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Bakalářská práce

The Search for Identity and Creating Parallel Worlds in The House of Sleep by J. Coe

Hledání identity a vytváření paralelních světů v románu J. Coea Dům spánku

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Abstract

The subject matter of this thesis is to analyse the novel *The House of Sleep* by Jonathan Coe in the context of the contemporary British experimental prose. In the theoretical part the work will focus on the main features and the development of the British postmodern novel and it will analyse the role and functions of sleep. Additionally, it will deal with the topics the search for identity and creating parallel worlds. In the practical part it will elaborate the dominant motif of insanity and it will focus on the ambiguity of the chief protagonists including the ambiguity of their sexual orientation. Last but not least, this thesis will provide a thematic analysis of the main characters in the context of the absence or the unfulfillment of their desires. Besides, this thesis will attempt to find out the basic traits of the narrative technique typical of postmodern novels.

Anotace

Předmětem této práce je analýza románu Jonathana Coea *The House of Sleep* (Dům spánku) v kontextu současné britské experimentální prózy. V teoretické části se práce zaměří na hlavní rysy a vývoj britského postmoderního románu a zanalyzuje roli a funkce spánku. Dále se bude zabývat tématy hledání vlastní identity a budování paralelních světů. V praktické části rozpracuje dominantní motiv šílenství, zaměří se na nejednoznačnost postav včetně nejednoznačnosti jejich sexuální orientace a v neposlední řadě provede tematickou analýzu hlavních postav v kontextu absence či nenaplněnosti jejich touhy. Práce se rovněž pokusí vysledovat základní rysy narativní techniky typické pro postmoderní román.

Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. British Experimental Prose.....	8
2. 1. Postmodernism	8
2. 2. Postmodern Literary Characters	9
2. 3. Ways towards the Contemporary British Novel	10
2. 4. Specifics of the Contemporary British Novel	12
2. 5. Themes and Motifs	15
2. 5. 1. Identity and Parallel Worlds.....	16
2. 5. 2. Sexual Identity and Gay Fiction.....	17
2. 5. 3. Insanity.....	19
3. Sleep.....	22
3. 1. General Characteristics	22
3. 2. Sleep Stages	23
3. 3. Importance of Sleep.....	24
3. 4. The Function of the Dream	25
3. 4. 1. Freud's Theory	25
3. 4. 2. Jung's Theory	26
3. 5. Sleep Disorders	27
3. 5. 1. Narcolepsy.....	27
3. 5. 2. Insomnia.....	28
3. 6. Deepak Chopra's Restful Sleep Theory.....	28
4. The House of Sleep	32

4. 1. Author	32
4.2. Plot and Characters.....	33
4. 2. 1. Sarah	33
4. 2. 2. Veronica	38
4. 2. 3. Terry	40
4. 2. 4. Robert.....	43
4. 2. 5. Gregory.....	48
4. 3. Basic Themes.....	49
4.4. Narrative Strategy; Style and Language	52
4.5. Weak Points	54
4. 6. Additional Comments	55
5. Conclusion.....	57
6. Résumé	60
7. Bibliography	

1. Introduction

The human mind ranks among the greatest mysteries of this world. Although it is a possession of all of us, an inseparable part of both our material and mental essence, its mechanisms are mostly concealed from us. Does it influence us or do we have an impact on it? Who is whose possession? Such questions are thought provoking and possible answers to them might be fascinating. Yet, yield them to philosophers who, unlike us – common readers, have hopefully become reconciled to the fact that it is not in our power to work out any concrete and definite solutions.

Nonetheless, there are questions relating to the human mind that are worth dealing with since they enable us to understand better the world we live in. This text is going this way. The goals of this thesis are following:

- a) to describe and to explain the chief features of British experimental prose;
- b) on the basis of a) to reveal key changes in the mentality of the contemporary British society that as it is clear from a) reflect in literature and other art branches;
- c) to characterise the role and functions of sleep and dreams in the human life, in other words – the impact of the sleeping mind on the active one;
- d) to analyse the novel *The House of Sleep* by Jonathan Coe which exemplifies the British experimental prose and that is based on b) and c);
- e) to draw conclusions on the importance and character of the main heroes in the novel *The House of Sleep* on the ground of the theoretical findings from a), b) and c) and from the practical analysis in d);
- f) to determine the main character of the novel and to justify the choice.

This thesis does neither strive for being ranked among top expert analyses nor does it aim to become a breakthrough work in the field of English literature. It modestly wishes it presented the most significant information about the analysed topics and it was an inspiring and readable text for its future readers.

2. British Experimental Prose

2. 1. Postmodernism

The British experimental prose is to be found chiefly in the contemporary era. When we talk about the British experimental novel, we mean the writings that have been published within the last four decades and that are usually labelled as postmodern literature.

There is an immense number of books, articles and essays dealing with the age of postmodernism and defining its features. However, there is mostly one thing that they all do agree on: they assert that postmodernism is so specific and so unclear that it is indefinable in fact.

Nevertheless, as already indicated, there are many theoretical approaches that try to reveal and to sum up its basic characteristics. One of them and probably one of the most famous and respected ones is Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation of the postmodern society. A short summary of it is to be found in the following lines.

Human life has become a city life. Man lives in a prison that he has built himself and the freedom he has is enclosed into the prison's walls. We are addicted to things that we have made but all of a sudden the creative power is gone and we do not know how to act or how to go on. Life is a city life but the city is a jungle where ethic and morals have no place (Bauman, 2002).

Every day we face up to chaos and absurdity. There is no God, no order and no punishment. For all we experience is temporary, there is nothing to win. We are ruled by our instincts and desires and they are our only real driving powers because the time has fallen into tiny pieces that make no sense and that show no way to follow. Hence we live in structures that could be compared to episodes of a TV series that do not bond much with each other. When you miss one you can watch the following one without getting lost in the plot¹ (Bauman, 2002).

¹ This metaphor is based on Bauman's ideas but it was formulated by the author of this text.

Everything is on move but it seems that no one knows where to go and what is possible to reach. As mentioned above, there are no guarantees and all you can have is always only for a temporary use. Moreover, the same applies to relationships, as well. Love is here not to lead to marriage and upbringing. It is here to satisfy your needs and to vanish afterwards. There are no souls and bodies, here are merely bodies that consume, enjoy or give pleasure to others (Bauman, 2002).

This era is an era of a huge unease. This unease drives us, pushes us and hurts us. We are forced to move and fight and to be effective. We have lost our identities and the society has lost its old firm structures. Despite this, we feel that even if the life has probably no deeper sense, there is still something to celebrate and to like about it (Bauman, 2002).

2. 2. Postmodern Literary Characters

Postmodern conditions produce not only people thinking in a postmodern way, but also writers who make up similar literary characters in whom they reflect changes that mankind undergoes.

According to Zabala (2007), the main quality of postmodern men is that they are responsible exclusively to themselves. There is no God we would be afraid of, no magical power that would play the role of certainty in our lives, no stable structures that would support our knowledge or ethic. A rationally organised world is a myth, something that our postmodern man needed at the previous level of life. Diversity, transience and irony are the major features of postmodern age. Although Zabala's theory deals chiefly with postmodernism in real life and in relation to religion, the present author assumes that Zabala's findings also depict literary heroes and their attitude to "life".

Defining postmodern literary characters is one of the topics dealt with by Lederbuchová (2003). She points out that the world of postmodern heroes consists mainly of subjective constructions in which characters feel more genuine than in their real life. They do not long for a convergence between these two spheres. They enjoy

being stuck in their non-real worlds where they experience their dreams and desires. Dreaminess seems to be the only way out of the restrictive and depressing social reality.

Postmodernism does not know any positive heroes. Those times when literary characters were expected to be moral and virtuous are over. Today's characters are anticultural and full of contradiction. They are no heroes in the traditional meaning of this word. They do not fight for any ideology, they do not care much about the place and time they live in. Postmodern characters are close to romantic ones – they are extraordinary, sensitive, dreamy, standing on the edge of society and very often they die tragically. However, compared to romantic heroes, people in postmodern stories are able to break free from social stereotypes. (Lederbuchová, 2003)

Postmodern characters are unique and original individuals. Their abnormality is based on a handicap of them – mental or physical. They destroy myths that used to rule literary history, chiefly patterns of human relationships. Their behaviour does not fit into any predictable frames. (Lederbuchová, 2003)

As Stark (2003) says, postmodern heroes are cynical. This quality separates them from the society they live in and brings them closer to their nature. They do not look for any definite answers and solutions. They are satisfied with relative knowledge.

2. 3. Ways towards the Contemporary British Novel

The contemporary British novel has been a result of changes in British literature since the end of WWII. As explained above, today's literature mostly falls within postmodernism. However, before it reached this level it had undergone two important phases.

The mid-1950s brought a wave of new young authors whose critical attitude to the then post-war society dominated the whole culture. Unlike former writers these young authors came from lower social classes and reflected their origin into their heroes. The new typical main character of that time was a disillusioned intellectual, a young man with a low social status but with good education. That enabled him to increase his

standard of living as well as the marriage to an attractive and rich woman from an old aristocratic family. Such a man wanted to succeed, he wanted to be admired but at the same time he scorned everyone and everything that resembled the pre-war British society or what was typically post-war and therefore demoralized from his point of view (Hilský, 1992).

Generally speaking, the 1950s relate not only to decreased morality but also to worsening the level of education that got rid of elitism and enabled to take a degree even to those whose skills were not as good as they should have been. It is even claimed that a lot of new authors were such “common” students and as a result their books are no high-value pieces of work (Hilský, 1992).

Conformity is claimed to be another typical feature of the 1950s. All the radicalism and criticism of the post-war development were allegedly nothing but an effort to hide a superficial desire for a comfortable life equipped with social symbols of the new time such as televisions, refrigerators or cars. These gadgets and machines meant that the war, its poverty and unemployment were over and that was exactly what people longed for (Hilský, 1992).

The 1950s’ literature was full of satire, anti-romanticism, resistance to everything foreign and stress on Anglicism. It expressed a strict refusal of high art and concentration on commonness and factuality. Features of these tendencies might be seen in the working-class novel that appeared at this time and that criticized the idea of a welfare state whose roots were laid on hard work of the common man (Hilský, 1992).

Furthermore, the 1950s were strongly affected by the Cold War and the Suez Crisis. Not only did the literary intelligence attempt then to point out the necessity of peace but they also campaigned for nuclear disarmament (Hilský, 1992).

The second most important landmark that preceded the origin of the contemporary British prose is to be seen in the 1960s. This period is generally understood as the definite downfall of the British Empire which led to a search for a new national identity. This search was also connected with the public discussion whether the UK

should join the European community or not. Of course, this question penetrated into literature, as well. The inevitable transition of the British national identity brought about the necessity of transforming individual identities, too (Hilský, 1992).

Besides, the British society of the 1960s underwent huge social changes. Partially they were induced by the liberalization of the legislative in the UK and partially by American influences – chiefly by the Beat Generation and its cult of youth and freedom (Hilský, 1992). Childs (2005) explains that the key reforms that were introduced in this period were: legalizations of abortions, decriminalization of homosexuality and passing a law that made divorce available through mutual consent.

Thanks both of the key influences a new topic was introduced into British culture: sex. Never before had sex been a public question. However, now on the ground of liberalization of the society and with the example of American culture sex became a central theme. As a consequence, the public notion of the relationship between men and women shifted and moreover the public debate on sex undermined the traditional picture of family and its basic functions. All of a sudden, family – the pillar of British society – stopped being understood as a source of stability. At that moment it was taken in as a source of worries and conflicts that may induce mental disorders (Hilský, 1992).

On the whole, it is apparent and understandable that all the changes that struck British culture in the 1950s and the 1960s must have reshaped British mentality. In a very short time the land lost its dominancy in the world's politics. Furthermore, the system of social classes collapsed and traditional values such as family, religion and conservatism were questioned. It is not a surprise that the coming generation that grew up in such conditions did not feel a strong background and that it went on doubting the social system and man's place in it.

2. 4. Specifics of the Contemporary British Novel

The very beginnings of the contemporary British novel are believed to date back into the 1970s. After a period of an economic crisis in the 1960s, conservatives gained

power again and the era of Thatcherism was started. The new national politics was focused on strengthening the economic position and concentrated on the policy of free market and privatization. Money and consumerism became symbols of this time which immediately found its critics in art. Liberalization seemed to be over. New political steps aimed at a renewal of old traditions and the situation of marginal people, f.e. gays and lesbians, got worse. Even immigration was restricted and the trade unions were weakened. The UK proved that it is a centralized state with power concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister. Surprisingly, these years of political repressions led to a renaissance in British literature (Childs, 2005).

Contemporary British prose is halfway between tradition and experiment. It is commonly labelled as postmodern literature although it does not directly follow modern literature in terms of time. Nevertheless, it is true that today's literature has originated from the ideas of the modern authors of the 1920s and that these set the roots of their writings on the critics of the realistic novel that was typical of the 19th century (Hilský, 1992).

The authors of realism were convinced that it is possible to depict and to understand the world they lived in. They were people of the Industrial Revolution and optimistic about the mankind's future. Modern authors struck by the horror of WWI questioned the realistic optimism and its belief in social structures. They claimed that man's knowledge and its possibilities are restricted merely to the world of morals and inner values. The world as a material unit was believed not to be definable. Postmodern authors inspired by their modern predecessors agree on the impossibility of understanding the material world. However – after the terror of WWII and radical political and social changes in the first two post-war decades - they even deny any chance to grasp the spiritual world. They grew up in a post-industrial society and they knew well that the optimism of realism will not be fulfilled. They have given up. Their life takes place in a world where you cannot find a clear boundary between reality and fiction; in a world of lies – political, media or individual. Man is overloaded by information and sociological theories but he is not able to understand any of his worlds anymore (Hilský, 1992).

Childs (2005) points out that contemporary novels tell their stories without any effort to reveal the truth or deep meanings. They depict particular aspects of the modern world and lives of individuals. As both Childs (2005) and Allen assert (2008), contemporary prose is distinguished by plurality, variety and marginal themes. Yet, as will be shown later, the contemporary novel is not new or experimental as a whole.

To Allen (2008), the most significant features of the contemporary British novel are two: Firstly, the belief in the importance of narrative and its revival to the exclusion of deconstructive and stylistic forms; secondly, the above mentioned shift of themes towards marginal subjects.

The contemporary novel depicts the life and experience of minority cultures and marginal people and it freely talks about taboo subjects. As a result, Allen (2008) calls the new British novel socially conscious fiction. He points out that the contemporary novel and its form and focus do not want to be sharply separated from previous literary styles. In his opinion, there is an apparent tendency to combine continuing pessimism and realism in the literature with innovative styles. This brings aesthetic newness into old narrative structures and besides this approach attempts to reshape readers' notions of social events.

Allen (2008) adds that the contemporary British novel functions as a bridge between the marginal individual and the mainstream. On the one hand, it highlights social problems, political issues and the decadence in relationships. On the other one, it passes on a continuing faith in solidarity. In the era of anonymity and incongruity the contemporary British novel brings such literary characters that readers can identify with. Consequently, this diminishes the feeling of unease and loneliness.

As indicated above, Allen (2008) claims that the contemporary British novel as a particular stream in the world's literature fits in with the general postmodern output only partially. He asserts that its main aim is more than to point out man's self and its existence in today's society. To his mind, the chief goal of the contemporary British novel is to offer an alternative interpretative scheme to affairs and events that literature has been dealing with in recent decades. By chance, as one of examples to

this assertion he gives Jonathan Coe's stress on the importance of dreams to the human psyche.

As for the concrete form of narration in the contemporary novel, Childs (2005) describes it in the following way. He believes that the transformation of British society has led local authors to a kind of philosophical and psychological extremity². Individual themes that appear in the contemporary novel seem to be so various that it is not possible to state any key ones.

Nonetheless, the authors recognize the importance of traditional narrative structures and use them as a backbone for their language experiments. They are interested in history and life stories of famous personalities but they retell historical events or biographies in a changed form. As a consequence, they contribute to the already mentioned wiping off boundaries between the real and the fictional (Childs, 2005).

Besides, Childs (2005) adds that recently narrating in the first person has dominated. The first person narrator might seem to be identical to the author in many ways. The writer, of course, does neither confirm nor deny the similarities which induce other speculations about to what extent the particular piece of work might be non-fictional.

2. 5. Themes and Motifs

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the contemporary British novel deals with a lot of themes among which it is not easy to label the key ones. With regard to the fact that this thesis is to analyse the novel *The House of Sleep*, we will describe in detail merely those that appear in this novel to create a base for the later analysis. Anyway, the scale of themes in the contemporary British prose was already indicated in the preceding chapters when we defined themes and motifs typical of postmodernism and contemporary British culture in general.

² This aspect of the contemporary prose has been already explained and described in the chapter 2. 1. dealing with general characteristics of postmodernism.

2. 5. 1. Identity and Parallel Worlds

Identity has been in the centre of our interest from everlasting. Especially in the time when no unifying ambit exists and we stay on the border of more worlds we feel a need to delimit ourselves. We stop taking our identity for granted. For plurality and ambiguity rank among the main features of today's postmodern age it is no surprise that our need for a definition and understanding identity has revived (Bubíková, 2003).

According to a definition in the Oxford Dictionaries ([online], 2013) identity is: "*the fact of being/the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.*" This may let us believe that identity is a collection of our personal features which can be described on the basis of our behaviour. However, such an interpretation would be too superfluous. Therefore the present author decided to incorporate a short contemplation on identity and the search for it, based on the present author's personal experience, knowledge and opinions applying to these topics.

Identity is apparently a complex attribute whose components might be hidden deep in our mind. We often do not know who we are. We act depending on how we think that we should do but at the same time we spend our lives in a search for our own self. This search, this inner unease, functions as a driving power that makes us become conscious of our nature and it shapes our way of life according to that.

We can ask ourselves whether identity is what we really are or what we do. Are self and identity one entity? If so, is it possible to create it and work on it? But what if it is fully inborn and can be regulated merely by the impacts of the environment? Would we not lose any motivation to fight for better us?

Or is there a difference between self and identity? Then what for do we have the eggshell of identity? Does it not repress our self? What to do in case that the artificially created identity seems to be better than our genuine self? There are too many questions that should be answered.

To the present author, the search for identity includes becoming conscious of our own self - of the something hidden under our eggshell. That requires courage to accept ourselves as we are and to resist the pressure from our surroundings that are nothing

but a clump of artificially created institutions and rules unfortunately strong enough to destroy us completely. Actually, it is ridiculous because nowadays we live in a world where we doubt all these institutions and systems but we still allow them to rule us!

It is a generally known fact that parallel worlds and the relative safety they offer might help when we cannot cope with our life situation. When we go back to the metaphor for identity as an eggshell, it is clear that an ostrich egg predestines a completely different life than a hen egg. Yet, both real people and literary characters have a tendency to dream of being someone else. Hence an escape into a parallel world has become a solution how to survive in this world to those whose identity is not strong enough to break through and face up to the reality. It is a logical step, well known to most of us. Therefore it is no surprise that this postmodern era in which the search for identity seems to be inevitable has also come up with the idea of parallel worlds that protect us from both the strange outside world and our unsure selves.

To conclude this topic, it remains to say that even such a private thing as mental worlds has lately become another victim of our consumerist society. After all, modern communication technologies and computer games are nothing but thieves of our fantasy that steal our unique parallel worlds and replace them with illusions bought with money.

2. 5. 2. Sexual Identity and Gay Fiction

The matter of identity applies also to sexual identity. As described in the previous text, social changes beginning in the 1960s brought a range of new topics and revealed many social taboos. Themes connected with sex, sexual disorders and homosexuality appeared and they provoked an animated public discussion undermining old conservative approaches to sex, partner relationships and family.

As Bradford mentions (2007), one of the new features in British postmodern literature is just gay fiction. The topic of homosexuality has been appearing in British novels on a large scale since the 1980s and it is usually set into a complex net of the social and political mood of that time. Originally, it reflected the AIDS crisis that numbed the

world during the 1980s. Besides, the theme of provocative and disruptive gay relationships was meant as a contrary to the cold, strict and authoritative Thatcherism ruling the British society.³

Bradford's analysis (2007) of a few significant British novels dealing with the topic of homosexuality revealed several basic characteristics typical of this type of fiction. First of all, he emphasizes that homosexuals are able to cross between two worlds – the world of heterosexuals and the world of gays and lesbians – thereby they gain an exclusive position compared to others. Their "sphere" involves its own codes and rules and it is characterized by the attraction of secret. Yet, homosexuals often fight their own sexual desires and they must decide whether they will deny their sexuality or whether they will come out. Homophobia in society leads to separateness of those who are not afraid to confess their dissimilarity but in parallel with that it causes collective alienation among the excluded ones. Very often novels about homosexuality twist on the border between comedy and heartless naturalism.

Among the new themes applying to sex gender identity disorder is to be found. Although it is not a frequent theme, this disorder is of a big importance to us because some of its symptoms were attributed to one character in Coe's *The House of Sleep*.

Gender identity disorder is a mental state when a person suffers from a strong feeling that their biological gender does not correspond with their identity. People with GID long for a life as a person of the opposite sex, they have anxiety and depression and they wish they could dress and behave in a way typical of the opposite sex (Psychology Today [online], 2005).

Such feelings lasts for at least two years and they are followed by such desires like getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics of the biological gender or they hope to be accepted by the society as members of the opposite sex (Psychology Today [online], 2005).

³ It is clear that these reasons do not play a decisive role in gay fiction anymore. The present author assumes that nowadays homosexuality as a literary topic appears to question equality in society regarding for example job prospects or adoption policy.

GID can manifest both in childhood and in adulthood and it is not known what the principal cause of it is. Researchers estimate that the major factors are hormonal influences, genetics and parenting (Psychology Today [online], 2005).

2. 5. 3. Insanity

When you label a person as insane, it is highly likely that your listeners or readers will not agree on symptoms of such a person. Insanity is a too wide and rather obscure term that we tend to use it quite often without having a clear idea what to understand under it and how to interpret it to others. Insanity, or madness if you prefer, has always been in authors' focus because it enables to use and to incorporate a great deal of fantasy without lowering the credibility of a story. Nonetheless, the postmodern era seems to be perfect (for reasons already given) for contemplations on it.

As defined in the Oxford Dictionaries ([online], 2013), insanity is *“the state of being seriously mentally ill; madness”*. This definition corresponds perfectly with the assertion that postmodern characters are abnormal and suffer from a mental handicap.

One of many statutory definitions starts its description with: *“Insanity is mental illness of such a severe nature that a person cannot distinguish fantasy from reality, cannot conduct her/his affairs due to psychosis, or is subject to uncontrollable impulsive behaviour. Insanity is distinguished from low intelligence or mental deficiency due to age or injury.”*(LawCom [online], 2013). Here we also come across a similarity between the approach to insanity and to the notion of postmodern literary heroes who often cannot distinguish between the real and the fictional and therefore they easily slip into their own boundary worlds.

Besides and with a pinch of irony, Albert Einstein said about insanity that it is *“doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”*(Quotations Page [online], 2013).

As it is apparent from the above mentioned definitions, insanity is considered a serious mental disorder that has a big impact on men's behaviour and which symptoms might

break out at any age. As for its characteristics, aggression, emotional instability, hallucinations, cognitive disorders, behaviour disorders or even menstrual problems rank among the main symptoms of this disease (Ihre Symptome [online], 2013). It follows that insanity is what we nowadays call psychosis. However, those who are not familiar with this medical definition may mistake it for neurosis or a deviation which could have very negative consequences. As the present author supposes, this is exactly one of the most significant points that the postmodern authors want to point out. As a result, they choose marginal topics and show that even people living on the edge of society are no freaks or monsters.

Mental diseases, their subcategories and their origin are topics dealt with by e.g. Neel Burton ([online], 2012). His article, that we use here as a source material, is based on the subdivision of mental diseases into neuroses and psychoses.

It is known that neuroses such as depressions or personality disorders are functional disorders. Burton assumes that they may be triggered by a significant life event or an existential crisis and that their goal is to tell us that something has been wrong and should be changed. To his theory, these mental disorders arise from a need to cope with the environment and to make sense of the human experience. Our existential anxieties predispose to developing phobias that both protect us from potential danger⁴ and make us aware of a need to give a sense to our lives. Burton believes that particular personality disorders may give us opportunities for self-understanding.⁵

Unlike neuroses, psychoses have a strong biological basis. They are usually carried by genes and influenced by the environment. Their prognosis is much more serious and on the basis of their symptoms they are sometimes labelled as insanity by laymen. Yet, it is interesting that also these disorders have what to do with our potentialities and skills. Burton ([online], 2012) mentions that the same genes that predispose to creativity might cause schizophrenia.

⁴ That was necessary in the past when people lived in the wild.

⁵ However unpleasant neuroses may be, in the present author's opinion, it would be wrong to name them "insanity" because they do not affect their victims on a biological basis; irrespective of that their symptoms might be of a physical character.

Burton ([online], 2012) points out that all mental disorders are painful and worsen the quality of their victims' lives. He warns that they can lead to serious harm or even death through accident, self-neglect or a suicide.

As already mentioned, the postmodern era is characterized by a general feeling of unease, disharmony and a lack of rules and securities. For it seems to be more difficult now than ever to distinguish what is still normal and acceptable and what is rather weird or even pathological, the matter of insanity has found a fixed place among literary themes.

Yet, it happens that not always allegedly insane people are those who need help or therapy. Sometimes they are just unjustly labelled by those whose subjective perceiving is out of a sound perspective. As you can see, stating whether you are sound or mad is not a question of a medical examination anymore; at least not in fictional worlds such as books, movies or games. The result depends on subjective opinions of other people/characters and even you – the reader.

3. Sleep

3. 1. General Characteristics

Sleep is *“a condition of body and mind which typically recurs for several hours every night, in which the nervous system is inactive, the eyes closed, the postural muscles relaxed, and consciousness practically suspended.”* (Oxford Dictionaries [online], 2013)

Sleep is one of basic body functions. In accordance with modern research sleep can be divided into two types: REM and NREM sleep. NREM sleep is preceded by the stage of being awake and consists of four stages⁶ – from shallow sleep to deep sleep – and it is followed by an REM period, which is characterized by a complete loss of muscle tone and rapid eye movements. Such one cycle lasts from 70 to 100 minutes and most people have four to six sleep cycles a night. (Prusiński, 1993)

There are two essential factors determining the sleep-wakefulness cycle. The first one is the circadian timing system regulated by the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) in the hypothalamus. Its cells express clock proteins that influence daily cycles of sleep, activity, hormone release and other bodily functions. The SCN also gets information from the retina and therefore its clock function remains linked to the day-night cycle in the outside world. Thanks to connections to other brain areas, the SCN has an impact on releasing orexin in orexin neurons in the lateral hypothalamus which directly control sleep and arousal. A sufficient orexin level prevents abnormal shift into REM sleep during the day, as is typical of narcolepsy. (Brain Facts [online], 2012)

The second determinative factor is the homeostatic system which is in charge of maintaining all basic bodily functions in balance. In case of longer wake periods, it increases levels of the inhibitory neurochemical adenosine that slows down cellular activity and leads to diminishing arousal. Brain adenosine is produced by adenosine triphosphate breakdown, the cellular energy source, and its levels decrease during

⁶ Sometimes the stage of being awake is considered as Stage One. In such cases we talk about five phases preceding REM sleep.

sleep. Since ATP produced exclusively during sleep is an irreplaceable source of adenosine, sleep is necessary both for providing new supplies of restorative energy and for producing substances being responsible for diminishing bodily activity. (Brain Facts [online], 2012)

3. 2. Sleep Stages

Psychology World ([online], 1998) describes sleep stages in the following way: They are defined by gross brain wave activity, muscle tone and eye movements. These characteristics are measured by highly specialised machines: EEG electroencephalogram (brain activity), EMG electromyogram (muscle tone) and EOG electro-oculogram (eye movement).

Stage One – known as the state of being awake – is usually described only by EEG patterns that distinguish two types of waves: beta and alpha. Beta waves are very dysynchronous. They reflect human day mental activity and it, as it is generally known, is greatly dysynchronous since it consists of many cognitive, motor, experience and other activities. Alpha waves compared to beta ones are slower and rather synchronous. They appear during periods of relaxation and it is widely believed that they have positive health benefits. On the whole, Stage One is a phase of being absolutely awake but shifting from common brain activity into a slower one typical of relaxing (Psychology World [online], 1998).

Stage Two is the first real stage of sleep. The transition from relaxing into sleep is gradual. Stage Two is characterised by theta brain waves which are slower than alpha waves. This second sleep stage switches to Stage Three and the theta wave activity undergoes two phenomena: a sudden increase in wave frequency (sleep spindles) and a sudden increase in wave amplitude (K complexes). Stages Two and Three represent light sleep stages (Psychology World [online], 1998).

Stage Three turns into Stages Four and Five – the deepest phases of sleep. They are distinguished by an often occurrence of delta waves, the slowest brain waves, whose presence is a little bit more frequent in Stage Five than in Stage Four. In other aspects,

there is almost no difference between these two last stages. These phases are called sound sleep and the brain activity within these two stages is the biggest opposite to waking (Psychology World [online], 1998).

The above mentioned stages are followed by REM sleep. Its name was derived from the rapid eye movement accompanying it. During this stage brain waves are very similar to waking because the brain activity is based on a combination of alpha and beta waves. Interestingly, muscles are paralysed in this sleep while our brain evinces dreaming (Psychology World [online], 1998).

“In a normal night's sleep one cycle, from stage 1 to REM takes approximately ninety minutes. This cycle is repeated throughout the night, with the length of REM periods increasing, and the length of delta sleep decreasing, until during the last few cycles there is no delta sleep at all.”(Psychology World [online], 1998)

3. 3. Importance of Sleep

As it was already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sleep is a very important part of the human life. To a non-professional, who does not lay stress on details, the necessity of high-quality sleep might be explained thanks to following facts.

Firstly, sufficient sleep contributes to good mood, raises our ability to concentrate and makes us feel relaxed. Secondly, it takes part in memory consolidation and it helps our brain to process new information. Additionally, it has a positive impact on our cardiovascular health since it influences blood pressure, stress hormone levels and the regularity of heartbeat. It is also claimed that good sleep could help to fight cancer. (Harvard Health Publications [online], 2006)

There are also other functions of sleep or even dreams. In the following subchapters we will discuss psychoanalytical approaches by Freud and by Jung and two chapters later we will deal with the alternative theory by Chopra.

3. 4. The Function of the Dream

This thesis is not a deep probe into the psychology of dream. Our main goal is not to describe all existing theories dealing with this topic. The aim we want to reach is to build a quality and technical base for our next work. For the theme “dreams and their functions” has been discussed throughout centuries, the present author decided to incorporate two big theories, Freud’s and Jung’s ones, that represent the psychoanalysis which turned her attention just to hidden meanings of dreams.

3. 4. 1. Freud’s Theory

As Freud (1921) believed, the dream is a suppressed wish. Its aim is to make its way to consciousness from unconsciousness through preconsciousness. The consciousness functions as a sensory organ perceiving psychic qualities and as a bridge to awareness of them.⁷ When the wish is strong enough, it can appear and be realised during the day. In case that its intensity is insufficient, it draws attention to itself at night.⁸

The suppressed wish comes as a dream and supplied with the energy from preconsciousness it disturbs our sleep. As soon as it manages to penetrate into perception, it moves from preconsciousness into consciousness and it starts its way to its hoped-for fulfillment (Freud, 1921).

In Freud’s (1921) opinion, the dream-work is not a matter of one night. He was convinced that a dream is produced within a certain period of time and he likened it to *“fireworks, which require hours of preparation and only a moment for ignition.”*

Freud’s (1921) theory sums up and explains the functions of sleep as a system in which we are made aware of our hidden desires⁹. Their pressure in our unconsciousness is released by shifting them and their energy into preconsciousness which passes them on and that vent them through dreams teasing our mind.

⁷ The expression “a bridge to awareness” is used here as a personal interpretation of the present author.

⁸ At night the consciousness is not distracted by as many stimuli from outside as by day.

⁹ As it is generally known, Freud usually talked about sexual desires.

3. 4. 2. Jung's Theory

Jung (1945) agreed that dreams have their source in the unconscious and that they represent fragments of involuntary psychic activities. He supposed that their meaning is deeper than a literal interpretation could show but he was not of the opinion that they would reflect only repressed wishes as Freud believed. Jung dealt with the relationship between unconsciousness and consciousness. He assumed that the function of dreams is compensation. When dreams produced by the unconscious are in opposition to our conscious purposes or possibilities, it comes to a lack of harmony between these two spheres. Unconsciousness, in order to get attention, lets disturbances - neurotic symptoms - out. Therefore a successful methodical analysis can help patients to get over their health problems by clarifying their causes with the aid of dreams.

As Jung (1945) pointed out, we tend to underestimate dreams' meanings because their structures and contents are rather irrational and illogical. However, he believed that it is possible to work out their meanings only in the collaboration with the dreamer whose associations within a methodical questioning can reveal significant hints. The analysis places demands on the analyst, as well, and requires specialized knowledge of mythology, folklore, psychology of primitives and comparative religions.

Not all dreams are of the equal importance and according to Jung's theory (1945) they might be divided into "little" and "big" dreams. The meaning of little dreams is limited to the affairs of everyday and we usually forget them soon. They are not so important and they do not conceal any deeper message. On the contrary, big dreams are of capital importance to us and to be able to understand them we must have a wide range of general knowledge. As Jung (1945) claimed, our psyche is unique only to a certain extent and for the rest it is collective. Big dreams contain symbolic images such as mythological motifs, archetypes, which originate from the collective unconsciousness. They depict universal human problems that repeat endlessly in the history of mankind.

3. 5. Sleep Disorders

We usually start thinking about sleep when we realize that we suffer from a sleep disorder. At such a moment we feel strongly how important restful sleep is and how much we miss its positive impacts both on our mind and our body.

Sleep disorders represent a very wide topic. For this thesis concentrates first and foremost on the novel *The House of Sleep* and its themes and motifs, the following paragraphs deal with those sleep disorders that we come across by reading this novel: narcolepsy and insomnia.

3. 5. 1. Narcolepsy

As already stated, sleep consists of several phases that may be divided into two main categories: NREM sleep and REM sleep. While people without any sleep disorders go through all NREM phases before they reach the REM stage, people with narcolepsy usually fall immediately into the REM sleep of which dreaming and muscle paralysis are typical (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

However, in case of narcolepsy sleep does not come only at night. This disease is characteristic of excessive daytime sleepiness that results in sleep attacks that may appear even several times a day. The second main feature of this disorder is cataplexy – a sudden loss of muscle tone that leads to collapse. It can hit only certain muscle groups or it can temporarily paralyse the whole body (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

Furthermore, people with narcolepsy suffer from psychic problems. Since they fall directly into the dreaming phase of sleep, they often face hypnagogic hallucinations and therefore they have difficulties in distinguishing between real events and dreaming. For people with narcolepsy suffer from a lack of certainty and their social relationships are often limited, they incline to depressions (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013). It is obvious that narcolepsy sharply deteriorates the quality of life and that people afflicted by it face many difficulties.

It has not been revealed yet what causes narcolepsy. It is supposed that it could be a deficiency in hypocretin production in the brain combined with environmental factors. Narcolepsy affects men and women equally and its first symptoms usually develop in young adulthood. Nowadays it is treated with help of medication and behavioural therapy (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

3. 5. 2. Insomnia

Insomnia is either an acute or a chronic sleep disorder whose symptoms include inability or difficulty to fall asleep, restless sleep and waking up not feeling refreshed. Its other traits may be daytime sleepiness and irritability (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

There are more causes inducing insomnia. As it has been proved, it can be a symptom of some other disease. Besides, it is claimed that it might be brought about by stress and worry and it has been found out that it can occur with schedule changes such as shift work or jet lag. Although insomnia might be the cause of depressions, depressions may start sleep problems, as well (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

According to some research, there are differences in the prevalence of insomnia between sexes and age categories. It is higher among women and older people. The treatment of insomnia usually includes behavioural therapy and sleep medications – hypnotics. It is also recommended to practise relaxation techniques (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

There are several factors increasing the frequency of insomnia occurrence such as high intake of caffeinated beverages, obesity, frequent daytime sleepiness and taking more than two naps a day (National Sleep Foundation [online], 2013).

3. 6. Deepak Chopra's Restful Sleep Theory

Sleep disorders and insufficient sleep are also themes that Deepak Chopra (1994) dealt with. To his mind, a lack of sleep arises as a consequence of social pressure. Insomnia

is sometimes understood as a source of power because it enables us to do more work and makes us more effective. These qualities seem to be particularly significant in today's society. Therefore a lot of people trivialize insomnia and its possible negative impacts.

Chopra's (1994) theory is based on principles of ayurveda. He believes that space is inside of us and that our bodies reflect space. All that happens around us is a context which we evolve in and which shapes us at the same time. Sleep is here to renew our bodies and to release stress and tension from our minds.

The human organism is set into a twenty-five-hour cycle that corresponds with the natural cycles in space. All nature works according to this time schedule. As Chopra (1994) adds, man has disturbed this system by introducing the twenty-four-hour standard time format and artificial illumination.

When the quality of our sleep is low and we do not sleep long enough to let our body relax sufficiently, then we might "sleep" during the day. However, here Chopra (1994) does not mean "to sleep" in the meaning "to be asleep". He points out that when we are tired and we do not feel well, we have a tendency to shift our mind into a sleep-like state. As a result, we are not able to enjoy our life in its full beauty.

Processes that happen at night have their roots in what happens during the day. Unsatisfied aspirations can penetrate into sleep and cause insomnia. If we want to prevent sleep disorders, we must be really awake when the body is – during the day. Only by being awake, we are able to bring our minds into harmony and to guarantee restful sleep (Chopra, 1994).

To sum up the last two points, we can say that sleep disorders are not definite health problems themselves. To be more precise we must be able to see them as dependant parts of a viscous circle. Since we do not live up to our expectations, we conceal our unsatisfied desires in our minds. From there on they have the power to come into our consciousness and once there they use our sleep as a gate into the world.¹⁰ As a result, they disturb our dreams and do not let us relax and renew our body energy. As a

¹⁰ In this point Chopra's theory resembles European psychoanalysis.

consequence, we feel tired during the day and we tend to switch our perception of reality into day dreaming. There we feel much better but it contributes to the fact that step by step we become victims of our own suppressed wishes and day by day we fall deeper into the life in our parallel worlds.

As Chopra (1994) says when he goes back to ayurveda, sleep disorders are caused by disorders in doshas. In accordance with the ayurveda belief, doshas are patterns of energy and every being consists of three different doshas whose proportion determines the character of each of us. Chopra (1994) describes them in the following way:

Vata dosha is typical of slim and short people who act quickly, work hard and easily get new information. On the other hand, they forget fast and get tired soon. They are enthusiastic about the life they live and full of energy and emotions. They tend to overwork and they are not stable as far as we talk about their mood and attitudes. Their outbursts of emotions are strong but short. People ruled by the Vata dosha do not have a regular day rhythm – their vigour comes and leaves, they go to bed at different times (Chopra, 1994).

Pitta dosha is peculiar to people of a middle body height and average physical strength. They are inclined to live under permanent stress. Pitta people are incredibly go-ahead and pushy. They love challenges and obstacles. They are endowed with high intelligence and they set clear goals. Pitta people live according to tight schedules which reflect also in their sleep habits (Chopra, 1994).

Kapha dosha is characteristic of people who are physically very strong but have a tendency to overeat because they are usually after some emotional satisfaction only in food. These people are calm and relaxed. Their movements are rather slow but elegant. They need more time to think things over or to grasp them but they have a good long-term memory. Kapha people are sensitive, tolerant and serene. However, they also like comfort and tend to hoard wealth. People who are under Kapha dosha influence love sleep. They often oversleep and need a lot of time to wake up (Chopra, 1994).

Doshas determine not only our characters; they also change the mood of the day. They take turns in taking charge of ruling the day cycle and on the ground of this they strengthen or weaken our dispositions (Chopra, 1994).

To Chopra's (1994) theory, there is a day's doshas cycle. Explained with the help of our time format, the cycle starts at 6 a.m. with Kapha, then it turns into Pitta at 10 a.m. and at 2 p.m. it changes to Vata. The second part of the cycle begins at 6 p.m. with Kapha, at 10 p.m. it is exchanged by Pitta and at 2 a.m. Vata starts. Ayurveda principles say that we should go to bed before 10 p.m. when we are under the power of Kapha. Kapha is typical of such features such as apathy, softness and the feeling of heaviness that we usually connect to sleep. Besides, it is recommended to get up before 6 a.m. - at the Vata time that can supply us with energy - and chiefly before the Kapha dosha comes again that would make it more difficult to us to get up and to start a new day.

Chopra (1994) believes that sleep disorders are caused by disturbing this natural doshas cycle. We plan our days in accordance with our jobs, duties and potential night entertainments. That leads to the fact that we go to bed and get up at a bad time when our bodies need something completely different. Chopra (1994) adds to this that in his opinion there are no night owls. He supposes that people living mostly at night are so unhinged from the natural rhythms that it has already become one of their habits. This habit makes them then "sleep" by day.

4. The House of Sleep

4. 1. Author

Jonathan Coe was born on 19 January 1961 in Lickey, a suburb of Birmingham, Great Britain (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014). As the younger of two sons he spent according to his own words “unnaturally untraumatic” childhood in a family, where the father was a research physicist and the mother worked as a music and PE teacher (Laity [online], 2010).

Coe’s earliest writing attempts date back in his schooldays when at the age of eight he accomplished his very first detective story *The Castle of Mystery*. This was followed by his first but unsuccessful novel *All The Way* seven years later. After his school years at King Edward’s School in Birmingham and at Trinity College, Cambridge, he went on to Warwick University. There he was awarded a doctorate and he won recognition for his thesis on Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones. During his study years Coe carried on fictional writing, and apart from short stories he completed two other novels, from which the later one, *The Accidental Woman*, was the first of his novels that found its acceptance by publishers. It was launched in 1987 (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014).

In the late 1980s Coe tried to break through both in literature and in music. However, his talent for music seemed to be much more limited than in literature and after a few failures experienced in his short-lived band *The Peer Group* and a feminist cabaret group *Wanda and the Willy Warmers* he decided to concentrate merely on writing (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014).

Finally, in 1993 the novel *What a Carve Up* became an international success. Nonetheless, to be able to concentrate on this work he had to find a job that would ensure him a financial stability first. Therefore his biographies of film stars Humphrey Bogart and James Stewart came into existence in the early 1990s (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014).

In the following years Coe’s successful career carried on and his good name in the literary world was strengthened by novels such as *The House of Sleep*, *The Rotters’*

Club, The Closed Circle, The Rain Before It Falls, The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim or by the biography of the British experimental novelist B.S. Johnson, *Like a Fiery Elephant*. In 2013 Coe published his for the time being last novel, *Expo 58* (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014).

Jonathan Coe is a holder of several literary awards, from which we mention the Prix Médicis Étranger for *The House of Sleep* in 1998. He lives in London (Coe [online], 2010 – 2014).

4.2. Plot and Characters

The House of Sleep, Coe's fifth novel which was first published in 1997, is a colourful mosaic of life stories. Its central themes are sleep and sleep disorders. Coe's characters exemplify how the quality of our lives reflects in the quality of our slumber and to what extent sleep can play the role of our friend or enemy.

The following subchapters retell Coe's story from the point of view of individual main characters. The length of each part roughly corresponds with the extent that Coe dedicated to his heroes in his work.

4. 2. 1. Sarah

Sarah is a student of primary school teaching. Since the age of fourteen she has suffered from an episodic inability to distinguish between her dreams and what happened to her. These difficulties appear especially at moments of intense emotional disturbance. She is narcoleptic.

Besides, she has been haunted by nightmares in which snakes and frogs fasten her eyelids with the twin ends of their tongues. Unfortunately, people tend to be fascinated by her eyes a lot. When they try to touch them, they make the nightmare come true.

At first, she had not known about her health disorder. As a result, it had led to many embarrassments that made her very unsure and with low self-esteem. Originally, she

had not dared to speak about her mishaps to anyone but finally she retold her weird stories to her boyfriend Gregory.

Gregory, a medicine student, was able to unlock Sarah's diagnoses which made him deeply captivated by her case. Yet, Sarah does not like him much. He was her first boyfriend, her roommate and for a long time he was her only friend at college. She lost her virginity to him but now he seems to be too dry and emotionless to her. In the first months of their relationship she believed that he is kind, wise and understanding. However, later she realized that his demeanour is completely academic, his mind rigid and his lovemaking as bad as his taste in music. Chiefly Gregory's strange behaviour during their sex disgusted her completely. Finally, they broke up at night before Gregory's departure to London where he is to specialise in psychiatry.

The break-up is an enormous relief to Sarah. Together with Gregory she has got rid of a huge burden. Furthermore, she is not as lonely now as she used to be. She has two new friends. One of them is Veronica, an economics student, interested in theatre and keen on feminism and gender issues. For the first time they met in the café Valladon where Sarah supported her in a discussion about men as potential rapist. For the second time it was in the library. This time it was no accident. Veronica brought her three books about feminism and she offered to her to come and talk about their contents anytime in the Valladon.

As for Robert, Sarah knows him from the Ashdown residence. He is new there although he is in his last year of study similarly to her. They met in the L-shape kitchen downstairs and their first, relaxed and pleasant, conversation made them think of each other. Moreover, she noticed that he had a kind face. In spite of Sarah's disorder that caused one terribly tragicomic misunderstanding between them, when Sarah mistook the death of Robert's cat for the death of his sister, they have found a way to each other, both in a real and in a metaphoric way.

This was caused chiefly by another accident. One afternoon Sarah managed to scare Robert so much when she entered the bathroom without warning that he cut his leg. Later she wanted to check that he was all right and all at once they were immersed

into a talk that changed into an all-night conversation during which they revealed their souls to each other.

However, the following day her steps did not head for Robert. It is likely that she even tried to avoid his company. She was confused. Her memory contained a truly strange story about Robert and his twin sister Cleo who was given for adoption after her birth and it was not easy for Sarah to get this into her stride. Instead of Robert, she ran across Veronica and this accidental encounter induced another one and then another one which finally caused that they became very close friends; so close ones that when one day Sarah had stayed with Veronica overnight, she woke up as her lover.

Sarah and Veronica are a couple now! However, there is still something that prevents them from showing their love in public. They just behave like friends when they are together, especially in the Valladon where they meet most often. Nonetheless, they share a secret world that is concealed in books they read. One of them, *The House of Sleep*, is to borrow for free in the cafe. It is not a masterpiece, just the opposite. It is a trashy detective story but the fun they have on reading it bonds them firmly. Ironically, Robert chooses this book as something private between him and Sarah when he is sitting with her in the Valladon one day and he confides to her that if it happens that he will want to leave something for her, she will find it in this book.

The sunny day on the beach ... to be honest, Robert's companionship can be really charming. Once it happened that he went with her and the housekeepers' little Ruby to the beach and they enjoyed a great time. It is true that as many times before he was not able to conceal his feelings for her well which was a bit unpleasant sometimes but all in all he is fabulous. He is here for you, he gives you room to breathe freely. To Sarah, he is like a sister to her.

By the way, Ruby – the sweet child – is simply gorgeous. However, already this tiny being has her own big worries – such as the one with the bicycle. Ruby would love to have one but her parents do not want to purchase her any. Luckily for her, Sarah advised her that if she did want it, she should ask for it in sleep. Nobody tells lies in their sleep and consequently her mother would see how much it would mean to her.

Alas, life is not only about sunny days at the sea. It seems that there is something wrong with Veronica. Her demeanour has changed and apparently she is holding something back from Sarah. It must be something in the letter she received and hid after reading. There is no doubt that the letter made her happy for some reasons. Sarah terribly needs to find out what is going on.

It was the letter, indeed. Veronica is going to work for a merchant bank in London. She kept it secret and behind Sarah's back she applied for this job. Veronica is a liar and a betrayer. Theatre, feminism and their common plans have vanished. There is no sense in keeping this relationship alive. It is time they split up.

They broke up just before the farewell party at Ashdown. Suddenly, everything seems to be upside down. Fortunately, Sarah can stay with Terry after summer. He offered to her a spare room in his new flat in London. Hopefully, Robert will move in, as well. The task for now is to survive the party and then it is high time she moved on.

Too much alcohol mixed with Terry's jokes do not seem to be a good combination for someone who suffers from cataplexy. Robert and Veronica helped her upstairs into one of the free bedrooms. Robert stayed with her to make sure that she was all right. At that moment she did it. Did she really want it or did she merely mean to take revenge on Veronica? All in all, she offered to him to spend night with her. He refused. He refused although he had clearly longed for such an offer for ages.

The next day, on the departure day, everybody felt terrible. Hangover and hurt feelings were in the air. Sarah's strategy was clear: to ignore Veronica and to apologise to Robert. He accepted her apology but there could be no word about common living. He does not want to be her "friend" any more. If only he were his lost twin sister! Such a person would be the right life partner for Sarah.

Sarah did not mind not being in touch with Veronica. What she worried about was the fact that Robert had disappeared. He did not phone, write or come. Her efforts to find him were in vain. She gave up. In the end, he sent a message – one single letter, in

which he wrote that he loved her even much than before and he promised that she would hear about him again.

Unfortunately, something else happened that day when she received Robert's letter. Terry was out on business. However, he phoned her and asked her to make some little changes in his latest article that was saved in his home PC and that was of a significant importance concerning his future career. She might have been too distracted by the letter but the matter of fact is that she did not manage it. Albeit she was convinced that she had done everything Terry had asked her for, it was only a dream in fact. Terry lost his job. They had to move out since they could not afford to pay for their flat any more. They stayed in touch for a few months. Eventually, this friendship faded away.

Five years after Sarah had left Ashdown something strange happened. Robert called her parents and he asked them to let her know about a planned reunion at Ashdown. She wanted to see him so much that she cancelled other meetings and she set out to their ex-home. It was pointless. He was there, she could hear his voice and steps but he did not show up. He kept speaking about a change he had undergone and that he most of all did not want to scare her. Unfortunately, it slipped out of her mouth that she was going to get married and that spoiled everything. He ran away from the building and he drove away.

Sarah's marriage to Anthony was a mistake. She could not give him what he expected. Finally, he started an affair. After divorce Sarah's job and her appointments with doctor Watts were the only things that remained to her. Every session is like a trip into her past.

Sarah works as a teacher. She lives alone in a house where you do not feel cosy. She is merely thirty-six but her hair is completely grey already. It has its charm. Is it a safety measure against men? She is both a teacher and a tutor. She shows future teachers how to master their occupation. She is among people all the time. She is lonely.

There is one peculiar girl among Sarah's pupils called Alison. She is such a little sad birdie. Sarah happens to get into conflict with her mother, one of her mothers, Rebecca. Sarah is shocked when she reveals that Alison's biological mother was

Veronica – Sarah’s Veronica who betrayed her many years ago but who showed her which path of love she should go. Veronica who is not anymore; Veronica who committed suicide a year ago; Veronica who was probably so sentimental that she kept the book *The House of Sleep* for all the years and that thanks to this may now belong to Sarah.

There is something in the book - Robert’s handwriting, Robert’s poem for her. The words burn her heart. It is obvious how much he cared for her. Ruby was right when she said that they belonged together. She visited Sarah after all the years just to say this to her but Sarah did not want to hear that. Hopefully, there is still a chance that Ruby could help her somehow. She must talk to her. They will meet in a few days and then they will make up a plan.

Someone is at the door. That is strange. It is late and Sarah is not waiting for anybody to come. It is a woman. She has a kind face. It is: ROBERT.

4. 2. 2. Veronica

Veronica, an economics student, is a very animated person. Sarah believes that her eyes are lively dark, which adds attractiveness to them. They noticed each other when they were in the Valladon. Veronica and her friends joined Sarah at her table and their discussion attracted her attention. As Veronica was speaking about men and their hidden violence, she found a strong supporter in Sarah. Veronica pleased with such an interest enthusiastically offered to her to talk about it any time and a few days later she even contacted her herself. She managed to find Sarah in the university library; she gave her some books to read about feminism and repeated her invitation for a talk in the café.

Luckily for both of them, they did meet soon and began seeing each other regularly. Sarah told Veronica about her vivid dreams and the health difficulties she has, which brought them even closer. They became friends, good ones, and stayed so till one day when Sarah stayed overnight. Since then they have been a couple.

Veronica's life seems to be going the right way. She is content. She has a fabulous girlfriend who she shares her intellectual ideas about life with, clear plans about her future (she is determined to start a theatre group) and moreover there is always a reason to laugh – Robert and his embarrassing obsession with Sarah.

Alas, life is not only about drama, politics or jokes. There are moments when one must grow up and take responsibility for their future life. She studies economics, why could not she then apply for a job in a bank? She is young; there is plenty of time to make her plans come true.

They arranged to meet in the cafe but Sarah did not come. It is a pity. The owner of the Valladon acted generously and let Veronica take a souvenir. After all, it is the end of semester – the end of studies. Without hesitation, Veronica decided for *The House of Sleep* - the secret code, the symbol of her and Sarah's relationship.

Even dreams have their limits. The time has come to reveal the cards. Sarah did not understand Veronica's change of plans. She found her letter of acceptance and got angry. Therefore she did not come to the cafe. All at once there was not much to say. They split up before the farewell party at Ashdown. The illusions of the last nine months are over. Their last common moments passed full of silent reproach and jealousy. They will never see each other again.

Veronica moved to London and in the course of the coming eleven years she built both successful career and a relationship with Rebecca. They even had a daughter; however, Veronica's maternal feelings never woke up. She was earning money and purchasing things but she did not feel happy. She never gave up her vision of an independent theatre group and she hoped for its realisation. After years of trying, her vigour was suddenly not strong enough. One night she drove with her luxury vehicle against a wall. She never learnt that her daughter's teacher was Sarah.

4. 2. 3. Terry

Terry is a student of film studies and he is completely captivated by it. Once he and Veronica were discussing the British theatre and film in the café Valladon and when their talk slipped to gender issues, a weird girl interrupted them and disappeared. It was Sarah, femme fatale for two of his friends.

Terry never drinks coffee. He asserts that it would make him awake. Dreams are the most precious part of his entire life. He seems to live merely to sleep because he is much happier than when he is awake. As a consequence, Terry sleeps at least fourteen hours a day. Dreams are his reasons to live but they torment him at the same time since he is never able to supply any details of them. Nonetheless, Terry knows that they are wonderful. He needs them, he adores them, he is addicted to them but he is never able to retell them.

There are only three places where Terry likes being: the cinema, the café Valladon and most of all his darkened room, his retreat from the outside world. He is not a sociable person in fact. He changes girlfriends so often that he almost does not recognize that they are gone. They leave him as soon as they find out that there are apparently only two things Terry takes interest in: sleep and movies.

In addition, there seems to be just one thing, or being more exact, one person, that is in Terry's field of perception: Robert, Terry's best friend. They have known each other for a couple of years. Therefore it is not easy for Terry to cope with the fact that Robert has not told him about his twin sister Cleo who was given for adoption after her birth. It is really incomprehensible. What is even worse is that Robert confided his secret to Sarah, the mad girl, who he has known merely for a few days. She is insane and Robert is obviously not better when he lets her blow his mind totally. Luckily, there might be a way of getting over Terry's worries; a way that could perhaps bring his beloved world of dreams into the world of reality.

To Terry's mind, films are like dreams or even like a collective unconscious. Similarly to forgotten dreams that are impossible to be retold, movies that have not been seen by anybody are the most stunning and the most wonderful ones. This personal conviction

makes Terry believe that his life mission is connected with the work of the Italian director Salvatore Ortese and with the search for this man's last film, *The Latrine Duty*, which is said to be so open and rough that it is unbearable to be watched. Unfortunately, no one can confirm this assertion since this movie has never been shown publicly and almost no proof exists that would demonstrate whether the movie was really made. That is exactly the impulse Terry seems to have been looking for. He is so fascinated by the movie's story that he decides to solve its mystery and to sacrifice his best to it. However, the only proof he reveals is one photograph supposedly made on shooting.

In the end, it was not even necessary to prove the movie's existence to reach a turning point in Terry's life. His thought provoking speculations made experts notice his work and he was offered a fixed job on *Frame*, a respected journal on film and art. Thanks to such a success and a generous salary following from it he will afford to rent a luxury flat directly in London. It may come in handy. Sarah and Veronica have just broken up and Terry kindly offered to Sarah to stay with him. He will have two spare rooms therefore he can hope that her presence will attract Robert, as well. Evidently, he is still mad about her!

Robert has disappeared. For the last time he saw him on the departure day from Ashdown. Sarah has tried to track him down but she had no luck. Unfortunately, it has worked with Sarah neither. She is lunatic and for her fault Terry lost his job. She damaged his article and spoiled everything. They were forced to move out since their money was suddenly tight. They kept in touch for a couple of following months, however, even their rare encounters finally stopped.

When you have worries, you cannot fall asleep. When you do not sleep, you manage to finish more work. When you work freelance and when you know, that you manage more tasks and duties on condition that you do not sleep, you do your best to achieve such a state. Terry was haunted by existential concerns. He could not sleep which resulted in the fact that his dreams and their mysteries vanished. They were substituted for films, dreams of other people. Terry writes pulp film reviews, performs

on TV, drinks litres of coffee and does not sleep. Terry suffers from insomnia. He forgot Ortese's movie ages ago. This item belongs to the world of lost dreams.

A famous journalist and insomniac in one person seems to be a tempting morsel for the sleep disorders clinic at Ashdown. A part of the clinic is a sleep laboratory – the only place with beds where they wire you to weird machines and they observe which sleep stages you reach and whether there is some enhancement in your condition. Its owner and founder Dr. Gregory Dudden apparently hopes for a cheap and good advertisement. Consequently, he offered to Terry a fortnight of free therapy. Who would ever think that twelve years after graduating Terry re-experiences his student years thanks to such circumstances?

Being a patient at Ashdown Terry came in contact chiefly with Dr. Dudden, Gregory, and Dr. Madison, Cleo. Coincidences are everywhere. Gregory is the "brainiac" who went out with Sarah. Strange that he is reluctant to admit it. Anyway, it is evident that Gregory's main aim is to get Terry on his side. Of course, at first he pretended treating Terry as a common patient; however, it did not take long until he showed favour and confidence to him. He took Terry into his secret laboratory where he tests sleep deprivation on animals. As he confided in Terry, he scorned himself for the necessity of sleep. Terry is probably the only one who can understand him. He knows well that he owes much to his extraordinary ability to live without sleep. How much could Gregory achieve on condition that he was not limited by sleep? Nevertheless, he is a man of science and all these little fellows dying in their glass tanks will help him one day to reveal the mystery of wakefulness.

Terry is shocked and disgusted. Yet, he stays at the clinic. He feels that it is possible that he really needs help. Being there he started remembering things from the past and to all evidence these flashbacks bring among others traces of sleep. Slowly but surely he comes closer to his inner self, to the gate of dreaming. His eternal fatigue seems to diminish. He even remembers his obsession with *The Latrine Duty* and all of a sudden he makes up his mind that he must go to London to find the old photograph and to fetch it back to Ashdown.

Anyway, Terry feels that there is something else wrong at Ashdown than the perverse sleep deprivation tests on animals. Firstly, it is not possible to consider this clinic a posh residence since they evidently do not clean up properly when you can find nasty inscriptions on walls. Secondly, an anonymous author drew Terry's attention to a Stephen Webb, whose name must be somehow connected with experiments at Ashdown. Thirdly, Terry's own investigation revealed that Gregory tortures not only animals but he is also ready to carry out his fatal experiments on human objects. Lastly, although one would find it highly improbable, Dr. Madison might be Robert's lost twin sister.

Cleo is Robert's twin sister. At first she tried to deny it but later she gave her secret away. Terry hopes that Cleo will tell him about her brother and his life but much to Terry's regret Robert does not live any more. He committed suicide by a car accident. Allegedly there was a woman.

The news of Robert's death hurt Terry a lot. Nonetheless, Cleo provided him with positive information, as well. She revealed to him to be the anonymous author who wanted to point out the case of Stephen Webb who died because of Gregory's professional negligence. She gave him even other discrediting materials about Gregory's experiments and she encouraged him to change his life and to start a new career as an investigative journalist. After many years Terry felt that his life was going the right way. Sadly, it did not take long. Just as he was about to start his investigation he fell victim to a psychotic who attacked him.

Terry is in a coma. Terry does not have almost any chance to get better. Terry is happy and his lips are smiling since his mind re-entered the world of dreams.

4. 2. 4. Robert

Robert, Terry's old friend, is in his last year of study but as for the Ashdown residence, he is new there. On his first day there he met Sarah. After a while she gained his confidence. To his surprise, he even entrusted his sorrow at the death of his cat to her. His father used to tell him that women did not like men to be weak and that nobody

respected a cry-baby but Sarah seems to be so different. He likes her eyes, her hair (especially when it is wet, as he realizes later) and the gesture when she runs a hand through it.

Robert has an odd habit – he shaves his legs. He finds it absorbing. To him, there is no point of hairy legs! Anyway, once when he was just shaving, Sarah entered the bathroom. He had not known how to lock the broken door and she scared him so much that he nicked his ankle so badly that he would have a double scar on it for the rest of his life.

Nonetheless, this unhappy encounter led to a talk that turned into an all-night conversation that brought around that Robert is terribly in love with Sarah now. He does his best to meet her everywhere; he buys presents for her and dreams of her. Unfortunately, she seems to have disappeared.

It is Terry, Robert's best friend, and Terry's latest girlfriend Lynne who tell Robert what is up with Sarah. As they say, she is mad! Everyone knows that. She comes up to people and claims to have had conversations with them. She falls asleep when you talk to her and she has even made up the weirdest story you can imagine – she is telling people that Robert had a twin sister Cleo who had been given for adoption after her birth!

Robert loves Sarah. Robert is here to confirm her story. Robert does so because he hopes to gain her. Robert breaks down as soon as Lynne reveals to him that Sarah has an affair, an affair with a woman called Veronica.

Nevertheless, Robert's affection for Sarah is much stronger than the despair that she is taken again. It is not easy to be close to her but it would be much more demanding to let her go. Unfortunately, when he manages to get into her proximity, there is usually Veronica, as well, and her never-ending jeer at him. However, he is not willing to give up without a fight. For the time being, the feelings he cannot reveal to Sarah directly are hidden in his poems for her. Hopefully, one day she will remember what he confided to her on one occasion and she will open the book she likes so much and there written into a poem she will find what he feels for her.

The best day ever! Who would expect that one sunny May afternoon will change your life forever? Now and then Sarah looks after Ruby, the housekeepers' eight-year-old daughter. Usually she does so with Veronica but this time Veronica was too busy. It is no surprise that Robert took advantage of this happy accident and kept Sarah and Ruby company. They spent half a day on the beach and to Robert this afternoon meant a twist in his life. He realized for sure that Sarah is the one for him. In a talk over sleeping Ruby she revealed to him that she felt much more comfy in his company than in Veronica's who did not give her space and tried to read her all the time. Supported by the hope Sarah's words struck in him, he later told the sleeping child, his innocent listener who was not asleep at all; that there was nothing he would not do to make Sarah want him.

Robert felt totally "stupid" after he had refused Sarah's offer to spend a night with her. She had just broken up with Veronica and they were having the farewell party at Ashdown when she got drunk and made this indecent proposal to him. He simply could not use her in such a situation. The next day she tried to apologize to him and she explained to him that she could not be happy in a sexual relationship with a man. These words had incredible power. Robert refused Sarah's suggestion that they could stay with Terry in London. To his words he did not want to be her "friend" anymore.

Within the next five years Robert's life underwent many changes. After leaving Ashdown he fully woke up to his life goal and he decided to adjust himself to Sarah's expectations. He had always detested his masculine looks. Now he knew for sure that they were the only boundary between him and his love. He made up his mind to fight it. Anyway, he felt that his decision was fully in accordance with his whole body since the only dream he had ever remembered was about a woman pointing to a hospital. That was a clear hint.

Two years of psychiatric examinations were followed by two years of medical treatment. Finally, he had himself sex change operated to accomplish his

transformation. Cleo¹¹, Robert's new female identity, was born! During this time he faced stress, loneliness and pain. However, he had a good reason to cope with it. He even decided to go back to university and to study psychology and sleep disorders in order to be able to make Sarah's life easier.

After five years Robert's change was done. He could not wait meeting Sarah. He thought everything through and he came to the conclusion that their reunion had to take place at Ashdown, in the L-shape kitchen where they had met for the first time many years before. The most awaited moment turned into a nightmare. She got his message and really came. She was beautiful as usual albeit her hair had already started to grey. He wanted everything to be perfect. He was planning to give her time to reveal the change he had undergone. Therefore he did not show up immediately. Alas, before he came to the revelation she had told him that she was going to get married. She even denied her homosexuality. Robert, Cleo, had to run away.

Cleo works as a psychologist at the Ashdown clinic. She is popular there, at least among patients. Her boss, Dr. Dudden, is not a big supporter of her methods that seem "unscientific" to him whereas she does not like his bureaucratic and cold attitude to patients.

Cleo is lesbian and she does not hide it. Yet, it is not always easy to handle it. Not long ago she met a girl on the beach. She found her nice but she dared merely to give her one of her business cards. Anyway, the girl must have noticed Cleo's mannish feet and the scar on her ankle. Such feet are not attractive at all so there was little chance that the girl would be interested in her.

Terry is at Ashdown. Nowadays he is a respected film critic and Dr. Dudden decided to use his influence in media by inviting him as a patient. Surprisingly, Terry, the heaviest sleeper Cleo has ever known, suffers from insomnia now. It is extremely difficult to her

¹¹ On the choice of his new name Robert was influenced by Sarah who told him once that his twist sister Cleo would be the perfect partner for her. Although the character of Cleo was merely one of Sarah's fabrications, he kept this idea and he accepted the name with a hope that it would help him to gain Sarah's affection.

to pretend being someone else in front of him. After all, they used to be such close friends in the past. Yet, she could take advantage of his presence at Ashdown too and let him somehow know about Dr. Dudden's doubtful and suspicious methods.

Terry proved a competent journalist. Not only did he see through Dr. Dudden's intentions but he also revealed something from Cleo's past. Looking for a socket he shifted furniture in his room and by accident he came across an old wall inscription "Stupid Fuck." If only he knew that it was Robert who wrote these desperate words with his own blood twelve years ago after he had refused Sarah's intimate offer. Anyway, Terry became aware of something else, as well. He realized that there might be some connection between his old friend Robert and Cleo. He started supposing that she might be the lost twin sister.

Cleo tried to avoid his questions however she did not resist for long. When she cannot tell him the whole truth, she could let him believe this lie. Terry would not understand Robert's transformation but if she lets Robert die, she might stay in touch with Terry as Cleo.

The girl from the beach came to Ashdown. Strangely, she did not come and visit Cleo but she insisted on being examined since to her words she had serious problems with somniloquy. She was taken into the sleep laboratory and after a night when she was not asleep at all she left a clear message for Cleo. The girl was Ruby and her night talk was nothing but a way of letting Cleo know where she will find Sarah and that Sarah wants her.

Uncertain and confused Cleo left for London. She went with Terry who supported by her friendship and information that she provided him with decided to investigate the real state of Dudden's clinic. Among his things she glimpsed an old photograph. He explained to her that the photo was from a very special movie that he had wanted to find. There was a woman pointing to a hospital in the picture. Life is full irony. Sometimes you reckon that your body sends messages to you and you feel unique. Later you learn that you just saw a movie, even a very original and rare one, which imprinted into your brains.

Nonetheless, Robert is Cleo now and Cleo is as much in love with Sarah as Robert used to be. That is a matter of fact that she simply cannot deny – especially not now standing at Sarah’s front door.

4. 2. 5. Gregory

Gregory studies medicine. Currently he is in London to specialise in psychiatry. He has just broken up with Sarah. His face is pale, his hair is dark and he tends to see the world through glasses of his beloved science.

Gregory and Sarah used to be a couple for a long time but her behaviour recently changed to unacceptable. Anyway, Sarah was very useful to Gregory. He revealed that she has an episodic psychological problem to distinguish between her dreams and the reality. That was the best what could happen to him. With his notes in his notebook labelled “Sarah’s Psychological Problems” he was sure to overtake all other psychiatry students. She became his research object.

What he loved about her most was her eyelids. However, she was not able to understand that he adored touching them when she was asleep to feel her dreaming mind while she was experiencing one of her REM phases! Besides, he loved pressing his fingers on her shielded eyeballs during their lovemaking. Sarah could never appreciate it. In the end, she refused to live with him in London after she postgraduates. It was inevitable that they would split up.

In the course of the following twelve years Gregory proved hard-working, ambitious and competent. He has built up a unique sleep disorders clinic which is by accident situated at Ashdown, the previous student residence where he used to live as a student. Gregory is a man of science and this means most to him. He hates Dr. Madison, his lesbian colleague, who turns everything into fun and behaves so unscientifically.

Gregory’s clinic is private which means that it lives on its clients. A good and cheap advertisement is something you are looking for all the time when you run such an

establishment. For this reason Gregory invited Terry Worth, a famous film critic and a heavy insomniac, who could pay for its treatment with an article praising the clinic and its staff.

However, there is one more reason why Gregory wants Terry to stay at Ashdown. Terry seems to be a key to the mystery of non-necessity of sleep. According to his own words he had not slept for years which had enabled him to build a star career in his field. Gregory scorns himself terribly for needing sleep and he would like to use Terry as an experimental object in order to reveal what induces his permanent insomnia. To gain Terry's confidence and to impress him Gregory shows him his secret sleep deprivation laboratory where he carries out tests on animals and where (as Terry learns later) he is going to sacrifice even some human objects.

Gregory's chief enemy is he himself. He is not able to come to terms with his own identity. When he accidentally meets doctor Watts at a conference about management in the Health Service, he learns that one of Watts' patients is Sarah. As Watts reveals to his colleagues, Sarah's mental and sleep problems originate from her first relationship that affected her in a negative way since her partner could fulfil her neither emotionally nor physically. As soon as Gregory realizes that he is the man who failed so badly, he goes mad. He returns back to Ashdown. Having banished all patients away, he wires himself to his experimental machines. He is not willing to pretend being a person helping people. Gregory hates people. Everyone is against him. Nonetheless, he will manage it. He will defeat sleep. *Nessun Dorma!*¹²

4. 3. Basic Themes

In the course of the story we meet Sarah, whose life is rather difficult since she suffers from narcolepsy. For love for her and inspired by her case Robert takes a degree in psychology and he works at a clinic for sleep disorders. This clinic was set up by

¹² At the time when Gregory is already out of mind, he is listening to his favourite aria "Nessun Dorma" over and over again. It is possible to translate this phrase as: If only no one ever slept! That perfectly corresponds with his obsession with the search for a cure for sleep.

Gregory, Sarah's first boyfriend, who thanks to or maybe because of her devoted both his career and common sense to scientific research in the field of sleep psychology.

Sarah's disorder affected other people, as well. One of them is Veronica. Sarah's disease helped her to find in her a lover for several months. Another one is Terry, whose career was in a way destroyed by Sarah's disorder and who gradually, as a result of the loss of his life dreams, started to suffer from insomnia. Alas, as for Terry, together with the world of slumber he also lost his pleasure in his real life.

The main characters of Coe's story share another trait. All of them fight their genuine self, often veiled and locked into a thousand of chambers, that does not fit into the others' expectations. Sarah's narcolepsy singles her out as much as her fear of men or her homosexual inclinations. It is hard to say whether she knows a place where she could shelter from the coldness of everydayness since oftentimes she is even not able to distinguish between life and fantasy.

To the contrary, Robert knows exactly what the reality looks like and what it claims. He is a man and a man ought to be a man. However, Robert is such a kind of man who despises both his male appearance and any rough behaviour that is usually expected by men. Being a boy he did his best to conduct reasonably. Being an adult man he prefers becoming a woman in order to gain love of his beloved one and to get an entrance ticket into a world where he feels safer and surer.

Gregory is a weakling, a tyrant and a loser. Most of all he longs for success and fame and he dreams of being unique. Unfortunately, he is chased by an enormous inner vigour thanks to which he manages to break through in science. Nonetheless, this wicked energy is not powerful enough to offset his low potential as a human being. Gregory builds a wall of his own lies around himself which leads to merely one effect – he goes mad at the moment when the wind of truth blows.

Veronica's inner world is a kingdom of art, freedom and lesbian love. Alas, her intellect proves stronger than this paradise and it makes her betray her own ideals, her close ones and even herself. In the course of her life she becomes a grey bank rat building her nest from banknotes but dying of hunger for self-fulfillment.

Finally, there is Terry left – a dreamer both in the literal and the metaphorical meaning of this word – a man who lives on the beauty of his dreams and on the magic of old movies. Irresponsible and indifferent Terry, whose change into a successful journalist induces that he gets lost in himself.

Five stories, five transformations from children to grown-ups, five times a search for identity, three sad ends and two for whose happy endings we can hope. It is no coincidence that this glimmer of happiness is glowing for Sarah and Robert, who have not ceased to fight for their real selves, who have not been defeated by the pressure of conventions and who have stayed the same as they have always considered themselves. That is the reason to believe that their potential reunion would intertwine rays of their inner suns that have never, irrespective of time and place, stopped shining for each other.

Reading between the lines, we realize that another of Coe's chief topics in *The House of Sleep* is the matter of madness. Who can be regarded crazy on condition that we admit that somebody is? Is it Sarah, who is diseased and whose disorder is usually misinterpreted as insanity since people are reluctant to deal with this "weird" girl? Is it Robert, who shows features of transsexuality, who is obsessed with the crazy girl and who has himself sex change operated for love for her? Is love madness? Do you think that it is Veronica who is insane? She commits suicide after she has built a dream life. Are you convinced that the madman is Terry - a human creature obsessed with fantasy, both his own one and somebody else's squeezed into the shape of movies? Are you saying that all of them are insane except Gregory, who is a scientist? Do you claim that no one is mad except Gregory, who plays a scientist but in fact he ruins his life and lives of his laboratory victims? Actually, that is what the author of this thesis is saying.

Apparently, Coe's novel conceals at least one more thematic level – an ethical one. Frankly speaking, how many times do we ask ourselves by reading the book: "Is this ethically correct?" Anyway, we instantly realize that such things as Coe depicts just happen. The appalling fact is that mostly we accept them wordlessly. We simply pretend that they do not exist.

Was it right of Sarah to take advantage of Robert's friendship at the time when she was not ready to start a relationship with him? Is it possible to justify Robert's demeanour in the situation when he confirmed the truthfulness of Sarah's fabrication to protect her reputation although it weakened the confidence between him and his best friend Terry? Was it fair that Veronica chose a materialistic way of life and as a safety measure that she would not lose to it she had a baby that she was never able to love? Was it ethically correct that Terry sold his artistic career out to a job that criticises pieces of work by other artists but merely to the extent that these works stay easy to sell which guarantees a fixed salary to him? May anyone understand and approve of Gregory's enthusiasm for science that has ended up in inhumane experiments on animals and people? Such questions apply only to the main characters; however, Coe's criticism of the human's decadence is to be found by other heroes of his novel too. Disregarding the clear example when the man's demoralization is stated as the main theme of the lost Italian movie that Terry tries to find, there is one even more horrifying example – the case of professor Cole's patient, a very dangerous psychotic, who is released from treatment because of a fault of the health care system and whose next victim becomes Terry at the end of the entire story.

4.4. Narrative Strategy; Style and Language

The plot of the novel is set into two time periods. The odd-numbered chapters retell events of the academic year 1983 - 1984, the even-numbered ones take place twelve years later. The book is segmented into divisions named after sleep stages. Similarly to a drowsing person who falls asleep from a state of full consciousness into depths of dreams, merciful or cruel ones, we go through stories of the main heroes and gradually we reveal their secrets, we learn about their grief and we hope that those who we like will fulfil their desires whereas we impatiently wait for some punishment by those who we scorn.

Obviously, there is one more meaning of the likening of the main chapters to sleep stages. It is a part of Terry's personal story. Coe introduces him as an insomniac.

However, as he starts recalling old dreams and events, he rediscovers his inner peace and the willingness of his mind to swing waves of the sleep river again.

Furthermore, Coe proved to be creative in joining the chief sections of his book. As already explained in chapters dealing with sleep, the transition between sleep stages is gradual. Coe managed to evoke the same impression. He let the last sentences of the main chapters open and he finished them at the beginning of successive sections; although the contents of both parts are not interconnected, you, as readers, transit from one storyline into another one without feeling distracted.

One of the most distinctive traits of *The House of Sleep* is its intertextuality. You come across it not only in the preface but also in appendices. Besides, it appears in various forms in many parts of the novel. Coe enlivened his story by incorporating extracts of poems, newspaper articles, medical records, a part of a medical reference and some letters. Thanks to this he raised the credibility and authenticity of his work.

The House of Sleep is a novel for observant readers. To be able to take in the twists in individual stories, you must follow details mentioned in preceding parts. At the same time, it is a piece of work which requires a certain intelligence level since you can reveal the true sense of the novel merely on condition that you are well informed about basic psychological problems and that you display a high level of empathy.

Apparently, Coe likes playing with words. Anyway, he lets us know about it himself through the character of the psychotherapist Russell Watts when he depicts the case of his patient Sarah and the influence of language on her health as well as the influence of her psychic condition on the language she speaks. Yet, it is not possible to consider Coe a great language magician. His style is readable, appealing and it does not bore. However, it does not bring anything new. He perfectly chooses phrases we subconsciously know but he has a flair for organising them in his work in a harmonic way which leads to the fact that they are strong enough to enthrall, touch and hurt.

4.5. Weak Points

Although Coe's novel is a very attractive reading that is distinguished by inventiveness, a wide spectrum of human characters and the ability to keep its readers in tension by plenty of unexpected twists, it has its weak points, as well.

First of all, we must reproach too frequent coincidence. Gregory manages to build up his clinic just at Ashdown where the life stories of main heroes gradually come back to. Ruby glimpses Cleo's/Robert's scar, although it is usually well veiled. One of Sarah's pupils, probably the most interesting one, is Veronica's daughter. Veronica never opens the book she takes as a souvenir from the cafe Valladon and consequently she does not find Robert's poem. This fact enables that many years later when the book becomes Sarah's property she finds out how much he cared for her. Robert is apparently one of the few people who have ever seen the movie that Terry tries to track back. Surprisingly (or not), it is just a scene from this movie kept in Robert's mind in the form of a dream that makes him change his life. Gregory takes part in a conference and there he meets both Russell Watts, Sarah's psychotherapist, and professor Cole, whose patient stabs Terry later in the course of the story.

It is possible to list even more such strokes of luck or bad luck but the one that should be considered the most distracting one is the fact that in the course of twelve years Robert's old dormitory bedroom has not been refurnished or repainted although the whole building has been rebuilt into a private clinic. As a result, the inscription "Stupid Fuck" stayed on the wall which had its consequences as described in previous chapters.

Secondly, the character of Stephen Webb might be taken as a weak point. This young man appears in the novel only as a name. He was a student and he belonged to Gregory's experimental objects. In consequence of Gregory's negligence he lost his life. After a long-term sleep deprivation he was sent home from the Ashdown clinic and he was run over by a car. It is not fair to claim that this character does not have his importance to the storyline; however, he seems to be rather redundant. Considering that Stephen's fate is not the only proof of Gregory's perverse methods and therefore

not the only corpus delicti that Terry could mention in the article he is going to write about Ashdown, the character of Stephen does seem to be superfluous.

Finally, we could talk critically about Coe's lack of originality regarding how he let Veronica commit suicide and how he depicted Robert's fabricated death. In both cases he let the characters die in a car accident, driving their cars against a wall. Albeit we know that Cleo's story about Robert's death is merely a metaphoric expression of his transformation, it is astounding that Coe chose the same end both for Robert and Veronica. We can only suppose that Cleo knew about Veronica's death, which is not apparent from the book at all, and therefore she borrowed this idea for her own "old self" when she was confronted by Terry's question about Robert's death.

4. 6. Additional Comments

The scope of this work does not allow analysing all traits and elements that Coe integrated into his novel. This analysis works chiefly on requirements stated in the introduction which limits this paper in its particularity but it also lets us suppose that *The House of Sleep* has a potential to become an analysis object of a more extensive work.

As for the novel itself, the present author believes that the analysis in this bachelor thesis has confirmed that *The House of Sleep* is justly considered one of the first-rate representatives of British experimental literature. Themes and the style of narration chosen by Coe perfectly correspond with the main features of this literary movement that we predefined in the theoretical part of this thesis.

Uncertainty and tension emanate from the entire novel. They originate from the main heroes' personal crises or from outside problems, mainly existential ones. Coe pointed out the mood of the 1980s and 1990s and he partly ridiculed the matters that stirred the British society at the time such as political changes, gender issues and the decadence in culture. Coe determined sleep and its disorders to play the main role of his plot. We can only guess that the scientific attitude in which the sleep was dealt with was meant as a way of introducing a fixed point into a story in which everything

changes all the time. At the same time it is possible to speculate that he wanted to emphasize the fact that our minds are able to play more roles. They might be our protectors who take us into the world of dreams. They may be fake players who manipulate us. However, they can be punishers who punish us for our guilts and who banish us into the world of people where they do not let us sleep and where we are forced to face the absurdity of the system we have created.

The House of Sleep is an outstanding example showing that British experimental literature does not produce any positive or negative heroes. Its products are characters who arouse both favourable and negative emotions and who are not possible to be pronounced unambiguous literary patterns. At this point we are still to state who is the main character of the whole novel. In case we insist that none of the main heroes dominates the other ones, we will have to pronounce that there is no main character in *The House of Sleep*. However, the present author is convinced that the structure of the novel and its ending clearly imply that Terry is the main protagonist. The plot of the novel culminates in accordance with how Terry's disorder gets better. We, similarly to him, move from the state of full consciousness to the REM stage in which people experience dreams. At the end of the novel we learn that Terry's "end" is drawing near, as well, for he is in a coma and no hope of enhancement seems to exist. Terry is asleep and he is smiling because he is there where has always felt best. We are at the end of the story and we are smiling since we anticipate that the relationship between Sarah and Robert will be fulfilled. Even we, the readers, are dreaming on reading the last sentences of the novel.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis entitled *The Search for Identity and Creating Parallel Worlds in The House of Sleep by J. Coe* we aimed at the following goals:

- a) to describe and to explain the chief features of British experimental prose;
- b) on the basis of a) to reveal key changes in the mentality of the contemporary British society that as it is clear from a) reflect in literature and other art branches;
- c) to characterise the role and functions of sleep and dreams in the human life, in other words – the impact of the sleeping mind on the active one;
- d) to analyse the novel *The House of Sleep* by Jonathan Coe which exemplifies the British experimental prose and that is based on b) and c);
- e) to draw conclusions on the importance and character of the main heroes in the novel *The House of Sleep* on the ground of the theoretical findings from a), b) and c) and from the practical analysis in d);
- f) to determine the main character of the novel and to justify the choice.

In the course of the work on this bachelor thesis the present author arrived at these conclusions:

- a) British experimental prose is distinguished by a combination of traditional narrative techniques with new themes that have originated from social changes in the second half of the 20th century. The most significant feature of contemporary British literature is its shift towards postmodernism that is typical of doubting social systems and human values and that is characterized by unclear boundaries between the real and the fictional. Literary characters of this period are usually ambiguous and they represent marginal people and their everyday worries. For they live in the time when nothing seems sure, safe or right they spend their lives searching for their true identities. At moments when they feel lost, they tend to daydream and to hide into their mental parallel worlds.

- b) In the chapters 2. 3. and 2. 4. we revealed the transformation procedure of British culture into its today's form. Here we could point out the change of the national identity based on post-war political changes that induced the necessity of reshaping individual identities. Britain lost its noble and dominant looks and it started facing problems of its own common man. The institution of family was questioned, gender issues were introduced and sex became a public topic. Later, money and consumerism penetrated into the British society and eventually, postmodern melancholic mood flooded British literature.
- c) Coe's choice of sleep as the dominant motif in his novel *The House of Sleep* perfectly symbolizes how narrow the boundary between the real world and the fantasy is nowadays and what consequences may be drawn when this fragile line is violated. The basic physical function of sleep is to restore the bodily energy. Yet, it should not be forgotten that it works at the mental level, as well. There it gives space for restoring psychic activities and besides it gives opportunity to dreams to inform our sleeping mind about our desires and worries. As it is apparent from Chopra's theory, when we do not enjoy restful sleep because of suppressed emotions or on the ground of an improper time management, our minds have a tendency to rest by day which deteriorates the quality of our lives and which may also lead to sleep disorders that result in a similar effect. That is exactly the case of Sarah, Gregory and Terry in Coe's novel.
- d) On analysing *The House of Sleep* we concentrated on its main themes and basic style features. It was verified that they are in accordance with characteristics of British experimental prose. Moreover, it was confirmed that Coe based his novel on expert knowledge of sleep psychology and sleep disorders.
- e) The present author believes that Coe intended to provoke with his novel. He accumulated an unexpectedly large number of questionable themes in this piece of work and he let them dominate the seemingly "normal" things such as the traditional relationship model, science and scientific experiments or career and making money. Coe focused *The House of Sleep* on the matter of the search for identity and he built up his story in such a way that we can do nothing but admit

that accepting yourself as you are is the only way of finding happiness in life. As for the parallel worlds, Coe showed how much they take part in our lives. They might be mere dreams but they mostly mean more to us than our real existence. Sarah's narcolepsy helps her to go through difficult life moments. Veronica's visions of her theatre group give her hope that there is still something to live for. Terry's obsession with movies and his love to his dreams express his despair in his real life. Robert and his pictures of Sarah and their common life encourage him more in his fatal decision than his family support. Even Gregory's strong belief in science and his persuasion of his own importance move him forward and they allow him to create his wicked world of cruelty and insanity.

- f) The last question that should be answered is who played the main role in Coe's novel. Albeit it is not unequivocal, this present author asserts that Terry is the one who was meant as the chief protagonist. The plot graduates in accordance with his life story. Besides, both the entire novel and Terry say goodbye to readers in a tragic-romantic way.

6. Résumé

Tato bakalářská práce s titulem *Hledání identity a vytváření paralelních světů v románu J. Coea Dům spánku* sestává ze tří základních částí.

Autorčiným primárním cílem bylo vypracovat analýzu výše zmíněného románu. Ten je však obsahově komplikovaný a jeho plné pochopení vyžaduje širší teoretické znalosti literární vědy, historie, sociologie a psychologie. V důsledku těchto skutečností se autorka rozhodla vyčlenit v práci prostor jak pro teoretický popis britské experimentální prózy, kam Coeův román spadá, tak pro úvod do problematiky spánku a psychologie spánku, tedy pro témata, jež Coe určil v *Domě spánku* za klíčová.

První blok textu je věnován tématu *British Experimental Prose*. Tato kapitola popisuje propojení britské experimentální prózy s postmodernismem. Blíže definuje samotný postmodernismus, jakož i jeho reflexi v britském experimentálním románu. Součástí této kapitoly je i nástin vývoje britské prózy od 50. let 20. století až ke konci 90. let, přičemž hlavní důraz je kladen na sociopolitické změny, které posunuly britský román až do jeho experimentální podoby.

Druhým pilířem této bakalářské práce je kapitola *Sleep* dedikovaná problematice spánku. Součástí tohoto textu je jak medicínský náhled na spánek a jeho fyziologické funkce, tak otázka spánkových poruch, jakož i pojednání o významu snů.

Vlastní analýza Coeova románu začíná kapitolou nesoucí jeho název, tedy *The House of Sleep*. Součástí analýzy je stručné představení autora, dále pak výčet základních témat a motivů objevujících se v *Domě spánku*, charakteristika autorova stylu, kritika slabých míst v díle a závěrečné komentáře. Specifikem této analýzy je převyprávění příběhu z pohledu všech pěti hlavních protagonistů. Cílem tohoto postupu bylo odkrýt, jakou roli u nich sehrálo hledání vlastní identity a útěk do paralelních světů, jakož i odhalit jednoho konečného hlavního hrdinu celého příběhu.

V úvodní kapitole této bakalářské práce zvané *Introduction* bylo vymezeno šest cílů, jichž autorka mínila dosáhnout a které dle svého přesvědčení i splnila. Toto tvrzení zakládá na argumentech uvedených v závěrečné kapitole *Conclusion*.

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