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God of Love, the Nature Symbolism in the Poetry of Roger McGough

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

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V Olomouci dne

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1. Introduction

In my thesis, I wish to explore the nature symbolism in the love poetry of one of the leading Liverpool writers, Roger McGough. For this purpose I chose several anthologies, including *Collected Poems* (2003), which covers over forty years of the author's work. The aim of my thesis is to examine individual symbols and provide their possible interpretations. I chose his love poetry in which he uses nature symbols because he refined the technique of expressing emotions through nature.

In the first chapter I will introduce the poet's background and the literary groups which he was part of, namely the British Underground and the Liverpool scene. Later I will make a quick introduction of the writer himself and provide some biographical data. In the second chapter I will introduce the poems which are relevant for this topic and suggest the meanings that could be found in his symbols.

The career of Roger McGough is associated with show business and pop culture. During a short time he achieved great success in his hometown as well as in the whole Britain. The consequence of such a great success is the struggle to be acknowledged by some academic circles as a serious poet, since pop culture is considered not worth serious study. I suggest that although his poetry targets mass audience, it is not low-brow because it is very refined and therefore is worth serious attention.

1.1. British Underground

Underground poetry is a phrase that describes the works of a number of writer-performers who were active in Britain between the late 1950s and mid – 1970s. The Underground poets, as well as Liverpool poets, were influenced by the American post World War Beat writers. The term beat suggests the “beat” of music, but also being “beaten” and “beatific”. The beats, whose art was often created under the influence of drugs, developed aesthetics based on the spontaneity of jazz, Buddhist mysticism, and raw urgency of sex. The underground poets followed the example of the beat poets and made use of jazz tunes in their poetry.

In 1960s, the life in Britain was marked by the growth of pop culture. Young people of all social classes grew interested in pop music and in a new kind of poetry that was connected to show business. This was the first time, when poetry approached mass audience. This new approach to poetry was typical for the underground writers.

Critics often refer to this group of poets as “the Underground”, although officially there was no clearly defined “school” of underground poets, it was not a coherent “movement”. It was a loosely organised individualistic group of young people who shared some technical and political positions. They first distributed their works among their friends, then they aimed for a bigger audience mainly in industrial cities. Since they were writing pop poetry, they started regarding the audience as a sort of consumer who imposed its own criteria on them. They travelled across the country, organized recitals of poetry and jazz, they read their works in museums amongst paintings.

The work of many of the Underground poets is written to be read aloud and the audience determines to a certain extent what it is going to hear. This performance poetry¹ was often improvised right on stage, responding to the moods of the listeners

¹ A piece of poetry which is specifically written to be performed on stage before an audience. It is usually performed from memory or improvised, accompanied by choreographed gestures and refined voice techniques. This poetry was a part of show business. The goal of the poets was to broaden the audience and share it with people of all social circles. These poets prefer to appear in bars and music venues, comedy festivals and radio rather than in literary clubs. Moreover, they may issue a CD before a book.

and therefore the audience plays an important role in the organisation of their poetry. The authors often preferred the oral form and some poems were available only on gramophone records. Their work is characterised by colloquial language, as well as the style of commercial slogans and parodies of overused clichés. This rhetorical device may be seen as a rebellion against the insipid language created by previous generations. Adrian Henri, one of the representatives of the Liverpool scene, calls it “The revaluation of the cliché”. In his words, “The cliché is a living piece of language that has gone dead through overwork. At any time it can be energised or revitalised. Often by changing its context, putting it in an alien context, contradicting its apparent meaning.”²

Although the poets mostly preferred the oral versions of their works, some of them were also available in anthologies and literary magazines. One of the first British underground magazines was called *Underdog*, which was published by Brian Patten, one of the leading figures of the Liverpool scene.

² Roger Garfitt, “The Group.” *British Poetry since 1960: A Critical Survey*, ed. Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop. (Oxford: Carcanet Press, 1972), 95.

1.2. Liverpool poets

The Liverpool poets, the term being coined by Edward Lucie-Smith, is the name of a loosely formed group of poets. The leading figures were Adrian Henri (1932-2000), Roger McGough (*1937) and Brian Patten (*1946). They appeared on the literary scene in the 1960's in the period of the Liverpool euphoria generated partly by the immense success of the pop-group Beatles. The three writers met in the Streat's bar, where they performed. They collaborated, performed together and published together in various periodicals and anthologies. The tone of their works is urban, anti-academic, humorous and vocal. With their verses they managed to attract people who had not been interested in poetry before.

Looking for the term "Liverpool poets" in a dictionary we find only the names Adrian Henri, Brian Pattern and Roger McGough. The names of these three writers became synonyms to the "Liverpool poets". It must be remarked, however, that in the sixties there were countless writers in Liverpool who lived a rich literary life. Adrian Henri once said that one cannot throw a bottle without hitting a poet. Nevertheless, only the three above mentioned poets managed to become famous at the national level.

It is remarkable that the Liverpool poets reached the mass audience in such a short time considering the circumstances. Only two decades before the literary boom Liverpool had primarily been a working class city with no literary tradition. Then during the sixties the literary scene as well as the social and cultural life of the city changed greatly³. Liverpool, where the most of the population were blue-collar workers, transformed within the second half of the decade into the second largest cultural capital in Britain of the time. Among other reasons, this happened also due to the increase of young educated people who were the main consumers of pop literature and pop culture in general.

New clubs and pubs opened, offering entertainment to this new generation. Those establishments specialized on live music performances, since listening to music was a

³ The reason for those cultural and social changes in the city on the river Mersey can be traced back to the Education Act from 1944, which changed the education system of secondary schools in England and Wales. This Act made secondary education free for all pupils, and that opened completely new doors for people from impecunious families.

favourite pastime activity of young people. Some of the clubs attained an exalted reputation. One of the most famous ones is Cavern, it is known for its connection with the Beatles and it is also the place where the music style “Merseybeat” was created. The style is also known as “Mersey Sound”.

It is generally known that Liverpool is the birthplace of the Beatles. Their success reflected on their hometown and its poets. In fact, it had an effect on the provincial culture as a whole. The popularity of the Beatles brought to the city a lot of journalists who looked for some new music sensations and since music and poetry were interconnected in Liverpool, some projects that had their origins in the literary world got some attention too.

Liverpool and its rich cultural life attracted increasingly more people and it became a destination of many bohemians. Here they could actively create, or passively consume the new culture. Even bad living conditions did not prevent people from coming, although at the time when the poets began their activity, Liverpool was the city of many broken windows, buildings in repair and graffiti. The inhabitants belonged mostly to the working class, since wealthy people moved out to the other side of the Mersey. That is the reason why the poetry of Liverpool targeted mainly the “common man”.

Since education became more accessible due to the Education Act, more people in Liverpool grew interested in writing. They attempted to create their own literary style but instead of looking for inspiration in the capital, they rebelled against the literary influence of London. They also disapproved of the elitism of Oxford and Cambridge. The poets opposed the academic tradition of poetry and tried to approach all social groups regardless of the level of their education.

The Liverpool writers believed that poetry should not belong only into the hands of the academics and that anybody can become a poet. Brian Pattern is the living proof for this statement. He grew up in a family that was involved in all kinds of criminal activities and he himself spent a part of his teenage days amongst children’s gangs. Once a gangster, he found his identity in writing and later he became a Liverpool poet who contributed to the town’s cultural life. Therefore, the Liverpool writers did not consider their university degrees a proof of intellectual status and they disapproved of strict academism in art.

The secret of their initial success lies in the accessibility of the poets. They try to be forthcoming and unpretentious “everyman”, addressing daily concerns their fellow Liverpudlians can relate to, for they realized that the majority of people ignore poetry because poetry often ignores them. They were proud that they are Liverpudlians, they were loyal to their environment and felt sympathy for it. In their poetry they did not fail to mention various monuments, pub names and street names and also the very turns of speech reflects the spirit of Liverpool.

After their first success the poets remained in their hometown instead of going to London, which is the capital of cultural life in Britain. The poets realized that they did not need to go to the capital to write poetry anymore because the entertainers were suddenly provided with an acceptable identity and Liverpool became a scene. Besides, they became bored and quite impatient with poetry held up to them by reviewers in London, saying which shape the literature is supposed to take. As Roger McGough once said: “If you’re, say, between the age of 15 and 98, and you say : ‘I’m writing poetry’, you wouldn’t think of going to London, you’d stay in Liverpool, because Liverpool is a scene now.”⁴

What began as a sort of club entertainment evolved into a movement of national importance. Unknown writers had the chance to express themselves and get public attention thanks to magazines like *Underdog* and *Contrasts*, who supported the local poets and printed their bold experiments on poetry.

The Liverpool poets reached the mass audience for the first time in the Penguin Modern Poets collection *The Mersey Sound* which was published in 1967. It has sold over a million copies and although it has been over forty years since *The Mersey Sound* was first published, it is still a well-known book of poetry. When Tony Richardson from Penguin Books was looking for authors who would represent the Liverpool scene, he chose Brian Patten, who was at the time considered a local talent, and Roger McGough. However, it was a tradition to cover three authors in every volume and therefore Adrian Henri was asked to join them on Patten’s recommendation. Before this anthology was published the three authors were known only from their live performances and occasionally their poems were published in independent magazines. To everyone's surprise the anthology of almost unknown writers became one of the

⁴ Edward Lucie-Smith, ed., *The Liverpool Scene* (London: Donald Carroll, 1967), 18.

best-selling anthologies in history of Britain and in the two following years the volume had to be printed three times additionally.

At the beginning Brian Patten and Roger McGough were not very satisfied with the title of their anthology. The name *Penguin Modern Poets 10* seemed efficient enough to them. Roger McGough confessed that he thought that it was “just grabbing on the coat tails of the Beatles”⁵. There is no doubt that the “Beatle mania” dragged some attention to *The Mersey Sound*. However, there were also other factors that contributed to the fame of the anthology. When the book was published in 1967, Roger McGough was with the music group Scaffold and their song “Thank You Very Much” hit the charts. One year later they hit the charts again with „Lily the Pink” and the attention of the media that Scaffold received helped to promote the book. It is also very likely that *The Mersey Sound* sold so well also because the three writers managed to capture the spirit of the time and place and young hip people could relate to their poems.

In the early stages of their careers the Liverpool poets felt a strong influence from American beat poets, who concentrated mainly on live poetry recites combined with jazz. However, they gradually realized that they were a little out of place among the jazzing Beat poets in Streats. They started organizing their own events where people could enjoy not only poetry and music, but also dancing, pantomime and other kinds of art. The Liverpool poets often collaborated with local bands and soon jazz was replaced by rock.

At this point it is necessary to mention that the Liverpool scene is related to show business and pop poetry. It evolved from a sort of club entertainment. Music and poetry were often interconnected and the reciting of the poems was accompanied by rhythmical melodies. The Liverpool writers did not deny the connection of their works to show business, on the contrary, some of them encouraged the audience to see their poetry as entertainment. As Roger McGough once said, during these events the audience did not perceive poetry as something to be written with a capital “P”. Their

⁵ „All 'Said and Done'?,“ 20 May 2008, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bradford/content/articles/2007/05/03/roger_mcgough_bradford_feature.shtml> (22 June 2012).

works should be regarded as a sort of experiment, and since Liverpool did not have any literal heritage, they had more space for it.

The wish to create their own Liverpool style brought the local writers to experiment with people. The artists collaborated with their audience and improvised right on stage. During their performances, the poets constantly paid attention to the smallest sign of boredom. They had to be sensitive to the moods of the listeners because they were responding according to their reaction. Their performance was like a ping-pong game, they tossed the ball to the audience and the audience responded. In this way the audience contributed to the shapes of the poems, perhaps even without realizing it.

Since the temperaments of the Liverpool writers differ, each of them developed a different performance style. While Adrian Henri's readings are carefully controlled and the moods of the poems are varied, Brian Patten is spontaneous and less relaxed at the same time, and Roger McGough keeps straight face even through the most comic poems.

An important characteristic of Liverpool poetry is that intonation, performance and feeling was valued more than the content itself. The poems were judged not by what they were, but rather by the effect they produced in the listener. One might say that their poetry was sort of a service to the society. As Roger McGough once said during an interview, "If I do a poetry reading I want people to walk out and say they feel better for having been there - not because you've done a comedy performance but because you're talking about your father dying or having young children, things that touch your soul. I hope people will feel better for it"⁶.

Despite the great success of Liverpool writers, sometimes the academic circles do not give them enough credit. It is because they consider their poetry as too commercial. The literary critics have the tendency to regard their pop-poetry as low-brow and therefore not worthy of serious literary attention. Therefore some of the Liverpool poets have certain animus against critics. They were often referred to as the

⁶ Emma Brockes, „ Emma Brockes Interview: Roger McGough,“ *The Guardian*, November 14, 2005, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/nov/14/poetry.shopping>>.

„pop brigade“ and they found themselves in the position of having to defend themselves. The Liverpool poets struggled to be acknowledged as poets who are worthy academic attention, and they had to endure many disappointments, especially when they were completely omitted when Motion and Morrison edited the Penguin Book of British Poetry.

At the present, Liverpool cannot pride itself on being the second largest cultural capital in Britain anymore. Some of the districts of the city, which were soaked with bohemian spirit, Like Liverpool 8, are gone. Times and people have changed, some of the Liverpool poets left the city. The “golden age” of the poets passed, and the “literary sixties” have never been repeated. However, the Liverpool scene will always remain an important chapter in literary history of Britain.

1.3. Life of Roger McGough

The award-winning poet Roger McGough is one of Britain's most-beloved poets for adults and children, a lyricist, musician, performer and dramatist. He was also involved into the world of television and broadcasting. He made his name as one of the leading figures of the Liverpool scene, along with Brian Patten and Adrian Henri. McGough has had the most steady and continues success of all the Liverpool poets. Since he was 26 years old he has been earning his daily bread with writing and during those fifty years of his career he has gained a respectable reputation by his audience as well as by many critics. While being a Liverpool poet, he joined another trio, the satirical comic pop group The Scaffold for which he also wrote lyrics. He is also the co-author of the lyrics for an adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*, which was first staged in Washington, DC, in 1984 and then on Broadway. He won the Cholmondeley Award, two prizes of Signal Poetry Award for children's literature. McGough was twice nominated for the national title Poet Laureate and honoured with the Freedom of City of Liverpool.

McGough organises improvised public readings, writes one-act plays and contributes to cultural programs on BBC, where he is known as the host of Radio 4's Poetry Please, and as a regular presenter he brings poetry to even wider audience. He also tried his hand in novel writing, creating his only novel *Frinck*. He collaborated with the Beatles on the script on the animated film *Yellow Submarine*. In 2005, McGough published his autobiography *Said and Done*. Among his most famous anthologies are *Everyday Eclipses* (2002), *Summer with Monica* (1967), *Defying Gravity* (1992) and *Collected Poems* (2003), the latter covers 40 years of his works.

Roger McGough was born in Liverpool, in 1937 and grew up in Litherland, a less fashionable part of the city. Coming from a working-class family, according to Roger McGough himself, is not an ideal background for a poet: "It's something to be ashamed of. Sort of thing one tells one's mother, and one's mother says you must get to be a teacher or something"⁷. He did not come from a literary based family. His father was a docker who left school at the age of 14. McGough confessed that there were no books

⁷ Edward Lucie-Smith, ed., *The Liverpool Scene* (London: Donald Carroll, 1967), 18.

in the house except of some medical dictionaries and although his father liked books about the sea, he had a working-class fear of going to the library. Although there were no bookshops in Litherland, there were some in the centre of the town. Nevertheless, McGough says that they never went there.

His great success in poetry might lead to the assumption that he was gifted in literature during his school days. However, it was not true because he failed English literature at Ordinary level. McGough concentrated mainly on French and Geography because he was good in these subjects. In one of the interviews McGough recalls: "I liked language, but English literature and the poems in Palgrave's Golden Treasury seemed more to do with history"⁸. He gradually became interested in poetry from reading the works of Rimbaud, Baudelaire and the spontaneous poetry of Ginsberg. Since Roger McGough studied the combination of Geography and French, he came into contact with literature in Hull indirectly, he relied on this models only loosely.

Roger McGough received his education at the Mary's College, Crosby, Liverpool, and at the University of Hull. Later he became a teacher at St Kevin's Comprehensive School, Kirby. He also lectured at Mabel Fletcher College in Liverpool and at the Liverpool College of Art. He was attracted by the underground happenings in Liverpool and soon he lived a double life, during the day he was a respectable teacher, at night a bohemian Beat poet.

In the early sixties, he became a part of the Mersey Beat scene. Although he enjoyed the company of the beat poets, he did not entirely fit in this group. To begin with, he did not use drugs. "When I was part of a music group and meeting Keith Moon and Jimi Hendrix, I felt excited about it but I never felt part of it. When they were passing the joints round on the coach on the way back from a gig, I was always the one who said no"⁹. Secondly, he did not participate in the promiscuity of rock'n'roll nights.

As a teacher he grew comfortable with speaking in front of an audience. The emphasis on performance poetry became a hallmark of his style, and although a lot of his works were published in printed form, their true power lies in the moment of

⁸ James Campbell, „A life in poetry: Roger McGough,“ *The Guardian*, August 22, 2009, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/22/poetry-roger-mcgough>>.

⁹ Campbell, „A life in poetry: Roger McGough.“

public performance. He uses simple language which is easy to understand. He talked very fast since his childhood and his rapid speech influenced his poetry. Although elocution lessons, which he took during his childhood have smoothed his Scouse accent, it remains available for professional purposes. His life performances were spiced up with Liverpool dialect and with rhythms of jazz and rock and roll.

Although some rhetorical devices can be applied only by live performance, it does not mean that his written works are less effective. In the written versions of his poems he sometimes uses graphic aids. In the poem "The Fly", for instance, he expresses his aversion towards common flies, asking "I'm sorry God, but why oh why / Did you create / the common fly?"¹⁰. Instead of saying directly that he killed the fly he puts a black stain on the page instead of the word "crush". He often ignores proper spelling, uses short sentences and the words are often blended together as if he was in too much of a hurry to put a blank space between them.

Roger McGough has a penchant for spoonerisms, puns and mischievous word-plays. He is fond of inventing his own words and word combinations. He often mocks clichés and other overly-familiar expressions. He recognized the multiple layers and ambiguity of words, expressions and concepts, and he uses them in a manner which is simultaneously humorous and insightful.

He often subverts the reality and emphasises that the truth is ambiguous and subjective, there are only its perceptions and interpretations. This form of subversion might be humorous or serious and sometimes it is both at the same time. For instance, when he writes poems for children, he encourages them not to take things at face value. As an example we can look at the following lines: „Is a bad speller / one / who casts a wicked spell?“ or “ Is a shop-lifter / a giant / who goes around lifting shops? [...]“¹¹.

There is an undercurrent of sarcasm, irony and wit, which runs through many of McGough's poems. He likes to play with his reader's expectations. Sometimes when he recites a poem, it starts as a funny anecdote and his audience laughs until he suddenly

¹⁰ Roger McGough, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 215.

¹¹ Elizabeth O'Reilly, „ Roger McGough,“ *British Council*, 2008, <<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/roger-mcgough>>.

changes the mood with a sudden shocking statement or a sad outcome of his poem. Therefore, one might call him “a trickster you can trust”.

McGough's trademark is the way he uses humour which is often very bleak . Brian Patten once said that “often it's the sound of laughter coming from the morgue”¹². His early works were almost always witty, especially when he touched a serious topic. This was due to his lack of confidence. In one of the interviews McGough recalls: „If I'd written a serious poem I'd always end up making it funny, to prove to this imagined reader or listener, which would have been a fellow Liverpudlian, that I'm not better than you. It took a while to have the confidence to be serious“¹³ .

The poetry of Roger McGough was not a success only in Liverpool, it expanded to the whole Britain and he became famous even outside of United Kingdom. He travelled to several countries, having his poetry as a friend and companion. On 9th October 1989 he also visited Prague and, surrounded by candles, recited his poems on the birthday anniversary of John Lennon. In one of the interviews he confessed the admiration of the Czech poet Miroslav Holub. In Prague and Bratislava he also met other writers for whom he found admiration for opposing the censorship with their works. His poetry is also available in Czech translation, in the anthology *Někdo přijde a udělá to za mě líp* (2011), covering some of the poems which were included in *Collected Poems* (2003).

Although Roger McGough has entered his seventh decade, he writes until the present day. His style has developed and matured over the years. However, he still remains true to his roots as an accessible, unpretentious poet who is in touch with the world of the commonplace and the ordinary people. It is arguable whether he should be still considered a Liverpool writer since he left his hometown and lives in London now. McGough expressed the thought that being a Liverpool poet is not a geographical matter: „It was something to do with time and place, and attitude, but that's sort of faded now, thank heavens, and I think I'm quite happy to be known as a Liverpool

¹² Campbell, "A Life in Poetry: Roger McGough."

¹³ O'Reilly, "Roger McGough."

poet. It just means I was brought up and lived there and feel very much as though it's home really even though I've been away from there for about 20 years "¹⁴.

¹⁴ "All 'Said and Done'?" *BBC Bradford and West Yorkshire*, May 4, 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bradford/content/articles/2007/05/03/roger_mcgough_bradford_feature.shtml>.

2. Nature symbolism

McGough's poetry might be described as fresh, innovative and imaginative. He often uses symbols intuitively ignoring their traditional meaning. However, he does not reject the ancient symbols neither and notwithstanding his aversion towards clichés he sometimes cannot resist using them himself. Time after time he puts old symbols into a new context, making the reader see them in a new light. Considering the fact that the feeling his works evoke is more important than the content itself, it is no surprise that some of his poems are created just for the effect. He creates abstract images and lets them work on reader's imagination. His symbols make us see the poetry world in new colours. Roger McGough might be also called the God of love because he speaks the language of love and he is skilled in expressing the very nature of it.

Since ancient times people have been admiring the beauty of the Moon. It has always been a productive topic in poetry and there are thousands of poems from all over the world celebrating its beauty and romantic nature. No matter how innovative the poet tries to be, the moon in love poetry is a cliché that is hard to avoid. Despite the fact that McGough uses the image of the Moon as well, he often sees it from another perspective.

The Moon in McGough's poetry has often human nature and it can be either male or female. Traditionally, the moon is associated with feminine power. It is the queen of the sky which contrasts with the sun as a male element. It is also the symbol of time and its measuring. When McGough associates the Moon with the feminine gender, it may appear as an old and no longer desirable woman, like in the poem "Mrs Moon": "Mrs Moon sitting up in the sky little old lady rock-a-bye with a ball of fading light and silvery needles knitting the night"¹⁵. Looking from the mythological point of view, the moon often represents the goddess of the night and the ruler of man's fate who knit their destiny.

There might be a link between the above mentioned poem and the poem „Aren't We All“ where the Moon also appears as an old lady. Here McGough makes a

¹⁵ „Roger McGough,“ *Poemhunter*, January 3, 2003, <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/mrs-moon/>>.

statement that is rather unusual especially for love poetry. He took courage to question the romantic nature of the Moon saying that this celestial body is as romantic as the body of an old woman. „There's the moon trying to look romantic / Moon's too old that's her trouble / Aren't we all “¹⁶. The view of a beautiful young woman would please the eye more than an old wrinkled lady , and therefore the young woman takes her destiny into her own hands and rises into the sky, becoming the queen of the night herself, at least until the moon is reborn again: ”a woman in a negligee / Walking out through the window / Over the sleeping city up into the sky. / To give the moon a rest / Moon's too tired that's her trouble/ Aren't we all“¹⁷. For a short time the woman has the chance to brighten the night herself.

The Moon symbolizes the circle of life. It will not spoil romantic moments with its old wrinkled face forever, for it is reborn every month. Therefore, the replacement of the Moon might also symbolise the transience of beauty. With time even the most graceful things lose their charm and one day the beautiful young woman who replaced the Moon will grow old herself.

The Moon may also appear in McGough’s poems in male gender. In North-American, Germanic and Japanese symbolism it is a male fertile element. In astrology, the moon stands for sexual urges and desires, and according to some legends, he is the husband of all women in the world. Therefore, the Moon as a man in “Said I trusted you” is not a counterpart to an old unromantic woman. On the contrary, he is a rival and a reason for jealousy. The short poem consists only of a few lines but it is very meaningful: “said I trusted you / spoke too soon / heard of your affair / with the man in the moon / say it’s all over / then if you’re right / why does he call / at the house every night?”¹⁸. The jealousy might come from the knowledge that the Moon can creep silently into her room and caress her with his rays, even when she sleeps. However, the Moon is not a pervert and the woman is not a victim. If his company was unwanted she could have closed the curtains and block his rays. However, she does not prevent him from coming and perhaps this is the source of his frustration.

¹⁶ Roger McGough, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 32.

¹⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 32.

¹⁸ Lucie-Smith Edward, ed., *The Liverpool Scene* (London: Donald Carroll, 1967), 62.

McGough also associates the Moon with homosexuality in "What you are", where he says rather mockingly: "you are the moment / before we learned that the maninthemoon was / queer and some of us fled into forests"¹⁹. The poem was written in the sixties, the time when sexual revolution was at its high point. Hippies were discussing the nature of love, saying that love was no longer limited to one person only and that one could love anyone one chooses. They believed that love was something that should be shared with everyone. Perhaps with these lines McGough wanted to point out the hypocrisy of some people who propagated sex with many partners saying that love should be shared with everyone and then rejecting a partner of the same sex who offers love.

By saying "some of us fled into forests"²⁰ McGough might be also pointing out that the homosexuals are often deliberately overlooked in the society. In traditional symbology the forest may stand for protection and unconsciousness. The people escaped from the homosexual rays of the moon because they wanted to protect themselves with ignorance. The moon is ancient, as well as the man who lives there. There was no reason for fear until the moment people found out the truth. Perhaps McGough wanted to convey that sometimes the attitudes of some people change once they find out that someone is homosexual, even if they have known the person for a long time. Sometimes they prefer not to know in the first place or they pretend not to know because they want to avoid awkward moments.

To bring some light into the way McGough uses his symbols we can also analyse the sun in his love poems. The sun and the moon are connected in a certain way because they both bring light into the darkness. Nevertheless, the sun is considered a counterpart to the moon. It is associated with divinity and grace. The sunshine makes most of people happy, it brings a good mood and when it is gone for too long, it makes people depressed. In "The sun no longer loves me" McGough compares a woman he admires with the bright star because she has the same effect on him, when she goes away he feels frustrated. She comes to see him but she does not arrive cheerfully "but out of a sense of duty"²¹. Sometimes she stays at his place for a longer time, "she

¹⁹Lucie-Smith, *The Liverpool Scene*, 60.

²⁰ Lucie-Smith, *The Liverpool Scene*, 60.

²¹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 43.

leans silky / against the wall lolling and stretchy²²” but most of the time he sees her only occasionally when she “scratches at clouds”²³. She is similar to the sun because she will not stay for the night: “ Whenever I ask her to stay the night / she takes umbrage / and is gone / like a National Health prostitute”²⁴. Sensing that his lover does not want to spend time with him he assumes that his sun no longer loves him.

The feeling that she does not love him anymore might come from the sense of inferiority. The sun gives us light, warmth and it is nourishing. However, it does not take anything from men. When it comes to love, giving is as important as taking. Maybe he thinks that he has nothing to offer to the sun and therefore she has no reason to love him.

What must be considered is how the woman is related to the man. If she is his girlfriend and she does not love him anymore she could end the relationship and come no more. It is also not probable that she is his wife because she would not leave him at night. The most likely explanation is that she is his mistress because he compares her to a national health prostitute.

Love can bring sunshine in one’s heart sometimes and when the one we love ends the relationship, the whole world seems to collapse. The “Sundead / greentears” deals with such a situation. Here the love is represented by the sun and it made a man so happy that he wanted to share it with the whole town: “ When you said you loved me the sun leapt out from behind st georges hall and ran around the town /... but when you said goodbye I heard that the sun had been runover /...by a busload of lovers whom you have yet to meet”²⁵. The statement that the sun died is contradictory. The sun is powerful and immortal, worshiped by many nations as a god. However, in McGough's poem it was hit by a bus like a common pedestrian, which means that even the most powerful feelings will not last forever and within a second everything might change. There might come an obstacle that is impossible to overcome and in this case it is a “busload of lovers”.

The sun symbolism appears also in the poem “Comeclose and Sleepnow“, which has an undertone of regret and penitence. “It is afterwards /and you talk on tiptoe /

²² McGough, Roger. *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 43.

²³ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 43.

²⁴ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 32.

²⁵ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 39.

happy to be part / of the darkness/ lips becoming limp/a prelude to tiredness²⁶. The lover tries to lure a woman he seduced into sleep, knowing that in the morning she will regret the night they spent together: "for in the morning / when policeman /disguised as the sun/ creeps into your room [...]"²⁷. The sun being compared to a policeman, stands for morale and order. At night when it is dark and people have the feeling of being unobserved, they tend to be more courageous to do naughty things. The night seems to veil their crimes. However, this is just an illusion because with the break of the day their crimes are exposed. Also in this case the sun exposed the shame of the girl and the day brought sobriety to her.

Traditionally, the sun is considered to be the eye of the day the eye of God. Therefore one might argue that the young girl feels guilty for giving in to lust because of religious reasons. However, McGough gives us no pretext to assume this and therefore the poem should be considered in a less religious vein. To find out the source of her transgression we will have to take the following lines into consideration: "your mother disguised as birds calls from the trees / you will put on a dress of guilt and shoes with broken high ideals / run alltheway home"²⁸. The crime of the girl is that she does not listen to her mother's warnings.

Although the birds usually stand for freedom, McGough contradicts the traditional symbols and uses them as the voice of reason and the embodiment of suppression. Every person has the freedom to follow one's inborn instincts and to do what is natural for any living creature. On the other hand there is suppression coming from moral ethics created by our society.

Birds appear frequently in other love poems. In "Summer with Monica", McGough compares his love to the dead bird in the city: "now love is gone / and anonymous / like the death of a bird in a city"²⁹. Perhaps the author wanted to imply that love is similar to the bird because once it is gone no one will miss it. People are hectic in the cities, they often live stressful lives and their minds are constantly occupied by some worries. They would just ignore a dead bird because it is a quite insignificant event for

²⁶ Roger McGough, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 30.

²⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 30.

²⁸ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 30.

²⁹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 73.

them in comparison with everyday concerns they have to deal with. Therefore dead love is like a dead bird, no one will care for it once it is gone.

The poem "Summer with Monica" is about lovers who spent their entire summer together in their room which was their private fantasy world where everything is made for their benefit. The lover locked himself with Monica and he thought that they live like in heaven in their house and they do not need anybody else. Their love might be compared to birds in a transistor box: "At first we kept birds in a transistor box to sing for us but sadly they died / we being too embraced in each other to feed them / But it didn't really matter/ because we made lovesongs with our bodies"³⁰. While the birds would have a chance to survive outside, in their prison they did not have any source to live from. It is similar to their love because it also died in captivity. This shows the selfishness of love. Some people want to keep their lovers only to themselves and being too needy they do not see that their partners need some privacy. The birds also represent the way the man was treating Monica, making her his own possession.

Although the lovers in the poem "Summer with Monica" were happy together at the beginning, the life in their little room became dull and lonely to Monica. "You dont say anything / but your eyes tell me / that my standing naked to seduce / the moon and my crying because / she walked past / is sadly symptomatic / of a fatal attack of / 'push your icy fingers into my brain / its so hot and lonely here'"³¹. The moon is a symbol of a woman. In this case it symbolizes Monica. Her lover wants to seduce her in the night and he is distressed because he fails. He can relate to her feeling of isolation and thinks about his own loneliness and desires when he says "push your icy fingers into my brain / its so hot and lonely here".

Eventually they both grew tired of each other and as the flame of their love was extinguishing, her lover expressed his regret: "our love is like a kitten in a well / the death of something young and softlywarm / the death of something of uncertainform"³². Their love was soft, innocent and playful like the kitten. It died too young and it did not have any time to take a form.

³⁰ McGough, Roger. *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 64.

³¹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 72.

³² McGough, *Collected Poems*, 72.

To symbolize fertility in the poem "The Fish", McGough uses religious symbols which have their origins in ancient times. The fish has similar meanings in many cultures. In Hinduism it is the embodiment of wealth and fertility and it is the attribute of gods of love. In ancient Greece it was the attribute of Aphrodite and similarly to Hinduism it also symbolised fertility. In Japan it stands for love. Even the words for love and fish are homophones in Japanese language.

Before a sexual intercourse, a woman catches a fish from a pond, puts it on the ground and watches it die: "your face was sad as you brought forth a switching twitching silver fish which you lay at my feet and as the quick tick of the grass gave way to the slow flop of the death stillkneeing you said softly: 'don't die little fish'"³³. Her sad look suggests that she feels sorry for the fish and it makes one wonder why she kills it. The reason might be that in old times, fish sacrifices were made to honour the lunar goddess of waters and goddess of love and fertility. Silver is the colour of purity. The woman treats the fish with respect, taking her glove off before touching it, which might be seen as a gesture of sincerity and friendliness. What she did appears to be a sort of ancient pagan ritual. Thus, the fish might be seen as a sacrifice to some ancient gods. When the fish dies they made love while "the fish stared coldly/and the moon admired its reflection / in the lily petaled pond"³⁴. The pond from which she took the fish was covered with lily petals. The lily is dedicated to the goddess of virginity as well as fertility of the earthgoddess. In such case, the lily petals might symbolize the loss of virginity.

The artificial pond from which she took the fish might be a symbol human's heart because when we look into its waters, we see our own reflection. It is "liquidblack" because it is deep and we cannot see its bottom. It is artificial because ideals and beliefs which are important to us and which we carry in our hearts are not something we are born with, they are artificial.

To look at the poem from a different angle, it might show the point of view of a Christian woman during the sexual revolution, the time of free love. According to the Bible Jesus once said to Peter, who was a fisherman, that from now on he will fish for

³³ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 41.

³⁴ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 41.

men. Therefore, the disciples of Christ were referred to as “fishers of man” and the fish is a Christian symbol of faith.

In ancient Greece the letter rho, which looks like the capital “P”, symbolised a fish. The ancient Romans pursued the early Christians for their belief, therefore they chose the letter rho (the fish) as their secret symbol so they could be recognized among each other. Christians believe that it is a sin to have sexual intercourse before the marriage. Therefore, if the girl in the poem is a Christian, she has a personal dilemma: she has to decide whether she should give herself to lust and passion or stay true to her belief. She decides to sin for her love. Therefore she takes the fish from the pond which means that she takes her faith from her heart. Then she says softly “don’t die little fish”³⁵ because she does not want to abandon her faith. However, this is the sacrifice she has to make when she decides to make love. In medieval times women who refused Christianity were often called witches. Therefore, before the sexual intercourse she and her lover went “towards witching”³⁶.

Beasts of prey appear often in McGough's symbolism when he celebrates devotion and love in all its stages from aesthetic love bordering on spirituality to sensual raptures. In “My cat and i ” there is a silent understanding between him and his pet. “Girls are simply the prettiest things / My cat and I believe”³⁷. The man and his cat smile together when the girls keep them waiting and when it is time for them to go the cat and its owner always sadden. “We like to see them to the door / Say how sad it couldn’t last / Then my cat and i go back inside / And talk about the past”³⁸.

Cats are generally associated with the female gender because of their beauty, elegance and grace. In some languages, in Czech for instance, calling a woman a cat is a compliment. Therefore, the cat in this poem might be a woman. However, their relationship is only platonic. She stays by his side and always supports him, gives him advices and supports him when his relationships end. The lines “and we’re always saddened / When it’s time for them to leave”³⁹ mean that his friend consoles him when his relationships end. They share many memories and can talk about the past.

³⁵ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 41.

³⁶ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 41.

³⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 44-45.

³⁸ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 44-45.

³⁹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 44-45.

There are many kinds of relationships between men and women. A man can have many women as friends, it does not necessarily mean that they have some romantic feelings for each other.

The women who come to stay with him for the night might be his friends too. However, they might not share his deep emotion and thoughts, only his desires. There are women with whom men can share physical pleasures and there are women with whom they can share their memories. Men need to be loved physically and mentally to achieve self-realization. Therefore many men keep a “cat” in their life.

The poem “ The Mongrel” is based on the emotions between a man, his lovers and a dog. The man in the poem remembers the time when all three of them lived together: “When I came to live with you / i brought a brighteyed pup / and as our love matured / so the pup grew up”⁴⁰. He bought the dog while he was still a puppy and his lover took care of him as if it was her own dog. When the relationship ended and she left, the pup became very sad, “now he’s uncontrollable / inconsolable”⁴¹. The dog's owner went on with his life and found new mistresses. Although they were nice to the puppy, the woman who left was so special to the dog that she could never be replaced. “He sulks around the kitchen / looking old and slightly lame / at night he howls at the window/ asif the moon’s to blame”⁴². He eats and lives as an empty husk. His eyes never appear happy again.

Although the mongrel does not participate directly in the relationship between the main character and his lover, the poem shows the difference between the human’s love and dog’s love. When the relationship ended, perhaps the man was heartbroken and suffered for a while. After some time, however, he forgot about his former girlfriend and moved on with his life. He had many lovers afterwards. As to the mongrel, once the woman entered his heart, she stayed there until the end of his days. The mongrel shows more emotional attachment and loyalty than anyone in the poem. The dog somehow persists in his memory of his former owner and without her, his world is not the same anymore. Therefore the love of the mongrel is stronger than his master’s love.

⁴⁰ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 91-92.

⁴¹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 91-92.

⁴² McGough, *Collected Poems*, 91-92.

Being unable to share his sorrow with anybody, the mongrel can only howl at the moon, which is the symbol for sexuality and lust. By howling at it the mongrel might blame his master because he let his sexual urges ruin his relationship with his former girlfriend. His owner seems unreliable and often changes his sexual partners because McGough says that his “mistresses they come and go / look pretty much the same”⁴³.

The man is aware of his dog's suffering. However, he cannot help him and the poem ends with the following lines: “and with every sad encounter / i realize to my shame / that my sadyed mongrel / answers to your name”⁴⁴. Perhaps the male in the poem realizes how irresponsible he was in his relationship and to which extent he was ignoring his duties towards his dog because he was the one who bought the mongrel but she was the one who took care of him. He may be also ashamed because the love of his dog is superior to his own.

“Tigerdreams” is a poem which deals with man's suppression of sexual lust, desire and aggression into the unconsciousness. In “tigerdreams” McGough embodies in his dreams a tiger, a predator on a hunt for a woman. He is lurking in his dream forest waiting for his moment to conquer the flesh: “i go to sleep on all fours / ready to pounce on every dream / in which you might appear”⁴⁵. However, he does not want to kill her right after he catches her, he wants to play a little first before eating her: “Claws withdrawn / i want you live”⁴⁶. There is no name of the female character and probably is not needed at all. It is being simplified into the word “prey” because his desire craves only for flesh : “The image fresh as meat / i want you live / the memories flesh to eat”⁴⁷.

According to Freud, every personality has three faces, namely, superego, ego and id. The superego is the part that represents the moral and ethic personality. Id is the basic lust and instinct hiding deeply in the mind. Ego is the balanced one, the most prominent personality and the result of compromise between superego and id. There are also three different levels of consciousness within every person: consciousness, subconsciousness and unconsciousness. Lust and aggression is a part of every human.

⁴³ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 91-92.

⁴⁴ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 91-92.

⁴⁵ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 90.

⁴⁶ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 90.

⁴⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 90.

However, due to education and social rules, they are suppressed and if they come to surface, people may feel shame of their basic instinct or desire. Then these feeling and needs would be suppressed into unconsciousness and mostly expressed in dreams.

There are many words which suggest a predator, such as “pounce”, “claws”, “prowling” and “growling”. It shows how aggressive the character is inside and it makes him sounds very dangerous. However, a small alarm clock simply kills the vicious beast : “the alarm clock cracks the first twig / and lifting the blankets / I collapse / into the undergrowth”⁴⁸. If the reality he is not a sexual predator, he is just a normal and lonely man, who can only express his hunger and aggression in dreams. Coming back from his dream, he is ashamed and perceives it as a nightmare: “Every nightmare it’s the same / prowling through forests growling your name”⁴⁹.

In dreams, an abstract idea can be visualized into a concrete object. “In a corner of my bedroom / grew a tree / a happytree / my own tree / its leaves were soft / like flesh / and its birds sang poems for me”⁵⁰. The tree may be the transformation of his lover and his love for her became the birds who gave him inspirations for poems. The tree brought him happiness and harmony. It grew in his bedroom, which may stand for privacy and safety. However, his sweet dream becomes a nightmare: “then / without warning / two men / with understanding smiles / and axes made of forged excuses / came and chopped it down”⁵¹.

The question is who those two man could be and why they cut the tree with understanding smiles. Perhaps they understand his fear of losing something he loves and they can relate to it. Living in the modern society, divorcing and breaking up becomes quite easy and it might come without any warning. The two men are the visualized form of his fear and anxiety of losing his lover. Their axes are excuses she might make as a pretext to end their relationship. The man loves her but he does not know whether she would not leave him one day. All these elements form a vivid dream in his sleep.

The poem “Laughing all the way to Bank” is about a man who admires the beauty of the green eyes of a girl. The girl carries two suitcases, her eyes “flashing like stolen

⁴⁸ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 90.

⁴⁹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 90.

⁵⁰ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 45.

⁵¹ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 45.

butterflies”⁵². “Would you be so kind / as to carry one for me”⁵³ she asked him. He cheerfully agrees and goes on saying that “moist in my palm, one green eye”⁵⁴. Butterflies are the symbol of beauty and they are associated with volatility. Butterflies undergo changes during their life and this might be compared with the eyes. The pupils change according to light conditions of the environment, they constrict and dilate. The colour might be also symbolic, the green is often associated with envy (being green with envy). Perhaps the man is envious that the woman sees the world through such beautiful things like butterflies. Perhaps the world would look more beautiful when looked through beautiful eyes.

The word “love” in the title of McGough's poem “after marrying, love?” has a double meaning. It means the act of lovemaking and also a deep feeling of attachment. A man in the poem meets a woman at a party. He does not ask her name and he refers to her as “you little shidevil / whoever you are”⁵⁵. When they come to his place they make love.

Similarly to the beat poets, McGough makes use of exotic nature symbols like lava: “after the love, / sleep. / In onrush on its lava we are caught side by side arms entangled / carcass to carcass”⁵⁶. Lava is the source of heat which is associated with passion. A volcano explosion might be used as a euphemism for orgasm. On the other hand, lava destroys everything it comes into touch, it brings death and destruction. Therefore in this case the lava does not represent passion but the decline of their desire and emotions. “After the sleep, / emptiness”⁵⁷. Their relation was purely physical and after the act of love they lost interest in each other, feeling like two empty shells next to each other “and a little nearer death / we awake to meet the day”⁵⁸.

Perhaps the man is facing a sense of emptiness in his life and tries to resolve his painful feelings by becoming addicted to an obsessive activity which might be compulsive sex. For a short time he might forget the gap in his life. When the volcano explodes he is at the peak of sexual excitation and he feels alive. However, soon the

⁵² McGough, *Collected Poems*, 265.

⁵³ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 265.

⁵⁴ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 265.

⁵⁵ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 33.

⁵⁶ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 33.

⁵⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 33.

⁵⁸ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 33.

lava comes, killing him from the inside and after waking up, he feels nothing, a state which is close to the state of death.

A crisis in McGough's marriage left a mark on his poetry in the anthology *Holidays on the death row*, which was first published in 1979. The name itself suggests a more pessimistic attitude. Holiday should be someplace full of sunshine and joy. A Death Row is the room where the prisoners are waiting for their execution. When a person spent his or her holiday on death row, it means there will be no future for them, they are dead, it is just a matter of time. Therefore, the Death Row is the worst place to go on holidays. The Death Row symbolizes his broken marriage and having holidays there means that it is only temporary. Although he still uses some humour in most of his poems about marriage, beneath the surface of the poems, there is a sense of frustration.

Holidays on the death row contains the poem "The Rot". It is a poem about the declining of his marriage. Instead of describing the mental state of him and his wife McGough chose to take a different approach. Many writers tried to put feelings into words and failed because they are too abstract. Being aware of this fact, rather than describing what one feels, McGough concentrates on what one sees. In the poem, the rot, which symbolises their marriage issues and the decline of their relationship, befalls their home and their bodies. "It began in a corner of the bedroom following the birth of the second child"⁵⁹ and it spread "across the fabric of our lives"⁶⁰. It started with sexual, since the rot spread from the bedroom issues small and inconspicuously in a corner and then it spread over their lives.

They formed a vacuum, a bubble where they lived together with the rot, it spread across their faces and smiles, until they became the fungus, being a bad influence on each other. "Experts came to treat it. Could not. The Rot could not be stopped"⁶¹. With "experts" McGough probably means the marriage counsellor. They could not be cured because they were living in an unhealthy environment, being a bad influence on each other. They cannot be cured because their home is an infected area and as long as they live together they will keep rotting each other. "Diseased, we become the

⁵⁹ Roger McGough, "The Rot." *Holiday on death row* (London: Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square London, 1983), 31.

⁶⁰ McGough, "The Rot." *Holiday on death row*, 31.

⁶¹ McGough, "The Rot." *Holiday on death row*, 31.

disease”⁶². However, McGough says “We will rot each other no longer”⁶³. The rot on their bodies represents their rotten state of mind, but he and his wife seem to be turned inside out in this poem. Their feelings for each other are dying and that projects on their bodies. “We watch the smiles rot, gestures crumble”⁶⁴. The fact that they are smiling while rotting may suggest that they are not aware of their decay and that their marriage is a disease.

In the end, they could not bear the broken marriage anymore, so they sold the house and left. „From the street outside comes the sound of the drill, as men, hungry for dust, close in for the kill”⁶⁵. When people divorce they often sell the house they own so they can share the money. When the new owners come they often want to change the appearance of the house, those are the people with “the drill”. They might have even torn the house down. Although they divorced and left the house, a part of them is still living inside – all the memories they had together. When the men with the drill come to tear down the house, not only the house, but part of them dies with it.

When people speak about sensitive matters, they tend to use euphemisms. McGough dealt with the matter in a way which is very typical for him, he put it in a witty riddle. The author covered the sexually explicit material in the poem “You and Your Strange Ways” with a veil of symbol: “increasingly often now / You reach into your handbag / (the one I bought you some Xmas ago) / and bringing forth / a pair of dead cats / skinned and glistening like the underside of tongues / or old elastoplasts / sticky with earwigs”⁶⁶. The handbag he bought for her years ago might a symbol of bra. A pair of dead cats which are skinned and look like the undersides of tongues might be her breasts (with smooth skin and veins). Elastoplasts which are skin coloured, oval and flat also symbolize her saggy breasts. It is covered with earwigs, small dark brown insects, which might symbolize her liver spots. “Even though we have grown older together[...]”⁶⁷ means that they are an old couple now and her breasts do not look as “fresh” as they used to. Trying to seduce her husband with her saggy breasts may

⁶² McGough, “The Rot.” *Holiday on death row*, 31.

⁶³ McGough, “The Rot.” *Holiday on death row*, 31.

⁶⁴ McGough, “The Rot.” *Holiday on death row*, 31.

⁶⁵ McGough, “The Rot.” *Holiday on death row*, 31.

⁶⁶ Roger McGough, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 40-41.

⁶⁷ McGough, *Collected Poems*, 40-41.

seem strange to him, so he says “you hurl them at my eyes / and laugh cruellongly / why?”⁶⁸.

Perhaps she exposes herself naked in front of him increasingly often because she wants to hear from him that he still wants her physically. It is important to all women to feel desirable and as women age, the changes in their bodies can trigger powerful emotions and frustration. They realize that there are not at the height of their fertility anymore and that might make it difficult for them to embrace their older selves. One way to deal with this issue is denial. However, he is honest to her and tells her the truth. The way he treats her might seem a little harsh at first. He tells her that she lost her feminine appeal and he seems to be amused that she tries to seduce him. Nevertheless, he is not trying to be deliberately cruel though. Perhaps he wants her to face the reality that there is no shame in being old and having “dead cats” as breasts, it is a part of everyone’s life. He reassures her that although their love is not physical anymore he still cares for her. “My kisses are little more than functional / I still love you / you and your strange ways”⁶⁹. The love between them has changed into a kind of comfortable love and their kisses became a habit. He loves her for who she is, for the memories they have in common and even for her flaws. “I still love you / you and your strange ways”⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ McGough, *Collected Poems* 40-41.

⁶⁹ McGough, *Collected Poems* 40-41.

⁷⁰ McGough, *Collected Poems* 40-41.

3. Conclusion:

In my thesis I have tried to explore the way Roger McGough uses symbols in his poetry. Although his poetry covers a large field of topics, I concentrated only on his love poetry in relation to nature symbolism and I have suggested what meanings can be found in these symbols. I have discussed which relevant love topics and pertinent love issues he is concerned with, and whether he uses his symbols in a traditional way. His poems are full of interesting metaphors, classical references and symbols invented by the author himself. I have mentioned that McGough regards his poetry as a sort of service to the society because he addresses everyday concerns which people can relate to and after reading his poems they are supposed to feel better.

Some critics might argue that his poetry is commercial and lowbrow because it is associated with pop culture and show business and because he often uses slang, taboo words and so on. His poems are enjoyable and witty on the surface but underneath the surface there is a lot of depth. I suggest that the poetry of Roger McGough should not be disregarded by the academics because it has many layers and it requires a deeper study.

McGough often uses celestial bodies in his poetry and one of the most frequent ones is the Moon. It can represent both, men and women. It does not always have a romantic nature because in the poem "Aren't we All" it symbolises an old lady who tries to look romantic but fails and needs to be replaced by a younger woman. The moon in "What you are" caused panic among men because they suddenly realized that the Moon is "queer" and therefore they had to hide from its homosexual rays. In most of McGough's poems the moon symbolism has an undercurrent of sadness. The poem "I said I trusted you" is about a man who is jealous of the man in the moon because he visits his girlfriend every night. The moon brings sexual frustration to a lover from "Summer with Monica" because it represents his girlfriend whom he fails to seduce.

Like the many colours of a kaleidoscope, McGough's sun symbolism is notable for the diversity of its meanings. It can be a symbol of a gracious woman in the poem "My sun doesn't love me anymore" who is admired by her lover. However, while the sun brings happiness to people, it brings only grief to him because she will not stay for the night. The bright star also represents powerful love as well as its vulnerability in the

poem "Sundeath / greentears", when it runs across the town and eventually gets hit by a bus loaded with lovers who are yet to come. It might also represent moral and order, which opposes raw sexual lust.

The birds represent love, mostly the unhappy one. They also symbolize suppression of sexual urges in the poem "Comeclose and Sleepnow". McGough illustrates what happened to love when one puts it under pressure, comparing it to a couple of birds which died in a transistor box in the poem "Summer with Monica". They also stand for possessiveness of the lover who locks them away as he did with his girlfriend.

McGough also deals with religious issues related to lovemaking. In the poem "The Fish" he describes a woman whose heart is like an artificial pond from which she takes a fish out and watches it die. I suggest that the fish is a symbol of Christianity since the early Christians were called "fishers of men". By sleeping with her lover the woman sacrificed more than her virginity, she had to betray their faith. I suggested that the meaning of fishing in McGough's poem contradicts the traditional symbolism since the woman "fished" the religion out of her heart.

Some of McGough's poems are concerned with human subconsciousness and with suppression of sexuality. He suggests that although most people are not aware of it, lust and aggression are a part of being a human. These instincts are suppressed into unconsciousness and they come to surface in our dreams. In McGough's symbolism a tiger embodies all the aggression and lust for flesh which people try to suppress. He suggests that deep inside people are predators and they can express their real nature without a shame only in their dreams.

In order to illustrate the transience of human feelings and the ability to replace people in our lives, McGough contrasts the love of a mongrel with the love of his master in the poem "the Mongrel". They both loved the same woman and when she left, the master forgot about her eventually and replaced her with countless mistresses while the mongrel stayed loyal to her and loved her all his life. Although human feelings are more complicated, the love of the mongrel was more sincere.

McGough points out the purposelessness of trying to compensate the sense of emptiness in one's life with compulsive sex. In the poem "after merrymaking, love?" he uses lava as a symbol of decline of the desire after sexual intercourse. The

emptiness does not disappear, although for a moment it is overwhelmed by physical pleasure. The lava also symbolizes death, which is close to the feeling of emptiness.

There might be a blend of cruelty and tenderness in McGough's poems. For instance, when a loving husband tells his old wife that she lost her sex appeal by telling her that her breasts look like dead cats and her liver spots are like earwigs in the poem "You and your strange ways". He reassures her that he loves her nevertheless. The purpose of his statement is not to distress his wife but rather to encourage her to take the aging with humour. The shocking image of the dead cats which is followed by a love confession is a manifestation of McGough's dark humour.

McGough wrote about what people know by intuition but have difficulties to express in words. Knowing that mere words cannot bridge the communication gap, he attempts to give the feelings physical shape. To symbolize his jaded marriage, alienation from his wife and decline of emotions he uses the image of rot in the poem "The Rot", which consumes the bodies of the married couple.

I hope that with my thesis will be a contribution to the academic world and will drag attention to a type of poetry, which still requires deeper study.

4. Résumé :

Cílem mé bakalářské práce bylo prozkoumat, jakým způsobem používá symboly ve své poezii Roger McGough (*1937), jedna z nejzajímavějších a nejpopulárnějších postav současné britské literatury.

Na úvod jsem představila literární skupiny, ke kterým básník patřil, dále jsem poskytla biografické údaje o básníkovi samotném. Ve druhé kapitole jsem věnovala pozornost přírodním symbolům v jeho milostné poezii a navrhla jsem jejich možné interpretace.

Přestože se básník věnuje různým tématům, ve své práci jsem se soustředila jen na přírodní symboly v jeho milostné poezii ve snaze prozkoumat, jak McGough vyjadřuje tak abstraktní věci, jako jsou například žárlivost a láska. Zaujalo mě, jak zdokonalil techniku vyjadřování pocitů prostřednictvím přírodních symbolů. Pro tento účel jsem zvolila několik básnických sbírek včetně *Collected Poems* (2003), ve které jsou obsaženy nejznámější básně celé jeho kariéry.

Jméno Rogera McGough je často spojováno s pop kulturou a jeho básně si získaly oblibu mezi masami lidí po celé Británii. Obzvláště produktivní byla literární léta „šedesátá“, kdy se prodalo přes milion kopií antologie *Mersey Sound* (1967), na které se podílel. Jeho básně, jejichž hlavním účelem bylo pobavit čtenáře, kontrastovaly s dosavadní britskou básnickou tradicí a někteří akademici tvrdí, že není hodna vážnějších studií, protože je spojena s show businessem. Nicméně jeho básně by se neměly podceňovat. Mohou pobavit i povrchní čtenáře, ale mezi řádky se skrývají hluboké myšlenky a jinotaje a jejich pravý význam se dá odhalit jen při důkladnějším zamyšlení. McGough říká, že svou poezii považuje za službu svým posluchačům a čtenářům, protože jeho básně pojednávají o běžných věcech a problémech, které se jich přímo týkají, mají v nich vyvolat pocit souznění a porozumění mezi autorem a čtenářem. To se zdá být hlavním krédem básníka.

Jeho verše překypují zajímavými metaforami a hluboce zakořeněnými symboly. Snaží se překlenout komunikační propast i metaforami, které sám vynalezl. Básně často okoření svým černým humorem, kterým dodává lehkost i vážným tématům. Například „You and your strange ways“ pojednává o muži, který se vyznává z lásky ke své ženě, se kterou žije již mnoho let. Na jedné straně se přiznává, že ho už

fyzicky nepřitahuje šokujícím přirovnáním jejího poprsí k mrtvým kočkám, a zdá se být pobaven tím, že ho chce po tolika letech svádět. Vzápětí jí ale říká, že ji má i přesto rád.

McGough si byl vědom, že je někdy velmi obtížné, ne-li nemožné, popsat pocity pouhými slovy. Ukázkovým příkladem je báseň „The Rot“, která by se dala přeložit jako „Kaz“ pojednávající o nešťastném manželství. Dalo by se říct, že McGough jejich vnitřní svět obrátil naruby a kaz na jejich vztahu promítl na jejich tělech.

Básník se zabývá také emocionálními problémy, které jsou spojeny s tělesnou láskou. Například báseň „After merrymaking, love?“ pojednává o marnivé snaze kompenzovat vnitřní prázdnotu notorickým sexem. Domnívám se, že láva v této básni symbolizuje prázdnotu, která přichází po krátké chvíli uspokojení.

McGough ve své poezii zkouší pojmenovat věci o kterých lidi vědí, ale mají problémy vyjádřit je slovy. Domnívám se, že zvláště téma lásky ve spojení s přírodou je k tomuto účelu vhodné.

Doufám, že moje práce bude alespoň malým přínosem pro akademický svět a upozorní na tuto poezii, která si stále zaslouží hlubšího zamyšlení.

Žijeme v hektické době, kde vládne elektronika, informace získávané z médií a kontakty mezi lidmi se omezují na zkratkovitá věcná sdělení jako jsou sms, faxy, e-maily, máme stále méně času na osobní setkávání a osobní dialog o věcech, které nás zajímají, trápí, kterým nerozumíme. Nepíšeme si dopisy, ubývá dospělých i dětských čtenářů knížek. Zdá se mi, že poezie je taková polozapomenutá studánka čisté vody. Osvěží, když jsme unaveni denními starostmi, pomůže, když potřebujeme pohladit po duši a vylepší nepodařený den. Myslím si, že by McGough se mnou souhlasil, jeho poezie o tom vypovídá- je pro lidi, o lidech a jejich pocitech.

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Anotace

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Název bakalářské práce: God of Love, the Nature Symbolism in the Poetry of Roger McGough

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová Ph.D.

Počet stran: 38

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Jazyk práce: Angličtina

Tématem bakalářské práce s názvem „Bůh lásky, symbolismus přírody v poezii Rogera McGougha“ je analyzovat básníkovy milostné básně a vysvětlit, jakou úlohu v nich hrají přírodní prvky. Práce se sestává ze tří částí. Úvod poskytuje přehled o literárních skupinách, ke kterým básník patřil, o jejich charakteristických znacích a jejich vlivu na britskou literaturu. Další část práce přináší biografické údaje Rogera McGougha, které jsou nezbytné pro pochopení jeho tvorby. Stěžejní část práce tvoří rozbor vybraných básní a možná interpretace přírodních symbolů. Dále bude následovat závěr.

Klíčová slova: Liverpoolská scéna, poezie, Mersey Sound, Roger McGough, přírodní symboly

Abstract

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The aim of the bachelor thesis „God of Love, the Nature Symbolism in the poetry of Roger McGough“ is to analyse the poet's love poems and explain the role of individual nature elements. The thesis consists of three parts. The introduction provides some information about the literary groups which he belonged to, their characteristic signs and their influence on British literature. Furthermore, some biographical information about Roger McGough are provided in order to explain the literary works by McGough. The most important part of the thesis consists of poetry analysis and possible interpretations of his nature symbols. The third part will be the conclusion.

Key Words: Liverpool scene, poetry, Mersey Sound, Roger McGough, nature symbolism

