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Southern Gothic: Macabre Heroes in Toole's Neon Bible and McCarthy's Child of God

Jižanská Gotika: Hrůzní hrdinové v Tooleově Neonové Bibli and McCarthyho Dítěti Božím

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Abstract

The aim of this diploma thesis is to compare the protagonists of two novels which are classified as Southern gothic writings: *Child of God* by Cormac McCarthy, and *The Neon Bible* by John Kennedy Toole. Although the pivotal characters appear dissimilar, the comparison and analysis of the novels might demonstrate common features and motifs. Studying of Southern gothic phenomena constitutes a background for the analysis, and also the initial part of the thesis. It is focused on a basic characteristic of the genre on the basis of the development of Southern literature. There is an introduction of the most important authors, genres, and typical motifs. The analytical part is prefaced by a reference to the life and work of the writers, as their nature and literary production vary. There is more attention paid to the texts by McCarthy because he has published a larger quantity of books in comparison with Toole. Southern gothic elements are therefore observed and compared in the analysed short novels, and also in other McCarthy's texts. The comparison corresponds to the theoretical ground.

Anotace

Cílem této diplomové práce je porovnání protagonistů dvou novel, které jsou řazeny mezi díla Jižanské gotiky: *Dítěte božího* od Cormaca McCarthyho a *Neonové Bible* od Johna Kennedyho Toolea. Ačkoliv se hlavní hrdinové jeví jako odlišní, porovnání a analýza novel by měly prokázat společné rysy a motivy. Studium Jižanské gotiky tvoří pozadí analýzy a také počáteční část práce. Ta je zaměřena na základní charakteristiku žánru na základě vývoje Jižanské literatury. Obsahuje představení nejdůležitějších autorů, žánrů a typických motivů. Analytická část je zahájena odkazem na život a dílo autorů, protože jejich povaha a literární tvorba se liší. Více pozornosti je věnováno McCarthyho textům, neboť v porovnání s Toolem publikoval větší množství knih. Prvky Jižanské gotiky jsou tudíž pozorovány a porovnávány v analyzovaných krátkých románech a také v dalších McCarthyho dílech. Komparace vychází z teoretického základu.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this diploma thesis is the presentation of Southern gothic phenomena, and subsequent observation of their application in two novels that are attributed to this literary area. The first one of the novels is *Child of God* by Cormac McCarthy, a contemporary novelist (also a dramatist, and scriptwriter) who has produced a quantity of works. Although the texts include a variety of styles, McCarthy is said to focus on a steady range of themes and motifs. He reflects the worthlessness of human existence in this world. His novels usually contain layers of myths which illustrate isolation, existential insecurity, a desperate search for the purpose of life, and a disposition of humans to violate everything. *Child of God* is his third novel, and it is based on real events. The text illustrates a part of Lester Ballard's life; a solitary young man living in a small town or rural area, who becomes more and more distant from other people, and turns into a perverse murderer. *The Neon Bible* is the second analysed text. It was written by John Kennedy Toole as the first one of his two novels. It is composed as a sequence of memories of an adolescent boy named David, which reflect his way from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to a burden of guilt. There are motifs of individual dissimilarity, seclusion, religious bigotry, social differences and the power of society. The analysis of the novels is primarily focused on the protagonists, though it also concerns other characters that influence the main characters, and concentrates on significant events.

The analysis is based on theoretical information gathered from the literary and online resources occupied with Southern, and especially Southern gothic literature on the background of historical events and literary development. *The Companion to Southern Literature* is our mostly cited source, as it covers a large span of Southern gothic elements. It is a collection of texts written by Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor, whose literary activity is focused on Southern literature and culture. Other literary critics who concentrate on Southern subjects are Lewis P. Simpson, Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Gary Richards, Sarah Gleeson-White, John D.

Sykes, Jr. and many more. From Czech authors, it is necessary to mention Michal Svěrák who has also translated McCarthy's second novel *Outer Dark* into Czech, and Marcel Arbeit whose work is focused on contemporary Southern literature and Canadian film. The thesis comprises of two spheres, theoretical and practical, which are interconnected. The first part of the thesis deals with the definition of the Southern Gothic genre. This involves a presentation of its origins and development, followed by a brief introduction of genres of Southern literature that might have influenced the authors of the analysed novels. The most significant chapter of the first part is the categorization of features that are typical for Southern gothic fiction. Such features usually involve themes and motifs which reflect the relevance of history, the attachment to land, the influence of society and religion in human life, and violence. There are also features of the grotesque, which are frequently associated with violent images. The thesis goes on to introduce some authors who have been considered as Southern, and whose literary works might contain some of the features mentioned in the preceding chapter. The second part of the thesis introduces McCarthy and Toole, addressing some important biographical circumstances, and their literary production. The third part concerns the particular novels of these authors which form the subject of this thesis. Their plot is briefly introduced, and supplemented by a definition of the narrative techniques which can be observed in the texts. Both texts are then analysed with reference to the theoretical grounds presented at the beginning of the thesis. The analysis is concluded with a final summary that reviews the similarities and differences of the protagonists, their development, and matters that have influenced their gradual descent to murder. The aim of the thesis is to discover Southern gothic features in both texts, and compare those protagonists in both works who appear to bear some common qualities, despite being somewhat different. A prominent observation is that they share frustration and anxiety, which stem from their inability to establish contact with their coevals and the people in their towns. This theme has existential and social attributes, and is distinctly associated with religion. The result of the analysis should demonstrate the common and distinct features of these two novels with respect to differences in the respective authors' literary experience and amount of works.

1. SOUTHERN GOTHIC

As association of words in the term prompts, this literary subject results from gothic literature, which originated in the British literary environment, but subsequently developed, was utilized under specific conditions (in a particular background, and at a certain time) and acquired other typical features. Southern gothic is a genre that comes out from Southern literature, the literature of the American South.

1.1 Definition and Development of Southern Gothic

1.1.1 Features of the Term "Southern"

The idea of Southern literature came to light in the 1830s as a result of efforts to constitute a regionally restricted literature, which would reflect the region's attributes and traditions within a wider conception of national literature. Later, the efforts developed into antagonistic tendencies against Northern literature. In the 1850s, their detachment became even more apparent because the South with its system of slavery, as well as other differences, attempted to separate itself from the abolitionist North. Among the literary authors, there were contradictory attitudes, some of which supported the strict thematic limitation and prompted Southern writers to produce regionally specialized works; others criticized this idea of permitting only regional topics. Nevertheless, Southern literature became officially accepted as it started to be mentioned and observed in textbooks, anthologies, and literary studies; this began in the second decade of the twentieth century.¹

At first, it is necessary to specify what the term *southern* comprises. According to *The Companion to Southern Literature*, Southern literature is a conception of political range, balancing regional and national alignment. The criteria for the definition of Southern literature have evolved and altered – there have been geographical, literary,

1 MACKETHAN, L. H., TAYLOR, T. W., FLORA, J. M., ed. *The Companion to Southern Literature: themes, genres, places, people, movements and motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8071-2692-6, p. 828-830.

political, cultural, or gender conditions measured.² As Southern we can mark the writers who were born and spent their productive period in the South, and thus were influenced by southern culture and temperament. Sometimes there are authors whose enlistment is not quite obvious because they relocated, or their writing changed. For example, William Styron was born in the South, and Dorothy Allison projects her childhood memories from this area to her fiction, yet these writers are not mechanically branded as Southern. The African American writers are often excluded because of their different ethnic history; although such writers have southern roots and many of them were born in the South, there are differences in their cultural and ancestral roots. They may be engaged in the movement of a certain period, but their literary production bears distinctive features, which make it unique.³ Our authors can be included on the basis of their place of origin and living. Cormac McCarthy was born in Rhode Island, lived in Knoxville in his childhood, and studied at the University of Tennessee. During his first marriage, he and his wife settled in Sevier County, which is the setting of the *Child of God* narrative. After spending some time travelling and living on the island of Ibiza with his second wife, Cormac returned to Tennessee.⁴ John Kennedy Toole was born and spent a large part of his life in New Orleans. His novel *The Neon Bible* is set in Mississippi, where he had relatives.⁵ However, the dwellings are not as important as their literary style, motifs and topics. In both short novels, the authors present protagonists whose lives are determined by their inability to incorporate themselves into the community, and are continually oppressed by its dismissive attitudes. The protagonists are taciturn, insecure and they try to protect themselves against the surrounding world. Elements of the grotesque, violence, religious bigotry and other southern features are to a certain degree utilized – particular features will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

2 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 828.

3 PROCHÁZKA, M., QUINN, J. ULMANOVÁ, H. *Lectures on American Literature*. 1. ed. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6, p. 225-226.

4 PRIOLA, M. *CormacMcCarthy.com: The Official Web Site of the Cormac McCarthy Society* [online]. Last revision 4th August 2013 [cit. 2015-12-17]. <<http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/biography/>>.

5 BLATTY, D. *John Kennedy Toole Biography* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-19]. <<http://www.biography.com/people/john-kennedy-toole>>.

Literary theorists speak about a so-called Southern myth. The concept is defined in comparison with Western myth which can be characterized with terms like mobility, space and movement. Southern myth is also associated with space but in a stagnant, passive sense; the myth bears the weight of the past, guilt, doubts, discomfort and the awareness of human limits.⁶ These features broadly mirror in Southern literature and Southern gothic in particular. It seems that both of McCarthy and Toole's antiheroes are bound by various limitations concerning their past, family roots, but also current difficulties, insecurity, social expectations etc. They are stuck in their native places, having no perspectives or development. Their only progress is connected with violence, and guilty deeds.

1.1.2 The Development of Gothic Fictio

A general meaning of the term *gothic* is medieval, and in the second half of the eighteenth century it was used to denote anything barbaric from a point of view of neo-classicists, who rejected anything that did not match their emphasis on probability and possibility. The gothic novel genre was established in English literature during the period 1764-1820 and its classic form is "characterized by elements of magic, mystery, and chivalry and by supernatural occurrences and horrific settings that impart an uncanny atmosphere of terror."⁷ Its connection with barbarism and decline was weakened by reference to greatness and magnificence, as was noted by Richard Hurd in 1762. Gothicism formed the dark side of the Enlightenment's rationalism, applying motifs of darkness, night, and the past. Darkness might be perceived as an instrument for religious purposes: meeting the inner spirit and deity, but also as an impulse for dreadful imagination causing anxiety. It was also connected with the past and images of the ancient world. Its bipolarity expands from religious experience to the fear of obscure forces, nothingness and the absurdity of the world. Catholicism was criticized

⁶ GRAY, R. J. *A History of American Literature*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4051-9228-6, p. 105.

⁷ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312.

through the use of gothic motifs like ruins of monasteries, and vicious representatives of the Church.⁸

Gothic novels and application of gothic in literature have come through a development. In Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms* a gothic novel is defined as following:

[A] type of romance very popular late in the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th, which has had a considerable influence on fiction since. [...] In 1764 Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, a tale of villainy, passion and blood (it includes a monstrous ghost) set in the 12th and 13th century. This novel proved a seminal work which was ultimately dubbed 'Gothic novel' [...]. Most Gothic novels were tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood. They contained a strong element of the supernatural and new traditional 'haunted house' props. Often they were set in medieval castles which had secret passages, dungeons, winding stairways, and stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom and a proper complement of spooky happenings and clanking spectres.⁹

Horace Walpole's novel evokes macabre, phantasmal images and a feeling of magnificence. The story is dramatized and also parodied; there are ridiculous situations and dialogues, the narrator's speech sounds ironic. Its settings constitute a significant instrument of the story and directly intervene in the action.¹⁰ It is marked as a model for the first group of gothic novels which contain features of Romanticism, and can be characterized by a struggle between good and evil that creates a background for more concrete confrontations and menace. Purity, sensibility, chastity and sanity of (usually female) characters are threatened by irrationality, dread and evil that seem to endanger our world and civilization. There is a conflict between two worlds with dissimilar orders attempting to destroy each other. The gothic world is dark, mysterious and irrational; it almost seems to have no order at all. To name a few examples of such works, we can choose *The Monk* by Mathew Lewis, *Caleb Williams* by

8 HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy: pojmy, proudy, kontexty*. 1. ed. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. ISBN 80-246-1060-4, p. 135.

9 CUDDON, J. A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Rev. ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979. 761 p. Penguin Reference Books. ISBN 0-14-051112-1, p. 289.

10 *Romantismus a romantismy*, p. 138-146.

William Godwin and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Another group consists of British authors as well, for example Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson; however, their novels are distinguished by more complexity and technical skill. Lind Bayer-Berenbaum pointed out their three typical elements – "an intensification of consciousness, an expansion of reality and a confrontation with evil".¹¹ In their writings, evil is not utterly connected with supernatural, magical elements. The supernatural aspect is weakened, and substituted by more realistic and social aspects.

Other three features in terms of gothic fiction were marked by David Punter. The first one is *paranoia* which denotes doubts, uncertainty and fear that cannot be explained or comprehended with any degree of certainty. The second, the *barbaric*, refers to social phenomena demonstrating the uncivilized nature of our society with the failure of moral and ethical rules. The last one is the *taboo*, representing facts and effects that are minimized and restrained within society in order to preserve the social and psychological equilibrium. Gothic fiction gradually started paying attention to social topics and current affairs of a given era, e.g. the consequences of the industrial revolution, subsequent industrialization and urbanization. It served to emphasise problems and negative issues, display disorder and deficiencies; writers could satirically express their contradiction and disapproval with contemporary conditions, their discomposure, and alarm. Some of them blamed not the society, but human nature itself for being guilty of disruption due to innate human cruelty, violence, disconcertment, instability and irrationality.¹² Although the original features of English gothic fiction (like supernatural, magical elements, and heroism) have subsided, attributes related to darkness, grossness, crudity, oddness and decay are still current. The setting of gothic stories and novels is gloomy, harsh, darksome, rugged, but there are no castles and mysterious places anymore. Narratives are usually set in towns and spaces where people currently live. The characters seem to be inhospitable, sullen,

¹¹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 312.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 312-313.

crooked, and also vicious. The struggle between two worlds is over, there is only one world left, and it is irrationally ruthless, indifferent, and incomprehensible.

Charles Brockden Brown is regarded as one of the founders of American gothic. He might have been inspired by Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, but his fiction contains only a fraction of gothic features. On the other hand, it covers some motifs that are characteristic for American literature. Human beings function in terms of heredity, predispositions, and a certain mechanization, which is based on conventions determined by society and religion. There is a difference between outer and inner human being – the external one is persistent and mechanistic, while the internal one is vulnerable. Everything is therefore based on the outward presentation, acting, hypocrisy and manipulation.¹³ The gothic cultivated in America focused on psychological aspects. In the 19th century, in the antebellum era, there were several authors (e.g. Robert Montgomery Bird, William Gilmore Simons and William Caruthers) who included the supernatural in their works, yet were rather rationalists and tried to explain everything on the basis of natural laws and knowledge, so mysteries were supposed to be revealed. In comparison with English gothic, the impact of the supernatural in American gothic is not distinctive. Lewis P. Simpson notes that despite being affected by historical efforts to establish a modern slave state, the works of southern writers always involved elements expressing fear, doubts and societal criticism. According to Simpson, "antebellum southern gothic offered an ironic comment on the American vision of a people for the first time in history forming and concluding a national order on the basis of the human capacity for "reflection and choice", or democracy".¹⁴ After the Civil War, the ideals of the antebellum society proved unreal and irrevocably lost, and thus nostalgic feelings mirrored in the fiction of post-bellum authors, but only a small number of them used gothic forms to express their contemplations, e.g. Mark Twain and G. W. Harris. Yet their importance is not irrelevant because their work inspired a new generation of gothic writers. Sequent

¹³ *Romantismus a romantismy*, p. 149-151.

¹⁴ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 313-314.

literary production in terms of gothic literature utilizes realistic themes and focuses on contemporary matters depicting them in a grotesque way. The modern Southern gothic was inspired by more models; Flannery O'Connor defined three predecessors:

the "dark and divisive romance novels" of traditional gothics (especially the antebellum plantation gothics, which deals with failures of the southern honor code, distorted family relationships and obligations, and community expectations and pressures); the comic-grotesque tradition (especially the graphic absurdities of the humor of the Old Southwest, utilizing the ambivalent clash between violence and humor characteristic of the grotesque), and finally, the "lessons all writers have learned from the naturalists" (especially the frank and clinically direct presentation of the fundamental urges and violent actions of primitive characters who respond to but do not understand the environmental forces, internal conflicts, and biological drives that motivate their brutal struggle for survival and over which they have no control).¹⁵

All these three features are fundamental in the analysed novels in the thesis. Disordered family relationships are presented in both of them; family should be a model institution within the body of society, nation and country, the ground for a properly functioning state. In the texts, there are no convenient models found. A lot of families are incomplete – owing to mental, interpersonal and social problems, or war. Families bear negative attributes; instead of being a symbol of security, support and relief, the dump keeper's family symbolizes disgust, resentment. It is an incoherent cluster of members, who stay together only because they have no other place to go. Gradually, the daughters leave the cramped home, their rude, primitive father and desperate mother, who is the only one who tries, yet unsuccessfully, to preserve the symbolic warmth of their household. In comparison, David's family is more supportive and flourishing, yet there are circumstances that cause its gradual disintegration. One of them is the community that expects uniformity and specified patterns of behaviour, appearance and living. It seeks to get rid of David's aunt, who does not satisfy the community's requirements. The people who are unsatisfactory are usually expelled from the society and forced to live solitary on its periphery, or leave it for good. The

¹⁵ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 315.

support of David's mother might be also ineffective. She cares of her only son too protectively so that he has no opportunity to act independently, and which constrains his development.

The gothic is also associated with the issue of gender; Susan V. Donaldson mentions changing gender roles and resultant anxiety as a possible reason why Southern writers tend to evoke the macabre and the grotesque. In the twentieth century, the standard of a Southern woman had developed. The traditional image of subordinated woman who followed the rules of patriarchy Southern order, took care of family members and household and did not participate in social affairs, business or politics transformed. The transformation is reflected in the works by Faulkner or Welty, in the portrayal of women characters as gothic or dangerous figures.¹⁶ In *Child of God* and *The Neon Bible*, there is a certain tension felt between genders. Men and women are not able to coexist equally, and without any problems, disagreements. Toole reflects on the shift of women's role within the society during wartime. They have to take up some of the duties and work of their husbands, fathers and brothers, who have gone to war, and this leads to their social independence. The image of women in McCarthy's short novel is unpleasant: they are messy, simple temptresses, vulgar drunkards, or vulnerable victims that end up in the arms of a necrophile.

16 DONALDSON, S. V. Making a spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern gothic. *Mississippi Quarterly* [online]. 1997, 50(4): 567-584 [cit. 2015-12-22]. ISSN 0026637X. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=731291&lang=cs&site=ehost-live&authtype=shib>>.

1.2 Genres of Southern Literature

Here follows a classification of southern genres that serves to sketch the background in which the analysed books originated. Although we can designate none of the novels as absolutely classifiable into one of the following schemes, we can observe certain elements typical for the genres in the texts.

When we sort literature into smaller units, we can apply more viewpoints. That is the reason why it is complicated to find a unified classification style which could be used by all the literary critics, who often disapprove of each other's approaches. The literature can be sorted chronologically, according to particular periods – e.g. antebellum and post-bellum, geographically, in reference to social, cultural or political aspect, on the basis of themes and plots applied in certain periods. Although genres are not widely considered to be significant when we think about categorization and characteristics of literature, Lucinda MacKethan¹⁷ claims that there are special literary genres in Southern literature. Certain forms and motifs are typical for the South, and can be observed and used to label certain groups of literary works containing them: the plantation novel, the slave narrative, south-western humor, southern pastoral and counter-pastoral, southern modernism, the southern grotesque, and grit lit. Southern literature itself may be regarded as a genre because it features specific themes, settings, structures and plots which developed in dependence on political and social differences of the South in comparison with the North. Within Southern literature, there are both similarities and differences characterising it. The differences are projected into utilization of various principles of literary production and are influenced by the place where authors live, and the way of experiencing history.

17 MACKETHAN, L. *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30] <<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

1.2.1 Plantation Literature

Plantation literature depicts the southern region in an idealized way; there are characters that develop, demonstrate their personal qualities and display standardised ways of dressing, speech and behaviour. Yet it implicitly discovers the social hierarchy of the inhabitants because the plantation owners, southern aristocrats are always at the centre of attention whereas dependent slaves remain in the background. Within plantation literature, there are historical romances usually produced by male writers and sentimental or domestic fiction generally written by women.¹⁸ The setting is stereotyped – it is usually a mansion inhabited by a range of characters: the master, his mistress, a belle, an uncle, a coachman, black servants and nurses etc. One of the most representative plantation fictions is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which became a model for many following plantation novels, but also commenced production of Anti-Tom novels. Publication of plantation literature increased after the Civil War, and subsequent termination of plantation economy. Most of the authors promoted vision of white southern racists, only a few of them (e.g. Kate Chopin, George Washington Cable, Mark Twain, Charles Chestnutt) exposed criticism of slavery and superiority of white men.¹⁹

1.2.2 Slave Literature

Plantations became a setting for another genre – the slave narrative, an autobiographical genre, currently sometimes called Fugitive Slave Narrative because it was usually produced by the authors who had escaped the conditions of the slavish South, and promoted an antislavery attitude. The slave narrative portrayed the discrimination, rough life and working conditions of black servants and workers. The black characters were the matter of interest and they usually conveyed their experience of confinement and cruelty. This genre contradicted the plantation fiction,

18 *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30] <<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

19 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 650-652.

and presented plantation life in different manners. The fiction was based on accuracy and real facts because it served as a contribution to the abolitionist movement. In sixties and seventies, the slavery theme was utilized in order to support the civil rights movement; novels displayed historical circumstances succeeded by the African American struggle for freedom, a variety of rebellions which took place in the past and became significant milestones on their way to liberty. Such writings are labelled as the Civic Rights Epic. Further, the theme developed to the Neo-Slave Novel which was also used as a response to political struggles and contained motifs like desire and courage to escape, gain freedom and oppose the racial injustice; however, there were fictional, in some novels even fantastic elements included.²⁰ Production of slave narratives thus continued after the Civil War, and abolition of slavery to remind American citizens of its inhumanity and brutality.

1.2.3 Pastoral Literature

The pastoral literature is characterized by the tension between the past (associated with rural, agrarian life; the people living in harmony with nature and their community, maintaining traditional customs, moral values and religious faith) and the present (manifesting the turmoil of the urban world and social upheaval). It was usually applied at a time of dramatic changes, struggling and separation. The authors utilized the power of memory as a means of consolation. Their message sometimes appealed nostalgic and fatalistic. Local color, written by white authors, mythologized the setting of plantations and had some distinctive attributes: peculiar locations, detailed depiction of dress, manner, speech and vernacular dialects, marriage plots (which both highlight and overcome differences between families, classes, and regions). There is a double narrative structure - a frame narrator who sounds omniscient and other narrators who are not as educated and sophisticated as the

20 *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30].
<<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

frame one; the distinction among them is less perceptible in women authors.²¹ Such a narrative structure can be observed in McCarthy's *Child of God*; along with the tension between the past personating traditions (the character of blacksmith), and the present mirroring decline (the other characters). Yet otherwise the novel does not correspond to the terms of pastoral literature.

Pastoral can be regarded as a form of critique – there is a discontented person looking back upon some idealised visions of the past. The beholder perceives changes, his own displacement and is conscious of their inevitability.²²

1.2.4 Counter-pastoral Literature

Generally, when one phenomenon occurs, another rises to oppose it; the same process applies in literature, and beside the pastoral, there is counter-pastoral literature, focusing on the contemporary issues and criticism of the previous Southern racist order (the counter-pastoral of race) and the dominance of the elite class formed from the descendants of the plantation owners (the counter-pastoral of class). The past is not idealised or mythologized. The privilege based on race, class or gender is abated by the characters. Counter-pastoral authors occupy themselves with current, usually social and economic issues, and the characters in their fiction are ordinary people, generally pictured positively in contrast to the upper-class representatives. The issues of poverty, industrialization, injustice and class-distinction are noted.²³ Such issues are included in *The Neon Bible*, as David's family suffers from poverty in consequence of the Great Depression. Many people became unemployed during this era of economic depression; David's father lost his occupation in a factory, and therefore the family lost its main income of financial resources. They could not afford to stay in their house, had to move away, and sometimes suffered from the lack of

21 *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30] <<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

22 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 649-650.

23 *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30] <<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

food. However otherwise the novel is not a representative of counter-pastoral literature; it does not compare the low-class families with the upper-class ones, and does not depict poor people in a positive way. It rather focuses on general questions of social, moral, and religious character, and depicts the difficulties resulting from living in a small-town society.

1.2.5 Southwestern Humor

This genre can be defined by several features that were introduced by the first major novel classified as Southern humor – *Georgia Scenes* by Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. There is an emphasis on realistic depiction and a colourful image of frontier society members, their contests and social rituals. The narrator might be a literate gentleman, who encounters lower-class characters, their dialects and manners. Literary works usually consist of a series of sketches featuring parody, exaggeration, and craftiness, lying and boasting. Many humourist writers also published their sketches in journals and newspapers. They turned to other literary forms as well and utilized the satire, the essay, the epistolary and picturesque novel, and the travel narrative. Depiction of life as a physical process is also a useful instrument of humour; body humour was broadly applied by Henry Clay Lewis, who enriched it with grotesque and gothic overtones, emphasizing disease and death in a large extent. George Washington Harris started producing tales about a protagonist Sut Lovingood, which were later published in a collective form. Sut is a character who boldly displays his cowardice and considers heroism as nonsense. Applying a dialectic speech, he tells about his adventures involving revenges on various people who have offended him, or who represent authority. His narrative detects absurd situations, the tension between masculinity and femininity, and relationship between representatives of the lower and upper class.²⁴ Southwestern humorists therefore present characters that are, in fact, anti-heroes. They demonstrate the ridiculousness of the aristocratic community and criticise it via irony, and exaggeration.

²⁴ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 844-850.

1.2.6 Grit Lit

The term *Grit Lit* refers to fiction which pictures roughness of life and spiritual poverty of the people; it usually offers gross stories about ordinary southern life in a humorous way. It mingles humour with violence, and uses regional elements concerning language, culture and manners. The suffering serves as an instrument to achievement and transformation.²⁵ McCarthy also utilizes violence and humour; those blend in a form of the grotesque. However, the characters cannot accomplish any changes through the suffering; it only brings them pain and disillusion.

1.2.7 The Western

Although the genre is not typical in terms of Southern literature, it was used by Cormac McCarthy. The Western is generally associated with cheap, trash literature and B-movies because of the massive production of it, but McCarthy used it in a modified way. The author did not produce a traditional Western, but he utilized some attributes of it – the protagonists are cowboys, and there is an emphasis on their ties to the land and history.

Stephen McVeigh claims that it is not easy to assign origins of this genre. Some critics tend to mark James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* as a predecessor to the western. His tales inspired so-called “dime novels” that were massively produced in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their popularity led to the formation of the modern western. Owen Wister's *The Virginian: a Horseman of the Plains* (1902) can be labelled as a prototypal western novel because the author formed a model of a cowboy (including his character, speech, manner, dress and skills). The way of seeing the frontier was based on social and political aspects – it highlighted the difference between the West and the East, exploring values, social and cultural circumstance of the West. It depicted the temper of cowboys as passionate and vigorous, yet noble, which was illustrated by their heroism and hospitality. There is a clash between wilderness and civilization – wild environment is endangered by the influence of

²⁵ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 319-320.

expanding civilization. Civilization and its components (like law and police systems, schools, and domesticity) are also symbolized by women, thus female characters are usually connected with a threat of the code of the West. After the publication of *The Virginian*, many novels inspired by this work followed, applying romantic principles, drawing inspiration either from the real West, or reading Western novels, and imagination. The character of the hero was later supplied with negative and darker qualities. Narratives within this genre were usually romances, which were gradually supplemented by realistic perspectives. In Zane Grey's westerns, there are protagonists who come from the Eastern society and experience physical and psychological resumption in the West. Max Brand presented a mythological image of the West; he opposed the conception of restorative western landscape. Jack Schaefer's *Shane* presents another level of the development of a cowboy. Shane is not a chivalrous hero with a revolver, but his relationship with the community is essential – he contributes to the birth of a new community, so he is rather a member of society than an extrinsic patron.²⁶ Next to the landscape, another feature of a restorative character is violence. It seems to be a principle of the frontier because it is contained in every element. Cowboy's conduct might be noble, but also violent – they struggle all the time to provide justice; there are gunfights, chases, murders, and torture. They fight against wicked outlaws who personify the dark, brutal and violent form of the West. Native inhabitants are usually depicted as savage and bloodthirsty enemies of white civilized men, and it illustrates the violent clash between two cultures, wilderness and civilization. Landscape is presented as rough too, as there are raw, wild sceneries, desolate deserts, and thunderstorms. Although the violence results in bloodshed and death, it carries a regenerative quality: when cowboys punish the gangsters, and when the storm is over, the air becomes clear again.

The New Western carries no signs of heroism and progress; it demonstrates the West as an image of conquest. With the beginning of the Vietnam War, the genre

26 MCVEIGH, S. *American Western* [online]. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. ProQuest ebrary. [Cit. 2016-01-21]. <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/reader.action?docID=10435281>>, p. 38-57.

experiences the appearance of the anti-hero and a revaluation of its values.²⁷ The western genre generally reflects the political and historical events and conflicts in relation to its interpretation of history. Initially, the Western authors tended to glorification and exaggeration of historical and mythical features. Later, the glorifying voice was substituted by a sober, darker, discouraging expression. Such tendencies are also mentioned by McVeigh, who describes the development of the genre in relation to relevant historical events like wars and claims that:

One thing connects all of these Westerns. Whether popular or serious, romantic or mature, all of them have an element of political purpose, of conveying values and institutions even if, as in the case of the mature-phase fiction, they are deliberately using the popularity of the form to challenge those values and institutions.²⁸

Cormac McCarthy's cowboys are not presented as prototypes of brave and noble heroes. His protagonists in Westerns are rather ordinary boys or young men who are seeking their purpose in life. They cope with experiences of solitude, despair, sorrow and deprivation, sometimes demonstrating cowardice, as they are not able to confront their faults, and are afraid of responsibility. It is connected with their fear to mature, and accept obligations of adults. They undertake journeys, the primary impulse is usually the desire for a revenge, retrieval, or finding their lives' aims.

McCarthy's Westerns are labelled as anti-Westerns; e.g. *Blood Meridian: or the Evening Redness in the West*²⁹ because it tries to disturb the form of the genre. McCarthy's work with history and his awareness of the notion of conquest range the novel to the New Western genre. He analyses and revises the history of the West, but he includes no heroism, glorification, or romantic myths; the traditional code of the West is destroyed. The novel demonstrates a violent nature in humans, which also radiates from the landscape; nothingness and vacancy dominate there.

²⁷ *The American Western*, p. 146-151.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 39.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 152.

Daniel Worden³⁰ points out that some writers (e.g. McCarthy and Larry McMurtry) have used the genre of western to allegorize the contemporary moment; they complicated its narratives, and therefore criticized, but also reinforced the genre. McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* dramatizes the persistence of western mythology in the modern Southwest, the protagonists take a journey to Mexico because they want to become cowboys, who personate old myths, traditions, and an ideal way of life. The Southwest is being modernized, but the boys long for preservation of traditional values.

³⁰ *The American Western*, p. 96.

1.3 Typical Features of Southern Gothic Fiction

The gothic fiction in the American South of the twentieth century can be characterised by a number of common features. It concentrates on an individual or a limited community of individuals and their existence in the modern era. The twentieth century represented a period in which modernity, science and technology clashed with a sense of history and hitherto events in the South. Living in a modern world brings many benefits, but also a fear of boundless options, and expansiveness of humankind, which can cause damage, destruction, and violation of nature and native places of living. L. P. Simpson declares that

the modern southern gothics "associate contemporary southern life with the 'absurdity' of human existence in the twentieth century" and therefore take up the same "underlying subject of modern literature" as other writers: the "drama of the estrangement of the soul from the tradition of faith" and "the soul's transformation into the alien entity of the 'self', isolated in the modern society of science and history".³¹

It is difficult for a human to keep pace with rapid progress, and satisfy the demands of the up-to-date period. People must handle feelings of pressure and terror because they are solitary, abandoned by other people, and even by God. In the past, there was faith as a certainty that although life was bitter and troublesome, there was salvation and the afterlife in Paradise at the end of it. Such security was ruined by the rational attitude based on new ways of thinking on grounds of science and technology. Modern people have to bear the burden from the past, and cope with the problems of the present. The weight of human existence, degeneracy, psychological and social decay have dominated in the South on the grounds of historical milestones. Southern fiction reflects southern history, culture, manners, social hierarchies, rituals, and desire. The key motifs in the Southern gothic are therefore associated with the history, society, and the land of the South, but also with violence, rape, breakdown, horror and insanity mingled with humour. The most significant features of Southern gothic literature are demonstrated in the following subchapters.

³¹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 315.

1.3.1 Bonds to History and Land

Southern authors are characterized by a strong bond to their region and the region's history. It is not flatly evident which states are branded as Southern though. The eleven states that belonged to the Confederacy are obviously a part of the South, but particular border countries (e.g. Kentucky and Missouri) are sometimes considered as well. Although we specify its margins, it tends to be a place with ever changing geography, society and consciousness. In letters of Southern writers, their readers may observe places, or cities of the region. For example, some narratives by Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote and Eudora Welty take place in New Orleans; the city offers various ways of perception, it can be perceived as a space of unlimited opportunities, or a setting ruled by destructive forces.³² Some McCarthy's novels (e.g. *The Orchard Keeper*) are set in the Appalachian area. Appalachia represents a cultural region that geographically comprises the Southern Highlands, the Upland South and the Back Country; it is named after the Appalachian Mountains which stretch from Canada to Alabama. The area was indicated as "devoted by nature to isolation and poverty"³³ by a geographer in 1901. Growing seasons in the mountain terrain are rather short, and although the location is rich in natural resources, it is difficult to get there, and its habitation is not dense. The people living in the area have always had their specific culture and manners which seemed peculiar to the people living somewhere else. It was influenced by Cherokees, Celtic roots, story-telling, folklore, and simple life in harmony with nature. The inhabitants with their customs are distinctive, and so are their writings that shape the Appalachian literature. Although he was born in the region, Cormac McCarthy is not considered to be its representative because not all his novels take place there.³⁴ Certain features characteristic for the Appalachian literature might be found in his books. There are characters representing the old way of living, respect for nature, traditions and values, and certain humility; preferring pristine simplicity and conventional crafts. The blacksmith from *Child of God* can be mentioned

32 *Lectures on American Literature*, p. 229.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

34 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 43-48.

as one of them. He is a man who respects his craftwork, honesty and traditional ways of working and living.

Utilization of the native southern environment was consistent in a major part of Faulkner's novels. He created a fictional territory which was directly inspired and based on the country where he was born and predominantly lived. Robert Penn Warren likewise used southern scenes as settings for his fictions, and employed typically southern phenomena. There are values as honour, responsibility, and topics like struggles between factory owners and workers. Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor did not leave their home towns for too long, they spent a significant part of their lives there, and were also linked with them in their novels and short stories. On the contrary, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote decided to depart from their homeland, yet constantly returned back in their writings and also for visits, so their literary style never ceased to be southern in many respects.³⁵

There is a strong historical consciousness which mirrors in Southerners' fiction and distinguishes it from other American works. Historical events must have had a huge influence on the mental, social and ethical development of Southerners. One of the most considerable fractions of their history is the Civil War, which splits the perception of time into two eras: antebellum and postbellum. The defeat of the South was a tragedy for the people who believed that they were a part of an invincible nation;

[...] the Southerner ceases to be classified as an American. He tasted the bitter cup of defeat which no American is supposed to know of, and his view of history is, consequently, much more pessimistic and, in a way, also European. War is not something that happens to other people. Thus in a world where the American is supposed to be uniformly successful, the Southerner is an anomalous American.³⁶

The past became a plot and setting for literary works, it was also romanticized, mythologized and linked with the image of gentility.³⁷ The former class structuring

35 *Lectures on American Literature*, p. 229-231.

36 *Ibid*, p. 227.

37 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 938.

seems to be illusively preserved by the descendants of the privilege class members, who are not willing to give up on their former exclusiveness. This is displayed in Faulkner's novels, e.g. *The Sound and the Fury*, and history and perception of the past are crucial factors of his novels in general. However, it seems to be lost as his narratives illustrate: in *The Sound and the Fury*, the old aristocratic family loses a deal of its property, and occurs to be in a deplorable situation. Longing for belongings and high position is rather destructive than profitable, as the character of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* demonstrates.³⁸ Southerners were not willing to give up on their past, so the antebellum period was often represented and fostered in their fiction for the rest of the nineteenth century; they fictionally preserved lost values and social order.³⁹ In later writings, there is a sceptic attitude towards the past. It is depicted as something negative, restrictive. The past of an individual is influenced by the damned past of the community and nation. It causes pain, its impact is oppressive and a new generation is stigmatized by the old one. In fiction, we can therefore perceive tragic fortunes of families and their members, who appear to be severe and mean.

Beside the weight of failure, there is another historical burden – slavery, which was directly associated with the Civil War. This testimony to violence and invading of fundamental human rights became a curse for following generations.

1.3.2 Slavery

In the 1620s Africans started to be imported to the American continent and the institution of slavery was established. Although it was regionally restricted during the second decade of the nineteenth century, it persisted until the end of the Civil war in 1865. Attitudes to this captive and restrictive system varied, especially when we compare the North and the South, and it was mirrored in the ideological and social

³⁸ *Lectures on American Literature*, p. 231-232.

³⁹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 619.

image of the regions, and also in their culture and literature.⁴⁰ Texts contain a testimony to functioning of slavery system. It is pictured in documents, diaries and fiction, so there are more points of view on the matter, oscillating from realistic to idealized viewpoints. For example, in antebellum pastoral texts, the character of a black slave was idyllic, presented as an important member of a plantation community. At first, the reasons for such representation were political, later they became nostalgic. Negroes were portrayed as moral models (modest and humble) in post-Reconstruction years as well, whereas racial conflicts were evident in slave narratives. Although some artists (e.g. the Agrarians) stressed the aesthetic function of art and wanted to get rid of political and social topics, the crisis was not over yet after the Civil War – racial intolerance was still persistent and led to lynching, Ku Klux Klan operations, and efforts to prevent equality of the blacks. The theme was therefore present in literature as well; sometimes it was referred to directly, sometimes implicitly.⁴¹

Slavery is interpreted as sacrificial machinery by Girard, who observes slaves as appropriate objects of victimization. The blacks lived in immediate proximity to the whites; they were virtually members of their society, although they did not have the same rights and were not regarded as equal citizens; their skin, culture, religion and manners were dissimilar. They corresponded to the requirement that a scapegoat must be akin to other members of community, but on the other hand, different inasmuch that the slaughter does not raise retaliations. Slavery signifies a deep crisis the southern society must have got into. The owners of slaves caused them not only physical violence, but also cultural - they deprived them of their own freedom, families and identities. Slavery was connected with racism, sexism, economic inequality, and it also influenced the formation of the class system in the southern society at the end of

40 *Southern Spaces* [online]. Published 2004-02-16. [cit. 2015-12-30] <<http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>>.

41 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 937.

the Civil war. The differences concerning possessions, wealth, or gender among the whites were minimized because they united against the blacks.⁴²

1.3.3 The Influence of Society

[Society is] a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done. All the people in a country, or in several similar countries, can be referred to as a society.⁴³

According to this *Cambridge dictionary* definition, a society might be composed of the people who cooperate, try to achieve collective aims, proceed to common targets, and solve problems together. Such a vision appears to be too optimistic because in reality, the people within a society are different and unequal; they concern themselves with their own individual matters and do not focus on common prosperity. Nevertheless, a human aspires to belong to a society, as Aristotle claimed – men are social beings by nature. The influence of society is hence what forms and shapes southern citizens as well. They usually strive to be valid constituents of society, even though they do not confess, or are not aware of it. Southern society has been influenced by a distinct class differentiation since the antebellum era when white plantation owners embodied the eminence, and black slaves the mud of the society. However there have been differences not only between whites and blacks, but also among whites, mirroring origin and property contrasts. The acquirement of a favourable position is contingent on wealth, property – the people who possess money and estates are regarded as powerful. In the Old South, a possession of land was always what mattered among people: they wanted to be owners of ostentatious mansions and huge plantations, usually including a group of slaves, because it provided a high position within their society.

42 CIUBA, Gary M. *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Southern literary studies [cit. 2015-12-30]. <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/Doc?id=10453818>>, p. 26-29.

43 *Cambridge Dictionaries online* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-17] <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/society>>.

*The Companion to Southern Literature*⁴⁴ analyses the occurrence of various social classes in Southern literature, declaring that the most dominant is the planter gentry whose superiority reflects its economic, political and intellectual dominance. The middle class appears less contrary to the aristocracy. Concerning the occurrence in Southern letters, the lowest class is located somewhere between the high and middle class, forming foils that make the upper-class palpable. The presence of slaves influenced the development and function of southern society – it provided a degree of privilege for the lowest class of poor Southerners and thus withdrew animosity and conflicts within the white society. Writers started to closely explore the relations of the classes with the beginning of Southern Renaissance; they applied realistic and complex approach. However, the southern community has always been variable and there are more images of it. One of them is regarded as The Mythic South, and it is associated with an idealized plantation society of southern gentlemen, belles and their loyal servants. Subsequently, this image was extended as there were planters who migrated to find fertile land and saw themselves as gentry as well; some of them even owned slaves. They were supported by rednecks – farm workers – who felt endangered by possibly freed slaves, who would occupy their positions as a cheap labour force. After the Civil War, some slaves moved and worked somewhere else in the region, some stayed at their former masters and some migrated to the North or Midwest. Further, there were groups of inhabitants divided on the basis of their surroundings: lowlanders and uplanders. They varied from each other because of different living conditions. Another element that underwent modifications was the role of women – they moved from the limited space of their households to a wider area to gain education, and cooperate with their husbands. Contrary to divergent tendencies, some social structures have developed strong bonds within the southern society – for example kinship, the courthouse, the county government, and the church.

44 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 162-163.

1.3.4 Religion

Religion and faith are deeply rooted in the nature of Americans. The colonization of American lands proceeded in the name of God and religion. Preachers were sent to the land in order to spread their belief, and evangelize the uncivilized country. They started to settle down, found settlements, build churches and make Christianity the most fundamental law. Puritans set strict and unconditional obedience to holy order, based on predestination and persistent deterrence by God's punishment and death. The only truth was personated by the holy Bible and commandments. The Church became a powerful institution with a huge impact on people. Their existence was bound to deity, particularly in a profoundly fatalistic way. They were told how to live modestly and humbly, how to avoid and dispose of sins, but there was a constant threat. Religion has gained an ambiguous nature: on the one hand, it offered hope and promised salvation, on the other hand, its instruments were usually applied in a way that was profitable for the Church.

Evangelical Christianity has deeply and broadly influenced the formation of southern history, culture, and literature. Southerners' belief in the existence of God and Satan, heaven and hell, and the possibility of saving their souls thanks to preaching the Gospel, following of commandments and biblical teaching has influenced all areas of their lives. Biblical and religious features have been a part of myths and tales, so Southerners have encountered them since their childhood. There were always images of guilt, sins, and God's omnipotent power that was both redemptive, and destructive. Religion has been an instrument of unification – Christians accentuate the importance of regular gatherings in a form of camp meetings, prayer meetings, Sunday masses etc., so it also agglutinates communities. Southerners had to cope with their contradictory heritage from the past – religious traditions, slavery, and violence. It was implied in the nineteenth century fiction and transferred into the literature of the following century. Writers have always faced up to such paradoxical, distinctive features of their region. They have also illustrated various themes related to religion: human efforts to reach God, or cope with their inability to recognise and meet him;

doubts of his existence; critical approach to religious institutions; religious bigotry. Faulkner occupied himself with religion and described its dual significance: it can bring the human spirit closer to the Divine; however, it also invokes human depravity, evil and causes suffering. Walker Percy's works were influenced by philosophy, theology and language theory – he included the motif of spiritual bankruptcy of language in some of his novels. Flannery O'Connor was a Catholic and therefore an outsider in largely Protestant South; her literary work was saturated with religious sensibility, the mystery of human and divine experience. O'Connor represents characters that are resistant to spiritual illumination or redemption to display human spiritual indifference and vacancy. The South has come through numerous (technological, political, social, cultural) changes since the time of these authors, however religion is still persistent in the literary production of contemporary southern authors: their attitude stretches from belief and fascination to scepticism and constant struggle; some of them use it to explore the mysteries of human and divine existence, some writers apply archetypal biblical themes because they constantly provide powerful structures and images for writing. Writers currently utilize irony and satirical humour to overcome the tension between religious ideals and violent experience; biblical traditions and their subsequent misuse.⁴⁵

The figure of Jesus is relevant for Christians because they know his holy deeds, and are familiar with his appearance. He is treated as a symbol of devotion, compassion, and self-sacrifice. However, Jesus is also associated with violence and cruelty. As Girard claims, the existence of Jesus is regarded as a positive form of mimesis because he imitated and represented the Father without longing to replace him completely; he was not God's rival. However, religion has been supported by violence and vice versa: Jesus is the evidence - he became the victim of crucifixion, and personated a scapegoat of both civil and religious communities. The Lord is not interpreted as entirely gracious and merciful, but also as wrathful, revengeful, punitive. He sacrificed his son for the

45 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 731-736.

sins of mankind and it became a model for the Christians who felt justified to commit violence as a punishment for the people trespassing laws.⁴⁶

1.3.5 The Grotesque

One of the most significant features of Southern gothic is grotesqueness. The authors of *Lectures on American Literature* admit that it is difficult to say what the Southern grotesque precisely means because there are more definitions that differ in the degree of generality and a point of view. Flannery O'Connor said that "in the North everything which comes from the South is considered grotesque, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is considered realistic".⁴⁷ In this chapter, we will provide origins and some definitions of the grotesque and a comparison of the terms grotesque and gothic because they are sometimes interchanged.

The word grotesque is defined as something "strange and unpleasant, especially in a silly or slightly frightening way"⁴⁸ in *Cambridge dictionary*. This word originally represents a decorative ornament depicting natural and supernatural motifs like leaves, stones and sphinxes.⁴⁹ Its usage thus originates in the field of visual arts (e. g. painting, sculpture, architecture) where it is "characterized by fantastic representations of intricately woven human, animal, and vegetable forms creating distortions of the natural to the point of comic absurdity, ridiculous ugliness, or ludicrous caricature."⁵⁰ It mingles various forms coming from animate and inanimate world, the human sphere is penetrated by elements typical for animal or even non-living systems, and therefore picturesque and anomalous images are created.

Grotesque paintings are a part of works of such artists as Hieronymus Bosch, Goya, Max Ernst, or Salvator Dalí who "use the grotesque for comic, sardonic and

46 *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30]. <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/Doc?id=10453818>>.

47 *Lectures on American Literature*. p. 236.

48 *Cambridge Dictionaries online* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30]. <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/grotesque>>.

49 *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 295.

50 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 321.

exaggerated satirical effects".⁵¹ Such usage may be corresponding to Southern gothic authors, who utilized the grotesque in relation to satirical criticism of our society and human race in general. The term subsequently started to be applied in a literary context. Recipients may encounter the grotesque in many forms:

as figures, or human beings who appear dehumanized because of physical deformity, the discordance of body and soul (or mind), incoherent behaviour, or the assumption of traits from the animal, vegetable, mineral, or mechanical kingdoms; as objects, or nonhuman things that appear to have become animated, to possess an unusual amount of energy or even something akin to human will, or to be the instrument of an ominous force; and as situations, or violations of static laws, disturbance of space-time perceptions, contrasts between expectation and fulfilment, disruptions of cause and effect, or juxtaposition of incompatible actions, elements of setting, or tones that evoke concrete images of an estranged world.⁵²

As a principal attribute we can consider a mixture of contrastive and heterogeneous elements. There are features of detestation, awfulness and terror mingled with comedy and humour, which consequently appear uneasy and factitious. Such blending implies inconsistent and ambivalent perception and evokes incongruous feelings in the recipients, who might be startled at the notion of such extraordinariness. Therefore, it is aptly used in literature as a means for representation of anything "ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant, freakish and unnatural; in short, aberrations the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportions."⁵³ Familiar elements that are unexpectedly, extraordinarily mingled evoke novelty and their familiarity is discontinued. Such combining is usual in the periods of crisis when people cannot manage with existing, traditional patterns, which may be deficient or disrupted, and need to constitute new types. Writers aspire to expose critical affairs via leading their action into extremes,

51 *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 295-296.

52 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 321.

53 *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 295-296.

usually transgressing acknowledged boundaries. For that purpose, they utilize the grotesque, which can deform what is familiar and combine what is incompatible.⁵⁴

A classification that is applied to humour can be used alike with the grotesque; it can be categorized as situational (which is based on clashes between words and actions; ideals and reality), linguistic (which profits from ambiguity of words and twisting of their meanings) and the grotesque of a character, yet such sorting is regarded as theoretical and not utterly determinable.⁵⁵

In McCarthy's books, a man experiences foreignness and divergence. Wolfgang Kayser defines the grotesque as an estranged world where everything that used to be familiar turned into alien and vicious. The shift tends to be unexpected, surprising and hence, it causes panic. It makes people realize that the reliability and firmness of their world is a delusion.⁵⁶

Some literary critics identify the Southern grotesque with the mirror of a human being in a modern world; dealing with existential problems, wandering, aimless, discontent, and wrathful. However, Gleeson-White sees also its significance in helping the literary works to transform, and develop. Bakhtin accentuates the continuous flow which makes the grotesque distinctive from the classical body.⁵⁷

The grotesque has been associated (sometimes even interchanged) with gothic, although Richard Hurd endeavoured to define gothic as a specific aesthetic. Procházka states that the gothic fiction transforms into the grotesque in Poe's works. The grotesque has more forms, but its most distinctive feature is exaggeration. Poe utilized horrific features, technology and scientific resources for a depiction of dark forces. In

54 *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30].

<<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/Doc?id=10453818>>, p. 52.

55 *Lectures on American Literature*, p. 237.

56 SVĚRÁK, M. *Svět v hrsti prachu: kritická recepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho*. Ed. 1. Praha: Argo, 2012, 335 p. ISBN 978-80-257-0407-3, p. 24.

57 GLEESON-WHITE, S. Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers. *Southern Literary Journal* [online]. 2001, [cit. 2016-01-02]. ISSN 00384291.

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspmu&AN=edspmu.S1534146101201082&lang=cs&authtype=shib>>.

contrast to Bachtin, he did not imply the elements of carnival and festivity. His instrument of the grotesque is a manipulation with a reader – he tries to shock, confuse and lead the reader to an unexpected unravelling. Later, Poe's romantic grotesque was enriched by the elements of absurd drama, and settings of fiction were moved to everyday life. For example, Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* is set in metropolitan surroundings and exaggeration is replaced by an opposite movement to grotesque simplification that illustrates a lack of space, freedom, and communication. Irony and absurdity are applied in the speech of the narrator and behaviour of characters. In Poe's, Melville's and other authors' grotesque fiction, we can notice that the characters behave like machines driven by mechanical force, which makes them repeat everyday actions and live in a uniform way. There is a motif of abandonment – a man gives up on any opportunity to act, communicate and participate in anything; therefore, they dispose of responsibility.⁵⁸

1.3.6 Violence

Violence is deeply rooted in human nature; our collective history is intertwined with conflicts, wars and violent events. Victimization has been performed in various forms – human and animal sacrifices, symbolic sacrifices provided during rituals, or as a part of theatre performances. In the American past, it was coined to be a means of regeneration or reaching supposedly honourable purposes. The South has become known as the most violent region of America and has been branded as a subculture of violence; there have been efforts to find out what the origins of such temper are.

They have explored whether its violence might be traced to class structure, rural lifestyles, poverty struggles to modernize, anomic, child-rearing practices, or peculiar qualities of interpersonal relationships. They have viewed the violence as the legacy of slavery, the frontier, Celtic settlers, and an obsession with honor. Clarence Cason even attributed the hot tempers to the hot temperatures.⁵⁹

58 *Romantismus a romantismy*, p. 151-153.

59 *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30], p. 4-5.

However, Girard interprets the violent origins not as a local, but rather a cultural phenomenon. The universal tendency to violent behaviour has territorially developed and thus there are particular causes of aggression specific for the South. Girard's studies also concentrate on the way violence mirrors in Southern literature because it "can reveal how desire may lead to violence, how violence may climax in scapegoating, and how scapegoating may generate the culture that disguises and deifies its origins in desire."⁶⁰ He declares that violence does not stem from our instincts, but rather from the interpersonal grounds – there is a mimetic relationship between the self and the other called "interdividuality". The matter of mimesis is significant because when the outrage is imitated, and brings benefit for the imitator, it inclines to be repeated further. Causing violence therefore produces more aggression and rage, the violence is reduplicated.

In *The Companion to Southern Literature*, the source of violence is primarily related to the historical events of the region, especially colonization and slavery. The land was acquired by force; colonists used coercion to subdue the tribes of native inhabitants. Afterwards, they carried on with subjugation, and expanded its range even further, to African continent. Such exploitation of other human beings remains one of the most barbarous and inhuman deeds in American history.

It is the inescapable fact of slavery that grounds the central ideological violence of southern historiography: that is, how explain a flight for freedom *from* bondage in the name of the sovereignty of the self while at the same time justifying a variation of that bondage in political practice.⁶¹

After the defeat in Civil War, Southerners felt vulnerable and threatened, and they usually reacted in a radical, passionate way. Sheldon Hackney denominated southern way of thinking as a "siege mentality"; inhabitants of the region fostered a paranoid fear of everything that was not familiar and traditional for them; namely "abolitionists, the Union Army, carpetbaggers, Wall Street and Pittsburgh, civil rights agitators, the

⁶⁰ *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30], p. 5.

⁶¹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 936.

federal government, feminism, socialism, trade-unionism, Darwinism, Communism, atheism, daylight-saving time, and other by-products of modernity."⁶² They adhered to old traditions because they promised former certainties, anything modern, progressive seemed suspicious and perilous, and they violently defended against it. Although the evangelical culture endeavoured to restrict ferociousness and propensity to violence, it further reflected in everyday life, in the way of entertainment; people indulged themselves in hunting, cockfights, gambling, circuses and attractions, militarism and various competitions like log rolling, or hog killing.

The society that gets into a crisis is considered to function as a group of the people imitating one another. Each member is a model for the others and also a disciple of the others. All the members aspire to gain or achieve something and present their competitive tendencies via strives and fighting; since they are imitators of one another, it sometimes happens that the whole society turns its rage and grudge against their member who represents a common enemy and victim. It must be one of their own because the victim substitutes all the possible victims of society and the violence against all thus transforms into violence against one. The person who is victimized gains a dual nature and transforms from a detested subject into a worshiped and sacred entity; the act of scapegoating is bipolar, it comprises both slaughter and salvation.⁶³

⁶² *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 16.

⁶³ *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30].

1.4 Southern Gothic Authors

The definition of a Southern author is usually a matter of their origins, residence and also themes and motifs applied in their writings. Some authors do not correspond to all the points, and their classification is not apparent. It is the case of Edgar Allan Poe, who is treated as a founding father of Southern myth, although he was born in Massachusetts. Some of his stories embody signs of Southern fiction. For example, *The Fall of the House of Usher* displays

a great house and family falling into decay and ruin, a feverish, introspective hero half in love with death, a pale, ethereal heroine who seems and then is more dead than alive, rumors of incest and guilt – and, above all, the sense that the past haunts the present and that there is evil in the world and it is strong.⁶⁴

Flannery O'Connor along with other Southern writers who produced works during the modernist and postmodernist era are denoted as the authors of *Southern Renaissance*, although most of them did not act as a unified group of writers, so literary critics and historians do not utterly agree on the authors who should be labelled this way. According to Ulmanová and Roraback, such authors are divided into two successive generations. The most outstanding person in the first one is William Faulkner; some others are Thomas Wolfe, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter, Lillian Hellman, Erskine Caldwell and Cleanth Brooks. The next generation, producing fiction in the forties and fifties, was sometimes called the generation "in search of love" and included (next to O'Connor) Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote.⁶⁵ The circuit of authors including Crowe, Warren, Tate, Donald Davidson and Merrill Moore, who worked at the Vanderbilt University, targeted the poetic production besides novels and biography. They drew on the agrarian tradition and were united within *the Fugitive* group (they issued the *Fugitive* magazine, firstly published in 1922), promoting their ideas with their manifesto *I'll take my stand*. The Fugitives coined the New Criticism approach;

64 *A History of American Literature*, p. 105.

65 *Lectures on American Literature*, p. 225.

their conception of interpretation excluded all the factors which could not be explicitly perceived during reading. The structure, images and meanings mattered, but biographical, sociological, political and historical aspects did not. In their poetry, they aspired to apply modernist features; using ironic satire, sharp images and discontinuous chronology.⁶⁶ The Southern Literary Renaissance occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, and covered all the basic literary genres; it can be marked as a part of regeneration of Southern literature after stages of wars. It realistically treated and critically observed concerns related to history, social topics, and the development of racial and gender matters; in terms of literary questions, there was interest in experimental techniques. Writers felt the need to look back; they were standing on the point of a shift because after World War I, the southern culture was going through a transformation from the traditional, agrarian form to the modern, industrial one.⁶⁷ The Southern Renaissance was based on "the dialectical quarrel between the truth of history and the deceptions of gnosis", and a critical scrutiny of disturbance produced by mimesis. Writers attached to novels, which are critical in contrast to romances; not self-justifying and delusive. They depicted desire and the myth with its origins in scapegoating and victimization, and concentrated on introspective analysis. This approach has been denounced by some critics who reject creations focused on the past and thus remote from contemporary quotidian life.⁶⁸

Southern writers who were labelled as gothic writers sometimes did not identify themselves with such designation. They never claimed to write a Southern gothic fiction, this term was created by literary critics and some writers (e.g. Faulkner or O'Connor) even considered the label opprobrious. It seemed to designate the Southern literary style as unhealthy, indecent and gross.⁶⁹ Eudora Welty was another author who rejected to be denoted as a writer of Southern gothic. There were many clichés connected with the term, further many myths that shaped an image of "the benighted

66 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 514, 840.

67 *Ibid*, p. 835.

68 *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online]. [cit. 2015-12-30], p. 49.

69 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 316.

South". At the beginning of the forties, the term *Southern gothic* became popular; it was widely used by reviewers and seemed almost synonymous to the conception of the grotesque or even modern Southern literature.⁷⁰

With another wave of authors (e.g. Walker Percy, William Styron, Cormac McCarthy and M. Steadman), strong societal criticism appeared in fiction, they critically judged contemporary situation. Some of them celebrated the South, the human spirit and confided in power of the self, but some of them were rather dark and pessimistic - sensations of alienation, solitude and isolation preserved in literary style. Outstanding features of the style were also comic, irony and grotesque. Kathy Hill said that in the Southern gothic,

regional peculiarities are the focus of humorous and often ironical treatment, but the humor is not belittling. Steadman's characters rise above the absurd stereotype of the rural, uneducated populace; they maintain an essential dignity of spirit in spite of their most undignified antics.⁷¹

No author can exist and produce texts without the influence of previous or his contemporary authors. Writers create in contradiction to other pieces of art, but they can also utilize them as a fruitful source of inspiration regarding themes and motifs. Therefore, a short introduction of the most relevant Southern gothic authors follows.

1.2.1 William Faulkner

William Faulkner was born in Mississippi in 1897, and lived near Oxford during his school years. He did not finish high school because his interest was writing. When he returned home after a pilot training in Canada, he shifted jobs and later he settled in New York where he published some of his stories and verses. Afterwards, he travelled to Europe where he was taking trips and writing texts. His novels had been published since 1925. *Soldier's Pay* includes the motif of post-war disillusion, *Sartoris* is inspired by the life of his own ancestors. His experimental tendencies mirror in *The*

⁷⁰ Making a spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern gothic. *Mississippi Quarterly* [online].

⁷¹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 316.

Sound and the Fury, in which he applied a stream-of-consciousness narration in conjunction with poetic images. Then many other noted novels succeeded, for example *As I Lay Dying* where symbolic and realistic features are involved. His fiction takes place in a fictitious setting – the Yoknapatawpha County, and it usually includes Christian and pagan allusions. Faulkner also displayed violence in large quantity and it brought him both popularity and critique; it is distinctively featured in *Sanctuary*. *Light in August* illustrates the struggle of individual characters against the Yoknapatawpha society, and *Absalom, Absalom!* is focused on southern history and human values.⁷² In his fiction, he explored the principles of human existence within our culture, the matter of identity with reference to gender and race. He was conscious of the burden of racial sin; his characters (e.g. Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Isaac McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*) bear the guilt and are horrified by the immoral, inhuman conduct of their ancestors. Faulkner perceived that the guilt was the matter of all the Southerners, but most of them tried to suppress it; from his point of view, the only way of banishing the burden was to engage its origins and history directly.⁷³ Issues of human existence and existential motifs are implicated in works of both McCarthy and Toole. They concentrate on individuals who live without any special goals to reach, without stable material and financial provisions, security and guaranteed incorporation into society. They also suffer because of their ancestors' faults and reputation; it is impossible to dispose of the former offences.

Faulkner's literary methods were complex, modernist; his fiction has sometimes been marked as naturalistic because of descriptions of brutal scenes and explicit treatment of sexual issues. He used unconventional narrative techniques involving internal monologues, and more perspectives on a single affair.⁷⁴ Depiction of brutality corresponds to gothic features because it illustrates dark corners of human nature.

72 FLORA, J. M., VOGEL, A. *Southern Literary Studies: Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-16] Baton Rouge, LA, USA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. ProQuest ebrary. <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/reader.action?docID=10554029>>.

73 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 253-254, 325.

74 *Ibid*, p. 531, 837.

Generally, he is a worldwide reputable author; his literary work has influenced many following writers.

1.2.2 Robert Penn Warren

Robert Penn Warren is regarded as a poet, philosophical novelist, biographer, social historian, and editor. In his work, there are themes of

lost innocence, fatal idealism, the inevitability of sin, the demand of forgiveness, the recognition of human complicity in all evil, the search for redemption, the hope against hope that lies in human relationship, the "awful responsibility of Time."⁷⁵

His contemplations related to human experience and complicated, wicked nature; he considered our grounds vicious and saw the need to control our behaviour by means of thoughts, and restrictions. In his novel *All the King's Men*, he applied a character who was a narrator at the same time; this technique then influenced many authors, e.g. William Styron, Walker Percy, and Richard Ford. The character named Jack Burden presents the man as a subject involved in culture and history, responsible for his deeds and thoughts. Warren's contribution to Southern literature was meaningful regarding his use of language – his literary speech was lyrical, rhythmic, transferring local features into transcendent; yet he was aware of the importance of the storytelling, even in his poetry as readers can observe primarily in his narrative poem *Brother to Dragons*.⁷⁶ The narrative technique of the identical narrator and character was used by Toole in *The Neon Bible* where the protagonist shares his own story.

1.2.3 Eudora Welty

Eudora Welty began to produce short stories in the thirties; later she also wrote several novels, memoirs and critical studies. Her letters usually refer to the folk life in the area of Mississippi, presenting the way of life on the background of customs, beliefs, and myths. She concentrated on everyday life details and ordinary people. Her

⁷⁵ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 950.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 950-952.

literary style can be characterized as objective, simple, utilizing humorous elements to make her literary speech colourful. Characters usually narrate their stories and reveal their personalities, qualities of families, communities and therefore distinctive features of the whole society.⁷⁷ In her fictions, she included colourful characters that tend to play the part of performers, being spectacles by way of their manners and behaviour which does not correspond to the general community view at that time:

the poor, the black, the marginal, the deformed, but especially women--like Minnie in particular, who make spectacles of themselves, and they do so in a strikingly panoptic world defined by a merciless collective gaze surveying the odd, the bizarre, and the marvellous.⁷⁸

Donaldson proclaims that Welty's (especially female) characters are presented as grotesque bodies; they are disproportional, exaggerated, extravagant, immense, and peculiar. Other distinctive features of theirs are heterogeneity and incompleteness; it seems like their bodies and minds are a blend of old and new components, some of them protruding, overshadowing the rest. The exaggeration is so intense that if they become aware of it, they are either able to pull themselves out of the restricted plots and enact some alternative roles, or they are brought to their tombs. The application of outrageous, grotesque bodies enabled Welty to construct different worlds and orders, as it is efficient to diminish the borderline between the spectator and spectacle, the tyrant and sufferer.⁷⁹

1.2.4 Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams, the author of psychological dramas, fiction and memoirs, focused on mental conflicts of his characters who were usually individuals estranged from the community within which they existed.⁸⁰ The motif of estrangement thus seems to appear in a broad field of Southern gothic literature. Williams' works mirror

⁷⁷ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 838, 956-957

⁷⁸ Making a spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern gothic. *Mississippi Quarterly* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-05].

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 839.

his own experience in displacement from domestic background, which is usually intertwined with sensations of deprivation, alienation and turning to the past. Although some of his pieces of work are set in distant areas, a lot of them are embedded in the South, which is sculptured as a living space of humans acquiring discrepancies – in their temper mingle violence with compassion, tolerance and intolerance, falsehood and credibility. He judges the southern district via his characters, but also criticizes it by images of racial exploitation, xenophobia, abusing, rape, impotence and cannibalism. His characters tend to be distinct from the conventional society's visions, either because they are not willing to submit to the rules, or are unable to do so. Some of them are vulnerable, fragile, and naive, but the variety of the characters prevents us from a general definition of them.⁸¹

1.2.5 Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor's fiction is noted for interlinking the grotesque, violent, and religious images; applying humorous and absurd situations mixed with the horrible and tragic. Her literary style has been inspiring for many authors; in McCarthy's novels, there is also a lot of assault, mayhem described, and in *A Confederacy of Dunces*, J. K. Toole used absurdity in a similar way and quantity as O'Connor did in her writings. It is conveyed in her characters' speech, thinking, and behaviour (particularly in critical conditions). In this manner, her characters' attention is called to insecurity and delusive faith, which they experience in the material world; she lays stress on theological and spiritual aspects of human life.⁸²

⁸¹ *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 963-964.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 600-601.

2. CORMAC MCCARTHY

McCarthy was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1933; he was given the name Charles after his father, and later adopted the name Cormac. His family moved to Knoxville, as the father got a job there, Cormac graduated from Catholic High School and started studying at the University of Tennessee, but dropped it and joined the US Air Force. Then he returned back to the University where he also published two of his first pieces of writing, which were short stories. He has married three times; he published *The Orchard Keeper* during his first marriage, travelled in Europe with his second wife, and after their divorce, he spent time in Texas where he collected resources for his later novels set in the Mexican frontier. His earlier novels gained critical appreciation but were not widely accepted by readers. That changed with the release of the Border Trilogy (*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *The Cities of the Plain*), an adaptation of the western genre. He altered his style and narrative methods and made his letters more accessible. It brought him popularity as well as literary awards, yet he did not become a celebrity and stayed private, keeping his life and creative process in secrecy.⁸³

2.1 McCarthy's Works and Southern Gothic

Cormac McCarthy's literary work is said to be inspired by Melville's, Hemingway's and Faulkner's fiction.⁸⁴ The author himself has marked works by James Joyce and MacKinlay Kantor as other sources of inspiration.⁸⁵ That is the reason why his literary style is pragmatic and minimalist, and why he uses punctuation in a limited

83 *Southern Literary Studies: Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-16] <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/reader.action?docID=10554029>>.

84 *Svět v hrsti prachu: Kritická percepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 18.

85 JONES, J. *Cormac McCarthy's Three Punctuation Rules, and How They All Go Back to James Joyce* [online]. Published 2013-08-13 [cit. 2016-02-10]. <<http://www.openculture.com/2013/08/cormac-mccarthys-punctuation-rules.html>>.

quantity. Svěrák⁸⁶ distinguishes four central motifs of Cormac's novels, which are already included in the first one. There is a character that embodies pure evil; a character that is inspired by American myths and folklore; a naive boy on his way to maturity who encounters deception of the world; and an old man with traditional and mythical experience who can be the boy's mentor.

McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, is set in Appalachian Mountains. The scenery contains an ancient orchard with unfruitful trees, separate houses, deep forests, and a dreary upland landscape. It evokes gothic images of gloominess. There are characters that also live on the edge or out of the world of society. The old orchard keeper Arthur Ownby revolts against society and its modernizing tendencies. He reflects the tradition of pastoral literature; his character is a source of myths and ideal traditions. All the characters are devoted to their own concerns, and therefore alienated from one another. Death is present as a constant part of our life and inevitable conclusion of human existence.

Characters of his second novel, *Outer Dark*, are even more uprooted and separated. Some of them lack human nature and manifest merciless violence. The setting of this story is also the Appalachian landscape, yet it is more desolate and gloomy than the scenery in the first novel. Svěrák⁸⁷ claims that figurative character of *Outer Dark* corresponds to the tradition of Southern gothic. It reminds us of an absurd dream with gruesome figures. The story is allegorical, and includes biblical motifs. Everything is related to darkness, sins and guilt, and the longing for redemption. The main character, Culla, is presented as a damned, rejected, desperate reprobate, who keeps searching for deliverance from the obscure world, but blindly ignores all the chances to escape inner emptiness and evil.

The novel presents the outcast who is rejected and almost lynched by society. There is a strong notion of human existential despair, distress, ignorance, and persistent escape

86 *Svět v hrsti prachu: Kritická percepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 34-35.

87 *Ibid*, p. 38-68.

from their own crimes and guilt. However, there is no way out of suffering and horrific destiny.

According to Svěrák⁸⁸, the last "purely southern" McCarthy's work is *Suttree*. This fiction is set in a metropolitan area. The main character suffers from existential anxiety and fear of death because he is aware of temporality of human life. He tries to escape the severe reality, finds out that it is impossible, but is not able to return back. Afterwards, he is imprisoned by his own conscience, sensations of guilt and fear of the unavoidable end.

These four initial novels include all the significant features of McCarthy's literary production. Generally, his works carry the features of Southern gothic that are related to lonesome human existence in the absurd, inhospitable world. People are inwardly distant from each other; they cannot associate with any other human beings. The people are either ignorant, or sensible, and the sensible ones suffer even more because they are conscious of their own futility, insignificance and impermanency. They realise that human life is transient and therefore, it lacks any values. There is nothing that can relieve a human being; the past is lost and painful, the present is unbearably disordered, and the future is vain. Although the time flows, it brings only chaos, desperation, and death. The burden of life is associated with an unceasing searching for something worth living, yet the search is useless because there is no sense, or value. McCarthy's gothic characters demonstrate inclinations to violence, and sometimes even lack human qualities and moral values, they appear to be monstrously wicked and degenerate.

88 Svět v hrsti prachu: Kritická percepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho, p. 103.

2.2 McCarthy and Postmodernism

Stephen Melville claims that it is not easy to define postmodernism because its meaning and value are obscure. There are not many attributes that we could mark as characteristic, but the rejection of universality, centrality, history, thus it is doubtful whether such negation is postmodernism or its breakdown.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, we shall briefly mention several definitions to illustrate the matter and consider whether some of the points occur in Cormac McCarthy's works.

Postmodern can be defined by means of the literary development resulting from the modernist authors' movement, the cultural state in the late-industrial West, or in relation to scepticism based on poststructuralist and deconstructionist thoughts whose elements appear in the works by many Southern writers and critics. Southern postmodernism comes to life in 1963; it is connected with cultural and social criticism in the capitalist era. Frederick Jameson (a social critic) declares the southern culture as the culture of imitations without origins:

He calls it a culture of the simulacrum, of copies without originals; one employing an aesthetic of textuality, of voices set off from one another by significant discontinuities; one that avoids all depths, whether of history, psychology, or art; one that privileges pastiche, nostalgia, images, and signifiers without limitable signifieds; a culture that struggles to surpass the modernist "canonization" of what was "hitherto scandalous, ugly, dissonant, amoral, antisocial."⁹⁰

Postmodernist theory reacted to shifts in political, economic and social spheres where tendencies towards unification applied. These endeavours resulted in disappearance of differentiations between high and low, central and marginal, past and present. Postmodernism went through a development which rooted in accumulation of various postmodernisms and consequently led to synthesis and generalization. It was mostly explored in contrast to modernism, its existence was sometimes denied, but later it

89 CONNOR, S., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. 1st pub. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 237 p. ISBN 0-521-64840-8, p. 82-84.

90 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 678-679.

was admitted that there are some common features of modernism and postmodernism – both aspire to shock and challenge senses with an explicit depiction of sex, brutality and other provocative elements. Both try to conceive and express what is imperceptible; postmodernist art exposes the presentation itself, being aware of eventual non-measurability, but modernist art modifies it into a recognizable form. The past and future are included in the present; everything is included in the present and therefore it is threatened by temporality. Postmodernism is associated with complexity and immensity, though it is continuity without completion.⁹¹ Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise* was marked as a syllabus of postmodern motifs:

In their exploration of the instability of identity, the enigmatic omnipresence of information, the cryptic excesses of consumption, the global power of a spectacle, and the ironic sense of the interweaving of disaster and triviality, DeLillo's works form a seemingly perfect fit with postmodern theory.⁹²

Some new methods and techniques appeared. Writers, literary scholars, and critics started to pay a larger attention to the presence of readers in the literary communication. Intertwining of various fields of arts was applied in postmodern art; literature was supported by paintings, music, and dance. Authors focused on working with the structure; they parodied already known textures and disrupted them. The parody became an important instrument within the postmodernist production; Flannery O'Connor used it to caricature the characters of southern modernist creation. John Barth's fiction is denoted as generally postmodern, containing existentialism, black humour and parody.⁹³

When we trace postmodernist elements in McCarthy's fiction, we might notice that it is intertwined with the motif of time that contains both the past and present. The past and present intervene in each other and are undistinguishable, thus the space of time is complex, immeasurable and imperceptible. Complexity is also reflected in human

91 *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, p. 1-19, 62-81.

92 *Ibid*, p. 72.

93 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 678-680.

beings. It is impossible to reveal the essence of our existence. Another postmodernist feature is McCarthy's utilization of an originally low genre: western. The genre was recovered and updated in terms of themes and the application of motifs. Western landscape serves as a suitable background for observation of psychological aspects of cowboys' life. There are characters who struggle through the period of their adolescence and further because they are not able to find a reason to exist, or settle down anywhere, so they are wandering, searching for short-term goals, which usually involve revenge, or passionate affairs. Their vacant life is reflected in the vast and desolate landscape where only danger lurks.

3. JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE

In comparison with Cormac McCarthy, John Kennedy Toole's bibliography is limited because of his short lifetime. On the top of that, his two novels are different, so it is difficult to generally characterise and classify his literary works.

He was born in New Orleans in 1937 and died by his own hand in Biloxi, Mississippi almost thirty-two years later. He was successful during his studies, and then he taught at universities and colleges. During his service at the US army, he started writing *The Confederacy of Dunces*, which he wanted to publish after his return to New Orleans. However, the novel was rejected by the editor in the end, and Toole could not cope with the failure, started drinking alcohol, suffered from paranoia and depression, and eventually committed suicide. His mother Thelma persisted in seeking for a publisher after her son's death, and the novel was released in 1980 with the help of Walker Percy. John was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.⁹⁴ Toole's first novel – *The Neon Bible* – was published in 1989, although he had finished it before he started attending Tulane University. Its publication was complicated because the family did not want to give up on their inheritance and after unsuccessful attempts to elude the law; Thelma decided not to publish the novel at all. She devised it to W. Kenneth Holditch, who was intended to be its guardian. Nevertheless, the book was parted in a legal process, and *The Neon Bible* was published fifteen years after its completion.⁹⁵ Circumstances of the release are not the only interesting fact regarding the book. It is notable because it was produced by a fifteen-year-old author. The style of the book illustrates his talent and ability to sensitively observe and contemplate. Such a competence is inherent to David, the narrator and protagonist of *The Neon Bible*, so the novel might be treated as (at least in some part) autobiographical.

94 *Southern Literary Studies: Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-16] <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/reader.action?docID=10554029>>.

95 HOLDITCH, W. K. Introduction. In *The Neon Bible*. New York: Grove Press, 1989. ISBN 978-0-8021-3207-9, p. 5-11.

4. CHILD OF GOD AND THE NEON BIBLE

This part of the thesis attempts to characterise the novels in order to reach a complex notion of the texts. Mentioning the plot, significant facts and distinctive motifs might approximate the novel's character. The description of narrative techniques serves for an illustration of authors' style.

4.1 A Brief Introduction of the Novels

4.1.1 Child of God

The novel *Child of God*⁹⁶ is divided into three parts, and every part is segmented into smaller sections. McCarthy's style is varied: he uses poetic and mysterious descriptions of landscape, pragmatic and naturalistic descriptions of human activities, and also colloquial narratives in the first person, though the direct speech is not marked with quotation marks. The text refers to a part of Lester Ballard's life; he is a hillbilly from Sevier County. The short period of his life is interlaced with episodes from his childhood, adolescence, and also glimpses from the past of the Sevier County community. Lester is continually deprived of his family members, family farm, and even the cabin that serves as his spare home. He is a solitary person, who seeks for human company, but is never completely accepted. Lester encounters various members of the community: a dump keeper, his wife, and licentious daughters, the local sheriff, countrymen, hunters, the man who illegally produces whiskey, a drunken woman, criminals, murderers etc. The people demonstrate the depravity and degeneration of society. Lester also manifests his personal moral decline, as he starts to be engaged in crimes (arson, necrophilia, murders) and violent deeds during his attempts at revenge and approximation to women. He attempts to live outside the social system, as he feels more and more distant from social order and values. The book illustrates his continual alienation. In the first part, he is still in contact with other

96 MCCARTHY, C. *Child of God*. 1st pub. London: Picador, 2010, 185 s. ISBN 978-0-330-51095-0.

citizens of Sevier County, they also keep talking about him, watching him, so he is a part of their myths. The second part contains Lester's inclination to non-living and inanimate elements of the earth. The last part is a demonstration of Lester's dehumanization, emigration to the underground of caves, and subsequent realization of his own degeneracy, return, and death. It is a story of isolation, inability to initiate human relations, decay and perversity of society.

4.1.2 The Neon Bible

*The Neon Bible*⁹⁷ is arranged as a diary; there are personal, retrospective records of an adolescent boy called David. He notes several current situations, but the narrative about his past predominates. There are his memories recorded in the first person narrative, but also some dialogues quoted. He quotes short passages of songs and poems as well. The novel is divided into ten chapters, which might remind us of the Ten Commandments in relation to the title of the novel. The chapters illustrate David's journey from childhood to his adolescence, or early adulthood, therefore the novel can be denoted as a bildungsroman.

In the story, David refers to both positive and negative situations of his childhood, school years at County Elementary, and the time when he is employed in the drugstore by Mr. Williams. The narrative begins in the present; David is on his way out of the town, escaping the terrible events of the recent past. He starts telling about his life, begins with the arrival of his aunt Mae, a performer and singer who started living with them when she was too old to get a job in the city. She is too extravagant to be accepted in a small town, but David admires her. They spend a lot of time together, playing and going for walks. David does not participate in the games with other children, as he is too shy and reticent. His family suffers from financial problems because of the father's displacement from employment. They move to an old house at the end of the town, and are excluded from social circles. The father is sent to Italy

97 TOOLE, J. K. *The Neon Bible*. 1st Evergreen ed. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990. ISBN 9780802132079.

during the second world war, and the rest of the family experiences changes: women start working in factories, the people have got enough money, but they still cannot buy what they need, the people go to the movies a lot, there are mobile religious revivals, which aspire to remind the people of the importance of their belief in God. Mae gets a job at the factory, and later becomes a singer in a local band. However, David's father is killed in Italy, and his mother goes insane, so the end of the war does not signify delight and celebrations for them. David faces troubles at school at first because his initial teacher, Mrs. Watkins, keeps mocking, verbally and physically attacking him. After he gets into higher grades, and has other teachers, he is able to finish the school easily. After his graduation, he is employed in the drugstore. He realises his dissimilarity in comparison to his coevals, experiences his first affection for a girl, and subsequent disappointment. Afterwards, he is exposed to a number of crises: his aunt leaves to get a job in Nashville, his mother dies, and he shoots the preacher in the moment of alarm, anxiety, and despair. The book represents an image of southern society, and events in the wartime and early post-war period from the point of view of a young boy. Due to David's sensitive observation, it is detailed: there are the tokens of religious bigotry, social inequality, xenophobia, racial animosity, and sexual discrimination.

4.2 Narrative Techniques

Child of God is a novel which contains more than just one narrator. There are more storytellers who are not unified; their narratives are not directly linked. The story therefore appeals as a bunch of stories stating the most important events and moments of Lester's life. The stories are narrated by the citizens of the town in Sevier County, so it is a kind of folk narrative, which is usually connected with possible inaccuracy. Narrators might be untrustworthy and not very precise because of their endeavour to make their story interesting and attractive. The arrangement of information is not chronological, but rather associative. One story reminds them of a similar one that happened to somebody else and at another time, but they retell it anyway. Arbeit⁹⁸ claims that exaggeration is typical for folk stories. It is evidently demonstrated in *Child of God* as well: the stories narrated by countrymen are hyperbolized; there are situations hard to believe, and Ballard gains mythical features through them. For example, the tale where he is said to pluck off his cow's head just because it refused to move:

I'll tell ye another thing he done one time. He had this old cow to balk on him, couldn't get her to do nothin. He pushed and pulled and beat on her till she'd wore him out. He went and borry'd Squire Helton's tractor and went back over there and thowed a rope over the old cow's head and took off on the tractor hard as he could go. When it took up the slack it like to of jerked her head plumb off. Broke her neck and killed her where she stood. Ast Floyd if he didn't.⁹⁹

There is always a certain degree of figments in folk narratives. The boundary between the truth and lie, the real and fictitious might be thin and vague. It is easy to become deceived and it can affect a general perception of the story and its characters, modify interpretation and implications.

98 ARBEIT, M. *Fred Chappell, Cormac McCarthy a proměny románu na americkém Jihu*. 1. Ed. Olomouc: Periplum, 2006. ISBN 80-86624-21-8, p. 169.

99 *Child of God*, p. 34.

In *Child of God*, there is the main narrator, the central voice of the novel, who describes current situations and whose narration is interlaid with the snippets from the past. The Southwest humourists used a similar narrative technique; there was the frame narrator as the centre of the story and other narrators, as Lucinda MacKethan explains.¹⁰⁰ The discourse of the central teller differs from the speech of other narrators and characters; it is literary language, whereas the characters use the territorial variants and ungrammatical structures as it can be seen in the example of the countryman's speech above.

Svěrák¹⁰¹ says that McCarthy's literary style is complex and complicated in terms of language and comprehension. He compares Cormac's narratives to a stratification of myths. There are many layers to be uncovered and readers therefore become archaeologists who subsequently disclose more and more myths. However, they are never able to reveal all of them, and thus it is impossible to perceive and apprehend integrity of the stories.

Bartlett describes four kinds of narrative perspectives utilized in *Child of God*: a voyeuristic perception whose field of view is strictly bounded – the narrator continually observes the protagonist who is not aware of it, and meanwhile concentrates on objects of his observation. Further, there is a passive perception of Ballard's surroundings, a blind perception caused by the darkness, and an archaeological perception focusing on relics which are on the boundary of the past and present.¹⁰² The voyeuristic perception is related to the present – we can follow Ballard's current situations, positions and actions via the main narrator's vision. It is focused entirely on the antihero; other characters are displayed in conjunction with Lester who encounters the villagers, occasionally talks to them or watches them. The voyeuristic view is doubled as Lester keeps also watching someone or something in a

100 *Southern Spaces* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-16] < <http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature> >

101 *Svět v hrsti prachu: Kritická percepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 8.

102 *Ibid*, p. 85.

composed way, from afar. Ballard's surroundings look indifferent, impervious: all the people and the nature around. Blindness can be interpreted as ignorance, the darkness of the mind; Lester and other human beings are not able to reach absolute knowledge. Other villagers do not seem bothered by their obvious lack of knowledge, but Ballard is in the process of searching for something all the time. He experiences an authentic, sensual blindness when he dwells in the cave. At first, he uses a flashlight but it becomes discharged later, and Lester has to move in the darkness, using other senses like hearing and touch. It seems like people go blind temporarily when they want to get too close to mysterious nature. The cave can be seen as something concealed, cryptic, inscrutable. It is a world concealing secrets, maybe the mystery of knowledge or deity. The archaeological perception is significant for the realization of the bond between the past and present. The past is always perceptible at the present time, its legacy is immortal by virtue of stories, newspapers, material objects, etc.

The Neon Bible offers the perception of the protagonist – David. He is the main character who also narrates the story, and represents his view on other characters, surroundings and all the events and circumstances. This narrative structure enables an intimate sight of David's opinions, feelings, and attitudes to various matters, yet it also bears some disadvantages. We can perceive his subjective notions and interpretations, which might not correspond to reality. Everyone's reception of real actions and objects is subjective, derived from personal experience, preferences, inclinations and other factors. David narrates his experiences retrospectively, with an emphasis on elements that protrude in his memory, those that got fixed because they have a significant meaning for him. The point of view of the narrator is therefore limited, and narrow in comparison to narrators who stay out of the story and are sometimes regarded as omniscient.

5. COMPARISON OF THE PROTAGONISTS: LESTER AND DAVID

In the following part come analyses of the novels with an emphasis on the protagonists. Both short novels will be analysed in reference to the theoretical background introduced in the first part of the thesis. We will explore Southern gothic features that were used by the authors, and compare to what extent the narratives can be classified to Southern gothic literature. The analysis starts with the general characteristic of the heroes (or rather antiheroes), and then deals with more concrete matters: their relationship to society, religion, their notion of history, and propensity to violence. Common and distinctive features of the works shall be presented in terms of Southern gothic.

5.1 Basic Characteristic of the Protagonists and Their Surroundings

5.1.1 Lester Ballard

Lester Ballard is twenty-seven years old, and dwells in a village or a small town in a valley next to the mountains towering above. Such surroundings correspond to the gothic settings: the highland landscape is inhospitable, wild, bleak; there are car wreckages, and unkempt houses. Lester is an orphan, who has lost all his relatives: his grandfather is dead, and the father committed suicide after his wife had run away. Their only son appears to be a lonely hunter, wandering around with his beloved rifle, searching for a prey. His appearance is rough; when we meet him for the first time, he is described like this:

He is small, unclean, unshaven. He moves in the dry chaff among the dust and slats of sunlight with a constrained truculence. Saxon and Celtic bloods. A child of God much like yourself perhaps. [...] Buttoning his jeans he moves along the barn wall, himself fiddlebacked with light, a petty annoyance flickering across the wallward eye. [...] His thinly bristled jaw knots and slacks as if he were chewing but he is not chewing. His eyes are almost shut against the sun and through the thin and blueveined lids you can see the eyeballs moving, watching.¹⁰³

103 *Child of God*, p. 5-6.

The description evokes an image of a restless, ugly creature, who is alert all the time in order to find an opportunity to attack and take vengeance. In Byrd's and the Southwest humour fiction, authors present characters that are morally and physically deformed – the malformations of the body testify moral and social deviations, the crooked state of mind mirrors in the physique and physiognomy. Another way of showing their temper, status and surroundings is through their language, which is usually informal, colloquial, or even gross and foul.¹⁰⁴ This theory can be applied to Ballard's personality. His body appears asymmetric, scrawny, and deformed, especially after he is hit with an axe by one of the organizers of his family farm auction; he can never walk upright after this incident.

Lester is a simple, rustic man who is usually resentful and coarse. Nevertheless, he is denoted as a child of God; this designation may be interpreted in two ways according to Marcel Arbeit¹⁰⁵: his temper, manners, and deeds might be regarded as common, usual because the narrator places him among receivers of the text, at the same level; the acts he performs might be therefore approved and accepted by the readers. Otherwise, the readers can perceive the whole community in the novel as rotten, degenerated and abandoned because they all behave in a similar way, lack moral rules and mental health. As Lester became an orphan, the community of citizens of the valley was the only medium that could be his model, teach him social and moral rules. This medium failed, and instead of raising the boy properly, it rejected him; he grew up detached, isolated, became an outcast, and that had disastrous consequences. He dwells isolated in the darkness, and acts on the basis of instincts as an animal; he lacks any concept of social norms. Bell¹⁰⁶ mentions another usage of the term "child of God" – it denotes children who are wrong in their heads somehow. It signifies that although these children are not flawless, they are still the Maker's creations nevertheless.

104 *The Companion to Southern Literature*, p. 350.

105 *Fred Chappell, Cormac McCarthy a proměny románu na americkém jihu*, p. 78.

106 *Svět v hrsti prachu: kritická recepce díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 75.

5.1.2 David

David is a boy living with his family in a small southern town situated in a valley. He is the only child of his parents, so he is not accustomed to a contact with other children since his infancy. He is an introvert, watching the people and the world around as though he cannot be a part of it all. David is not talkative; he usually conducts an inner speech, but does not communicate with others a lot because he is shy and timid. David manifests himself childishly, unable or unwilling to mature, his adolescence proceeds slower than that of his coevals'. He is sensitive and strongly perceptive – he perceives his surroundings and the people in detail. His appearance is also childlike – he is thin, weak, pale; he looks even unhealthy. It corresponds to his manners: his behaviour appears delicate, gentle, and mild, almost sheepish. David never expresses any emotions, never protests, acts naughtily, demonstrates disagreement, or opposes his parents or anybody else. He is always quiet and composed. This behaviour is not common for boys of his age, and his relatives are aware of it. David's father forces him to meet other children, but when he takes him to see his co-worker's son Bruce, David is waiting for him beaten, dirty and weeping in front of the co-worker's house at the end of the day. His father does not say anything and never speaks about it. He is obviously disappointed by his son's sensitivity, fragility, and inability to participate in boyish leisure activities.

Regarding the family's domicile, they lived in a nice house in the town at first, but were obliged to leave it, as the father lost his employment at the factory, and did not earn enough to pay for the rent. David calls their former house "home", but denotes the new one as a "place"; it illustrates his cold relation to it. It is an old house in the hills, which has been unfurnished and uninhabited for a long time. David perceives it unfamiliar, uncomfortable; it is bigger than they need, so they do not use all the rooms, there are no curtains, and only a few non-uniform pieces of furniture. The old house has been abandoned because it is dangerous – during windy and rainy weather, its foundations move and make the building creak, or even crumble. David's family literally lives in a deteriorating house, and the conditions of living reflect the

functioning of the family. As their habitation falls into disrepair, their family relations also decay, and family members are getting more and more distant from each other, their subjective solitude becoming larger. When they move to the old house, they become detached from the community, but also from one another. This corresponds to the gothic state of isolation, disintegration and decline. The surroundings of the house are desolate as well – the infertile soil enables no plants to flourish, there are only bushes and pines growing in the clay.

David's life is set into a limited space: he never leaves the town, as he mentions several times. It suggests his longing to change it; he sometimes daydreams about leaving it and seeing other places, keeps wondering what the other places are like. It illustrates his desire for freedom. He spends a lot of time at home, goes to town only with his aunt for walks, though he wants to visit it more often, he is happy when they go to town to see a movie, or a special event like a religious revival, or a party at the factory. The termination of his movement is reflected in David's reserved nature, and causes his ignorance and sensitivity. Such qualities are the reason for his isolation. He is an outsider, though he is unaware of it. This might be more alarming than the fact itself. David does not seek friends of his own age; he is satisfied when he can play with his mother, and especially, with his aunt. Meeting other children signifies disaster for him – he does not know what the other boys are like, what to do with them, he does not understand their games and humour. The children are lively, restless, and they engage in rough games, so they are the opposite of David, thus he cannot get along with them.

5.2 The Development of the Protagonists

5.2.1 The Development of Lester

There are not many details about Ballard's complete development mentioned in the novel. The narrator does not talk about his childhood or adolescence comprehensively and explicitly, there are only fragments uttered by various narrators, folk people, who used to know Lester's family members and Lester when he was younger. It cannot be proved whether these pieces of information are true or fictitious. Arbeit¹⁰⁷ declares that these stories are parts of local folklore; when a person acts in native narratives, they become a member of the community as well. Thus Lester belongs to the community, but there are no evident tokens of it. He lives alone in a desolate cabin where he speaks aloud only when he swears. Other dwellers of the valley consider him strange, not right; they recall flashbacks from his youth when he demonstrated his violent nature: punched a younger boy in his face just because the boy refused to bring Lester's softball from the bushes. The onlookers and the victim himself were startled, as if they did not expect and had not seen anything like that ever before; the young boy did not even cry. Their shock suggests that Lester had not assaulted anyone before, that this was not his usual conduct. Furthermore, he had warned the boy before he hit him. If he had longed to beat someone, he could have just knocked the boy down without any talking. Lester probably wanted to assert his superiority. He did not long for violence, but rather for supremacy, and he used the violence as an instrument to achieve it. Lester manifests his inclination to violence gradually; the intensity and frequency are increasing during the narrative – it is a progress of his disposition.

The most outstanding event in Ballard's childhood was definitely the suicide of his father. The young son found him hanging in the barn and had to deliver the news to the local shop:

107 Fred Chappell, *Cormac McCarthy a proměny románu na americkém jihu*, p. 79.

He come in the store and told it like you'd tell it was rainin out. We went up there and walked in the barn and I seen his feet hangin. We just cut him down, let him fall in the floor. Just like cuttin down meat. He stood there and watched, never said nothin. He was about nine or ten year old at the time. The old man's eyes was run out on stems like a crawfish and his tongue blacker'n a chow dog's.¹⁰⁸

Such a dreadful experience must cause damage and deform one's personality. A human being cannot be the same after having looked straight at the horrible face of death. Lester never speaks about it; he probably strives to displace all the memories and thoughts of this scene out of his mind. So far, from this point of view, the child of God appears to be a regretful figure; without any relatives, friendly relations, or people that he could affiliate to. Svěrák¹⁰⁹ remarks that Lester lives with a permanent experience of deprivation. The condition of his body develops through the novel as well as the state of his mind. His murderous tendencies gradually emerge, the mind is becoming darker and darker, and his body gains macabre, monstrous, and grotesque attributes. Winter weather makes his skin look like wax, the face is wind-beaten, and the weight of committed crimes mirrors in his visage. Lester starts wearing women clothes of his victims, puts on their lipstick and even a scalp with long hair. This appearance is a climax of his gruesome evolution, evoking uneasy, distressing feelings, disgusted and amused responses at the same time.

Ballard's condition might be getting worse because he cannot satisfy basic human needs. If we imagine the Maslow's hierarchy of needs from the bottom to the top, we ascertain that no stage of the necessities is thoroughly satisfied. Even his biological needs are not contented: he neither eats sufficiently, nor abounds with enough property, but what teases him even more is the lack of physical proximity and sexual intercourse. Lester hangs around, watches daughters of the dump keeper, and tries to get into intimate relations with them, but he is repulsed. He watches couples making love in lay-bys, and masturbates. Once, he finds a dead couple in a car, poisoned by

108 *Child of God*, p. 22.

109 *Svět v hrsti prachu: kritická recepcie díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 74.

exhaust fumes, and this occasion initiates his acts of necrophilia. As his enormity is gradating, the protagonist is gradually becoming a monstrous pervert. His macabre uprising culminates in a series of murders, and the horrid transformation is done. Marcel Arbeit defines his condition hereby:

After several murders, as a necrophile, a transvestite, and a fetishist, for whom there is no return back to the normal life, he becomes a "gothic puppet in an ill-fitting dress whose crimson mouth indifferently and radiantly flows through the white landscape."¹¹⁰

For a content life, humans need to feel comfortable and safe. Safety is also one of our fundamental needs. It is backed by certainties like having home, job, and money – instruments providing convenient living. Lester has had only one proper job in his lifetime: when he wanted to buy a rifle, he was hired to dig holes for fence stakes, but as soon as he earned enough money for the gun, he quit the job. Thus he is constantly limited by the shortage of money. He gets groceries on credit in the local store, and when he wants to obtain some whiskey, he must offer his knife for an exchange. When he is deprived of his house, he loses the last property that he could consider as his own. In the cabin, he feels insecure, and sleeps only with his rifle next to the mattress. There is nothing Lester can rely on; his existence seems empty and bitter. It is no wonder that his body and mood take vicious shapes, as it is demonstrated by the chief narrator:

He'd grown lean and bitter.
Some said mad.
A malign star kept him.
He stood in the crossroads listening to other men's hounds on the mountain. A figure of wretched arrogance in the lights of few cars passing. In their coiling dust he cursed or muttered or spat after them [...].¹¹¹

110 *Fred Chappell, Cormac McCarthy a proměny románu na americkém jihu*, p. 79-80. Translation by the author: Po několika vraždách, jako nekrofil, transvestita a fetišista, pro něhož není návratu do normálního života, se z něj stává „gotická loutka v špatně padnoucích šatech, jejíž karmínová ústa plují netečně a zářivě bílou krajinou.“

111 *Child of God*, p. 40.

He is neither loved, nor esteemed by anybody in spite of his endeavour to approach a human being. Ballard's attempts at socialization turn up in the narrative; his visits to the dump, the attendance at church service, and at a carnival (where he experiences a moment of glory when he gains three big stuffed animals thanks to his shooting skills, and the folks finally notice him for a while, admiring his trophies). He longs to take care of someone or something. When he is followed by a dog from the dump, he whistles to call the animal, as it stops to accompany him. It is further manifested in the way he cherishes his rifle. Although it is only an inanimate object, for Lester it personates something more. It is the only valuable thing that he owns, his only property, which furthermore constitutes an instrument of protection, his loyal guard and faithful companion.

Ballard's urge to treat a human being affectionately is demonstrated at the moment when he takes care of the body of the girl that he found dead in the car. He caresses her cold skin, whispers delicate loving words into her ears, and confesses his concealed desires to her. His further concern is to dedicate something special to the object of his affections; he undertakes a journey to the town in freezing weather to buy a red dress and underwear of the same colour for his beloved corpse. That can be perceived as an erotic motive because the colour tends to symbolize passion and love, but also rage. Love itself is violent, and it is new experience for Lester. He longed for a love affair and for human proximity, though he was afraid of it. It was not easy to be in contact with females, perhaps because of the faulty model of his mother. When he encounters a drunken woman at the turnaround, he does not molest her; she actually appears more aggressive than him, provokes him and makes him hit her back. This intensifies his troublesome relationship to women. Everything female makes him uneasy and embarrassed, although it also excites him. In the shop, talking about and looking at lingerie make him blush. Contradictory sensations arouse within him, and it is arduous to cope with them. In the end, he becomes so disordered that he is able to approach only cadavers of women.

All Lester's attempts to socialize result in failure after all. It makes space for the darker part of his personality to come out. He expresses tendencies to violent behaviour over the narrative, since his childhood to adulthood, yet their intensity, seriousness, and frequency of occurrence escalate. Lester's personal development appears to have a backward progress. Rosemary Jackson mentions that one of the features of the gothic is also the metamorphosis; it might be in a form of "recurrence fantasy" when a human being descends to lower evolutionary stages and can even transform into an animal creature.¹¹² This is illustrated by the fact that Lester is motivated only by the primitive instincts; he does not contemplate, but acts by virtue of impulses and urges. Indifference of the society causes the regressive transformation and dehumanization. Later in the novel, the protagonist befalls dehumanized, as he abandons the human world and leaves to a cave. The cave complex serves as his personal restricted universe. Hidden underground, protected by the mass of rocks, he moves along a labyrinth framework of tunnels in the darkness. There are no other living humans besides him, but he strives to establish his private community of corpses. Having been repulsed and disappointed by living people, he gives up on their society and forsakes their world. Lester Ballard appears to bear a dual identity. He is a victim and a killer at the same time. His contradictory attributes make him a complicated character.

5.2.2 The Development of David

By virtue of the protagonist's retrospective narrative, there is a subjective view of David's development in course of time. David talks about his memories of childhood and later life; he presents his subjective vision, and therefore mentions the situations and moments that are of unique value for him, whether in a positive or negative sense. He refers to pleasant childhood memories (playing with the aunt Mae, his train and the track that he made by himself, a party in the war plant), his beloved mother and aunt, but also to the people who he did not like (his teacher Mrs. Watkins, naughty boys from the town), and distressful memories (of losing their home, his father hurting his

¹¹² Fred Chappell, *Cormac McCarthy a proměny románu na americkém jihu*, p. 85.

mother, the death of his father, his mother's poor mental health etc.). At the beginning, David's childhood seems joyful: although he does not associate with other children, he is happy. The boy enjoys walking around the town and spending time with his mother and aunt, unaware of his own oddity. David subsequently encounters difficulties that terminate the trouble-free period of his life. He seems insensible of the mischief that is present in the world. He avoids any violent acts, rude words, and negative thoughts. When he sees, or hears something improper, he rather pretends not to perceive it. It is his only response because he is unable to strive back. His father even laughs at his naivety and simplicity. When he is confronted by other boys, he does not know how to act, so he starts crying. His behaviour sometimes seems rather girlish. He participates in no boys' fights, teasing, and jokes; for example, when the class is going by bus to the courthouse, and the "bad boys" are singing some improper words instead of the right lyrics, David is silent, pretending not to notice anything, as well as the girls. He strives to avoid any violence and mischief, but he later ascertains that it is not possible because all the evil is absorbed by the community.

Michael Hardin¹¹³ indicates David's identity as queer, referring to his gentle, effeminate manners, timidity, and discretion. He is being feminized all the time (his vulnerability makes him a target of mockery and physical assaults by other boys; when he dances with his mother, he takes the girl's part). He points out that David is not aware of his own sexuality, but his avoidance of anything connected with sexes suggests his tendencies to homosexuality. David's bashfulness might be caused by his immaturity, but also by the efforts to hide his homoerotic desires. He is unfamiliar with any intimate topics, and shy that much that he rejects to look at the naked statue of Justice at the courthouse. His speech is only allusive when he mentions any delicate matters, he marks the body parts of the naked statue that the boys are pointing and

113 HARDIN, M. Between Queer Performances: John Kennedy Toole's "The Neon Bible" and "A Confederacy of Dunces.". *Southern Literary Journal*[online]. 2007, p. 58-77 [cit. 2016-01-27]. ISSN 00384291.
<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.165575195&lang=cs&authtype=shib>>.

laughing at as "things", sexual intercourse as "what the boys at school were talking about." When David observes young males (for example, Bobbie Lee Taylor and Mr. Farney), he perceives their appearance, and especially their faces in detail. They are presented as pure, handsome, having blue eyes, which make their look deep and bright. The description of them evokes an image of angels; graceful, delicate, ethereal creatures. Hardin compares these depictions with the description of Jo Lynne, which does not appear as sensuous to him. However, the text suggests that David's affection for Jo is not only superficial. It is reflected in his inability to stop thinking about her. It might be caused by the fact that she is the only girl who he has ever known, and that even his aunt tells him that it is unnatural not to go out with any girls at his age. Nevertheless, David recalls his memories of their kiss when he is feeling distressed, when he needs to distract negative and painful thoughts.

David occupies himself with his thoughts and imagination all the time. He wonders what some things and situations could be like, and usually thinks in a chain of associations. Some of his associations are unusual, for example flowers remind him of funerals, although he has never been to one; a night bird's singing appears to sound like moaning of a dying person. When he walks along the path to their house in spring, he observes the ground and wonders:

Down in the wet mud I could see the holes that the worms made and the bigger holes of some bugs. I wondered what it would be like to live down in the wet mud with the water going by you every time it rained and your home liable to be knocked in when someone stepped on it, or else be trapped when someone just closed the opening and you couldn't get out. I wondered what happened to bugs that were just trapped and if they starved to death. I wondered what it would be like to starve to death.¹¹⁴

David's way of thinking is unique, even in his childhood when he demonstrates signs of immaturity; his reflections are unbalanced, sometimes naive, and sometimes complex. Contemplating about something always evokes a string of associations, which get more serious when he grows older and presumes possible consequences of events.

114 *The Neon Bible*, p. 89-90.

David's mental development is slower in comparison with other children at his age; it might be caused by the lack of impulses, and a narrow scope of vision. His parents (especially his mother) do not motivate him enough to explore his surroundings, perhaps in order to protect him from negative effects, though their attention causes disastrous consequences as well.

There are several crucial points in his life that prove his ability, or inability to act mature. The first one is his father's assault on his wife during which he hits her jaw with his knee, and kicks out her tooth. The father leaves the house immediately, and David remains with his moaning mother and alarmed aunt. At the moment, he is able to make his aunt act sensibly, and take care of her sister. He appears more mature than his parents and panicking aunt for a while. Such an instance of domestic violence ruins family relations; the father should serve as a model for his son, but he fails. David loses the masculine aspect of his family, he can turn to women only, and later, he has to cope with a complete loss of his father. David demonstrates he is more composed than his mother who is shocked, broken down, and goes mad. The further important occasion of David's life is his graduation. The end of his elementary studies represents the point of shift: David is suddenly aware of his distinctness; he does not go out with girls as other boys, he is not interested in it; he further realises that he is tall, has grown up that much that he is taller than his aunt. Not only his physique, but also his mental aspect has changed. He focuses on more serious thoughts, contemplates his future because of encountering some responsibilities of adults: getting a job, having a relationship. He compares himself with other boys who went to high schools and universities, and wonders about his own future, being aware of his doubts and uncertainty. David takes a regressive step when he is left by his aunt Mae in the house. She leaves him with his insane mother, and it makes him horrified, as he speculates about getting money, food, and taking care of his mother. He admits that he is scared of his own mother, who appears not to be familiar anymore. When he finds her lying on the floor with blood pouring out of her mouth, he is bewildered, and behaves infantile again. He does not know how to help her, so he tries to stop the bleeding by obstructing her mouth. Instead of going for help, he hopes she will feel better in the

morning. However, all childish hopes fade away, his mother dies, and he digs up a grave for her. The crisis is intensified because the preacher comes to the house, wants to take his mother to the asylum, and is about to go upstairs where her body is resting under a cover. David shoots him in a moment of blinding panic, and runs away after burying his mother, leaving the town by train. His fierce opposition to the preacher is surprising because otherwise, he has always accepted the will of the others. When he disagreed with aunt Mae's departure to Nashville, or Jo Lynne's going home, he was worried about it, but never commented on it. He kept all the bitterness and indignation inside. David never discussed any problems, and this was another sign of his immaturity. When Jo Lynne announced her return home, he acted like a small child, unable to comprehend the fact, unwilling to concede the truth at first. He seemed to take some time to absorb the information.

I didn't answer her. When things like that happen to me, I just don't speak. I don't know what to say. I just looked up at the shelf next to me and thought a while about nothing. For a while my eye read the label on one of the bottles there.¹¹⁵

His escape after the committing a crime signifies his inability to be mature and responsible enough, but also a way of release from the force of social and religious institutions.

David's dissimilarity is highlighted in comparison with the homogeneity of the community, especially the members of the Church. They only accept the people who are willing to follow their rules, and strive to eradicate all signs of distinctness. Their conduct involves intolerance, and disapproval of anything different, foreign; they demonstrate racist and xenophobic tendencies. All the people in the valley behave in the same or at least similar way, and David is conscious of their uniformity. He finds it repulsive, always expresses sympathies to distinct, eccentric things. He admires his aunt Mae for being extravagant, unique, unlike the others. Mae is the person who does not concern herself with what the people in the town think or say about her. This

115 *The Neon Bible*, p. 130-131.

liberates her from the direct influence of the community, although she is being rejected, and mocked in return. David also sympathizes with one of his teachers, Mr. Farney who teaches late grades at the Elementary School. He is interpreted as apparently different (in terms of his effeminate appearance, cultivated manners, taste for classical music and poetry, interest in growing flowers, living with another man), though tolerated by the community by virtue of his knowledge and competences; he is denoted as the best teacher in the town. The only girl that captivates David is Jo Lynne; he discerns she is not from the valley at first sight. He finds her attractive because she is not local, and has unique eyes, black hair, and soft pale skin unlike the girls from the town. David is being fascinated and attracted by foreignness, marginality. It might be caused by the fact that he regards himself as a stranger in the valley.

5.3 The Influence of the Past on the Protagonists

The past influences the characters of both novels even though they might not be aware of it. Elements from former times might be either visible, or obscure, but the impact of them is always palpable.

5.3.1 Lester and the Tokens from the Past

Ballard encounters hints that refer to the past of his family, and community in the town. There is the rope in the barn where Lester's father hung himself, articles about the people already dead, and events already forgotten in the old newspapers that Lester reads on a lonely evening. However, Lester is lacking his personal past that he could anchor to; his memories are only painful, and therefore forbidden. The past is distressful and miserable, the future is insecure; hence he concentrates only on the present, which however appears disconsolate too. The past permanently accompanies him through the notion of the people living in the town: they recall instances from the past that form Ballard's present image. As they pass the stories on, Lester's past and current life become mythicized.

5.3.2 David and his Personal Past

In contrast to Lester, David is not apprised of his family history, he never learns of his ancestors, as his father never speaks about his parents or grandparents. The boy is disconnected from his roots; it might cause the unanchored feelings. He can reflect only on his personal past, which appears important for him. David had a joyful childhood, and the memories of it evoke comfort and delight. When he gets to critical situations, he tends to flight to his visions of the past when the family was complete, the father was alive, the mother was healthy, and his aunt was younger. The old train is a symbol of his childhood. It is one of a few objects that remained him from that period. He keeps it in the room, even though he is too old to play with it. The engine does not function any more, and David occasionally thinks about repairing it, though he never executes it. His train is rusted and not moving – it is a symbol of his lost childhood, which can be recalled only through his memories.

His personal past is also stigmatized by unfortunate circumstances, e.g. the death of his father. When the war is over, men are returning home and the citizens are celebrating the end, but the people who lost a family member appear not to move on. They are stuck in the past through their mourning. The course of events around proceeds fast – there are babies growing, families moving, and the town enlarging. The past appears to have an intense influence on the families of deceased soldiers.

5.4 The Role of the Community in the Life of Protagonists

The personal history of both protagonists is illustrated by the background of their community's past and current disposition. In *Child of God*, the collective history is embodied by violence because all the stories from the past include rough and violent elements. In *The Neon Bible*, the community functions on the basis of social status and religious agency. Society has got a forming power in human life. A human being is shaped in accordance to the community they grow up surrounded by. Community always observes, evaluates individuals and families. They are consequently placed in various positions according to common persuasion. As Susan V. Donaldson¹¹⁶ remarks in her study, characters in Faulkner's and Welty's fiction tend to be entrapped by various limits, and thus boundaries of the stories are shaped by the communities, which keep observing the characters. The communities within the stories powerfully affect the protagonists of the both analysed novels; the people keep scrutinizing them, although they pretend they do not care about them. The community has got an intense impact on the formation of the protagonists.

5.4.1 Correlation Between Lester Ballard and the Community

The community in *Child of God* resembles a company of degenerated, perverted, amoral persons with violent tendencies. From the beginning of the novel, the people in the town manifest instances of outrage, domestic violence, drunkenness, promiscuity and incest. Lester has grown up and been treated within the community, and thus represents a model of the Sevier County community. Although they claim that he is not alright and talk about him as he was abnormal in comparison with the others, the contrary is the case. Lester resembles other countrymen in many ways. They commit violence, murder animals, produce alcohol illegally, and drink heavily. It is not a correctly functioning companionship. American countrymen of the South are predominantly depicted as uneducated, bizarre people with mental and psychical

116 Making a spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern gothic. *Mississippi Quarterly* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-22].

anomalies. Svěrák¹¹⁷ mentions that it is projected into many works of art, e.g. *Deliverance*, a novel by James Dickey, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* movie where all the countrymen are poor, illiterate, dirty and nasty, wandering around in ragged clothes. It is a kind of stereotype to display dark aspects of American villagers' appearance and behaviour.

Next to the direct influence on its members through collective tendencies and interaction, the community also employs the elements of predetermination and prejudice in terms of formation of individuals. Lester Ballard is despised by other citizens, who regard him as an outcast from the beginning of the novel, and expect him to act in immoral and illegal manners. His family was not popular, and he is no exception. He is observed by the local sheriff, who keeps suspecting him of potential crimes; he is also a subject of dialogues of many citizens who keep talking about him and his family that is labelled as lunatic. Lester seems to be a kind of a hidden spectacle – at first glance, he is ignored, mocked, and rejected, but on the other hand, the people gossip about him. This bipolarity bears evidence of his complexity and ambiguity. Some authors claim (cf. Svěrák¹¹⁸) that he is the same as other members.

5.4.2 Correlation Between David and the Community

For David, the confines of his existence are constituted by his family and the community of citizens in the town. At first, David's family belongs to the middle class; the father has got a job at the factory, and earns enough money to support his family and keep in contact with other citizens. They pay the pledge to the preacher, therefore are on the church rolls and go to church every Sunday. The first matter that affects their position in the society is the arrival of the mother's sister – Aunt Mae. She is an eccentric person because she likes wearing outstanding, showy clothes, does not go to church, and behaves coquettish. The people, especially women, cannot stand her, and discredit her and the whole family. Afterwards, David's family experiences downward

117 *Svět v hrsti prachu: Kritická percepcie díla Cormaca McCarthyho*, p. 79-80.

118 *Ibid*, p. 76.

social mobility when his father is sacked from his job and loses the chief income for the family. Before the father's discharge, other citizens in the town accepted them. David's parents entertained and hosted guests in their house, primarily because of the social status they wanted to retain. After the father's loss of occupation, the family is compelled to move out of their house to a hilly, desolated area. The community is constituted in terms of property and belonging to the Church. The social position of the citizens results from their financial situation and loyalty to the preacher. The rich people and the Church people are the ones who determine collective questions of the community. Poor people are considered marginal, and poverty is therefore regarded as a disastrous condition. David's father cannot cope with their humble position, and occupies himself with apathetic contemplation, blaming the owners of the factory, and foolish attempts to cultivate the ground and grow his own crops. David is affected by the absence of money and material support for the rest of his life. When he makes decisions, or considers something, he usually does it in reference to money. When Mrs. Watkins is sent to hospital after she falls over a chair in the room where she had put David, he wonders if she will get her salary during the hospitalization. When he wants to ask Jo Lynne to go out with him, he hesitates because he does not have enough money to take her to the roadhouse. Even when his mother is dying, he does not consider calling the doctor, as it is too expensive and he is unable to pay for it. The absence of money restricts him all the time.

Society constantly manifests unifying tendencies. Citizens of the town want to keep it uniform because it evokes security, and it is easier to control a unified crowd of people. They get rid of all the strange, distinct features. The community rejects the people who come from other countries, and have got different ethnic origins. They also banish the people who dress, behave, and talk in ways not corresponding to common expectations. They radiate an intolerant, malevolent, xenophobic atmosphere. Aunt Mae is hated in the town at the beginning because she comes from a city and wears extravagant clothes and large hats. However, she partly assimilates later, as she gets a job at the war plant, and starts wearing ordinary clothes as other women. She never becomes an absolute member because there are still many people

who disdain her, but gains partial appreciation thanks to her occupation and singing in a band. Mae is not the only person who is being ejected; the citizens also repulse the soldiers who married any European or Asian women. Most of them are compelled to leave the valley because they cannot cope with the ceaseless oppression. The community's attitude, opinions and acts are alarming. The people do not demonstrate any sympathy and graciousness; they illustrate impassivity and cruelty of the world, which makes the presence of an individual uneasy, complicated. Relations with other human beings should provide support and security for the individual, but the community offers only restrictions, intolerance, hatred, and hypocrisy. The inhabitants of the valley pretend to be friendly, supportive, but they only search for opportunities to disclose, and subsequently eradicate everything that could endanger their conventions, stereotypes, and monotony. Individual members pretend to act in order to help the others, but they selfishly focus only on their own interests and goals, and are determined to utilize even inhuman, immoral means to reach them. David is criticising such tendencies, as he is referring to the way of consideration of his fellow citizens:

But I knew the way the people in the town thought about things. They always had some time left over from their life to bother about other people and what they did. They thought they had to get together to help other people out, like the time they got together about the woman who let a colored man borrow her car and told her the best place for her was up north with all the other nigger lovers, and the time they got the veterans with overseas wives out. If you were different from anybody in the town, you had to get out. That's why everybody was so much alike.¹¹⁹

David usually becomes a spectacle by the medium of other members of his family. When he walks about with his extravagant aunt, gazes of the town citizens hang on them. Later, he becomes the centre of interest when his mother goes mad and Aunt Mae's co-worker spreads the news in the town. Collective gazes constantly seek peculiarities, distinctions, and anomalies. The people long for sensations, exciting

¹¹⁹ *The Neon Bible*, p. 138.

stories and gossip, which are being spread. They do not concern themselves with the verity of the news; its rarity and piquancy matter. The more shocking, scandalous and incredible the story is the better. Listeners usually accept it as right, real, and seek to pass it on to other people. The acceptance of an individual depends on his or her reputation, which is based on such stories, but also prejudice. David is oppressed by his first teacher at school – Mrs. Watkins, who is the deacon's wife and therefore a respectable citizen. She despises his aunt, and treats David on grounds of it: brands him as sly, tricky, naughty, and stupid although he never behaves in such a way. David is exposed to physical and psychic compulsion, it makes him an outsider and a victim even in the area of school.

5.5 The Protagonists and Religion

The communities in both novels are devoted to religion and religious rituals to a certain degree. Every Sunday morning, the people go to church to attend church service, and apply themselves to prayers. It is paradoxical, ironic, as otherwise they do not manifest any attributes of religious humility, charity, and devotion to their fellowmen. In *Child of God*, the community appears to be rather unrighteous and wicked. *The Neon Bible* represents the people strongly devoted to the local preacher, and other representatives of religious ceremonies. They demonstrate symptoms of intolerance and bigotry. Christians in the novels exploit their faith in order to gain social status and achieve their objectives. Their faith is not genuine and pure, but false and hypocritical.

5.5.1 Lester and Religion

Ballard attends a Sunday mass in order to join the community of the town. He does not express any interest in the sermon, or respect to the Church because he comes late, and disturbs all the other attendants. He does not pay attention to the preacher's words, looking at the noticeboard and noisily snuffling during the service. He regards the preacher's speech as a biblical babbling. This illustrates his attitude to the Church: he defies its conventions, and manifests his disengagement in Christian fellowship. He cannot be considered as one of the God's sheep, which follow their shepherd – a representative of the Church, he disesteems religious, clerical ministry and its control of the public. However, he is denoted as a child of God, therefore he cannot be put out of the divine order. His personality urges to realise that sinfulness, mischief, and pain are an inherent component of God's creatures.

5.5.2 David and Religion

David is conscious of religious bigotry in the valley. He does not deny spiritual rituals, though he cannot execute them in relation to religious institutions. When his mother is hurt by his father, David says a prayer with his aunt and is not able to pray to the sign of Bible, or the image of God as interpreted by the people. Institutionalized

religion does not provide consolation; it only restricts people, and spreads hatred. Individuals who differ from the majority are forced to assimilate, or leave the community. God is said not to distinguish among people, he might be gracious to poor and rich, ill and healthy, but the Church members display the opposite notions. They hold the view that their community should be protected from any foreign influences, and strive to exterminate dissimilar opinions, and perspectives. They even demonstrate xenophobic and racist attitude. The preacher and the deacon strive to keep the American blood pure, so they want no ethnic minorities in the valley. They support an old-fashioned, traditional, sterile attitude, any innovative tendencies are suppressed. The preacher disapproves a modern way of entertainment – movie houses, music concerts; and also stands against books which are popular, and regards them as wrong, wicked.

The people in the town incline to religious fanaticism. They are manipulated by the advertisement that announces a revival of Bobbie Lee Taylor, “the boy who has seen the Light, Wonder Evangelist.” He comes to the town and holds revivals every evening during his stay. He is designated as a boy because it makes him look modest, ordinary, he is presented as one of the people, though otherwise his image is exaggerated, hyperbolized. He is a spectacle for the people, who want to see him because there are posters everywhere, everybody speaks about him, and they usually enjoy revivals because such events are more entertaining than usual sermons at church. It is a mass matter: attendants sing songs together, listen to Bobbie's speech, and can speak about themselves feeling the need of Jesus. Bobbie is presented as their friend, idol, and the chosen one. He aims his speech at women, who predominate in the audience (as almost all the men are at war), and Bobbie warns them against rottenness, and sinfulness of the world. He evokes doubts of men's and women's faithfulness, his speech is full of warnings and negativity. He makes the people realise their sins and feel guilty. They are asked to come on stage and testify, some of them start to cry, some of them even moan and scream, they behave like hypnotized. Bobbie Lee Taylor's gathering demonstrates the power of the mass of people: individuals are willing to join the others, accept their belief and opinions, adapt to collective

conditions. He also presents the attitude of the Church – its obsolete estimation of inequality of men and women, and black people in society. On the contrary, the Church also tries to utilize modern technologies: the power of media and advertisement. The preacher contributes to the newspaper, has a radio programme, and was even married on the radio. There is a neon sign with the Bible that is constantly on, it symbolizes the presence of God, his supervision of sins, but also boundless mercy. However, the association of the kitschy sign and the religious symbol is paradoxical and it illustrates contradictory tendencies of the Church representatives – on the one hand, they reject everything modern and progressive, but on the other hand, they use innovations for their profit. This also declares hypocrisy of the Church.

5.6 The Protagonists' Relationship to Women

5.6.1 Lester and Women

Women are generally represented as dissipated, abandoned creatures in *Child of God*. They do not personate tenderness, attention and security, but rather contemptibility and profanity. They are either depraved and rude, or anonymous. In the novel, McCarthy uses female characters rather marginally; their image seems impersonal, as they are not denoted by names, or their names are casual (e.g. the dump keeper's daughters). There are negative images related to feminine characters, they appear to be gothic figures: morally deformed, repulsive, lonesome. Although they are in touch with men, their relationships are not stable and long-lasting. Lester's contact with women is complicated from the beginning. He lacks a feminine element in his life: his mother left him, he had no other female relatives, and his further meeting with women is usually infused with contradictory sensations of desire and insecurity. Ballard often feels awkward in the presence of women, he watches them silently, but cannot talk with them without turning red, or feeling uneasy. His unsatisfied desires drive him to the desperate, scandalous approximation to dead women.

5.6.2 David and Women

Female characters in *The Neon Bible* are more miscellaneous. David encounters various women and girls; negative and positive as well. The most important women in his life are his mother, Aunt Mae, Mrs. Watkins, and Jo Lynne. His mother demonstrates a representative woman of the traditional Old South. She is a caring mother, supportive wife and spends all her time cooking, looking after household and family members. She has never got a job as an independent woman. David must have inherited her gentleness and sensitivity. In comparison to her sister Mae, she is weaker. She cannot cope with the loss of her husband, loses her sanity, and therefore is unable to take care of her son anymore. There is a case of estrangement due to mental illness. The illness creates a restricted area in the mind of an individual, and separates them from the others. It seems like David's mother lives in another universe

that is formed by a few things: the photograph of white crosses, her husband's acre and radio programmes which she listens to. Although David feels ashamed, he cannot treat the woman as his mother anymore; her unceasing staring and strange language make him scared of her. She is also an illustration of the fact that our body reflects our mental state. She becomes thinner and thinner; her body is fading away as well as her reason. Aunt Mae and Jo Lynne are representatives of the new order society – they are liberal, open-minded, and they do not long for a traditional way of life – to get married and bring up children. David appreciates their distinctness because he longs for an escape from the uniformity of the community. He is attracted by elements which deviate from generally approved notions. David admires his aunt from the time she started living with them, he feels a kind of childish affection to her. Jo Lynne is the first girl that he asks to go out with him. Her name and appearance suggest that she is not from the town, and that she might have Asian ancestors. Her uniqueness makes David think of her. They spend an evening together and kiss at the end of their date. However, he is disappointed by both Mae and Jo in the end. Jo Lynne returns home and does not even give him her address. Aunt Mae leaves him at the moment when he needs her, leaving him alone with the insane mother. Both Mae and Jo behave irresponsibly and insensitively towards David, they do not serve as a proper model of females. Such experience might persuade him of the absence of functioning relationships between men and women.

5.7 The Bond Between Characters and the Land

Strong bonds to the land are evident in the both protagonists' cases. They rarely or never leave boundaries of their towns as David confesses at the beginning of the story: "This is the first time I've been on a train."¹²⁰ The place of living thus has a huge impact on their formation; they constantly meet the same people, pass by the same houses and through the same natural environment. On one hand, it might provide the feeling of security - their surroundings are largely invariable, and constitute a constant part of their personal universe. On the other hand, it can be perceived as a cage where they are entrapped. It is a bounded space which provides only limited opportunities to develop. The order of things is fixed, stationary, and it is necessary to correspond to generally accepted visions of the community. The protagonists deviate from the accepted views. Both David and Ballard are ejected from their homes. They hardly cope with the fact, each one in his own way: David in silence, looking at their former house with a longing expression from afar; Lester violently, frowning, scolding, monitoring the estate and looking for a way to take revenge on the new owner. The deprivation seems to start a transformation in both male characters' nature. It activates malignant tendencies and intensifies their alienation.

5.7.1 Relevance of the Land and Nature in *Child of God*

The importance of land is emphasized, as an auctioneer acclaims that there is no better investment than a piece of land with a real estate. He highlights the value of the land in comparison with the dollar whose worth may decline, but the cost of the land is expected to go up. It is associated with wealth, and acquires materialistic attributes.

Nature in the country seems indifferent as well as the society of people, living in its own manner. It exists simultaneously with the human world, but arbitrarily, independently of human activities. Nature is a disinterested observer: it perceives all

¹²⁰ *The Neon Bible*, p. 5.

the mischief, malice, outrage and harm, but does not intervene in the crimes, or prevent the folks from commission of them. Nature just lets things happen and carries on in its periodic motion. High grass grows next to the Lester's cabin, almost covering up the building; there is a blacksnake resting quietly indoors until Ballard touches and disturbs it; rusting car wreckages are grown through by grass. There are some contrast images of human and natural worlds; e.g. a naturalist image of Lester emptying himself in contrast to an idyllic background with a singing bird. Nature embodies signs of violence, causes disasters (e.g. floods), her insensibility may be harmful for humans, it bears gothic features as well.

Lester gradually becomes more and more connected with nature. The less he communicates with humans, the more he turns to nature. He appears to be conspired with it because his requests are usually answered. He tells the snow to fall, and it falls. He tells it to fall faster, and it does. He is not a human anymore, and therefore nature can accept him. He has almost godlike attributes because only God can control natural processes.

5.7.2 Relevance of the Land in The Neon Bible

David's father is obsessed with the need to cultivate the land around their latter house. Although the soil is infertile, he invests their money to the purchase of crops and gardening tools, and creates a small acre for growing plants. Willa Cather used a similar motif in her novel *O Pioneers!*¹²¹, in which she represents the pioneers who came to cultivate the land in the West. There is a woman whose dedication to the land and determination lead her efforts to success. She is able to make the land suitable for farming, although her father's endeavour was never effective. Neither David's father is successful. He invests time and efforts to his intentions, but there are no satisfactory results. It suggests that even though a person tries hard, it is not a guarantee of success. This contributes to the feeling of futility and disillusion in the contemporary world. At first, David's mother disapproves of her husband's efforts,

121 *The American Western*, p. 48-49.

seeing the inefficiency of them, but when he perishes, she continues in his endeavour – the southern madness has affected her.

David appears to show a strong affinity for nature. In the end, it seems as an advantage for him that they have to live in a hilly landscape, surrounded by nature, though it is not a kind of rich, lush scenery. It evokes the image of desolate gothic landscapes; it is bleak, barren and clayey. It also threatens its inhabitants, as there are floods during rains, and strong winds, sometimes even hurricanes. Wind gusts create horrible scenery: there are howling sounds, trees bowing, and branches fluttering all around. Nature demonstrates its unrestrained force, wildness, and roughness. It cannot be easily tamed, or possessed by humans, and David is aware of it. Due to his sensitive perception, he perceives elements of nature using all his senses. He listens to the birds singing at night, observes small animals, which come out in the dark and are more active owing to the windy weather, and smells the intensive scent of honeysuckle. His favourite season is spring because there are flowers blooming in the gardens, wild flowers, and the hills appear to be the prettiest place in the valley. David's relation to nature refers to romanticism, and its application of natural images and motifs. David evokes an image of a romantic subject – the character who devotes to observing, contemplation, and inner rebellion against society and institutional religion. However, nature is not idealized, there are also images of decay and death: an egg that had fallen from the nest, a dead bird. Nature sometimes illustrates the progress of affairs: it is late autumn at the end of the story, and it corresponds to David's feelings and state of mind. He might realise that his childhood is over, his father is dead, mother is a lunatic, his aunt is leaving, and his family is thus defective. However, there is a contrast between the outside, and the inside of the house when his mother dies: the sun is shining and the sky is bright, though it is cold and dark inside.

5.8 The Protagonists and Violence

In the Old South, the children were expected to be aggressive, as Gary M. Ciuba¹²² declares. The traditional image of a man was related to violent and aggressive activities, young boys were encouraged to hunt, use weapons like knives, whips and guns. They were required to behave roughly, have rude manners and achieve their goals by means of physical strength, fighting, or at least coarse language.

5.8.1 Lester and Violence

Lester Ballard matches the demanded image in many respects: he enjoys executing and watching violent deeds, carries his gun and swears all the time. The outrageous nature seems to be innate in his case. Violence is a prevailing power in the universe of *Child of God*. Acting violently is not only Lester's distinctive quality, but also an integral part of the community's actions. All the people manifest their propensity to outrage. Men predominantly devote themselves to hunting and drinking whiskey. Even women tend to behave in the same way, for example the woman that Lester finds alone at a turnaround. She is drunken, almost naked, keeps swearing, and even assaults Ballard without any reason. Men treat their children and animals in a rough way – they are often beaten. In a narrative told by one of the inhabitants of the Sevier County, there was a boy who had set a fire under his oxen just to make them move. In jail, Lester meets a black man who claims that he was arrested because he had cut off a man's head with a pocketknife. There are many posters of the wanted men who committed crimes of some sort. Even the forms of entertainment bear violent qualities: at a carnival, the attendants can try how long they endure with an ape in its cage while they are beating the beast with boxing gloves. Nature demonstrates its violent side in a ferocious image of hound hunting: a pack of hounds is chasing a boar through a snowy landscape, killing the boar in the end, but losing some of its dog members as well. The dogs appear as bloodthirsty beasts, devils obsessed by the

122 *Desire, violence & divinity in modern southern fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* [online], p. 19.

hunger for killing. The boar keeps defending their assaults, striving to hold its bare life. Two fundamental principles of nature collide there – longing to stay alive, and inevitability of death. The scene is furious, full of blood, animal sounds, hysterical snapping and intensive struggling:

The boar did not turn until the first hound reached him. He spun and cut the dog and went on. The dogs swarmed over his hindquarters and he turned and hooked with his razorous tushes and reared back on his haunches but there was nothing for shelter. He kept turning, enmeshed in a wheel of snarling hounds until he caught one and drove upon it and pinned and disembowelled it. When he went to turn again to save his flanks he could not.

Ballard watched this ballet tilt and swirl and churn mud up through the snow and watched the lovely blood welter there in its holograph of battle, spray burst from a ruptured lung, the dark heart's blood, pinwheel and pirouette, until shots rang and all was done. A young hound worried the boar's ears and one lay dead with his bright ropy innards folded upon the snow and another whined and dragged himself about.¹²³

In this case, Ballard is a beholder of the violent act, watching the bloody performance. His reaction cannot be judged because he does not show any response or emotion; he is just looking at the spectacle, motionless and soundless as a camera lens; there is not a glimpse of his notions. In the story, he embodies the role of a watching participant of affairs not only once. It seems that it is easier, more natural and comfortable for him to watch than to execute something. Through the spectacles, from a distance, he experiences what he longs for. It prevents him from a possible disappointment, suffering and frustration caused by thwarted plans and expectations. He can imagine he is experiencing the same, put himself in somebody else's place. That is the reason why he watches couples, his lust is fed on visual images.

123 *Child of God*, p. 65-66.

5.8.2 David and Violence

In contrast to Lester, David's temper initially appears to be peaceful, gentle, even apathetic. He rejects being violent, and detests seeing violent acts, wounded people, or dead animals.

Sometimes I would see a broken egg along the path that fell from a nest up in the pines, and I thought what a fine bird it might have been. Sometimes a little baby bird would fall out too, and I saw it there dead and blue. I didn't like to see dead animals. I never hunted like plenty people in the valley did. Some just shot at a bird to test their aim.¹²⁴

He is horrified by the violent tendencies of other people, and cannot comprehend their intentions, which are congenitally a part of their temper. David does not conform the requirements of southern violent temperament, does not correspond to its violent nature. This is the cause of his father's disappointment; he expects his son to follow the southern code, and behave livelier, roughly as other boys. His father demonstrates rough qualities when he attacks his wife just because she disapproved his intentions, and therefore manifests elements of domestic violence. David encounters the same kind of violence when he is kicked by his teacher's knee. Mrs. Watkins constantly punishes him, usually without any evident reason, she abuses him emotionally, verbally, sometimes even physically. David therefore becomes a witness and a victim of violence; he seems to be surrounded by manifestations of violence. Even Jo Lynne slaps him in his face, as he is trying to discourage her from leaving the town, and instead of feeling angry, he feels ashamed that he was hit by a girl. The fact that a gentle girl is capable of a forcible act makes David's predisposition to violence imperceptible. His ability to cause violence manifests at the moment of crisis and pressure. When negative incidents and experiences accumulate and reach the unbearable boundary, David demonstrates that the violent southern qualities are encoded in his nature as well. He is exposed to unceasing pressure caused by maturing, new responsibilities, the loss of family members, disappointment, and fear.

¹²⁴ *The Neon Bible*, p. 89.

David is anxious when he finds out that he shall stay alone with his insane mother of whom he has to take care. He loses everything what he had at the moment of his aunt's departure: his family, job, and security. Nothing seems warranted to him. When the preacher comes to their house, David is anxious and desperate, possessed by fear. He does not think or act reasonably, but rather instinctively. When he feels endangered, he explodes emotionally, swears, and shoots the preacher, who came to take his mother into asylum. At the instant, David seems not to be aware of the act, he becomes aware of it later, starts shivering and feeling sick.

5.9 Summary

The protagonists appear to be different at first sight. They differ in temper, appearance and language. Lester is a typical villain – he looks ugly, neglectful, dishevelled; evil mirrors in his face and speech. He tends to be hot-tempered, angry, rough, and nasty. David is Lester's opposite – he is always decent, serene, reticent, timid, almost lethargic. He is strongly perceptive, though he rarely expresses any responses, or intense emotions. Although the characters do not resemble each other, they both bear some mutual qualities, and live in similar conditions, which make them antiheroes. They are outsiders wandering on the edge of the community, never able to establish firm and stable relationships. They are bound by unpleasantness of the people who keep rejecting them on the basis of their past, family roots, distinctness, manners, social status, appearance, or prejudice. The antiheroes therefore dwell in spiritual or material isolation. It is one of the significant common features – they are strangers in their communities, and there is no-one who could comfort them because even their family members are not constantly able to provide them with necessary comfort and security. They are the only children of their parents, but they cannot depend on them. Their parents are not able to take care of them when the protagonists need their support. Lester loses all his family members in his childhood, so he cannot experience the care and security of domesticity. David gradually loses his relatives during his adolescence. In these phases of life, the role of family is crucial because family serves as an agent of upbringing. Children need models which form their further values, qualities, and development in general. Lester and David either have no proper role-models, or lose them by degrees. They lack a fundamental family background.

It must be highly disturbing for them to confront their parents' death. Young Lester finds his father's body hanging on a rope in their barn, and it must strikingly affect him, although he reacts impassively, in silence. David is notified with a telegram that his father has been killed in war. The image of a grave somewhere overseas, without any possibility to go and express honour in remembrance of his father, makes David feel

strange. They have no opportunity to bury the body of his father because he is buried in Italy and becomes one of the anonymous white crosses on the photograph; his death is therefore impalpable. David experiences a concrete loss when his mother dies. He finds her in a pool of blood, and she passes away in his presence. He covers her body with a blanket and is unable to look at her anymore. The corpses show the instance of dehumanization. Two men from the store cut down the body of Lester's father as a piece of meat. The body of David's mother is only a feeble shell of her former spirit, dry and brown flesh, which fills David with disgust. Both protagonists are struck by the notion of loss and ephemeral nature of human life. Such experience makes them realise that there is nothing sacred about dying; human body only deteriorates and there is no redemption, or consolation. Death is silent, merciless and ultimate.

Neither Lester nor David ever leave their hometowns. They have only a restricted space for life, and therefore their opportunities are limited. They appear to be prisoners of their own location of living; it has a restrictive effect on their development. Their simplicity and inability to participate in public or personal matters correspond to the limitation. At least David is interested in his future, while Lester focuses on his current state only. He lives recklessly and indifferently, never demonstrates any efforts to improve his living conditions, never cares about the following day. When David graduates, he reflects on his life and situation, compares himself to other children, and tries to get a job in the small town to secure his family. He is more responsible and careful in comparison with Lester. However, neither of them could achieve higher goals because the community would not allow it. They are predestined to insufficiency and separation from the others.

The antiheroes are rather beholders than agents of actions; they apply themselves to observation, though the nature of the observations is different. They carefully observe things and people: David usually observes nature and his surroundings, while Lester is a perverse observer. He inspects the bodies of his female victims, sets the dead girl that he found in the car to various positions, goes out and watches her through the

window. Lester as well as David is discouraged by their insecurity and fear of approximation to women, but they cope with it in a dissimilar way. Lester manifests perverse and deviant tendencies; David usually avoids any intimate subjects.

Ballard and David are unable to live in a standard society. They are rejected outcasts, and it causes their damnation. They have difficulties with communication and establishing relationships with other people, cannot find out their part within society, and therefore struggle with feelings of uprooting, futility, and frustration.

CONCLUSION

The analysis has demonstrated several facts that will be presented in the conclusion. The study of literature focusing on Southern gothic proves its large scope. It is a literary area which works with a particular amount of typical themes and motifs, but draws inspiration from various sources, and therefore is not easily definable. By virtue of more resources, we can summarize that Southern gothic focuses on the role of an individual in the contemporary world that is irrational, dark, and lacks any qualities of constancy and certainty. The inhabitants of the southern world are obscure, macabre, degenerate and secluded. There are no solid relations among them. Everything (reason, morality, social order) seems to be volatile, disintegrating. Nothing is certain because the reality might be only illusive, created by our imagination and subconscious. All the disturbing features are presented in frank, naturalistic and grotesque way.

Although the foundation of Southern literature was connected with a regional restriction, and later antagonism towards other (especially Northern) literatures, it has always been in an interaction with various literatures and literary movements, and therefore influenced by a variety of literary tendencies. All the responses have affected the development of Southern literature. Some tendencies were rejected; some of them were adopted, but also adapted to the regional conditions. For example, gothic fiction was accepted from English literature, but acquired some dissimilar features. It lost elements of magic, supernatural and chivalry. Horror is therefore evoked by no ghosts and mysterious castles, but by evil in the modern world. Characters are bound by their past, heredity, and predestination, and also current limitations pursued by society and religion. Human beings act as machines driven by fundamental impulses, uncontrollable, and struggling for their worthless existence.

Southern authors' apprehension and presentation of the world stems in the history of their country. Americans have always been strongly influenced by religion, and devoted to faith. Ordinary people tend to follow the representatives of the Church

who often use their authority for restrictive purposes, trying to keep the people controlled. Southerners experienced the era of slavery, which evoked a sensation of supremacy, set a rigid division of the social order, values and standards. However, the Civil War brought an upheaval of the political, social, and economic system, and influenced all the spheres of the Southern life, it had such an impact that it caused a division into the antebellum and post-bellum period in terms of history and literature. The people lost their former certainties, and their self-confidence proved to be illusive. Public affairs were reflected in literature, and after the Civil War, there were two principal tendencies – some authors endeavoured to preserve the old system and traditions, and presented the past in an idealized way (such tendencies are demonstrated in plantation literature), but other authors decided to objectify the dark past, and their writings embodied features of desolation, terror, irrationality, and violence.

As history largely influences Southerners, it is frequently included in letters. The life of characters is shaped by legacy of their ancestors, and also by their own former deeds and experience which tend to have horrific effects in gothic literature. There are references to common history of Southern Americans, especially the burning token of slavery, their defeat, and subsequent consequences. Southern fiction is characterized by a retrospective attitude and regional setting. The surroundings gain gothic elements, as there are waste landscapes, decaying houses, desolate cars, sombre forests, dirt and dreariness. Narratives usually take place in southern rural or urban areas, and the characters are therefore strongly affected by local communities, and controlled by local authorities. The role of society and religion is profound in the life of Southerners, and their negative, sinister influence is often demonstrated in gothic writings. The society is formed by a distinct class differentiation based on ethnic origins, social and financial status, religion, and willingness to follow uniform, collective notions. The world of Southern gothic literature and its inhabitants are violent, hateful, and barbaric. Characters display propensity to aggressive, malevolent behaviour in response to anything unfamiliar, or distinct. Images of violence evoke consternation, and also discomposure as they are often depicted in a grotesque way.

The comparison of two novels has detected differences, but also a number of parallel motifs. Literary style of the authors is diverse; they use different forms and narrative techniques. McCarthy's style is more symbolic, he uses imaginative, metaphoric descriptions, and on the contrary dispassionate attitude of the narrator. Toole's style corresponds to the figure of the narrator; the adolescent boy's language is plain, not figurative. The world of McCarthy's *Child of God* is also darker, more violent and mysterious in comparison to the world of *The Neon Bible*.

On the surface, the protagonists of the novels appear to be different, though the comparison of their conditions, backgrounds and surroundings has demonstrated a range of correspondent points. Lester and David are presented as unique within their community because they are continually rejected. It indicates their distinctive individuality that keeps them unlike the other members. Communities in both novels manifest intolerance and illiberal tendencies. They restrain individuals in a relentless way, keep observing them, their activities and domicile. The influence of the communities is apparent, although the protagonists are not their equivalent members. Lester and David hold a part of outcasts, who are under the supervision of their antagonists.

Constant rejection forms the character of the antiheroes. They feel insecure, doubtful and wrong. Lester hides his insecurity behind his indifference, or rude language. He is a solitary figure with a rifle, which he constantly carries in his hand. He is a representative of an exemplary southern villager – an untidy, lone hunter with a strong attachment to nature and propensity to violence. David's insecurity is legible in his reticence and timidity; he does not behave in a conflicting or violent manner. The grounds of Lester's and David's distinctness might be caused by their desire for secure home, proximity and freedom. They both lack a solid family background and models that would suggest them how to behave and how to deal with various matters of adult life in the material world. Lester and David are frustrated by the image of the community because all the people are the same, and they are not proper models because of their depravity, religious bigotry and hypocrisy. The protagonists would

prefer to live independently, in proximity to nature. Nature is also violent and merciless, but it provides some certainties, as it operates in a periodic manner. Natural cycle is the opposite to chaotic, irrational and absurd course of the world.

The antiheroes of the novels symbolize the despair and emptiness of human life. Human beings are condemned to unceasing quest for the purpose of their existence, while they are consumed by their needs and guided by elementary instincts. They observe the world around and are conscious of the immensity of the universe and also our pettiness, worthlessness within it. They cannot find any consolation; the only certainty is the inevitability of death.

RESUMÉ

Diplomová práce se věnuje problematice Jižanské gotiky představující unikátní součást literatury amerického Jihu; literární oblasti, jež vznikla postupným vymezováním jižanských autorů, které bylo regionálně a historicky podmíněno. Jižanská gotika vychází z odkazu anglické gotické literatury, z níž však přebrala pouze některé elementy, které obohatila osobitými prvky a přizpůsobila je tak lokálnímu prostředí. Hlavním cílem práce bylo porovnání dvou děl, respektive jejich hlavních hrdinů, z per dvou autorů pocházejících z jižanského prostředí – Cormaca McCarthyho a Johna Kennedyho Toolea. Na základě prostudování teoretických zdrojů proběhla analýza obou děl, během níž byla věnována pozornost zejména prvkům typickým pro Jižanskou gotiku, u protagonistů bylo sledováno, do jaké míry se shodují a v čem se naopak rozcházejí, jak se u nich projevuje vliv rodinné, osobní, ale také lokální minulosti, prostředí a společnosti, ve kterých žijí, náboženství a obecných atributů lidské povahy, které se v románech projevují zejména v negativním světle (postavy vykazují násilnické, nenávistné, netolerantní až xenofobní, rasistické a homofobní sklony).

Práce je zahájena teoretickou částí, která se snaží nastínit vznik a vývoj zkoumaného žánru, a to na základě původu v americké jižanské literatuře a současné inspirace anglickou gotickou literaturou. Porovnání gotické literatury amerického a anglického prostředí poukazuje na redukci užití tajemných a nadpřirozených prvků pro navození děsivé a úzkostné atmosféry. Jižanská gotika prezentuje strašlivost a iracionalitu světa a lidského bytí skrze různá omezení vycházející ze společnosti či náboženství, hranice lidské existence, nedostatečnost, bezmoc na základě předurčenosti a sklony k násilí, které jsou lidským bytostem vlastní. Znepokojivé pocity jsou vyvolávány také formou zobrazení, kdy jsou zneklidňující situace a prvky prezentovány groteskně.

Teoretická část dále obsahuje stručný přehled žánrů, které jsou typické pro literaturu amerického Jihu, a to z důvodu možného vzájemného ovlivnění. V přehledu jsou zmíněny prvky, které mají jednotlivé žánry společné s Jižanskou gotikou. Následuje

podrobnější zachycení rysů typických pro jižanská gotická díla, která mnohdy odkazují k poutům s minulostí a oblastí, ve které postavy žijí. Historie většinou ztělesňuje břemena jednotlivců, společnosti, ale také národa žijícího na území jižních amerických států, konkrétně otroctví a prohru v občanské válce. Charakteristické jsou také odkazy ke vlivu společnosti a náboženství na jedince, které jsou prezentovány jako stěžejní prvky formování člověka během jeho vývoje. Jižanské prostředí se vyznačuje mnoha kontrasty, kdy proti sobě stojí v rámci společenského rozdělení bohatá vyšší třída naproti chudým dělníkům, venkovanům či stále diskriminovaným černochům, dále otrokářská minulost s uctíváním a provoláváním Božího zákona až na pokraj náboženského fanatismu nebo snaha veřejnosti působit pospolitě a podpůrně, která je ale ve skutečnosti pouhým pokrytectvím zastiňujícím nelidské jednání vytěsňující vše, co neodpovídá obecným požadavkům společenství. Ve spojení s chováním společnosti je zmíněna také Girardova teorie obětního mechanismu, během kterého dochází k proměně zástupce v obětního beránka a který můžeme pozorovat zejména v *Dítěti Božím*.

Součástí teoretického základu je vymezení pojmu groteskno, které bývá některými autory ztotožňováno s pojmem gotično. Práce se věnuje vzniku termínu, jeho charakteristice a využití, zmiňuje původ v jiných uměleckých oblastech a nakonec obsahuje porovnání s gotičnem. Groteskno je založeno zejména na spojování nesourodých prvků, neobvyklosti, absurditě, karikatuře a ošklivosti společně s komičností a kritikou. Vše je dohnáno až do krajnosti, což reflektuje samu existenci člověka v současném světě. V něm (zejména v tom jižanském) se objevují intenzivní projevy násilí, o nichž je pojednáno v další podkapitole. Různí autoři a literární vědci se snažili o nalezení příčiny, proč je americký Jih označován za násilnický region, a zdůvodňovali to ať už třídním rozdělením, venkovským životním stylem a chudobou, mezilidskými vztahy či historickými událostmi, nebo se přikláněli spíše k intrapersonálním a kulturním příčinám nesoucím regionální specifika.

Následuje podkapitola věnovaná jižanským gotickým autorům, u nichž je nutno poznamenat, že se většinou o klasifikaci k žánru Jižanské gotiky nesnažili, nebo ji

dokonce odmítali. Existují dvě skupiny, tzv. Jižanská renesance (jejímž nejvýznačnějším představitelem je William Faulkner), a generace „In search of love“ (kam jsou řazeni např. Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty a Tennessee Williams). Tyto skupiny byly postupem času vyvozeny na základě původu a pobytu autorů a jimi aplikovaných literárních témat a motivů (zařazení jednotlivých autorů se tedy někdy může setkávat s nejistotou). K nové vlně jižanských autorů bývají přiřazovány osobnosti jako Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy, William Styron a další.

Analytická část navazuje na tu teoretickou představením autorů analyzovaných románů. U každého z nich je stručně nastíněn jejich život a dílo, u McCarthyho pojednáváme také o souvislosti jeho dalších děl s Jižanskou gotikou, následně o diskutované spojitosti jeho tvorby s postmodernismem. Následuje stručná charakteristika děl (s ohledem na užití umělecké postupy, kompozici, nejvýznamnější součásti děje a postavy) a také pozorování vypravěčských postupů aplikovaných v textech. Dále již přichází samotná komparace, jejíž jednotlivé komponenty jsou řazeny tak, že nejdříve se věnujeme knize *Dítě Boží* a postavě Lestera Ballarda, které vzápětí porovnáme s dílem *Neonová Bible* a postavou Davida. Je zahájena charakteristikou protagonistů, lze říci antihrdinů, a současně vesnického či maloměstského prostředí, ve kterém pobývají. Charakteristika si všímá hlavně gotických prvků, které se na stránkách objevují, těmi jsou často pochmurné přírodní krajiny, chátrající lidská obydlí, opuštěná a pustá místa, ale také izolovaní lidé žijící v osamění a soužení různými nedostatky, o jejichž prázdné existenci vypovídá jejich psychický i fyzický stav, neschopnost uchovat rodinné vztahy, navazovat mezilidské či vrstevnické vztahy a zdánlivá odlišnost v rámci společnosti. Hrdinní hrdinové jsou více přiblíženi během pozorování jejich vývoje. Ačkoliv nejsou informace explicitně vyjádřeny, dají se odvodit ze situací a událostí objevujících se v průběhu děje, retrospektivních pohledů do minulosti v případě Davida či lidových historek a vyprávění z Lesterova života. Lesterův vývoj má podobu přeměny z chlapce zažívajícího neúměrné množství ztrát a snažícího se získat nadřazenost prostřednictvím násilí na mladého muže se stále intenzivnějšími násilnickými tendencemi a morální i sexuální deformací, který se přes snahu přiblížit se neustále oddaluje lidem a zároveň ztrácí i vlastní lidské rysy, opouští lidský svět a stává se takřka

bohem podsvětí dohlížejícím na společenství mrtvol. Průběh vývoje má výrazně regresivní rysy, protože Lester se čím dál více řídí primitivními instinkty. Povaha Davida se v porovnání s tou Lesterovou výrazně liší, ale v závěru jsou oba schopní spáchat násilný čin, k čemuž je vedou podobné vlivy a okolnosti. David je po většinu času prezentován jako tichý, citlivý, nezralý mladík se spokojeným dětstvím a až dívčími povahovými rysy, jeho chování a zájmy neodpovídají způsobům jeho vrstevníků. Detailně vnímá své okolí, a přestože jeho interpretace situací a jevů bývají neobvyklé, projevuje schopnost vcítit se a snahu pochopit. Okolní vlivy povahy rodinné, společenské, náboženské, ale i politické a nahromadění nešťastných událostí, prožívání pocitů strachu, úzkosti a bezmoci však vyvolají zoufalou reakci, která graduje ve vraždu a následný útěk. Styčné body vývoje antihrdinů vychází zejména z vlivu rodiny a jejich osobní minulosti, společnosti a neschopnosti stát se její uznávanou součástí, které ústí v pocity odloučení a odmítání. Lester a David jsou ostatními lidmi odmítáni, ignorováni nebo hodnoceni negativně, objevuje se zde motiv anticipace, kdy se lidský jedinec s negativním hodnocením smiřuje a přijímá ho za své, přestože původně nemuselo být jeho povaze vlastní. Formování životů protagonistů je fatálně ovlivněno tím, že nepřetržitě pobývají v jednom prostředí, nemají možnost uniknout neblahému působení a hodnocení spoluobčanů, setkat se s jiným a objektivním pohledem na jejich osobu, nemohou se vymanit ze stavu, který jim byl přisouzen. Lester a David tak v závěru působí jako oběti a vrazi v jedné osobě. Oběti násilnické historie i současnosti lidstva, moderního světa, zvrácené a nenávistné společnosti, zoufalství, nejistoty a bezvýchodnosti vycházející z naší existence.

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