁸ she is taken to hospital due to her bad shape caused by her systematic refusals to drink any liquids. Despite the tests show no particular disease, her condition does not seem to improve and numerous specialists are consulted. The worried family accuse themselves of her condition and gather. In one of the breaks from visiting her in the hospital they find two neatly labelled tapes Joan left for them at home with precise instructions not written by her but cut out and glued to the boxes in which the tapes are found, which is the first written communication by Joan. On one tape, there is the song Mr. Sandman playing meanwhile on the second one voices speak. First, it is difficult to make out what the words are because of various noises in the background; later, however, to their great astonishment they can

⁸⁶ Michael Warner, Introduction to *Fear Of A Queer Planet: Queer Politics And Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii.

⁸⁷ Italics added. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 108.

⁸⁸ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 110.

⁸⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 67-68.

⁹⁰ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 71.

⁹¹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 68.

⁹² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 68.

⁹³ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 71.

⁹⁴ Only Gordon has a suspicion that Joan, who is rather sensitive and perceptive, might possibly sense ‘something fishy about old Dad.’ Such a suspicion is naturally provoked by his own thoughts about he fact that ‘he has always had an urge to pour his heart around her. Why? And (here’s where it gets out of hand) why can’t he distinguish between what he’s said out loud and what he’s only been thinking? Dead-give-away words—“lover,” for example, or, worse: “queer,” even “Al Yothers”—will suddenly seem to be booming off the walls, and he’ll jerk up and gape at her alert little face in the back of the closet while the words, whether he spoke them or not, settle like nuclear fallout.’ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 142-143.

⁹⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 71.

⁹⁶ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 227.

⁹⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 229.

⁹⁸ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 278.

clearly hear, 'YOU CAN KEEP A SECRET, CAN'T YOU?'⁹⁹ Then a series of different announcements follow, first in the form of random words and then as sentences uttered by the Canaries, each of them being initially pleased about Joan's achievement but step-by-step revealing his or her most intimate secrets Joan has been taping and editing for years such as Doris and Gordon's desire for the same sex or Marcia's promiscuity.¹⁰⁰ Gordon's explanation that the tapes have been edited and Joan extracted 'a word from this conversation and a word from that conversation'¹⁰¹ in order to manufacture her own sentences cannot make the initial impact of what they hear any better. The last straws become Doris' 'I LOVE TO HAVE SEX WITH BARE-NAKED WOMEN,' Gordon's 'I HAVE ORGASMS WITH QUEER MEN' and Sonja's 'ALWAYS REMEMBER, BUNNY, I'M YOUR REAL MOTHER.'¹⁰² As a result, nobody seems to be listening to the others' arguments about one's life being over such issues back in the 1950s would have meant or wondering why did Joan what she did, being too occupied by their own shame momentarily.¹⁰³

On one hand, the celebration of radical diversity and ludicrous behaviour depicted in *Mr. Sandman* can easily lead to fragmentation; on the other one, it cannot be omitted that it is also a celebration of individualism leading to mutual understanding and ultimate happiness.

Traditionally, hetero- and homosexuality are perceived as mutually dependent, yet antagonistic. At last, the couple rejects to be defined in terms of a fixed sexuality, moving from performing hetero- or homosexuality, which enables them to remain within the family and learn to love each other just the way they are. Both Doris and Gordon have reached amiable distance, realizing under the influence of the possible loss of Joan that, in fact, after all, they can say aloud for the first time they have been "[l]uckier than [they] deserve. A pair of lucky so-and-so's. A pair of lucky homo-," Doris "can't get it out but it's so funny. Old-timers who love to..."¹⁰⁴ What is more, in a conversation either of them can even believe they are having Doris makes it clear to Gordon she has known for a long time and they can both 'stop this dance and song.'¹⁰⁵ None of them finds the other disgusting but simply just not attractive; moreover, the relieved woman 'is feeling more friendly toward him than she has felt in years';¹⁰⁶ both have partners who are single and without any demand on Gordon and Doris getting divorced. Consequently, as they 'don't want anything to change'¹⁰⁷—not because they would be forced to stay together by any conventions but because of the love they have been sharing—they decide to stay together and tell the daughters, especially to Marcia, in the following way: "If she asks... Well, let's wait and see." (...) "Lie our heads off." A tired, reckless laugh.¹⁰⁸

To sum up, Barbara Gowdy reveals the eccentricities of her characters with an empathy that makes the novel *Mister Sandman* not a satire of a family novel. What is more important, it challenges the institutional foundations of gender and sexuality that underlie taken for granted family patterns and practices, threatening the mainstream heteronormative family regime. As it was said above, if gender is not connected to an essence but is rather viewed as a performance, then the fact that both Doris and Gordon Canary choose an alternative behaviour, putting a stop to homophobic marginalization in a specific way, they change the gender norms in an active way and challenge the binary understanding of femininity and masculinity. Having heard their secrets, they are able to use their power to articulate the sexualities and fantasies that other people would be condemned for at that time. Moreover, the confines of their identity are successfully reinvented.

Last but not least, the undeserved critique queer has received for the presumption it points ahead without actually knowing for certain what to point at should be overcome. It describes a horizon of possibility and thus cannot be in principle delimited in advance, anticipating any particular future. A spontaneous Canary family reunion that closes the book and the way its members are playing at night after Joan's return from the hospital is a wonderful symbol of human ability to reach a reasonable compromise after they have forgiven to one another their sexual vices and hurt prides:

⁹⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 299.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon says, 'I THINK ABOUT HIM ALL THE TIME;' Marcia boasts, 'WE WENT ALL THE WAY TONIGHT' or 'I HAVE SLEPT WITH SO MANY BOYS I HAVE LOST COUNT.' Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 300-302.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 302.

¹⁰² Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 306-308.

¹⁰³ Due to Marcia's telepathic conversation with Joan she finds out her reason for the secret taping of them was simply because they were 'so interesting' for her. Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 315.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 317.

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 318.

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 319-320.

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 321.

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 321.

As if she were expecting them she throws the ball their way, and Marcia catches it and tosses it to Doris, who tosses it to Sonja. They form a circle and keep tossing, industriously, carefully. Without a word. They could be people passing buckets of water to put out a fire. They could be a family spending a day at the beach together. If they were on a beach. If it was day.¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁹ Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1996), 325.

ABSTRACT

The presented paper deals with realization aspects of CLIL within European context in two European countries – Slovakia and Germany. Term “realization aspects” incorporates CLIL models, curriculum, methodology and material used, teacher qualification and student certification and these contribute to the comprehensive overview of the current state of CLIL. Germany and Slovakia are the countries with diverse social, cultural and political background and therefore development and introduction of CLIL into education systems varies. CLIL realization aspect assets and imperfections are depicted and finally directed into reaching one common goal that is European Commission’s objective of improving the foreign language proficiency.

KEY WORDS

CLIL, CLIL models, CLIL curriculum, historical context of CLIL, teacher qualification, student certification, Slovakia, Germany

1. Introduction

Term CLIL - Content and language integrated learning (in English and German), EMILE – *Enseignement de matières par intégration d'une langue étrangère* (in French) or EICLE – *El enfoque integrado de contenidos e lenguas* (in Spanish) is a wide-spread subject in many on-going debates and is now well being established in the countries of Europe. European commission expressed the requirement that the citizens of European Union should speak two foreign languages besides of their mother tongue. “*The Commission’s long-term objective is to increase individual multilingualism until every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue.*” (Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p.4). Many European countries, in order to fulfill this requirement, have been choosing and introducing various integrated forms of learning language across the curriculum to their educational system and therefore these diverse models as the results of educational traditions are worth comparing not only for stressing the strengths and weaknesses of each model but above all, for the effectiveness of the applied models in the educational reality.

What is CLIL? The term Content-and –Language-Integrated-Learning (CLIL) refers to educational settings where a language other than the students’ mother tongue is used as medium of instruction. *The term CLIL covers a wide range of educational practices and settings whose common denominator is that a non LI is used in classes other than those labeled as “language classes”* (e.g. Snow, 1998, p. 224, in Dalton-Puffer, Ch., 2007). Foreign language is used as mean to mediate the content of a subject and vice-versa content is a strengthening resource for learning languages. Since students are using the target language forthwith along learning content, the factor of motivation is highly present. This is the reason CLIL is receiving a special attention in Europe. Thinking globally in nursery, primary, secondary schools and universities across Europe the adoption CLIL programs help the pupils and students acquire necessary linguistic skills of two foreign languages through the content subject.

Situation of content language integrated learning is diverse throughout countries and it is subject to their political, cultural and socio-economical contexts. The subject of this paper is a contrastive comparison of the CLIL situation in Slovakia and in Germany. The following questions will be answered and outcomes compared: What is the historical context of CLIL in Germany and in Slovakia? What are the models of CLIL used in these two countries? Are they functioning efficiently? What is a teacher qualification required to teach content subject

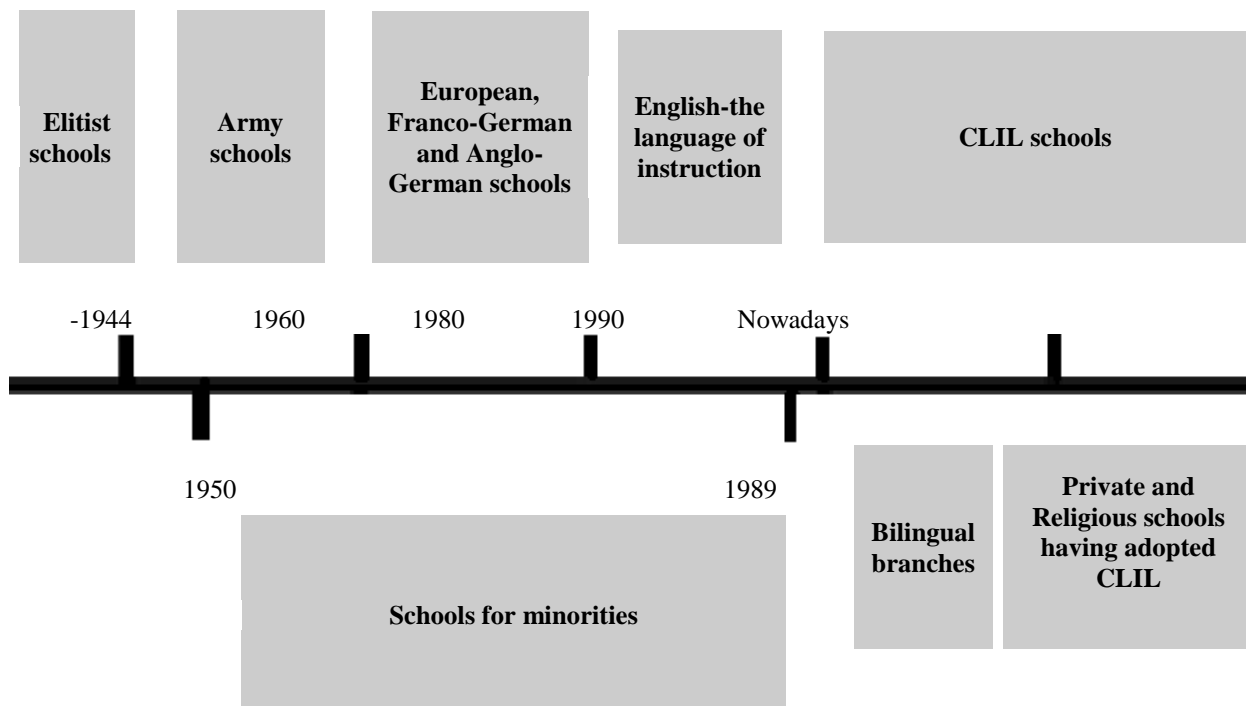
via foreign language? What curriculum, methodology and material are being used in order to teach CLIL in different types of schools?

2. General overview of the linguistic situation in Germany and Slovakia in a context of historical development.

Germany is a federal republic of sixteen states and the only official language is German. However few linguistic minorities are officially recognized: Sorbs, Danes and Frisians. The minority rights guarantee them the right being educated in their correspondent languages and therefore they have their own primary schools; all the official documents might be issued in the respective language. Part of the population is represented by groups of migrants that have settled in Germany. The largest minority group is the Turks. *Although migrant languages are not officially recognized, most of the minorities try to educate their children bilingually, making use of the facilities offered by the German educational system, but additionally creating their own schools which legally have private status and in which children study their heritage language and culture in the afternoon.* (Wolff, D., 2007, p. 93)

CLIL in German school system has been in existence for about 100 years. According to Wolff, (2007, p. 94) in some private schools, so-called elitist schools a foreign language was used as a medium of instruction already in the first half of the 20th century. After the 2nd World War army schools were founded by military authorities for the off springs mostly of American, British or French soldiers based in Germany. Bilingual European schools and the Franco-German and Anglo-German schools were established in the sixties and seventies; French and English were the only languages of instruction. The first German schools adopting and implementing the CLIL idea were the state grammar schools and they offered only a limited number of content subjects in a foreign language. Besides the traditional education bilingual branches were founded where up to three subjects and a language were taught in integration. These schools were founded right after the Franco-German friendship treaty concluded in 1963 and therefore French used to be the only CLIL language for more than 10 years. As common in Western Europe, the number of grammar schools founding bilingual branches was increasing in the eighties; English as a medium of instruction became the major target language. Nowadays CLIL schools are wide-spread in all the states of Germany. The timeline below outlines CLIL development in Germany and Slovakia.

Tab. n.1. The historical timeline of CLIL development in Germany (above the line) and Slovakia (below the line).



Slovakia is a monolingual country; however, languages of minorities living in Slovakia are present. These are: Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Romany language. Several schools provide education to the children from minorities in their language ranging from preschool to university level, depending on a language. Unlike in Germany, the historic background of language learning through subject content in Slovakia notes its naissance in early fifties when the schools for Hungarian, Ukrainian and Ruthenian minorities were founded. After the revolution in 1989 when communism collapsed a big boom of CLIL provision came into existence. Language learning became a priority in education and therefore the first bilingual schools were being established in 1990. Some existing secondary schools founded bilingual branches where Spanish, French, German, English Italian and in 2005 also Russian were the languages of instruction. These branches were involved in bilateral agreements with countries of a target language; mostly they provided staff and curriculum, which was being implemented by some of the schools. Later on, several private and religious schools were established based on CLIL methodology. It is important to mention that Slovakia had experienced two major historical events that had attracted people towards foreign language learning. The first was the above mentioned revolution in 1989 where the opportunity of personal choice of language learning was taken into account that was based on political and economical changes in the country and the second one was the year 2004 when Slovakia joined the European Union. This act had a positive impact in matters of language education: new opportunities of studying and working in the countries of European Union have opened for students, conditioned by the acquisition of the necessary language skills and reciprocally the option to receive the students from abroad who wanted to study in Slovakia began to spread.

2.1. CLIL models

In Germany 846 schools of all types are practicing CLIL (KMK report 2006) and therefore it is understandable that numbers of varieties in modules using CLIL are still developing. Each state has developed profiles for CLIL that may be similar to profiles of other states, but some of them are specific. Vasquéz introduces two basic models of CLIL used in Germany based on teaching staff's perspective (Vasquéz, G., 2007, p. 99):

- *Additonal model* - being applied only in Nordrhein Westfalen state. A native speaking teacher teaches one or two subjects in the target language and cooperates with a German teacher. Additional lesson in German is incorporated and German teacher clarifies any defficiencies possible.
- *Integrated model* - applied in all the other fifteen states. One teacher teaches the language and content; ideally it is a native speaker, however this is rather a rare case due to the limitations of the civil service system.

Wolff subsumed 3 categories of CLIL rather from a structural point of view (Wolff, D., 2007, p. 94 – 95):

- *General CLIL*- Foreign language teaching starts in grade five (children are 10 years old then); pupils in bilingual branches receive 2 more lessons of target language instruction than average four to five academic hours per week provided in non-bilingual schools and there fore it is more intensive. From grade seven on one content subject, that is often Geography, is taught in the target language that requires one or two extra teaching periods per week. From year eight on a second content subject, often History, is introduced in the target language and two additional periods are added to the curriculum. Generally said, in all the German states CLIL programs are accessible to students entering the bilingual branch in grade 5 (beginning of the preparatory course) and ending in grade 13 that is the end of secondary education. However, the system of bilingual branches is not completely unified in all the states of Germany and things vary from one state to another.
- *Additive and an integrative model of CLIL* - this model is already described in the paper, see classification by Vasquéz, p. 4.
- *Modular CLIL* – Modular approach is encouraging teacher using a target language, when explaining specific parts of content subjects. To illustrate this case, for example history teachers are asked to teach the French revolution in French or the development of colonialism in English; teachers of other subjects may opt to teach parts of their subjects in a target language, if they are sufficiently language competent. Target languages are usually French and English. Time span for this module is 6 to 8 weeks in average and teachers are encouraged to use a project work or inquiry learning methodology. Modular CLIL does not deal with complex matters of one subject as students are not technically skilled in language to comprehend the subject thoroughly; however, it is a great tool in gaining students' motivation and engagement in language learning.

In comparison to Germany, CLIL models in Slovakia are not as categorized yet. Apart of bilingual schools or branches that admit longer history of CLIL usage in Slovak education, and private schools using foreign language of instruction, CLIL in Slovak state schools is experiencing its experimental phase. Twelve primary schools are taking part in an experimental project that is currently being conducted in Slovakia under the National institute for education. The base of the project is to implement CLIL into grade 1 and to monitor

consecutive outcomes and results during four years (January 2008 – December 2012). The main goal is to experimentally find and prove adequate applications of foreign language teaching in content subjects, to find suitable contents, to verify influence on a motivation factor and pupils' results, to prepare didactic materials for teaching target languages (English, German, Russian, French and later extend to Italian and Spanish). Pupils should understand the meaning and importance of foreign language as mean of communication and realize its cognitive function via immediate usage. The results of the experimental group will be compared to the results of the control group at the end of the trial run and the outcomes will be evaluated and dissected.

The bilingual education encounters curriculum variations across the country. Majority is content-oriented and language is a medium of instruction rather than a goal of learning. Slovak State Pedagogic Institution, bilingual branches and foreign partners set up three requirements in a common agreement: *Subjects physics, biology, chemistry and math may be taught through the medium of a foreign language at all schools. Other subjects may be included according to bilateral agreements, demands or conditions. Weekly allocation of lessons per subject should meet the requirements valid for Slovak schools at a particular level (more are possible but not fewer). Optional and compulsory subjects in the last years of the school study programs should be planned so that students can learn adequate Slovak terminology in subjects related to their professional orientation.* (Lauková, D., 2007, p. 156).

2.2. Teacher qualification

In Germany, secondary school teachers teaching via target language are qualified for bilingual instruction; they study a subject and a foreign language at university and obtain a dual qualification. However, there are various national teaching centers offering an additional training (in-service or pre-service) qualification in CLIL, which is required by the school authorities on top of the dual qualification. For example, University of Bremen offers regular CLIL conferences and cooperating universities in Bochum, Cologne, Dortmund and Wuppertal in Nordrhein-Westfalen lead CLIL teacher-training courses in close research cooperation at PhD level. CLIL teachers in most German states are organized in language-specific associations and meet regularly once a year.

Situation in Slovakia approaches to the German system in a matter of qualification. A university degree is required in a content subject and the target language. Bilateral agreements suggest hiring native speakers even without them possessing a teaching qualification and they either lead the instruction, or are present together with a non native speaking teacher. Even though the in-service training for teachers at the beginning of the project is more and more common, unlike in Germany, Slovak teachers are not officially trained in CLIL methodology. Few language centers provide CLIL training. Teachers from both countries Germany and Slovakia, being parts of the European Union, are offered to participate in various Comenius and Minerva trainings, workshops and study stays.

2.3. Student Certification

The German school system recognizes 4 types of secondary schools. In grammar schools (*Gymnasien*) and comprehensive schools (*Gesampt Schulen*) the general school-leaving certification is *Abitur* (equivalent to British *A-levels*, French *baccalauréat* or Slovak *maturita*). The students participating in a CLIL program obtain *Abitur* in which the participation in the program is mentioned. One exception is the agreement among French and German school authorities that allow students studying in French language to receive a double qualification after successful passing of leaving exams– French *baccalauréat* and the German *Abitur*. The exams are synthesis of the French Ministry of Education requirements and the ministry of the respective German state. Studies at secondary general schools (*Hauptschulen*) and intermediate schools (*Realschulen*) are focused on subjects related to professional and end at the age of 16 with vocational qualification that is not comparable to *Abitur*.

Selection of students for CLIL learning is not official; teachers recommend and suggest the weaker students not to participate in CLIL section and their parents are advised not to enroll them.

Slovak schools issue general leaving certificate called *Maturita* and according to bilateral agreements the bilingual branches offer in addition a state exam from the target language. Similar to Germany and other European countries, international schools offer internationally recognized certificates based on curriculum (*international general certificate of secondary education-IGCSE, the international baccalauréat diploma- IB diploma, A-levels*), that may be obtained besides Slovak *maturita*.

The selection criteria of the students interested in studying at the state bilingual schools are set up by the Ministry of Education. Students' skills in Slovak language and Math and their ability in studying through the medium of a foreign language are tested. Similarly to Germany, private international and religious schools are autonomous in matter of entrance exam.

2.4. CLIL Curriculum

CLIL in Germany is regarded as a content-oriented rather than a language-oriented approach. (Wolff, D., 2007, p. 95). Wolff also states, that since German states are autonomous in matters of educational policy, no specific CLIL curriculum has been developed in any of them apart from Rheinland-Pfalz and Nordrhein-Westfalen. For all integrated CLIL programs a curriculum called *Recommendations* was created and developed by school authorities. Recommendations involve programs for CLIL languages that are English, French and Italian and for the content subjects such as History, Geography, Biology and Social Sciences; however teachers are flexible to extend the content which they consider of specific importance. The CLIL program of content subjects is comparable in quality and quantity matters to mother tongue content subjects. Even though the unified curriculum has not been issued, there is a competition of CLIL curriculum publishers on the German market.

Two approaches are worth to be pointed out:

1. The European state school in Berlin merges 15 primary schools where homogenous groups are formed from children from different nationalities together with German pupils (German-Turkish, German-Spanish, German-Russian, German-French and German-English etc.). In one group there is about 30 pupils and the content subject is instructed in their two respective languages and at the same time they learn the two languages to be able to comprehend content. This experiment was based on acute need of integration and effective education of minority children and the success is seen so the school authorities of Berlin state plan to continue in the project also in the secondary sector.

2. German-Italian bilingual and bicultural education in various primary schools has been coordinated in Niedersachsen in cooperation with Italy. Children are being educated bilingually by German and Italian native speaking teachers. This project has been conducted upon a need to educate children of Italian workmen, which were attracted to work in Wolfsburg, city of Volkswagen.

In some German states school authorities discuss the CLIL to be compulsory introduced in all secondary schools where one content subject would be taught in a target language. The issue of teachers' qualification in subject and language arises: Wolff assumes that *modular CLIL is a good alternative within the German school system. From the experience with modular CLIL we have had up to now, it has become clear that normally only teachers who are qualified language and content teachers are ready to teach within this model.* (Wolff, D., 2007, p. 97).

CLIL curriculum in Slovakia is non-uniform and varies according to a type of school. Bilingual branches of secondary schools have developed their own curriculum in cooperation with bilateral partners upon the approval of the Slovak Ministry of Education. However, the total weekly subsidy of lessons per subject has to correspond to Slovak schools of particular type and level. Since students entering bilingual programs usually do not master the target language, a preparatory year is a compulsory year at the beginning of studies where intensive language preparation is provided and therefore studies last for five years (one more year than non-bilingual secondary schools).

Curriculum of some international schools in Slovakia that are independent to Ministry of education of Slovakia is based upon National Curricula of other countries with certain modifications to reflect the Central European location and internationally diverse pupil body (e.g. British international school-British national curriculum or QSI international school- American education model).

2.5. Methodology and material

Methodology used in Germany is rather traditional but teachers use modern approaches such as group work, project work, inquiry learning. Teachers are given theoretical statements and the problem they encounter is lack of suitable materials. Since there are no official materials in existence, in many cases teachers are opting for producing their own material or using content materials from the target language countries and adapt it to students' needs. Some German publishers offer the materials they have developed and adapted to CLIL education.

Similar to Germany, the manner of effective methodology usage in CLIL teaching has been a subject in various discussions. Bilingual classes in Slovakia developed the curriculum based on requirements of Slovakia and the target language country. Methodology is based on implementing the linguistic awareness in reading, writing and phonics and subject content is reduced to the core amount of information to be a good base to be built upon. Adequate materials are an important part in the process of education; however the official common materials to teach CLIL subjects have not been issued by the school authorities. Schools developed them upon the agreement with a target language country to meet the language and content requirements.

2.6. Research and future developments

Subject of CLIL research in Germany is bounded in topics such as *comparison of outcomes of language learning with outcomes of foreign language classes, content-learning outcomes, concept development, and reading academic texts in a foreign language*. (Wolff, 2007, p. 99). Recent research on CLIL is summed up in a collection *Diverse Contexts - Converging Goals: CLIL in Europe* published by D. Wolff and D. Marsh in 2007. CLIL is a subject of many on-going discussions in Slovak education system and therefore various experiments are being conducted and research undertaken. Language department of Pedagogic faculty of University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra and Comenius University in Bratislava are two major institutions dedicated to CLIL research. Two main issues are depicted concerning its future development: shortage of CLIL qualified teachers requires setting-up in-service education to cope with efficient implementing of CLIL into Slovak education. CLIL approach has become an important tool in supporting the achievement of the European Commission's objective of improving the foreign language proficiency of people and to respond the demand of the European education platform CLIL is planned to be introduced in primary schools and vocational schools. There is a pressing need for this task to be undertaken in the immediate future.

3. Conclusion

CLIL represents the best framework in terms of a content-based bilingual approach in both countries Germany and Slovakia. In a background of historical development the nature of CLIL has been on a scene for more than 100 years in Germany and for about 60 years in Slovakia, in different forms and socio-political contexts. Varieties of CLIL modules have been developed and categorized, tested and implemented; concerning state education, it can be assumed that CLIL in Slovakia is still rather in its experimental phase experiencing the dissemination and evaluation of outcomes followed by the application in state school systems (excluding bilingual schools, where CLIL models and curriculum have sustainably developed) in contrary to Germany, where CLIL is already functioning in most of German states. The common major problem that is encountered in both countries may be the lack of CLIL qualified teachers and therefore the need for extended in-service training and teacher training programs is highly expressed.

Nevertheless, in a long term there are political, economic and cultural considerations liaised in the context of globalization, which are likely to make CLIL a common feature of Slovak and German education systems in the European context.

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ABSTRACT

In order to attract the audiences, news text has to be constructed in a way that it is recognized by the viewers and the content engages them in the process of communication. The material for news programmes that is received or acquired by any means is further selected. The criteria for the selection correspond with the functions of television news. The principle of selection has to respect the need to make information understandable for a wide spectrum of audiences; thus the information should be condensed, confirmed, generalized and schematised. From the infinite number of possible events the professionals choose what they assume is significant. News values form a code that is by consensus shared by journalists and which enables them to select events that can be narrated by the news discourse. The question of what becomes news, which elements of reality are constructed into news, is answered differently at various times and by various media.

KEY WORDS

stereotypes; television; news; values

News is one of the regularly analysed television genres. As any other media discourse it is an object of the study by researchers, long-term interest of professional journalists and a frequent topic of discussion for individuals. Study of print and broadcast news discourse usually involves the use of a multidisciplinary approach and discourse of news can be approached from variety of platforms.

Television news programmes have become one of the chief sources of information about society and the world for both western and eastern societies. They usually gain more trust than any other journalistic media. They represent links between public and private spheres in society, and they also combine elements of the global and the local with the national and the international. In the 1990s television becomes the first and the most decisive information medium. It is the television that dictates what is newsworthy. With the satellite and digital technologies the television becomes also the fastest information and image provider and the one allowing live broadcasting within its news programmes. Live reporting from a real place in real time creates the notion that live is true. Thus the audience becomes direct participant of the live or 'online' reporting and participates in the narrative itself. In this sense, the television news bulletin is structured as a fiction full of visual images. The media try to persuade the audiences that what they present has really taken place and the visual elements are used to support it.

Television news is a high status genre. News is a commercial product, the result of a professional approach, thinking, writing, and recording. The economic factors affect the content and form of news. Because television news is a commodity, commercialisation is present in every aspect of the media communication process. Postman (1985) asserts that the television industry manipulates individual topics, however serious, to become a source of entertainment. Television news programme not only brings knowledge in the form of information, but also provides entertainment, the main element of the ideology of consumerism.

The potential of the television news programmes and their societal effects is identified by the following functions:

- Attracting and directing public attention.
- Persuasion in matters of opinion and belief.
- Influencing behaviour.
- Structuring definitions of reality.

Conferring status and legitimacy.
Informing quickly and extensively.
(McQuail 2002, 78)

Statistics prove that by the end of the 1990s British people use news media as their primary source of information. Newspapers, radio and television news programmes and news organizations with their websites provide an enormous amount of news. Television is the main source of world news for more than 65 percent of British population. At the same time, opinion polls, surveys and research studies find that people search in news not only for information with the goal of educating themselves, but also for entertainment. In order to attract their attention, therefore, news has to be both informative by providing factual information and popular enough to make advertisers feel justified in paying the costs of producing and distributing it.

In the 1990s the primary function of television news to inform began disappearing as involvement of individual into the process of mediated communication became the main goal for producers. This major change of conception is reflected in all elements and functions of television news communication discourse. Consequently, several changes have occurred: the informational elements are less dominant and dramatic elements are over-represented; the plurality of opinions overcomes former dominant ideologies; and problematisation and elementarisation win over former contrasts created by binary oppositions.

More general properties are discussed by Norman Fairclough (1995), who identifies two general tendencies appearing in media in the 1990s. The first is the conversationalisation of public affairs media; the second, movement towards entertainment in order to make products more marketable. In news media discourse these are visible in the tension between information and entertainment and between public and private (Fairclough 1995, 10).

Ignacio Ramonet (2003) adds two additional strategies for attracting the attention of audiences: the use of hyper-emotions and imitation. The latter leads to stimulation of the media themselves to spend more time and space on the topics that appear to be central. Even the more serious media that used to prefer a strict and factual approach to news production place an equality mark between information and emotion (Ramonet 2003, 27-30).

Andrew Cline, the author of the article *Media / Political Bias* (2003) approaches the problem from the point of view of journalists and describes specific characteristics found in news media discourse as various biases. His list may serve as a summary of issues discussed above. Commercial bias is a consequence of the main goal of producers being to make a profit by selling a good product. What attracts audiences/consumers has to be respected in the creation of the text. Temporal bias is a consequence of the news media being governed by a principle of immediacy. Visual bias reflects the tendency to visualize all discourses and include fewer elements that cannot be visualized. The images either simplify or exaggerate. Bad news bias is a consequence of the fact that good news is not as attractive.

Narrative bias leads to the assumption that events become more understandable when constructed into stories. Narratives require drama and the use of narratives leads to dramatization of news discourse. The pressure to keep and entertain viewers moves news away from its former solely informative function. *Status quo* bias does not question systems, especially political systems, which are considered to be working, and safe. Fairness bias, however contradictory the term may appear, is visible in regular attempts of journalists to provide a reaction from an opposite side to any story. This creates the false illusion of everlasting competitiveness on opposite political sides, lack of cooperation, etc. Expediency bias is present in many aspects of professional journalism. Competition for keeping to deadlines, getting into prime time and prime space, getting larger audiences and consequently larger advertising market, etc., requires that news agencies be expedient. The last, glory bias, can be described as the presence of a journalist/reporter in the reported text. The journalist is part of the story creating an image of a heroic mission of getting to the centre of the happening. According to the author these are all specific manifestations of structural bias, the professional frames journalists use in their work.

Producers of news programmes also choose a genre of news according to overall principles set in the given era. There is a hierarchy of news ranging from hard news through feature news, background analysis, and cultural coverage to lifestyle, routine crime, and celebrity gossip. Hard news is the most rationalistic element and the most demanding on the audiences. It is the least likely to be associated with pleasure and entertainment. The further down the scale the more infotainment character of news. Although television news belongs to non-fiction genres, it is obvious that it shares certain characteristics of dramatic and serial television genres.

Doris Graber (1994) classifies television news into categories of high drama stories, routine stories, feature essays and story snippets using criteria of duration and content. The genre of the high drama story focuses on conflicts and accidents of larger scale, for instance terrorist bombings or group accidents. Routine stories cover issues of politics and diplomacy, social and legal matters, economic and political problems, and symbolic activities. Feature essays are longer, with content dedicated to social issues, cultural events, sports and occasionally conflict. The last genre is the story snippet which can be no longer than 21 seconds. It provides a short account of event with either a routine or high drama story content. In her analysis, Graber uses the definitions of approaches to news story telling enunciated by Dan Nimmo and James Combs (1985). In the

populist/sensationalist approach news events are depicted as dramatic events and the people are involved in fighting problems or experiencing great happiness. The elitist/factual presentation focuses on a more intellectual audience and provides factual information. The ignorant/didactic style is typical for the simplification of information in both form and language. The last, the pluralist/feature approach places an event into a broader context and the story is reminiscent of a feature article. The period of the 1990s reveals a turn towards the populist/sensational approach.

It must be recognised that media texts do not mirror reality. Rather they construct dominant reality by mediating the sense of the real through elements of the live, visual, and contemporary. The elementary supposition of the analysis that television news is a construct re-appears in numerous sources. For Tomáš Trampota (2004) television news as a construct incorporates elements and processes of social reality and mediates a message that is supposed to be new, relevant or at least interesting (the last element is added to previously established descriptions of news in the 1990s). Another theorist claims that 'the representation of reality offered by TV news is not reality itself, but reality mediated by the signs, codes, myths and ideologies of news' (Bignell 2002, 112).

In order to attract the audiences news text has to be constructed in a way that it is recognized by the viewers and the content engages them in the process of communication. The material for news programmes that is received or acquired by any means is further selected. The criteria for selection correspond with the functions of television news. The principle of selection has to respect the need to make information understandable for a wide spectrum of audiences; thus the information should be condensed, confirmed, generalized and schematised. Jonathan Bignell (2002) states that from the infinite number of possible events the professionals choose what they assume is significant. News values form a code that is by consensus shared by journalists and which enables them to select events that can be narrated by the news discourse (Bignell 2002, 84). The question of what becomes news, which elements of reality are constructed into news, is answered differently at various times and by various media.

Niklas Luhmann (2000, 28-35) is more particular in identifying criteria for selection of news items. These are:

- (1) Surprise or novelty that are only recognized in a familiar context, i.e. standardization (earthquakes, accidents, sports, etc.).
- (2) Conflicts that generate tension.
- (3) Quantities that serve as effective attention-grabbers and providers of an information value.
- (4) Local relevance that is often compensated for by the gravity of information or strangeness.
- (5) Violations of norms that relate to established law or accepted moral codes.
- (6) Norm violations that are accompanied by moral judgements and which function to maintain and reproduce morality.
- (7) Focus on particular people who are of interest to the audience.
- (8) Topicality that concentrates on individual cases and recursivity that refers to topical events in subsequent items.
- (9) Expression of opinions that is presented as either commentary or criticism.
- (10) Routines and templates which are selected items that have to fit the predefined space and time.

News values used by British broadcast journalists are set forth in a list created by Johan Galtung and Marie Ruge (1965), but a modified version of the list used by Keith Selby and Ron Cowdery (1995) among others involves fifteen components:

- * Magnitude. The event should be big in either number of persons involved or in an impact.
- * Clarity. The story that is simple and easy to understand gets to a news programme.
- * Ethnocentricity. The physical closeness of a story to its audience is important.
- * Consonance. The story should share the values of the audience.
- * Surprise. Extraordinary, strange events are attractive and get reported.
- * Elite-centeredness. The lives of members of elite groups is always watched and reported.
- * Negativity. Bad news is more surprising than good news.
- * Human interest. Stories that affect ordinary peoples' lives are newsworthy.
- * Composition or balance. The structure of news bulletin and of individual news items should guarantee variety.
- * Location reporting. The reporter should get as close to the centre of event as possible.
- * Actuality reporting. Some visual material from the location of the event should be included in the report.
- * The inheritance factor. Being in the headlines the story becomes news.
- * Framework. Expectations of what might happen influence the way of presentation.
- * Frequency. Daily events of short duration are more often reported than extensive developing stories.
- * Impartiality. British journalists are obliged to give both sides of the reported story (Lacey 1998, 153-155).

In the process of the selection of an event to be reported, the news values are not applied individually. Most reported news items indicate the presence of at least two news values.

The list of attributes is also presented in the text by Denis McQuail (2002) who shows that television news as a genre can be characterized by its actuality, unexpectedness, predictability, fragmentary nature, temporality, resourcefulness, informative character, factualness, curiosity, worthiness and stability of its structure (McQuail 2002, 301-305).

All tendencies and their specific mechanisms outlined above find their place in television news narrative which is consequently under the pressure of tension between sensationalisation and fictionalisation (pressure to entertain) against authenticity and truth (urge to inform).

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(Katerina Veselá (ed.) Cudzie jazyky v škole 6 (Foreign Languages at School 6) Nitra: PF UKF, 2009, 136 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-549-7)

The CD proceedings *Foreign Languages at School 6* is a part of the research project KEGA 3/6308/08: Obsahová reforma a modernizácia vyučovania cudzích jazykov na základných a stredných školách: Vytváranie podmienok pre efektívne uplatňovanie metodiky CLIL (Content reform and foreign language teaching modernization in primary and secondary schools: Creating conditions for effective implementation of the CLIL methodology).

The publication is the sixth from the series of proceedings, annually issued at the Department of Language Pedagogy and Intercultural Studies, Faculty of Education, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. At the beginning of July 2009, the department organized the annual international conference accompanied with a number of practical workshops, the outcome of which is presented in the reviewed proceedings. It brings the summary of the topical and currently widely discussed issues from the field of foreign language teaching and intercultural studies.

Even though the papers are non-traditionally organized in the alphabetical order of the authors, after having read all of them it is evident that they fall into several separate topic areas:

- content and language integrated learning
- special educational needs
- modern technologies and multimedia in foreign language teaching
- intercultural aspect in teaching foreign languages
- and modernization of foreign language teacher training.

The topics discussed at the conference and consequently dealt with in the conference proceedings are closely connected to the new concept of foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools in Slovakia, implemented in practice since September 2008. The papers, apart from giving the theoretical concepts, present the situation in foreign language teaching in the context of Slovak schools. However, some of the articles cross the borders of Slovakia and bring results of international research projects. Klimentová Katarína and Klimentová Anna in their paper *Communicative and Intercultural Competence in a Foreign Language Teaching and Learning* focus on the data collected from the questionnaire survey carried out in 5 EU Member States as a part of the international project Socrates Grundtvig "Multicultural Education for European Citizenship." Pathóová, Iliena and Lukácsi in "I liked my English teacher" - *Is this a good enough motive to choose the same career path?* present findings of a questionnaire study conducted in international settings of four countries: Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. While the focus of most of the papers is on how to teach English and German language and culture, Hornáčková points out the importance of teaching foreign languages, other than English, in the USA. Also in countries where English is spoken as an official language there is a need of foreign language and cultural competence development in various areas of life.

One of the key words in the European documents concerning foreign language teaching is the interculturality and multicultural education. Teaching and learning about cultures of other nations should form an inseparable part of foreign language teaching nowadays. A lot of information about the target culture could be found in authentic materials, originally created for native speakers. The advantages and disadvantages of authentic materials use as well as their potential to develop the language and cultural competencies is discussed in *Using authentic materials as an effective method of language learning accompanied with intercultural understanding* by Eva Reid. Spálová also considers the cultural content of learning materials and points out the need of learning material preparation with respect to their time, geographical and multicultural aspects. An interesting survey of approaches, theories and methods implemented in cultural studies in historic perspective is given in the *Aspects of culture and communication within foreign language learning* by Slávka Tomaščíková, who concludes her paper stressing the need to include culture, its elements and products into foreign language classroom. While the aforementioned papers focus primarily on the theory of interculturality, Klimentová Katarína and Anna deal with the foreign language and culture literacy in a more practical perspective, presenting the results of the research conducted in 5 EU Member States. Discussion about another, equally important aspect of interculturality forms the content of Gálová's *Unknown Realia as the Translation Problem in the Period of Information Boom*. She asks and tries to answer some of the questions related to the translation of unknown realia. The article also brings possibilities and examples of translation problems solution.

Considerable attention in the proceedings papers is given to the currently widely discussed methodology of language teaching CLIL (content and language integrated learning), which was recommended by European authorities in 1995 and repeatedly in the Action Plan in 2003 as a suitable method for foreign language education and European plurilinguism development. The paper of Mária Badinská brings the theoretical aspects of CLIL in the global context. The paper is a concise overview of several CLIL related issues; however, the reader would possibly appreciate also some information about how CLIL is implemented in the context of Slovak primary and secondary schools and colleges. This question is partly answered in the article of Mária Hudáková, who, after the theoretical introduction, presents results (mostly positive) of her work and work of her colleagues in the CLIP Centre.

A topic that is gaining in importance at present and definitely deserves to be dealt with is the use of technologies and multimedia in the foreign language classroom. Practical tips for the use of video and computers, methodology of work as well as examples of text-books sets for work with technologies are given by Jana Hartánská in *Modern Technologies at English Lessons for Young Learners*. Krištofíčová and Šimonová further discuss this topic, the latter also giving data from her research.

The common characteristic of the remaining papers in the proceedings is the effort to bring suggestions for modernization in the field of foreign language teaching and learning as well as the language competencies development. Božena Horváthová in *Learning Strategies for the foreign Language Acquisition in traditional Classes* presents the results of her research in the learning strategies utilization in the traditional teaching process. In the end she sums up the data and stresses the importance to make teachers and students aware of various learning strategies keeping in mind how they can help them progress in learning and in error elimination. Vančo in *Future Interpreters and Their Language Language Training* draws upon his experience in future interpreters' language training, pointing out its positives as well as negatives. He states that the interpreters' language training is not sufficient and does not reflect the needs of the transforming society and market. However, apart from the well-founded criticism he also brings suggestions for improvement.

To sum up, the papers in the proceedings bring a balanced amount of theory and practice. The foreign language teachers, students and teacher trainees can find a lot of information and inspiration concerning language education and they can benefit from the theory, research results and practical tips for the foreign language and culture competencies development.