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Ghosts that Sell Memories to Shadows: Postmodern Challenge Of Historiography In Postmodern Canadian Fiction

A Case Study

Duchové, již prodávají vzpomínky stínům: Postmoderní výzva historiografie v odrazu kanadské postmoderní fikce

Případová studie

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Prohlašuji, že jsem dizertační práci vypracovala samostatně, pouze s použitím citovaných pramenů a literatury.

I hereby declare that I have written this dissertation by myself, using only literature and sources cited below.

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with problematics of postmodern challenge of historiography, which originted from works of Friedrich Nietzsche, R. G. Collingwood and Hayden White. It examines how postmodern challenge reflected in selected English-written postmodern Canadian novels by female authors. Postmodern challenge of historiography called into question an objective enquiry and truth value of historiography, and Hayden White developed a theory that on the level of discourse, historiography is a mere narrative and therefore no different from fiction. This dissertation demonstrates, on three selected novels, that Canadian postmodern fiction embraces postmodern challenge of historiography, namely by using unreliable homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, thematizing history and historiography, or using metafictional elements. Thus novels emphasize the irretrievability of the past and the impossibility of knowing it. Also, by creating mysterious female characters, whose mystery remains unresolved and undisclosed, the novels point out to the existence of so called lost, silent voices, whose testimony remained lost for the official historical record.

Abstrakt

Tato dizertační práce se zabývá problematikou postmoderní výzvy historiografie, která vychází z myšlenek Friedricha Nietzscheho, R. G. Collingwooda a Haydena Whitea, a zkoumá, jak se tato výzva odrazila ve vybraných anglicky psaných románech kanadských postmoderních autorek. Postmoderní výzva historiografie zpochybnila objektivnost a pravdivostní hodnotu historiografie, přičemž Hayden White rozvinul teorii, že historiografie je na rovině diskurzu narativem a neliší se tudíž od fikce. Tato dizertace se na třech vybraných románech snaží demonstrovat, že v kanadské postmoderní fikci dochází k reakci na postmoderní výzvu historiografie, a to zejména použitím nespolehlivého homodiegetického a heterodiegetického vypravěče, tematizací historie a historiografie, či užitím metafikčních prvků, čímž romány zdůrazňují téma neuchopitelnosti minulosti a nemožnosti ji doopravdy poznat. Zároveň vytvořením tajemných ženských postav, jejichž tajemství nedokáže nikdo odhalit, upozorňují na existenci tzv. ztracených, umlčených hlasů, jichž svědectví zůstalo před oficiální historií skryto.

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"He had begun to lose faith
in his old belief
that the past is retrievable"
(Carol Shields, *Mary Swann*)

"Human kind.
Cannot bear very much of reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present."
(T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

Introduction

The Weak, the Anonymous, the Defeated: Those who Leave Few Scratches on the Face of History

In *A History of the Canadian Peoples* (1998), J. M. Bumsted hypothesizes about the numbers of aboriginal population of the North American continent "on the eve of European intrusion,"[1] claiming that it is impossible to determine them.[2] However, he is clear on one point:

> "The Native population, lacking immunities to a variety of European diseases, was quickly decimated by epidemics, which spread silently across the land, often in advance of the actual appearance of a European carrier. ... The size of the population observed by the first European arrivals may have already been considerably modified by disease brought by the earliest fishermen."[3]

Contact with Europeans proved deadly for indigenous cultures inhabiting North American continent, as it eventually decimated them or wiped them out altogether. Physical extermination was accompanied by cultural extermination and many indigenous people vanished, together with their myths, folklore and history. As Bumsted's opening line states: "once upon a time, a history of Canada would typically begin with the arrival of the European 'discoverers.'"[4] According to this statement, native peoples were denied a place in Canadian history, for which they were the silent, unheard, unrecorded voices, swallowed by history. Their testimonies, their perspectives, their personal histories did not survive and were erased from official history of Canada. And just how we cannot know how many of them actually existed, we also cannot retrieve their past.

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[1] J. M. Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.
[2] See Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, 7.
[3] Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, 7.
[4] Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, 1.

The existence of the silent voices, those never recorded and deeply buried and forgotten, who still were an undeniable part of the past of the continent, inspired many postmodern authors, who found themselves fascinated by the process of how history is created and the concept of what exactly is a historical fact. Historiography, writing of history, has long been considered a science that strives for objectivity and factual correctness of the presented data. However, the objectivity of history was called into question by numerous historians, literary theoreticians and philosophers of history, most importantly by Robin George Collingwood, Edward Hallet Carr, and later by Hayden White, an author of the theory that, as both historiography and fiction are narratives, on the level of discourse they are no different. Moreover, historiography is inevitably a result of an interpretation of facts, provided by an historian. White, among others, contributed to the assertion of postmodern challenge of historiography, which aimed to qustion the historical truth and trustworthiness of historiography, pronouncing history a construct.

It is safe to claim that 1980s and 1990s were the decades when the postmodern challenge of historiography, whose first notions became visible in 1940s, was still a raging subject among historians and philosophers of history. Although the idea of challenging historiography as an objective science, presenting the trustworthy and undisprovable factual evidence about the dealings in the past was hardly a new thing in the late 1980s and 1990s, it was that particular decade when many works were published, in which the term postmodern challenge was fully demonstrated and opposing perspectives on the problem were manifested. One group followed R. G. Collingwood's and E. H. Carr's notion of unreliability and bias of historiography, the other defended the scientific status of historiography and claimed that the postmodern challenge is unproductive and cannot provide any answers to the question whether historiography can offer a truthful representation of the

past. Among the challengers of historiography and their works published in the decades of 1980s and 1990s we can count authors such as Keith Jenkins with his *On "What is History?" From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (1995), Beverly Southgate with *History: What and Why? Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (1996) or Alun Munslow with *Deconstructing History* (1997), while the opposite party includes such defenders of historiography as Arthur Marwick with *The Nature of History, revised edition* (1989), Geoffrey Elton with *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (1991) or Richard J. Evans and his *In Defence of History* (1997).

The disagreement over postmodern challenge is not limited only to historians. The quarrel has affected also literary science and has continued to rage even in the first decade of the 21st century. Among the most important representatives of the critics of postmodern challenge of historiography, and Hayden White, in particular, we can count for example theoreticians Lubomír Doležel and Dorrit Cohn. The latest contribution to postmodern challenge of historiography from among historians can be seen in the trend of counterfactual historiography, or alternative historiography, as described and defined by Niall Ferguson in the "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," an introductory essay to *Virtual History* (1997). In the first two chapters of this thesis I will introduce the reader to the problematics of the postmodern challenge, focusing my attention especially on the theory of Hayden White and the criticism it received from literary theoreticians, Lubomír Doležel and Dorrit Cohn.

The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the problematics of postmodern challenge of historiography in the reflection of selected English written postmodern Canadian novels. My claim, presented in this thesis, is that in the postmodern novels that are inspired by a historical event, or that imitate the process of reconstruction of a historical event or of a personal history,

- selected postmodern Canadian novelists embraced the challenge of historiography and pointed out the existence of the silent voices, voided by history. Their main characters (often with a historical counterpart) retell their story, i.e. they are given a voice, or, on the contrary, their being a silenced voice is emphasized and thematized,

- selected postmodern Canadian novelists question the ability of historiography to provide a truthful representation of the past by using various techniques to undermine the reliability of historiography, namely unreliable homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, features of metafiction and juxtaposition of contradictory historical documents,

- selected postmodern Canadian novelists emphasized irretrievability and the ultimate loss of the past by thematizing history and historiography in their novels and using symbols that serve the purpose of representing the vanishing, or irrecoverable past.

The decades of 1980s and 1990s were not just the years of acute exchange of theories and opinions on postmodern challenge. In Canadian literature, these decades witnessed an emergence of a vast number of novels that were inspired by history, for example the novels of George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Carol Shields, Michael Ondaatje, Jack Hodgins, Margaret Atwood or Kate Pullinger. As this dissertation aims to be a case study, I have chosen three representative novels which I analyzed in order to prove the aforementioned theses. There are many similarities that connect the selected novels, yet they are diverse enough to allow non-repetitiveness of the ways in which they challenge historiography. All of them were written by female authors, they were written in the late 1980s and 1990s, with Carol Shields's *Mary Swann* being published in 1987 in Canada (1990 in England), Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* in 1996 and Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister* in 1999. Each of them has features of a different genre, which enables them to explore the issue of historiography on their own specific terms. Atwood's *Alias Grace* represents the genre of historiographic

metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon in her 1988 monograph *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister* is a postmodern gothic novel and Carol Shields's *Mary Swann* is a playful cross-genre novel with elements of campus novel, mystery novel and historiographic metaficion, as defined by Lubomír Doležel in *Possible Worlds in Fiction and History: The Postmodern Stage* (2010). All three works present a prototype of a female character, who is a mysterious, elusive woman, either with a historical counterpart (*Alias Grace* and *Weird Sister*) or without one (*Mary Swann*), who harbours a secret that cannot be revealed. All three novels embrace the problematics of postmodern challenge of historiography in their own, specific way.

Carol Shields's *Mary Swann* revolves around a mysterious Ontario poetess, gruesomelly murdered by her husband. The story depics the effort of a group of characters to reconstruct Mary Swann as a person and a poetess. Since she died leaving very little factual evidence about her life and her work behind, evidence that would help to re-create her life story and demask the mystery of her extraordinary literary feat is scarce and so the characters resort to fabulating and lying. Despite their efforts, the mystery of Mary Swann remains unresolved, as the characters fail to reconstruct her personna.

In Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, the basis of the story is a historical event from the 19th century when a sixteen year old maid, Grace Marks, was convicted of being an accomplice to a double murder of her master, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery. Grace Marks had spent almost thirty years in prison, after which she was pardoned and released. Similarly to Mary Swann, the story of *Alias Grace* revolves around the murder, only the roles of the victim and victimizer are reversed. However, just like Mary, Grace Marks remains the embodiment of elusiveness and mystery.

The basis for Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister* is a real historical event of a 15th century witch trial which took place in a small English village of Warboys. The Samuel family members were accused of using witchcraft to cause malady to daughters of the Throckmorton family and were hanged. Pullinger's novel constructs a fictional act of revenge of an alleged reincarnation of the youngest executed, Agnes Samuel, who returns to Warboys in the 20th century and preys on the descendants of the Throckmorton family. The main question that this novel asks is 'who is Agnes?'A ghost from the past, the witch, the murderess or the lunatic? The novel fails to provide the answer, and the character of Agnes Samuel remains veiled in mystery.

In all three novels we can ask ourselves: 'Who are these women?', yet in none of them we obtain the answer. Even though historical documents, real or fictional, are present and should serve as a source of information and knowledge about the past, they fundamentally fail in that very respect. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis present an analysis of the selected novels, in order to scrutinize the means which are used by the authors to reflect on the postmodern challenge of historiography. Using the method of close reading, the subchapters will provide narratological analyses in order to detect textual signals of unreliability of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators and also thematic analyses in order to map the development of the relevant themes connected with history, historiography, memory, and the representation of the past.

Chapter 1

Postmodern Challenge of Historiography: Hayden White against Historians

In 2007, Doris Lessing published her novel, *The Cleft*, the main theme of which is the fictitious historical account of the beginning of men and women's life on Earth. In it, she presents a primitive tribe of primal women, the Females, who record their history by committing the past events to the memory of a selected few members of the community. Those are aptly called the Memories, and their role is to remember the past and transmit it orally to the second generation of the Memories. By including this very process of keeping history alive for the future generations in her novel, Lessing contributes to a decades-long debate concerning the extent to which writing, or in the case of *The Cleft* oral creation of history is an objective process, capable of preserving the past, as it really happened. The narrator in *The Cleft* questions objectivity by saying:

> We all know that in the telling and retelling of an event ... there will be as many accounts as there are tellers. An event should be recorded. Then it must be agreed by whoever's task it is that this version rather than that must be committed to memory ... Whose version of events is going to be committed to memory by the Memories?[5]

Similarly sceptical account comes from Salman Rushdie, in his much older novel *Shame* (1983), where the narrator states, on account of history, that "History is a natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded ad smoking last cigarettes. ... The weak, the

[5] Doris Lessing, *The Cleft* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 136.

anonymous, the defeated leave few marks ... History loves only those who dominate her,"[6] hinting at the existence of a vast amount of voices that have never been recorded (or not sufficiently recorded) in the official history, for which they practically do not exist.

What both Lessing's and Rushdie's novels (among many others) demonstrate is scepticism regarding historiography as an objective recording of the past. As Frank Ankersmit succintly expressed, "if one view of the past prevails, there is no view of the past because only a multiple play of perspectives provided by a variety of narrations can enable us to 'see' at all the contours and specificity of each view of the past."[7] Such scepticism is nothing new in the disciplines of philosophy of history and literary theory, and Ankersmith's words are just another demonstration of the dispute identified as the postmodern challenge to historiography. Lessing's or Ankersmit's quote also recall the words of historian Jacques Barzun:

> Whereas there is one natural science, there are many histories, overlapping and contradictory, argumentative and detached, biased and ambiguous. Each viewer remakes a past in keeping with his powers of search and vision, whose defects readily show up in his work: nobody is deceived. [But] the multiplicity of historical versions does not make them all false. Rather it mirrors the character of mankind.[8]

Barzun subscribes to the postmodern challenge to historiography and questions the reliability of a historical fact by simply noting the non-existence of one true version of events, similar to what Lessing points out when describing the practice of the Memories. The presented quotes

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[6] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1983), 124.
[7] Frank R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), as quoted in Hans Kellner, "Narrativity in History: Poststructuralism and Since," *History and Theory* 26.4 (1987): 21
[8] Jacques Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) as quoted in Niall Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," in *Virtual History*, ed. Niall Ferguson (New York: Perseus Books Group, 1999), 65.

demonstrate how wide a scope postmodern challenge of historiography encompasses: it resonates in the works of historical theoreticians, historians and also novelists.

However, it is quite difficult to pin down the moment when postmodern challenge of historiography appeared. Its main notion is notion is that historical fact, as presented in historical writing, is not, strictly speaking, a representation of historical truth. Simply put, all historiography is written by people and people are not objective, therefore historiography cannot be objective either. The first concepts of such scepticism towards objectivity of historiography date back to the nineteenth century – to Friedrich Nietzsche and his *Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872), who provides "the first incisive attack on the conception of truth and with it of historical truth."[9] As Iggers claims, Nietzsche's work asserted that "the entire philosophical tradition of the West, beginning with Sokrates, has been false and rested on the myth that reality could be grasped by means of concepts."[10] Nietzsche questioned Western thinking, which harbors the faith in the ability of people to capture and understand the reality of the world around them through descriptions, or words – through representations and images of reality. However, the core of his scepticism lies in the understanding that this is not possible, as the representation of reality will never be the same as the reality itself. The same notion is valid for history. Historical reality, the past, captured in words can never be the same as the past itself. If reality cannot be understood through concepts, neither can history.

The crisis of historiography has deepened with linguistic turn:

"The linguistic turn in historiography was all but inevitable. It had occurred almost everywhere else in the human sciences earlier… If history proved laggard, it

[9] George G. Iggers, "Rationality and History" in *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. Henry Kozicki (London: Macmillan, 1993), 22.
[10] Iggers, "Rationality and History," 22.

may have been … because the new linguistics was primarily synchronically oriented and had … little interest in historical change. The real impact of linguistics on historiography came later, by way of literary theory and literary criticism with a theoretical bent."[11]

Literary theory and criticism did, indeed, latch onto historiography, claiming that "a historical text is in essence nothing more than a literary text."[12] However, even historians proved to lack immunity against the doubt of the objectivity and factual truth in historiography.[13]

Robin George Collingwood embraced the concept of postmodern challenge of historiography, although he never uses the term itself. His posthumously published work *The Idea of History* (1946), however, resonates with the ideas that are in accordance with postmodern challenge. Collingwood's text inspired a variety of interpretations which are strikingly diverse, also containing "remarkable discrepancy."[14] According to his reviewers, Collingwood was supposed to exhibit simultaneously "a pathetic belief in the possibility of indisputable knowledge"[15] and hold the view that "reconstructions of past thoughts are corrigible and … hypothetical."[16] In other words, he was supposed to be a believer in a possibility of gaining absolute knowledge of history and at the same time consider objectivity of historiography a sham. What can be, however, understood not only from Collingwood's text itself, but also from various reactions to it, is that Collingwood imputed historians

[11] Sidney Monas, "Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin," in *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. Henry Kozicki (London: Macmillan ,1993), 3.
[12] Monas, "Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin," 6.
[13] More on linguistic turn in historiography see for example John E. Toews, "Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience" in *American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987): 879-907, "Manifesting, Producing, and Mobilizing Historical Consciousness in the 'Postmodern Condition'" in *History and Theory* 48, no. 3 (2009): 257-275, or "A New Philosophy of History: Reflections on Postmodern Historicizing" in *History and Theory* 36, no. 2 (1997): 235-248.
[14] Jan Van Der Dussen, "The Perception of the *Idea of History,*" in Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xxv.
[15] G. J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Methods* (London: Allen u. Unwin, 1950), 215.
[16] D. M. Mackinnon, "Review of The Idea of History," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1947): 252.

with intuitive capacity that helps them to narrate the history, calling this intuitive capacity "constructive imagination."[17] Hayden White claims that "Collingwood insisted that the historian was above all a story teller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of 'facts' which … made no sense at all."[18] Constructive imagination was there to help the historian to create a plausible story from the random historical facts. With this statement, we are one step closer to understanding historiography as a mere narrative, on the level of discourse not different from fictional narrative.

Edward Hallet Carr's 1961 study *What is History* also contains ideas that can be identified as an agreement with postmodern challenge. However, similarly to Collingwood, neither Carr uses the term, and, as Keith Jenkins claims, Carr is no longer a sufficient guide to the debate on what is history, as he had been replaced by Hayden White.[19]

Hayden White's name is for many connected with blurring the borders between historiography and fiction, claiming that in its process of creation, historiography is similar, if not identical with writing fiction. Together with semiotician Roland Barthes, Hayden White popularized and spread the concept of postmodern challenge among literary theoreticians. White dealt with the issue extensively in his monograph *Metahistory* (1973) and later in a series of lectures, published as *Tropics of Discourse* (1978). White's theory gained numerous followers over the last four decades, Keith Jenkins, Alun Munslow, or Dominick LaCapra being just a few of them.[20]

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[17] Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 242.
[18] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 84.
[19] See Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-2.
[20] For further reading on the postmodern challenge to historiography, see Keith Jenkins, *Why History: Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999) or Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

LaCapra emphasizes the importance of the context for interpretation of historical sources, pointing out that the contexts are "multiple and at times conflicting or at least problematically related to one another as well as to interpretation and reading … no text totally masters its contexts or transcends a more or less unconscious implication in contemporary ideologies."[21] In other words, each historical text is a remnant of a certain approach, a certain way of thinking, of a context, or a set of contexts that may remain (partially or wholly) hidden from the historian and thus bias historian's interpretation. According to LaCapra, "texts are both historical events in their own right and a crucial basis for our inferential reconstruction of other events; the problem of how to read and interpret them should be considered vital for the historian."[22] LaCapra calls into question objectivity and grasp of the historical fact of historiography, pointing out that all we can receive is an interpretation, and frequently a (partially) erroneous one, as understanding of a particular context, in which historical text was created, is often either missing, incomplete or misunderstood.

The term postmodern challenge appears frequently in the work of Georg G. Iggers, namely in his *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (1997), where he summarizes the essence of postmodern challenge as a frontal attack on the possibility of objectivity of historiography, led by philosophers and literary critics, who claim to be postmodernists.[23] According to Iggers, this was the result of the development in historical thinking, which, in the course of the second half of the 20th century, tended to abandon the traditional approach to historiography - to point out political historical events and use them as canvas for the 'greater story.'[24] What

[21] Dominick LaCapra, "Intellectual History and Its Ways," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (April, 1992): 430.
[22] LaCapra, "Intellectual History and Its Ways," 430-1.
[23] See Georg G. Iggers, "Předmluva k českému vydání," in *Dějepisectví 20. století*, transl. Pavel Kolář (Praha: Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2002), 8.
[24] See Iggers, "Předmluva k českému vydání," *Dějepisectví 20. století*, 7.

has been more and more frequently preferred after the WWII was an analytical approach, emphasizing social structures and processes,[25] as well as microhistory, retelling small, seemingly unimportant events, which often remained lost or forgotten in macrohistorical works. Thus historians accepted the fact that there is not just one history, but many histories, covering even those facets of human life that had been considered ahistorical.[26] Such an approach to historiography therefore counts with the existence of Rushdie's weak, anonymous and defeated,[27] acknowledging the existence of silent voices, who so far remained ignored by history.

The second facet of postmodern challenge, according to Iggers, is what Hayden White pointed out – literary aspect of all historical works, turning back to Jacques Derrida, who, famously claiming "there is nothing outside of the text,"[28] works with the assumption that "language constructs reality rather than referring to it. The historian works with texts, but these texts do not refer to an outside world."[29] Therefore, as Iggers has it, theoreticians, including Derrida, recognized that every historical work is historians subjective construct, and that is why there is no history outside of texts and that those texts have no relation to the actual past. There can be innumerable amount of texts, and all of them have the same truth value,[30] even though they may contradict one another.

Doubting objectivity of the historical fact, together with argumentation that proclaims historical text nothing more than a literary text, together constituting postmodern challenge of historiography, resulted in what many historians call crisis of historical profession –

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[25] See Iggers, "Předmluva k českému vydání," *Dějepisectví 20. století*, 7.
[26] See Iggers, "Předmluva k českému vydání," *Dějepisectví 20. století*, 9.
[27] See Rushdie, *Shame*, 124.
[28] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1997), 242.
[29] Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography of the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 9.
[30] See Iggers, "Předmluva k českému vydání," *Dějepisectví 20. století*, 9.

"failure of cliometry to achieve comprehensive results"[31] - seemingly giving in to "the threat of 'narrativity' to remove history from the strictures of scientific method and reducing it to the condition of a merely literary genre."[32] Nevertheless, equal number of historians and literary theorists stood against White's notion, bringing new concepts in order to re-establish the boundary between fiction and historiography and to defend the scientific value of historiography and with it objectivity of the historical fact.

Leon Goldstein considers history to be "a way of knowing, not a mode of discourse"[33] and the real work of history is done and finished before anything is written. As Sidney Monas states, Goldstein "seems to understand Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra and David Harlan well enough, yet remains untroubled by their work. In his terms, they are writing 'about' history, not 'doing' it."[34] As for 'doing' history, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive overview of Hayden White's argumentation and theory, which focuses on blurring the borderline between the fiction and historiography. The overview of his theory, together with the criticism it received from literary theoreticians, Lubomír Doležel and Dorrit Cohn, will be the focus of the following chapter.

[31] Monas, "Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin," 1.
[32] Monas, "Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin," 1.
[33] Leon Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1976), xix.
[34] Monas, "Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin," 9.

Chapter 2

"The Relationship Between Fiction and History is Assuredly More Complex than We Will Ever be Able to Put into Words:"[35] Dorrit Cohn and Lubomír Doležel against Hayden White[36]

At the beginning of his 1966 work of structuralist narratology, Roland Barthes claimed that "there are countless forms of narrative in the world ...; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables ... epics, history ... narrative starts with the very history of mankind,"[37] meaning that the 'narratological imperialism' has transcended the boundaries between genres and deleted also the boundary between fictional narrative and historiographic narrative.[38] In *The Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White provides a chronological overview that proves that viewing historiography as a process of an objective record of past events is a relatively new phenomenon, introduced as late as the nineteenth century. In the course of recording history, historians inevitably encounter gaps in the knowledge of a historical event, yet these gaps rarely remain empty. According to White, a "historian must interpret his materials by filling in the gaps in his information on inferential or speculative grounds,"[39] in other words, fill them with assumptions.[40] Therefore, interpreting one's

[35] Paul Ricoeur, quoted in Dorrit Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), vii. Unfortunately, Cohn does not state which particular work by Ricoeur she is referring to, therefore I am referring only to him as the author of the idea and Cohn as the source of the reference.

[36] Parts of this chapter were published as "A Star-Shaped Crossroad: From (Counterfactual) Historiography to Historiographic Metafiction," in *From Theory to Practice 2013: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Anglophone Studies*, eds. Roman Trušník, Gregory Jason Bell and Katarína Nemčoková (Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, 2015), 201-212.

[37] Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 237, http://www.jstor.org/stable/468419.

[38] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 15.

[39] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 51.

[40] In a historiographic text, these assumptions must be clearly marked, and in order to do so, historians use what Jesperson, later Jakobson and finally Roland Barthes named as 'shifters.'

material pushes the historiographic text further from being a mere objective record towards narrative.

As for narrative discourse, White claims that historians choose their own style of writing history.[41] He states: "There is no such thing as a single correct view of any object under study but that there are many correct views, each requiring its own style of representation."[42] An interpretation of an historical event enables historians to choose a particular narrative style in which to report on that event. To support this claim, White uses an example of French historians and the event of the French Revolution, which was interpreted as a romance by Jules Michelet and as a tragedy by Alexis de Tocqueville.[43] Other examples White uses include Jacob Burckhardt, who writes historical texts in satiric mode, and Leopold von Ranke, who writes in the mode of comedy.[44] Referring to R. G. Collingwood's notion about historian being above all a story teller,[45] White's conclusion is that as far as narrative discourse goes, there is little that would differentiate historiography from fiction.

A literary theorist and narratologist, Dorrit Cohn, started a dialogue with White's theory in her 1989 article "Fictional versus Historical Lives: Borderlines and Borderline Cases" and foremost in her monograph *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), in which she set out to oppose White's argumentation and built her defense not on the grounds of "what novelists can do and historians cannot (but rather) in terms of what historians can do and novelists cannot."[46] She opposes White's assumption that if we view historiography and fiction as verbal artifacts,

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Shifters are, in linguistic discourse, phrases that express subjectivity and are clear markers that a historian is not on firm ground. For further reading on this issue, see Lubomír Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 25.

[41] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 45.

[42] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 47.

[43] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 59.

[44] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 67

[45] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 83.

[46] Philippe Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," *Narrative* 20, no. 1 (January 2012), 125.

they are indistinguishable from one another,[47] claiming that there, in fact, is a difference between the two – in the traditional distinction between the 'story' and the 'discourse.' Cohn states that White only looked on structuration on the story level, never looking at the level of discourse, where "narratology can come into play to define highly differentiated formal features that do … prevent histories from passing for novels and vice versa."[48] In this respect, Cohn reacts also to John Searle's claims, who stated that "there is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction."[49] She attempts to disprove his argumentation by using the same quote Searle used to prove his argument – the sentence from Iris Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* (1965). In this quote the extradiegedic narrator enters the mind of one of the characters, claiming: "So thought Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith, recently commissioned in the regiment of King Edwards Horse, as he pottered contentedly in a garden on the outskirts of Dublin."[50] Cohn claims that this quote clearly marks the fictionality of the work, because:

> "What 'serious' discourse ever quoted the thoughts of a person other than the speaker's own? Even if the …cover page of this novel were removed, we would know from its first sentence that this scene tells of a fictional second lieutenant – a character who is known to his narrator in a manner no real person can be known to a real speaker. This is not … the manner in which historical figures are known to historians."[51]

[47] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 122.
[48] Dorrit Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 114.
[49] John R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter, 1975), 325.
[50] Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), as quoted in Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, 117.
[51] Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, 117-8.

However, in the words of Philippe Carrard, we can say that "Cohn … overstates her case"[52] here. If historians have the appropriate sources for such a deed, such as journal entries or letters, it is possible, in the process of emplotment (a term used by White to describe the process of selecting and weaving the facts into a story in historiography), to enter the mind of the historical figures. After all, such practice is nothing new in the realm of popular biographies or historical popularizations.[53] Therefore, Cohn argument about historian's lacking ability to provide an insight into the mind of his/her subject proves to be insufficient as a reliable marker of historiography, in opposition to the work of fiction.

Cohn's other distinction between historiography and fiction is the necessity, and therefore presence, of a reference – the "more or less reliably documented evidence of past events out of which the historian fashions his story."[54] Generally, novels indeed do not need or use references, as whatever the author says needs no verification of its truth value, while they are obligatory in a historiographic text. However, references can also be routinelly found in historical novels, or such postmodern novels that "playfully adopt the conventions of historical discourse,"[55] for example in historiographic metafiction, among others. Therefore, references themselves cannot serve the purpose of distinguishing historiography from fiction.

Turning back to narratology, Cohn continues to state her case of differentiating historiography from fiction by comparing how the authors of fiction and historiography cope with the gaps in knowledge. Historians, when lacking the evidence, must "acknowledge the lacks and the ensuing incompleteness of their enterprise."[56] Works of fiction also include situations in which the narrator acknowledges a gap in knowledge, however, these are part of the plan, the intention of the

[52] Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," 128.
[53] See Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," 128.
[54] Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, 112.
[55] Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," 126.
[56] Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," 128.

authors and can serve as interpretive keys. However, from the perspective of the discourse, the boundary between historiography and fiction is blurred again: in historical text, we can detect usage of "modalizing and conjectural phrases,"[57] such as 'must have done' or 'could have done.' By using these, the authors of historiography acknowledge the gap, admitting they are not sure what exactly happened, but that they are making a judicious guess. Still, Cohn herself admits the existence of so called "borderline cases,"[58] the genres or even particular books that quiver on the verge between the fact and fiction.

In the Czech Republic, a notable critic of Hayden White's theory is a well-known narratologist, Lubomír Doležel, who presents a stricter theory than that of Dorrit Cohn, however, with several very similar criteria, on which he bases his distinction between historiography and fiction. Doležel spent a generous part of his academic career developing the semantics of possible worlds, together with Umberto Eco, Thomas G. Pavel and Marie-Laure Ryan.[59] The main theses of his theory regarding the difference between historiography and fiction are collected in *Possible Worlds in Fiction and History: The Postmodern Stage*. Doležel's theory proves effective when reestablishing the borderline between historiography and fiction, but only partially covers and resolves the problem of the distinction between historiography and fiction when it comes to literary subgenres that have the possiblity of mixing historical fact with fiction, ergo Cohn's borderline cases. It also proves insufficient when applied to counterfactual historiography, a trend in historiography that has been traditionally shamed and discredited, yet extremely popular in the recent decades. With a theoretical frame, provided by a historian

[57] Carrard, "Distinction of Historiography: Dorrit Cohn and Referential Discourse," 129.
[58] Dorrit Cohn, "Fictional versus Historical Lives: Borderlines and Borderline Cases," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19, no.1 (Winter, 1989): 3.
[59] See Lubomír Doležel, *Fikce a historie v období postmoderny* (Praha: Academia, 2008), 12. Even though this monograph was published both in Czech and English, there was a two-year gap between the publications and the preface and introduction of the two version differ slightly. What I am paraphrasing here is the Czech version, as the particular reference to Thomas Pavel, Umberto Eco and Marie Laure Ryan is not present in the English one.

Niall Ferguson, counterfactual historiography has been guaranteed a respectable place in the field of historiography and therefore must be taken into consideration when talking about postmodern challenge.

Lubomír Doležel opposes White's enthusiastic refusal of borders between historiography and fiction by applying the possible worlds theory. As the possible worlds theory presents a very new approach in the field of narratology in general, and presents an opportunity to interconnect Czech academic space of literary theory with that of English speaking countries, I will dedicate more space in the thesis to it, in comparison to Dorrit Cohn.

Doležel claims that the postmodern challenge to history has reached a dead end if analyzed from the perspective of narrative discourse: "With regard to ... the relationship between history and fiction, discourse analysis cannot support any particular answer, or rather, it can support any answer."[60] However, when looking at the relationship between fiction and historiography from the perspective of the possible worlds theory, certain differences emerge, prompting Doležel to attempt to rebuild the border between the two.

2.1. Historiography versus Fiction: Lubomír Doležel's Perspective of the Possible Worlds Theory

Doležel describes possible worlds as "the only worlds that human language is capable of creating or producing."[61] Therefore, it is a world of written text, either fictional or non-fictional, and for the purposes of this thesis - historiographic. Significant differences exist between the possible world of a historiographic text and the possible world of a fictional text, and based on these differences, Doležel redefines the challenged border.

[60] Lubomír Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 18.
[61] Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 30.

The first is a functional difference. Fictional worlds are described as "imaginary alternates of the actual world; historical worlds as cognitive models of the actual past;"[62] in other words, a historical world is a reconstruction of the actual past. In his pivotal work on the possible worlds theory, *Heterocosmica* (2003 Czech version, 1998 English version), Doležel clarifies the function of fictional worlds as treasure chests of fictionality in the real world and fictional texts as mediums of creating and sharing fictional worlds.[63] However, the most important issue about the first criterion seems to be the cognitive value of the possible world presented; a possible world of historiography possesses cognitive value, while a possible world of fiction does not. In other words, historiography serves the purpose of informing its reader, while fiction has the function poetically described in the abovementioned quote from *Heterocosmica*.

A second criterion identified by Doležel is basic structural differences. A fictional world can represent any imaginable world, even one that does not respect the physical laws of the actual world, i.e., a fantastic one, while a historical world is strictly limited to the physically possible.[64] A third difference noted by Doležel is agential constellation. Fictional worlds are peopled by characters who are fictional, i.e., they did not or do not have a counterpart in the actual world, or the actual past. Historical worlds, however, can only be peopled by characters who had or have their counterpart in the actual past.[65] The last difference, according to Doležel, lies in the way fictional and historical worlds deal with their incompleteness. Both historical and fictional worlds are incomplete (as are all possible worlds), since writing a complete possible world of fiction or history would require creating an impossibly long

[62] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 33.
[63] See Doležel, *Heterocosmica* (Praha: Karolinum, 2003), 41.
[64] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 35.
[65] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 36; When discussing agential constellation, Doležel does not mention events as agents, only characters.

text.[66] Such a theoretical complete possible world would need to include every possible detail and even insignificant facts about the possible world, such as, for example, colour of the hair on a random carpet in some office, or the number of the dust specks on the shelves in the library. Therefore a complete possible world will remain a theoretical construct.

Incompleteness of a possible world is reminiscent of Hayden White's concept of gaps in knowledge. Both fictional and historical worlds have gaps. In a fictional world, the gaps are of no importance and are therefore ignored; for example, it is of no importance to the development of the plot to know the colour of Offred's eyes in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Gaps in historical worlds are different. They emanate from the limits of human knowledge and cannot be arbitrarily completed, as "the construction of the historical world can proceed only from reliable evidence."[67] If there is no existing evidence that something happened, there must remain a gap in the historical world. Such a gap can be filled with an assumption, however, these assumptions must be treated as White described in *The Tropics of Discourse*,[68] i.e. with so called shifters[69] that clearly mark that the historian is no longer relying on facts but on personal interpretation.

2.2. Historiography versus Historiographic Fiction

When establishing differences between historiography and fiction, Doležel's criteria serve a purpose. However, when taking into consideration a historical world and a possible world of historiographic

[66] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 37.
[67] Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 39.
[68] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 52.
[69] A term for "shifting deixis." Shifters are expressions that clearly signal that what follows is an assumption. They are "indices of discursive subjectivity (and) traces of authorial interference," first described by Otto Jespersen and later named by Roman Jacobson. (See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 16-17).

fiction, certain problems arise. If a fictional world is an imaginary alternative to an actual world and an historical world a cognitive model of an actual past, it is feasible to claim that a possible world of historiographic fiction can just as well be a model of the actual past. The writer and the historian can have the same approach when creating the possible worlds, both of them struggling to create a cognitive model of the actual world that would be as close to conveying a story based on reliable sources as possible. True, the primary function of a historical novel is not a cognitive one, but if the author of such a novel relies on documented facts and well-performed research when creating it, it would be wrong to disregard its cognitive value and claim it is non-existent. As for the difference in basic structure, a world of historiographic fiction, just like an historical world, is limited to only the physically possible. If this condition is not fulfilled, such a possible world becomes a world of a different genre than that of historiographic fiction, e.g., fantasy, science fiction, fairy tale, or historiographic metafiction.

Regarding the third criterion, agential constellation, a huge potential exists for historiographic fiction to be different from historiography. Doležel claims that the major difference between the historical world and the world of historiographic fiction is that even though both of them include characters that are the counterparts of real people from the past, historiographic fiction has the liberty of peopling its world also with fictional characters. He even goes as far as calling it a "defining feature of this genre."[70] The historical world does not have this option; it must be strictly peopled only by representations of people who existed in the actual past. However, if historiographic fiction decides to ignore this possibility and create a possible world of historiographic fiction peopled only by characters who have their counterparts in the actual past (and such an approach is not that unusual), the act itself would not make such writing automatically historiography, as is

[70] Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 36.

suggested by the following practical example. Kate Pullinger wrote a historical novel, *A Mistress of Nothing* (2009), drawing its inspiration from a segment of life of a celebrated Victorian writer and traveller, Lucie Duff Gordon, author of *Letters from Egypt* (1865). In the novel, Pullinger did not allow the mixing of real characters with fictional ones, and her novel is peopled only by characters who are representatives of those existing in the actual past, centering the story around Lucie's maid, Sally Naldrett. Yet, this alone does not make her novel less of a historiographic fiction. In addition, the author willingly admits in an "Author's Note" that she has altered the timescale to suit her purposes and has telescoped three years, 1863-1865, down to one, and reduced Lucie Duff Gordon's two trips home to one.[71] This playing with the timescale and adjustment of the events might just as well form a basis for another criterion helpful in distinguishing a possible world of historiography and a possible world of historiographic fiction – a constellation of events. Naturally, historiographic fiction disposes of unlimited freedom regarding the inclusion of events that do not have a counterpart in the actual past or are not documented by any reliable sources. Many of these are the tissue with which the author chooses to fill the gaps and therefore are material for the fourth criterion – incompleteness. However, if the author decides to use only the events that have counterparts in the actual past and change those to serve aesthetic purpose, it is not a violation of Doležel's third criterion of agential constellation; yet such writing cannot be called historiography. Certainly, the constellation of events can then be regarded as a helpful criterion with establishing the line between historiography and historiographic fiction.

The last criterion that, according to Doležel, reestablishes the boundary between fiction and history is incompleteness. As stated,

[71] See Kate Pullinger, "Author's Note," in *Mistress of Nothing* (Toronto: McArthur and Company, 2009), 250.

possible worlds are inevitably incomplete, containing gaps. The gaps in a possible world of fiction are different from those in a possible world of history. Doležel claims that, similarly to the freedom authors have when it comes to agential constellation, writers of historiographic fiction have freedom to complete the gaps created by the limits of human knowledge with fabrication, while a historian cannot go further than using assumptions that are properly acknowledged in a historiographic text.[72] This is the same manner of filling the gaps that White described, and as for a proper marking of such an assumption in a historiographic text, White used the term shifters. However, authors of historiographic fiction can also use assumptions, based on their research, similarly to historians, although they are not obliged to use shifters. Authors therefore can weave their text seamlessly, mixing a proven fact with an assumption, or a fabrication. In case an author decides not to use a fabrication, the difference between historiography and historiographic fiction seems to be rather a formal one. Thus, when Doležel's criteria are applied to historiographic fiction, they tend to lose their clarity.

2.3. Historiography versus Historiographic Metafiction

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a new, postmodern, approach to historiographic fiction. This trend embraced the possibility to "fictionalize history, but by doing so [postmodern authors] imply that history itself may be a form of fiction."[73] Doležel adds that as a part of this trend, postmodernists "cultivate a radically nonessentialist semantics, which allows them to change even the most fundamental, individuating properties of historical persons, events, settings."[74] Where historiographic fiction strives to avoid contraditions between their versions of historical figures and the

[72] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 39.
[73] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2004), 96.
[74] Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 87.

familiar facts of history, postmodern historiographic fiction tactlessly contradicts them.[75] This postmodern trend of creating a contradictory historiographic fiction was defined and described by a Canadian critic, Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. There she operates with a specific term to be applied to such writing - historiographic metafiction – postmodern fiction that deconstructs the myth of objectivity of history, by implying that history itself is a human construct, a discourse.[76] Doležel understands the genre in a more specific way. According to him, a perfect example of such a genre is a novel that reconstructs fictional history, a historical event or events that have absolutely no counterpart in the actual history. As an example he identifies Antonia Susan Byatt's *Possession* (1990), a novel reconstructing the history of two fictional Victorian poets.[77] For the purposes of my thesis, I will work with Hutcheon's definition for Atwood's *Alias Grace*, and Doležel's defintion for *Mary Swann*. Hutcheon's definition enables to include among historiographic metafiction a wide range of postmodern novels that are based on events from the actual past, but enrich the possible world by adding counterfactual or fantastic elements to emphasize the difference between its possible world and the historical world. In case of *Alias Grace*, the novel is extremely playful and deconstructive when it comes to the reliability of historical facts it presents. In case of *Mary Swann*, Shields presents a reconstruction of a persoal history of a fictional Ontario poetess, therefore the novel fits Doležel's definition of historiographic metafiction.

The application of Doležel's criteria to historiographic metafiction, a genre whose authors do not care about the cognitive value of the facts they present and therefore they deliberately break the rules of truthful representation of historical events (or the illusion of it), looks as

[75] See McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 17.
[76] See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 92-93.
[77] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 99.

follows. As for the functional difference, a possible world of historiographic metafiction has a similar function to a fictional world; it's main purpose is to create an imaginary alternative to the world of the actual past and to add certain twists and turns in order to play with the material. It is not possible to generalize to such an extent, but most probably, the cognitive function of a possible world of historiographic metafiction would be extremely limited, if existent at all. When it comes to the difference in basic structure, historiographic metafiction is allowed more freedom in comparison to historiographic fiction or historiography. Given that authors of such fiction do not attempt to create a possible world similar or identical to a historical world, this criterion is truly viable – the authors of historiographic metafiction often use the possiblity of undermining the reliability and truthfulness of historical facts by creating a possible world with fantastic elements. A good example of such is aforementioned *Alias Grace*, which features a ghost taking events into her transparent hands by possessing the narrator's body and commiting the murder of which the historical Grace Marks was accused.

Regarding the agential constellation, since historiographic metafiction is in its nature and function practically identical with fiction, this criterion is again a viable one, as historiographic metafiction demonstrates a strong tendency to include characters that do not have counterparts in history. However, similarly to criteria demonstrating the difference between historiography and historiographic fiction, agential constellation should not be limited only to characters that inhabit the possible world. An additional criterion of a constellation of events might be added. This criterion would cover the intentional changes to events that have counterparts in the actual past and would serve as an additional possibility to establish the difference between historiography and genres of fiction. As for the last criterion, incompleteness**,** when filling in the existing gaps in human knowledge, historiographic metafiction has a

strong tendency to play with them and fill them in any possible way, often with unrealistic, fantastic or deliberately historically impossible solutions. Authors of historiographic metafiction invent events that could have never happened, embed them in an otherwise reliable possible world and as such emphasize their ironic treatment of the historical facts.

2.4. Historiography versus Alternative Historiography

When it comes to alternative, or counterfactual, historiography, there are many opposing views. The majority of voices disregards this field as unimportant, or downright redundant. As Michael Oakeshott claimed, "history is never what … might have taken place, but solely what the evidence obliges us to conclude did take place."[78] On the other hand, Niall Ferguson tries to determine the rules for alternative historiography that would distance it from the realm of pure fiction and give it a solid scientific background. In his essay "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past" he successfully describes why alternative history should be taken seriously, claiming that "not everything in If … is devoid of historical value."[79] Discrediting historical evidence with the words of R. G. Collingwood - "all historical evidence is merely a reflection of 'thought'"[80] and Patrick Joyce - "history is never present to us in anything but a discursive form,"[81] Ferguson partially revives, partially complements Hayden White's argumentation with the thought that "the most the historian could … do was to 'reconstruct' or 're-enact' past thoughts, under the unevitable influence of his own unique

[78] Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 139.
[79] Niall Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," 11.
[80] R. G. Collingwood, "The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History," in *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, by Robin George Collingwood, edited by William Debbins (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), as quoted in Niall Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," 48.
[81] Patrick Joyce, "History and Postmodernism," *Past and Present*, no. 133 (1991): 204-13, as quoted in Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," 65.

experience."[82] Adding the problem of bias in the picture, Ferguson claims that since objectivity of historical knowledge is a myth, why not take seriously also what could well have happened and what was well possible as a future development at a particular moment in history. Of course, it is possible to write counterfactual history as a fantastic tale and build upon, for example, the question, 'what would have happened if, during the battle of Waterloo, the cannons shot confetti instead of canon balls.' However, Ferguson dismisses this treatment of alternative history and strictly limits the questions to be explored to those both relevant and plausible. He takes the limits for what should be considered the relevant counterfactual history even further and thus also defeats the arguments of those who claimed that alternative history should not be ever considered a relevant field:

> "We should consider as plausible or probable *only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered*. … What we call the past was once the future; and the people of the past no more knew what their future would be than we can know our own. … People in the past have tended to consider more than one possible future. And although no more than one of these actually has come about, at the moment before it came about it was no more real … than the others. … If all history is the history of (recorded) thought, … we must attach equal significance to *all* the outcomes thought about."[83]

When applying Doležel's theory of the possible worlds to Ferguson's concept of counterfactual history, the analysis looks as follows. Taking into consideration Doležel's first criterion of functional difference, a possible world of counterfactual historiography cannot be called a cognitive model of the actual past, since it is describing a situation that never came to be. More suiting would be to define it as an imaginary alternative of an actual past, and therefore an intersection

[82] Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," 48-49.
[83] Ferguson, "Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past," 86. Italics in the original.

between the definition of a possible world of fiction and that of historiography. As for the second criterion of basic structural differences, a possible world of counterfactual historiography (as defined by Ferguson) is bound by the same limitations as a possible world of historiography. Therefore, it must abide by the physical laws of the actual world, which disallows cannons shooting confetti during a battle. However, as stated, a possible world of historiographic fiction is also bound by the same limitations.

As for the third criterion, agential constellation, the situation of counterfactual historiography is the same as that of historiography; both possible worlds can be peopled only by characters that have their counterparts in the actual past. Even though a possible world of counterfactual historiography is not a cognitive model of an actual past, it cannot include characters for whom there is no actual evidence. Taking into consideration incompleteness, the fourth criterion of Doležel's theory, a possible world of counterfactual historiography equals those possible worlds of fiction and of historiography - it is incomplete. Yet, since it includes events that could well have happened, but in fact did not, a possible world of such historiography is much closer to a possible world of fiction or historiographic metafiction. The use of shifters would be problematic, as we could only hardly use a phrase that points to an assumption in the text, while the whole text is an assumption. Therefore, it seems that if Doležel's theory is applied to a possible world of a counterfactual historiography, such an historiography moves closer to fiction. Yet, a cognitive value of such historiography is undeniable and therefore it is not possible to dismiss it as a non-informative and irrelevant quasi fiction, especially if there is serious research backing it up, just as Ferguson assumes it should.

A possible world of historiography can be created only by such events and characters that have their representative in the actual past. In contrast, in historiographic fiction the authors have more liberty in

dealing with the gaps in human knowledge about the past and can make any assumptions or fabrications they please and sell them as real. In historiographic metafiction, authors flamboyantly abandon the attempts to make reliable assumptions, which would be based on painstaking research and as a result they embrace the scope of possibilites and the ultimate freedom with which the genre provides them. Finally, in a possible world of counterfactual historiography, the author constructs an imaginary alternative to a development in the past, which was plausible in the past, but it never happened.

When applying Doležel's theory of possible worlds to historiography, fiction, historiographic fiction, historiographic metafiction and counterfactual historiography, certain differences appear. The original four criteria work when applied to historiography vs. fiction and historiography vs. historiographic metafiction. Nevertheless, with historiographic fiction, the difference between such fiction and historiography is not neccessarily an obvious one. Considering there are historiographic novels that do attempt to reconstruct the actual past as closely and precisely as possible, using extensive research and accepting the limitations that a historian must accept, the four criteria do not build a reliable borderline between the two types of possible worlds. In such a case, the difference between historiography and historiographic fiction is rather a formal one – historiography uses shifters when filling the gaps in human knowledge with an historian's assumptions; historiographic fiction does not and embeds the assumptions seamlessly. When it comes to a specific treatment of historical knowledge – counterfactual historiography, as defined by Niall Ferguson – Doležel's criteria also lose their clarity. When taking into consideration Ferguson's rather strict definition, counterfactual historiography cannot be simply considered a history-inspired fairy tale answering a countless amount of "what if" questions. Applying Ferguson's limitations, counterfactual historiography explores one of the few possible outcomes of the past

events that were plausible and possible at a certain moment in the past and therefore, regarding its cognitive value, it cannot be put in the same position as fiction. However, when applying Doležel's criteria to such historiography, a possible world of counterfactual historiography is much closer to fiction.

Doležel's careful reconstruction of the borderline between historiography and fiction, which Hayden White and his followers shattered several decades ago, is for sure sufficient for the distinction between historiography and fiction, historiographic metafiction and such historical novels that fully use the potential of fiction and mix fictional characters with characters with counterparts in the actual past. It is also sufficient for such counterfactual historiography that does not respect Niall Ferguson's limitations. Nevertheless, as Dorrit Cohn already mentioned in her paper, the problem is with the borderline cases. In case of Doležel's theory, it becomes insufficient with such borderline genres as carefully-researched historical novels that accept the limitations of the accessibility of historical documents and Ferguson's carefully outlined counterfactual historiography.

Chapter 3

How Historiography is Challenged in Postmodern Canadian Fiction

Käte Hamburger in *Die Logik der Dichtung* (1957, *The Logic of Literature*, 1973) preceded Dorrit Cohn's argument regarding the difference between historiography and fiction by claiming that one of the most important markers of fictionality is demonstrating an insight into the inner world of the character.[84] In other words, in fiction it is possible to see the thoughts and be a witness to the presentation of feelings of the characters, even historical ones. Wolf Schmid refers to Dorrit Cohn's argument that "in a factual, historical text, presenting the inner life of a statesman … would be unthinkable and would not be accepted. … The omniscience of the author is a privilege and a mark of fiction."[85] Therefore omniscience of the author is used for what E. M. Forster identified as perfect knowledge of the character, because "people in the novel can be understood completely … And that is why they often seem more definite than characters in history."[86] From these quotes it seems that fiction has an upper hand in comparison to historiography, because thanks to its freedom with invention and speculation, fiction can create a fuller, more definite picture, or representation of the characters who inhabit its possible world.

However, creating a fuller and more definite representation of the characters is not the case of many novels that represent the genre of historiographic metafiction, as identified by Hutcheon. It is also not the

[84] See Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, transl. Marilynn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 83. Cohn refers to Hamburger's argumentation and builds up on it in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
[85] Dorrit Cohn, "Narratologische Kennzeichen der Fiktionalität," *Sprachkunst. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 26 (1995): 105-12, as quoted in Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*, transl. Alexander Starrit (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 28.
[86] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1985), 47.

case of the three novels selected for the analysis in this thesis. On the one hand, in *Alias Grace*, the author does present us with an inner world of the main character, Grace Marks, she gives her the voice, but it is a voice of a liar who admits the possibility of not telling the truth. Therefore the reader does not receive a definite representation of her character, but a rather twisted, biased one. The result is an utter confusion about who Grace Marks truly is and the reader never learns the truth about her role in the murders of which she was convicted. Whatever picture of the inner world of Grace's the reader obtains, it is not necessarily a true one.

The authors of *Weird Sister* and *Mary Swann* intentionally create an unbreakable mystery around their protagonists, rather than portraying a definite representation of them. In *Weird Sister*, the reader is presented with an omniscient narrator, yet the narrator avoids presenting an insight into the main character's mind that would truly disclose her secrets and help portray her as a character with definite contours. Thus the author voluntarily and purposedly ensnares her main character in the fog of the mystery.

Mary Swann of Shields's novel is an epitome for mystery, as the reader follows the effort of a group of characters who fevereshly try to reconstruct Mary and her inner world. Nothing they do can help them proceed with the plan. Mary is an elusive and slippery figure and they cannot, will not ever understand her. Creating mystery around the character is one of the strategies the authors use in order to emphasize the theme of loss and irretrievability when it comes to historical fact and its sources. Although the framework of fiction, in which the authors are constructing their novels, gives them an opportunity to use an omniscient narrator who would have access to every possible thought of every possible character inhabiting the fictional world, they choose not to use this option and rather opt for leaving certain gaps empty.

This chapter will outline several strategies that authors of postmodern Canadian fiction use in order to point out that history is a

contruct, as "no historiographical account can claim to be objective,"[87] or, as David Harlan claims, that historians "cannot strip themselves of their inherited prejudices and preconceptions ... because the historian's preconceptions ... are what make understanding possible in the first place."[88] Therefore, as it was a prejudiced point of view of historians that shaped what we call history, we are obliged to search for alternative histories,[89] search for the voices that were silenced, unheard or deemed unimportant. This is what postmodern Canadian fiction does, it gives the voice to the voiceless, yet this voice does not give definitive answers, because neither can history.

3.1. Historiographic Metafiction: Linda Hutcheon's Concept

First strategy to be identified as a means of undermining the notion of reliablity of history is the use of the genre of historiographic metafiction. Even though the authors have a chance to use the devices available to fiction (and according to Cohn, Hamburger and Doležel, not available to historiography), such as the omniscient narrator in order to fill the gaps in the knowledge, they choose not to and use the gaps for a different purpose - to emphasize the irretrievability and eternal loss of (historical) fact.

Linda Hutcheon, in her article "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History" claims that postmodern literature is intensely self-reflexive and uses overtly parodic intertextuality.[90] This would mean that when assessing history,

[87] Rosalind Barber, "Exploring Biographical Fictions: The Role of Imagination in Writing and Reading Narrative," *Rethinking History* 14, no. 2 (June 2010): 165.
[88] David Harlan, "Intellectual Hisory and the Return to Literature," *The American Hisorical Review* 94, no. 3 (1989): 587.
[89] See Barber, "Exploring Biographical Fictions," 166.
[90] See Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History," 3.

postmodern fiction uses it as a rich source of inspiration, or as a pool of intertextual data. This would be nothing new, as history has always been the source for novelists. What differentiates postmodern fiction is the angle from which it assesses history – the angle that does not take history at its face value, does not try to be a truthful representation of the past. On the contrary, it plays with the material as much as possible, parodizes it, and revells in the fact that the truth about history is a myth, irretrievable and forever lost, or, as Rosalind Barber says: "the methods of creative fiction allow us to escape temporarily from our received histories and bring to light the assumptions that underpin their construction."[91]

Hutcheon claims that she introduces the term historiographic metafiction in order to "distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction,"[92] to make sure that this new type of fiction, which "works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrending its autonomy as fiction,"[93] has its own genre category to fall into. She describes and specifies the genre as a postmodern novel in which the conventions of historiography and fiction are both used and abused, maintained but at the same time denied.[94] In *Poetics of Postmodernism*, she builds up on the issue of historiographic metafiction as follows:

> "Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity."[95]

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https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10252/1/TSpace0167.pdf?q=historiographic-metafiction

[91] Barber, "Exploring Biographical Fictions," 166.
[92] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 3.
[93] See Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 4.
[94] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 5.
[95] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 93.

In this quote she defines the essence of postmodern challenge of historiography and its reflection in literature – doubting the face value of history, pronouncing the existence of a single history and the ability to discover the true history as an illusion, a human construct. We may say that historiographic metafiction challenges the representation of the past in historiography, but according to Hutcheon, to parody the past does not mean to destroy it. Quite the contrary seems to be true, which creates the postmodern paradox: to parody means "both to enshrine the past and to question it."[96] What Atwood does in *Alias Grace* is exercising this very same postmodern paradox. She is questioning the past by challenging the reliability of historical documents concerning Grace Marks (such as confessions of Grace's and McDermott's, Susanna Moodie's account of visiting Grace in prison etc.), yet at the same time she enshrines Grace's story, attempts to give the voice to the voice silenced and irretrieveable and this way to facilitate the emergence of new possible historical truths. This notion is supported also by Rosalind Barber, who states that "through fiction, we have license to construct alternative narratives, rethinking histories so widely assumed to be 'true.'"[97] As Hutcheon argues, historiographic metafiction does not destroy the past, as it is "overtly and resolutely historical,"[98] it only destroys the illusion of history being transparent and objective. The aim of such fiction is to emphasize the non-transparency of history, the fact that often it is confused and multifocal. Historiographic metafiction is trying to give the voice to "silent voices of those who did not make it to the records, to the archives, to the documents."[99] The existence of the voice that went unrecorded and therefore, for the official history, it does not exist, is a common ground for all three novels that will be analysed in this thesis.

[96] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 6.
[97] Barber, "Exploring Biographical Fictions,"166.
[98] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 10.
[99] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 10.

Those who remain unknown, undiscovered give the historiographic metafiction a wide range of possibilities to recreate their lost identities.

3.2. The Voice that May Be Lying: Unreliable Narrator, an Elusive Category

Another strategy that postmodern Canadian authors use in order to dispute the transparency and truthfulness of historiography is the usage of unreliable narrators. What may be a better way to challenge the truthfulness of a narrative about the past than using a potentially lying voice to narrate its story?

The concept of the unreliable narrator has haunted narratologists for over half of a century; from Wayne C. Booth's rhetoric concept (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 1961) to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (*Narrative Fiction*, 1983), Gerald Prince (*A Dictionary of Narratology*, 1987), Monika Fludernik ("Defining (In)sanity: The Narrator of the 'Yellow Wallpaper' and the Question of Unreliability," 1999), Ansgar Nünning ("Unreliable, Compared to What: Towards a Cognitive Theory of Unreliable Narration: Prolegomena and Hypotheses," 1999) and James Phelan together with Mary P. Martin ("The Lessons of 'Weymouth:' Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*," 1999). All of these scholars came with their own theories how to accurately define the unreliable narrator and how to recognize him/her in the narrative. Some of them saw the solution in introducting the concept of irony (Booth, Nünning), others in introducing a unique category of implied author (Booth, Rimmon-Kenan, Phelan and Martin). Some even claimed that any first person narrative is unreliable due to its subjectivity (Gerald Prince, Greta Olson's "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators," 2003, Tamar Yacobi's "Interart Narrative: (Un)reliability and Ekphrasis," 2000, Monika Fludernik).

The more recent concepts attempt to explain the unreliability of a narrator through cognitive and reader's response theories (Nünning, Rimmon-Kenan) and some scholars try to include historical-cultural influence on interpreting a narrator as an unreliable one (Bruno Zerweck, "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction," 2001).

Despite the wide range of approaches, unreliable narrator remains a vague and elusive category in narratology. In the Czech Republic, one of the scholars who attempted to provide an exhaustive solution for the unreliability of the narrator is Tomáš Kubíček. For the purposes of this thesis I decided to choose his theory of unreliability to apply on the novels, as it gives us an opportunity to interconnect the world of anglophone literature with Czech theoretical background. In his monograph *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy* (2007), Kubíček centers his theory in structuralist approach, and therefore leans towards the classical, rather than postclassical narratology.[100] His theory of unreliable narrator takes into consideration solutions proposed by Ansgar Nünning and James Phelan, but provides his own grasp of the concept.

Kubíček deals with potential unreliability of both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives. As for homodiegetic narrator, Kubíček strictly differentiates between the subjective narrative and unreliable narrative, claiming that by no means are they identical. This way he deals with the theory by Monika Fludernik who, in her first two propositions of unreliability, suggested that narrator can be unreliable due to the lack of objectivity or ideological unreliability.[101] Because her theory of unreliability counts on extratextual evaluation of the narrated and

[100] For more details on the devision of classical and postclassical narratology see Tomáš Kubíček, Jiří Hrabal and Petr A. Bílek, *Naratologie, strukturální analýza vyprávění* (Praha: Dauphin, 2013), 8.
[101] See Monika Fludernik, "Defining (In)sanity: The Narrator of the 'Yellow Wallpaper' and the Question of Unreliability," in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext*, eds. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), 75-95, as quoted in Tomáš Kubíček, *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy* (Brno: Host, 2007), 122.

therefore is undesirably psychologized,[102] Kubíček disregards Fludernik's two propositions.[103]

Considering Phelan's proposal of unreliability, he claims that the narrators can be unreliable in two different ways: when they omit certain facts (and therefore shorten the narrative) and when they distort the facts. When they omit the facts, they are still partially reliable. When they distort the facts, they are unreliable.[104] In Phelan's proposal Kubíček sees an attempt to stabilize the central position of the text[105] (see K, 125), as Phelan places the signals of unreliability into the structure of the literary work. According to Kubíček, Phelan claims that the unreliability is not connected with subjectivization of the narrative, but with textual signals in the text that form the basis for the strategy of disclosing the unreliability of narrator (see K, 125). Kubíček agrees with validity of Phelan's proposal of partial unreliability and (intentional) unreliability, however, he insists that only such narrator should be called unreliable, who does not strive to provide a reliable narrative. The others, who do (even if they cannot, due to limited knowledge) should be called partially reliable narrators (see K, 126).

Kubíček's proposal of unreliablity does not, however, focus only on homodiegetic narrators (who are commonly the subjects of countless theories of unreliability), but also on the omniscient narrators. He asks a crucial question whether heterodiegetic narrative can also be unreliable (see K, 157). According to Kubíček, heterodiegetic narrator can be called unreliable if s/he intentionally leaves the blank spaces in the narrative, enabling contrasting ironization of the whole narrative space and thus

[102] See Tomáš Kubíček, *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy* (Brno: Host, 2007), 123. The source will be henceforth referred to as K.
[103] A part of Fludernik's theory of unreliability is also the third proposition, claiming that unreliable narrator is such narrator who willingly and knowingly hinders the truth, or is in any way guilty of factual inaccuracy. This is the proposition Kubíček considers partly relevant for his own theory. For further details, see Kubíček, 122-123.
[104] See James Phelan, "Can Readers Infer What Authors Imply," lecture given at Modern Language Association, New Orleans, December 2001, as quoted in Kubíček, *Vypravěč*, 125.

changing the polarity of the semantic construction (see K, 161). He claims that the gaps the narrator leaves behind not only question narrator's omniscience, but question also all statements, which determine and evaluate the situations and circumstances within the fictional world (see K, 160). And yet, there is a contradiction in this, because Kubíček's exemplary heterodiegetic narrator (from Jan Neruda's "Týden v tichém domě") does, indeed, have the ability of omniscience, which s/he proves by accessing the mind of selected characters (see K, 162). Therefore, such a heterodiegetic narrator on the one hand proves that s/he is omniscient, on the other hand proves that s/he actually is not or does not want to be. Or rather, s/he constructs the fictional world selectively, with carefully chosen means, but if s/he chooses, s/he can refuse to use some means that are available (see K, 162).

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be working with Kubíček's theory of unreliability concerning homodiegetic narrator, which will be applied on Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, and heterodiegetic intradiegetic narrator, which will be applied on the heterodiegetic narrator of Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister*.

Chapter 4

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*: The Eternal Lure of Murder Mysteries

"The lure of the Canadian past, for the writers of my generation, has been partly the lure of the unmentionable – the mysterious, the buried, the forgotten, the discarded, the taboo."[106] This way Margaret Atwood commented on the creation of her historiographic novel about a nineteenth century convicted murderess, Grace Marks. That huge gap of the unknown is what has been luring the authors; the craving to give the voice to the unheard ones. As Coomi S. Vevaina stated, Atwood demonstrates fascination with history and "reveals a distinctly postmodern engagement with history"[107] in all her works, but especially in *Alias Grace*, which demonstrates not only a fascination with history, but also reflects another trend in contemporary historiography: "a shift away from macro-history to micro-history, where the story is told by marginalized voices or eyewitness accounts which were frequently omitted from official historical records."[108] Giving the voice to the marginalized voice is just one step from giving the voice to those who were denied it in the first place.

The case of Grace Marks is far from being resolved and it will most probably remain so. During the research, Atwood encountered a contradictory evidence regarding Grace's cases[109] and her novel plays with the possibilities of discovering the truth by giving Grace voice and

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[106] Margaret Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction," *Curious Pursuits* (London: Virago Press, 2006), 218.
[107] Coomi S. Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87.
[108] Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History," 86.
[109] See Coral Ann Howells, "Margaret Atwood: Alias Grace," in *Cross/Cultures 73: Where Are the Voices Coming From*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2004), 29.

letting her narrate "herstory."[110] Atwood engages an unreliable homodiegetic narrator, whose narrative alternates with the narrative of a reliable heterodiegetic narrator. Part of the novel are also artifacts of documentary nature and the nineteenth century remnants of artistic nature, all of them used in order to provide a contradictory commentary on Grace's story. *Alias Grace* is historiographic metafiction, aiming at discrediting the objectivity of historiography, because, as Atwood shows the reader, even historical documents can contradict one another and cannot be taken at face value. In the novel "Atwood's half-historical, half-imaginative reconstruction uncovers important aspects of Anglo-Canadian history that have been neglected or 'forgotten'"[111] but at the same time does not try to reconstruct them in a trustworthy manner. On the contrary, by engaging the elements of the gothic and fantastic, Atwood undermines any potential factual value, which is part of the strategy for undermining the factual value of historiography.

4.1. Unheard Playful Voices: Margaret Atwood's Grace Marks as a (Reliably) Unreliable Narrator

In this subchapter I intend to focus on Grace Marks and her homodiegetic narrative, leaving out those parts of *Alias Grace* narrated by heterodiegetic narrator and the epistolary parts. Grace Marks's narrative will be scrutinized for textual signals of unreliability, as defined for homodiegetic narrator by Tomáš Kubíček.

Regarding Kubíček's definition of unreliability of homodiegetic narrators, he claims that it is necessary to find signals in the narrative that would lead to disclosure of the narrator as an unreliable one. The narrator cannot be automatically considered unreliable based only on his or her suggested moral flaws, identified thanks to the outer context of the reader

[110] Howells, "Margaret Atwood: Alias Grace," 29.
[111] Howells, "Margaret Atwood: Alias Grace," 29.

by the readers (see K, 127). Such a simplifying approach would, indeed, be applicable to Grace Marks. The random reader is prone to judge her as a liar, *ergo* an unreliable narrator, due to her supposed moral flaws and the fact that she may be using her narrative to achieve acquittal. However, according to Kubíček's theory, Grace cannot be considered as an unreliable narrator only because she is a convicted criminal. Such an approach, Kubíček warns, would be a counter productive shortcut and may result in a misleading interpretation (see K, 116). It is necessary to identify the textual signals that would prove Grace's moral deviation and also convict her of presenting an untrue story.

To illustrate the differences in the unreliability of various types of homodiegetic narrators, Kubíček uses examples from Czech literature - the novel by Vladimír Neff, *Trampoty pana Humbla* (1967) and Arnošt Lustig's *Nemilovaná: Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* (1979). In *Trampoty pana Humbla* Kubíček identifies the signals of unreliability in the stylistic means the protagonist uses to presents himself; while he demonstrably wishes to use the narrative as the defense of his good character. Therefore he tries to portray himself as a good person, while the textual signals within his statements prove the opposite: that he is a morally perverted and opportunistic man and therefore his strategy to defend himself turns against him (see K., 126). With *Nemilovaná: Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* Kubíček deconstructs Ansgar Nünning's theory of unreliability and proves it insufficient.

Nünning connects his theory of unreliability tightly with reader's competences and rethinks the concept in the "context of frame theory as a projection by the reader … (in which) the invention of unreliable narrators can be understood as an interpretive strategy or cognitive process."[112] Kubíček mentions Nünning's detailed list of signals of unreliability to help the reader with identification of such. This list

[112] Ansgar Nünning, "Unreliable, Compared to What? Towards a Cognitive Theory of Unreliable Narration: Prolegomena and Hypotheses, " in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext*, eds. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Günter Narr Verlag), 54.

includes also such cases of homodiegetic narrators who suffer from memory loss or have cognitive limitation or create gaps in their narrative (see K, 122). Kubíček uses this particular example for deconstruction of Nünning's theory when he applies it on Perla Sch. Kubíček claims that although there are gaps in Perla's narrative and some facts are omitted, and moreover, her perspective is a perspective of an immature girl with limited abilities to recognize and evaluate some situations, it is not possible to label her as an unreliable narrator. He identifies Perla Sch. as partially reliable narrator (see K, 128), due to the fact that she doesn't intentionally lie, only omits certain facts when referring to her life (see K, 129). The reader learns from the text also about the facts which Perla does not disclose but finding out what Perla has omitted does not change the meaning of the narrative. In other words, after having read the novel, readers do not identify the discrepancy between what Perla was saying and what really happened, they do not come to conclusion that everything happened differently from what they have been told. As Kubíček argues, it is not possible to label Perla as an unreliable narrator only because she makes the fictional world of the novel her subjective construct. This subjective construct of a world then necessarily reflects her structure of values, which may differ from the reader's significantly (see K, 128 – 129). Moreover, Perla clearly identifies the gaps in her narrative and therefore, in Kubíček's words, she realiably marks her own unreliability (see K, 130).

To summarize Kubíček's concept of unreliable homodiegetic narrator: he does not recognize as an unreliable such homodiegetic narrators who omit or hide parts of the story, or who do not report on the events which are marginal and not important for reader's understanding of the story. Only if later it is disclosed that the narrator intentionally kept silent about an event that plays a significant role in reader's understanding of the story, such a narrator should be labeled as unreliable (see K, 134). According to Kubíček, unreliability in case of

homodiegetic narrator is a structural element and is part of narrative work as a dominant semantic feature. Unreliability in his understanding is functional, deliberate, intentional and purposeful distortion of the facts presented, or omitting such facts about the story, its events and characters that are crucial for the understanding of the story (see K, 172). He recognizes partial reliability, which means that the narrator either does not have access to certain facts about the story, events or characters, or lacks the ability to report on them. Partially reliable narrative does not cause change in the semantic construction of the narrative in order to deconstruct the fictional world of the characters (see K, 172).

When Kubíček talks about unreliability, he talks about the discord between the fictional world of the narrative and the fictional world of the story. Unreliability in the text is identified via textual signals and therefore it is an immanent part of the text. The responsibility of recognizing the unreliability lies with the reader (see K, 172), but Kubíček understands this differently than Nünning. For Nünning, recognizing a narrator as an unreliable one is reader's competence and he or she can do so based on his/her system of values or his/her cultural context. According to Kubíček, even though it is the reader who is responsible for recognizing the unreliability of the narrator, unreliability as such must be an immanent part of the text. Text must include signals of unreliability and only these signals can serve as the basis for recognizing narrator's unreliability.

For the analysis of the character of Grace Marks as a homodiegetic narrator I will use the aforementioned theory by Kubíček. Grace Marks was a young housemaid from the nineteenth century, who was convicted at the age of sixteen of being an accomplice to her supposed paramour, James McDermott, while he murdered their master Sir Thomas Kinnear and the housekeeper and Kinnear's lover, Nancy Montgomery. At the time of murder Montgomery was pregnant with Kinnear's child. No one ever found out what role Grace played in the

murders; whether she participated actively in the killings, or just helped McDermott with the logistics. During the investigation of the crimes and the trial Grace provided several versions of confession and kept claiming that she retained no memory of the murders. It was therefore stated that the subject suffered from selective amnesia due to unknown reasons.

Both Grace and James McDermott were sentenced to death, but thanks to her youth and the doubts regarding her participation, Grace was pardoned and sentenced to life imprisonment instead. She spent almost thirty years in prison (combined with the time she spent in a mental institution) and in 1873, due to strong protests and petitions signed in her favour, she was acquitted. That was also the end of the trace of Grace, as no one knows for sure what happened to her afterwards. Popular belief has it that she changed her name and moved to the United States.

In *Alias Grace*, fictional Grace Marks underwent a treatment while staying in Kingston Penitentiary. There she was a subject to several sessions with a young psychiatrist, Simon Jordan (a fictional character with no historical counterpart), who tried to use psychoanalysis in order to retrieve the memories Grace claimed to have lost. The murders and the consequent sessions of Grace and Dr. Jordan are central to the storyline of *Alias Grace*.

Narratologically, the novel presents a complex net of narrative situations. Part of the novel is narrated by homodiegetic narrator (Grace), other part by heterodiegetic extradiegetic narrator (this part focuses on Simon Jordan, who serves as a reflector). The novel also includes authentic historical documents, for example excerpts from *Life in the Clearings vs. the Bush* (1853) by Susanna Moodie (who visited Grace Marks in the prison and gave a thorough description of her and her behaviour), confessions of Grace Marks or James McDermott, excerpts from Kingston Penitentiary behavior guidelines, clippings from the newspapers which reported on the case and the trial, or a 19th century ballad on Grace Marks and the gruesome murders. Another part of the

novel are also fictional 'authentic' documents, such as letters to and by Simon Jordan.

As already mentioned, this chapter will deal only with Grace's narrative, omitting those parts of the novel that do not show the signals of unreliability. In the course of her narrative, Grace constructs two narratives for two different audiences. One is the narratee[113] and the other one is the character of Simon Jordan, for whom she constructs a tale of her life. Her attitude to these two audiences is different, or seemingly so, when it comes to reliability. With Simon, Grace communicates with a declared intention not to be always truthful, a fact which she does not hide neither from the narratee, nor Simon. She tries to manipulate with Simon, feed him information she wants him to know. Increasingly, as the narrative progresses, she emphasizes and enhances her dominion over him.

When Grace meets Simon and recognizes that he is there to listen to her life story and maybe help her escape the prison, she commences a narrative within narrative. The narratee witnesses her deliberate construction of the narrative designed for Simon and is given insider information and explanations that hint on the 'true' version which Simon does not have access to. However, as the story progresses, Grace stops differentiating between her audiences and the marking of the true and the false stops. She continues retelling (and possibly falsely recreating) her life story even in Simon Jordan's absence, with only the narratee as her audience.

First I will focus on question of Grace's narrative reliability in her interaction with Simon. From their very first meeting, it is clear that she is acting in front of him and that she is carefully watching her actions, pretending to be something else than she really is. This fact is not hidden

[113] For the purposes of this chapter I will be using the term narratee, as defined by Wolf Schmid in *Narratology: An Introduction* (2010). There is a variety of terms that can be used instead, for example the addressee, implied reader or fictive reader. However, the simple term 'reader' is not suitable in this context, as Grace's narrative is not aimed at a particular, concrete reader, but rather an abstract, narratological entity that differs from a concrete reader.

from the narratee. For example, during Simon's first visit, Grace notes: "I look at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practiced."[114] She openly acknowledges that she intentionally appears stupid in front of Simon, although she is anything but. To the narratee, Grace admits she is not telling Simon everything; that she is wary in his presence, distrustful, but at the same time, she is toying with him. During their first meeting, Simon gives Grace an apple. Trying to practice psychoanalysis with her and to awaken her subconscious, he brings a variety of objects to the sessions, mostly fruit and vegetables that she may associate with certain memories from her past. Grace sees through Simon's attempts and playfully resists them as the following conversation between Simon and Grace proves:

> "[Simon:] 'What does apple make you think of?'... [Grace:] 'I don't understand you.' It must be a riddle. [Simon:] 'I think you understand well enough.' [Grace:] 'My sampler.' Now it is his turn to know nothing. [Simon:] 'A what?' [Grace:] 'Sampler. ... A is for apple, B is for bee.' [Simon:] 'Nothing else?' [Grace:] I give him my stupid look. 'Apple pie.' ... [Simon:] 'Is there any kind of apple you should not eat?' [Grace:] 'A rotten one.'" (AG, 45)

Even though she acts like she does not understand Simon's intention, Grace had deciphered what he wanted to hear right at the beginning. As she claims: "The apple of the tree of knowledge is what he means. Good and evil, any child could guess it. I go back to my stupid look." (AG, 45) This playing with Simon is Grace's strategy of defying Simon's dominance over her. She is well aware of the fact that she is not his equal when it comes to education, social status, or money, but she will have her dominance when it comes to information. During their first meeting she recognizes Simon's intentions with her as a medical case and knows that she is supposed to be his trophee case: "He wishes to go home and say to

[114] Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Virago Press, 1997), 43. The novel will be henceforth referred to as AG.

himself – I stuck in my thumb and pulled out the plum, what a good boy am I. But I will not be anybody's plum" (AG, 46). Grace is portrayed as a proud woman and she is determined to resist Simon's attempts to recover her supposedly lost memory and to feed him selective and probably false information. The informational dominance which Grace exercises over Simon is demonstrated on several occasions throughout the novel, especially further into their sessions, when Grace has Simon trained like a Pavlov's dog:

> "As he was looking forlorn … I suspected that not all was going well with him, I did not say I could not remember [the dream]. Instead I said that I had indeed had a dream. And what was it about, said he, brightening up considerably, and fiddling with his pencil" (AG, 281).

Grace lets the narratee see how she manipulates with her narrative for Simon, adjusting it for various reasons, including the reason to make him feel better.

The aforementioned examples prove that Grace is a capricious narrator, which would readily make her a straightforward example of an unreliable narrator. But one should not be too quick to label her as one. There is another significant exchange which takes place during Grace's first meeting with Simon. She openly tells him "I perhaps will tell you lies," (AG, 46) while Simon's response is: "Perhaps you will tell lies without meaning to, and perhaps you will tell them deliberately. Perhaps you are a liar" (AG, 46). Grace's unreliability is therefore established very openly, which is something what Kubíček calls 'reliably unreliable,' or 'partial reliability,' as in the case of Perla Sch. (see K, 130). It is clear what Simon should expect from Grace and it is clear to Simon, too. After all, he openly accepts it. The narratee knows what to expect from Grace in communication with Simon, as she declares her intentions very clearly; first she does not want to give him the satisfaction of cracking her open (see AG, 357) and being his trophee case and then she wants to

please him when he looks like something is bothering him and therefore tells him about a dream she never had, so he could write it down in his notebook and feel good about himself.

When we apply Kubíček's theory on Grace's communicative plan with Simon, the case of Grace Marks is very similar to the case of Perla Sch. Also Perla shows the narratee that she is not revealing everything and that there are gaps in her knowledge and omissions (intentional or unintentional) in her narrative. According to Kubíček, Perla clearly marks her own unreliability and therefore her narrative should be labeled as partially reliable one (see K, 130). From the first meeting with Grace, Simon is informed of the nature of the tale she is going to tell him and she provides him with numerous signals that she is fabulating, distorting and omitting some facts; for example, at every stage of her narrative, she claims to remember ridiculously many details. When describing her life in Ireland, she remembers exact layout of their house and is capable of recreating the whole conversations her mother had with Grace's aunt Pauline on many occasions (see AG, 118). When she describes her voyage from Ireland to Canada, she provides an account of 'memories' of an adult person rather than those of a child of eleven or twelve. For example, she recounts organizational issues of the crew on the ship, including list of details she saw, such as "greasy ladder (that led) into what they called the hold, which was built all through with beds" (AG, 131). She remembers the rules on the ship (see AG, 131), how and when exactly did the weather change (see AG, 137) and various issues that a child most probably would not have noticed. She recalls that on the ship she once gave biscuits to a woman who was a Catholic and Grace retells the woman's life story (see AG, 136). She remembers that exactly after a week and a half the ship was struck by a gale (see AG, 136). From later parts of her life she remembers the exact layout of the house at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's (see AG, 170), all songs her co-worker and best friend, Mary Whitney, ever sang to her (see AG, 177), exact details of

outfits she wore for some occasions, including the colour of the ribbons (see AG, 237). She recounts to the tiniest detail the layout of Mr. Kinnear's house, the exact number of animals on property, she even claims to remember the name of the dog that died before she came there (see AG, 246 - 247). Such a detailed account of the events that happened ten to twenty years ago can be interpreted as a signal that Grace kept her word and indeed is telling Simon lies.

As for the most important part of Grace's narrative, the murders, which is crucial for the interpretation of Grace as a literary character, Grace keeps silent. She does not tell Simon a single thing about it, which is exactly what he wants to know the most. That too was expected from the beginning, because she claimed she had no memory of those events. Therefore, if Kubíček's theory of unreliability is applied, Grace, in the interaction with Simon Jordan, is disclosed as a partially reliable narrator, or rather, reliably unreliable, as she does not hide the fact that she may be lying and adjusting the story. It is a game whose rules are known from the beginning and therefore the semantic construction of the narrative is not changed by Grace's openly admitted and acknowledged unreliability.

When we scrutinize the second narrative plan that focuses on the interaction between Grace and the narratee, we can see that at the beginning of her narrative, it is clear which information is for Simon and which is for the narratee. Grace discloses her secrets in front of the narratee, explaining her actions towards Simon and the lies she is feeding him, by using expressions like "the truth is" (AG, 343) when addressing the narratee. She lets the narratee know what parts she is keeping to herself when talking to Simon:

> "I told him I'd dreamt about flowers; and he wrote that down busily, and asked what sort of flowers. I said that they were red flowers, and quite large, with glossy leaves like a peony. But I did not say that they were made of cloth, nor did I say when I had seen them last; nor did I say that they were not a dream" (AS, 281).

The dream is just one of the examples, in which Grace admits that she presents Simon with an unjusted version (unlike the narratee, whom she presents with a true version of events). Another example is the song that young Jamie Walsh, a boy from a farm near Mr. Kinnear's house, used to sing. Grace gives Simon a radically different version of the song while she tells the narratee that she knew she "remembered it wrong, and the real song said the pig was eat and Tom was beat, and then went howling down the street" (AG, 276). Grace continues with the confession to the narratee by saying that "(she) didn't see why (she) shouldn't make it come out in a better way" (AG, 276). Even if there is a moment when Grace is inventing in the communication with he narratee, she corrects herself and gives the narratee the true version, for example when she describes the beautiful, pink sunrise (see AG, 275), only to admit a sentence later that "in fact I have no idea of what kind of a sunrise there was. In prison they make the windows high up ... so you cannot see out of them" (AG, 275). Therefore Grace's signal towards the narratee is clear. She is lying to Simon, she is keeping facts from Simon but not from the narratee. Towards narratee, she is declaring her truthfulness via numerous textual signals.

However, as the story progresses, the division between the 'story for Simon' and 'story for the narratee' becomes blurred and some of the later parts of Grace's life are narrated even in Simon's absence, but as if he had been there, listening. 'Corrections,' aimed at the narratee, such as those about the flowers in the dream or the song, become less and less frequent, giving the impression that they are not needed, and therefore Grace is telling the truth. Some chapters continue with Grace's story, but it is not clear if Simon is present or not, therefore it is no longer transparent to which communictive plan the chapter belongs (for example Chapter 39). As the line between the two narratives starts to fade, moments of discrepancy between the fictional world of the

narrative and the fictional world of the story occur; namely the discord between what Grace claims herself to be like and what she seems really to be like and what actions she is capable of taking. This discrepancy successfully questions her narrator's reliability in the communicative plan with the narratee.

Although Grace tries to come across as a modest, clever, but above all, religiously superstitious, chaste and moral woman, she lets the narratee see when she acts and pretends, by commenting on the techniques she uses in front of other characters, apart from Simon. Her acting in front of Simon is justified, as she is distrustful of doctors in general, but her acting in front of people who try to do their best to help her is not. When staying at the house of Governor's wife (Governor responsible for Kingston Penitentiary where Grace is imprisoned), serving there and performing the maid's tasks, Grace is very careful about the expression on her face, which means that she is incessantly pretending. She never smiles becuase if she did, the women at the Governor's house would not perceive her as a romantic, tragic character (see AG, 27). Ominously she adds that if she started laughing, she would not be able ever to stop (see AG, 27). She does not provide an explanation or the interpretation of her urge to laugh. The questions arise whether Grace considers her situation funny or absurd or whether it is madness that is lurking behind her contained behavior. Her urge to laugh at being imprisoned for especially gruesome murders adds a sinister hue to her portrayal, contrasting with the image of a pure and sensitive woman Grace is describing herself to be.

Grace continues recounting her acting in front of the others with the description of how she learned to hide her true emotions, and to appear repentant: "I've learnt how to keep my face still, I made my eyes wide and flat … and I said I had repented in bitter tears, and was now a changed person" (AG, 29). If penance is her act, then having no regrets would be her true state of mind. So far, though, she comes across as a

reliable narrator, as she guarantees the narratee an insight into her mind and permitting the view of her pretense. Nevertheless, also in the communicative plan with the narratee, Grace constructs a certain image of herself.

In the course of the narrative, Grace emphasizes herself to be a merciful and kind-hearted human being, and a person who believes in bad luck and bad omens. She repeatedly mentions the things she considers cruel, such as a popular pastime involving dogs running with hot coals tied to their tails (see AG, 266) or laughing at the expense of a dead person (see AG, 280). She abhors the talk of killing, when Jeremiah the peddler visits Mr. Kinnear's house (see AG, 308). She states on many occasions that she could never harm another being, that "she had an aversion to shedding the blood of any living thing" (AG, 289) or that, for superstitious reasons, she would never "kill a spider" (AG, 251). Image of soft-hearted, morally strong Grace does not agree with an image of Grace strangling bleeding Nancy with a handkerchief while she begged for her life and the life of her unborn baby for the sake of Mr. Kinnear, as a popular ballad about the murders illustrated (see AG, 14), therefore it seems that Grace must be innocent.

However, when Grace describes how she saw an inscription in a scrapbook of Governor's wife's daughter (a morbid poem about rotting bones and graves, signed with "I will always be with you in Spirit, Your loving 'Nancy'" (AG, 28)), her initial reaction is fright (see AG, 28). When she overcomes the shock, she comments surprisingly dryly on the scrapbook inscription:

> "Of course it was a different Nancy. Still, the rotten bones. They would be, by now. Her face was all black by the time they found her, there must have been a dreadful smell. It was hot then … still she went off surprisingly soon, you'd think she would have kept longer in the dairy, it is usually cool down there" (AG, 29).

Describing the decaying body of a woman she was convicted of murdering, Grace is surprisingly pragmatic. On the one hand, she is frightened that Nancy is haunting her from the grave (the question arises if she would be scared if she were not responsible for Nancy's death), on the other hand, when she realizes this is not the case, she describes in cold blood how surprising it was that Nancy rotted so quickly and what a horrible smell the body must have produced. Such a reaction is in disagreement with the carefully built image of soft and tender Grace.

Being cold and pragmatic about Nancy's quickly rotting body is not the only occasion that creates discord between the image Grace constructs and the image that arises via textual signals. There are several more occasions that reveal Grace as cold or emotionless. For example, when Nancy instructs her to kill a chicken for dinner, Grace is in tears, describing herself as incapable of bearing "the thought of it," (see AG, 289) meaning performing what was requested of her. She asks young Jamie Walsh for help, and he kills the chicken neatly. What is curious is Grace's reaction that betrays a sudden change in sentiment towards the chicken. A minute ago Grace was in tears, unable to kill it, but when the miserable animal "lay kicking in the dirt ... (she) thought it was very pathetic" (AG, 289). Such a sudden change in sentiment can be read as a textual signal of Grace's unreliability when it comes to presenting herself as a tender hearted person. The list can go on, tender hearted Grace refuses to feed the hungry horses because "it was not (her) duty to feed them" (AG, 251), nor would she tend to the mooing cow with painfully full udder, because "(she) could not do everything at once" (AG, 251). It is not her inaction towards the animals that triggers suspicion, it is the emotionless manner in which she refers to it.

There are more occasions on which Grace's mask of a tender woman seems to obtain cracks. On several instances she proves herself to be proud, self-important, ego-centric and scornful towards people who are socially above her, such as Governor's wife. Governor's wife is

afraid of Grace, worrying about her having one of her fits (see AG, 74) and Grace comments on it disdainfuly: “you would think she never heard anyone scream before” (AG, 74). Her pride shows when she comments on a picture, painted by Governor’s wife, which is not of the best quality: “I could do better myself with my eyes closed” (AG, 77). Grace is proud of her abilities and her knowledge regarding housekeeping, she is proud of her practicality and throughout her narrative her disdain for upper class is obvious. She takes every opportunity to emphasize that she is in no way worse than them; on the contrary, she considers herself better, as her comment on th quality of Governor’s wife’s picture demonstrated. She feels superior when Simon does not understand the housemaid’s duties: “men such as him do not have to clean up the messes they make, but we have to clean up our own messes, and theirs into the bargain. In that way they are like children” (AG, 249). However, right after this thought she adds a conciliatory note “but it’s not their fault, it is only how they are brought up” (AG, 249), as if attempting to hide her scorn. She would also like to chastize Governor’s adult daughters for behaving in a way Grace considers inappropriate: “(Miss Lydia) ... does tend to be careless about her clothes, and ought to be told that such fine clothes as hers are do not grow on trees” (AG, 280). There is obviously little good that Grace thinks of her masters and upper class in general, yet she claims that “(she) did not like to speak ill of anyone, and especially not (her) master and mistress” (AG, 307). Grace is completing the image of herself with the tint of loyalty and good-naturedness. Yet, thanks to her thoughts regarding the upper class it is clear that she has no respect and no loyalty towards them, even though she claims otherwise.

Grace’s true nature is also hinted at on symbolical level. Grace mentions that, when Simon writes his notes from what he hears from Grace, it feels as if he were drawing her, or drawing on her (see AG, 79). But what portrait would that be? It has already been stated that Grace is telling Simon lies, therefore the portrait he creates from her words must

be false as well. Grace thinks about a comparison – she likens herself to an overripe peach that bursts open, and "inside the peach there's a stone" (AG, 79). This is, indeed, a telling comparison. Softness on the outside, but hard as stone inside. This might be the actual truthful portrait of Grace's character, however, revealed tentatively, in symbolic form.

When it comes to Grace's communicative plan with the narratee, it is revealed that she keeps certain facts hidden not only from Simon, but narratee as well. When she describes her meeting Simon for the first time, the narratee knows that she understands more than she acknowledges in front of Simon. This particular scene, however, discloses also the fact that Grace is a selective narrator in her communication with the narratee. In the scene with the apple, in which Simon is trying to lure the answer from Grace that it reminds her of the Tree of Knowledge, the narratee knows that Grace understands what he wants to hear, while Simon does not. However, once Grace tells him that she may tell him lies and Simon accepts this possibility, Grace takes the apple and puts it against her forehead (see AG, 47). This simple gesture can be interpreted as her sign towards Simon, meaning 'I did understand what you meant before. Apple + knowledge (touching the forehead) = tree of knowledge.' Therefore it is a siginificant communicative act of Grace's towards Simon. Grace, however, does not mention Simon's reaction, although it is a crucial moment. Without it the narratee cannot know whether Simon understood her gesture or not. The gesture reveals to Simon that Grace is capable of figurative thinking and therefore whenever she teases him by answering primitively to his questions about fruit and vegetables he brings to sessions, he should know that she is just teasing and pretending. Therefore Grace keeps certain facts also from the narratee, just like she does with Simon. This can be read as another textual signal of Grace's unreliability in communication with the narratee.

Another textual signal, indicating Grace's unreliability, is her entangling herself in the facts she presents. When talking about her family back in Ireland, Grace says that she took care of her younger siblings, as her mother was perpetually pregnant. This means Grace spent a considerable part of her childhood in the presence of pregnancy symptoms. When Grace works in the house of Mrs. Alderman Parkinson and her best friend, Mary Whitney, becomes pregnant, Grace knows immediately what is the problem with her, as she had seen it often enough. She even says she can recognize the "milky smell of it" (AG, 200). Yet, when Nancy Montgomery becomes pregnant and Grace is witnessing the very same symptoms, including the same excuses both Mary and Nancy used, she claims it took her a few days to guess what was going on (see AG, 315-321). The discrepancy between Grace claiming familiarity with the pregnancy symptoms and her not being able to tell what is wrong with Nancy for several days after she had witnessed the same symptoms as many times before is obvious and can be interpreted as a textal signal of narrator's unreliability.

The reason why Grace claimed she had not recognized Nancy's symptoms for several days may stem from an ulterior motive. The relationship between Nancy and Grace is far from ideal. Moreover, Nancy is expecting her master's baby and Mr. Kinnear seems to be in love with Nancy enough to marry her, although she holds a much lower social position. Mary Whitney also had an affair with a man from higher society, a son of her employer, but she ended up as most women in her situation did - abandoned by her lover and left to her own resources. In Mary's case this led to botched abortion and her bleeding to death. Grace expresses indignation over the fact that Nancy, whom she dislikes, should end happily married and satisfied, while Mary, whom she loved, had to die, even though they both had made the same mistake:

"It would not be fair and just that she (Nancy) should end up a respectable married lady with a ring on her finger, and rich into the bargain. It would not be right at all. Mary Whitney had done the same as her, and had gone to her death. Why should the one be rewarded and the other punished, for the same sin?" (AG, 321)

Understandably, it is outrageous for Grace to admit that such injustice exists. Her best friend had to die, while a frivolous, jealous and mean Nancy should end up well provided for. Nancy's pregnancy may have been the motivation for the murder, so she wouldn't be rewarded for the same thing that caused Mary's untimely demise. Therefore, being ominous about when exactly Grace learned about the pregnancy may be of vital importance when we take into consideration the murder plan. As Simon reminds Grace, James McDermott confessed that the murder plan originally came from her: "before he was hanged, McDermott said that you were the one who put him up to it ... He claimed you intended to murder Nancy and Mr. Kinnear by putting poison into their porridge" (AG, 299). If Grace had learned about the pregnancy several days later, as she claims, she would not have had time to plan the murders, as they occurred very shortly after Grace's claimed realization of Nancy's pregnancy and McDermott's testimony would be an obvious lie. However, if she understood the nature of Nancy's condition right away, she would have had time to plan the murder, just like McDermott testified. Atwood is not trying to give a definitive answer to the question whether Grace killed Nancy or not. She solely opens up the possibilities with the textual signals that can identify Grace as an unreliable narrator. It is clear that Grace, in communication with the narratee, hides the facts that are vital for the semantic construction of the narrative. Grace is trying to persuade the narratee (as well as Simon) that she is innocent and had nothing to do with the murders. If she is omiting the facts that may indicate that this is not true and she indeed is a murderess, then she deserves to be identified as an unreliable narrator.

The conclusion that can be reached after the analysis of the homodiegetic narrator in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, in the light of Tomáš Kubíček's theory of unreliable narrators, is that even though Grace Marks proves to be a partially reliable narrator in the communicative plan with the character of Simon Jordan, claiming her unreliability openly to him, she proves to be an unreliable narrator in communicative plan with the narratee, when considering the textual signals included in her story. She may have claimed the possibility of her lying to Simon, but towards the narratee she claimed no such thing. On the contrary, she did her best to give the impression she is telling the narratee the truth, while she kept deliberately omitting and distorting certain facts, thus creating discrepancy between the fictional world of the story and the fictional world of the narrative.[115] As Kubíček claims, we talk about unreliability of the narrator if we can identify textual signals that enable constructing a paralel meaning of the read text (see K, 174). This happens in *Alias Grace*, as the effort of the narrator is to persuade the narratee that she did not kill Nancy Montgomery and is, in fact, innocent. However, textual signals that indicate the narrator's unreliability suggest an alternative answer, unlocking the paralel meaning and accusing Grace Marks of possibly truly being the celebrated murderess.

4.2. To Prove the Sources Wrong: "Just Because a Thing Is Written Down, Does Not Mean It's God's Truth" (AG, 299)

Before Atwood commenced her research for Alias Grace, she was working on a sequence of poems entitled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). For the purposes of this collection, she studied Moodie's

[115] The terms fictional world of the story and the fictional world of the narrative are used in accordance with Tomáš Kubíček's *Vypravěč*, 172.

Life in the Clearings, which contains the story of Grace Marks.[116] This account served as Atwood's first source on Grace and gave her the inspiration to give historical Grace the voice and a chance to tell 'herstory.' The additional pull towards retelling of Grace's story in the way she finally did was finding out various possible versions of what had happened: "having found three different versions of the Kinnear-Montgomery murder given by Grace herself and numerous, often contradictory, accounts of the 'facts' of Grace's life, she (Atwood) has fictionalized historical events ... and ... felt free to invent."[117]

Contradiction in historical documents of either factual or artistic character is something Atwood uses in *Alias Grace* in order to further undermine factual accuracy and 'truthfulness' of historiography. This subchapter will deal with the authentic documents that are presented in the novel and they are to be analysed for the contradictions they contain. The purpose is to prove that Atwood intentionally juxtaposes the documents so that the discord in the information would be striking, thus emphasizing the ultimate impossibility of learning the truth about Grace Marks and her case, no matter how many fragments from the past we have at our disposal and how much we try to construct a reliable picture of the past from them.

The novel is devided into fifteen parts, each of them bearing the name of a patchwork pattern. Patchwork patterns for quilts are of special importance in the novel, as making quilts is one of Grace's special abilities, and something she is very proud of. They also bear a symbolic meaning, as making the quilt is similar to creating a story; it is a time-consuming, elaborate process of fashioning random pieces of cloth together, which must come out just right in the chosen pattern. Therefore, quilt-making functions as a symbol for Grace's story. Each chapter starts with a selection from excerpts from authentic historical sources (such as

[116] See Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace," 223.
[117] Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History," 88.

newspaper clippings, court documents, confessions of Grace's and McDermott's, Susanna Moodie's account of meeting Grace, Kingston Penitentiary list of punishments for misdemeanours etc) and a selection from the documents of artistic nature, for example folk ballad that recounts the story of the murders or poems that deal with the themes of violence, murder, innocence or power-struggle, so that the picture of Grace would become as complex and as confusing as possible. Some of the excerpts are used as if to ironize the preceding excerpt, or to provide a commentary to it, which destabilizes the factuality of the preceding text. Atwood uses this strategy, according to Gina Wisker, to produce a "fiction which mirrors the confusion of reported and recorded versions (of Grace's story)."[118]

Part I starts with the first material about Grace Atwood encountered – excerpt from Moodie's *Life in the Clearings*. At the beginning of her research, Atwood reportedly "accepted Mrs. Moodie's account uncritically till years later when she began serious research on Grace's life."[119] Then she found out several factual mistakes in Moodie's narrative, such as mistakes in the names of the participants or the actual locations connected with Grace's case[120] and therefore, even though Moodie is probably the only person who actually met Grace personally and whose first-hand testimony of the meeting we have at our disposal today, she is not reliable as a source and the documentary value of the information she gives is flawed. The first excerpt from *Life in the Clearings* states the reason why Moodie went to Kingston Penitentiary, introduces Moodie's interest in Grace Marks and establishes that Moodie did not just possess second-hand knowledge of Grace from newspapers, but also from the lawyer who defended Grace at court.[121] Therefore

[118] Gina Wisker, *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 123.
[119] Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History," 92.
[120] See Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History," 92.
[121] See Moodie, *Life in the Clearings* (New York: De Witt & Davenport, 1854), as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 4.

Moodie, apart from stating her interest, also gives a clear signal of her reliability as a source. The excerpt that follows is a poem by Bashō: "Come, see / real flowers / of this painful world,"[122] which seemingly invites Moodie to come and find out the 'truth' about Grace and offers an assumption that the truth (real flowers) is there to be had, to be known. However, knowing that Moodie's version of Grace's story is factually flawed, the juxtaposition of these two excerpts is highly ironic. Moodie did not reveal the truth, she did not come to see the real flowers. Based on her impression of Grace, she came to the conclusion that Grace was indeed guilty and that she was the "driving engine of the affair"[123] – in love with Thomas Kinnear and jealous of Nancy Montgomery, his actual mistress.[124] Moodie went to see Grace again, in a Lunatic Asylum in Toronto and she changed her opinion on Grace following that visit. She came to the conclusion that Grace might have been deranged.[125]

Part II starts with an excerpt from *Toronto Mirror*, from 23rd November 1843, describing the hanging of James McDermot (sic), ascribing him with "the same coolness and intrepidity at the awful moment that has marked his conduct ever since his arrest."[126] This excerpt is important as it contains a mistake, tiny and insignificant – spelling of James McDermott's name, still, this mistake is to discredit factual accuracy of the source. In Grace's words: "they couldn't even get the names right ... so how could you expect them to get anything else right?" (AG, 117) Even more ironic then seems the use of the document that follows – a folk ballad describing the murder events, in which the names are spelled correctly. The juxtaposition of documents again is interesting – a factual document that got the names wrong, and piece of folk art that got them right, pronouncing a silent judgement upon

[122] Bashō, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 4.
[123] Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace," 223.
[124] See Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace," 223.
[125] See Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace," 224.
[126] *Toronto Mirror*, November 23rd, 1843, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 11.

historical sources and documents that are supposed to be reliable and trustworthy.

The following excerpt, used in Part III is another excerpt from Moodie's *Life in the Clearings*, focusing on description of Grace. Even though Moodie tries to be objective, she can't help using the language that reveals that she is prejudiced: "her face would be rather handsome were it not for he long curved chin, which gives, as it always does to most persons who have this facial defect, a cunning, cruel expression."[127] As a complement to it Atwood uses a poem "The Prisoner" by Emily Brontë, which expresses an inverse sentiment towards prisoners, romanticizing them. Although Moodie's text is non-fiction, it betrays the same bias as Brontë's text, only in different direction: Moodie sees the prisoner as an evil creature, Brontë as a romantic, beautiful creature.[128] Moodie continues with subjective evaluation of Grace in the excerpt that Atwood uses in Part IV. This one describes their meeting in Lunatic Asylum, where Moodie sees Grace "among ... raving maniacs ... no longer sad and despairing, but lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiend-like merriment."[129] Automatically Moodie considers the insane to be dangerous, fiendish, the 'raving maniacs,' as if the sole purpose of the existence of the insane was to do harm to the others. From the excerpt it is clear that Moodie romanticizes just as Brontë did. Even more contrastive then seems an excerpt from a letter by Dr. Joseph Workman, an employee of the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto, whose attitude to the insane is radically different, as he expresses a great regret at not being able to help the mentally ill the same way surgeon can help those who suffer from a physical affliction.[130] It is clear that the doctor views his patients as mere afflicted individuals who

[127] Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 21.
[128] See Emily Brontë, "Prisoner," in *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*, by Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë (London: Aylott and Jones, 1846), as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 21.
[129] Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 51.
[130] See Letter by Dr. Joseph Workman, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 51.

need his help, not as people whose insanity is driving them to fiendish acts towards other people. It is therefore clear that Moodie's view of Grace is just one of the many, and no more truthful than that of others.

In Part VII the reader is presented with another view of Grace, given by William Harrison, a reporter for Ontario newspapers[131] who claims that Grace was a lively, merry girl who most likely ended up entangled in the murders unwillingly.[132] However, even this testimony cannot be taken at face value, as it is not objective. As Enderle states, Harrison's comments are "patronizing and self-serving ... the authoritative excerpt is dialogically stagnant, expressing the limited perspective of its inflexible author."[133] What Harrison gives the reader is yet another view of Grace, but no more true than the others.

Parts VIII – X juxtapose the excerpts from the confessions by Grace Marks and James McDermott, highlighting the differences in what those two claimed that had happened. In the first two excerpts Grace and James mutually accuse one another of being of a surly, angry, sullen disposition.[134] In both excerpts the possible motive for murder of the other party appears – Grace claims that McDermott was scolded by Nancy, which he did not accept well, while McDermott claims that Grace was fiercely jealous of Nancy.[135] The obvious discord between the two confessions is not the only problem with trustworthiness. Grace's confession does not come from a court document, but its version printed in *Star and Transcript*, while James's confession is retold by Moodie in *Life in the Clearings*, therefore further tampering with facts may have taken place. Grace also directly accuses James of wanting to kill Nancy,

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[131] See Laura Enderle, "Defining Heteroglossia: Psychological Dysfunction and the Dialogism of the Testimonial Pastiche in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*," *TCNJ Journal of Student Scholarship* XI (April, 2009): 5. http://joss.pages.tcnj.edu/files/2012/04/2009-Enderle.pdf

[132] See William Harrison, "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy," quoted in Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 213.

[133] Laura Enderle, "Defining Heteroglossia," 5.

[134] "Confession of Grace Marks" and Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 273-4.

[135] See "Confession of Grace Marks," as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 273.

while she tried to stop him,[136] and James claims that Grace took action while strangling Nancy: "I threw myself upon the body of the housekeeper ... I tied the handkerchief round her throat ... giving Grace one end to hold, while I drew the other."[137] Grace does not mention these events and in her confession she claims that she did not see Nancy's body, although she knew it was there in the cellar,[138] disproving James's version of events, in which she saw Nancy's body at least after she has helped to strangle it.

The excerpts from confessions, used in Parts VIII – X are all from the same source – *Star and Transcript* for Grace's confession and *Life in the Clearings* for James's confession. In part XI, Atwood uses Grace's confession to Kenneth MacKenzie, as retold by Moodie and this text is in discord with Grace's confession for *Star and Transcript*: Grace confesses to having helped Macdermot (sic) to strangle Nancy and repents the act.[139] Again, the spelling mistake of McDermott's name appears in Moodie's account, once again undermining the reliability of the document.

Another view of Grace is presented in an excerpt used in Part XI, from Kingston's *Chronicle and Gazette* from 1843, in which the author describes Grace as curiously undisturbed and well-rested, showing no guilt or anxiety and her only worry being the clothes, as she keeps asking for the box of dresses that used to belong to murdered Nancy.[140] This view agrees with the first impression Moodie had of Grace, although she later changed it, convinced that Grace probably was deranged all along. This view also reflect the view of James McDermott in his confession (but once again, as retold by Moodie), in which he wonders:

[136] See "Confession of Grace Marks," as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 331.
[137] Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 332.
[138] See "Confession of Grace Marks," as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 381.
[139] Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 403.
[140] *Chronicle and Gazette*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 403.

"Can this be a woman? A pretty, soft-looking woman too – and a mere girl! What a heart she must have! I felt equally tempted to tell her that she was a devil, and that I would have nothing more to do with such a horrible piece of business."[141]

McDermott thus expresses his own horror at Grace's character, her actions and her behavior during and after the murders, putting himself in the position of a simple man who was merely tempted and seduced by a pretty face.[142]

Part XIV is introduced by another pair of contradictory documents. The first includes two entries from *The Warden's Daybook* at Provincial Penitentiary in Kingston, claiming that Grace Marks is in possession of a "unfortunate disposition"[143] and that she "has become a dangerous creature."[144] The two entries show that at Kingston Penitentiary, it was expected that Grace would cause troubles. However, in the second excerpt Atwood juxtaposes the fact that the exact opposite seems to have happened. In his "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy" William Harrison claims that Grace showed nothing but exemplary behaviour during her thirty-year-long imprisonment, claiming that Grace most probably was nothing like James McDermott portrayed her in his confession.[145]

In the excerpts, with which Atwood works at the beginning of the parts of the novel, she manages to discredit the reliability of historical documents – for a variety of reasons, thus confirming what she said in "In Search of Alias Grace":

"Past is made of paper ... What's on the paper? The same things that are on paper now. Records, documents, newspaper stories, eyewitness reports, gossip and rumour and opinion and contradiction. There is ... no more reason to trust something written down

[141] Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 429.
[142] See Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 429.
[143] *Warden's Daybook*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 483.
[144] *Warden's Daybook*, as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 483.
[145] See Harrison, "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy," as quoted in Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 483.

on paper then than there is now. After all, the writers-down were ... human beings, and are subject to error, intentional or not, and to the very human desire to magnify a scandal, and to their own biases."[146]

Moodie's *Life in the Clearings* proves to be full of factual errors and also subject to her bias and tendency to romanticize. Newspaper clippings voice opinions of the writers, rarely facts and the confessions of the two participants naturally disagree. But all these documents shape history, they are the sources and our only way how to learn about the past. The question is what kind of portrait of the past they finally present. Atwood gives the first definitive answer to that question – it is impossible to learn the truth about the past, as the sources lie, just like Grace seems to be.

[146] Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace," 225.

Chapter 5

A Witch and a Whore:[147] Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister*

Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister* is a relativelly unknown novel, published in 1999. Although an active writer since 1980s, Pullinger made her literary breakthrough as late as 2009 when she was awarded Governor General's Prize for *The Mistress of Nothing*. Both novels deal with microhistoric material, although the treatment of it is different in each of them. Both novels are inspired by lives of women who were deemed insignificant by history (servant Sally Naldrett and a fifteen-year-old Agnes Samuel, hanged for witchcraft). As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, *The Mistress of Nothing* strives to provide a historical reconstruction of Sally Naldrett's life that would be as factually accurate as possible. *Weird Sister*, on the contrary, demonstrates a daring approach to historic material, more 'profoundly postmodern,' we may say, as Pullinger does not recreate a historically accurate reconstruction of the events, in which Agnes Samuel was involved. She recreates an image of historical Agnes Samuel in modern-day England, endowing her with witch's powers Agnes's historical counterpart was hanged for, and letting her complete her act of revenge not in her original 16th century, but the 20th.

As for now, despite the success of *The Mistress of Nothing*, Kate Pullinger remains a rather unknown author, and an author fairly neglected by the academic circles (in the words of Pullinger herself, when she was asked in an interview if she knows she has inspired some

[147] The name of the chapter refers to the confession of Agnes Samuel, when she was prompted to save herself from execution by claiming pregnancy, she said "that will I not do; it shall never be said that I was both a witch and whore," in *The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys*, as quoted in Kate Pullinger, *Weird Sister* (London: Phoenix House, 1999), page preceding the first chapter (no pagination is provided).

scholarship on her writing: "I know that there are a few things"[148]) and therefore there is a very limited amount of secondary sources on her work. Even more limited sources exist for *Weird Sister*, therefore the following chapter will rely mostly on primary sources and the thematic and narratological analysis of such.

5.1. Witches of Warboys: Children, the Devil's Cesspool[149]

In order to foreshadow *Weird Sister*, it is necessary to introduce the context of the novel – the actual events revolving aroud English witch hunts in the village of Warboys which inspired Kate Pullinger to write the novel. What makes these events interesting from historiographic perspective, is the limited sources that exist on it and the treatment of the events in them.

In November 1589, a common practice of a neighbourly visit to a family with a sick child proved fatal for a poor family of Warboys in Huntingdonshire (nowadays part of Cambridgeshire). A daughter of a wealthy Throckmorton family fell suddenly sick and when Alice Samuel, a neighbour, paid her family a visit, the child pronounced what proved to be fateful words: "Grandmother, look where the old witch sits … Did you ever see … one more like a witch than she is?"[150] A probably feverish accusation consequently spinned out of control and caused the ensuing execution of Alice's whole family – her husband John and their fifteen-year-old daughter Agnes. Samuels were charged under the Elizabethan witchcraft statute of 1563 "against Conjurations, Enchantments, and Witchcrafts."[151] The penalty for damage caused to persons or their property by witchcraft was prison sentence for one year

[148] Dene Grigar, "Breath by Breath: An Interview with Kate Pullinger," *Computers and Compositions*, 21 (2004): 481.
[149] Philip C. Almond, *The Witches of Warboys* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 13. The monograph will henceforth be referred to as Almond.
[150] Sig.A.3.r., as quoted in Almond, *The Witches of Warboys*, 15-16.
[151] Statute 5 Eliz. I, cap. 15, as quoted in James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early modern England* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), 99.

and six hours of being pilloried once in every quarter of that year. That was the punishment for the first offence (see Almond, 3). The punishment, however became much more more forbidding, if a death occured, supposedly as a result of witchcraft:

"If any person or persons ... use, practise or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, to or for any intent or purpose; or else if any person or persons ... shall use, practice or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed … shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons."[152]

This particular part of the Act later brought Samuels to trial.

There is only one account in existence that summarizes what had happened in Warboys regarding the Throckmorton-Samuel witchcraft dispute between the years 1589 – 1593. It was entitled *The Most Strange And Admirable Discoverie Of The Three Witches Of Warboys, Arraigned, Convicted, And Executed At The Last Assises At Huntington, For The Bewitching Of The Five Daughters Of Robert Throckmorton Esquire, And Divers Other Persons, With Sundrie Divellish And Grievous Torments: And Also For The Bewitching To Death Of The Lady Cromwell, The Like Hath Not Been Heard Of In This Age* and published by Thomas Man in 1593 under the patronage of Judge Edward Fenner. Judge Fenner was the one who presided over the trials of the Samuel family (see Almond, 5). That is the only source we can rely on regarding the issue, as all the other retellings are derivates from this one account. As Almond states:

"We have no records at all of the case. No judicial or other documents have endured. The only other reference to the story from the period is the record of a ballad, entered in the Stationers's Registers on 4. December 1593, … entitled 'A Lamentable Songe Of Three Wytches Of Warboys.'" (Almond, 6)

[152] Elizabethan Witchcraft Statute of 1563, as quoted in Almond, *The Witches of Warboys*, 3-4.

Nowadays we do not even have the ballad, as it did not survive to be read. The problem with the account of the story is its historical unreliability. Not in the sense that it would tell the story of supposedly bewitched children which never ocurred. We know it did, because it is possible to verify the existence of various agents in the story via contemporary records. In the story itself there is a detailed chronology of events, including times, exact places and dates, which emphasizes the impression of accuracy of the reports.[153]

The problem is its bias. Even though the author is unknown, the book was published under the patronage of the judge who sentenced Samuels to death, therefore it is only natural to presume that the account was written so it would shed a shadow on the Samuels, making them look guilty. The story is written so that not a splinter of guilt may stick to Throckmortons: the book emphasizes that they had no disputes with Samuels (Almond, 28) and therefore there was no reason for revenge, as the common belief was that witchcraft was motivated by revenge. After some time all Throckmorton daughters fell ill with the same symptoms as the first daughter, Jane, did and all of them accused Alice Samuel of bewitching them. Alice Samuel ultimately did confess to bewitching them but soon after execution there were rumours that an injustice had been done to Samuels. Some people from the county, "among those who thought themselves wise" (Almond, 7) said "that this Mother Samuel now in question, was an old simple woman, and that one might make her by (fair) words confess what they would."[154] However, the doubts came too late for the Samuel family to save their life and reputation.

We will probably never know what was it that caused the malady of the Throckmorton children. The causes may vary and it needs saying that at the beginning, Robert and Elizabeth Throckmorton, the parents of

[153] See Anne Reiber Windt, "Witchcraft and Conflicting Visions of the Ideal Village Community," *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995): 450.
[154] Sig. H.1.v., as quoted in Almond, *The Witches of Warboys*, 7.

afflicted children, did not believe the accusations of witchcraft. They tried all tests available to contemporary science in order to discover what was wrong. It was the doctor who persistently claimed that witchcraft was behind the troubles (see Almond, 21-22).

The question arises of why a ten-year-old Jane even accused Alice. It is known that Alice was wearing a black cap when she visited the Throckmorton house and as Almond points out, "children of the time were frightened of anything black. They were brought up to fear ghosts and goblins, black men, bogeymen in general, the devil and his minions – and, of course, witches" (Almond, 16). Also Alice Samuel, as she was approximately fifty-seven at that time, was, thanks to her age, a viable target for such an accusation (see Almond, 17). Things consequently grew worse, with seven female servants falling ill in the same way as the Throckmorton daughter (see Almond, 29), then all Throckmorton daughters and finally a relative of Throckmortons, Lady Susan Cromwell. After her visit to Throckmorton house, where Susan Cromwell met Alice Samuel and had a conflict with her, she started having strange dreams and fell ill with a disease that reminded that of the afflicted children (see Almond, 64-66). She died of the malady and was therefore the reason why the punishment of the Samuel family was capital.

Another important feature of Warboys witchhunt was the presence of so called familiars (see Almond, 51), the animal guides or familiar spirits of a witch, who fed on the witch' s blood, which she gave them willingly. They were supposed to have various animal forms, a toad, a mouse, or a cat. The last Throckmorton daughter to fall ill claimed to see visions of Alice, accompanied by various animals and accused her of putting those animals in her, the child's, mouth. It was a common belief that witch tormented her victim with help of the familiars. This belief of a witch being accompanied by familiar spirits gave rise to a so called scratching test. During it the skin of a witch was scratched until the blood

started flowing. The blood was supposed to lure her familiars from the victim to the open wound, as they supposedly suckled on the witch's blood. The aim of the scratching test was primarily to relieve the bewitched – as the familiars would leave victim's body as the result of it (see Almond, 43). Scratching test was performed with Alice, but the affected children did not feel any better. As Almond claims, paradoxically, scratching test "continually reinforces the guilt of Alice … through its inability to function effectively as a cure of bewitchment" (Almond, 43).

First notion of Alice' s daughter, Agnes, being the source of the torment of Throckmorton daughters, came in early 1593 (see Almond, 32). At that time, Alice had already confessed, under much pressure from the afflicted children and Robert Throckmorton (see Almond, 105-8). Similarly to her mother, Agnes was forced to stay in the Throckmorton's house, as the children at some point claimed that the presence of the witch relieves their suffering (see Almond, 131). Also Agnes had to undergo the scratching test, which was particularly violent in her case, with Mary Throckmorton scratching her face, drawing blood (see Almond, 145-6). Eventually, young Elizabeth Throckmorton, the daughter, accused Agnes of being the worst of the whole family and that she was the reason why Alice did them so much harm (see Almond, 153). Agnes had to undergo scratching test several times; she was scratched by Mary, Joan, Elizabeth and Jane. Despite the violence against her, Agnes, although weeping, remained still and took it patiently. Later this was interpreted as another proof of her witchcraft (see Almond, 167). Samuels were not allowed to present a defence at the trial (see Almond, 187), but both John and Alice claimed that Agnes was innocent. They were all executed on 5. April, 1593 (see Almond, 194).

5.2 Who is Agnes? Re-creating a Historical Figure in Contemporary Environment

In *Weird Sister* Kate Pullinger presents her own interpretation of the story of Warboys witches. Her novel revolves around the character of historical Agnes Samuel, but it does not attempt to reconstruct the historical events of bewitching the Throckmorton children as they happened back in the 16th century. Pullinger rather creates her own version of Agnes; she transplants the character from the 16th to the 20th century, veiling her in impenetrable mystery and uses her for her own adaptation of history. The theme of mystery and a mysterious character, strongly connected with history becomes dominant in the novel and presents yet another way of how postmodern writers deal with elusiveness of history. Kate Pullinger mystifies her central character, through her she mystifies also history and thus points out its irretrievability and our impossibility to unveil it and to know it for what it truly was.

Weird Sister does not represent Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. As a genre, it can be defined as a neogothic novel, making the use of supernatural elements that historical account of the Warboys witches offered. The novel presents a mysterious young American, Agnes Samuel, who arrives to Warboys one winter evening, seduces and marries a handsome local bachelor, Robert Throckmorton, descendant of the ancient Throckmorton family, infiltrates the family and watches the series of tragedies that strike Throckmortons happen. Robert's brother Graeme's already chipped marriage to his exhausted (house)wife Karen dilapidates thanks to a love affair Graeme starts with Agnes, ending with the tragic deaths not only of Karen, but also of a troubled teenaged sister of Robert's and Graeme's, Jenny, who commits suicide. The last Throckmorton to die is Graeme himself, killed by Robert when he defends Agnes from Graeme's attack.

The central question that the novel thematizes is the question of Agnes's identity. For the further analysis of how Pullinger subverts reliability of historiography, it is necessary to analyse the character of Agnes Samuel, as her character will be central in the narratological analysis in subchapter 5.3 and also because she has an additional, symbolic, function connected with the theme of history, and therefore she will be the crucial element in the thematic analysis in subchapter 5.4.

From the very beginning, when Agnes Samuel arrives to a sleepy village of contemporary Warboys, she is portrayed as someone veiled in mystery and around whom mysterious things keep happening. When she arrives in a taxi, "the bulb in the streetlamp … explodes. A shower of sparks falls over the roof of the … cab, fireworks heralding the arrival of Agnes."[155] In one sentence, Agnes is introduced as a potentially supernatural creature, whose sheer presence causes bulbs to explode, and as someone who is special, hence the fireworks. At the same time, we can sense a touch of irony - after all, the fireworks comes from a something as ordinary as a broken bulb. Thus Agnes is presented as a potential troublemaker, yet a special one. She seems to have a strange power over people, besotting everyone whom she meets; from the taxi driver to her future husband, Robert Throckmorton. The inn keeper, in whose inn Agnes stays the first few nights "can hardly breathe" (WS, 2) when he spots her for the first time. The taxi driver "has fallen in love with his passenger" (WS, 1). And yet, something dark and ominous accompanies her, because although the taxi driver "feels full of regret at leaving her in this small, damp village … at the same time he can't wait to get away" (WS, 2), sensing her dangerousness.

When Agnes meets Robert, she presents herself as the perfect woman for him, expressing neverending interest in him, in his soul, heart, mind, everything about him (see WS, 17). Yet, despite the interest being mutual, Robert does not get to know anything about Anges's soul,

[155] Pullinger, *Weird Sister*, 1. The novel will henceforth be referred to as WS.

heart or mind. The story is narrated retrospectivelly, after all the Warboys events happened and yet Robert asks himself "what can I say about her" (WS, 23)? After having been married to her, after having spent more time with her than anyone else in the village, he is still unsure about what to say when people ask him what Agnes was really like, in private (see WS, 23). He cannot say "if she is teasing" (WS, 30) or not, she is impenetrable.

Agnes's ominousness and somewhat sinister air, qualities that were hinted at in the strange reaction of the taxi driver at the beginning of the novel, are reinvoked when Agnes is introduced to Robert' s family. Her reaction when she is, for the first time, taken into the Throckmorton house, is strange, to say the least. She does not greet the members of the family, she stands near the doorway and does not reciprocate Jenny' s attempt to welcome her. After a few moments, though, she changes her demeanour and "smiles brilliantly and then looks directly into the eyes of each of the Throckmortons, one at a time. Her voice is low and mesmerizing as she speaks … It is as though she has cast a spell" (WS, 32). The scene of Agnes's introduction to Throckmorton family is presented to once again emphasize Agnes's potentially supernatural abilities and her extraordinary way how to enthrall (or bewitch) people. At the same time, it gives rise to a feeling that there is something odd with Agnes.

Agnes's outlandish nature is envisioned through the perspective of several characters. Jenny Throckmorton harbors deep admiration for Agnes at the beginning. She "can't believe her sister-in-law-to-be is real. She's like a creature from another planet" (WS, 37). We can read this passage in two possible ways. One is that Jenny, living in a very limited world of a sleepy English village, is breathless from the appearance of so extraordinary and different a woman. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret it that Agnes does not really belong to the world of

contemporary England. That she truly is from another 'planet' - as a historical figure, who finds herself transplanted in the twentieth century.

Agnes's strange behavior continues, with an emphasis on her sinister nature, for example she is continuously portrayed as someone with chillingly pragmatic approach to human tragedies. When she and Jenny run to catch the subway, they "hear a terrible sound, an enormous crippling thud, and people already on the platform begin to shriek and scream" (WS, 55). Jenny stops, horrified, because she knows that someone must have fallen or jumped under the oncoming train, "she knows what that sound means, it doesn't take imagination" (WS, 55). Yet Agnes walks on and when Jenny stops her, she "turns around, smiling, (and saying) 'What's wrong'" (WS, 55)? It is impossible for Jenny to have guessed correctly what happened and simultaneously for Agnes to remain oblivious, especially when people on the platform start to scream. Yet Agnes is not horrified by the tragedy, on the contrary - she smiles, which is a very uncommon reaction to such circumstances. When Agnes sees Jenny's surprise, she gives a cold-blood pragmatic explanation to why she had not stopped: "We're travelling in the other direction" (WS, 56). In this scene Agnes is portrayed as a person so pragmatic and unbothered by the suffering of others that it is downright sociopathic. When the owner of the local pub, Jim Drury, closes his pub for the day of Robert's and Agnes's wedding in order to give Agnes away, and his pub gets burgled and vandalized as a result of his absence, Agnes once again reacts sociopathically, claiming, in the midst of a ruined pub that "it was a great idea … to close the pub" (WS, 87). She then suddenly changes her behavior and replaces her "inappropriate comments" (WS, 87) with "that husky tone we men loved" (WS, 87), saying "you can give me away any time you want, Jim. I'm yours for the giving" (WS, 87). This makes Jim forget about anything cruel and inappropriate she had just said a holds no grudges.

Agnes's odd absence of empathy is mentioned twice more, both times in connection with the deaths of the members of Throckmorton family. When Karen, Graeme's wife is accidentally killed by Graeme, and Robert finds out, there is a myriad of things that need to be arranged, such as calling the police, giving the statements, helping with the investigation. However, Agnes goes upstairs to take a nap instead (see WS, 221). Robert reflects on this as "at that time I thought this perfectly normal," (WS, 221) indicating that once he was no longer in Agnes's company, he did reasses her behavior and came to a different conclusion. He justifies his not realizing the oddness of her earlier actions by claiming that "it was as though Agnes was occupying my emotions so fully that there wasn't room for anything else" (WS, 221). Anges fails to wear proper clothes to Karen's funeral, opting for a provocative dress even at such an occasion (see WS, 228), thus expressing her lack of rudimentary respect for the deceased.

The last occasion when the reader has a chance to witness Agnes's sociopathic behavior and the void of empathy on her side is when Jenny commits suicide. Agnes sees Graeme taking down Jenny's corpse that is hanging in the window, and when he notices Agnes staring at him, she waves at him (see WS, 266) as if playfully greeting him. Moments away from Jenny's funeral, Agnes keeps dragging Robert to bed and indulges in sex, although Robert suffers from mild remorse, asking himself "how can it be right to take pleasure when Jenny is not yet buried" (WS, 286)? This behavior of Agnes's intensifies during the funeral ceremony itself, when Graeme makes a scene, escalating his attacks and accusations aimed at Agnes, claiming that she had killed Jenny. In the middle of the scene, Agnes tries to lure Robert upstairs, smiling (see WS, 291). She is portrayed as a woman of an enormous sexual appetite, which does not tire even when facing the direst of circumstances, but Agnes also uses sex as the means of manipulation – first when she seduces Robert in order to infiltrate Throckmorton family, then when seducing Graeme in

order to escalate the disintegration of his marriage to Karen and finally, luring Robert to the bedroom when her the accusations against her pile.

Portrait of Agnes as a sociopathic, immoral, cruel woman with chilling absence of empathy, however, clashes with the portrait of a different side of Agnes. There are numerous occasions when Agnes's behavior is at her best, generating confusion about what she is really like. She is adored by Karen's and Graeme's young sons (see WS, 237) and when their mother dies, Agnes steps in and "is there for them, always, morning, noon and night" (WS, 235). She also makes Robert unbelievably happy, taking him off the bachelor market that tired him immensely (WS, 13), sparking in him love that is so "palpable (that) everyone present feels it" (WS, 231), making him "stupid with hapiness" (WS, 34). This infatuation with Agnes does not last only when Agnes is present. Robert still loves her even when she is gone and he is married to his best friend Elizabeth. Despite all that had happened, Agnes remains his "best. His beloved. His girl" (WS, 307).

The durability of Robert's deep feelings for Agnes serves as a proof that it was not just a spell, or a temporary madness, induced by her 'witchcraft.' Robert rationalizes his feelings for Agnes, he knows clearly why he fell in love with her and why he loved her so deeply: "when she married me, she married my family. I loved her for that as much as anything" (WS, 305). In this respect, Agnes was a diligent wife, spending time with Jenny, with Karen's little boys, even with Robert's father, wheelchair-bound, mute and incontinent Martin. This contrasting portrayal of Agnes contributes to the confusion connected with the impenetrably mysterious character of Agnes.

The novel's central question is 'who is Agnes?' Is she the incarnation of the 16th century witch seeking revenge, which would justify her cruelty and insensitvity? Or is she just a woman with sociopathic traits who convinced herself that she is an incarnation of the 16th century Agnes Samuel? Or is she someone completely different?

The unifying element connected with character of Agnes is her mystery. Elusiveness and impossibility of understanding who she truly is is present throughout the whole storyline. Whenever anyone tries to get to know her, they hit the wall Agnes erected around herself. Agnes does not share her thoughts. She does not share the information about her and she refuses to talk about her past (see WS, 88). Elizabeth talks to Agnes on several occasions, even gets involved in an intimate conversations with her, but as she states, Agnes "had somehow deflected all conversation away from herself onto Robert and me. During the course of the evening I learned nothing about her" (WS, 100). Agnes refuses to answer Jenny's questions – when she inquires about Agnes's motivation to come to England, Agnes "looks at Jenny sharply" and averts all questions away from her (see WS, 124). Elizabeth describes this impenetrability of Agnes's, claiming that "it was as though she was in our midst but none of us could really see her. Or what we saw differed so dramatically from one person to the next that you wouldn't think we were describing one person, but many" (WS, 115). This recalls the portrayal of Atwood's Grace, who was described as a sullen and bad-tempered person by James McDermott, as dangerous criminal by the author of *Warden's Daybook*, as an insane loner by Susanna Moodie and as an obedient, cheerful and bubbly girl by William Harrison (see subchapter 4.2). From this it can be concluded that no one really knew Grace, just like no one in Warboys really knew Agnes, hinting at the fact that reconstructing a (historical) person from existing documentation can be a tricky process that is bound to fail anyway, because the documents are contradictory and the truth about someone (or something) is irretrievable and lost forever.

Agnes is like a perfectly polished surface, like a mirror. When people look at her, they don't see her, but rather the reflection of their own feelings towards Agnes. This is explicitely stated when Elizabeth ponders about how Robert viewed Agnes: "When Robert looked at Agnes Samuel I don't know what he saw. Love, I guess, love itself, his

own love reflected back at him" (WS, 116). Not even Robert can see Agnes, even his look inevitably rests on the reflective surface and fails to penetrate.

Agnes's mysteriousness works also on symbolic level. When she starts her affair with Graeme, it is very shortly after her wedding with Robert, therefore she and Graeme are still two strangers. During sex "they keep on their clothes and bare only the necessary flesh" (WS, 127), which symbolizes that their selves remain hidden from one another. However, as their affair progresses, Graeme starts baring not only his flesh, but also his feelings and confesses to Agnes even his deepest secrets. During sex he is completely naked, but Agnes never undresses, she remains hidden, and during intercourse "she has kept most of her clothes on" (WS, 173). Agnes "opens something up in (Graeme), something that is usually closed, locked up tight" (WS, 172), but it does not work both ways. Graeme cannot penetrate the reflective surface of Agnes's either.

Not even searching through Agnes's things proves helpful with disclosing any of her secrets. When Jenny goes into Agnes's room and rummages her things, after a while she "stops looking, she knows she won't find anything" (WS, 248). Jenny fails to penetrate Agnes's surface, too.

All that is known about Agnes is people's interpretations, or their wishful thinking. Lolly, Jenny's best friend with naïve interest in witchcraft, is heavily influenced by the book about Warboys witch trials concerning Samuels, which she finds in a library. Lolly is convinced that Agnes is a revengeful incarnation of the historical Agnes, believing that she "is evil" (WS, 285). Nevertheless, her opinion is the opinion of a child who likes to play at being a witch with a bit of chanting, lighting a few candles and reading up on spells (see WS, 285), therefore she has a tendency to romanticize. When Lolly finds the book about the Samuel trial, she is convinced that the facts in there are "exactly what happened,"

(WS, 255), because “to her the book’s age gives it authority” (WS, 255). Lolly is a child incapable of critical perspective on historical sources. She takes the authority of a historical source for granted and it would not occur to her to quesiton its reliability. She bases her interpretation of who Agnes is on that one source, which is, according to her, infallible. Giving Lolly, a naïve and romanticizing child, the unshakeable faith in the historical sources may be interpreted as one of the ways in which Pullinger reacts to postmodern challenge of historiography.

An interpretation of Agnes’s character, similar to Lolly’s interpretation, comes from a much more rational and reasonable of the Warboys citizens – Marlene Henderson, the local lawyer, pregnant at thirty-nine with her first child after years and years of trying and plenty of hormone shots (see WS, 239). Marlene is presented as a “bright and articulate and well-informed about politics and history” (WS, 240), yet she is convinced that Agnes is a witch and when she suffers a miscarriage, she believes that Agnes killed her baby (see WS, 240). However, Marlene does not base her opinion on the historical source, as she does not know of the existence of the book on Samuels witch trial. The point of view of Marlene’s husband is different. He is well aware of medical problems connected with Marlene’s pregnancy and the potential danger it bore with it. His view is that “Marlene can say whatever she wants as far as he is concerned, she can blame Agnes, she can blame the Prime Minister and the Pope if she likes; he is glad to have her in one piece” (WS, 250). Marlene’s and her husband’s different perspectives show that the interpretation of Anges as a witch has serious flaws. In case of Lolly, it is an accusation of a disturbed child who has just lost her best friend under extremely dramatic circumstances and who always romanticized about witchcraft. Therefore, when she is confronted with a source about the Samuel case, it is only natural that she sees a witch in Agnes. In case of Marlene it is an accusation of a woman who desperately needs to blame someone or something for her miscarriage

and who willingly ignores rational explanation for the miscarriage, although such explanation is implied by her husband.

There are two more major characters who attempt to understand Agnes and find out who she really is – the counterparts of historical Throckmorton parents – Robert Throckmorton and Elizabeth. Both of them reflect the reluctance of historical Throckmortons to believe that witchcraft is responsible for their children's affliction – in *Weird sister* both Robert and Elizabeth refuse the accusation that Agnes is a witch. Robert adores his first wife no matter what she does and his interpretation of her character is a positive one, although he admits that he did not know her any better than anyone else in the village (see WS, 23 and 30). He is always on Agnes's side even though it means to oppose the members of his own family. He is angry with Jenny for telling him about Agnes cheating on him with Graeme (see WS, 205) and he doesn't believe her (see WS, 206). He doesn't believe it even when Agnes is gone and Graeme is dead (see WS, 304). When Graeme makes a horrible scene at his wife's funeral and accuses Agnes of bewitching and seducing him, Robert claims that "Agnes forgave him (Graeme). She did not harbour a grudge, was not capable of harbouring a grudge" (WS, 232). On the one hand Robert claims he did not really know Agnes, on the other hand he claims that she was not capable of hating someone over a long period of time. This creates a clear contrast with Lolly's interpretation, which is based on the belief that Agnes came to Warboys to revenge her and her family's death. Such an action inevitably requires harbouring a grudge.

Robert also adores Agnes's pragmatism and active approach, as we learn when his motivation for loving Agnes and disliking Elizabeth is identified: "that's why he loves Agnes, he thinks, she doesn't want to talk. She wants to fuck, she wants to live, she wants to get to it. Without delay" (WS, 286). From Robert's perspective, Agnes comes across as a pragmatic, although at times weird, wonderful woman who gave him

everything he had ever dreamt of. His enthusiasm is not shared with his future second wife. Elizabeth, a childhood friend and a teenage sweetheart of Robert's suffers from pangs of jealousy when hearing and seeing Agnes. Her interpretation of Agnes is therefore biased from the beginning, as Elizabeth herself admits (see WS, 74). When she first sees Agnes in interaction with Throckmorton family (after Agnes's and Robert's wedding), she does admit that "that evening the Throckmortons were a picture of happiness" (WS, 98) yet she adds that "it seemed to me, with hindsight, that the whole set up was one enormous, loud, false chord ... Agnes was biding her time. She was getting everyone where she wanted them. And everyone included me" (WS, 98). Therefore Elizabeth openly shows her view of Agnes which is in concordance with Lolly's and Marlene's negative view. She also claims that the reason why she told Agnes so much about her intimate life was because of "some spell that Agnes had cast" (WS, 141). She sheds the responsibility for saying too much by transfering it to Agnes: "I looked at her and, before I knew what was happening, my tongue was loosened" (WS, 141). Elizabeth's view of Agnes is tightly connected with Elizabeth's own personality and her personal problems. She is in love with Agnes's husband, she had made some poor life choices and as a result of it she is facing problems with money and issues connected with her failed career of a psychotherapist. She admits that she "couldn't stand the fact that she (Agnes) had money, that she had beautiful clothes, lovely things, that it wasn't an issue for her" (WS, 176). Together with Elizabeth's sour feeling that it should have been her to marry Robert (see WS, 110), her confession about hating Agnes Samuel (see WS, 215) only confirms how very biased Elizabeth is. Therefore we are presented with a subjective perspective on Agnes by a woman who feels that this woman stole the man who was righteously hers and who believes that Agnes was hurting the family to which Elizabeth desperately wanted to belong. Yet as for the accusation of witchcraft, Elizabeth demonstrates her rationality. Here

we can see the paralel with historical Elizabeth Throckmorton who also showed reluctance to believe this accusation. When Marlene Henderson accuses Agnes of killing her baby, Elizabeth feels that "accusations like this were no good; it wasn't going to help anybody. There was a problem with Agnes … (but) it had nothing to do with witchcraft, nothing to do with the supernatural" (WS, 240). Over time, Elizabeth comes to believe that "Agnes came to Warboys to destroy the Throckmortons" (WS, 303), yet, she does not believe that Agnes was a witch. Elizabeth presents her own take on Warboys witchcraft ocurrance, the conclusion she reaches after having read the only existing historical source:

> "I think about that little book from time to time. The story it tells is grim, but if you read between the lines, it's much worse. The Samuels were beholden to their neighbours the Throckmortons, the power the wealthy family had over their lives was absolute. … Agnes's father, John Samuel, was a brutal man and he fought hard against the allegations of witchcraft, but he could not stop the Throckmortons from making their case." (WS, 302-3)

Elizabeth understands the social background of the Warboys witchcraft trials and with this explanation she refuses the belief that Agnes was the incarnation of historical Agnes Samuel. She understands Agnes differently from Lolly or Marlene, as she expresses it when confronting Agnes, saying:

> "I don't know if Agnes Samuel is your real name. You think you are a witch, but you are not, you can't be. You have internalized the story … Witches don't exist. The Throckmortons were rich, the Samuels poor. They had no way of mounting a defence. The children were hysterical. No one understood about these things." (WS, 287)

Elizabeth proves to be a rational woman, and above all, a psychoterapist, as she cannot deny the influence of her profession when she analyzes Agnes's actions. Although she blames Agnes for the misfortunes that

encountered the Throckmortons, she does not believe it had anything to do with witchcraft. Her interpretation of who Agnes really is is influenced by her profession, for her Agnes is a woman who read the story about Warboys witch trials, identified with the executed Agnes Samuel and decided to take revenge on her behalf.

With the multiple perspectives of the characters in the novel, we are nowhere near answering the question who Agnes Samuel really is or why she came to Warboys. She remains a mysterious entity, uncoverable and undecipherable. She gets to be called a witch, an adulterer, a mentally disturbed woman, a good wife or a beloved, best girl. When Elizabeth shouts at her "I want to know why you are here" (WS, 295), Agnes only smiles and avoids giving away any information by saying "Does anyone know the answer to that question" (WS, 295)? Pullinger is mocking the effort of her characters to uncover Agnes's true identity and her true purpose.

Yet, there is one character who does know it all: "Martin knows who Agnes is" (WS, 223). Martin Throckmorton, Robert's, Graeme's and Jenny's father, mute and fully dependent on his wheelchair and the care of the others, is the only one who uncovered Agnes's secret, whatever it may be. Martin cannot talk, change facial expression, or move, he is an ultimate silent witness, a silent voice which will never be able to pass on his knowledge. Agnes spends hours sitting with him, talking to him, although he cannot respond. Pullinger's choice of Martin as the only truly seeing pair of eyes is of great significance when interpreting the novel through the prism of postmodern challenge of historiography. Martin is the voiceless witness, the lost voice. He is the only one who knows the truth, yet he is the only one who cannot communicate it. He represents all the lost sources, all the lost voices that history buried and whose accounts are unrecoverable and therefore lost forever. Author's choice of mute Martin as the only one who knows all is

another way how she ironizes the effort to get to know history, how to crack the mystery of who someone really is, or what really happened.

5.3. Truth Where One Expects Lies and Lies Where One Expects Truth: Narratological Analysis of Homodiegetic and Heterodiegetic Narrators in *Weird Sister*

Weird sister, similarly to *Alias Grace*, presents a complex narrative situation. The novel is narrated by three different narrators: a heterodiegetic narrator, who omnisciently provides the insight into the heads of all the characters (including the marginal ones) and two homodiegetic narrators who give their personal, first-person accounts of the story – Robert and Elizabeth. As with Atwood's *Alias Grace*, my claim here is that Kate Pullinger employs an unreliable narrator in her novel, which should serve as one of the means of undermining the reliability of written texts, written sources, including historiography.

Majority of theorists who deal with the problematics of unreliable narrators claim that only a first-person narrative can bear the signs of unreliability. However, Tomáš Kubíček, in *Vypravěč* presents a theory of unreliability that includes also heterodiegetic narrators. The aim of this subchapter is to prove that Kate Pullinger employs an unreliable heterodiegetic intradiegetic narrator, as defined and described by Kubíček. First I will provide an analysis of the two homodiegetic narrators and scrutinize their statements for the signs of unreliability, as would be traditionally expected. In this subchapter I will strictly stick to Kubíček's theory of unreliability, abandoning for example Nünning's or Fludernik's notions that the sole fact of first-person narration means unreliability, due to the subjectivity of the presented view.

The reader has the opportunity to explore Robert from two perspectives – that of the heterodiegetic narrator and Robert himself.

From the narrative of homodiegetic narrator - Robert, a picture of Robert that emerges is that of an honest, good-hearted man, who is strong, resilient and firm, yet loving and caring when it comes to his family and his wife. With his unresponsive father Martin in the wheelchair, he is the head of the family, despite Graeme unsuccessfully fighting with him for that position. Robert is the one who runs the business of renting the cottages adjacent to the Throckmorton property and who makes the important decisions. After Graeme was fired from the police department, he is the only one working, which puts him in the position of power. Yet, Robert does not abuse this position and consults the decisions with other members of the family. He is helpful and never hesitates if he can do anything to make other family members happy. When Graeme finds out that he is sterile, while his wife Karen wants children desperately, it never crosses his mind to refuse to donate the sperm (see WS, 85).

Robert desperately wants to find love, he is tired of being a bachelor and when he meets Agnes, he is the happiest man alive. After they are married, when he is confronted with his bachelor's past, he feels immensely relieved that he is married (see WS, 163). He also makes an impression of a man who is capable of forgetting his own vanity and suppressing his ego – when he thinks about the possibility that Agnes had been unfaithful to him, he claims "in a way it doesn't matter, I don't have to believe it, even if it is the truth. There are bigger truths out there, truths more difficult to face" (WS, 304). He is capable of seeing the bigger picture, to see further than to his own hurt pride. When the problems with Agnes culminate and he is confronted with the ghostly, supernatural option of her identity, he accepts the responsibility for his ancestors and defends Agnes: "I've been to the library to look at the book (the account of Warboys witch trials)… I was shocked by it, by the story it told. I think there is no escape from that story. 1593; the Samuels were hanged, my family was responsible. It's enough to turn anyone toward evil" (WS, 307). Even after all that had happened to his family,

death of his brother, sister and sister-in-law, he refuses to hold Agnes responsible.

When looking at the signs of unreliability in his narrative, there are several occasions of discrepancy between what Robert says and what either the omniscient narrator, or Elizabeth, or other characters say. For example when Robert mentions that he is not interested in local history and that "neither, it transpired, was Agnes," (WS, 18) there is a discrepancy, because the inn-keeper, Jim Drury said that Agnes came to Warboys "to seek out her roots" (WS, 18), which would definitely require an interest in the local history of Warboys. Robert is aware of this inconsistency and explains it readily: "I know that Elizabeth used Jim's statement … to help support her theory, but Agnes never demonstrated the slightest bit of interest in that stuff to me. She was like a lot of Americans that way, to her England itself was historical" (WS, 18). He continues defending his statement by describing how Agnes liked modern things (see WS, 18) and that is the reason why he "would maintain that Agnes was not interested in history" (WS, 19). Robert takes a lot of effort to explain any possible discrepancy between what he is saying and what others are saying. The same goes for his explanation of how he fell in love with Agnes. First he claims that he fell in love with her the first moment he saw her sitting in Jim Drury's inn (see WS, 5). But then he says something that can be interpreted as if he was presenting a different fact: "It pained me when Jim used those words (make friends) to describe my relationsihp with Agnes and that's when I realized that I had fallen in love with her" (WS, 24). Yet Robert immediately clarifies and reconfirms what he had said before: "and as I have said, it happened when we first met, when I first saw her in front of the fire" (WS, 24). Therefore, there is a very strong tendency of Robert's to come across as a reliable narrator, explaining himself and clarifying every possible misinterpretation of his words.

As for Elizabeth narrative, she does not demonstrate any signs of unreliability either, although in comparison with Robert, she does not show any effort to appear as a reliable narrator. Her narrative, however, is devoid of any textual signs of unreliability, hence to present an extensive analysis is not necessary for the purposes of this thesis. Therefore, the homodiegetic narrators in *Weird Sister* can be proclaimed reliable, even though there are occasional inconsistencies in Robert's narrative. Those are, however, readily explained and justified and thus they do not trigger change in the semantic construction of the narrative.

The heterodiegetic narrator is, by far, responsible for the largest part of the narrative. It is a heterodiegetic narrator who appears to be extradiegetic – s/he doesn't possess a body that would inhabit the fictional world as one of the characters, and constructs the narrative in seemingly uncomplicated, straightforward, transparent manner. S/he also demonstrates his/her omniscience – s/he has access to both the main characters' and minor characters' minds. S/he presents the thoughts and feelings of even the most marginal characters, such as taxi driver, who appears only once, at the beginning of the novel. S/he moves smoothly from one character's mind into another, seamlessly:

> "Graeme … feels the weight of the pub's scorn on his back and it burns at him, but he does not care. He is used to hatred, it doesn't touch him. Back inside the pub Jim Drury can't believe his luck. Trouble averted – forgotten – he looks at Agnes and is freshly amazed that a woman like this should happen to come and stay in his pub." (WS, 12)

There are scenes in which the narrator claims to know not only all the aspects of the present situation, but that he can also see in the future: "Geoff Henderson … is a good bloke, he was born a good bloke and will one day die a good bloke" (WS, 9). He describes the events with levity and clarity, invoking a tight hold of the construction of the presented fictional world.

The first question that needs to be explored and answered, before any conclusion regarding the narrator's reliability is to be reached, is whether this heterodiegetic narrator is indeed extradiegetic, or if s/he is in any way thematized in the text,[156] and thus becoming an intradiegetic narrator. At first it seems that the thematization of the narrator does not occur, and therefore it would be safe to say that we are dealing with an extradiegetic narrator. However, when scrutinizing the heterodiegetic narrator, it is feasible to find several similarities between this narrator and the narrator Kubíček chose for his analysis of a heterodiegetic intradiegetic narrator - Jan Neruda's "Týden v tichém domě." In his analysis, Kubíček identifies several ways, how to distinguish whether heterodiegetic narrator is extradiegetic or intradiegetic. In case of Neruda's narrator, what seems like a traditional omniscient narrator proves, under scrutiny, to be a demonstration of a much more modern approach to narrative: category of omniscience is made more complicated, the narrative is subjectivized and how the meaning is constructed is unclear (see K, 157). First of all, heterodiegetic intradiegetic narrator is clearly thematized in the text (without him becoming a character in the story). This thematization is emphasized by using the first person plural form when narrator addresses the narratee.

Another way how to thematize a heterodiegetic narrator in the text is by activating the senses with which s/he perceives the space around him/her – sense of touch, smell, hearing (see K, 158). The third option of thematization Kubíček mentions is questioning the omniscience of the narrator – as often such narrator is not sure about the space in which s/he exists, s/he isn't sure about what is happening, what s/he is smelling, or hearing (see K, 159), in other words, such narrator presents us with guesses or assumptions when describing the fictional world. Heterodiegetic narrator in Kubíček's example never becomes a character

[156] The expression "narrator who is thematized in the text" refers to Kubíček's terminology. See Kubíček, *Vypravěč*, 157.

in the story; s/he rather remains, as Kubíček describes, an occurence, a ghost who transcends all the walls of the story, but simultaneously is a body with human features (see K, 158).

Contrastively, the heterodiegetic narrator in *Weird Sister*, while also never becoming a character in the story, never demonstrates the possession of other senses than seeing and hearing, and therefore can be described as the ghost transcending the walls of the story, but without the ability to touch, smell or feel the space around him/her. However, it is still possible to prove that s/he is thematized in the text, because his/her omniscience is questionable and one can see a pattern of an ulterior motivation why s/he says certain things. Also, at one occasion, s/he uses the first person plural pronoun to refer to him/herself and the other characters, when addressing the narratee. This happens at the end of the novel, when the narrator refers to the situation of Agnes: "It might be ten years before that black taxi makes its way down the high street, it might be one hundred years. We might have to wait another four centuries before we see Agnes Samuel again … But she will return. She will come back to Warboys … Robert hopes" (WS, 308). Two important things happen here – first, the narrator includes him/herself among the other characters of the novel – claiming that we (Robert, people of Warboys, general public) might have to wait to see Agnes. Second, the narrator's omniscience can be questioned based on this passage. By using modal verb might and also enumerating several possible outcomes, s/he acknowledges that s/he does not have the certainty about how long it will take till Agnes returns, even though there were instances before in which the narrator claimed to know the future (the example with Geoff Henderson).

Narrator's lack of certainly is demonstrated on a number of different occasions. There are moments, when s/he guesses what is going on, instead of claiming it; when Karen dies and Agnes and Robert have to take care of everything, narrator says: "it was as though recent events

had drawn them closer to each other, as though as time passed Robert was even more deeply ensnared" (WS, 240). Narrator demonstrated before that he has access to Robert's mind, therefore there should not be the need to guess whether having to face the responsibility after Karen's death had drawn him closer to Agnes or not. Similar situation arises when the narrator describes Agnes's first meeting with Throckmorton family. Again s/he is assuming, rather than claiming, when describing the scene, "it is as though she has cast a spell" (WS, 32). A pattern starts to emerge – narrator uses assumptions to deliver hints regarding Agnes's dubious nature of a witch – emphasizing that Robert gets ensnared or that Agnes might have cast a spell. Narrator's quesswork serves the purpose of enhancing the interpretation that Agnes is, in fact, a witch. Narrator demonstrates his bias in this way, proving that s/he him/herself, tends to believe in Agnes's supernatural abilities. However, such a belief distances him/her from the objective, traditional, omniscient narrator s/he seemed to be at the beginning.

Based on the narrator's questionable omniscience, lack of objectivity and the usage of the pronoun 'we' when referring to him/herself and other characters when addresing the narratee, it is possible to claim that the heterodiegetic narrator of *Weird Sister* is thematized in the text and therefore can be identified as an intradiegetic narrator. The most important issue of this subchapter, however, is proving the heterodiegetic narrator unreliable. Again, questioning the omniscience of the narrator will play an important role, as the suspicious attitude of the narrator to his/her own omniscience will be crucial in proving him/her unreliable.

According to Kubíček, heterodiegetic narrator can be called unreliable if s/he intentionally leaves the blank spaces in the narrative, enabling contrasting ironization of the whole narrative space and thus changing the semantic construction of the narrative (see K, 161). He claims that the gaps the narrator leaves behind not only question

narrator's omniscience, but question also all statements, which evaluate the situations and circumstances within the fictional world (see K, 160). And yet, there is a contradiction, or a paradox, in this, as Kubíček acknowledges, because his exemplary heterodiegetic narrator from Neruda's short story does, indeed, have the ability of omniscience, which s/he proves by accessing the minds of selected characters (see K, 160). The paradox lies in the following: such a heterodiegetic narrator on the one hand proves that s/he is omniscient (has access to any mind s/he pleases) but simultaneously proves that s/he either is not or does not want to be (refuses to provide an access to character's mind). Such a narrator constructs the fictional world with selected facts and data, s/he has at his/her disposal any means to serve him/her with the construction of the fictional world, yet the narrator refuses to use it. (see K, 162).

Heterodiegetic narrator in *Weird Sister* behaves in similar manner. S/he proves repeatedly that s/he has access to the mind of any possible character in the novel – main characters (Robert, Graeme, Karen, Elizabeth, Jenny), marginal characters (taxi-driver, Jim Drury, his wife, Marlene Henderson), children (Andrew and Francis), the handicapped (Martin). All but one – Agnes. Whenever Agnes appears, the narrator loses his/her omniscience and does not mediate Agnes's thoughts or feelings.

Agnes remains a mystery – in her case the narrator resorts to guessing and provides a description of the situation from the position of an external observer: "she stares as though she is sending a message" (WS, 12). When the narrator is describing a scene of Karen's death after a violent argument with Graeme, the narrator provides an insight into the mind of one witness (little Andrew), but not the other one (Agnes): "Andrew is standing in the door of the sitting room. He has seen Mummy fall and Daddy go forward … Agnes is directly behind him … Her expression is odd, she is wearing a little half-smile" (WS, 220). With the usage of a small child's vocabulary – Mommy, Daddy – narrator

demonstratively shifts perspective to little Andrew. However, with Agnes, s/he is once again an external observer, who describes her odd facial expresion but does not give Agnes the voice that would explain it. With such approach, the narrator intentionally veils Agnes's mind in mystery and her character is spun around with secrets. In the fictional world that the narrator mediates, Agnes does not have a voice with which she could explain herself, or defend her actions.

However, the lack of the insight into Agnes's mind, and therefore the lack of omniscience on the part of the narrator is the strategy the narrator plays with the narratee. On several occasions, s/he 'slips' and demonstrates that s/he actually can access even Agnes's mind, only s/he chooses not to in most situations. But while with all the other characters the narrator provides the insight at all occasions, with Agnes it happens scarcily and randomly. When Jenny expresses her frustration with Agnes, she mutters into her pillow for Agnes to go away (see WS, 169) and the narrator says "Agnes hears her" (WS, 169). No more detailed an insight into Agnes's mind follows, the narratee is not given information on how hearing Jenny's refusal of her person affects her, or what feelings it evokes, even though the narrator could provide it. If s/he knows that Agnes heard Jenny, s/he demonstratingly has the access to Agnes's mind.

Another insight into Agnes's mind follows when the narrator introduces the narratee into the history of Warboys. S/he gives a hint at a bleak chapter of it concerning the Samuels, but does not identify the witch trial directly, when s/he claims: "Awful stories are always the most thrilling. But people forget. People have forgotten ... The Throckmortons of Warboys have forgotten ... But some people do remember. Some never forget. Like Agnes Samuel … Agnes hasn't forgotten" (WS, 6-7). Here the narrator peeps into Agnes's mind, yet at the same occasion s/he mentions unanswered issues regarding Agnes's own attitude to that particular historical event: "In Warboys they say it is as though for her (Agnes) the past lives as vividly as the present" (WS, 6). Again, the

phrase ‘as if’ is used to reinforce the deliberate limits of the narrator’s omniscience, when it comes to Agnes. Guesses and suggestions, but never certainty about what actually goes on in Agnes’s mind is provided to the narratee. Still, the narrator knows that Agnes hasn’t forgotten, whatever that might mean.

Similarly mysterious insight that reveals little information about Agnes, except the fact that the narrator does have access into Agnes’s mind, is offered when the narrator introduces the character of Martin: “Martin knows who Agnes is” (WS, 223) – as the only person in the whole fictional world. Agnes reportedly “knows he knows who she is” (WS, 224), but nothing more substantial is disclosed, Agnes’s identity is not revealed. The rest of the instances when the narrator exposes Agnes’s mind disclose unsubstantial, or trivial information. They are either evaluations of Agnes’s appearance: “She brushes her hair and looks in the mirror. Fine. She looks good” (WS, 247) or statements of her aesthetic preferences regarding the house: “It’s Robert’s old bedroom. She doesn’t much like it” (WS, 247). Comparatively, the narrator enables access to Agnes’s mind on significantly smaller scale than he does with other characters and the insights fail to provide a comprehensible picture of who Agnes truly is. Therefore it is possible to interpret narrator’s selective omniscience as part of his game with the narratee and as a mark of his/her unreliability.

Narrator’s utterances in which s/he provides assumptions regarding Agnes are to reinforce the idea that Agnes is a supernatural being, a reincarnation of the 16th century witch. The narrator painstaikingly constructs the image of Agnes as a weird creature, possessing supernatural abilities and does not mention anything that might shatter that image. Finally, thanks to narrator’s selectiveness in his/her own omniscience allows Agnes to remain shrouded in mystery.

There is another textual signal of narrator’s unreliability and that is discrepancy between the facts provided by him/her and the facts

provided by the characters. The most significant discrepancy revolves around the character of Robert. It has been already established that Robert is a reliable homodiegetic narrator. Therefore, what he says or describes is endowed with a high level of reliability. The heterodiegetic narrator describes Robert's character and introduces him to the narratee, and there is discrepancy between what the heterodiegetic narrator says about him and what kind of person Robert seems to be, based on his actions, which are described either by Robert himself, or the heterodiegetic narrator. Therefore, at some occasions, heterodiegetic narrator even contradicts him/herself.

When heterodiegetic narrator introduces Robert, he compares him to his violent, sullen and aggresive brother, Graeme, claiming: "Both men are arrogant, it is a Throckmorton condition, but where Graeme spells it out, Robert keeps it hidden. At least, he thinks he keeps it hidden" (WS, 13). As the story develops, nothing in the novel supports this statement. Robert could not be less of an arrogant man. On the contrary, the words that would describe him best are timid, loving, devoted, meek, yet firm and strong. He is lovingly taking care of handicapped Martin: "Robert pushes his father's wheelchair to his bedroom. He lifts him into bed … strokes his father's forehead" (WS, 76), expressing gentleness and genuine care for him. He never hesitates to become a biological father of his brother's children, because he wants to help.

Robert also contrasts with Graeme when it comes to their relationship with Agnes. In this case, Robert seems to be his brother's exact oppossite. When Agnes needs to go to see a doctor, "Robert looks anxious, is my beloved unwell? (while) Graeme's face has darkened; he can't bear the idea of the doctor touching Agnes" (WS, 161). These fundamentally different reactions show Robert's caring and unselfish nature, while Graeme comes across as a self-centered, egoistic person,

who is interested only in being the only man in possession of Agnes's body.

Once Agnes is gone and Robert and Elizabeth are married, Robert takes great care that she is happy. He admits that "part of me left with Agnes.The better part perhaps, I don't know. Elizabeth is happy, and that's a good thing" (WS, 306-7). Even though he himself is longing for Agnes to return, he is glad he can make Elizabeth happy, even though he himself is not. The image of Robert that forms as the novel progresses is very different from an arrogant man, similar to egoistic Graeme, as the heterodiegetic narrator described him to be.

Another instance when a discrepancy in the statements of heterodiegetic narrator occurs is description of Robert's bachelor life and his ways of seducing girls. Narrator claims that Robert is rather fed-up with it, that "now the women he sees are getting younger and younger … He can't follow their conversation anymore, pop stars he's never heard of, movies he wouldn't dream of going to … He wouldn't admit it out loud, but Robert is getting tired of being eligible" (WS, 13). Therefore the narrator portrays Robert as an ageing man who is desperately trying to find a woman, a woman he would understand, who would be 'of his time' and not a decade or more younger. But then, Robert finds an extremely young girl to chat up that evening (not knowing she is a sixteen-year-old daughter of his acquaintance) and the narrator claims that "Robert felt happy" (WS, 14) when the two started talking. Therefore, at one occasion narrator claims that Robert cannot talk to much younger women, because they have nothing in common, at another occasion, just a few moments later, he feels happy talking to a sixteen-year-old.

The narrator also pictures Robert as a sexual predator, who is hunting for a new "victim this evening" (WS, 14), claiming that "Robert … is accustomed to – rather fond of – this routine. He fetches the girl, cajoling, arm around her waist" (WS, 14). And then again, s/he claims

that Robert “is only looking for love, he didn’t set out to be lecherous” (WS, 14). There is a clear contradiction in claiming that a man has a routine how to cajole very young girls, who the narrator identifies as his victims, and simultaneously claiming that he is looking for love and that he is fed up with picking up young girls, as he feels they can’t really talk about anything of essence together. The image of Robert as a man who is actually far from being the predator is confirmed at a later occasion, when, already married to Agnes, he phones with the very same sixteen-year-old and feels very much relieved that he is married (see WS, 163).

Additional contradiction in the portrayal of Robert by heterodiegetic narrator is added when Elizabeth claims that Robert, just like her, was and still is a shy person (see WS, 40). Being shy creates a clear contrast with arrogance the heterodiegetic narrator ascribed to him. Yet another discrepancy appears when Robert mentions that he was helping Karen with washing up (see WS, 51), while the heterodiegetic narrator claims, on several occasions, that no one ever bothered to help Karen with anything round the household, and she is frequently depicted as the only one doing the washing up and other housework (see WS, 35, 106, 165, 180, 195).

However, narrator’s contradictions, which function as textual signs of his/her unreliability, are not limited to Robert only. We can find them also in narrator’s descriptions of Karen’s and Graeme’s relationship. Graeme is repeatedly unfaithful to his wife and she is aware of the fact (see WS, 212). Still, she is in love with him, and she confirms it in a conversation with Jenny (see WS, 199). The same evening, after this conversation, Karen hears Graeme say Agnes’s name in his sleep and “in a flash Karen knows about Graeme and Agnes, in a flash she sees what has been happening” (WS, 202), meaning the affair those two are having. However, Graeme’s saying Agnes’s name that particular night is nothing too extraordinary, as a certain incident preceded that night; an incident that involved Agnes and left Graeme very upset. Therefore it is

not so revelatory that his dream, directly following that upsetting incident, involved Agnes. Narrator's explanation of how Karen found out about the affair is therefore suspicious at best. Just a few days later Karen finds what she considers another proof of the affair (an expensive suit Graeme bought without her knowledge) and feels that she no longer loves Graeme (see WS, 212). Within a very short period of time, there are two moments that contradict one another, and both of them are mediated by the heterodiegetic narrator: Karen claiming her love for Graeme and meaning it (see WS, 199), and Karen saying she no longer loves Graeme and that her "marriage is dead and rotting thing" (WS, 212). This contradiction can be considered as another textual signal of narrator's unreliability.

More textual signals of heterodiegetic narrator's unreliability can be seen in the contrast between the names of the chapters and the actual content of them – for example the chapter that refers to the situation in Throckmorton family after Karen's death. It is entitled "Robert and Agnes are happy" (WS, 235), yet nothing in the chapter would support that statement. The chapter includes description of how much work Agnes and Robert had, taking care of Martin and Karen's sons, while Graeme seemed always absent (see WS, 235), but description, or implication of happiness is not part of it. On the contrary, as it describes a stressful time that followed a tragic death of a family member, it can be assumed that the title of the chapter is ironic.

The textual signals that have been listed in this subchapter successfully prove unreliability of the heterodiegetic narrator in *Weird Sister*. Therefore, it is possible to reach the conclusion that Kate Pullinger employs the same means as Margaret Atwood, an unreliable narrator, in order to emphasize the unreliability of written texts in general, including historiographic documents, thus embracing the postmodern challenge of historiography.

5.4. Thematization of History: Agnes Samuel and the Throckmorton House as Symbols

Apart from an unreliable narrator, Kate Pullinger employs also several ways how to work with the theme of history in her novel. This subchapter will analyse thematization of history via usage of symbols. Pullinger creates such symbolism in *Weird Sister* which would refer to history as something ephemeral, irrecoverable, potentially valuable, but nevertheless, lost forever. We can identify two major symbols connected with history: the Throckmorton house and the character of Agnes Samuel. Both of these symbols also interact with one another and are, therefore, interconnected.

Agnes's symbolic meaning is ambiguous. She can be read as a destroyer, or the erasor of history, but simultaneously, she is supposed to be the postmodern counterpart of the historical Agnes Samuel, hence the reviver of history. This ambiguity is best expressed when Robert ponders about Agnes's attitude to history. As I mentioned in the previous subchapter, Robert is convinced that Agnes was not interested in local history, because she never expressed such an interest in front of him (see WS, 18). Elizabeth disagrees and claims that Agnes was no less than obsessed with it (see WS, 18), as she believes that Agnes came to Warboys to take revenge on behalf of the original Samuels. Therefore, Agnes is supposedly deeply connected with local history of the place. Nevertheless, Agnes is also described as someone with whom Robert could feel like a tabula rasa; with her it was "as though all the other women I'd been with didn't count, I had no history" (WS, 50). Here Agnes acts as an erasor of Robert's personal history, with her he can start afresh.

Agnes is potrayed as a thoroughly modern person, who loves modern equipment in the house, and even her nationality confirms this symbolic reading. She is American, so she belongs to a new nation, the

modern nation with short history, rather than the ancient nation of the British. Agnes's modernity is emphasized by her practicality, her pragmatism, and her adoration for all the comforts of modern life, which demonstrate fully when she moves into the ancient, dilapidating Throckmorton house. Her pragmatism is emphasized on several occasions, namely when Robert claims that Agnes is all for doing and living, not talking. She also expresses her opinion on happiness that resonates with American pragmatism – that we have as many chances for happiness as we make (see WS, 146). She is also very matter-of-fact when it comes to her involvement with Graeme. While he believes his marriage is over thanks to the affair (see WS, 139), for her he is "just temporary" (WS, 174), because she is only "stopping by" (WS, 174). She is using people as a means to an end, whatever that might be, she is utterly practical and focused on result.

One of the most significant features, connected with the ambiguity of Agnes's symbolic load is her storytelling. Part of her relationship with Jenny is the habit of Agnes coming to Jenny's room and telling her stories – usually horror stories. This ritual in particular contributes to the ambiguity of Agnes in relation to history. Her being a storyteller concords with Collingwood's notion of historian being a storyteller, yet the content of the stories themselves resonates with modernity - they are plots of popular mainstream horror films, such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) or *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). Jenny, living the life of an almost impossibly isolated teenager, does not recognize the stories, as she had never seen those films and considers them Agnes's original creations. Agnes's storytelling resembles fairy-story telling of parents to their children. Fairy-stories breathe with historical background; they are the creations of folklore and mythology, they are the remnants of folk history. Jenny interprets Agnes as a person with historical knowledge and she is desolate when she learns the true origin of Agnes's fairy-stories. Those stories in fact only confirm the notion of Agnes as a

modern person, while Jenny understood her as a historical person. Yet there are references that can support Jenny's and Elizabeth's interpretation of Agnes.

On several occasions throughout the novel, Agnes's perfume is mentioned. The perfume is described as with "an undertow to it that makes him (Graeme) feel queasy" (WS, 73). The perfume always appears in connection with Agnes's body, it's either on her clothes, or her, no character smells the bottle itself. Therefore, it is the smell of Agnes that makes Graeme queasy, which could be interpreted as a reference to the smell of a decomposing body. This would make Agnes a spectre of the past, long dead, coming back among the living, beautiful, young and lustrous, but carrying a touch, an undertow of the smell of the decay with her. Similar is the resonance with the quotation from Macbeth - "Fair is foul, and foul is fair,"[157] which could be interpreted as a reference to Agnes, too. Although beautiful, there is something foul about her.

There are several similarities between historical Agnes Samuel and the supposed modern reincarnation of her. Philip Almond, in *Witches of Warboys*, mentions that historical Agnes Samuel took after her father, when it comes to using expressive language. John Samuel was referred to as a crude man and Agnes used bad language similar to his (see Almond, 86). Agnes in *Weird Sister* also does not shy away from swearing, and she uses it as a means of bonding with Jenny (see WS, 132). Although historical Agnes was much younger than her fictional counterpart, and was in no way betrothed with any member of the Throckmorton family, she did live under the Throckmorton roof, as the afflicted girls claimed that the presence of the bewitcher makes them feel better (see Almond, 131). While Agnes stayed at the Throckmorton house, she was said to end many of the girls' fits by invocations. This was considered the proof

[157] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth,* in *First folio*, by William Shakespeare (London: William and Isaac Jaggard, 1623), as quoted in Pullinger, *Weird Sister*, 131.

that she could control the spirits just like her mother (see Almond, 149). Fictional Agnes gets to live under the Throckmorton roof because of the marriage to Robert, yet even though she is officially a Throckmorton, "no one ever called Agnes by her married name" (WS, 215). Thus Agnes remains a Samuel, and as Agnes Samuel she stays at the Throckmorton house, just like her historical counterpart.

Another association between historical and fictional Agnes is the resistance to pain. Graeme treats Agnes with violence, to such extent that he himself wonders "how Agnes withstands his assaults on her body" (WS, 152). Historical Agnes was subjected to several scratching tests – by all the Throckmorton girls. Her scratching test, performed by Mary Throckmorton was particularly violent. Agnes was persuaded to carry Mary downstairs, but when she lifted her, Mary started scratching Agnes's face violently, drawing blood and later expressing shock at what she had done. Agnes was stunned by such violence, but could stand the pain exceptionally well. This was later used against her as another proof of her witchcraft (see Almond, 145-6, also 151).

Based on the analysis presented it is possible to conclude that Agnes Samuel functions as an ambiguous symbol in *Weird Sister*. On the one hand she is presented as a thoroughly modern person and a pragmatic American who, in her relationship with Robert, is the erasor of history. It is because of her that Robert starts an extensive reconstruction of the house in order to give Agnes a modern home she requires. On the other hand, she is supposed to be the reincarnation of historical Agnes Samuel from the 16th century, therefore she proves to be deeply connected with history. This ambiguity is no coincidence. It can be interpreted as another reflection of postmodern challenge of historiography in postmodern fiction.

The Throckmorton house functions as a complex symbol for the historiography and history itself. The house is ancient, a building where the original bewitchings of the Throckmorton children took place. It is a

palimpsest, a house that had been rebuilt many times and whose code is the constant transformation:

> "On the top floor there are three crooked bedrooms with gables and sloping ceilings and a fourth room that was converted to a bathroom in the 1930s. This is the Elizabethan part of the house but that is evident only in the main bedroom … The other rooms have had piecemeal work done to them over the years, cheap flock vinyl wallpaper in pink and brown and double-glazing in the 1970s." (WS, 46-47)

The house was originally built in Elizabethan era, however, major part of that is lost, rebuilt, remodelled. History is vanishing from the house, it is a subject to constant modernization and change and what was once modern is now obsolete. One of the most significant places in the house is the ballroom, as it is one of the few remaining Elizabethan parts of the house. A special focus is centered on this room, especially its historical value, when Agnes pronounces that "this room has seen too much" (WS, 72). Too much – as if historical events can be a burden too great to carry. This figurative overload becomes a literal overload when the ceiling of the room collapses: "on the floor little mounds of plaster dust are growing steadily. The heavy plaster ceiling has been shifting over the centuries … not … restored or stabilized in any way … A large chunk of carved plaster drops from the ceiling" (WS, 72-73). Important notion about the destruction of the ceiling is that it was "the recent building work upstairs (that) has loosened it further" (WS, 72), resulting in collapse. The construction work that helped to destroy the ceiling is a reconstruction that commences when Robert marries Agnes. He wants to give her a modern house, therefore he starts the reconstruction to give it a twentieth century look. Agnes is thus an initiatior of yet another destruction of history.

House is personified, which is demonstrated in the language Robert uses when he shows the alterations of the house to Elizabeth. He claims: "You must see what we are doing to the house" (WS, 96), not

‘with the house,’ but ‘to the house,’ as if the house was a silent sufferer, or a person to whom something is being done. This personification is also enhanced by Karen’s perception of it - for her, the house consoles and comforts her (see WS, 79) and she loves it “because it is Throckmorton, always has been; they have lived here forever” (WS, 79). Karen feels soothed by the history the house represents, for her it is the symbol of stability, steadiness. She even ponders on the pun with the word ‘housewife:’ “sometimes she thinks … I really am a housewife, the house is my husband” (WS, 80).

Also Elizabeth and Lolly, Jenny’s friend, have similar feelings concerning the Throckmorton house. Lolly adores it for its age and the history it represents, just like Karen. She loves it because it is “so gothic” (WS, 167) and the windows are “like a castle watchtower” (WS, 168). For Lolly, the house is a symbol for her romanticized version of history, which she glamorizes just like witches and witchcraft. For Elizabeth, the house is a beloved place because it is bound with her memories of the places where she spent time with Robert when they were growing up; for her the house is the symbol of her personal history with Robert. She loves it because “(it) was full of nice old things, worn, comfortable things, there was nothing valuable, nothing that could be classified antique” (WS, 98). The value the house has for Elizabeth is emotional rather than material, which supports the claim that for her it represents her personal history, as she feels emotionally bonded with the place.

Although the house is ancient, and should have the value as an antiquity as well, it does not. The things the Throckmorton family furnishes the house with are replaced when broken, and the house is constantly being rebuilt in a more and more modern style, when the need arises. Thus it loses the antiquity value and now Agnes is transforming it even further, modernizing it: “upstairs … the transformation was much more remarkable. The bathroom wasn’t finished but I could see that it would be splendid, it would have a hotel gleam” (WS, 99). Utterly

modern, gleaming, clean and shiny, just like Agnes herself. There seems to be no place for the obscure, antiquated English bathrooms that appall Agnes (see WS, 47).

Agnes does not function as a destructor, or erasor of history only when it comes to the Throckmorton house, or Robert's personal history. When Jim Drury closes his ancient pub for one night in order to attend Agnes's wedding, the pub is burgled and destroyed, and afterwards in the need of a total makeover. After reconstruction, the pub is "restored to its former glory, except now everything is new – carpets, curtains, upholstery" (WS, 102). Thus Ages is connected with yet another modernization and disposing of the history, which Jim's former pub represented. It is emphasized that if it wasn't for Agnes's wedding, Jim wouldn't have closed the pub, as he never closed it before (see WS, 62) and Agnes's wedding was an exceptional occasion to do so, although done reluctantly.

Agnes functions also as a pragmatist and belittler of the historical importance. One of the builders, after careful examination of the oldest part of the house says that one needs to be careful with a house that old: "you've got to treat it with care, like you would a very old lady" (WS, 113). The builder sees the significance of the antiquity and the historical value of the house, but Agnes's reaction is downright pragmatic: "It's only a house" (WS, 113), she claims, emphasizing her practicality and detachment from history. The builder, astonished, ascribes such a reaction to her being an American, the nation that has difficulties understanding the importance of the old.

The Throckmorton house is a dilapidating structure and Robert ponders about what secrets the it conceals, what is hidden behind the walls and the ceiling (see WS, 112). Just like the past, the house has secrets it will never give up, secrets that are irretrieveable, impossible to reconstruct. Until disturbed, the house held together. As Robert notes, "the problems started with the renovations" (WS, 112), referring to the

problems with the building that start piling as soon as the builders commence the work. Soon afterwards, with "every step forward the builders discovered something else that needed to be done. Work on the ceiling revealed a leak in the roof. Work on the flooring revealed dry rot in the joists. Work on the plumbing revealed lead piping throughout the wing" (WS, 112). The problematic reconstruction of the house may serve as a metaphor for historian's work, when s/he faces the problem with insufficient sources. There is always an information, or a source missing, argument falling apart and with every step, new gaps, voids and problems are discovered. Thus, the symbolic load of the house is enriched. Not only does it function as a symbol for history, but also for historiography.

The house is very fragile, again evoking the fragility of the process of reconstructing history:

> "If I leaned against the wall it would crumble to powder beneath my weight; if I knocked in a nail to hang a picture the whole structure would collapse … As if (the house) couldn't stand the thought of the twenty-first century, coming as it does from the sixteenth." (WS, 112)

The house, functioning as a symbol for historiography, crumbles when Robert tries to bring it up-to-date, to give it a twentieth century look, just like many reconstructions of the past crumble when the historian tries to bring it up-to-date and retell it in a modern context. History, as ancient as almost five-hundred years, is fragile, often with scarce documentation. There are no witnesses, no modern ways of recording the facts, just old papers, often so worn by age that it is dangerous to touch them, as they may crumble to dust.

The image of the house as a symbol of historiography is emphasized when Robert enumerates what needs to be done with it:

"The wing needed a new roof, all the structural supports – joists, beams – should be replaced, new wiring, new plumbing … he said it would be best if we could think of that part of the house as just a shell. It would have to be taken apart and put back together again, including what was left of the precious plaster ceiling in the room downstairs." (WS, 206-207)

When writing about an historical event, retelling it in a modern context, a historian must proceed similarly to how the reconstruction of the house is described. If we take as an example the story of the Samuel family, what survived till present day is a shell of the historical fact. We know it happened, but to know what exactly happened is impossible. There is one surviving document and the objectivity of it is dubious at best. A historian approaching that historical event has a shell at his/her disposal, but the content needs to be rebuild from scratch; like in the house joists and beams need to be replaced, historian needs to replace the whole structure that would hold the story.

5.5. Thematization of History: The Irretrievable Past

Jenny tries hard to understand as much as she can from the only surviving document about Warboys witch trials. When she finds the *The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys*, she reads the tiny book over and over, trying to discover to the 'truth' of what happened to the Samuels. But the heterodiegetic narrator mocks her attempts: "she sits at her desk to read the book … as if reading it again will help her understand what it might mean" (WS, 263). Jenny's attemps are futile and predestined to fail as one can never understand more from the record than there is. And what is there is always just a part of the story, as someone inevitably selected the facts and organized the facts (recalling White's term 'emplotment'[158]) either according to their opinion or their best knowledge. Lolly serves as a perfect example of

[158] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 60.

how people generally do not understand the limitations of the historical sources. Not only does she demonstrate blind faith in the sources, taking their age as the ultimate proof of reliability (see WS, 255), but she also uses the book as the proof of Agnes being a witch, jumping to a naïve and romanticized conclusion:

> "She's a witch … I can show you. I found a book in the library in Cambridge. 1593 – that's the date it was published … it's a record of what happened in the village … in Warboys … She's come back to take her revenge. Why else would she return? Why else would she come all the way from America?" (WS, 276)

Lolly thus demonstrates her belief that since the book was published in 1593 and was placed in a library in Cambridge, it is a valid proof of the existence of witches, together with the fact that historical Samuel family had supernatural abilities and also that Agnes Samuel, Jenny's sister-in-law is a supernatural being as well. With Lolly Pullinger mocks the uncritical treatment of historical sources and once again turns the focus on the fact that "just because a thing is written down, does not mean it is God's truth" (AG, 299).

The most important question regarding the source is voiced by Elizabeth, when she reads *The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys.* She asks: "what can this little book possibly mean? .. Who is Agnes Samuel" (WS, 285)? Elizabeth tries to understand the history, but to no avail. Just like Agnes's true identity, the truth about the Throckmorton–Samuel case will remain hidden. The mystery remains; just as nobody could disclose Agnes's true self and her secrets, no one can disclose the truth about what actually happened to Throckmorton children, what was the nature of their affliction and what or who was its source. It is impossible to know for certain whether Samuels were the victims and more importantly, of what exactly were they victims.

The heterodiegetic narrator comments on the parallel between the current behaviour of the people of Warboys and their behaviour in the past: “there will be no village uprising, no public accusations … The good people of Warboys abandon the Throckmortons; they leave the Throckmorton family to find its own way. Like they abandoned the Samuels a long time ago” (WS, 282). The history repeats itself, only the victim has changed. Heterodiegetic narrator also reminds us of the existence of silent voices, the sources that never came to be – like Samuels and their version of what happened: “the village backs down, as if they hope that because the gossip has stopped, the stories will go away. If no one speaks of it, it cannot be true” (WS, 282). As if when certain voices are silenced, then the tragedy would go away, as if it never happened. People of Warboys forgot about the Samuels. Their side of the story was never voiced, they became those silent voices, the weak and the defeated; parts of history that are irretrievable and lost, although they clearly existed.

Chapter 6

Carol Shields' *Mary Swann*: "A Beautiful Toothless Witch"[159] Who Kept to Herself

Carol Shields was a unique occurance in Canadian literature. US born mother of five children, who became a Canadian when she married her husband, became a renown writer and also a university teacher. She authored not only novels and short story collections, but also non-fiction – biographies, essays and academic papers. Her lifelong fascination with biographies and the creative process of writing one is present also in her fiction, for example her novels *Small Ceremonies* (1976) and the sequel *The Box Garden* (1977), which focus on the character of Judith Gill, a biographer of Susanna Moodie's life. In these novels, which happen to be her first, Shields started her exploration of the thin line between the fact and fiction, be it a fact of personal history, or, from the wider perspective, a historical fact. This chapter will offer an insight into the reflection of postmodern challenge of historiography in the novel that deals with the reconstruction of personal history, rather than history. Yet, it adds an important facet to the reaction of postmodern literature to postmodern challenge, and therefore, its place in this thesis is justified.

6.1. Hunger for Life Stories: Carol Shields and Biographies

In her address "Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing Cupboard," delivered at Shields' alma mater, Hanover College, in 1996, Carol Shields commented on the usefulness of fiction when learning about history, thus demonstrating that the subject of the interconnection between the fact and fiction was steadily on her mind, and, subsequently,

[159] Carol Shields, *Mary Swann* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 218. The novel will be henceforth referred to as MS.

in her work. As an exampe Shields uses facts about peasant life in France in the 18th century and refers to the extensive work of an historian, Theodore Zeldin, on the history of French society, who claims that nine-tenths of the French in the 18th century were peasants. Yet there is only one personal eye-witness account of French peasant life from that time and even that one is skewed (the author became literate and left peasant life behind.)[160] However, there are many novels set in rural France of that period, in which their authors "have leapt across the synapse of what is known and what is imagined, or deduced their historical narratives from artefacts, paintings or documents."[161] Shields then concludes by asking a fundamental question regarding the cognitive value of such writing, value that Doležel denied in *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*:[162] "Is conjecture better than nothing at all when it comes to reaching into the narrative cupboard for something to eat?"[163] Is reading about what may have happened better than not reading about it at all? With some of her fiction and non-fiction, Shields attempts to find the answer to this question.

Another feature that links many of Shields' works which explore the relation between fact and fiction is fascination with the unsaid, the hidden, the irrecoverable. This is a feature that connects all three novels that are subject to this thesis. All three present a mysterious female character that is in the centre of the novel, each of them representing a silenced voice. Yet the authors do not simply give these female characters their voice: Atwood lets Grace Marks narrate her story, but she makes her a liar, Pullinger gives the narrator access into Agnes Samuel's mind, but s/he does not reveal Agnes's true nature, and Shields creates a fictional poet who was violently silenced. But even though

[160] See Carol Shields, "Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing Cupboard," in *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*, eds. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 26.
[161] Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 27.
[162] See Doležel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History*, 51.
[163] Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 27.

other characters in *Mary Swann* are frantic to uncover Mary's true nature, the best they can do is generate a series of re-creations, and none of them is successful in discovering the true Mary. In this respect, Sarah Gamble's assumption is applicable - that Shields "goes along with the postmodern view that history, like fiction, is a discourse ...(and that) narrative is not an entirely inflexible medium ... it is inextricably dependent on language, a notoriously slippery medium of communication."[164] Language therefore, thanks to its slipperiness, cannot reveal the mystery of Mary Swann, as she keeps getting lost in it. Her story never gets told and her voice remains silenced.

In an interview with Harvey De Roo, Shields admitted that the point her fiction is trying to make is to show "the failure of language, the abuse of language, the gaps in language"[165] which Gamble interpreted as a proof of Shields's fascination with "the notion of using ... narrative to convey the unsaid or (even more radically) the unsayable."[166] It is undeniable that Shields's work demonstrates this kind of fascination, and what is more, it shows the fascination with the unsaid itself, yet Shields toys with the impossibility of capturing the 'unsaid and unsayable.' After all, as I mentioned earlier, mystery that shrouds all three silenced voices (Grace, Agnes, Mary) does not get demystified. The language therefore fails to convey their story and the void remains, emphasizing its existence in the first place.

Mary Swann is a playful novel that thematizes the issue of female identity, satirizes academic world and questions the process of reconstructing a person's identity, his/her mind, life and circumstances from available documentation. It also represents historiographic metafiction, as identified by Lubomír Doležel in *Possible Worlds of*

[164] Sarah Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," in *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*, eds. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 45.
[165] Harvey De Roo, "A Little like Flying: An Interview with Carol Shields," *West Coast Review* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1988): 45.
[166] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 45.

Fiction and History. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, Doležel defines historiographic metafiction differetly from Hutcheon, as he limits the concept to such fiction that presents a reconstruction of a fictional historical event or a life of a fictional character. *Mary Swann* does not reconstruct a real historical event, nor a real historical character. It toys with the fictional character of a newly discovered Ontario poetess, who died under mysterious circumstances, and presents a process in which several characters (a literary critic, a biographer, an acquaintance and a publisher) attempt to reconstruct the identity of the subject of their professional and personal interest.

Mary Swann was a woman who twice a month went to the local library of Nadeau, Ontario, grabbed two books each time (more were not allowed by her oppressive and primitive husband) and vanished into the seclusion of her husband's remote and isolated farm. She wrote poems on the scraps of papers, she brought them to Frederick Cruzzi, an owner of a small publishing house in Kingston and he published it as a collection of *Swann's Songs*. The night after she handed her manuscripts to Cruzzi, her husband shot her, dismembered her body, dropped the pieces in the silo and committed suicide. A few years later, the obscure publication finds its way into the hands of a young literary critic, Sarah Maloney, who makes Mary Swann her professional discovery and thus ignites an overall interest in Mary's personna. Mary Swann becomes the newest obsession of the academic world, attracting the attention of a controversial biographer, Morton Jimroy, who then starts his ardent search for any piece of information and biographical material from which he could concoct his newest book. The search for information and any written documentation concerning Mary leads both Sarah and Jimroy to the small Nadeau library, where they meet a reportedly close friend of Mary's, the librarian Rose Hindmarch. As she proves to be a rich source of information on Mary, Rose gets an invitation to a Swann Symposium that Sarah organizes, together with the publisher, Frederick Cruzzi.

The novel presents an interesting narrative situation. It is devided into five parts: the first one is narrated by a homodiegetic narrator, Sarah Maloney, the second part is dedicated to Morton Jimroy, who functions as a reflector in heterodiegetic extradiegetic narrative. The same narrative situation is maintained also in the third and the fourth part, which focus on Rose Hindmarch and Frederick Cruzzi, who also function as reflectors. However, the third and the fourth part is enriched: Rose's by frequent addresses of the narrator to the narratee and Cruzzi's part by letters that evoke an actual conversation between the writers of the letters and their addressees. Such a composition of narrative situation is identified by Tomáš Kubíček as multiperspective narrative, a narrative which consists of several different narrative perspectives (see K, 136). The last part of the book, entitled 'The Swann Symposium' immitates a film script, emphasizing the metafictional character of the novel. In the last part it is revealed that the preceding four parts were fictional, and the characters in them are not, within the fictional world of the novel, real. Thus their fictionality is squared, as the fictional novel characters are revealed to be the fictional characters of a film. As Sarah Gamble states: "Shields's use of a film-script format in this final section, which refers to the characters throughout as actors, ultimately draws attention to their fictional status as well, thus adding yet another layer to the interlocked levels of narrative operating within the text."[167] When one reads a novel, one enters the fictional world and the characters that inhabit it are considered 'real' (in the realm of the fictional world). What Shields does is revealing that the fictional world of the novel was the whole time a construct for the purposes of a fitional film, thus making its characters doubly fictional. Hence the metafiction.

The most important question the novel tries to find an answer for is, similarly to *Weird Sister* and its (mock)quest for the identity of Agnes Samuel, 'Who was Mary Swann?' To revolve a novel around such a

[167] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 58.

question is natural for an author deeply interested in biographies and the lives of other people. Shields herself was in the role of a biographer when she worked on *Jane Austen: A Life* (2001). Also in the address at Hanover College, she talked about her fascination with the lives of people she read about or the people from obituaries. She mentioned an anecdote about herself and an example from an arithmetic book, in which a Mary Brown was supposed to buy some cheese and young Shields was insterested in who that girl was and what was she to do with all that cheese.[168] This neverending curiousity regarding people, this incessant wondering and 'narrative hunger,' as Shields called it, is probably the same impetus that triggered her own writing, fuelled with narrative enterprise and playfulness.

Shields explained how she understood the nature of narrative hunger – as a thirst for stories, which is never quenched. She talked about how people listen to snippets of narratives by other people at cafés or restaurants, watch TV sitcoms and the news for fragments of other people's lives, listen to song lyrics and believe the urban myths, but none of these things satisfies the narrative hunger.[169] On the contrary, it rather triggers more of it. Shields claims that these 'snippets of narratives' are inevitably "never quite accurate ...(as they are) glancing off the epic of human experience rather than reflecting it back to us."[170] Maybe the true, accurate representation of human experience could satisfy the narrative hunger, but such a representation is a myth, as any represented experience will be emplotted and interpreted by its narrator. One has to forget about the narrative representation being objective, truthful or accurate. With such an approximation, Shields subscribes to the postmodernists perspective that challenges the existence of one truth or the existence of objective representation of reality.

[168] See Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 20.
[169] See Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 21-22.
[170] Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 22.

When Edward Eden asked a student (Gwen Amman), who went to listen to Shields's address at Hanover College, about Shields's speech, her reply was that Shields had such a beautiful voice.[171] Of course, Gwen Amman referred to "the sound of Shields' voice, her rich, mellifluous, meditative, playful, indescribable tones."[172] However, it is easy to interpret the statement metaphorically and claim that also Shields' narrative voice is beautiful, rich and playful. With her versatile works, all of which are inspired by other people's lives, Eden claims that "(Shields) continually alerts us to the pleasures and perils of biography …(as) much of her work focuses on the nature of the self, and how that self gets reflected or represented in literary works."[173] This is Shields's own unique way how she contributed to postmodern challenge of historiography. Her works do not deal with general history, they explore intimate histories of the self. Like many postmodern historiographic metafiction novels, also Shields's (fictional) re-creation of Mary Swann gives up on an attempt to capture one's identity and one's personal history through writing. In the novel she rather presents the spectrum of narrative voices that try to re-create Mary, but their attempts are bound to fail.

As Kubíček claims, multiperspective narrative has a rare ability to challenge the identity of the fictional world by pointing out its individual validity. The issues of 'truthful and objective representation' and the reliability of the data are presented through subjective perspective of a variety of narrators and thus the fictional truth appears to be subjective, valid for a limited time only (see K, 136). Therefore, by using multiperspective narrative (and a variety of narrators and reflectors) Shields challenges the actual ability of a narrative to re-create Mary

[171] Edward Eden, introduction to *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, And the Possibilities of Fiction*, eds. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 3.
[172] Eden, introduction, 3.
[173] Eden, introduction, 4.

Swann, or her true self. Just like historical truths are lost and irretrievable, so is personal history of a single person.

Gamble also points out multitude of narrative voices, not only in *Mary Swann*, but also other Shields' novels. She claims that:

> "(Shields's) two *Happenstance* novels (1980/2) and (Mary) *Swann* (1987) play much more daring games with narrative construction, presenting the reader with multiple, frequently contradictory, points of view, and a variety of different styles and techniques. Shields is particularly concerned with exploring the limitations of narrative, and the experimentation in her texts tends to push towards the point where the conventions of storytelling falter, and language falls silent."[174]

Already in *Small Ceremonies* Shields treated a similar theme as in *Mary Swann*: recreation and reviving of a writer, although this time a real one - Susanna Moodie. On the pages of *Small Ceremonies*, "'Susanna Moodie' is … not a person but a linguistic cipher which points to nothing but more words, more manuscripts, and all Judith as a biographer can do is rearrange those words a little."[175] This description of biographer's work resonates with Hayden White's statements about historiographer's work of rearranging the words in order to create a narrative from random pile of historical fact.[176] Mary Swann proves to be a similar cipher, a one that cannot be deciphered, no matter how hard Sarah, Jimroy, Cruzzi and others try.

According to Gamble, "*Small Ceremonies* … presents biography as a kind of borderline genre, not quite history, not quite fiction, yet it is this very transitional status that provides Shields with a standpoint from which to critique both history and fiction."[177] While *Mary Swann* is not, strictly speaking, a biography, it makes problematics of writing a biography its subject, and thus Gamble's words are applicable to it, too.

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[174] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 41.
[175] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 43.
[176] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 83.
[177] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 43.

Swann's biography, in the process of being written by Jimroy, is a genre that lingers in the no man's land between history and fiction, as Jimroy selects the facts for the biography, keeping those he prefers and ignoring those that do not fit his idea of Mary Swann. Thus he creates a representation of an entirely fictitious Mary. Francis Sparshott commented on historiographic metafiction: "(it) always asserts that its world is both resolutely fictive and yet undeniably historical … what both realms share is their constitution in and as discourse."[178] According to Gamble "this is almost exactly the function fulfilled by biography in Shields' work (and in *Mary Swann* particularly) for in presenting a life as a story, the biographer also exposes history itself as a narrative construct,"[179] which is "unavoidably figurative, allegorical, fictive … always already textualised."[180] This is exactly what Jimroy does with Mary's biography – provides a fictive narrative construct, as the true represenation of the personna in question is unattainable, just like the true representation of a historical event.

6.2. Mary Swann Re-created, But Never Found: Reconstructions of a Fictional Poetess

One of the major issues *Mary Swann* focuses on is reconstruction of Mary. The novel mocks the process during which Sarah Maloney, Morton Jimroy, Rose Hindmarch and Frederick Cruzzi, among many others, try to discover who that woman really was and what influenced her enigmatic, cryptic poetry. The actual information on her is very scarce: "She was a farmer's wife. Uneducated" (MS, 18). The woman did not have a driver's licence, therefore there is no information about her height and weight. And there are no other records, no doctor's

[178] Francis E. Sparshott, "The Case of the Unreliable Author," *Philosophy and Literature*, 10, no. 2 (1986): 154-5.
[179] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 43.
[180] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism,* 143.

records, something Jimroy would not imagine possible in the twentieth century (see MS, 212). She lived in Nadeau, was married, had one daughter, went to library every two weeks, loved Edna Ferber and her husband killed her. With these fragments of information, the four main characters work to re-create Mary, or rather, their versions of her.

Sarah Maloney accepts the responsibility for Mary, as she is the one who discovered her (see MS, 30) and this act of Sarah's is fuelled by a desire for her own academic success. However, the statement about discovering Mary is ironic, as she remains undiscovered despite the effort; she remains a mystery that is frequently thematized in connection with her. Sarah admits that rather than discovering, she "invented Mary Swann" (MS, 30). The statement suggests that her version of Mary is an invention, which is much closer to truth. Sarah's version of Mary is reflected also in the language she (Sarah) uses when writing about her. She produces new fancy academic catchphrases to describe Mary's poetic style, such as "Swannian urgency" (MS, 19) that, according to Sarah, can be sensed in Mary's rather primitive and uninventive rhymes (see MS, 18). However, the only urgency that Mary most probably ever felt was connected with busy farmlife and despotic husband, not with rhymes. Sarah's creation of Mary is just that, a creation with which she interprets and widens Mary's 'narrowly rural' context (see MS, 18), which is another academic phrase, used by another fictional academic in the novel, Willard Lang. Sarah intuitively feels the nonsensical nature of these catchprases, describing 'Swannian urgency' as pompous (see MS, 19), yet she perseveres and adjusts the image of Mary to what she imagines her to be, rather than what she most probably really was.

Sarah has the unique access to two documents that have the potential to unveil the secret of Mary Swann: her journal and her rhyming dictionary. Both were given to Sarah by Nadeau librarian, Rose Hindmarch, when Sarah visited her before Mary Swann became the subject of academic interest. Right there, in the rhyming dictionary Sarah

can see the real source of 'Swannian urgency.' Rhyming dictionary offers Sarah an important information about Mary right there: none of her rhymes are hers - she borrowed them from a dictionary. However, Sarah is selective and she keeps only such information that suits her version of Mary. So she throws the rhyming dictionary in the "first roadside litter box" (MS, 46), getting rid of an authentic piece of a puzzle. Sarah wants her Mary Swann to be a genius poetess, driven by 'Swannian urgency,' inventing her own modern poetry and taking the academic world by storm. She is not interested in a simple farmer's wife who scribbled her simplistic poems on scraps of paper with the help of a rhyming dictionary. Sarah is shaping Mary's reality, and the only artifacts she is interested in are those that fit the desired image, while she arrogantly disregards the others. Here we can see a paralel with historiography. In White's understanding, every historian selects their sources based on their best knowledge and conscience, but in a way, what Sarah does, may not be that different. An historian also has an image of the event he wants to write about and appropriates the selection of sources to that.[181] Of course, it would not be so blatant as in Shields' novel, after all, what Sarah does is denying the existence of evidence, as she disposes of such evidence that disproves her theory, but if a certain historical source is rejected as unimportant, the result may be similar to *Mary Swann* – the truth is lost.

The second document Sarah has in her exclusive possession, Mary's notebook, serves the purpose of mocking the documenting effort of the academics, Sarah in particular. She has high hopes for the content of the notebook, expecting tenuously "what its contents would soon reveal" (MS, 46). But when she finally reads it, she finds it to be a "profound disapointment" (MS, 49). She describes reading the notebook as follows:

[181] White operates with the term 'interpretation' of historical facts when describing the process of writing history. The process is described in detail in the chapter "Interpretation in History," published in *Tropics of Discourse*, 51-80.

"What I wanted was elucidation and grace and a glimpse of the woman Mary Swann as she drifted in and out of her poems. What I got was 'Creek down today,' or 'Green beans up,' or 'cash low.' … This 'journal' was no more than the ups-and-downs accounting of a farmer's wife, of *any* farmer's wife, and all of it in appaling handwriting." (MS, 49)

The source for which Sarah had such high expectations proves useless in her quest of discovering Mary. It is a document which could have been written by anyone who lived like Mary. It contains no illuminating facts on what kind of person or poet she was. Sarah feels betrayed by the notebook (see MS, 49), but she is not giving up, she is determined not to accept what the facts in the notebook suggest. She keeps her hopes up, "imagining that one day they (the pages of the notebook) would yield up a key that would turn the dull little entries into pellucid messages" (MS, 49). She therefore keeps projecting her version of Mary, keeping it alive by further interpretations and adjusted re-creations. Mary Swann, who lived her simple and unsophisticated life, also used very simple language when writing her poems. Her notebook presents a problem for Sarah, if she wants to find an approximation between Mary's poetry (as she reads and interprets it) and the notebook. The connection is there, clearly and bluntly, only Sarah refuses to accept that Mary's poems might be just what they seem to be. Mary Swann thus "becomes doubly distanced – not just by death, but by her fictionality."[182]

Part of Sarah's adjusted version of Mary are her interpretations of Mary's poems, which again confirm her subjective view. Sarah tries to understand the circumstances of Mary's murder, and what caused it, even though "there was no explanation, no note or sign" (MS, 43). Sarah thinks she found a signal of upcoming murder in Mary's poetry - "one of Swann's last poems points to her growing sense of claustrophobia and helplessness" (MS, 43). The fact, however, is that Sarah cannot know,

[182] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 58.

does not know which of Mary's poems are her 'last.' Mary Swann's poems, as we learn from Frederick Cruzzi's part of the novel, were given to him, the publisher, in a paper bag, which was full of scraps of paper with poems scribbled on them. It is emphasized that there was no order in which to read or arrange the poems and that Mary herself was surprised when Cruzzi asked her about it (see MS, 215). Therefore it is not possible to arrange them chronologically as they were written and establish which of them were the last ones. The arrangement in *Swann Songs* was purely an invention of Frederick Cruzzi and as such, Sarah's interpretation that points out to the problems between Mary and her husband, is unfounded and remains just another of her readings and interpretations.

Sarah's narrative also includes a pivotal thought on the nature of reality with which the novel plays indefinitely: "Ah, but what is reality? In a fit of self-mockery … I ask myself this question … Reality is no more than a word that begins with r and ends with y" (MS, 36). This enhances the subjective nature of Sarah's reality regarding re-creating Mary, and once again mocks the process of it. Mary, as reconstructed by Sarah, is no more real than a reality being no more than just a word. And what is history if not not a story weaved from records of reality. Therefore it is possible to sense a parallel between how nature of reality is described and how the nature of history can be understood. If reality is irretrievable, incomprehensible, untouchable, then so is history.

Shields works with the nature of reality and its representation in words in "Narrative Hunger":

> "We can start … with the admission that both real events and their accompanying narratives are conveyed to us by words, and that words, words alone, will always fail in their attempt to express what we mean by reality. We cannot think without words … and thus the only defence against words is more words. But we need to remember that the labyrinth of language stands beside reality itself: a somewhat

awkward, almost always distorted facsimile or matrix. Exprience – reality, that is – possessed immediacy; language plods behind, a rational or irrational tortoise."[183]

Language is described as limiting the experience, as a failure to capture the moment and recreate what has just passed. In this manner Shields' words resonate with Derrida's famous "there is nothing outside of the text,"[184] assuming that language, which creates the text, cannot refer to reality, only construct an entirely new one. Therefore the same goes for historiography, just like it is impossible to express reality through words, it is impossible to capture history in historiography, because language is its single means.

Sarah is not the only one who distorts the known facts in order to create her own version of Mary. Morton Jimroy, Mary's biographer, is another. Although he tries to present himself as a serious biographer (for example in his letters to Sarah), and emphasizes his "compulsion to *document document document*" (MS, 48, italics in the original), as well as his conviction that "the oxygen of the biographer is not … speculation; it is the small careful proofs that he pins down and sits hard upon" (MS, 49), he is consequently revealed to be a liar.

Jimroy's being an instinctive liar is part of his character portrayal: at the beginning of the narrative, where he functions as a focalizer, he is depicted as someone who lies twice within a short period of time (see MS, 73-74), although lying in those cases can be considered justified. Yet, it reveals an important side of Jimroy's character - his effortless lying. Lying proves to be an inherent part of him, as he later lies to Mary Swann's daughter about the stolen pen and also to Rose Hindmarch about the stolen photograph, while he had committed both thefts. He also proves to be a liar in his profession and the image of him as a biographer, who carefully documents, is shattered to pieces. When describing his work on Ezra Pound's biography, it becomes clear that a biographer has

[183] Shields, "Narrative Hunger," 23.
[184] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 242.

the power to create his subject. All it takes is to leave out a piece of evidence here, and piece of evidence there, or just "pile massive incriminating quotations onto the page, worrying not a whit that they might be out of context. What was the point of context anyway" (MS, 83-84)? Creating the subject how the biographer chooses, regardless of the facts, context, or documentation, is presented as an easy thing to do and Jimroy is depicted as someone who would not hesitate to do it.

Jimroy's process of creating his version of Ezra Pound includes another thought relevant for the argument of this thesis: "what was the difference … between an ellipsis and a vacuum" (MS, 86)? This question is relevant for historiography and the postmodern challenge. If there is no document supporting biographer's, or historian's theory, s/he cannot proceed with it. But if there is a document that contradicts the theory and s/he fails to acknowledge it in order not to lose the theory, what is lost – and what is the difference between an ellipsis and a vacuum in such case – is the truth. The issue of retrievablity of historical truth persists, because in both cases – either when no document exists, or when it is conveniently forgotten – historical truth is lost and irretrievable. Jimroy believes that biographer judges and interprets his subject out of love (see MS, 84), just like White claimed that historian interprets the historical event s/he writes about.[185] Words of Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly are more than valid in such case:

> "the subjects of ... biographies are always constructions. The knowledge ... biographers provide is not a 'true' representation of an independently existing reality. At best they can show a representation of life that we accept as a plausible expression of the flux and vicissitudes of life."[186]

[185] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 51-80.
[186] Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly, "Carol Shields: A (De)Constructivist Approach to Identity in Auto/Biography Writing," in *Latitude 63° North: Proceedings of the 8th Interational Region and Nation Literature Conference*, ed. David Bell (Östersund: Mid-Sweden University College, 2002), 300.

If biographies are constructions, so is historiography, as the process of writing them both is identical.

Jimroy's reconstruction of Mary's character is undeniably romanticized, and he is aware of it:

> "Jimroy's nose feels tweaked by tears when he thinks of Mary Swann's reddened hands grasping the stub of a pencil and putting together the first extraordinary stanza of 'Lilacs' (But he romances; it is believed that even her early poems were written with a fountain pen)" (MS, 87).

Jimroy feels for his subject, in a way he loves his subject, but it drives him away from objectivity and away from facts. This particular part is highly ironic though – because later it is revealed that Mary Swann indeed wrote her poems with a pencil and only afterwards she transcribed them in pen (see MS,113). Hence what seems to be a subjective interpretation based on a romanticized vision of Mary, is true all along, while deemed as biased and untrue even by the originator of the idea.

Being accidentaly right, nevertheless, does not mean that Jimroy is capable of capturing the 'true' Mary Swann. He creates his own version of Mary, just like Sarah. Just like Sarah throwing away Mary's rhyming dictionary, Jimroy decides to "withhold the underwear letter from his book, and he had 'misplaced' another, which referred to a 'nigger family' the astonished Mary Swann saw in Elgin one summer" (MS, 88). Jimroy's version of Mary can be neither trivial, nor racist. The documents Jimroy has at his disposal are not helpful anyway. In the letters by Mary herself she proves to be an unreliable narrator of her own life: "she was unreliable about dates, contradictory about events, occasionally untruthful" (MS, 88). This is another usage of irony by Shields: Jimroy, the liar and an unreliable narrator of his biographies, is writing a biography of an unreliable narrator. The truth, the reality, the personal history of Mary's cannot be more lost.

Even interviews with Mary's daughter Frances do not shed any light on who Mary truly was. Jimroy's questions are answered with exasperated "heaven only knows" (MS, 93) and as for the literary influences, where Jimroy expects Jane Austen, Frances confirms Rose Hindmarch's statement that Mary liked Edna Ferber (see MS, 93). Mary once again elusively slithers from Jimroy's grasp and irretrievability of the facts about her is once again emphasized. Even more so when Jimroy ponders about possible sources on Mary and comes to the conclusion that almost anyone who could know anyting about her is either retarded, senile, unreliable or just does not remember (see MS, 107). Yet Jimroy does not give up and is determined to create his Mary, regardless of her daughter claims:

> "Of course he can surmise certain things, influences for instance. He is almost sure she came in contact with the work of Emily Dickinson, regardless of what Frances Moore says. He intends to mention, to comment extensively, in fact, on the Dickinsonian influence, and sees no point … in taking up the Edna Ferber influence, it is too ludicrous." (MS, 110)

Too ludicrous would also be not mentioning the influence of Jane Austen, although that is another influence which is never confirmed by any of the sources. This does not stop Jimroy from fantasizing and presenting his fantasies as facts: "He is going over some notes covering Mary Swann's middle period (1940-1955) and making a few additions and notations … *It is highly probable that Swann read Jane Austen during this period because*..." (MS, 118, italics in the original). He consciously lies, yet wraps his lies in academic discourse, using shifters, such as 'it is highly probable.' Here Jimroy abandons the realm of the documented fact and takes up his own mission of telling the world who Mary Swann was. Nevertheless, his version of Mary is nothing more than a figment of his imagination. As Morgan suggests, Jimroy is behaving similarly to Sarah when recreating Mary: "Jimroy wants an

alliance with the canon, Sarah wants a 'poetic' soul in the romance tradition."[187] Their desires may be different, but the result is the same.

Ludicrousness of Jimroy's assumptions, presented as facts, is fully revealed at the Swann Symposium, where Jimroy's fake research of the Swannian influences is debunked by professor Boswell. He points out that Mary Swann could not ever have been influenced by the poets Jimroy mentions, because the only library she had ever had an access to was Nadeau library, and Nadeau library does not possess a single publication by T. S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson on any other of the influences attributed to Mary (see MS, 258-260). But then again, when Buswell claims that "the resources of the Nadeau Public Library *cannot* seriously be considered as an influence" (MS, 260) he is making the same mistake as Jimroy and Sarah – imagining a particular version of Mary. Nadeau library could have been an influence, only different from what Buswell (or any other person at the Symposium) imagines it to be.

Therefore also Buswell willingly ignores the facts because they do not fit his theory. When defeated and exasperated Jimroy admits that the one book he is absolutely sure Mary Swann read (as was confirmed by her daughter) was *Mother Goose*, Buswell reacts with an "appalled laugh" (MS, 261) dismissing Jimroy's statement as untrue and the other Symposium participants immediately start calling Jimroy "bloody rude son of a –" (MS, 261). This ardent refusal of data that does not fit the pre-created image of Mary underlines the absence of Mary Swann and the ultimate irretrievability of her personna. As Gamble states, "Mary Swann … is simply not recuperable. All 'Mary Swann' really consists of is a collection of artefacts – her collection of poetry, two blurred photographs, the Parker pen with which she wrote, her notebook, her rhyming dictionary"[188] and with as little as this, creation of Mary Swann is initiated. The rest is imagination of those who try to discover her.

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[187] Patricia Joan Morgan, *Transgressive Play: Narrative Strategies in the Novels and Short Stories of Carol Shields* (North York: York University, 1997), 164.
[188] Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 53.

The way Rose Hindmarch re-creates Mary is different. Rose is not an academic and she does not need to build up a career by analysing Mary's poems or 'finding' Mary. She is the Nadeau Public Library administrator and a desk clerk who for years kept lending Mary books, but never actually spoke to her more than just a few sentences. Rose, similarly to Morton Jimroy, is disclosed as a liar, though her motivation is different. Seduced by the thought of being interesting for a famous biographer, such as Jimroy, Rose is desperate to keep his attention (see MS, 150) and since Jimroy's attention is focused on Mary, Mary becomes the means through which Rose can remain interesting for Jimroy, too. At first, she widens the scope of themes she supposedly discussed with Mary. Those are trivial and irrelevant for Jimroy, as they do not match his version of Mary and do not help him re-create Mary in the way he wants: "we used to chat about this and that. About the weather. I knew her daugter, Frances, a little at school. I used to ask her how Frances was getting along out in California, that kind of thing" (MS, 144). So far what Rose says is not strictly speaking untrue, as Rose did know Frances and one cannot reveal much about oneself during small talk. The actual conversation between Rose and Mary on the subject of weather, however, went as follows: "Nice weather we're having, Mrs. Swann. Won't be long till the snow flies" (MS, 152). Mary's answers are not mentioned, suggesting that there probably were none. Mary remains a silenced voice. Shields is once again ironic, as this one-sided conversation that Rose supposedly had with Mary is a metaphor for the process of re-creation of Mary – a lot of talking, but saying nothing that would bear actual relevance to who Mary really was. Creating something out of nothing through exaggeration, projecting one's own desires and using Mary as a means to an end – that is how versions of Mary come to existence.

When Rose says goodbye to Jimroy (as she cannot think of anything that would make him stay any longer), the remorse of growing

bolder and bolder when talking about Mary, and finishing with blatantly lying strikes her with full force:

> "She had not intended to exaggerate her friendship with Mary Swann. Friendship! … The two of them had not gone for long walks together. They had not discussed … the books Mary Swann borrowed from the library. Mary Swann had not given Rose Hindmarch copies of her poems to read and comment upon. They had not ... discussed their deeply shared feeling about literature or about families or about nature. … Mary Swann had been a virtual stranger to Rose Hindmarch, just as she was to everyone else in Nadeau, Ontario." (MS, 152)

The only true fact known about Mary resurfaces again: "A woman who kept to herself, that was Mary Swann" (MS, 152). This is the truth that every character involved in re-creation of Mary Swann ignores as it is either insufficient for their purposes or it does not match their pre-created image of Mary.

Still, even though Rose did not know Mary any more than Sarah or Jimroy, she is capable of interpreting Mary's actions and her poems much more realistically than the academics. Rose's dialogue with Jimroy is an obvious example. In this dialogue Shields ironizes Jimroy's fictionalization of Mary. When he fantasizes about the reasons why Mary avoided "so religiously" (MS, 147) going to church, Rose weighs in with a practical and down-to-earth remark: "Clothes, probably … she probably didn't have the right clothes" (MS, 147). Jimroy overtly ignores an important fact about life in a close communities in rural Ontario – that such a thing as clothes matters so much that it may prevent one from going to church, or that church is probably the only place where a poor farmer's wife can wear good clothes – and concentrates on his fantasies about Mary's spirituality being "less explicit … outside the bounds, as it were, of church doctrine" (MS, 147). These are repudiated by practical Rose when she says "I know it sounds silly, but a few years ago it was different. You just didn't set foot in church without a hat, not in Nadeau,

not in the United Church. And gloves. Mrs. Swann didn't have a hat or gloves" (MS, 147). Rose is, without knowing it, providing Jimroy with useful material for a truthful biography of Mary's, but he ignores it, just like Sarah decided to ignore the existence of the rhyming dictionary. Rose, pretending to have known Mary better than she actually did, does know her better, because she is acquainted with the same environment as Mary was and is capable of understanding its restrictions on an individual and the ways it makes one behave. Jimroy fails to recognize this and continues to search for the answers he requires, suggesting that Mary expressed in her poems "profound sense of Angst" (MS, 147). Desperate to keep alive the suggestion that Mary was somehow acquainted with the works of existencialists he claims: "I don't suppose our Swann read the existentialists, at least there is no concrete evidence that she did, but she was most assuredly affected by the trickle-down despair of our century" (MS, 147). This example demonstrates how unwilling he is to let go of the thought of Mary who is equipped with the knowledge of existentialist angst, pointing out that the only reason why he cannot openly claim so is because there is (at least) no concrete evidence of it; as if such an evidence could resurface any minute.

Rose, however, does use Mary similarly to Sarah and Jimroy – for her own promotion. Rose is a proud citizen of Nadeau and she takes special pride in establishing and furnishing Mary Swann Memorial Room in the old high school in Nadeau. Being a "local expert on Mary Swann" (MS, 151) is her own way of publicizing herself and making herself feel important. The trouble Rose encounters when furnishing the room is similar to Jimroy's troubles when collecting the material for biography. In Swann's house she finds very few suitable items; suitable for her naïve idea of Mary, the celebrated poetess. In the Swann's house, Rose does a similar selection of the useful material like Sarah with the rhyming dictionary and Jimroy with the evidence: "Rose took the kitchen table, two of the better kitchen chairs … and a few cooking utensils …

She left behind the bent rusty carving knife and the nickel-plated forks and spoons" (MS, 163). The rest of the items for furnishing the Memorial room Rose bought at auctions or Antique Barn or Antique shop. She watched proudly how the Memorial room "took shape, acquiring a look of authenticity" (MS, 163), and if she had doubts about the truthful representation, she silenced the remorse with the acknowledgement that after all, the things she bought "belong to the *time* and the *region* of which Mary Swann was a part, and therefore nothing is misrepresented" (MS, 163, italics in the original). Nothing being misrepresented is an ironic remark, as the things that are supposed to represent Mary only represent Rose's version of her, therefore everything about that Memorial room is misrepresented. Mary Swann never owned quilts, or a framed picture of a cocker-spaniel or books by Dickens and Sir Walter Scott. The impression the visitors have from the room is very different from the original stern and half-empty Swann's house, with only the most necessary utensils, well-worn and old. From what Rose could see in the house, there was no place for embellishments or femininity in Mary Swann's life. Therefore providing Memorial room of Mary's with a "fanciful, feminine iron bedstead" (MS, 163) is presenting a very misleading image of the woman Mary was supposed to be. Shields ironizes again with the claim that "the charm of falsehood is not that it distorts reality, but it creates reality afresh" (MS, 163). The version of Mary which Rose creates, is a new Mary, and a different Mary than that created by Jimroy or Sarah. All three versions, however, have something in common – they bear little likeness to the woman who kept to herself.

Frederick Cruzzi, Mary's publisher plays the most mischievous role in the process of creating Mary Swann. He does not attempt to recreate Mary as a person, nor is he interested in what kind of woman she was. On the contrary, he is the voice of reason, who, when talking to Sarah about Mary's love poems, grounds her boisterous and unrealistic assumptions. When Sarah mentions that Mary may have had a lover to

whom she dedicated her love poems, Cruzzi looks at her in disbelief and claims: "That exhausted woman" (MS, 279)? Cruzzi also deflates Jimroy's interpretations and flamboyant assumptions about what Mary may have thought: "'I suppose this was a moment of epiphany for her,' Morton Jimroy had commented" (MS, 216). Cruzzi plainly answers: "I have no idea … what she was thinking" (MS, 216). When Jimroy pushes Cruzzi to reveal more details of his conversation with Mary, Cruzzi simply states "this conversation took place in 1965. I cannot possibly … reconstruct our conversation in its entirety" (MS, 216). Through Cruzzi Shields points out another aspect that problematizes truthfulness of historical sources and evidence: they are all based on memory of certain individuals - be it witnesses or primary sources - and human memory is fallible, unreliable from its very nature. Cruzzi ridicules Jimroy's persistence and unrealistic expectations: "'What were the last words she said to you?' Morton Jimroy asked, pressing the release button on his tape recorder. … 'She said goodbye'" (MS, 217). Jimroy intuitively expects big gestures, big words that would be worthy of Mary's supposed genius. He expects nothing less than all-revealing, all-embracing last words, like in a romantic novel. Down-to-earth Cruzzi provides him only with the truthful response, devoid of bigger-than-life meaning.

Ironically, Cruzzi is the greatest forger of Mary, greater than Sarah or Jimroy, or Rose. He is the designer of the artifacts that initiated all the interest in Mary in the first place – her poems. Mary's original poems were accidentally semi-destroyed by Cruzzi's wife, who stuffed the remains of the fish in the paper bag where the poems were (see MS, 220). Before that happened, Cruzzi had read them only once, and after the accident he and his wife Hildë did their best to restore the poems from Cruzzi's memory and the remnants of the wet, runny manuscript:

"At least half of the poems had escaped serious damage, and these they worked on first, Cruzzi reading them aloud while Hildë transcribed them in her round, ready handwriting … from the puddles of blue ink, words could be glimpsed, then guessed at … Hildë was quick to pick up Mary Swann's quirky syntax, and when she made guesses, they seemed to Cruzzi's ear laden with logic … Cautious at first, they grew bolder … Already they were referring to Hildë's transcribed notes, and not the drying, curling poems on the table as 'the manuscript.'" (MS, 222)

This is how Mary Swann's poems come to existence in the form that is known to the world. Recovered from memory of a person who read them once and from the puddles of blue ink. When Sarah writes to Cruzzi, claiming that she is wants to invite him to the Symposium because he was the one who midwifed Mary's poems (see MS, 191), she has no idea how very true that metaphor is. This is yet another of Shields's uses of irony in the novel.

The accidentally destroyed manuscript represents the lost source, the lost voice, which is replaced by another, non-genuine one. Even though it was inspired by the original, the second manuscript cannot replace it. Just like Rose's Memorial room of Mary Swann, the poems themselves, the poems that ignite the academic debate and recreation processes of Sarah's and Jimroy's, are not authentic. Even though Hildë claims that "she could feel what the inside of Mary Swann's head must look like" (MS, 223), it does not make the poems (especially the badly damaged ones) any less of an invention. In the slimy remnants of a fish, the only authentic documents of Mary's get lost, emphasizing the theme of loss and irretrievability. The fact that Mary is killed that very night during which the Cruzzis so feverishly work on her poems only underscores the finality of the loss and impossibility to retrieve the historical fact. Mary is silenced forever, just like her poems are lost forever. She cannot correct the new versions and thus her poems commence a life of their own.

In *Mary Swann,* Shields points out several key issues connected with postmodern challenge of historiography: unreliability of an individual' memory, impossibility of recovering one's personal history, manipulation with facts that may occur as a result of historian's / biographer's interpretation of his/her subject and the issue of unrecorded facts that may change the interpretation of a certain historical event / personal history altogether.

6.3. Memory, An Instrument of the Ultimate Loss: Irretrievability of Historical Fact Thematized

The theme of absence is repeatedly accentuated in *Mary Swann*. Patricia Morgan highlights its presence in the concluding part of the novel, entitled the Symposium:

> "In the final section of the novel all the absences collide. There are only actors and not the characters … There are no poems, no journal, no pen, no photograph and no Mary Swann. There are no clues to the existence of Mary Swann at all. The 'true' story of her published poems has not been recorded ... There can be no solution to a mystery that does not exist."[189]

Throughout the novel, mysterious vanishing of the artifacts connected with Mary Swann (including the last remaining copies of *Swann Songs*) occurs. Sarah 'lost' Mary's journal and her copy of *Swann Songs.* The copy of the journal and other papers on Mary from the university archives disappeared without a trace. Rose Hindmarch 'loses' one of the two photos of Mary Swann. Frances 'loses' her mother's parker pen. At the Symposium, all the copies of *Swann Songs* disappear and so do all the academic papers that were to be presented. The one remaining photograph of Mary, which Rose brought to the symposium, disappears

[189] Morgan, "Transgressive Play," 189.

during the night. All these mysterious losses are actually thefts, some done by Morton Jimroy (photograph and pen), and the rest by Sarah's lover and book seller, Brownie.

Brownie becomes responsible for the final and irreversible loss of all the materials on Mary at the Symposium, when he runs away and throws a pillowcase filled with stolen artifacts out of the window. The whole of Mary Swann "falls through the air; some of its contents fly out as it descends, mixing with the snow and carried by the wind into the street" (MS, 309). All the materials are destroyed and there is nothing written on Mary, or by Mary. From that moment, similarly to the night when she was killed, all the versions of Mary stop existing in themselves and they only exists in terms of the minds of the scholars at the symposium, thus recalling the ontological question of human existence raised by E. M. Forster in *Passage to India* (1924).[190] The real Mary Swann stopped existing the night her husband killed her and none of the re-creation efforts of the scholars succeeded in reviving her. Brownie's act of destruction in a way repeats the murder and kills the re-created Marys – Sarah's enigmatic Mary with secret lover and even more secret understanding of how the universe works, Jimroy's genius and profoundly modern poetess with acute angst awareness, Cruzzi's exhausted and worn "beautiful toothless witch" (MS, 218), or Rose's almost-an-intimate-friend, who may have had a framed picture of a cocker-spaniel in her house.

The concluding section of the book, apart from emphasizing metafictional nature of the novel, continues thematizing the ultimate loss. When all the artifacts are lost and cannot be recovered, the only thing that remains is the memory of the participants and academics who devoted their careers to Mary Swann. The problem with memory, as had already been hinted at during Cruzzi's dialogue with Jimroy, is that it

[190] See E. M. Forster, *Passage to India* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1952), 108. The exact quote goes as follows: "... he lost his usual sane view of human intercourse and felt that we exist not in ourselves, but in terms of each other's minds."

"alters and distorts our most intimate settings so that passion, forgiveness, and the currency of small daily bargains are largely stolen from us" (MS, 227). Memory is not constant. It is not reliable. It is influenced by the personality of its carrier, by the circumstances of his/her life. It is fluid. And yet it must serve as the basis for historical fact, in this case, historical fact of Mary Swann's existence and her work.

The process of the second recreation of Mary's work is described in the last scene of the script, where the members of the Symposium reconstrut a poem together. The poem is significantly entitled, "Lost Things." Unreliability of memory is accentuated again, when the participants need to come to terms with the possibility that each of them may remember the first line differently: "We all agree, then, on the first line," (MS, 311) says professor Buswell, suggesting that there had been a discussion about that line before. Another participant is almost sure that the second line of the poem was a run-on line (see MS, 311). The poem itself is a melancholic testimony of irretrievability of certain objects, which serve as a metaphor for Mary Swann's work, but also in broader sense, for the irretrievability of personal history, and even history itself.

The poem's lines read as follows:

> "As though the lost things have withdrawn
> Into themselves, books returned
> To paper or wood or thought,
> Coins and spoons to simple ores,
> Lustreless and without history,
> waiting out of sight
> And becoming part of a larger loss
> Without a name
> Or definition or form" (MS, 313)

The poem is an open mourning over the ultimate loss not only of the artifacts (coins, spoons), but the larger piece of history to which those

small and simple artifacts belonged (becoming part of a larger loss). Those lost things in case of Mary Swann are not only the stolen copies of *Swann Songs*, her journal, her rhyming dictionary and the papers on her, but above all her original poems that ended up dissolved by the innards of the fish Hildë Cruzzi prepared for dinner. Lost was also her life, taken by her husband, and lost was her talent that never had the chance of a full presentation. Ultimately, lost is Mary's personal history, her voice and her identity. The question 'Who was Mary Swann?' is never answered and Mary is never discovered.

Similarly to Pullinger's *Weird Sister* and Atwood's *Alias Grace*, Shields thematizes fragility of historical fact and biography as a reconstruction of a personal history. She also mocks the notion of reliability of sources that historians or biographers depend on, be it chronicles, diaries or letters.

Sarah read the content of Mary Swann's journal many times, so she knows it well. Yet the object itself is lost (as are the copies) and she has to rely on her memory if she wants to recall the content of it. With the past it is similar. Some facts about it are known, some remnants of the past are preserved in documents, sources, yet the past itself is gone and cannot be retrieved. "History is the remembered past"[191] and as Morton Jimroy frequently emphasizes, memory is opaque (see MS, 26) and therefore unreliable. With the opacity of memory Jimroy is referring to Mary Swann's daughter's memory, yet his statement is applicable to everybody's memory. This is demonstrated in the scene in which Jimroy interviews Cruzzi, who is delighted to ridicule Jimroy's expectations that someone is capable of remembering a conversation from several decades ago. Jimroy himself serves as a demonstration of unreliability of memory: when he tries to remember the word for the Highlander's purse worn in front of the quilt but he cannot. The word surprises him then in

[191] John Lukacz, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 152.

the middle of the night, when he no longer remembers that he was trying to remember it (see MS, 100). Jimroy ponders on an increasing frequency of the troubles with memory: "a word or phrase or piece of trivia will completely slip out of his mind, only to reappear later when the need of it has passed. Objects mislaid, an appointment overlooked. It happens to everyone … and gets worse with age" (MS, 100). And yet, memory is the only thing that allows us to create history, memory that is recorded in journal entries, the letters, chronicles or witness's statements – all of them are records of the past events, even if these events happened a few days, or hours ago.

The issue that makes memory unreliable is not only the fading of it over time, but also an individual perspective. Two people may remember the same event differently, but if only one of them records it in the form of a letter or a journal entry, the voice of the other vanishes for ever. Which of the two voices described the event more reliably and objectivelly cannot be revealed. Not only because one of them is lost, but also because a representation of the past event faces the limitations of the language and language cannot reliably capture the reality (as was argued by Shields and Derrida).

Primary historical sources, based on someone's memory, are treated ironically in Frederick Cruzzi's part of *Mary Swann*. Part of the narrative consists of letters, some written by Cruzzi to a variety of addressees, some are addressed to Cruzzi. In one of the letters Cruzzi claims to be "a strict vegetarian, eschwing fowl as well as other animal proteins" (MS, 184), while in the letter that directly follows, Cruzzi's friend is inviting him for dinner, promising him "roast lamb and a good bottle of wine" (MS, 184). In Cruzzi's answer that follows the two letters we read that he has just "written a shameful and pompous letter … declining an unwanted invitation and claiming to be a vegetarian" (MS, 184). Such a juxtaposition of letters serves a similar purpose as juxtaposition of contrasting and contradictory historical documents in

Atwood's *Alias Grace.* In *Mary Swann*, these documents are fictional, unlike in *Alias Grace*, yet they serve a similar purpose of ridiculing supposed objectivity and 'truth' that can be extrapolated from them.

The event during which Mary Swann's poems were destroyed and recreated by Hildë and Cruzzi is recorded in a chapter playfully entitled "Frederic Cruzzi: An Unwritten Account of the Fifteenth of December, 1965" (MS, 205). The name of the chapter evokes a historical source, a statement or a confession of a witness, yet its name suggests that the content of it is a lost history. And indeed, Cruzzi is the only living person who knows what happened that night following Mary Swann's visit and he is not telling – hence the unwritten.

Similarly to Lolly's blind faith in old documents in *Weird Sister*, Shields portrays such a faith in the Symposium section of *Mary Swann*. When Sarah admits that she had lost Mary's journal, she becomes, understandably, the target of criticism, as the members of Symposium feel they have lost an important document that would undoubtedly have shed some light on Swann's poetry, her life and her personality. When Sarah, exasperated, tries to explain that there is nothing in the journal that might would serve such purpose (see MS, 268), the audience refuses to believe her, claiming that "there must be something" (MS, 268), that even such marginalia as shopping lists and comments on weather (see MS, 268) do "offer a glimpse of that private person behind –" (MS, 269). When Sarah vehemently claims that it "does not. Offer a glimpse" (MS, 269), another belief replaces the previous one and the participants claim that the problem is not the lack of any meaningful information in the journal, but Sarah's incapability to see the meaning in the data (see, MS, 272). No matter how hard Sarah tries, the faith in the meaning, hidden in a written document, a remnant of the personal past of Mary Swann, will not be shaken. For Lolly in *Weird Sister* it was enough that the document was written in the 16th century. For the members of Swann Symposium it is enough that the document was written by Mary Swann herself. In

both instances they demonstrate a complete faith in document's truthfulness, reliability and informational value. Gamble states that Shields's work resonates with Hayden White's words stated back in 1970s: "while Shields goes along with the postmodern view that history, like fiction, is a discourse, she also follows up on the implications of such an assumption."[192] In this chapter we could see how her follow-up on White's theory looks like. In the words of Patricia Morgan: "Cruzzi' s collection of Swann's poetry is false, Sarah's work on Swann hides her essential ordinariness, Jimroy's biography is an exercise in wish fulfillment and Rose's friendship with Mary is a lie."[193] Shields ridicules the belief that truth about past can be found in historical documents. She ironizes the work of historians and biographers, she emphasizes that the personality and perspective of a historian / biographer gives shape to historiography / biography just as much, if not more, as the nature or personality of the subject. True nature of historical event or a true identity of a person remains mystery, mystery being an all encompassing word in this case as history, personal history, memory and identity are mystery, irretrievable, lost, like Swann's original texts, like her identity, like herself.

[192]Gamble, "Filling the Creative Void," 45.
[193] Morgan, *Transgressive Play*, 155-6.

Conclusion

"How can we know the past today – and what can we know about it?"[194] Such is the question Linda Hutcheon raises in her study on postmodernism, recalling the dispute that has been raging among the historians, literary theoreticians and philosophers of history since 1970s when Roland Barthes and Hayden White challenged the borderline between historiography and fiction and popularized R. G. Collingwood's notion that historian was above all a storyteller. Claim that on the discourse level, historiography is no different from fiction became one of the most prominent facets of so called postmodern challenge of historiography. In its most basic form postmodern challenge questions the scientific status of history, asks the unpleasant questions regarding the representation of the past in historiography and claims that the written history is always an outcome of an interpretation of the known facts. Another facet of postmodern challenge points to the existence of many individuals in the past whose voices were silenced, deemed unimportant or redundant for history. These individuals thus became the silent voices, silenced witnesses who existed, yet their perspectives, testimonies or personal histories are forgotten or lost. Last but not least, postmodern challenge conveys a pessimistic notion that it is impossible to retrieve the past and therefore it is impossible to know it. First reason why, is inability to capture historical truth, as the only available means historiography has at its disposal is the language, which, in Derrida's words, creates reality rather than refers to it. Thus to capture the past in its true form in a narrative is impossible, as the language would create historical reality. The limitations of language are only a part of the problem with recovering the past. The other being the missing documents, incomplete testimonies and above all, unreliable testimonies, given by unreliable witnesses and unreliable primary sources. This

[194] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, 92.

unreliability is given thanks to the very nature of human memory, and memory is what most historical sources rely on (be it chronicles, letters, confessions, journal entries etc.). Not only is human memory fallible, it is also influenced by the context of its bearer, be it a context cultural or personal. And, as Dominick LaCapra accentuated, the contexts from which the sources emerge are often multiple and conflicting, but above all, often hidden and irrecoverable. Therefore, through the prism of postmodern challenge, historiography is considered as incapable of conveying the truth about the past and cannot offer its truthful representation.

This dissertation focused on the problematics of postmodern challenge of historiography in all its aspects and provided an analysis of the reflection of it in selected English-written postmodern Canadian novels by female authors. The aims of this thesis were threefold. The first was to demonstrate that Canadian postmodern novels embraced the postmodern challenge of historiography and called into question objectivity and reliability of the representation of the past in historiography while emphasizing the forgotten, or ignored existence of the silent voices - people whose perspective, their personal histories were never sufficiently (if at all) recorded. With this focus it is feasible to claim that Canadian literature partially reacts to the history of its continent, taken over by European conquerors, wiping out many of the indigenous inhabitants together with their own, unique history. Many aboriginal tribes thus became the silent voices, whose testimony will remain lost forever.

The second aim was to demonstrate the techniques which the authors of the selected novels used to challenge the objectivity of historiography and the notion of history as the truthful representation of the past. The analysed techniques included usage of an unreliable homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator, metafictional elements, writing novels that represent a thoroughly postmodern genre of historiographic

metafiction, and juxtaposition of contradictory historical documents, thus demonstrating the unreliability of such.

The third aim was to show that the selected postmodern Canadian novelists emphasized the irretrievability and the ultimate loss of the past by thematizing history and historiography in their novels and using symbols that function as representations of the vanishing, or irrecoverable past.

My dissertation aimed to be a case study, so in no way am I claiming that the reaction of postmodern literature towards postmodern challenge of historiography, in the way I described it, is to be found in all postmodern Canadian literature which is inspired by the past and historiography. The techniques I determined occur in the chosen three novels, which illustrate a diversity of the approaches to postmodern challenge and yet share the suffient amount of common features. In the theoretical part of my dissertation I foreshadowed the problematics of the postmodern challenge of historiography in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the movements and countermovements that reacted to it. In the analytical part of my dissertation I provided narratological and thematic analyses of the novels, carried out by the method of close reading.

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, inspired by a micro-historical event, revives a figure of a convicted murderess from the 19th century. In this novel, which represents the genre of historiographic metafiction as defined by Linda Hutcheon, Atwood presents a complex narrative situation, in which homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives alternate. I focused on the analysis of the homodiegetic narrative, delivered by Grace Marks, and scrutinized it for textual signals of unreliability. In academic papers on the subject, Grace is commonly referred to as an unreliable narrator, because she openly states her intention to tell lies. However, in my thesis I decided to implement a theory of unreliability by a Czech narratologist, Tomáš Kubíček, who approaches unreliability

of a homodiegetic narrator differently than for example Ansgar Nünning, James Phelan, or Monika Fludernik. Kubíček claims that if the narrator reliably marks his/her own unreliability, we cannot consider him/her unreliable. Therefore, in the light of Kubíček's theory, Grace cannot be labeled as an unreliable narrator only because she says "I perhaps will tell you lies," (AG, 46). Her case is narratologically more complicated. She creates two narrative plans – one towards the character of a fictional psychiatrist, Simon Jordan, the second towards the narrattee. Grace's intention to lie is stated in the communicative plan with Simon, while towards the narratee she sends the signals of the opposite intention (frequent corrections of her statements for Simon). Therefore it can be assumed that in the communicative plan with the narratee Grace intends to be truthful. Nevertheless, the scrutiny of Grace's narrative plan with the narratee revealed that it contains numerous textual signals of unreliability, such as Grace entangling herself with the facts she presents, or the discrepancy between what she claims to be like and what her actions reveal her to be like. Based on the analysis, Grace can indeed be identified as an unreliable homodiegetic narrator. Grace Marks thus retains her air of mystery and remains a figure whose secrets will not be revealed. Even though she is given a voice and has a chance to narrate her story, the truth of her past is irretrievable.

The second strategy Atwood used to undermine the reliabiliy of historical fact was juxtaposition of contradictory, or contrasting documents or historical or artistic nature at the beginning of each part of the novel. These documents include for example confessions of Grace Marks and her accomplice, James McDermott, records from the employees at Kingston Penitentiary (where Grace was imprisoned), articles from the contemporary newspapers that reported on Grace's trial, contemporary ballads that recounted the story of the murders Grace was supposed to commit, non-fictional account of Grace's case by Susanna Moodie etc. By highlighting obvious contradictions in the documents

Atwood discredited their reliability as historical sources and with it she also buried the possibility of discovering historical truth about Grace Marks.

Kate Pullinger's *Weird Sister* grasps the postmodern challenge of historiography differently than *Alias Grace*, yet the aims are similar – to discredit reliability of historical fact and reject the notion of retrievability of truthful representation of the past. Inspired by a micro-historical event of the 16th century witch hunts in an English village of Warboys, the novel extensively thematizes history and historiography, and presents, similarly to *Alias Grace*, a mysterious female character – Agnes Samuel, a fictional re-creation of a fifteen-year-old Agnes Samuel, who was hanged for witchcraft in 1593. Pullinger's Agnes is a mystery incarnate, utterly modern and simultaneously deeply rooted in the local history of Warboys, irresistibly charming and disdainfuly hateful at the same time, nothing and no one can unveil her true identity and find an answer to the fundamental question the novel asks: "Who is Agnes?"

Agnes's impenetrable mystery is reflected also in the narrative structure. The novel is narrated by two homodiegetic narrators and a heterodiegetic narrator. Similarly to *Alias Grace*, my narratological analysis of this novel aimed at revealing (an) unreliable narrator(s). Also in this case, the narratological analysis was performed in the light of Kubíček's theory of unreliability. Although the probability of unreliability is traditionally higher in a homodiegetic narrative, in *Weird Sister* this proved not to be the case. The narrative of the first homodiegetic narrator, Robert Throckmorton showed no textual signals of unreliability; on the contrary, it contained many corrections and explanations whenever a discrepancy between what he said and what other characters said occurs. Also the second homodiegetic narrative, by Elizabeth, was devoid of any textual signals of unreliability.

The situation was different with heterodiegetic narrator. Even though s/he appeared to be an extradiegetic narrator, whose sole function

in the text is to narrate and be detached from the diegesis, the outcome of the narratological analysis revealed that this narrator thematized in the text, and is therefore intradiegetic. As for his/her unreliability, analysis disclosed several textual signals that point to the fact that this narrator is indeed an unreliable one. The heterodiegetic narrator contradicted him/herself within his/her own narrative, there was a discrepancy between what s/he said and what Robert or other characters said and there was also an issue with his/her problematic omniscience. The narrator demonstrated his/her ability to access the minds of all characters that inhabit the fictional world of *Weird Sister*, including Agnes Samuel. Yet, the insight into Agnes's mind was very limited and scarce and never revealed anything about Agnes's identity. Therefore the heterodiegetic narrator resolved to keep the true identity of Agnes a secret, even though s/he was the only one who could unveil it. As such, the narrator caused a significant change in the semantic construction of the novel, which, in concordance with Kubíček's theory, constituted his/her unreliability. By using an unreliable heterodiegetic (omniscient) narrator, Pullinger successfuly undermined the trust in the reliability of traditional narratives, narrated by omniscient narrators, including historiography.

Weird Sister also extensively thematizes history and historiography through two main symbols. One is Agnes Samuel herself, who functions as an ambiguous symbol. On the one hand she is connected with the local history of Warboys, as she may be an incarnation of historical Agnes Samuel, on the other hand she symbolizes an erasor, a destructor of history - a person who is thorougly modern and requires modern things around her, which is the reason why the extensive reconstruction of the ancient Throckmorton house was initiated. The Throckmorton house, the setting of the real Warboys events of the 16th century served as another symbol. Its fragility suggested fragility of the process in which historical fact is being retrieved from surviving materials. The house is described as a shell, inside of which must be

reconstructed anew, evoking the process of reconstruction of an historical event.

Carol Shields' *Mary Swann* presents a multiperspecive narrative (as defined by Kubíček), which serves the purpose of pointing out a diversity of possible perspectives, and thus points out a limited validity of a single perspective. *Mary Swann* represents historiographic metafiction as defined by Lubomír Doležel, who understands it as a reconstruction of a personal history of a fictional character. *Mary Swann* is a quest for a reconstruction of a personal history and identity of an enigmatic Ontario poetess, Mary Swann. Shields embraces postmodern challenge of historiography in a unique way – by approaching it through the problematics of writing biographies. With *Mary Swann* Shields points out that biographies, and by extension also historiography, are constructs that are easily manipulated by those who are writing them. By presenting a female character, who is, similarly to Agnes Samuel, veiled in impenetrable mystery, the novel revolves around the question "Who was Mary Swann?" All the characters who attempt to discover the true Mary fail in their effort, yet each of them constructs their own version of her. The novel also points to the issues with human memory, responsible for many historical documents, and identifies it as a flawed and unreliable medium. Thus *Mary Swann* fulfils the same goal as *Alias Grace* and *Weird Sister* – it accentuates the irretrievability of the past and the impossibility of truly knowing it.

In *Mary Swann*, absence and the ultimate loss of someone's personal history and identity are thematized. The documents and sources on Mary mysteriously vanish and even before that vanished, they proved to be of no informational value regarding Mary Swann. Thus Shields challenges and ironizes the informational value of historical sources in general. Absence and the ultimate loss of Mary Swann is stressed when it is revealed that her poems, considered to be her creation, the testimonies

of her mind and her vision of the world, were actually only inspired by Mary's original poems, which were destroyed in an unfortunate incident.

The novel accentuates its fictionality my adding metafictional feature – the last part of the novel, which reveals that all the characters who feverishly re-created Mary Swann, are in reality actors in a prepared film. Therefore Mary and her personal history are lost in several ways: When her original poems are replaced by poems inspired by the originals, when her personna is re-created, resulting in several versions of Mary, and finally, when she is doubly fictionalized by revealing that the people who were fictionalizing her in the first place, are themselves fictional film characters.

Postmodern Canadian female authors in the selected novels demonstrably embraced postmodern challenge of historiography and each of them shows a different reflection of it, yet with the same goal. All of them present a so called lost, silenced voice – a character who is shrouded in mystery and whose identity and secrets cannot be recovered. Those silent voices represent all the lost voices in history, all the people who did not make it to the official records, all those that Salman Rushdie so aptly named the weak, the anonymous, the defeated.[195] It might be a way how to come to terms with the reality of European conquest of North American continent, which resulted in wiping out of thousands original inhabitants together with their history. That may be the reason why, just like Marcel Proust attempted to search for lost time (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1992), postmodern Canadian writers attempt to find the lost history. By giving voices or centering their novels around those who were forgotten or deemed unimportant, they attempt to quench at least partially the thirst for what was lost in the whirlpool of time.

[195] See Rushdie, *Shame*, 124.

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