JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

FORMING IDENTITY IN JENNIFER EGAN'S NOVELS

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Studijní obor: Bohemistika – Anglická a americká literatura
Ročník: 3.

2021

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

30 July 2021 in České Budějovice

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I would like to thank doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, PhD., for patience, support and helpful advice.

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na otázku identity a jejího formování v románech současné americké autorky Jennifer Eganové. Nejprve charakterizuje pojetí identity v literatuře ve vztahu k literárním postavám a vymezuje tento termín jako takový. Dále se soustředí na zasazení konceptu identity do jednotlivých literárních období s důrazem na kontext, ve kterém si autorka budovala kariéru úspěšné spisovatelky a v němž přetrvává na straně jedné dědictví postmodernismu a na straně druhé nastupuje současný novelistický proud, jenž je někdy nazýván „post-posmodernismem". V praktické části se práce zabývá konkrétními romány Eganové*, Look at Me, The Keep, A Visit from the Goon Squad* a *Manhattan Beach,* a skrze podrobnou analýzu ukazuje, jak v nich s tímto konceptem pracuje. Za pomoci intepretace se snaží postihnout podstatu identit postav, existuje-li, a částečně odpovědět tak i na to, jakou povahu má dnešní americká tvorba.

Klíčová slova: Jennifer Egan, post-postmodernismus, identita, self, čas, paměť, technologie, současná americká literatura

Abstract

This diploma thesis focuses on the question of identity and its formation in the novels of the contemporary American author, Jennifer Egan. At first, it characterizes the concept of identity in literature in relation to literary characters, and it attempts to define the term as such. After the introduction, it moves to situating the concept in particular literary periods, with an emphasis on the context in which the writer has built her career of a successful novelist and in which there is a continuation of postmodern heritage on the one hand and the emergence of contemporary novelistic writing that is sometimes called "post-postmodernism" on the other hand. In the practical part, the thesis examines selected Egan's novels, *Look at Me, The Keep, A Visit from the Goon Squad* a *Manhattan Beach*, and thoroughly analyses how she deals with the topic. By a method of close-reading and interpretation, it aims to capture the essence of characters' identities, if there is any, and subsequently to identify the nature of today's American fiction.

Keywords: Jennifer Egan, post-postmodernism, identity, self, time, memory, technology, contemporary American literature

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Introductory Note

When reading Jennifer Egan's books, we are entering a reality not unlike our own – because they belong to contemporary literature, they reflect our current conditions, joys and worries, and above all, the stories bring to the surface an important question: what is our contemporary identity? And should we be concerned with it at all? Since it is clear that it is through identity that we function in the world, it is nearly desirable that we deal with it in some way, or at least examine its shape, dimensions, boundaries, or limits, just as the characters in her novels do, and which can help us with this task.

Yet, in order to undertake it boldly, we must first understand what identity is and how we can pre-define it. Thus, the first part of this thesis focuses on the theoretical background. We comment on the concept from the point of view of literature in relation to literary characters and the author, we study how the term personal identity is seen from the perspective of, for example, sociology and psychology, and then, we survey where and in what forms it appears in particular literary periods, from the beginning of the novel through modernism and postmodernism to contemporary literature, or so-called "post-posmodernism". Here, the thesis pauses for a brief moment to consider the relationship between the current and the previous literary period, the term "post-postmodernism", and after that, we return to the examination of how contemporary literary discourse perceives identity.

The concept is then specifically explored in the practical part of the thesis, which analyses four of Egan's novels, using a close-reading method to reveal through what themes or motifs the author approaches it with assistance of her literary characters. Each section, therefore, draws on slightly different areas through which we can encounter and contemplate identity in Egan's books, but which turn to be, after all, as interconnected. Finally, these thematic areas are summarized in the conclusion, together with the main findings we have reached during the detailed analysis, which, as we hope, gives a comprehensive idea of the treatment and depiction of the topic by this popular American author.

1. Identity in literature

1.1 Identity & the author

In his publication that introduces us to the different angles one can address the concept of identity in literature, Florian Coulmas notes that

> "[…] we can find all the aspects and dimensions of identity […]: identity through time, the mind–body problem, the identity of words and things, gender boundaries, identity crisis, divided loyalty, mistaken identity, split identity, and the demands of modernity for individuals to have a national, social, and gender identity." (125).

While identity has been a philosophical issue for ages, literature have always dealt with it in its own terms, applying not only the knowledge of philosophy, neurology, psychology, sociology, linguistics and other disciplines, but also reacting to general and time-based challenges one is confronted with when searching for the meaning and own definition of identity. Basically, literary works are circling again and again around the fundamental question that has been put forward and answered a thousand times before. It is the question of who we are, and also, who we may become in parallel universes, as the stories expand the lines of it by offering a range of similar and dissimilar possibilities.

Contemporary American literature is still growing in books which discuss the concept. Mostly, they relate to, say, the type of above-mentioned national identity (for example, many Afro-American writers reflect on the history of slavery from which their identity inevitably roots; similarly Jewish authors process the war experience of their predecessors); they explore the forms of identity influenced by gender and sexual orientation, and, last but not least, identity which is reflected in the language of a book itself. Since many American writers are of different origins and speak with more than one mother tongue, the clash between dissimilar identities – national and individual – comes to the fore and creates sometimes an irresolvable tension. Although it is not purpose of this debate to bring an in-depth analysis of a relation between the author and character, both these terms (together with the term of the narrator, added to the double-sided view by narratological studies) seem to significate the areas where one is able to aim his attention, aside from the story as a whole, when coming to terms with the concept of identity through literature, in some of the areas Coulmas has outlined.

The entrance of author's persona to his work and specifically his characters have been doubted and disproved as irrelevant many times, however, as the examples above have shown, in some cases, it is hardly separable from it. Still, it can easily create an image which paralyzes the writer in a fixed position including a means readers choose when they interpret his literary pieces. On that account, every book which diverts somehow from this image, say, through its unusual protagonists, or the topic, is considered false, unauthentic, a presentation of eccentricity which cannot be taken seriously regarding otherwise the "stable" row of his work (Sánchez-Arce 13). Such artificial, inflexible context, which may be sometimes deathly for author's creativity, often incorporates literary characters too. It is not an exception that one frequently constructs what can be called a set of figures – a notion of characters which are typical for a certain author – in order to make a connection between separated works during reading. In most cases, connecting books by similarity of their characters is nothing wrong, since it affirms a repeated structure, conscious or unconscious, the writer uses and the reader can stick to. The moment this notion goes wrong is when we insist on this similarity as a part of writing style that cannot be literally overwritten, and, furthermore, that characters reflect the author and the other way round, that he/she embodies a part of own identity in them, otherwise they would not be credible or functional. Again, this could be then as a fruitful perspective as a toxic one. An ill-conceived transition of this approach into a rule can be illustrated by the interview in which Jennifer Egan had to explain why she writes more from a man's perspective, rather than woman's, even though she considers herself a feminist (Dyg and Egan 30:20-35:06). In this manner, the interview hints a fallacious presupposition that writers have the obligation to express themselves only *from* a space of identity/identities they assign themselves, or others ascribe them.

In this thesis, we will be thus careful when linking characters to the author's life, and rather we will mainly focus on characters just for themselves and within them to reveal the general understandings Egan's novels present in relation to the theme of identity. For Egan, literature is more about walking in shoes of another self than being oneself, although it means sometimes a difficult task to imagine a self absolutely different from us, for example, by gender, (Dyg an Egan 33:18-33:40) and giving up own identity "categories" we are used to live in. As Egan adds, that helps us partially to overcome the frustration of not knowing what the other person thinks and experiences, to leave the closed, sometimes very lonely territory of oneself for a while (Dyg and Egan 32:40-

33:03). She appreciates the illuminative power of literature by claiming that “finding my way to an alternative consciousness that has been formed by such a different experience and writing from that is just… it feels enlightening – sort of capital E” (Dyg and Egan 34:03-34:18). The literary characters and the room of their consciousness they live in, hence, can be a good place where to begin when we analyse identity.

1.2 Identity & the character

Nonetheless, as well as characters are not to be merged with the author, in accordance with O’Donnell, they should not be substituted interchangeably with identity, because they are “in essence, the collection of words and signs that gesture toward a fictional embodiment of identity” (82). Implying a kind of insufficiency to capture identity only by language used in a particular work, O’Donnell appears to be, at the same time, aware that this verbalization through the character is the only and the most adequate means how to achieve it in literature. He admits that the character is “the element of fiction most closely aligned with the notion of identity” (82), even though every author treats it more or less differently. Thus, this closeness allows one to grasp the theory of the idea in practice, and rather than giving a straightforward answer, more importantly, it provides the place for raising questions.

Although a character has been said to be rather a rough outline, sketch of identities than a depicted real person (and we need to point out that it is often not even their purpose, if we take into consideration the so-called “types” which stand for an universal figure with a settled collection of pre-determined attributes), it proves to be useful when we, as readers, identify or not identify with them, and solutions and suggestions they propose when they meet the identity issue in any way. In agreement with Patrick Colm Hogan, despite its certain shortcomings that are caused by the limited capability to cover the concept fully, literature turns out to be one of the most effective and most imaginative instruments for doing this, creating a playing area for modelling an array of situations in which different aspects of identity are tested (11). Hogan aptly describes it as following:

> “[…] literary works frequently depict characters’ identities in complex situations, involving multifaceted social interactions, and with precisely detailed internal experience. Thus, they provide us with ways of thinking about identity

> through fine-grained representations of psychological processes that take place in relation to richly represented environments." (11-12).

All afore-mentioned possibilities of who one can become, with their infinite variables, take place and shape in the particular stories which serve as a laboratory (cf. Procházka 8), and they are, thus, demonstrated through fictional protagonists who, as primarily language-made constructs and to some extent guinea pigs for imagination, point back to reality and inquiries concerning identity. Similarly, Vermeulen considers characters, no matter if they go through a development in a plot and literary history, or not, "the greatest practical-reasoning schemes ever invented" (xii). Consequently, they act as subjects for a myriad of experiments which are supposed to bring results, while the author alters all the variables that relate to the characters, such as external and internal traits, living conditions, other figures that surround him, his/her primary purpose (if he/she has any), the way he/she spends time given in the story, thoughts and emotions that inhabit his mind, events that cross his path etc. It is needed to say that the "experiments" should not awaken a notion of a silly voodoo-pinning when the author chases characters solely in inscrutable or scary situations to test their identities. There can be no dramatic moment, no plot twist or extreme, absurd situation, and it can still tell a lot about how identity is approached and consequently, it can make us re-evaluate our current opinions, assumptions and experience with it.

As we have noticed before, Hogan remarks that literature does not often manage to study identity alone without other disciplines; however, it prepares a solid ground for scientific analysing (12). Assessing the importance of literary character, Vermeulen even argues that "we think about most things—facts, values, norms, history, morality, society, even our own fates—by bundling them up into figures and stories about other people" (23-24). In other words, the characters are created to translate almost any kind of information that comes to our mind to an imaginable (however, not always digestible), concrete form. What is more, he affirms that in some cases, they fulfil a function of a "sifter" of these information – because regarding their constantly changing and overwhelmingly large amount, we are not able to absorb, nor make a connection among them. Just as journalism uses individual stories to help readers to find an anchorage in much wider topic, fictional characters can assist to process the cultural, political or historical events (Vermeulen xii). This function, therefore, can be also used for manifold theories of identity, although they do not refer to them openly.

Vermeulen's opinion has very close to an assertion by a narratologist Mark Turner who came with a term of a "literary mind", arguing that our brain works in a narrative thinking, since we organize our thoughts in a shape of stories which help us with world-understanding (Turner 1996). Owing to this, we are closer to the fictional and fictionalized nonfictional characters more than we think – they live in literature and we live literary.

Nevertheless, such belief in a character that is able to mediate us a specific view on the topic of identity, has not been a matter-of-course not so long time ago. The awareness of the fact that literature is only a representation, but also the only way how to represent our experience (McLaughlin, "Post-postmodern Discontent" 67; also Burn 20-21), has returned roughly at the beginning of 21st century, at the time connected to the dominance of so-called "contemporary" literature after a long era of postmodernist rule. It would be short-sighted to say that postmodernism detracted from the theme of identity because of its literary plays with characters on which the illusory nature of literature was exhibited. In fact, it is quite opposite – it made a strong statement about identity insecurities thanks to the characters too, in spite of its refusal to accept them sometimes as a factitious portrayal of reality. All literary eras deal with identity – and all different attitudes show the correlation between them. They are used to delimit themselves (or we are used to delimit in historicizing) against each other, still, the similarities indicate that the "end" of one period and "beginning" of another one are not as unequivocal as we are taught to think.

1.3 Personal identity & the character during literary history

1.3.1 Identity as a term

As Steph Lawler puts it, a struggle to find a "correct", all-including definition of identity is given by the fact that we always tackle the concept within a particular context, applying one of the point-of-views, which arrives at a description that necessarily differs, at least in some parts, from those which were attained through another point of view (7). Yet, we should see not only divergence, but mainly resemblance between the conceptions of identity which proceed from and depend on each other (Lawler 9). In this thesis, we will draw, therefore, on sources which may give

an impression of being miles apart from each other, however, they will, hopefully, show evidence of sharing some aspects.[1]

Lawler summarizes the obscureness of the term by stressing the fact that it alludes to many contents, although she mentions only some of its possible meanings:

> " […] My sense of myself, others' perceptions of me, my reactions to others' perceptions, the social categories that attach themselves to me and to which I attach myself – all may be referred to as 'identity' […] Any discussion of identity always means we are in the presence of not one but many persons – or perceptions of a person." (7-8)

On the one hand, we are aware of belonging into a group(s) of society, while these attachments can be in a harmony, or can collide with each other, specifically when various social roles, which we either accept or refuse, enter the formation of identity. On the other hand, there is a strong notion of the "I" – of who we are or we think we are, when we are excluded from influence of others, the outer social world.

The quotation implies, though, that unbinding identity from societal relations is highly improbable, nearly impossible. It is not only due to the natural fact that we are born into a certain social surroundings, but also because one must place own identity within these relations in order to even be *able* to make an attempt to define oneself. Without reflections by others, their views of one's identity, and simultaneously one's view of oneself that often become clearer in human interactions, identity would probably dissolve in foggy impressions, missing out the external impulses that would arouse one's interest in thinking and shaping of it.

The part of self which is unaffected and exists in oneself like an isolated island is in Lawler's opinion a myth that was created in Western tradition, and is so rooted in it that it usually evades being called into question (15)[2]. In addition, it is encompassed by the concept that she calls "essentialism", which means a persuasion that we have an essential, non-material element, no matter if it has been named a soul or a mind etc., that represents an intangible, inalienable piece of self that remains the same for a whole life despite the changing environs, and also, it preserves authenticity and inner "truth" the other parts of self cannot offer (Lawler 15, 18). Similarly, Sanchéz-Arce highlights

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[1] It should be, too, mentioned that in some approaches, self and identity stand for two terms characterized separately, still, in majority of cases we will use them interchangeably for greater intelligibility; if not, the notification of this will occur.

[2] For now, we are leaving aside a postmodernist stand to it that proves the opposite.

the illusion of an independent identity when she emphasizes that there is a circulation of individual and general ways how to perceive and contemplate it, and how to speak about it (5), essentialism being one of them. Consequently, it can be difficult to distinguish between what we really think of identity on our own and what we are made and used to think of the term. The afore-mentioned implication to refuse the "I" containing an essence as a false theory is very serious, for it undermines the long-standing beliefs. However, to agree with it would be precipitate and counterproductive for our purposes, since we will show how deep this traditional approach is entrenched in literary characters and us alike. Looking solely through the glance of others brings about also many problems as we will observe in our first analysis of Egan's novel, *Look at Me*.

All in all, both authors do not deny *personal* identity that we will bear in mind in our examination; they claim that it grows up from the social one and not vice versa. What their statements have in common with the theories which request the opposite direction is the process when "'I' is defined by 'you'" (Sanchéz-Arce 5). Actually, if we turn it upside down, we will see a second side of the coin, which Musholt calls "self-other differentiation" (qtd in Hogan xii). Despite the wide scope of reference the term of identity has, this double-sided outlook on it is likely to be shared across the different approaches. Moreover, it does not rule out the assumption that there is a part of identity, bounded (but not always accessible) merely to oneself. Thus, these resemblances aid us in conceiving the idea of personal identity that we will inspect on examples of Egan's characters.

1.3.2 Personal identity

As Hogan and other theoreticians clarify, the most distinctive trait of personal identity is consciousness that we are what others are *not*, i.e. we are able to delineate a margin between "I" as a self and others as different selves (xii-xiii, cf. also Kast 16). This delineation, or the "self-other differentiation", can be based on anything we can imagine in relevance to a person – internal or external traits like appearance or style, similarly to literary characters which are gifted them by the authors. In line with James Fearon, who also dissects an extensive content of the word "identity", the margins are dependent on a viewpoint of importance – attributes which we regard as necessary and valuable for "I" we use for the further definition of who we are, and this makes

understanding to personal identity difficult owing to a variety of features which are (not) selected to the important ones (20). Building borders of identity means, therefore, for everyone a usage of different blocks which may also include a set of things that are closer to the concept of social identity, such as the social roles. Furthermore, these often represent a source of identity crisis; yet, it offers us at least one clue in the crisis when we are rediscovering a self.

Notwithstanding the layers such identity is composed of, say, the social layer, the word "personal" suggests subjectivity, even something intimate that belongs solely to ourselves, to one, particular person, regardless whether it is subordinate to modifications during life or not. It is an idea that is not distant from the belief in an essence, only its milder version because it acknowledges that the persistence of it needs not to be unconditional. In other words, the quality or qualities we perceive as "our own" can change as they encounter any influences and can be even replaced by other quality, however, in a self, there exists always at least one of those we regard that way, a quality that we possess and that is, thus, individual. As a result, this leads to a conviction that the base of personal identity is located in its individuality, which can evoke a sense of originality, uniqueness, and irreplaceability by another human being. This brings us back to the beginning of the argument – the line between two entities, i.e. identities, which has been based on the difference, can be explained like the difference given by the individuality of a person. Although one may share a lot of aspects of life with somebody else, also due to belonging into various social categories and groups, two persons are never absolutely identical – and as it has been stated frequently, identity is a complex interplay between the same and the unique (Lawler 15, 2). And it is exactly this friction area that can generate a lot of conflicts which can be sometimes irreconcilable.

The irreconcilability of particular aspects of identity is a subject for a psychological point of view too, often with connection to an (in)authentic way of living. Since Erik Erikson, a father of a psychosocial conception of identity in psychology who introduced the theory of identity crises typical for eight phases of life, the question of authenticity is still relevant in the discourse. To put it simply, authenticity (that is generally viewed to be placed in the centre of that "inner" self) happens to be in the moment when our acts, thoughts, our state of being, harmonize with who we are. A psychologist Verena Kast describes the experience of it, again, through self-other differentiation in the moments of complicated ethical decisions, pain, serious illness, fear or any kind of the

borderline situation when one very strongly feels what belongs to his own sense of self, what he understands as fundamental for him, and what goes deeply against his identity (16-17), unlike identities of some other people. In ordinary daily moments, though, it might be more strenuous to find and distinguish authenticity applicable for our individual, personal identity, not only because of the conflicts between many aspects of it and clashes between two perceptions (by others and by ourselves), but also because of overlooking it. To not to be mindful of the need to be authentic, to not act in agreement with our identity ends, in Kast's opinion, in being carried meaninglessly by random events which are out of our control and which are abrading our sense of identity to no sense, no limited notion of who one can be (15). Authenticity and its opposite will haunt heroes from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, illustrating how they have forgotten the original meaning of it.

Contrary to the sociologists who nowadays avoid viewing self as containing an essence, in any form it was considered in history, in developmental psychology, self represents a core that should remain the same although it changes, as we have discussed lately. The core must participate on deciding of what qualities it will accept, assigning it to a particular person, to the referent of "I". Like Erikson highlighted the continuity of "I" in time, Kast adds that a pillar for the continuity is the authenticity, otherwise the line will be interrupted and a person will feel estrangement to himself/herself (15). Nonetheless, when one is forced or must change himself, the continuity is also discontinued, with the necessary adjusting to environment and happenings in life, thus, a feeling like a stranger to ourselves can last intensively for a long time and can even move us away from who we once were irretrievably. The "I" from past is not, therefore, synthetized – it is pulled apart into separated periods or versions that can give an impression that "this could not have been me" instead of "I was once like that but I am aware of it internally". In this case, self-other differentiation turns into self-self differentiation when one limits oneself through identity/ies once experienced, which often hits protagonists in Egan's novels a lot

Besides, Kast, annotating on Erikson's psychosocial theory, expresses a doubt whether one can even be continuous as "I" in a social and cultural world that places increasing demands on it, due to speed with which it moves forward (48). In the light of her remark, social theory seems to destabilize the continuity because "I" relies upon a measure that yields to never-ending shifts. It holds a view that identity is rather copying the direction of all transformations within worldwide integration, so the activity in

which it continues is primarily changing (Lawler 3), which is what we cannot say with such certainty about synthetization and formation of the lasting "core". For modern psychology, though, establishing identity is also a lifelong process that is never completed simply with passing through one age; in addition, one may get stuck in front of the quest of the formation forever. Regarding inclusion of social facet to analysis of identity, thereby Erikson differed from the previous development (Kast 47), we can recognize points of contact between both theories. Both point out a self existing not in a vacuum, but surrounded by people, both admit that identity is a matter of movement.

To sum up, on the one hand, continuity, as the psychological perspective indicates, should be in the interest of preserving personal identity as the same to some extent. On the other hand, with an understandable need to differentiate in order to know one's uniqueness within others, and with a pressure for adaptability in the rapid passage of time, one can quickly lose sight of this task and lose own sense of identity.

1.3.3 Characters as places for individual identity in literary history

Individualism can be said to be emblematic for American culture, especially as self-reliance; yet, individuality in a sense of a distinctive identity was not always the case for Anglophone literature and its characters. It was only with the advent of the "rule-breaking" novel in the 18th century that the way in which literary characters were depicted and read began to change on a larger scale. The novel picked up the threads of previous tendencies that aimed from universality to individuality, drawing inspiration from genres which were favourite that time, such as criminal biographies or travelogues, which we can categorize as the examples of strongly individualized narratives. Although the novel was at first condemned by many as suspect, immoral or dubious genre, it evolved into a lot of shapes and over time earned its unquestioned place among readers and publishers – and what is more, it brought a new perspective on the identity of characters. As Patricia Specks writes, these were "assigned individualized natures and following individualized life courses" (2). Therefore, no longer extraordinary protagonists stood in the centre of attention, rather ordinary people from the middle or lower class, more specifically one, individual *person* who recounts his story usually from the perspective that gives an impression of the greatest credibility, truthfulness and probability of the narrative – i.e., the 1st person. The novel was involved in depiction of personal truth, a view that, in correspondence with the

currents of the Enlightenment thoughts, presented an innovative, individual-oriented approach to experience (Watt 17). Moreover, such mediation of experience was often spiced up by the reader's access to the character's inner life, which turned out to be much more emotionally rich and unstable in the long run than it seemed at first sight.

Despite the fact that it was, at the beginning, more challenging to identify with a particular life that includes the individual rather than universal view of the world the novel provided the reader with an insight to the parallel and somehow familiar universes. They could recognize there the struggles and toiling of a common day that resembles one's reality much more. The recognisability and familiarity of the story together with the development of characters into "more individual and unique" throughout 18th and following 19th century (Procházka 8) opened a space for a readership to reconsider personal identity, which was supported by the individualization of reading that became more private activity. Furthermore, the stress of individuality had evolved in relation with then philosophical conceptions, since they have the same object to focus on: an individual (Watt 17). Personal identity was widely discussed by philosophers of the Enlightenment, while stands to this topic by empiricist John Locke, primarily *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, resonated the most in the atmosphere, repeatedly criticized, revised and widened, which lasted up to day, in a neo-Lockean theories. Whereas Locke appertained to a long lineage of disputation about identity that was contemplated before Christ, his work is considered one of the defining milestones because it brought a change into a way how identity was treated and imagined since Plato (Martin and Barresi 1).

In spite of the simplification that accompanies understanding of Locke's ideas nowadays more that they deserve to be understood (Martin and Barresi 3), the main argument is adequately captured. For Locke, the cornerstone of identity lies in memory, so-called consciousness, that serves as a junction between stages of life in which one inevitably undergoes certain transformations that manifest itself in mind[3] or body (Bělohrad 24, cf. also Barresi and Martin 1, or Watt 20). Precisely speaking, despite the fact, that we develop, sometimes into a phase that is hardly recognizable in contrast to the preceding "self", the memories of ourselves in a previous stage provides us with a feeling of stableness, that in the core, we remain the same person as we were and will be. This dependence of identity coherence solely on memory of course can lead to

[3] Let us apologize for the usage of word „mind“ in a tricky context of identity theories where it has a lot of serious connotation; we refer, though, in a laymen terms to the changes on a psychological level.

paradoxical consequences, as later critics, such as Samuel Butler and Thomas Reid, pointed out, referring to the unreliability of memory, forgetting and creation of fake memories (cf. Bělohrad 28-38). However, today's neo-Lockeans utilized Locke's ideas, working mainly with the argument he proposed: an identity of a man, who goes through different life phases, can be maintained by means of a continuous, lasting element. Neo-Lockeans elaborate it into a psychological continuity (Shoemaker 2010) that includes more than memory which can be sometimes deceptive and that has many things in common with the view of psychology.[4]

Regardless of all critiques which Locke's theory was later exposed to, for the era of the novel, it meant a big step forward, as it had affected their narrative style too. For instance, Watt points out that from the 18th century to modernism, novels analysed individual identity placed in time where one needs to systematize the past experience regarding present state of being to reach the notion of a self in flushing moments of three time dimensions (20). Many characters in novels, therefore, have used memory to discrete their life in episodes where they can more easily acknowledge the journey of their identity. Even though they do not always agree with past forms of it, they were able to see themselves as a continuing and thus still the same person through memories, without rejection of the whole concept due to the confusion how to handle it.

It does not mean that literary figures which inhabited the stories before the golden age of a novel would lack the "inner side" of self that is often associated with a notion of identity. Nonetheless, it had not been still equivalent to individuality. Firstly, as we have noted before, in literature to the 17th century "the focus was [primarily] on the type, not on the individual" (Bos 142). It is reflected most visibly in dramas or allegories where these types were not yet given their name that would distinguish them not only from other characters, but generally from all other beings, stating their individuality. The name served as, say, a marker of a trait (negative or positive), function in the story, or if it were particular, it had been chosen simply without a purpose of making the statement, rather it emphasized the universality one can identify with (cf. also Watt 17-18). Secondly, Jacques Bos demonstrates on a genre of 17th century character sketch that there was running a direct line between what is located inside and what is found outside the character, hence, what he/she does is an unfiltered expression of his real nature (155). Thus, a sense of inwardness was commonly present

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[4] In the philosophical discourse nowadays, it is also studied under the term persistence.

in the figures, but it was communicated and displayed through actions. With increasing attention to self in the 18th century, the straightforward view was complicated, since the representation had become inaccurate because of the contrast between the two sides – the action needs not to be corresponding with the actual personality and the personality of a character, vice versa, does not promise a list of acts easily assignable to it (Bos 156, 157, cf. also Gelley 110). That is also one of the reasons why the genre of character sketch and other writings about types gradually reached its limits. The novel began picking up distinctive characters where the relationship between inner and outer and to own self evolved into much more intricate. Even though Bos pessimistically notes that "due to the emptiness and changeability of most people, an action […] can signify almost anything" (156), in our opinion, instead of forming a paralyzing void of a mysterious, undetectable identity, the complexity of this signification brought a new orientation in mapping of human self through fictional protagonists. What had been *characteristic* of a character-type disappeared, but at the same time appeared in a character-individual with one variance, that is "characteristic" now means something (a little) different to each of them. The following literary development did not, therefore, discover the inwardness – it accented it in a way where the individuality comes to the fore. The extraordinariness moved from the qualities of the character to an extraordinary shape of personality and their outlook which, still, touches on deeper, universal topics, such as identity. Personal identity was again later problematized in novels close to the gothic, which we will look at in more detail in close-reading of Egan's *The Keep*.

While occurrence of personal, individualized characters substantially increased during these periods, it culminated in modernism that was concerned primarily with the psychological depth of a character and its effect on the vision of the external world. O'Donnell characterizes this literary era as having an "inward turn" in which the writers directed their attention to the "psychologies and interiorities of complex individuals who are rendered as 'subjects in process'" (80). In modernist novels, in British and American alike, the type of individual inwardness we have spoken about was maximized through the exploration of surroundings from the position of "I" which must have faced urgent events like war, while it was confronted with own self-perception during a pursuit of finding a new, solid place in the world which was crumbling down. Commenting on Locke's influence on the novel in the 18th century, Dussinger says that he "implies that memory is necessary to the perception of time, but it was his successors who actually saw the problem of naming the point of time for reflecting on the ideas

passing through the mind" (20). After centuries of development of novelistic form and also philosophical theories of identity, Dussinger's argument is materialized in modernism which was aware that the identity of a character is not simply preserved through looking into past and synthetizing it into attached episodes, but it is time, split into subjective and objective, that makes it difficult to keep the identity clearly in one point where it would be perceived as *fixed* and from where it would be, thus, able to structuralize itself and its experience. Time, which is streaming through the identity from various directions – jumbled moments of past, future, present –, causes that a chronology of stories is not equal with a selective "chronology" of mind that, additionally, often pours from one voice to another. Although the first great novels, such as Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, played with time in similar way like modernists did, therefore, we cannot look upon it like a brand new technique (Hilský 36), in the episodes – no matter how juxtaposed – the question of the preservation of identity within a span of time was not put in the same way like in modernism. It was the method that came there in the spotlight – how a self can be "caught […] in the momentary flux of consciousness" (Dussinger 21) which was partly solved by the memory holding the parts of it together. Modernists, though, rather asked whether the self can even be arrested in the moment when it represents the flux itself. It does not guarantee that in the next minute the self will not be completely different. As a consequence, they focused rather on capturing that flux from which a particular identity may arise.

Even American novels that we regard as more traditional than experimental in their narrative style, say, by Fitzgerald or Steinbeck, showed a lot of insecurities that casted doubt on sustainability of identity in a wider sense – its broken bond with the national past, that was ruptured by traumas at that time, its desperate dependency on having a meaningful place in society, its confusions in a fragile age of paradoxes and many other issues that shook the concept a lot. Even Hemingway whose impersonal, seemingly objective style avoided expressing heroes' unnecessary states of mind sent their personal identities "in those places of existential encounter that bring selfhood and courage physically to trial" (Ruland and Bradbury 302). These borderline situations in which the "true" self should manifest itself (let us remind the note of Verena Kast about this type of testing identity) often reveal the paralysis of it, incapability to reconcile with current conditions or to decide in them, and the feeling of emptiness in personal identity which was somehow disrupted or threatened.

In her well-known essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Virginia Woolf advocates for putting literary figures in the first place in the novel, because none of the books can become a great and popular if it does not pay attention to them, as characters help to achieve an impression of realness, a picture of human being of flesh and blood (Woolf 1924). On top of that, she emphasizes that the ways in which we can portray them are inexhaustible, while none of these portrayals will be more important than other (Woolf 1924). This multi-layered perspective tells us that a character can always be someone else, still, if we infiltrate into his/her mind, into the interior, we can come to what she describes as "the spirit we live by, life itself" (Woolf 1924). Thus, Woolf indicates that although we may look at the character in thirteen different ways like at blackbird, the general truths about life and identity within any representation should be disclosed.

The fact that a character can be incarnated in many versions is close to a postmodern view of identity, but for modernism it was always possible to have only one, individual version at a time and not to fragment them into parallely existing selves. When McHale establishes the approximate oppositions between modernism and postmodernism in terms of epistemological and ontological view for each of them, he declares that in a sense of identity, both literary aesthetics have a different area of interest: modernism investigates "How can I interpret the world of which I am a part? And what am *I* in it?" (9, italics ours), whereas postmodernism invites into a discussion questions like "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my *selves* is to do it?" (10, italics ours). In spite of being conscious of an escaping inner world of the character, modernism believed that attempts to capture – at least partly – the complexity and richness of the interiority can form the base from which a distinctive identity may crystallize, although it may sometimes expose vacancy of it as well. Modernists chased the flying butterflies of mind, the flux of it, but they did not aspire to doubt the existence of one, singular self or to arrive at "decentring and disintegration of the self" (Dolaykaya 1005). The subjects truly became the subjects in process because their identity is not so easily catchable and identifiable outside their fluctuating thoughts, sensations and (un)wavering beliefs. However, even in the process, the subject has its centre, whose position does not remain fixed, as we have argued above, and moves according to the waves on which the mind is brought, but this centre is always single one. From one wave breaking into another, from stream of memories to another stream, from one voice to the next – the characters are represented in one moment from one point and the following moment they are viewed from another. In contrast to

postmodernism, then, modernism used the multiplicity of standing points from which one can regard self.

For postmodernism, it is a bit different story though. The multiplicity does not relate to the number of points of view that are centred to one place and alternate with each other; it relates to the identity whose wholeness is challenged and subsequently is shattered into many selves, as McHale's statement has suggested. Dolaykaya and others posit that the disintegration of the unity is associated with a representation that belonged to one of the subject matters problematized in postmodernism (1004–1009), not only in literature, but also media. And what is more, the reality itself had become a target for suspecting hits because the fiction and fictionalizing weaved into people's lives prevents from identifying and knowing it, let alone its literary adaptation (Călinescu 273). Questioning and subverting narratives that have served as a signpost of basic beliefs for a collective consciousness since the Enlightenment are now acknowledged less radical and surprising than in 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, in these decades, it disputed the power of representative mode due to its inaccurateness and, to some extent, hypocrisy when it either seeks to seize reality as objective and universal, or as subjective and individual to proclaim certain features holding a general value for our identity/identities. Postmodernist attitude criticizes both depictions because they oversee the chance that even the centre – a character connected to identity – may be nothing more than the *concept* that is accepted without verifying its meaning.

Dolaykaya notes that in literature of this aesthetics

> one can no longer talk about a unitary concept of self; on the contrary, the idea of self becomes polysemous, disseminated, and diverse. Often contradictory to one another, these polysemic selves co-exist without culminating into a unified whole. (1006)

The recognition of dissemination of the whole concept is echoing the (literary) theories intertwined in postmodernist methods, such as deconstruction that aimed to break out of the notion of literary text as a fixed artefact that consists of the binary, unifiable terms whose meaning can be described sufficiently and thoroughly. By deconstructing the signs, it highlighted their instability, logical contradictions and incompleteness of their deferred meaning, on the other hand, it wakes one up from the ignorance of the fact that the objects and the way of their description are not given – not excepting identity. The representatives of deconstruction and postmodernism alike (even though some of them

reject being categorized under this label) were aware that “everything is constructed, mediated, put there by someone for a particular reason” (Bran 4). While deconstruction pioneered a new way how feminist criticism has dealt with constructed identities based on gender, it underlines also the incapability to conclude a meaning of identity under a unified interpretation that would be absolute – as Lawler has recognized, we are always confronted with not one but many persons which refer to each other. This is nowadays most reflected in the multitude of identity theories, none of which can be reliably labelled as dominant, and when it is, this dominance is soon challenged as an artificial superiority serving certain purposes.

Postmodernist polysemous selves in literary figures actually accentuated the subjectivity of a self to the greatest extent. However, the accent was without ordinariness of individual life, awaking familiarity in readers like in the first great novels, and without modernist demands on the reality complexly perceived from the inward, a “spirit of life” that would connect us all as humans. The characters were often treated expressively as those constructs, which can be modified and embodied by the author according to his will and which do not even hide it, thus, their construction is deconstructed and questioned. These typical metafictions and narrative plays were one of means to face and solve the “impossibility” (Călinescu 305) of representation. Other postmodernist narratives were not so extremely foregrounding, yet, they often employ the unclearness, indefinability and dissolution of identity in polysemy. It resembles a luminous state of gothic schizophrenia in the 19th century, even though it meant “only” a doubleness of a fictional hero/heroine there, not its infinite, simultaneous versions that are often contradicted to each other and repulsive to any definite description. A character crossing to an unreliable narrator offers another solution to pressure of non-representability of reality, since it admits the problem openly. The subjective, individual record of the story by such narrator which may have been in another literary era seen as untrustworthy or erroneous, was accepted as more legitimate answer to current disorientating, subverted environments. As Zerweck explains, bewilderment caused by world which was dismantled of clear-cut oppositions, given borders of “truths” and knowledge (the questions of “Who am I? Who are my selves?” included), makes the report by unreliable narrator, paradoxically, much more reliable and credible; furthermore, it is symptomatic for contemporary literature too (169). Instances of such narrator proliferated in post-war fiction and finally, it was fused in the narrative as a

common type, for the focus had turned away from the issue of unreliability to other things (169).

The reason why we have brought forward the narratives told by (un)reliable narrator is that it affirms Dolaykaya's argument of disseminated self, but also the fact that despite the representation crisis, the characters as well as the narrators (or both together, if they are mixed) still represent this conflict (Zerweck 167). Since the subjectivity of records had become then endless and since it had no undisputed values or norms to stick to, these selves appearing in stories may be nothing more than a parade of characters whose only one common trait is that they do not give exhaustive testimonies about identity – there is always something missing. Rather than saying that for postmodernism identity is meaningless, it could be said that it is not meaningful in an old sense of unity because we can never embrace it fully. Memory, for instance, is often put in the fore in novels like an example that does not work – it can deceive us and deform the events stored in our mind or possibly create things that did not happen, so one cannot rely on it as an instrument for keeping the "real" identity. Individual or national memory serves as a mediator of all events; therefore, like the media, it does not allow one to access them in a pure, objective, undescribed state. In addition, memories are constantly rewritten and overwritten, judged from the different perspectives of "I". On top of that, the "I" does not promise to hold onto any of the lasting qualities that would maintain its existence.

In the light of multiperspectivity, we return to the fact that the postmodernist concept of identity is not so distant from the modernist one. In spite of scepticism that is usually associated with the former, identity remains one of its important topics (Bran 4) that plays also a key role for many characters who try to search for it and a new order in the fragmented world too. Even though postmodernist writers chose the same refusing approach to preceding literary era with which modernism stood against Benettian realism of the 19th century, the heritage of modernism, was still present in it (as well as in the contemporary writings) and fragments that was expressed in the style of writing in both aesthetics are one of the examples.

Contrary to modernism, the search seems to be much more difficult, for it is affected, at the same time, by disbelief in the concept of identity and by anxiety that either one is not able to define it for oneself, or it is shadowed and controlled by unknown powers one cannot influence or uncover – which drives him/her to even bigger anxiety. It could be argued that both modernism and postmodernism, in fact, questioned the idea of an

inner part(s) of self that resists all changes the whole 20th century was filled with, however, modernism, at least at the beginning, was more determined to restore it and trusted that it will become evident through a detailed depiction of the interiority.

1.4 Contemporary self, contemporary literature

Although Kast correlates the loss of the concept of personal identity with postmodernism in a wider sense, she remarks, however, that despite that, there are still attempts to establish it again, for it relates greatly to the question of personal value (11). In other words, the postmodern art could undermine personal identity, but losing all elements related to self and self-perception as uncertain forever could mean too much a dangerous threat. In addition, what her observation suggests is two things – firstly, a greater scope of the term "postmodernism", and secondly, the uncertainty of periodization that has been always problematic. This terminological and periodizing blurriness can be caused by the scope reaching to a lot of other disciplines where its content is adjusted to the area in which it is discussed (cf. Bran 2). While actual literary discourse works, despite all uncaptured nuances, with a general list of "specific set of philosophical ideas, thematic foci and aesthetic devices" (Huber 5, similarly Bran 2) for description of postmodernism, Kast as a philosopher and psychologist sees many lines in society where it still lasts. Contrarily, somewhere the occurrence of re-establishment rather corresponds with efforts of contemporary literature.

The irresolution about setting time boundaries was mostly visible at the beginning of the millennium, when it involved also recording the essence of postmodernism as such. Both concerns can be summarized by a hesitative remark from the 2001 anthology called *After postmodernism*: "another reason for postmodernism's intellectual popularity was that it was never entirely clear exactly just what postmodernism was (is?)" (Lopez and Potter 5). Nowadays, the question of its definition generally has discontinued being a topic number one for literary theory, because to some point, it has been summarized satisfactorily (Bran 2-3), so it can move to other subjects. However, a disputation about its end comes up from time to time, even on account of some of its typical uncertainties and paranoid perceptions which have been creeping back to us recently. Some critics stress that postmodern decline is misinterpreted and not possible because its techniques have imprinted in culture too much to be erased (for instance, Hoberek 236). That is not to say that current literary production cannot flee from it. Yet,

especially for the generation of Jennifer Egan it seems to be unrealizable to completely separate from it.

It was in the 1980s and chiefly the 1990s when these two generations of writers met – (former) postmodernists and those, at first unnamed, representatives of a "new" literature, the one we still, after ca. thirty years, consider 'contemporary'. Jennifer Egan, who was born in 1962, wrote her first novel *Invisible Circus* in 1994, except the publication of a collection of short stories, *Emerald City*, one year before. It can be said, therefore, that she belongs to the second generation appearing on the scene, together with such figures like David Foster Wallace or Jonathan Franzen. In accordance with Adam Kelly, these authors can be classified as so-called "post-boomer" (4). They were brought to world in times of postmodernism reaching its peak, and its success was reproduced during 1980s in post-boomers' university syllabi, right next to the fading texts of literary theoreticians (Kelly 396). Thus, the effect of then-generation on them had been remarkable even before post-boomer writers' works was accessible to a broader readership.

Nicoline Timmer argues that for the generation of 1960s and 1970s, "it is against [postmodernist] background *a new sense of self* is becoming manifested in this fiction" (13, italics ours). However, she clarifies that, at the same time, this background (in her words, "frame") can no longer serve as determining for the (re)creation of the concept, because contemporary authors integrate it to the conditions, dissimilar to those in time of their birth (17). Thus, whereas some critics at the beginning of 21st century were still not sure about the final countdown of the postmodernist era, the shift in living conditions and the entrance of modern technologies have conduced to the argument that literature now cannot stay within it simply because of its incapability to look for answers to a plethora of questions arising with identity in a new century.

If we look at this "contemporary" literature, we will find out that its characterization has, due to a massive production of books which have absorbed many influential art modes, still relatively a form of drawings. On the one hand, there is an attempt to systematize preceding literary period, to make a springboard for debate about current works of art. On the other hand, the organization of appearance and methods of recent literature takes place too. However, in contrast to critics who examine postmodern era, the 'contemporary' ones must overcome a lot of obstacles, since they analyse a situation that has not formed into a finite state. Its time lapse is still "under construction" (Kelly 392, cf. also Huber 24). Their ambivalence and confusion mirror in a search for a proper

name, which cannot be unified (Kelly, 392, also Huber 46) and rather remains a flexible, program designation. From many variants that have been invented to label modern fiction, post-postmodernism appears to be, unfortunately, not ideal one because of its implications. It opens old wounds because it brings back the unsolved places in clarification of the names it contains, modernism and postmodernism (Potgieter 8). In spite of this, it seems to be most commonly used, simply because no better denomination exists yet. In flood of names, theoreticians often return to the term, put to use with a similar meaning already in 1970s (cf. Burn 21). On that account, it may be viewed also like giving up coming up with something that would really conveys its substance (Huber 45). The name is preferred for logic of its word-formation instead. Whereas Huber finds it puzzling and not useful for its signalization of "a clear break" (45) with postmodernism, we might look at it more positively. It can, actually, signalize that it has joined in the line of literary tradition, and while it displays simultaneously that despite many similarities, it moves on to its unique features. Although the standardized set of ideas and mechanisms, with which post-postmodernists writers operate, has not been set down yet, a number of authors have tried to highlight what they consider as essential traits of novels published in 21st century. As it emerges from Huber's publication which carefully gathers all their theories, the general discussion arrives primarily at one conclusion: "literature is struggling to recover a sense of commitment and sincerity" (24). Even though it may sometimes incline to credulousness, post-posmodernism is, contrary to its predecessor, more trustful. It believes that it can restore all things that have been lost – its connection between author and reader, yet not maintaining it fully, to world, yet observing it critically, and to language, yet aware of its limits. The problem of representation is there observed with much conciliatory tone. (McLaughlin 289; Burn 20; Huber 35). As it was said before, that is partly because of the knowledge that the narrative and narration is the only one thing we have to approach reality, although it would still resist our effort to grasp it (Huber 26). Post-postmodernist "attempts to reconstruct, (re-)connect, communicate and engage" (Huber 24) concerns also an emphasis on history, time and a fictional character in it, which is, subsequently, related to theme of identity.

Timmer is convinced that contemporary literature is going back to the self and to a human and his psychology as a centre of the story (51). According to her, authors of the 60s and 70s generation react upon the subjectivity of identity that was previously stressed even to the point of solipsism (13). This made the individuality of personal

identity so strong that it threw it into captivity of loneliness. Consequently, regarding the prevailing purpose of (re)connection, we can suppose that post-postmodernist works are going to preserve this individuality, but generally, they desire to free it from the isolation that was cast upon it and deal again with the concept in a serious tone, rather than ironical, and with a vision to conceive it in understandable terms that would respond to contemporary challenges. While the conception of identity had been dispersed and deconstructed many times before and just as chaos had been thrown into will for order in modernism, now there supposedly appears to be a tendency to look again for a certain arrangement again that would amalgamate the possible meanings into a particular, more observable notion. Given the nature of identity as such and one's need to "anchor" oneself, whether internally or externally, its total rejection or at least destabilization by an infinite chain of deferred and deferring meanings which can reach a dead end was untenable and could not grow forever. Nevertheless, this does not mean that contemporary literature has forgotten the doubts that have been uttered about the self. On the contrary, it has been made to constantly interrogate not only the newly created empty areas in the theory of self, but those still precarious, unresolvable ones. As Timmer writes, we are therefore not speaking about

> "naïve return to the more traditional view of the self as centered and autonomous meaning marker, […] but neither is the absence of an 'inner' center any longer uncritically reiterated". (52)

Her statement implies that post-boomers continuously oscillate between a conception of a self as decentralised, constantly moving and not closed by any definition, and a self that perhaps contains something internal, stable, and unchanging. The first view is in many ways close to its literary predecessor, while the second view reminds of the western "mythical" accommodation of the term or/and psychological continuity and philosophical persistence of identity. The framework seems to be needed and necessary. In the spirit of reconstruction, the authors try to recover and link the individual meanings – as we are trying to do – on the other hand, they expose them to constant scrutiny. Thus, postmodern disintegration is not rejected, but used for a different purpose (for a subsequent formation of the concept, to be precise); just as many of the methods of this aesthetics are constantly used, only in a different way (for example McLaughlin 289, also Hoberek 241). According to O'Donell's opinion, we can place the oscillation also between singularity and multiplicity with which the identity is viewed in the works of contemporary authors (81). For some, identity exists only in one

form, for others it splits into several different versions where putting them together can lead paradoxically to inner, irreconcilable contradictions the characters must solve. Due to the richness of the various depictions of self in contemporary literature, O'Donell confirms that it is a difficult task to say what identity means to later generation of writers in general, given the various influences on their work (81). Literature now has to decide how it will deal with the previous traditions and which way it will go, while it would assert own principles. Such decision often results in merging that appears to be connection of all paths:

> "Fiction over the long 20th century abandons the lurch between centripetal interiority and centrifugal exteriority, now looking to interweave epistemological and ontological interrogations." (Trimm 11)

Trimm's study on persisting modernism from the 1980s to millennial fiction represents a standpoint where the internal exploration of modernism and external focus of postmodernism both find its expression. Identity viewed from the inside of "I" which provides us with a certain unique, personal insight to being in a world is continually interfered by the stimuli from the outside that shape it and make its centralized interiority and its outlook fragile – questionable and changeable. Recalling McHale's distinction the author hints, contemporary literature asks what the "I" and his interpretation of the world sound like, and also by what means these interpretations are gained and how the "I" (or more precisely, several "Is") is formed within them and within self-consciousness when, on top of that, any knowledge can be relativized in any moment. For today's fiction, the epistemology and ontology are no longer generally perceived as crucial owing to acceptance of limits of literature, "rather ethical and pragmatic" questions come into the fore when reinforcing the relationship between the reader and the author (Huber 40). On a micro-level of certain topics and motifs, the lurch between two sides is, in our view, still actual. Similarly to Timmer, who highlights the return to self, Burn affirms that it happens simultaneously with a character too. Although he does not advocate for approaching postmodern characters as constructs (which, as we have argued, is only one side of the coin), in consonance with Timmer, he recognises that there is a greater emphasis on what is so-called "human" in the characters (23). While he does not go to much detail about this new "humanism", he reasons it by the literary drawing on non-literary disciplines, mainly neuropsychological findings that can be applied to literary figures (26). What this observation indicates is again the approximation of a real person to a fictional person. This can happen not only

by assimilating the latest findings of science to contemporary literature, but simply by the attempt to make a character more reminding of a human being, at least in certain attributes. Through them, they can address our identity and our attributes that we perceive as foundational. What re-emerges to post-postmodernists as a crucial topic is time and its significant effect on the characters and forming their identity (Burn 25).

For now, we are not aiming to provide a complete overview of hypotheses about post-postmodernism. Some of the most important features were presented and some of them, hopefully, will be manifested in the following chapters. Without further delay, our journey to identity in Jennifer Egan's novels can begin.

2. “*The objects in the mirror are closer than they appear*”: Look at Me and Self-objectified Identity

2.1 Introduction

The second Egan’s novel, *Look at Me* (2001), narrates mainly about four characters whose fates gradually reveal to be tangled together. The central story is recounted by a former model, Charlotte Swenson, who suffered a severe injury in a car accident. As a consequence, she had to undergo a surgery, in which a major part of her face, which had been crashed, was reconstructed and must be supported by over eighty titanium screw now. While she is coming to terms with the effects the accident and a consequent surgery have on her life, she is also looking for a new place in modelling in New York again. Next story line belongs to Moose, a professor, who is considered by a family of his sister and majority of his colleagues a (dangerous) eccentric after he brought a homemade bomb to university in order to demonstrate the ethical aspect of “pushing the button” to students at his lecture. Moose lives in Rockford, which is a hometown not only to the “first” Charlotte, who was once a friend to him and his sister Ellen, but also to his niece with the same name, the “second” Charlotte Hauser, Ellen’s daughter. In addition, younger Charlotte becomes romantically involved with a mysterious Mr. Z. who occurs in Rockford under a false name, Michael West. Mr. Z. is suspected for planning a terrorist attack and wanted by a private detective Anthony Halliday. Older Charlotte decides to assist him in looking for Z. because she once knew him, and, additionally, he is probably the answer why the accident happened to her. Her story is the only one that is told from the 1st person perspective.

Even before the plot begins to unfold, a lot of queries regarding identity arise thanks to the first “statement” that Egan makes in the book, as she quotes from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

> *We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves. (Joyce qtd. in “Look at Me”, Egan)*

With a reference to our previous analysis of the concept, the quote can suggest some of the identity issues we have discussed, chiefly the general wobble between stability and instability of identity and its essence in me-other differentiation and also I-I differentiation, social roles and the attributes we ascribe to ourselves as crucial for our

identities. If the excerpt that Egan chooses for some deliberate reason says that during life one meets plenty of different kinds of people, it may as well indicate that some of these roles that are enumerated here one acquires, too. Looking at others often sends the gaze back to us, and frequently, we form and (re)interpret ourselves under its influence. These ways of reflection can lead to particular effects, such as blurring the borderline between identities, between I and you, and it can problematize the relation between our self and perception of it that is perceived actually three times – by us, by others and by us through others. These two to three points of view may (and usually do) differentiate, but to acknowledge in which of the perceptions one thinks about own self at the particular moment is a difficult task that requires great effort with an uncertain outcome. What Lawler has found in the reference of the term, i.e. "My sense of myself, others' perceptions of me, my reactions to others' perceptions" (7) is exactly what is signalized here in advance as a strong topic to be found in the novel where it is intensified through many motifs, most markedly by a motif of mirrors and glass(es).

According to Gerald L. Bruns, the motif of looking at oneself in a mirror is one of the main ingredients that create a philosophical dimension in Joyce's work (573). Bruns, however, notes that mirrors in Joyce's world might give us only a type of illusory impression of how we look like because they often "defeat logical notions of identity (I=I) in favour of the idea that relations of self and image are unstable and excessive." (573). Hence, the image in a mirror does not correspond with self, it is affected by specific modifications for through the process of mirroring, say, the ascription of qualities to the image by a person who sees himself/herself (or through the others). This is applicable not only for physical appearance visible in a mirror that reverses the image and affects it differently by changing lightings, but also to the notion of identity that is somehow viewed and understood, while this understanding is not exceptionally deformed. Furthermore, we do not even *need* the mirror, as others becoming one for us. The "authentic", "real" selfhood we are concerned with as humans and that is often dismissed as a pointless chase of delusion seems to be hardly approachable. The safety instruction, which is written on the rear-view windows in cars, in which the characters are looking in the novel, affirms the illusory impression of not only how we look like but who we are too: "The objects in the mirror are closer than they appear." Thus, the seemingly innocent, ordinary notice serves as a warning before inclination to believe unreservedly the image, regardless of whether it is physical or mental, as being real, or what is more, as faithful representation of ourselves. It suggests that there is always a

distance that cannot be covered by no means. In the most illuminating moments when one feels like he has identity finally within one's reach, the distance can paradoxically grow bigger. The method of looking at oneself is strongly present in *Look at Me* and, after all, in its symbolical title. The main protagonists watch themselves and are watched at the same time – they are thus not only a subject in the world but objects of that double gaze.

This finding is, of course, nothing revolutionary – it has been studied, for example, by an art critic John Berger, the author of *Ways of Seeing*, a book that Egan read as a student and in which she first encountered the idea of so-called self-objectification. As she admitted, she is fascinated and terrified at the same time by it (Dinnen and Egan). Self-objectification is an inherent part of the whole process of seeing Berger examines in an insightful introduction. Berger who considers seeing more primary than speaking (7) states a simple, core idea that Egan later develops through her characters: "Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world." (9). Thus, in this visible world, we are not only its observers, but at the same time, we become observed. By realizing that one is always at the scene, in sight, one places oneself in a position of an object which he/she forms so that it can be observed in a particular way. Viewing oneself as the object, self-objectification, while essential to the ability to recognize one's identity, can have obscure, even frightening consequences too. This is something that Egan herself notices in her children's generation, since this mode is the very basis of social media posts:

> "Obviously when you use social media to display your experience for the benefit of others, you're pretty close to thinking of yourself in a natural state, in terms of 'here I am': as an object to be perceived. The imagined viewer is always there, in other words. That's pretty horrifying! (Dinnen and Egan)"

Such "split" of identity into the subject and the object (if we want to be precise, to "I" and "me") can thus lead down two paths. Seeing ourselves in any kind of mirror can mean trying to get closer to ourselves – regardless of the distance that is created between us and our real identity, assuming it exists. On the other hand, it can mean approaching only the image that is still changing and that we adapt as it is suitable for us. Both cases, then, raise a serious question – do we get closer to identity by being looked at and being able to look at ourselves, or is it the other way round, and the gap

between the subject and the object widens? And if so, which of the identities is the "real one"? And can this look reflect rays back to remould what and who we are? The characters are faced with these dilemmas walking through the labyrinthine streets like Ulysses. Even though these are less claustrophobic and nightmarish, their pedestrians always must meet themselves (and the illusions about them) which may be similarly scary.

2.2 Mirrors

Moose, a former professor at Yale University, is an outcast among colleagues. After the bomb incident, he took a job as a teacher at Winnebago College in Rockford and probably due to his scandal, he was relocated to the most cramped office almost below ground level where he prepares for his lectures, works on a history of Rockford with focus on industrialization, and reflects on what he calls repeatedly "the vision" (132). From all protagonists, Moose is concerned with mirrors and their effect on a view of oneself most directly, as a title of his dissertation indicates: *Bathe the World in Light: How the Dissemination of Clear Glass Altered Human Perception* (67). In context of his work, Moose divides human perception historically to three stages with regard to invention of mirrors – a blind phase, before mirrors, when any deviation on own face went unnoticed, a revelatory phase with expansion of mirrors, and again contemporary blind phase that represents a reversal, disadvantaging all the advantages of clear glasses. Moose's fascination with the early mirror phase that led to the multiplication, *dissemination* of mirrors into glasses, telescopes, microscopes, small pocket mirrors, into a thousand different observing eyes, is linked, firstly, to the physical appearance that, in his opinion, people were for the first time able to see in its entirety: "their outward selves blinking strangely back at them from mirrors – *"this is what I look like; this is what other people see when they look at me*" (135). At this moment, people became from pure subjects, dived more into own interiority, to objects of that doubled glance – objects reflecting their identity on basis of physicality and objects of other people's observation. The realization that they could be looked at by other "watchers" was, as Moose's dissertation proposes, the first step towards the great modification of identity through its perception. Interestingly, for this first objectification he uses a reference to a theory of Jacques Lacan who also defined a mirror stage in psychoanalysis[5]. Whether it is an intentional allusion, or just mocking of Moose's style of thinking that will later show problematic for him, in our opinion, we should pay an attention to it for a short time, since it corresponds with Berger's and Bruns' argument we have proposed.

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[5] Lacan's article, in full name *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experienc*e, was first presented in 1949 at the conference in Zurich. Even though some critics have doubted its exclusive originality, taking into consideration the earlier theories which he hardly mentioned, the article belongs to the most known Lacan's pieces among the public, evident in in its high number of interpretations. Lacan himself revisited it many years after its delivery, and this topic pervades all his work.

On the basis of preceding practical research, Lacan placed the beginning of this period between six and eighteen months of child's age. He declares that in this stage it starts to recognize himself/herself in a mirror or other thing with similar function and is able to acknowledge that the image is reflection of him/her (Johnston 2018). The main conflict lies, though, in the difference between the child and what it sees in the mirror as "I" – in Lacan's terms, on the second side there is so-called "ideal-I" (95), the perfect image that shows the child a possible shape of future identity in which it would not feel so helpless (cf. Zuern). Because at this age his physical body must have a support for standing (Lacan 503) in order to look at this ideal-I, the child feels incomplete and imperfect, the more he tries to "rule over" the image by physical movements that are due to the underdeveloped motor activity clumsy and ponderous. The helplessness is thus evident in the inability to blend with the perfection of one's own reflection and simultaneously the urge to do so. On the one hand, there is a unified self that is presented in the mirror, on the other hand, experiencing the incompetence to seize control over the image makes the real body and its inner side "fragmented" (Lacan 97). Identity is still heavily dependent on the closest people in this period; however, through the recognition and identification with the reflected identity, the child acquires the capability to reflect himself even in others (Johnston 2018). This rough self differentiation opens a gate to the delineation of identity against another person. Yet, with a movement from the imaginary world to the world of symbolical order (Johnston 2018), the child adopts, aside from language, many (social) categories which are imposed on him and which it later redefines, especially in the sensitive age of adolescence. What is worth noting is that Lacan later classified the "ideal-I" as Other too (Hewitson 2010). This even more highlights the "alienating" effect that the image has on the child. Although he/she does identify with himself/herself in the perception, he/she is aware that there is a gap between it and his real self. Zuern even says that it cannot be overcome in any notions of us, yet, our formation is dependent on it. The frustration experienced in childhood is likely to never disappear, as this suggests that what we chase the phantom of this real "I". This is the earliest example of self-objectification, repeated then all life and affecting us heavily. However, the issue with self-objectification, seeing of ideal-I as an object, is that, in Lacan's view (influenced by Freud), we misrepresent the "I" to ego. In other words, we trust the objectified image, i.e. ego, that represents a playing area for any type of projection, rather than the subject, the "I" that cannot be in fact represented wholly by it: "the Lacanian enunciating subject

of the unconscious speaks through the ego while remaining irreducibly distinct from it." (Johnston 2018). Thus, the ego underlies not only out self-identification but also recognition of the self as such (Hewitson 2010). One is often willing to accept identification through an object although one does not know how faithfully and non-fictionally the "I" is made available in the ego or whether it is whole an illusion.

Mentioning Lacan's work thus shows a kind of hopeless, illusory state of the "I" that is escaping before our grasp and that can look different, even exaggeratedly bigger like in Ulysses, and like cars would have looked in the rear-view mirrors. In that sense, this takes only a step to the third period when the border to an exceeded self-objectification with stress on the point that *this is me who can be observed* was crossed. According to Moose, the early "Lacan's mirror phase wrought upon whole villages, whole cultures" (135) and changed gradually not only the perceiving of own appearance and also manners, but also reverted the whole understanding of identity. He regards it a the greatest tragedy for humanity that will lead to its destruction. For him, the most recent state of blindness "came from too much sight, appearances disjoined from anything real, afloat upon nothing, in the service of nothing, cut off from every source of blood and life" (135). On the surface, it is echoing the picture of Charlotte's world of modelling – its emphasis on appearance by whose conformity everybody is tired in the end, like in the ironical scene with cutting faces (see chapter 2.3). Under the surface, though, it is, like in Lacan's theory, connected also to one's inner part(s) of identity that is unfortunately "lived from the outside" (484), in other words, from the position of that seen object rather than the subject. In this context, one may speculate that we are decoding another allusion to the famous text of deconstruction, a tiny, but not rare pun to literary and theoretical background of postmodernism. However, in Moose's world like in Charlotte's one too, insight brings no recognition of identity at the expense of temporary blindness to other aspects of it. Most people, according to the academic, are focused solely on the perception itself, on their (self-) image which they can reshape as they like. They prefer object-ego before the subject, how they look like and what impression they give before who they are. Thus, one is disjoining from anything real in order to accept the illusion of image. The very question of identity therefore ceases to be relevant for them. In Moose's fear of these chameleon people who are changing colours according to environment and who rule the world more and more we can notice sensibility of post-posmodernist literature to current issues. This is because, in his definition, such people do not care about things like "soaring temperatures and rampant

extinctions, the dying coral and heaps of garbage lying in the deepest reaches of the sea (497)”. This implies that if one does not have defined the “stable” centre and one puts all energy to adapt in the instability, one tends to ignore what is going on around him/her. Without reconstructing the concept of identity personally or generally, without investment of energy to experience oneself *as* the identity, we can barely hear the world screaming. The passage awakens even an environmental anxiety which is a piece to puzzle with an urgent social undertone, distinguishing even more complexly what it means to be the “seeing” person and contrary, the “blind”, or to be more precise, blind because of seeing too much in the tunnel.

Despite this, Moose believes that there must be something like the “inner side” (like in Timmer’s argument, he does not reject it) that is not lived as an objectified version. He hopes for existence of people who have chances to step out of the darkness, to be sensible like him, to *see* all things complexly without an extreme concentrating on themselves, in short, to share his mysterious “vision”. Mostly, he searches among his students who are likely to be only in the second phase that has not passed to the identity-changing blindness of too much sight. Nevertheless, one may wonder: what if Moose is living his identity outside like others as well? For instance, he clings to the idea about himself, about a man who is not blind and who experienced some kind of modernist, authentic moment of epiphany when he “opened [his] eyes” and his “head was clear” (362) before twenty-three years, as if he had undergone a spiritual awakening. He lives with it and in it, ascribing it a kind of uniqueness, that is, on the other hand, a burden for him. Still, in moments where truthfulness and actuality of his vision is challenged to the greatest extent even by him, he refuses furiously to let it go (395), because it is a part of his identity. To give up on this important attribute would mean to give up on oneself, to slide into a crisis of identity that would, like in his case, ends in a greater fear, losing of the whole life that would not make sense, would look like wasting of time up to this point (Kast 14). Moose cannot simply imagine transforming his identity again since beside the feeling of a thwarted task he was wrong with his clinging to one of its concrete shape, and thus the same like the chameleon people. During the story, as he tries to explore the meaning of identity and more evidently, history, he is at the same time afraid of facing his own in its wholeness.

Even though history, as well as mirrors, is of great importance to him, as his attempt of writing magnum opus about Rockford’s past demonstrates, he evades treating his personal history. Yet, fragments of who he *was* are leaking to his mind quite often and

can be noticed also in memories of other people. For example, older Charlotte remembers him as a popular adolescent, full of wit and energy, a person, who was always surrounded by people, and who, in her opinion, had the biggest chance to leave Rockford for something "better" (26-27). Younger Charlotte carries his photograph with her; sometimes she takes it out of her wallet to look at it and is taken by surprise for the change on his appearance (108) that could not be corresponding with today's personality, cynical and reserved. Moose, like all characters, sees himself retrospectively as a stranger too, distinguishing between his contemporary and younger self:

> "Remembering his youth was a vexed experience for Moose. […] He pictured a boy watching him across a doorway, through a screen, and a bubble of sorrow would break in his chest, as if he were seeing someone who had died or vanished inexplicably […] as if some vital connection between himself and that boy had been lost." (*LaM*, 144)

Moose's memories of his youth and childhood are mixed with pain and estrangement, since he realises that he has lost a possibility to close the gap between two of his selves. The older version of his identity is here personalised into an imagined human being, with whom he was once very related. However, now he associates the detachment from him even with death of a person he knew for a long time, putting both experience as similar level of painfulness. Such feeling is strengthened by the fact that he can no longer say what these selves connected at the time, identify with the object of his past self, and moreover, that he cannot return to his previous state of being. Moose separates these two parts of himself to two different persons by an unknown, lonely suffering (143) that occurs after "the vision" enters his life. Internalization of pain together with knowledge which no one else can understand except him causes firstly his personality to fall into bitterness, and secondly his memory to not function for centralization of identity. The memory that should link the different phases of it suddenly ceases to operate here – it allows Moose to catch a glimpse of the person who he was, but it prevents him also from establishing any connection to it again. It stays behind the screen, hence, differentiation is not ensued, in this case, by synthetization, and identity in a line does not exist, it is kept only at the moment, merely joining to a line of persons. In one of Charlotte Swenson's memories, he delineates himself even against his hobbies and things, which belonged to his identity once like against garbage that Moose-the-boy

considered important. The definitiveness of transition from one self to another is also expressed in Moose's reminding of his real name, Edmund (28), as if he was saying that he is no longer who others have seen in him.

However, some signals indicate that there is, after all, some coherence. For instance, despite his unpopularity among his co-workers, students like him, as if he was still encircled with some aura of celebrity (131). Moose himself labels the boy as an "unhappy ghost" that often pays him a visit (144), therefore, he admits that this version somehow influences him even today, although it is present mainly in his remorse that he did not continue in the path where the past self (and also others) would expect him to go. Furthermore, there is a "promise" (144) he gave himself previously and which remains with him, unfulfilled, but as a junction between the man and the boy. In remembering his youth, the glance they switch between each other on the opposite sides of a doorway is likely to represent a desire for connection, in spite of knowing that it cannot be reached. The promise that Moose does not particularize is shared with Ellen who was the closest to Moose's growing up. Instead of easing the weight of broken commitment, it brings a disgrace on him. It would be less difficult to face the transformation of oneself without a witness, or even to deny it. The thought that another person witnessing it "make[s] it true" (143) echoes the old inquiry of empiricism: "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" If Moose's transformation of identity was not observed by his sister and people who reflects this event back to him, existing as a different person would probably not become such an intense problem that burns in his mind, heard and seen twice, and thus real. On the other hand, meeting his former classmate Teeter who insists on the sameness of Moose's identity in order to find common ground with him is similarly problematic because it would mean not only to believe a lie, but to doubt all the hardships Moose had to go through within transformations: "Look at us right? Thirty years later and so what." (361). Teeter embodies the general tendency to look for the continuity of identity in the second person, even though Moose struggles with it.

Similar unbalanced approach to one's identity is apparent in a relationship with his niece Charlotte whom he later tutors in history. Charlotte literally offers him a mirror of his younger self, a life before the vision that filled it with an unspecified pain and loneliness. In his imagination, through which he views his past identity, she sometimes replaces him-boy when he looks at her (144). What is more, she vividly evokes feelings that he experienced before but which have only materialized now, in hindsight: "an old,

half-forgotten pleasure from a time when he was someone else" (145). With her initial patient attention, Charlotte thus provides him with access to emotional areas he appeared not to be capable to step into from position of his contemporary "I". Yet, he perceives these emotions as belonging not to "me", but to other person, other self, more as a revelation of that ghost than present experience.

The otherness emerges in ordinary moments, for example during a telephone conversation with Ellen which defines also their relationship: he has "a hangover from so much time spent together long ago, when he was someone else" (225). It seems that his sister is also, like her daughter Charlotte, a reminder of his former self, but somehow more poisonous, as she herself *is* the hangover from his past he cannot get over. Unlike Charlotte, she knows (like the second Charlotte) both his versions, the boy and the man, and that hurts him nearly physically, making it harder for him to not to think about the split. Still, he values their bond so much that he seems unwilling to renounce it, even though he is no longer sure how to behave in it. There is a hopeful moment of a mental touch; comfort to worrying sister that lifts her spirits. It is what Timmer describes as a contemporary self that becomes clearly visible in a relationship between "you" and "me", in the inter-subjectivity of two selves rather than subjectivity of one stable, but isolated identity (45). Contrarily, at the same minute, Moose realizes how insufficiently capable we are in coming out of one's identity towards the second person's, from the lonely territory of one's mind as Egan pointed out. The other person can give us comfort but cannot become us, in the end, as Moose says, "we are all alone" (225).

Thus, Moose is alone in his visionary world, but not lonely. He is married to his second wife, Priscilla, and we can notice that he does not insist on the isolation or even on elitist character of it. He perceives himself as different from others, yet not special – deep down he longs to connect, to fit in. Because of it he still greets his colleagues every morning even though he does not expect a warm reaction (and when he is ignored, he is rather relieved (131)), and dreams about going on a trip to Hawaii with Priscilla like any other "normal" couple, although it scares him: "happy people everywhere, people like Priscilla – Moose longed to be in their midst" (229). It is noticeable that every action he makes in the direction to people is accompanied with anxiety – that his greetings will sound foolish and contribute to the hatred of his persona, the marriage will not last (227), the trip will not turn out the way he wants etc. And what frightens him the most is that he will not succeed in transmitting "the vision" to other human being, that it will lock him in his mental exile forever. The

interchangeable perspective that makes him so-called unique is something that he wants to hand over because this uniqueness is more of a curse to him. As Ellen's "testimonial" of his change, sharing the secret with others (if he would know how to do that) would make it true and would single out this aspect of individuality, and at the same time frees him from it, being on that same wave with the next "illuminated" ones. The same gap within his identity(ies) is here reiterated in relations between him and others, and even though it seats him to an identical emotional roller coaster, he "keep(s) trying, in hopes that someone, at last, would look back at him with recognition" (226). Inside, Moose fights with selfishness of the wish to align with a group of individualities who would have the same outlook, because sharing his individual perspective and making his students, especially Charlotte, to see would probably mean initiate them into misery too.

Moose is a (anti)hero representational for the beginning of post-postmodernist era – he tries to grow out of isolation and reconnect, but he is shadowed by the prospect that it can never happen; he is too much entrapped in postmodern conditions. Kelly, for instance, describes Moose "as a character whose self-conscious doubt encourages empathy in the reader, a character who engages with his own postmodernity and tries to find a way beyond its limits." (412). Empathy for the character is also a key for reconnecting between the reader and the author and it again points out the reconstructive attempts of contemporary literature, like Moose tries to reconstruct the nature of meaning in whatever sense he detects it around him. Additionally, Kelly regards Moose's involvement in history as a typical feature of fictional figures created by the generation of post-boomers, since they are chased by history that was suppressed in postmodernism and now it addresses them with almost a mythical power that must be answered and reacted upon (409, 414). Like identity, history is a concept that was doubted before but now, in a manner of reconstruction, the theoretical and practical influence of the precedent literary era must be reflected within a historical understanding in opposite to a-historicity. There can be seen also an effort, maybe a little naïve, to make peace with this preceding approach – historicizing of what has been there before can help with identification of contemporary and future forms. However, for these types of characters, it is not so easy – they are often lured by the notion that with rediscovering history, they rediscover something authentic that is missing in their identities. Kelly aptly quotes from the novel a statement of Charlotte's father who believes that Moose's frantical exploration of Rockford's history is just a pretext to find out what is wrong with him (411, in book 72), what caused the state of city, which he

despises now, as well as his own. In fact, the vision itself can serve with the same coverage for Moose's explanation of his transformation (Kelly 411), since Moose's perceives it as a transitional point in his life when nothing can revert a future course of his identity. The history for Moose is written in the "glyphs" (228) that are waiting to be decoded. This reminds of not only belief in a hidden meaning, but it also highlights restoration of the will for the meaning itself, which could be deciphered (unlike unstable, unclear meaning in postmodernism, as Kelly remarks (412)) and would contribute, thus, to the sense-making.

Sense-making is actually what Moose attempts to do, through general history to his personal history that he avoids reading although it is the thing in which his relatives are interested most. His individual uprootedness even in hometown is intensified by rejecting personal history as false, only as a cheating mechanism for stuffing empty places of American history which he, ironically, considers to have no (cultural) roots too (356). Yet, one may sense his nostalgia exactly for the past. For a long time, it is not expressed what causes Moose's pain aside from its association with alienation, but it is also grieving for history that has been somehow lost and that is viewed as being full of authenticity that the contemporary selves now lack. Moose studies old materials and maps of Rockford, reads Charlotte's essays about growth of the town and mechanical processes of factories that do not exist today or their products are merged with infinite number of objects that "had lost their allure generations ago" (357). This nostalgia induces even a modernist tone as Moose tries to put together the missing great narrative about development of Rockford that would be relatable to history of America and, finally, humanity:

> "…a tale that began with rationalization of objects through standardization, abstraction and mass production, and concluded with the rationalization of human beings through marketing, public relations, image consulting and spin." (228)

Such interpretation of history furnishes Moose with the certainty of a renewed origin and an explanation for the current state of affair that is so unbearable to him. It helps him with orientation in a world where he puts things and humans at the same level as both were not living, not alive. On the other hand, it is the view that he has found quite difficult to listen to. People become themselves just objects, numbers, materials that are

massively influenced, accepted or rejected, selected, tutored by the empty phrases of motivational couches, and transformed into the same series of images in a roll of film that can be played in an appropriate situation. As it is indicated, in Moose's opinion, there is no place for what is actually human, genuine feelings or passions, the origins do not matter, what matters are the rules what (no more *who*) one should be like to succeed. Identity turns to an abstraction too – because of its vagueness, it can be used for purposes of another products and objects. Identities are now serially produced, disillusioning one with a sense of originality and freedom, yet, still given clear boundaries they cannot cross to end up like people similar to Moose. The only consolation for Moose is that this pessimistic and rather narrow point of view makes sense to him, that the globalized planet with chameleons as leaders had a definite cause which he can trace back.

Despite his rejection and denying of own past, personal history is chasing him still, since he feels inside that his past identity is unsettled, unresolved and now fixated to one idea he bears in mind and which he, on top of that, cannot clarify to anyone explicitly. The frustration from this non-transferability by a plain explanation grows in Moose until the culminating moment when he misunderstands Charlotte, supposing that she has opened her eyes too like him, and finally shares the vision with him. Otherwise reserved, Moose offers her a few words of comfort, reassuring her, that she is not alone in the world where all innocence, beauty and joy have now ended, as if he was reassuring himself that he has just broken out of isolation too. Celebration of his success proves to be premature, since Charlotte, crashed from her first love and experiencing the pain of another characteristic, still has not "woken up" in a sense Moose imagines, and she cannot suddenly stand his behaviour. In an escalated scene she abandons hi because she wants to be like "normal people" (to which Moose wishes to belong), and rather she would die than resemble him in any way (454, cf. also Kelly's description of the scene 414). Escaping from her own pain and from Moose's unusual, misdirected consoling that is rather humiliating for her, Charlotte leaves Moose in the most difficult situation when all his beliefs are shaken to its foundations. He cannot know that her identity has been changed too, by two wounds at once – an unexplained missing of her first lover, Michael, and breaking up with Moose, even though she knows instinctively that his familial love is more honest than Michael's evasive displays of attraction.

It occurs to one's mind early if Moose has not fallen prey to his own assumption by which all tragedy is caused – that "*we are what we see*" (138). The over-identification

with the Lacanian image has in turn a great power over us, especially when the perception of others' with their wishes, pressures and notions about one's self enters the objectified ego. That is why the teacher advises Charlotte to eschew looking through the eyes of others on her. The connection between the two gazes mean that the way how she observes herself could be completely undermined by the way she is looked at, and at this moment she would lost her freedom because "they will have won" (138). Like in many other scenes, Moose looks like he is in fact talking about himself, about his surrendering to the others' judgment of him as an outsider, due to which he might put himself into that position.

His insecurity whether he is a victim of that doubled gaze or not reaches its peak almost at the end of the book when the vision and all his academic research seem to be in vain, as well as all his existence. Moose is aware of deceptiveness of the image, but at the same time, that it is generally accepted as real in a "world without history or context or meaning, and because we are what we see, *we are what we see*, such a world was certainly headed toward death" (483). The comparison of future to death is the final, desperate scream after he realizes that everything can mean anything, and at the same time everything can mean nothing, that the meaning he obsessively searches for may be so dispersed that for majority of people it turns out to be not important. His deepest fear springs exactly from the illusion threatening to cover the real sense, the "truth", and what is more, from the possibility that the illusion is the only thing existing, that there is no "I", no cornerstone on which he can rely. Even his vision may be "just a metaphor […] might not exist in itself" (490), it may be only explaining the glyphs he decodes about himself – that there is mainly something terribly wrong with him. That nothing more lies under this metaphor or it can be only another metaphor of a metaphor, that the meaning is constantly deferred, blurred and the original of it is untraceable highlights Moose's entrapment in postmodern anxieties (which Kelly calls the fear from poststructuralist theories (413)) which reflects in his real anxiety to which he must take pills to calm down his distracted mind (496). Hence, although this is probably another reference to Egan's literary background, it serves not only as a smart pun, but as a serious, even existential picture of person who cannot live in an environment without context where people are objects "assembled for the eye from prototypes […] people without souls" (483-4) with no continuity, nor coherence, for whom the only quality of identity is its flexibility. The irony of the generalization can be that because of the vision, as the metaphor for his fragile psyche and hypersensitiveness, he may be

ignoring those who are the “seeing”, since they probably cannot flee from isolative forces of their brains that cannot put the illuminative, yet frightening experience in words.

In the greatest despair, Moose tries to find balance to the burden exactly in the memories, but not those of his adolescence (these he suppresses because they are shrouded in a life-threatening nostalgia), but of childhood that are more peaceful. Instinctively, he goes back to places which he and his father, when he was still alive, often visited, and remembers their walks hand in hand. Again, he must face Moose-the-boy, watching him from the other side of hall and asks himself, for the first time, the same question Charlotte put him – “what had happened to him?” (476). Although he has to admit he does not know the answer, something is different in the scene – a physical connection between him and the boy is made in his wild, hallucinating imagination, these two are now holding hands, “walking together” (475) as a father and a son. This reconnection of selves, even though one does not know how long it will last, is concluded when he arrives at the place where he first grasped the vision while heavy rain is falling:

> “” […] this was no metaphor, Moose thought, with satisfaction, this was a bona fide summer storm! Already he was relieved. Here was the link between his old self and his present-day self – the boy and the man – here was the place that gathered them together. He was whole, had everything he needed, and yet, even as Moose bathed in this sense of completion, he was assailed once again by the terrible contents of the vision itself” (495)

On the one hand, Moose is slowly returning to his roots, making peace with his old self. This is where the transformation occurred where two versions of him merged then (and merge now) in one moment before they separated and part from each other, hiding behind the glass doors. On the other hand, he is constantly aware of how dissimilar they are from each other by that very vision which he ultimately holds onto as something true. After a shock of challenge to his idea, he rejects that it could be only a metaphor. He soothes himself by a thought that for example rain has no other meaning for him either – so why would his vision have? He envies the life of blindness to others, he knows that it prevents him from experiencing real, carefree happiness – but he takes the burden anyway with all its troublesome responsibility.

Moose is a character that stands at the borderline: between postmodernism and post-postmodernism; between the acknowledgment that all the narratives may be false and leading nowhere and a restoration of effort to find the meaning and narratives again; between the subject and the object, between Moose-boy-Edmund, and the man with a vision. Identity is a question of every day for him; however, he does not always find the courage to ask it about his personal self. What he believes in most is that underneath the illusion of the (self)image, there must be something real, something authentic. The trouble is that he does not have an idea where to look for it – in an increasingly accelerating world where "a devastation [is] a simple by-product of the motion itself" (496).

2.3 Objects

For Charlotte, a fashion model who lies about her real age, the crisis of identity is most obvious. Her appearance was changed, people hardly recognize her, and she becomes a ghost roaming in a museum of her successes and a promising career which is now covered with a little layer of dust. Charlotte tries to return to modelling, yet, despite of opportunities that her "new" face can offer, it made her a different person too much to manage it without any obstacle. Apparently, the appearance plays a huge role in Charlotte's life; however, one may ask how much the outward self is connected to her identity, since there are many different stands Charlotte takes towards it.

At first glance, Charlotte wears her face as a model "like a sign, holding it out a foot or so in front of me" (30), drawing attention to it "out of sheer practicality: here's *what* I am [...] it was what I had to offer to the world where I had spent my life" (30, italics ours). Thus, Charlotte's face is her brand. It represents her and she represents herself by it for certain purposes, most financially and career-wise; it is the necessary essence of her work. She describes her appearance, therefore, as practical, as a means how to achieve next level on a social ladder. Concurrently, Charlotte is expressing a certain doubt through it – whether there is anything more that she could be good at. She suggests that offering her appearance to people as a type of goods is her obligation, not only because of her profession, but also because she got used to it as to the quality her social circle can appreciate instead of others.

According to Llewellyn Negrin, it is in this age[6] of the extreme cult of the body and the physical appearance when a strange contradiction occurs. Rather than our appearance being a manifestation of individuality in a world where it is up to each person to choose how they want to look, it is this promoted choice that distances us from ourselves and that develops into a link to an infinite number of contradictory signs (if not a contradictory loop that ends in a void), and ultimately leads to the loss of individuality itself (3, 10). Thus, the face as a sign needs not further refer to internality or individuality of person; it can be even detached from the real personality. However, Charlotte who deeply hates letting anyone to get under her skin (as is then evident in her first meeting with the fake journalist Irene) accepts this possibility gratefully. Consequently, she seems to direct other's attention to appearance for another practical

[6] Interestingly, she still speaks about it as the postmodern age, which nicely illustrates the different distinctions of the endings and beginnings of postmodernism(s).

reason – self-protection. She usually overshadows other aspects of identity, since everything located in her mind, all delicate information and secrets; she considers "a plutonium" (56) that would destroy her that if not handled carefully. Despite the disappointment and frustration of not being able to go back from a post-accident state to a pre-accident one (as Charlotte calls it) even after additional surgeries and medical treatments, the "new" face gradually grows back on Charlotte and improves greatly the way how to hide behind what is exposed. Contrarily, it should be noted in which context Charlotte utters the word "identity" as she is used to the particular usage of it. When Irene comes to her luxurious flat for the first time, pretending to be a reporter from *New York Post*, who wants to cover her story of identity after the accident, the first thing Charlotte judges in connection to the word is exactly Irene's appearance. According to the model, she should wear rather "clothing that had, if not personality, at least some semblance of an identity" (91). Thus, paradoxically, Charlotte who makes use of her appearance as a shield against someone touching what is behind it in the core, in the spirit of thinking implanted by a fashion industry, she still believes that the outward self should be a bearer of some inner qualities, of the individuality of a person. However, as Negrin pointed out, nowadays this is a (self)deception. Appearance, and especially fashion, no longer says anything about who we are, but only introduces to the possibilities of an external being that reflects inward into an infinite objectification of our inner selves. Charlotte finds out that her ascription of some traits to Irene based on her "mousiness" (91) is delusive when she discovers that Irene is actually a professor of comparative literature who helps Halliday gain information in exchange for gathering materials for her new study. The work of next academic in the novel discusses the theme of self-objectification too – Irene is interested on how the detective stories or movies influence the experience of real detectives and vice versa, if there is a change to how they act or think about themselves in the profession thanks to the various artistic depiction of it. Her study is, in fact, practical application of Moose's hypothesis of *we are what we see*.

Furthermore, the external belief that we can look anyhow we want leads not only to the mindless pursuit of trends and a generalized notion of the "ideal-I", but to a complete destabilization of the self who gets lost at the crossroads. The sabotage of fixed identities through a free choice of the outward self is not so subversive for the system of binary oppositions anymore, as Negrin writes (5), but rather consonant with consumer society and its "malleable identities" (5). On the one hand, there are still

waves of the new identities, expansion of its boundaries; on the other hand, the tendencies to reject it as limiting grow stronger too. However, what Negrin proposes is a desire to *overcome* modernity, the dissemination which Doloykaya presented in her article. The preference for these types of identities, which can change from the outside and consequently in the inside, and into whose core other people's opinions, thoughts and ideas can easily embed, is not only advantageous in marketing terms. Where many sociologists see the myth of fixed identity, Negrin sees chaos, which is threatened all the more so because the way in which today's concept of identity and self-understanding as identity is steeped in the cult of the body. Charlotte's world is doubly filled with these paradoxes and reflects all the fears of characters like Moose, chiefly dislocation from anything real. Similarly, Charlotte describes her personal traits as "disjoined from [her] own appearance" (30), as if she were affirming the anxious hypothesis of the illusionary self. Because it is produced in various forms, fashioned in many ways, put in different contexts, it is not actually related to her in any way. Baudrillard would describe it as a sign without a referent, simulacra, and Berger would view it as the base of advertisements – the image strikes our senses with the realness of it (141), yet, there is no reality beyond it. With the conscious acceptance of the unreal as real, of simulacra as a substitute for truth, it is also increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is true and what is not without resigning on this everyday work. On the one hand, there is a restored optimism in this trust to unreal realities of advertisements, TV programmes and inspirational stories (Kirby qtd. in Huber 43) as well as literature, turning blind eye to its shortcomings. On the other hand, it can be signalized by the general exhaustion of simulacra leading nowhere, the missing authenticity which many characters in *Look at Me* search for, without even knowing the original meaning of it. When Charlotte is invited to the photoshoot by a former paparazzi photograph Spiro, she cannot overlook how much the "authenticity" is reversed almost to the point of perversity. Taking photos of young girls fashioned in a Greek style, Spiro uses small razor blades to cut their faces in order to catch something more real than a fake blood, the authentic emotion, the pain. As he explains to Charlotte, he wants to "get at some kind of truth here, in this phony, sick, ludicrous world. Something pure. Releasing blood is a sacrifice. It's the most real thing there is." (179) However, the authenticity Spiro desires his photos to have, with blooding models, is an exaggerated symbol of "artifice" (180) too. No one is distinguishing between real and fake blood flowing from the wound that would be photographed, it is another self-referential loop that does not

say anything about the truth, nor about the person who is cut, about identity of the girl as an object that could be substituted by another victim if she does not agree to work on the “real” act which is faked like anything else. In addition, Spiro shocks the heroine, who is a little ashamed to expose her changed appearance publicly for the first time, by claiming that others should envy Charlotte that she had had her face re-operated because it is a dream of many “to look different all of sudden” (170). It is in those moments when Charlotte realises that there is something wrong with the industry she had been used to for years. In a young Korean girl who undergoes Spiro’s experiment instead of her, she sees herself, her naivety and her urge to be seen (183), no matter what it takes. Nonetheless, the accident, suffering of her face she did not fake or choose, has given her some limits so she refuses being part of the photoshoot, defending her decision: “this face has already been through so much.” (180).

Charlotte’s note of disjoining hints, though, that chances are that at a particular place, the illusion is broken, and that her identity is more than a sign that is on display. However, Charlotte resists discovering it, like she refuses a therapy after trauma of the accident, succumbing rather to alcohol and seducing others, like the detective Anthony, to take the same route. She is so afraid to be alone with herself, especially sober, because immersing in oneself would mean facing the risk of discovering either old grievances or unpalatable mistakes, or absolutely nothing worth noting, i.e. the “malleable” identity that was too much affected by the flexibility of the outward self that it cannot be acknowledged in any way. Her projected wish for authenticity she hesitates searching for in herself is reflected in her “superpower” to catch a glimpse of so-called shadow selves (Kelly 408) – this means the real inward selves of others that are usually covered with masks. Charlotte obviously misses what lies underneath, but she likes to live in the disguise too. When she visits a club in order to show Halliday where she meets Mr. Z. for the first time, she passes herself off as Irene to look more credible, combining her operated face as one mask and Irene’s identity (which is fake too) as another. Under such double disguise, she can thus watch her old acquaintances without being recognized by them, and she imitates Halliday’s work of detective. She perceives the invisibility (199) as an advantage that allows her to observe, without interruption by observation of others. Until she makes even her new face a brand – and this is what she really does later, she can stay in this neutral position that brings her at least some benefits, while she is desperate of the slow process of healing. Shortly after the accident when she is recovering for some time in her home city, Rockford, and

decides to pay a visit to Ellen's house, sneaking through the empty rooms like a thief, she reassures herself with a rhetorical question: "how could I be caught, when I didn't look like anyone?" (29). Nevertheless, such protection against recognition again puts forward a question whether there is even something which can be recognized. The way in which she thinks about her face as one that resembles no one's face now evokes a fuzziness of a self that had been accustomed to constant identity change. Few years ago, she got used to live always a double life when she was cheating on her future fiancé (106), feeling again, like after the sexual experience with Ellen, like two versions of herself, "two different people" (104), one of which wants to flee from the ordinary, too easy, settled life where everything is planned naturally, in a long-term view.

Furthermore, without her "old" face serving as a sign of recognition, Charlotte suddenly does not recognize herself not only from the outside, but from the inside. Moose would fear her as one of the chameleon people, but Charlotte fears herself more as a person who has lost the capability to be like them. She lost such a significant component of understanding her own identity that she is now unable to say what she is without her appearance. Because she has been accustomed to the self-formation through appearance which is now "privileged over all other modes of self-definition" (Negrin 2), she is confused how to anchor herself in the world as identity in opposition to others. Instead of feeling like someone who can be anyone, she feels more like nobody who can no longer be anyone. Although she herself claims that her actual features are detached from her appearance, guarded inside behind the shield, it is just the opposite.

Charlotte faces similar estrangement that Moose relates to his past self, especially when looking into mirror or flicking through old photos. She can describe her external qualities dismantled to the smallest parts ("Eyes: green. Facial features: delicate, somewhat pixies-ish, the sort of feature that register at first glance, as young. Neck: long." etc. (162)), yet, she has no idea of how all things works together as one unit (163). When she examines the photos again, she feels as if she is looking at someone else – objectively, she knows that that is her in the pictures, her face before the accident, all her outward attributes, but subjectively a flattering angle in which she has had herself captured conveys nothing at all about her outer or inner self: "I'd held up old pictures of myself beside my reflection […] my sole discovery was that in addition to not knowing what I looked like now, I had never known. […] bad pictures were the only ones that could show you what you actually looked like." (40-41). Paradoxically, watching herself in mirrors and comparing the old face of a stranger to a *reflection* of

another stranger's face doubles the feeling of estrangement and Charlotte does not experience herself in none of her portrayals. Again, it is all just an image, a self-image she has created, but which cannot helps her now in the middle of identity crisis.

Nevertheless, this is a consequence of how she perceives and yields herself to the constant scrutiny of others. According to Berger, especially women learn to be so-called "surveyors" of themselves since childhood (45-47) and due to it, they constantly live on two planets – they are aware of themselves and they are also aware of being observed by their surroundings. The chronic mode of extreme self-consciousness switches to what Negrin calls an "image-conscious" (5) state of being in a wider sense, accompanied by obsessive controlling of one's extended demonstration of physicality, such as movements, gestures, behaviours etc. Charlotte, as the part of a fashion industry, cannot avoid such a split – she is always an object of observation, which she knows well when she works with showing her appearance in particular form. Thanks to this double gaze, she gradually views herself more as an object, "a sight" (Berger 51) that she shapes to be suitable for viewing. Even the previously mentioned personal photos must perfectly match her ideas of how she should appear to others. Since the moment a model scout notices her in her twenty (although she lies to be eighteen), she lives in a way in which "being observed felt like an action, a central action – the only one worth taking. Anything else I might attempt seemed passive, futile by comparison" (165). Charlotte, in fact, interchanges her own acting for the passivity, she leaves the action to others, to their looks which she considers being more significant, and which determine her identity based on appearance. She needs not to do anything except adaptation, using her own self-objectification to meet the demands of others. Correspondingly, she felt that "being discovered, rather than discovering something myself, should prove the decisive event of my life. Being discovered felt like a discovery." (165). The heroine let anyone to dictate with what she will identify, again and again, changing colours like chameleon, aiming to what she names as the mirrored room, the equivalent for finding her place among rich and famous. This room, symbolically full of mirrors, acts as the ideal place. Metaphorically speaking, she would be seen and could see herself from any angle there, and thus gain a total control over her perfect image that cannot be ruined by anything from that moment. However, this is also an illusion that does not exist as she later must admit to herself. Charlotte, though, is dependent on the fact that she is seen, because for her, it is a source of energy (178) that affirms her own existence. Berger aptly outlines this dependence that contains also

a threat: “her own sense of being herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.” (46)

It could be said that since the discovery, she follows the phases Moose analysed in his dissertation, from one line of blindness to another blindness, over-focusing not only on her physicality. If it were not for the accident, she would not probably realise how much she is the victim of *we are what we see*, the same thing Moose warns young Charlotte before. Some of the inclinations and ways Charlotte uses to treat identity and even form one’s own starts changing slowly, like in the scene with Spiro; some of those are still rooted in her, resulting in participation in a business plan that is based on nothing more than people-products themselves, *Ordinary People*. In the project, her strengthening relationship with Irene shows that Charlotte is reflecting on her inner disagreement with what mistake she had done. She left the strenuous job of forming one’s identity to others, even though she once might have been focused on other aspects than only appearance: “I didn’t want Irene to be like me. I wanted her to have the qualities I no longer had – perhaps had never had – so that in her company, I would have them too.” (350) She is disappointed by the revelation of real Irene because it breaks her notion of Irene as a pure, loving, honest, selfless person who never lies, in other words, having all the attributes Charlotte (who calls herself “the biggest liar”) sincerely admires and wishes for them secretly. As it is suggested, she might have been a similar person once, probably before the discovery took place. At one moment, Charlotte feels as if she was given a chance to be a new person under the new face, not only thanks to the Irene’s inspirational presence, but in the story Irene writes about her for the project: “a life in which my choices were all different, in which *I* was different. The life of someone else. […] I was thirty-five. I’d my choices long ago.” (331). Charlotte’s dissatisfaction with her own life ends in resigning on recreating her identity because it has been already made. She regards it as difficult to reform in other way than from the outside, lived outside, because that is the most usual way how she has approached it. Shortly after the accident, a look in the mirror is a look of distancing, hinting Charlotte’s habit to objectify herself in the name of transient beauty: “This is your Charlotte, and you must take good care of her so she’ll grow up to be a beautiful girl, and live an extraordinary life” (35).

The myth of extraordinariness represented by the mirrored room does not happen to Charlotte, but she fulfils her dream when she becomes literally one of the *Extraordinaries* in *Ordinary People*. After a few illuminative moments Charlotte

experience, she returns to her old ways but more violently – blinded by the prospect of money, instead of making only her face a product she sells all her identity. The platform Egan invented is almost chillingly visionary since it has a lot in common with Facebook that was launched few years later. For instance, it consists of the so-called PersonalSpace™, not dissimilar to the Facebook wall where the "ordinaries" can and even must, under a contract with the company, share their lives online, revealing even the most private thoughts, wishes, fears. Some of the aspects of the "database" anticipate the terms that are commonly used today, such as influencer marketing and advertisement targeting.[7] The aim of the project, according to its founder Thomas Keen, is directed to the Internet "cyberplacelessness" as Alan Kirby terms it in his article. Cyberplacelessness is linked to the contemporary digimodernism that dominates (not only) culture. Kirby replaces post-postmodernism with this name, dating it to the 1970s when the internet was born and attention began to turn to its new form as well ("The Possibility of Cyber-Placelessness", Kirby 71). Completely changing how we communicate and how culture is produced, conceived and sold in a space that is understood as limitless, undefined, unbound to one place ("The Possibility of Cyber-Placelessness", Kirby 78), the Internet allows information to be accessible anywhere on the planet (if one has an internet connection). They are made free for anyone and this reinforces a sense of belonging, of connecting people with the similar nature. However, the accessibility brings about a lot of uneasiness. It includes, for example, the uncertainty of the original source or author, and the globalization that delocalizes the specifics of one country, region or – literature ("The Possibility of Cyber-Placelessness", Kirby 78). Thus, the goal of Keen's project appears to be at first noble and very clever, since it would connect the users and their followers/fans across the world. Without a need to travel somewhere (and undergoing the risk of exotic illnesses, uncomfortable conditions and a scene of dying nature), one could find a website to watch and read about lives of people with various occupations, race, gender etc. Furthermore, one could purchase to look at the livestreams of the *Extraordinaries*' normal day or to gain extra-advantages like privileged access to the locked categories of their PersonalSpace. Breaking the borders and closing the gaps between people by giving them a notion about the life in its infinite number of appearances all around the

[7] Various companies would fight for „renting space" in life of a normal or famous person participating in the project. For example, a can of Coca Cola would look in an "authentic" surrounding absolutely natural and would increase interest of new customers. (247)

world is contrasted to the requirement of live transmission all day for the raw and possibly unmediated material that would be more real than the reality that TV and books present to their addressers. When Thomas says that "Irony is what we do not want" (318), it may seem as a hidden stand against the postmodernism, unless his project is full of bitter irony and paradoxes itself. It attempts to the universal connection, and at the same time it emphasises the differences in its highest form (when two Ordinaries are too much alike, one is deleted from the database), representing well the friction between delocalized space and insuperable localism of the Internet users. While stressing the objectivity and rawness, it implicitly demands making up their stories to be more "dramatic", intense and thus attractive, so the manipulation with the facts happens on the same, even more sophisticated level like in every other media. Keen even sends back Irene's drafts of Charlotte's story to revision because the style sounds, ironically, too much like Charlotte, i.e. not sufficiently interesting. (303) The website provides a freedom to show one's individuality, but identity itself becomes a product that has, in the end, no relation to the original self, still modified, watched and rewritten and repeatedly transformed into sellable objects. Charlotte and Irene both know this similarly from the fashion, but contrarily to Keen's platform, it is much safer business, since it relates "only" to the faces. Like Spiro, Keen is another example of a person who is obsessed with the so-called authenticity of identity, yet, he fails to see that it is not made by faking it. It has nothing to do with the rawness which is what Charlotte and Irene anticipate too ("The thing is rotten" (330) Irene remarks) but the financial burden is for them a greater motivation than keeping one's identity far away from monetizing it. The website is the extreme realization of Irene's academic work – after it expands, there will be nothing like the authenticity Keen desires. The film-makers and advertisers finding the "authentic" in ordinary lives and people still watching the real-time footage from them will affect them in such a way that one will live in own nightmare of hyperreality, experiencing and adapting that experience to omniscient camera, as well as Charlotte have always seen her life like a movie, not excepting her accident (3). She hesitates at the last minute – the inner voice, another Charlotte, who had been silence for a long time, tries to discourage her by a disquieting question that foretells the future fate of her identity: "*Who are you*?" or "*Do I know you*?" (253)

When the model decides to go for this digimodernist project, the spiral cannot be stopped. Objectification and self-objectification take place again and again, ending in a

complete split of identity. It starts with the moments when Irene and Thomas are speaking about Charlotte's story in front of her, and despite her presence they address her in a third person form, "her", as if she were only the character from a narrative. Kelly notices that both Irene and Thomas were influenced by the academic sphere, the first as a professor and the second as a member of a writing class, and as they share their book lists, they refine Charlotte's fate to fit to their literary experience (405), as if her whole identity was reduced only to the aspects that are worth to be adapted in the portrayal of a fictional person. Being so directly objectified in conversation which she thinks she is part of is surprising, but familiar (Kelly 405), and she immediately adjusts to the mechanism. Watching herself as a literary character too, she proposes them even the intentions her figure could have to give the sin-punishment story of a depressed woman some deeper meaning (316). Then it is quick – a book, making of a film, adverts, video games, magazines, toys and a myriad of lot of products in which Charlotte as a brand becomes dispersed. It spreads as an avalanche and all events that happened to Charlotte are assigned different meanings than that they originally had. In fact, she has now what she wanted – she is recognized again, there is no one who would be unfamiliar with her name or face. However, not unexpectedly, taking herself apart to a thousand of pieces that represent her brand does not bring Charlotte any joy or happiness, instead, she is locked in a form of schizophrenia existence when she is at the same time many and many persons or resemblances of persons. It is exactly the mirrored room when she must ceaselessly control her while a million of eyes observe her. It is an irony that Thomas mocks Irene's concern about the project being "Orwellian" back then, when now Charlotte must live in two minds too – the private and the public, guarding the last remnants of what has not yet been revealed to the public by the sensation-seeking alter ego, the model Charlotte, guarding everything, that has not become yet marketable information (512). Her own wish turns against her, the devilish work of (self-)objectification has been completed. She looks at herself, and she comes to a clear realization that "a chasm developed within me, a sinkhole of massive proportions dividing me from Charlotte Swenson. I was someone else." (511). Because she no longer can endure living in „a kind of fission"(512), she resolve to sold her own identity for good. The company's contract is brought to such extreme that it legally insures the claim on the identity after the user cancels his membership. This includes all the data that the platform collected till the cancellation, and the former member has no right even to use his name again, as it is seen as a breach of the agreement. Charlotte

Swenson is now only information with no beginning, no end, living its infinite afterlife (as the chapter is named) in a cyberplacelessness, probably outliving Charlotte who has disjoined from her. Charlotte-the-model is, like a lot of other famous person, created by Irene and her team, that same Irene who was, ironically, at first examining "the relationship among image, perception and identity … in a virtually based, media-drive culture" (92), and nowadays she stays unconditionally at the side of the image, or better said, image-consulting that Moose thought about, ignoring the effects it has on the other two vertices of the triangle.

Although Charlotte, or now the nameless woman, has experienced the disintegration of her own identity in live transmission, in a sense, she has saved herself, the remnants. She comes to accept that the mirror is not the answer. There is no ideal I, and that the true nature of ourselves is always a mystery, something that is far from a material thing, a thing *at all* that can be verbalized. It is the inner core, the essence and trying to find it with cutting razors or making up stories is futile. Using the self-consciousness to shaping it from the outside can be destructive: "It cannot be seen, much as one might wish to show it. It dies the instant it is touched by light." (514).

In the motifs of light, mirrors, objects and its reflections the bitterness can be felt, but the belief of post-postmodernist characters that despite all of this there still must be the "I" somewhere inside remains too.

2.4 Reflections

Aziz, Mr. Z., Michael West, or any of the next name he chooses during his life in America, is an enigma for everybody – and mainly for himself. Nobody knows what exactly he does; he appears and then disappears, literally changing his identities like clothes. He has been involved in lives of both Charlottes, as he had a (love) affair with both of them. While being suspected by Halliday for terroristic activities, he is rather passive, in a state of preparing for the future act. It is nowhere expressively named as terrorism, yet it unsettled minds of many readers as intentions of this character was underlined even more with the uncanny coincidence that accompanied the publication of the novel. It came out on the same week of 9/11, and put Egan almost in a position of prophet. She commented on it, noting that "almost every aspect I invented has come to pass in some way, including the terrorist who fantasises about blowing up the World Trade Centre. That was extremely uncomfortable." (Fox and Egan). The uncomfortableness is also the main feeling that Mr. Z. experiences in America. The preparation for what should be done (even though it is unclear why and at whose behest) consists of an attempt to fit in with Americans, blending into the crowd, and also of denying his past identity which is here associated mainly with Z's origin. What reveals it is his accent he wants to desperately get rid of (152), hence, he imitates it from the TV, radio, movies or other Americans, still, he senses that none of the forms is his own, which strengthens his feeling as an impostor. His insecurity in languages is accompanied with certain clumsiness – he must observe and learn carefully everything, from simple gestures to activities like going to cinema, from the beginning to an end, in order to give an impression of a "normal" person. Like Charlotte or Halliday, he is a good observer but in every town, he meets the same prototypes of people who are, in addition, attracted to the same types like him. This is because Z's ability of absorption all information he is surrounded with provides him with the advantage and disadvantage at the same time – others usually do not notice his insecurity because they project their identities into his blurry one like on canvas: "people saw in it whatever they chose. That was his gift: to be blessed with a soul that promised whatever people wished, and yielded nothing" (153). Abby's wish for father of his child, young Charlotte's desire to find a proof of someone's love (or appreciation), all makes him a great mirror where

they can see themselves and which awaken people's sympathy for Z. Other use his Lacanian objectified identity for realization of these wishes. It is too much open to people that "his own soul was tight and hard, white as a diamond" (153). He acts as a reflecting surface, but there is a small place left solely to him, containing a kind of sharpness, insensitiveness to people's feelings which exhaust him. The tightness of his soul – and it should be stressed he always names it that way, trusting in existence of an inner, immaterial core – does not allow him to stay. If he settled down at one place, he would suffocate there, in constant giving and caring, in the ordinariness in life that requires "too much work" (154), like Charlotte would felt out of place in marriage with Hansen.

Large weariness and loneliness characterizes Z., he is a stream of information he has no chance to filter and process, or distinguish if they are real because especially TV makes an impression that all could contain at least a piece of truth (154). Still, they give him an illusion of power and invulnerability. Even his interest in the smallest details Charlotte Hauser's life, which is surprising for her, has nothing to do with love or natural curiosity. Z. constantly studies who these Americans are, as if some human qualities were not universal, must have been watched and memorized. Z. is the least readable character and sometimes it seems he cannot somehow justify his actions that fall into some random, purposeless order – moving out and starting again in a new city, with a new name and profession, adapting one's identity to reflect others and denying one's own. In some moments, Z. even forgets what the original goal set was for him (probably by a greater organization, as he speaks about "compatriots" (425)). The conspiracy he has been fighting against, the great rage that has motivated him in the next steps he was ordered to take was connected to his homeland and identity he had there, but with endless adaptation and deliberate forgetting of one's way of being in order to not reveal his plans, he suddenly does not know the purpose and who he really was before – all is in vain. Looking back, he finds it difficult to give up the conspiracy, the Us – Them distinction, since it would mean that all his actions and repudiation of own feelings that made him an individual human were meaningless: "His first son, wet from the womb, kicking in sunlight […] His tired wife smiling at him from tousled sheets. All this and more he'd given up to fight the conspiracy, and so he had to win. Had to, or these forfeitures would have been for nothing."(441). Like for Moose who sees himself as a prophetic, a man who is not blind, for Aziz who has the notion of himself as a man who battles for the greater, transcendental good, it is almost

unthinkable to separate from this attribute that forms his identity. However, the crisis he experiences, similarly to other characters, has ambiguous resolution. On the one hand, watching his "personal history" like a film he can narrate, himself being the main hero, he arrives at conclusion that he has actually become one of Them, Americans, crossing from one group to another. It seems that Z. had no other options, since living the double life exhausted him, so he had made commitment only to one. On the other hand, when he catches himself even dreaming "in English" (387), forgetting his own language, he has the feeling that "they'd won" (387). It supports the argument that Z. has seen too much, he has absorbed too much, and finally he surrendered to these various reflections, becoming *what he saw*, the enemies themselves. The successful merging with the crowd, even internally through the acquired language and the American self-dependency, may be a reversed dream he must defend – and which may be still followed by the action he has planned, burning down his own camp. Z. is unpredictable and that makes him dangerous because he can adapt to whatever he wants, while people always see in him only the image of themselves.

3. “*Is it real?*” The Keep and Gothic Identity

3.1 Introduction

Egan’s third novel, *The Keep* (2006), is a realization of her approach to writing in which she prefers experimentation to revising tried and tested themes and narrative techniques, thus, she can explore many fictional worlds and modes of storytelling:

> “I’m eager to have an experience I haven’t had before. The thing that is most threatening to me as a writer is the feeling of familiarity or repetition. If I feel like I’ve done something before, my reaction to that is somewhere between horror and nausea.”
> (DeAngelis and Egan; similarly Brockes and Egan)

The novel differs, therefore, in terms of construction, the subject matter and, above all, the genre. It has been labelled sometimes as a contemporary Gothic story[8], consisting two main narratives mingled with each other. The first, superordinate narrative tells the story of a prisoner, Ray, who has been convicted of murder, and in prison, he is now attending writing classes led by a teacher named Holly. The second, subordinate story is written by Ray himself, and follows a character, Danny, who accepted an invitation from his cousin, Howard, to come to a gothic castle somewhere in Europe where he should help him with the reconstruction of place to Howard’s business plan, a touristic hotel.

The modern treatment of the so-called Gothic novel is a typical trait of the “experimental” background of post-postmodern literature: according to Hoberek, there is a continuation of disrupting the difference between “low” and “high” literature and in addition, to equal both types on the same level of seriousness in art (237). Besides, older cultural forms and elements are communicated to the reader in an attempt to convey a forgotten literary experience that would, at the same time, fit in the contemporary pop-cultural perception and distinction of what is important, often learned through the repeated, “over-familiarized” plots and time-proven schemes which may paradoxically cause the isolation of the reader to surroundings due to a distortion of knowledge

[8] For example, in *The New Yorker* review, it is called „neo-gothic tale”, Kelly finds Egan’s works gothic or even posthuman overally (406), Holliday discovers “gothic tropes in the postmodern world” in the novel.

(McLaughlin 286-7). Contrary to postmodernism, the incorporation of various genres to the text does not serve to challenge the essence and functioning of these genres themselves. They do not give an impression of a narrative that would be shattered into unconnected pieces, inducing the reader's distrustfulness in hardly believable events; on the contrary, they function as a frame for the narrative that may be less likely to happen, but still highly plausible (Hoberek 238). Thus, although paranoia and blurriness between the real and the unreal play a major role in the novel and it is characteristically postmodern in usage of conscious metanarratives, the story as a whole is an example of "convincing realism" (Bell). In this playful exploration of what literary tradition can offer to the novel nowadays, we are therefore witnessing a return to a type of realistic literature which many contemporary critics stressed when characterising post-postmodern writing period.

Interestingly, Egan's adaptation of the genre combines various gothic traits that could be put together. Firstly, Danny's narrative occurs in typical Gothic environment, an old castle dominated by the keep and a network of underground tunnels. In addition, a prison is counted as one of the characteristic Gothic spaces too (Hogle 2), thus, there is not only a story within a story, but also an isolated space within another isolated space that strengthens the feeling of claustrophobia. This kind of oppressive enclosure from which there are few ways to escape (if so) makes the heroes face themselves the most and force them to find out where borders of their identities lie or do not lie (mostly they are projected to the physically materialized form of "otherness", such as a monster). As Bell summarizes, all heroes from *The Keep* are locked somewhere, "if not in a physical jail or labyrinth or keep — like the one inhabited by a fey descendant of the castle's founding family who refuses to acknowledge Howie's rights of ownership — then in various mental squirrel cages". The latter form of imprisonment, the psychological one, highlights the second appearance of gothic in the novel – the main source of terror that awakes a strange fascination with hazard in Danny comes, like in Poe's short stories or Brontës' novels[9], from inside, the inner fears of one's psyche. What hides inside then affects the line of events in Danny's story, questioning whether the events happen in a

[9] For example, Patricia Ingham notices this movement from outer to inner in Brontës's work, especially with regard to mental illnesses which were one of the topics in then (pseduo)sciences, and thus appeared in their novels. She reasons that all that can be considered as supernatural, exaggerated or frightening is happening due to irritation of a sensible mind that tends to be in a state of insanity (176). This view is not remote from scenes in *The Keep* in which Danny touches the edge of madness too. Furthermore, in a recent interview, the novel gave the publisher a reminiscence of *Jane Eyre* and the woman in attic thanks to the character of baroness (Temple and Egan 7:03-7:10).

particular way due to his disconcerted mind, or they contribute to increasing this disconcertment, which results in a self-affecting wheel of mutual consequences.

The serious employment of gothic elements is partly ironized by Ray's decision to stylize Danny to a Goth (Holliday). Other prisoners-classmates struggle with classifying the account in terms of genre, too. Based on their knowledge, they try to mark it as "a ghost story" (96) which Ray rejects as inaccurate. Still, many ghosts appear in both stories but not in a classic form we are used to in the "traditional" gothic novel; mainly, these are spirits invoked by a virtual world and unstableness of one's position in it, ghosts of past that are now howling terribly inside, and last but not least, ghosts of literary characters that somehow resemble ourselves, as Ray hints, but not says outright, his identification with one of the figures. While the gothic creates only one layer in the story, it underlies the remaining parts of it, bringing out the gloomy parts of all characters, and unveiling what haunts Danny, Ray and Holly, their personal demons that endanger them with disrupting their identities.

3.2 The Castle

Since the beginning, the real motivation of Danny, Ray's literary creation, for visiting the castle with a one-way ticket in his pocket is unclear. As Danny was growing up and deciding which side to take – whether to stay in his cousin's safe, but outwardly strange world, or try to fit in with other boys – he eventually abandoned Howard. At the last minute, he pushed him into an underground lake without Howard knowing how to swim and ran off with his new friends. Howard, a little boy scared-to-death, then wandering there for three days and could not find his way from caves. This experience changed both Howard's and Danny's life forever, and even though any of them disclose it to anyone, not even Howard's adoptive parents ever learned the truth about the real culprit, it lingers in their reunion as a shadow, dark and unspoken. The fact that the heroes are haunted, usually by something or someone from the past, is not uncommon in the gothic story (Hogle 2); still, the ways in which a particular danger is portrayed varies. It can be distinguished, for example, in Hogle's conception, between horror and terror type of the gothic, to which we can add various intermediate stages (3). In the latter type, which can be applied to Danny's narrative, one does not encounter horrific monsters, murders, or bloodshed; instead, the danger is found in mind itself or in a vague form somewhere "in the air" (Hogle 2). It cannot be identified clearly – in the act or inhuman creation. When we turn around, it disappears, but the terror remains. Danny, who seems to be fleeing from equally unspecified troubles that threatens him in New York (as his ex-girlfriend mentions, "those guys drove by my place again" (66)) is tortured psychologically in the enclosed environment of the castle – by the fear of Howard's revenge for Danny's betrayal. In their relationship, the underlying tension is created and grows proportionately under other suspicious circumstances that only aggravates Danny's tendency to paranoia. Even Danny does not understand himself for going here: "*What the fuck am I doing here*?" (24). The answer is likely to be finding a proper hideaway and/or solving a bleak financial situation rather than awaiting a happy ending and even reconciliation; however, it comes with the price.

The "traumatic experience" or "incident" (8) as Danny's extended family calls it caused Howard's pathological behaviour, including drugs, robbing, buying a gun, vandalism, which led to years spent in a reform school, as a way how to deny the incident inside, by making himself a villain who is never afraid of anything, not even the darkness in his room (16). And Danny, on the other hand, is glad that the curse of

becoming a black sheep in his family did not fall on him: “He’d liked hearing those things about Howie because it reminded him of who he *was*, Danny King, *suchagoodboy*” (16, first italics our). Still, the comparison to Howard, in fact a victim of his vivid imagination that did not correspond with the “normality” of teenagers, does not help Danny at all, no matter how often he is praised. The incident was a transition point even for him that changed his perception of himself. He cannot return to the previous state of being, the innocence of childhood, even though he wishes to and try to do it by controlling his acts to give an impression that he has not changed at all, while he covers his unbearable guilt this way:

> “… *itwasRafeI’majustakid*, until it seemed like everything in Danny’s life has the witness he needed to prove he was still himself, still Danny King, exactly like before*: See, I scored a goal! See, I’m hanging with my friends!* But he wasn’t one hundred percent there, he was watching, too, hoping everyone would be convinced.” (16)

For Danny, it is the first time he encounters himself through self-consciousness as the object and enters that double gaze that was mentioned in *Look at Me*. He is observing himself to create a required image of “the good boy”; therefore, he is the “I”, and at the same time, he is distanced from it, looking at it from the outer perspective. However, the gaze of others, according to which Danny attempts to keep the preceding identity by using all activities as an instrument for the pretension of it, does not make it real. Deep down, Danny knows the falseness and a true reason why he clings to it so much. Such anxious self-control under a constant feeling of being witnessed widens the gap between the two selves. It is the public and authentic self, which – not only in Gothic stories – contains some terrible, immoral secret that cannot be divulged with impunity and without judgment (Walker 44-45). In Danny’s case, we would call the authentic self rather a private self, since there is only the burning desire for a previous, pure, authentic self of a child living in fantasies and games. The private self cannot be fully shown outwardly. Although identity consists of, as it has been already pointed out, of several “layers”, not excepting the social self, in moments like these there is no recognition of them as properly belonging to the “I” by the person himself, they are rather seen as a strange part of ourselves. As Walker argues, when analysing Gothic heroes, we speak about “a state of disidentity […] By problematizing boundaries between internal and external through concealing the objectified yet internalized self, the subject becomes

confused with regard to authentic identity" (45). The period of everyday self-objectification and subsequent confusion is tiring for the hero, and the pressure of others' image that does not match Danny's perception of himself (itself a distorted picture) drives him to an attempt to break free, at least in part, from one of the influences which causes this confusion. After moving to New York, Danny tries to fulfil the wish of his parents, especially his father – to graduate from a good school, find a good job and a wife etc., but then he jumps into a phase of self-discovery, hoping for finding himself truly and healing identity contradictions. Danny follows a typical, although somewhat belated, scenario of the actions of an adolescent who rejects the way in which others think he should function in the (social) world and what he should do, which is imposed on him (Erikson 132). Nevertheless, the rebellion against father's notions (merely positive expectations of Danny's lined future) and later assumptions (merely negative after his son refuses to be the "good boy" any longer) proves to be both destructive for their relationship and also a final confirmation that the notion of oneself is always to some extent false when it comes under own scrutiny: "'Self exploration' is always dangerous for this nice outline you thought was you" (32). Thus, aside from the façade he kept for years to not dishearten his family, it throws Danny off his balance and makes him question what exactly he should find under that outline. He continues wearing masks and disguises (Walker 45), creating ideas about his identity which he brings with himself to the castle too (see 3.3), still not being able to discover anything that would be persistent. Most obviously, it is symbolized in his appearance that he repeatedly reorganizes:

> "At the beginning he had thought of his style as being his essence, the perfect expression of who he was inside, but lately the styles had started to feel like disguises, distractions Danny could move around behind without being seen." (26)

Unlike Charlotte, at first, Danny believes that his external stylization, such as clothes or makeup, can say something about his inner qualities; that his personality can be found in the style, but again, it is exactly the opposite. Danny's constantly changing styles only demonstrate his constant search for himself, and without any cliché, one can state that they do not show absolutely anything about him except that he uses it as another shield against the world that might see him, either literally (his enemies) or metaphorically (anyone who might reveal all of Danny's instabilities, the malleable

identity). Like Charlotte's face, his appearance acts as a protection, and at the same time concatenation of the endless possibilities of self-realization through fashion. However, these do not point to any meaning or to anything Danny is actually looking for – the lost balance of his once authentic self. By (not only) an eccentric fashion one may compensate for his insecurity about one's identity and besides, he can join a group with similar wearing where he is at least calmed by the certainty of the sameness, "fitting in" (Erikson 183). Danny hopes that one day, one of the looks will ring with a bell of recognition in front of him, and he will *see* himself in the mirror with relief: aha, that's you! It has not yet happened; the only thing remaining is still the confusion that invokes a crisis of identity. At the point when his friends from New York leaves him for building a new house, relationship, family, he is still stuck at the phase of self-exploring, feeling like a teenager who is still affected by his father's repudiation: "He was some kind of adult, but what kind?" (28) In spite of his defiance period, it was not followed by another phase of achieved identity. In contrast, it has stopped in a moratorium phase where one is moving from the familial background to own, assembled and steady self through the various self-discoveries and tests (Marcia 7, 8), which are accompanied by general incoherence, for example, in opinions or stylization, and also the fear to take the first great steps without others' advice how to decide. Danny cannot imagine growing mature because he is afraid to take responsibility for himself (Eve 146). It is then his own naked body that helps Danny to approach a sense of genuine self, and simultaneously it serves as a map of "many ID's he'd tried on" (26), a map of tattoos, injuries, physical scars from all kinds of Danny's jobs where he has met people with not so good intentions. Every chosen ID that lasts only for some period has dealt him a blow but none of them was integrated to the "I". It brought him a visible record of failed experience and a limp, perhaps for life, but even Danny's body does not guarantee any kind of stability as we will see later. Bell highlights that Danny was not successful in anything, "including the construction of a stable identity for himself".

While Danny's promising career ended rather quickly, and the hero must even sleeps on the streets, Howard seems to have thrown the trauma off and is now making a great amount of money. Danny's and Howard's personal history, together with a universal history represented by the character of the baroness, is made present at the castle more than anything else. In contemporary Gothic stories the haunt of past is breaking the perception of present, without a prospect of a future that would be not burdened by

power of old traumas from childhood, and is often seen as juxtaposed, as implemented to one's point of view exactly because one has not grown up from a feeble child to an independent adult yet (Bruhm 268). Danny is an example of this, standing scarcely in his thirties on the threshold of adulthood. He clings to the one attribute which he has probably lost years ago, whereas he is reluctant to admit it: youth (22). For women characters (Charlotte, Sasha) who lie about their real age, this reluctance is due to the appearance; Danny's reason differs a little. Otherwise, it would require him to finally move on, to decide for one way of being which is almost impossible for him, for wearing and re-wearing a number of identities as we have commented above. He would have to give up the claim to self-inspection that he still fails to do; but is more excusable at a young age.

Thus, the past, especially some of the specific memories from childhood and adolescence appearing before Danny's eyes, represents the only one of the times that roughly exists at this place. It is projected, apart from the unspoken and unspeakable event between cousins, in his comparison of Howard-then to Howard-now, for example, when "he was seeing an earlier version" (31) or thinks that there must be "a distant connection" (20) between these two versions, the first possibly distorting the expectations about contemporary Howard's identity where he notices the discontinuity with his notion based on past; still, he hopes for the opposite to hold on to what he knows safely. Nevertheless, he is instinctively aware that none of them could remain the same "good boy" after what happened.

From the moment the protagonist arrives at the castle, time seems to be flowing differently, or rather not at all. As if Danny dives in his own personal lake (and there is one too, at the former castle garden) of timelessness, orientating only by when the meals are served in the provisional kitchen. Otherwise days blend into a mass, in which it never fully dawns, and one cannot say if it is a few hours or a few days that have passed – both are experienced similarly. Initially, Danny is informed of how long others are staying here (29), but little by little, he is losing any notion of time. Holliday, who proceeds from Kelly's article, explains this by Egan's application of postmodernist "privileging spatiality over temporality" (Holliday). However, the space, which Danny shares with Howard, his wife Anne, his old friend from a reform school, Mick, and a group of post-gradual students on an educational stay, cannot be described and thus privileged easily too. The future hotel cannot be found on the internet maps, and even Howard, its new owner, does not know its precise location in Europe, as "those borders

are constantly sliding around" (4). The imaginary boundaries that trap the hero in his own thoughts, delusions and addictions actually aim to the placelessness, a maze of towers, corridors and stairs where Danny goes around in circles. The castle seems to grow in a vast, infinite size of the labyrinth that is emphasised again by the underground passages Howard searches for. As we define our identity naturally not only in opposition to others, but also in space and time, for instance, through experiencing our bodies in a particular place and through looking back into the past forms of it in relation to the present and future, this no-time and no-place dimension has the effect of dissolution on it. It is difficult to perceive one's own identity without these categories, to have any awareness of self at all. This is the real labyrinth that was only hinted at in the preceding novel.

Nonetheless, Danny is partly used to that, thanks to his regular usage of the technology, namely the internet and telephone. These inventions give him a feeling of home while he is on

> […] both places at once. Being somewhere but not completely: that was home for Danny, and it sure as hell was easier to land than a decent apartment. All he needed was a cell phone, or I-access" (63-64)

After not having found a city where to settle in, he has discovered a substitute in the virtuality. At the same time, he does not have to be fixed, bonded to one particular place. This seemingly provides him with freedom of placelessness that turns into earlier mentioned cyberplacelessness there, the indefinite area in which Danny can cross the boundaries among people at completely different locations, and thus he can, at first sight, overcome his loneliness and isolation. In contrast, like everything in Danny's live, it has its drawbacks. The fascination with the power of reach, of an almost mystical connection to signal through which one can get in touch with thousands on the other side of the planet with the invisible hand of technology (41), becomes a morbid addiction for Danny. Already on the first day of his arrival, he is tortured by the thought he is out of the signal and accompanied by almost withdrawal symptoms, he literally "itched to make some calls" (6). For chronic cell phone users, these psychological and also psychical symptoms are not uncommon, and they can be even comparable to well-known addictions, such as to alcohol or drugs (Carbonell, Oberst and Beranuy 906) Howard's strategy for the touristic centre that includes, besides other things, no signal to reach the castle in the future too, is for Danny something unimaginable, terrifying. He

compares the need for connection with other basic human needs, referring to it as "primal" (6) or "brain need" (106), disrupting his concentration and causing impulsivity of his reactions when he cannot call or send a message. The connectedness which should free him from his isolated space is also a form of escapism before what Danny carries in his head (see 11), so he needs not to have to deal with it. This literary figure anticipates accurately what our daily routine is now – the behaviour of the addicted *en masse* we accept as normal and a loop of short-termed dopamine pleasures that draws from being part of the virtuality, which leaves behind a bitter aftertaste that must be swept away by the next stimulus. The fact that he abbreviates the internet to "I-access" is apposite – it is not "just" a mere tool of communication, but of access to the "I", to the self which can thus belong somewhere. The internet represents a non-place where Danny can shape identity and share the same moment of connection with the other side. However, also in this virtual space, his identity is, like in fashion, rather a performance, outward alternating forms which he displays and is comprised of empty phrases and learned formulas. It is an expression of a world of possibilities and "prospects floating around maybe an inch or two beyond the horizon" (71). Like characters in other Egan's stories (and most evidently in the collection *Emerald City*), Danny is waiting for something to happen that would completely revert his aimless course of life, but "the thing" (65), regardless of what it can be, is likely to appear at any moment and thus, the permanent connection is the necessary condition for not leaking it between fingers. He must be up there, tangled with people he barely knows or not interested in (which is nearly everybody) because they may become the *chance* for opening the right door. Hence, Danny suffers from another contemporary trouble – the fear of missing out, or shortly FOMO. It is characterized as a worry of "losing something important, of being left out of the information circuits" (Carbonell, Oberst and Beranuy 907), which is what Danny exactly experiences after he is not able to find the coverage and then after his satellite dish sinks into the pool forever. The dread fills him up to the brink because since this moment, there will be "no people, no events, none on the horizon" (103), the opposite of what connection promises him even though it is apparently a disillusioning belief that underscores Danny's inner insecurities. He is, therefore, addicted not to the phone itself but to the information that he absorbs in large quantities. They are not fit to be exploited but they serve him as an internal power that aids him to orientate in the situation (like when he figures out that Mick and Anne had an affair a few years ago). What is tricky is that Danny himself becomes flowing information there. Identity turns

into a mere matter of textuality in the virtual space; one can write it oneself in a certain way, and this text influences it back ("Digimodernism", Kirby 106; Higham 161). Still, it is only a kind of extract of who one really is. Even the long-distance friendships that Danny maintains are based only on what is written and spoken on the telephone. Consequently, these move only within repetitive textuality that pretends to establish its real essence but are nothing really lived ("Digimodernism", Kirby 122). Yielding oneself to that informational form of existence means to leave aside the other aspects that are not yet transferable to virtuality, such as the body which is a needless baggage. Without the body, which may but need not be expressed verbally there, one can wear any of the virtual faces and stylize identity in an occurrence of a particular text (Higham 162). For Egan, it is exactly "the ubiquitous disembodied communication" that "might mimic gothic experience" (Sanders and Egan 30:20-30:30).

Contrarily, the body serves as a connector to reality, to a particular place. Holliday points out that entering into cyberplacelessness, the protagonist of the subordinate story ceases to have any idea where his body is (since he cannot carry it with him) and thus loses another way of experiencing himself from outward to inwards. With moving into a global space, the body and the self in it is delocalized – one can be there and here at the same time, which suits Danny perfectly. However, it is risky too. Like when he began to be the observer to himself in childhood, being torn between two places at once results in being properly nowhere. That Holliday seeks the postmodern nature in this modern gothic story is not off-topic – Danny illustrates the postmodern dissemination of self, the split between several appearances, styles, possibilities, voices that sometimes contradict each other and make his character a little elusive. Similarly to many protagonists in Egan's novels, he is paralyzed by almost existential indecision. Because of so many options, he ends up unable to decide for any of them (Timmer 42), or life paths; and rather he just waits for what will be sent his way.

In this fast-moving, endless world of information, where what happened a minute ago is already half-forgotten, where every phone call floats away into the void the moment it happens (it has no beginning or end, information comes from basically nowhere as Carbonell, Oberst and Beranuy argue (908)), the existence of identity is a matter of seconds and being not online, not keeping one's persona visible in the various connections, is destructive for it. That is why next Danny's fear relates to vanishing from the visible world, from being forgotten in the virtual space. Without it, there is nothing more than emptiness and death: "the thought of disappearing like that was

worse than dying" (44). Comparably, when he searches for the right place where his satellite dish would catch the signal, he calls it "a flicker of life" (38). Thus, even though the conversations and calls with his "friends" are in the majority of cases shallow, it makes him feel alive. He must affirm and enliven his virtual existence by these small, insignificant interactions. It seems that *this* existence, despite a one-sided view of it that is stripped off any individuality in a globalized area, has greater importance for him than the one connected to physicality ,which has been in a sense sacrificed.

On the contrary, Howard is convinced that the obsessive floating in an absorbing and delocalizing cyberplace is a result of people's boredom that will not be in future satisfied by any type of entertainment because it will be exhausted. In cyberspace, everything is prepared and presented for direct consumption without need to think. People have lost the ability to imagine; it has been stultified by the entertainment industry. According to Howard's plan, imagination should replace the constant connection to consumer goods, i.e. information. The brain itself should create the information. It should return to the medieval age to which the history of the castle reaches not by giving up the whole modernity, but the modern technologies that negatively influence creativity. In fact, Howard is hinting at the above-mentioned pop-culture (or mainstream culture) that stoles it to use it in the thousand times seen adaptation consisting of the favourite scenarios that cause the addiction exactly by its effortless familiarity (47). People who have been cut off their imagination (in Howard's words, *the Imagination Pool* (47)) should find it here again and with it their "inner life […] rich and weird" (44). However, without being used to it, there is a chance for imagination going too much wild, which is what happens to Danny – at least, in Howard's opinion. Danny's mind lacking external impulses begins to be sensible of the shifting microcosm of the castle where he meets his own ghosts, represented not only by Howard, a personification of the *worm*, but also a baroness, the only surviving descendant of a long Ausblinkers lineage who refuses to leave a tower, called the keep, the oldest part of the castle.

3.3 The Keep

The baroness stands for another example of the past, the only time that sometimes flickers through the no-time surroundings, and according to her words, she is keeping all previous generations which once lived here in her. Without the successor who would take the place back from Howard, she tries to protect at least the keep as a sacred building. From time to time, other inhabitants can catch a sight of her in the window – once, as an old woman, and then as a young girl with golden hair, evoking the impression of a fairy-tale princess. However, the second appearance is observed only by Danny, and then affirmed in their first and foremost last encounter in the keep where baroness uses her ability to change to a young, attractive woman who seduces Danny – but the next morning, there is nothing left except the dust on the floor she has been standing. Holliday notes that her character is an expression of many tensions that are going on in the story: "Her doubleness acts as a trope that reflects both the play between interior and exterior […] Such a mutable identity underscores the gothic as a state of uncertainty or destabilization". Just as the protagonist is destabilized by being simultaneously outside and inside, while he cannot pinpoint the location of his body or mind, the baroness draw attention to this fragmentation between several parallel realities – or perhaps more accurately, illusions. The duality has been a favourite element for the Gothic story since the 19th century. Based on then essays dealing with a division of consciousness, it brought the first greater insecurities about the stable core of identity, even gradually suggesting that the doubleness is not a final station – identity can be divided into flowing occurrence of sometimes contradictory persons (Walker 40-41). Hence, while baroness looks at one moment like an old wise (in fact, insane) lady, and at another time she puts on a youthful, wrinkle-free face, smoothed of all hardships, it reinforces the confusion and inability to know and identify others as well as oneself. If there exists certain fluidity one can make use of for reaching particular goals – and it needs not to take into consideration only physical appearance because we can control it only in cyberspace like supernatural – one may ask whether it is nowadays anachronistic to advance the core when we may choose from the wardrobe of identities, interiorly and exteriorly, according to a situation like Danny has used to do. However, even in these stories, which involve any type of doubleness, this form of identity never ends well, for the perception of oneself in several completely different shapes concurrently leads to the disintegration of the concept as such, to its postmodern

rejection. Thus, there is still an attempt to define the self, but this self-definition ceases to make sense in light of the baroness's literal mutability and travelling between times. As we have already noted, a sense of alienation from the self is an ordinary factor in the process of identity formation. However, this unrestricted shifting back and forth where one tries to keep several parts at the same level of importance simultaneously and prefers roles and faces to something that underlies them, it can separate us from ourselves, making us stand in front of the wardrobe and choose. On the other hand, baroness's persona may equally suggest that belief in essentialism is no longer necessary, and that destabilization is a natural part of who we are today. As it has been argued, post-postmodern literature moves between these two stands, attempting to recover the concept, but also few believe that one can proceeds from the self as fixed and unchanging without a critical evaluation. Apart from her being the Gothic element in the story with an obvious creepiness that escalates when she locks the door of an underground web of tunnels where the group sets out on a discovery journey in order to starve them to death, she breaks the last border between reality and unreality, fact and illusion. The thing is that Danny, who could no longer be connected to virtuality, is now immediately trapped at the castle even mentally since his brain cannot be at two places at once, cannot "overflow" towards the other people on the line. He must rely on his imagination alone to escape his own thoughts and physical-mental lockdown in the unidentifiable castle that pulses around him like a heartbeat, repeatedly contracting and expanding in endless proportions. For Howard, Danny is the first testing subject for demonstrating how the imagination works, but by belittling his vision of the young baroness's appearance as merely a figment of the mind in which the ability to create, not just passively consume, is coming to life again, it unsettles Danny and makes him question whether there remains anything he can trust. This gradually results in an ever-increasing sense of paranoia, not relating to the organizations or secret unexplained signs, but to his cousin himself. The main hero suspects Howard of planning revenge and that he wants to do so by depriving him of his sanity which he might lose in the recurring discernment of what can and cannot be trusted as truly existing. If the renewed imagination should enter into a rich inner life that itself invents experiences, for Danny, the inner life is just a prison of fears and worries, and his own mind is likely to begin to turn against him. Hence, he cannot trust it as his main access to the world too. When the protagonist recovers from a fall from the window of the keep, his cousin tries to keep him awake by irritating him with his opinion on digitalized culture:

> What's real, Danny? Is reality TV real? Are confessions you read on the Internet real? The words are real, *someone* wrote them, but beyond that the question doesn't even make sense. Who are you talking to on your cell phone? In the end you have no fucking idea. We're living in a supernatural world, Danny. We're surrounded by ghosts. (130)

Although afterwards he calls it a joke, this very idea sows the seeds of postmodern anxiety, which, as Howard suggests, is all technology's fault. The cyberplacelessness that Danny believes in implicitly is nothing more than a parade of shadows, unverifiable statements, and people reduced to ghosts, only a light imprint of who they are merged with a million textual occurrences. The refinement of the digimodernist space to match the real one is perfected every year – social networking improving the means of interaction, shops replacing the physical contact with the product by detailed descriptions ("The Possibility of Cyber-Placelessnes", Kirby 79) etc. Thus, for Danny, who is searching for his home and identity here (as many people are), Howard's comment that this may be an unreal, mediated image of himself is destructive. It is as if this certainty of a moving world in which Howard flows like a river of information, since there "the self is merely data" (Higham 161), is being set on fire right before his eyes. The real Gothic terror resides, then, not so much in the external typical motifs of the genre, which of course enhance it, but in the possibility that everything that Danny hears and sees on a daily basis from the position of "I" is of obscure origin, a phantasm of his strained senses, which have no way of verifying it. Howard compares the postmodern issue of events mediated through television to internet and telephone transmissions, the potential disillusionment of which, contrasted to the issue already discussed in previous decades (and which was even displayed on the character of Aziz who wonders about the nature of TV information, as he was unsure of what he could trust and how to even discern it), is emphasized as an even more serious matter when he even refers to these kinds of information, put in a cyberplace, as supernatural. Thus, the communication with those who are supposedly authors of them (the commentators, the people talking on the telephone) are truly "mimicking the Gothic experience", because it is equal to talking with the spirits. This is in line with Howard's labelling not only the baroness but his friends (and all people he thinks he knows) a fabrication: "If you're surrounded by people, you're making them up" (131) – this "ghost story", as Ray's cellmates term it, thus takes on a whole new dimension. It implicates that one does not

need any kind of gothic if one lives in it[10]. Being captured in a cycle of the real and the unreal, Danny is visited by his demons in a terrifying scene where he, given his head injury, is probably suffering from vivid hallucinations where an unspecified danger buzzes just behind his back. It is a dream within a dream, lucid daydreaming in which Danny realizes it but convincing himself of it does not help him to wake up: "*It's not real, I'm hallucinating. It's all in my head so there's nothing to be scared of.*" (150). The paralysis is strengthened by the persuasion that this is retribution by Howard who is sadistically enjoying Danny's entrapment. Even the reader cannot be sure whether this is really the case in which the hero is tortured by the drug trips (nor do characters know, or pretend to not know, what the doctor from the town below the castle is injecting into his veins). This experience culminates not only in a resolution to flee from Howard's reach, but in a new distrust of telephones and the internet. When Danny contacts Martha again with Mick's phone, the seeds of scepticism are sprouting in him: "I don't believe that you're Martha" (168). He may, therefore, wonder whether he is able to define himself in any way if he has lost all the certainties he had – self-realisation in a cyber place where others' faces changed into phantoms, orientation in time and space (when he goes down to the town to buy a ticket back to Prague, it has turned into a different city altogether, the railway has vanished) and, most of all, reality and real people as outer pillars for his definition. If they are ghosts, malleable identities, even Danny cannot confront himself as "I". In the course of the story, he also loses another thing he used to associate with himself externally – his lucky shoes. They stand as a symbol of his separation from the young age and its imposed identity. He chooses them in the shop after moving in to New York, "when he'd just figured out who he was *not* (Danny King, *suchagoodboy*) and was burning up with excitement to find out who he was instead." (105). The inner opposition to the older, innocent part of himself which he understands finally as irretrievable and pretentious then, is a milestone in identity formation but the enthusiasm slowly fades as one classification from external point of view is substituted by other. Danny gives up to see himself as such a good boy, instead he poses as "the guy who wears boots like this" (105). This description has something to do with his notion of what kind of life this person should lead, a second flash of future which is

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[10] In a similar manner, Egan speaks with Temple about contemporary pandemic world which can be seen as Gothic too, combining the physical isolation and constant online connection. In today's informational war, Egan stresses the difficulty in discerning the real vs. the unreal „as we deal with fraudulent news, with the inability to actually settle on facts with the idea, you know, that people of different political persuasions actually don't agree on each other's facts" (Egan with Temple 4:53-5:05).

now a forgotten past wish, leaving Danny to switch identities while searching for something of himself in them. During the accident, he realises that the boots do not properly fit and that it has been like that maybe for years (113), indicating how delusional his idea of identity of "the guy with boots" is. Then, walking barefoot is like freeing himself from the idea; yet, the shoes as a symbol of it are the only self-identification marker that he has kept for so long, and thus, he is glad to wear them again, even though they are not fully corresponding with who Danny is.

The tension of Gothic terror, escalating in the dream scene in which something gradually rises to the surface of the pool/lake that is shrouded in the legend of drowned twins, then runs in similar spasms in the final scene. The old traumas are experienced again, but surprisingly, the author of the story gifts the whole group of characters with a seemingly happy ending. They discover an unlocked way from the underground passages and the relatives are reconciled. Furthermore, the connectedness to place and time starts renewing after the reconciliation, since the "invisible clock has started to tick" (205). What is more, the future is acquiring clearer outlines with only one way of living in cousins' common plans (even though one cannot be sure if this will not be the next disguise for Danny). However, even the moment of slow returning to the present, which is not affected by the past, does not last for a long time. Danny is killed by Mick, who hates sharing Howard's family with anyone – Mick, who is an embodiment of Ray, and the same Mick for whom the murdered Danny becomes his own ghost, a voice in his head: "Let the haunting begin." (211).

3.4 The Prison and the Door

The main protagonists of Ray's story can be described as made-up ghosts too, since they are (at least partly) fictional creations born from the writer's pen. Despite Ray's identification with the murderer Mick, and the castle-hotel really located in Europe (as Holly later visits it), which are the real foundations for the writing, Ray can only guess Danny's thoughts. However, the two stories are merging together to such an extent that the previous appellation of it as subordinate and superordinate is not accurate. As one of the prisoners aptly interprets, Ray's characters are "not alive, not dead. An in-between thing." (96) This is given by a few things, mainly by the mutual links among them, "a metaleptic violation of the discrete layers" (Eve 143). Firstly, whereas we are able to track the line between Mick and Ray, there exists also an inner relation between Ray and Danny. The voice of the victim infiltrates his mind as his enemy alter-ego who forces him to write; therefore, he is at the same time a part of him and part of another person. This evokes the gothic schizophrenic mind in which one can hardly figure out what belongs to him and what is the alienated piece of oneself one can no longer regulate. To depict Danny's inner feelings and his nature is for Ray easier due to the resemblance between them: "He reminded me of me" (209). In a sense, we cannot know what happens to whom in the first story because of this mirroring into each other. Interestingly, Ray is objectified in this story, too, because he observes himself from the perspective of another character.

Secondly, the story is written during the course, so it is acceptable to call it an openly expressed metanarrative where the author actively enters with his commentaries and ironic notes rather than subordinate narrative, owing to meta-links between layers in terms of their heroes whose identities overlap. While the character of Danny, whether fictionalized or memorized, and the whole act of murder terrorizing Ray (similarly as cousins were haunted), the only way how to solve this is again usage of imagination that helped Howard to alleviate the momentary suffering (206). In Ray's narrative it is symbolized by "the door" (18) Holly offers to her students through writing. The imagination and words are for prisoners the only power and contact with the outer world, a way to forget their loneliness and urge for physical touch Ray projects into Holly. In an extreme case, it manifests as a complete dependency on it, which could be registered on other members of writing course who want to punish Ray for not speeding up writing of new pages. Whereas metanarratives belong to the characteristic

postmodern techniques, they are used much less in post-postmodern literature or are turned into multiply layered metafiction, as in Wallace's work, for example; it is generally argued that the contemporary generation of post-boomers is mostly trying to break out of this method of a closed circle that would refer to the disputability of literary representation (Burn 20-21; Călinescu speaks about this circularity in connection with "undecided" postmodern writings 304). Thus, although it is quite clear here that Ray is the creator of the story, in which his style of expression, especially sarcasm and vulgar words, is reflected, he does not feel the need to label it as mere fabrication, nor his narrator's unreliability is put forward. According to Huber, this is not even the aim of contemporary metanarratives; on the contrary, they are meant to affirm and bless the existence of the writer (26). While he plays with this position precisely through the uncertain boundaries of illusion and truth (not only) through Howard's views, these debates never directly challenge the very framework of the narrative itself; rather, they stand in contrast to the unlimited internet posts that *someone* has written there. Ray does not want to show his superiority over the story nor "overrule" it. In his case, it is an attempt to come to terms with his own demons, to make peace with the past too, and in addition, to pay off the unpayable debt. Through writing about his victim, he manages to think about Danny and himself in a larger frame beyond the rivalry, trying to understand a life journey that could have been very similar for both characters. In this sense, it shows a kind of empathetic approach to self, to others, and to writing itself. Since Ray's story is always read in front of the next listeners, metafiction becomes a communicative tool to restore credibility (Funk qtd. in Huber 33). Holly encourages the other convicts to respond to the short pieces somehow, to give feedback, and at the same time she demands from them an authentic literary statement: "powerful, honest, moving" (139). Thus, it can be translated to contemporary literature terms of engagement, communication, connection, in which Holly appears to believe.

All in all, Ray's past and clues of who he once was, in his pre-prison state, emerges from both stories, but it is with Holly when he is most honest, expecting the same sincerity from her: "Holly T. Farrell, I say, who are you?" (178) Holly, however, remains mysterious for obvious reasons. A former drug addict whose husband still does drugs and who had a nervous breakdown after her baby's death is now starting her MA study, and the creative visits have been an experiment for her – an experiment that brought her a vision of alternative life when she would be happy. Although she must

bury Ray's handwriting in her garden to prevent the police from finding it, this story of which setting she then experiences first-hand, stays in her mind, lives another life, and may even see her authorial adaptation. Thanks to it, she could escape too – into a world of imagination from the oppressive realities of her own life.

4. *“Time’s goon, right?” :* A Visit from the Goon Squad and Thirteen Ways of Looking at Identity

4.1 Introduction

A lot has already been written and said about Egan’s best-known piece of writing, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, which, after its publication in a paperback version in 2011[11] won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award. It generated another flurry of positive reviews across literary and non-literary journals and newspapers. This major success always comes up in most interviews and is glorified not only for its style, and the range of themes it explores, but also for its unconventional composition which consists of thirteen loosely linked stories through which characters go at different times of their lives. At the same time, it is the composition that makes it difficult to classify this work as a single type of literature. On the one hand, the stories can stand on their own, and can be read individually (e. g. Mandys online), which is supported by the fact some that of them were released separately like short stories before they were collected together. On the other hand, the book is frequently described as a novel, while other critics deem it to a special genre, for instance, the genre of so-called novella-in-flesh which comprises several interconnected point of views which find their intersection in one of components of the narrative (Smith 171, 176); and finally, some settle for genre and formal uncategorizability (e. g. Eve 147).

Egan admits a modernist influence of *The Remembrance of Things Past / In Search of Lost Time* (Flood and Egan; Brockes and Egan). What has been stressed in modernism, which differentiated between subjectively and objectively experienced time, is enlivened in these stories with similar juxtaposition of time lines. Subjectivity brings out to light memories which proved later to be formative within the passage of objective time that presses the characters with power they cannot defeat. Thus, as well as *Look at Me* which begins with the quotation by another modernist author, James Joyce, at the first page of *Goon Squad* Egan cites from Marcel Proust. This highlights the affinity of these novels Egan sees between them (Fox and Egan), but what is more, it bespeaks her

[11] Actually, the book had an interesting journey to popularity. It was firstly published in June 2010 as a hardcover and, according to Egan’s wish in order to prevent the false expectations from an undefined genre of the book, the name “novel” was omitted on the cover. It resulted in a mild interest of readers who thought it to be a nonfiction work from the music industry. After adding the designation in the second publication, this time a paperback, in March 2011 with inclusion of the PowerPoint chapter, it finally received more attention and was followed by a great success (Rankin and Egan 30:30-34:23).

enthrallment with the depiction of life by abandonment of linearity and preference of a natural "constant negotiation between reflection and anticipation" (Brockes and Egan). Egan added that, reading Proust with the greatest admiration (that took its time), aspired to create a similar work that would tackle the topic of time in a non-chronological way that would resemble flowing of time, however she wanted to do it "more economically and contemporary" (Sanders and Egan 31:51-32:00). Instead of concentrating on multi-generational history that spans over decades under the turbulence of national dramas, Egan singles out and emphasizes particular intimate moments in them that only hint at the tragedies, personal and historical, without a detailed, long-winded expedition into protagonists' minds. Recalling Burn's argument, this is a characteristic trait for post-postmodernist works – the emphasis is put much more on personal history of the character through the employment of flashforwards that enter the stream of story (25-26). Consequently, time is treated more simultaneously in all three lines. Additionally, these are branching off to variances according to the subject who perceives it, and are situated together at the same level of significance, since every moment counts for creating the frame of character's evolvement (Smith 151-152). Nothing can describe this book better, as the organization of the text, crucial for the overall message of the stories/novel/flash cycle, should mimic the time and its effect on identities.

All chapters are analepses and prolepses to each other, depending on the order in which they are read. The personal history, contrary to *The Keep*, does not terrorize characters and does not make a moment be stuck in no-time, but it induces more or less rather a bittersweet nostalgia, while it is, furthermore, accompanied by prediction of future. Post-postmodernist writers are aware that all three timelines are similarly important and identity is formed through the particular past experience that determines its direction (Burn 25). Time weaves and unweaves in *Good Squad*, as the story covers a period from the 70s to the present day at random – we can only attempt some sort of chronology after we have finished the book. Many graphic depictions of decades in which each chapter enacts have been produced, so that we can piece together the sequential perception that the book deliberately avoids for the reason of approaching time like it is usually experienced – subjectively and not chronologically. It also gives us the opportunity to re-read and form the overall picture with a different starting point each reading. Funk argues that it is the arrangement of the narratives, due to which we must continuously alter the suppositions and findings we have formed yet of the plot or characters, that points to the relationship between the reader and the author who are thus

interacting with each other (177). The reader who reconstructs the story contained in the textual material, in which he or she repeatedly re-orientates, does that thanks to the author who leaves the text to him or her with a trust that he/she will try putting it together from the fragments (Funk 177). Hence, a relationship between the reader and the author, their mutual communication and cooperation through the text, is renewed here. At the same time, it requires reader's engagement in the play of the text, which does not exclude him but involves him in an active process of reading, a responsible work that stems from a narrative that does not claim to escape and close up, but it is instead open to interpretation and further exploration.

In addition, the composition Egan decided for is probably the reason why many critics cannot even agree to which tradition the book leans to, whether modernist or postmodernist.[12] However, this may be the question that is needless to ask, since both directions are merged in this post-postmodernist experiment with varied narrative points of view (all 1st, 2nd and 3rd person are employed). On the one hand, it is highlighted that objective reality does not exist in these thirteen chapters. Some of the characters are at one occasion the tellers of the story and observers, but as they appear again in another part, they are observed and told about by next characters – this reminds us of the object-subject situation we have investigated in *Look at Me*. As we already know, one usually does not see oneself in the same way other see him, or precisely speaking, both perceptions influence each other almost to an undistinguishable mass. All in all, the novel reflects again dissimilar versions of identity according to the perspective that is chosen in order to watch it, and these versions may be nearly inconsistent. This corresponds with postmodernist objective relativism, furthermore, characters often manipulate with the truth[13]. On the other hand, dealing with a character within several different views can be marked as modernistic too, since the person can resemble a cube which we turn around, looking at its different sides through binoculars of time periods – one may argue that we are still looking at the same cube, the same person. When commenting on the quotation from Proust, Smith states that the heroes from *Goon Squad* nostalgically return to past, hoping to find a proof that they did not change, but what they discover is usually opposite (148). The sameness about which Smith talks is,

[12] For instance, Mishra acclaims the novel for „modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and dissolution", while Shone admires how the novelist „anchor[s] postmodern trickery to more reassuringly solid novel".
[13] To give two examples, people claim to be at Dolly's party or Scotty's concert to demonstrate their social status, and even they do not hesitate to physically hurt themselves to have the scars as a proof of their presence.

though, a matter of past, and not finding it does not exclude the continuity of the person who stays the same *in spite of* the changes. Thus, as the citation indicates, instead of exchanging personal history with who one is now and be disappointed by disharmony between these selves, “it is in ourselves that we should rather to find those fixed places, contemporaneous with different years” (Proust qtd. in “Goon Squad”, Egan). Hence, contrary to identity that may diffuse in the connected narratives, the belief in its stable centre that endures is presented there, exhorting us not to rely on (illuminative) moments of past to compensate the feeling of identity absence or unauthenticity. This is because this “moment the self that we were long ago” (Proust qtd. in “Goon Squad”, Egan) has already passed into irretrievability, and although it has shaped us, it can no longer be reclaimed as our present identity. Nevertheless, the specific point on the journey can remind us of the path we have taken and what may still be valuable for us (or, conversely, not). Proust’s work proposes that it is exactly individual and even national history that grounds our self and therefore cannot be ignored (Zelechow 81, 86). Heroes, then, balance between who they were, are, and will be. What was relevant for Proust’s protagonist in relation to self during time, i.e. “memory and self-consciousness” (Zelechow 88) can become central mechanisms for orientation in identities of Egan’s literary figures. Their support, however, is not unreserved, since both can fail being reliable or without lapses. In the end, neither of them can be always like that because they are always related to one person, and thereby affected by the subjectivity.

4.2 Melody

Every character changes in time – some turn out badly, some do better, but it leaves no one out from its business. And every character has a way how to deal with the *goon* that gives and takes things, without any justice or equality, while it often results in an existential crisis or at least disappointment of how things went in past years. The above-mentioned memory and self-consciousness can, paradoxically, lead to struggle with admitting the transformation or with finding one anchoring point which should help them to see the "I" in a passage of time.

Sasha, for example, has a unique, although somewhat risky way of coping with it. From almost every person she meets in her life, whether it is a strange woman in a restaurant, a one-night stand, or a plumber she has barely seen for less than an hour, she steals one of his/her things and exhibits it on a special shelf in her apartment. In this context, her kleptomania is rather collecting of individual moments in time by which she not only overcomes the "pain" (7) caused by each fleeting encounter – and most encounters, except for those at work, are fleeting for her until a certain age – but it also serves as a substitute for memory, which she does not trust very much. The memory lies in these things, euphemistically referred to as "found", even though Sasha has rather appropriated them. They help her with the remembrance; it can be likened to putting small pins into her life map, otherwise she would forget the moments that are preserved in these pins. However, she realizes, too, that they are only a limited sliver of what she has experienced: "it contained years of her life compressed" (15). Therefore, when she looks at them, a whole mixture of emotions give way to emptiness and a bitter understanding that her efforts to acquire these objects have come to nothing – she cannot capture with them who she once was. There are only a few things lying in front of her that she could simply take and pack it away, arranged as "the raw, warped core of her life" (16). Only a vague image of Sasha's identity and experience is carved in them, no less warped than her own memory would be able record.

When a thing that belonged to someone becomes stolen (or "found"), the aura that surrounds it disappears – they are no longer a thing related to a person, but a mere object. Sasha thinks of them as a "symbol" (8), which may very well symbolize the lost time, which are theoretically trapped in them, but no longer there, no longer having any further magic; the thing is emptied like the goods in shops (which do not attract Sasha at all). Yet, she cannot detach herself from them which is signalled by her reasoning why

she steals the items but never uses them afterwards: „because leaving them untouched made it seem as if she might one day give them back" (17). Sasha is unable to let go of the past and, at the same time, the future possibility of making that past present again when she meets the people who once owned the things. In most cases, she may not even remember them, but the objects represent for her an opportunity, however illusory and deceptive, to come back even to herself in particular whiles in life, and furthermore, to avoid falling into oblivion.

Ironically, as reported by Funk, similarly contorted memory of Alex, her then-date, confuses the two memories – without remembering Sasha's last name, appearance, or how she acted ("'What was she like?'" (346) he asks Bennie) , or their strange dinner at restaurant where she almost stole a wallet, he only recollects that she had a bathtub in the living room – her property comes to the fore in his mind instead of Sasha's identity (13). Musing on the silhouette of a girl he once went out with is rather given by remembering of his youth back then. It turns out, then, exactly what she presupposed, Alex forgot. This is the fact she may not have wanted to admit to herself – none of the items on display can be in any way indicative of those who have been robbed; they are mere materiality, which, if she tries to remember, is a reminder of the act of theft, but not of persons as individuals.

Furthermore, Sasha finds it difficult to break this habit, or more precisely, this criminal activity, also because she affirms "her individuality" (4) through it, even perceiving herself as having a talent for stealing (8). Again, this is another of the attributes that the characters ascribe to themselves and repeat, and to change them would be to invade their identity as such. Thus, the moments in which this Sasha's individuality manifests itself can be preserved in these items, which completely differ from one another (from candles to tools to pieces of clothing). The only thing that unites them, and what is most appealing to Sasha, is that they belonged to a specific person. We can emphasize this longing through objects as essential. Smith explains this by calling "a deep desire for connection" (150). Again, this shows a tendency that is central to a post-postmodern understanding of the self – it is not just an identity defined against someone, but an identity defined *in relation* to someone. The pattern we have seen in previous books is repeated – longing to escape the clutches of loneliness, the craving to be in connection with others. The relationship of shared identity (Timmer 45) in the You – Me relationships re-appears here; besides, it bears resemblance to Charlotte's

pursue of shadow selves as a kind of authenticity, the pursue with a goal of unearthing what lies underneath, in the very core of one’s self.

On the other hand, her wish, in which things can be a record or reminder of specific people, comes true years later. That is when she starts a family and instead of stealing, she documents various fragments of their life together in collages (cf. Smith 161). When her daughter, Ally, asks why she puts together clippings of shopping lists, appointments, or tasks (273) that are graphically represented in Ally's PowerPoint presentation, which replaces one classic chapter, Sasha explains that all the clippings are “precious because they're casual and meaningless. But they tell the whole story if you really look.” (273). In this essential way, then, her collecting now differs: unlike her earlier form of “found objects” these are always within reach of family members at home who remind Sasha of them every day; the objects can refer to them in real time and act as a kind of link to present people, the real relationships Sasha longed for. Moreover, they take the form of actions, not things, and this proves to be far more important to Sasha, the everyday experiences of the day that tell, as she assumes, much more than just being written down somewhere and pinned or glued. To some extent, it also exemplifies the narrative organization that resonates both in this PowerPoint chapter and in the composition of the book. Thanks to the therapy that she seeks for solving the stealing problem, Sasha knows that we all tend to create a story about ourselves, to put together cause and effect, to find reasons for unexplained events. Nevertheless, this kind of self-consciousness is not unproblematic. Although Sasha wishes she could also create a “redemption, transformation” (19) story about herself (again, very evocative of the PR agency’s stylization of Charlotte’s story), she is well aware that it would not be true, as she would not only have to shed parts of her identity, but also leave out parts of the story that would invalidate it, for example, her relationship with her father who abandoned her (9). Even years later, when we can state that both of these processes happened independently of whether Sasha began “writing herself” or not, the heroine is reluctant to create and view stories except those that emerge out of ordinary daily events.

Self-consciousness has its limits from the start - if we discern Sasha’s implicit distrust in memory and her will to replace it materially in the first chapter, these tendencies were already manifested earlier. On top of that, despite the objects she accumulated, there are a lot of memories she would prefer to obliterate. At the university, for instance, the heroine opposed herself, quite understandably, to her past, when she ran

away from home, slept on the streets of Naples and made a living partly through prostitution and theft for a wealthy reseller (she used her skills of burglary she has been improving since her thirteen years; at those times she was, though, still stealing from "impersonal" shops). Sasha experiences a forced alienation from herself which she can also use to rid herself of her feeling of shame: "That wasn't me [...] I don't know who it was. I feel sorry for her." (201). A similar pattern of distancing from the former self is then found in Ally's reproduction of her mother's words: "I don't trust my memories." "It feels like another life." (267) Yet, the perception of the self as certain versions of itself that she does not want to return to is not due to awareness of the distortion and unreliability of memory, as Sasha verifies with the stolen items. It is also due to the fact that if she were to turn to any of her previous lives, she would have to relive the traumas, "own struggles" (267) that she was dealing with during this time, whether it was rape, a suicidal attempt or the death of her best friend from college, Rob, who drowned in the river. In accordance with Smith, these and other traumas probably led Sasha's to continue for some time in stealing and self-destructive behaviour (163). Looking at oneself from a detached view is not easy – and Sasha knows this well and wants to close eyes before it, which is why she chooses to disown past selves as strangers, who are going on dissimilar life lines that she would have condemned or found implausible. On the contrary, Rob chooses from Sasha's identity precisely her Neapolitan self, emphasizing that the she-stranger is not living in the past, but it is a determinative part of her. Rob identifies in Sasha's then hardships her depth, genuineness that, moreover, converts to a secret that binds the two, unlike Drew, who does not have an idea about Sasha's stay in Naples until the last moment. However, in the last chapter where we meet Sasha, she focuses on the present, the present and future moments of clippings that bring balance to her coexistence with her daughter, her son with Asperger and her husband Drew, whom she also met in college. Self-consciousness contributes to liberating insight and possible forgiveness, but also to strong discomfort – discomfort from the physical shell (Sasha lies about her age like Charlotte), and from the disordered inner side (where traumas remain, even though she tries to forget or let them drift away).

Sasha thus becomes a series of versions of herself that she no longer wants to relate to. It picks up on Alex's exasperated comment that all New Yorkers are unguessable: "'You have no fucking idea what people are really like. They're not even two-faced – they're, like, multiple personalities'" (13). When Sasha states as a matter of fact that

this post-Janus phenomenon hold true for all people regardless of the city they live in (14), it echoes not only Moose's assumption of chameleon personalities but also the general frustration with the unknowability of others (despite efforts in reconnection) that is one of Egan's motivations for writing. The second person will remain always a mystery, no matter how many secret chambers of his being we penetrate, as the second quotation of Proust underlines: "The unknown element of the lives of other people is like that of nature, which each fresh scientific discovery merely reduces but does not abolish." (Proust qtd. in Egan). In addition, it affirms Smith's remark that all characters are only consisted of bits which are scattered in their unreliable memories like crumbs and which cannot be put together to a whole puzzle, since there is always a missing piece even though they suppose they are familiar with every part of their history (143). However, the opposite is true: even though the chapters provide little explanations and context to each other, adding another piece to the picture of a certain character, a number of them are incomplete and at times they appear to be contradicting each other. Only particular memories are left for recognizing the self which is re-interpreted each time from various perspectives, and these are selected as important randomly, sometimes despite their seemingly ordinariness (like Bennie who is mainly obtruded by reminiscence of embarrassing moments he would rather forget). Hence, identity, ours and theirs, flutter within our grasp, but every time we throw light at it, we uncover the next unexplored area of darkness. Egan once partially elucidated the quotation – imagining the lives of strangers she meets on her errands or in her fantasy, she has understood that "there's just something in us that cannot be revealed." (Sanders and Egan 38:58-39:10*). Goon Squad* and *Look at Me* alike epitomize this realisation with precision.

Nonetheless, for some figures, this unknowability is also because of their arguably unintentional ignoring, when most of the time they are mainly concerned with their own issues, such as Bennie, who, looking at Sasha, is testing the results of his "gold cure", i.e., whether gold flakes work for impotence. In one moment, he happens to look at her for the first time as a person he has just met, and realizes how little they know about each other, how little they ask (37). Still, Sasha is a better reader of others than Bennie because, in addition to her job as his assistant, for whom it is important to keep up with events, she seems to "knew everything" (39) about his private life, since she is, as he compliments her in spirit, "half of [his] brain" (346). In this nearly intimate moment of mutual recognition as humans, not only as colleagues or the centre of unrequited,

desperate infatuation, Bennie is amazed how the growth has not touched only his son's body to the point of enigmatic metamorphosis, but also Sasha's face, robbing it of the last signs of girliness. Thus, roaming all day in recollections which randomly appear in his mind, he is taken away by how much these daily immersions of any kind are preventing him from perceiving the change that happens in every minute. Sasha walks next to him as almost an invisible companion during his downs and ups, and therefore there is a usually harmonious sympathy between them, in which they respect each other's occasional excesses (until she gets fired for stealing, and their paths part forever).

However, one is not always present to the other in their full breadth and through all the stages of their lives, and hence, this elicits further disillusionment the characters experience with each other. Whereas we, as readers, can view them in their bits of happy life stages as well as in dark times, characters themselves are, in majority of cases, not there to inspect these progresses and retrogressions, or they meet each other in completely opposite sides of success and tragedy. This is another case when memory fails in its naïve assumption, connected mostly to character's youth, that everything will stay the same, our identity, our relationships, conditions which were propitious once. In the novel, it takes place when tracks of certain people cross after years they have not seen each other, and they subsequently rely on being able to return to these past moments as intact, to build on the intimacy they shared at one point. For instance, the participants of the trip to Africa in the chapter *Safari*, contact each other after a long time, and in most cases it winds up rather embarrassing because "having been on safari thirty-five years before doesn't qualify as having much in common, and they'll part ways wondering what, exactly, they hoped for. " (75). All mistake their past identities with the future ones; they forget the fickleness of emotions out of an appropriate surroundings, and therefore, they are disappointed with their notion about others that do not tally with reality.

Scotty, Bennie's former teenage friend with whom he was a member of the punk band called *The Flaming Dildos* (together with Jocelyn, Rhea and Alice), experience similar hardship in their remoulded relationship, from a friend to acquaintance. They meet in a moment when Bennie is at height of his career, being a producer of a famous music company, Sow's Ear Records, and Scotty is struck by Bennie's opulent office, and also by his reserved, even nervous behaviour. Scotty cannot understand the change, even though their fates have diverged respectively, and wonders out loud what has brought so

much professional coldness in their friendship: “I want to know what happened between A and B.” (106). The fallen star who were admired earlier greatly and who is now working as a janitor and living in a small flat, cannot overcome the fact that he is out of the spotlights which shine on Bennie alone. In his view, Bennie in the picture is now “a whole happy life attached” (97) who he badly envies, with a spine of wishing him the bad luck even though he convinces himself that he is not at worse position. However, at that moment of utterance, Scotty could not know that a few years later Bennie sells the brand, divorces his wife Stephanie like Alice broke up with Scotty, and is allowed to see his little son only in a limited amount of time. In addition, Scotty will have his moments of glory again. As humans, we are not able to look into future course (only writers like Egan can do that) of our identities, yet these characters through the narrative mechanism exist in those three timelines parallel. For instance, Rolph, son of Lou (who helped the band to get their minutes of fame), or Charlie, Lou’s daughter, and in fact, majority of characters, are observed not only from the perspective of others, but also from the three point of times. Rolph, who tries to make his sister remember of their vacation spent with a complete family, is turned to his memories in order to find peace in feeling it again with all his senses together with Charlie, is predicted to kill himself, while Charlie is foretold to keep coming back to the recollection of dancing with Rolph as a young boy who was at that moment already dead, in future (87). For Charlie, the remembrance of her brother alive will bring again the pain of loss like for Sasha; therefore, Charlie decides to start using her name not in a diminutive (87), to leave behind her younger self whose continuation was terminated by Rolph’s death.

The reversal of perspectives in relation to the self is most evident in the chapter *Out of body*, when the protagonist observes himself almost from a bird’s eye view:

> “[…] a part of you is a few feet away, or above, […] and the question is, which one is really ‘you’, the one saying and doing whatever it is, or the one watching?”

Here, too, self-consciousness is taken to an extreme, like in case of Charlotte or Danny; furthermore, it is also underlined by the second-person narration. Rob is an example of a character who not only defines himself against past forms of himself (for example, because of his sexual experience with the same sex, judging the person, i.e. him, with disgust), but actually performs self-self differentiation in the present moment as well. His gaze also evokes a certain mental illness, such as depersonalization, in which one

perceives oneself from a distance as an alien, acting body, an automaton that may not even be a real part of the world, while the mind floats outside the body (Britannica), as the chapter title suggests. Rob has been through an unsuccessful suicide attempt. He was saved in time by his best friend, Sasha, and has since suffered from the notion (but not a delusional one) that his university friends view him a little differently, cautiously and adjust their actions accordingly, using a "Calm Voice" (194) to prevent any word from hurting him and sending him back into the abyss of suicidal thoughts. Rob, who feels their cautiousness very strongly, then over-analyses every situation, checking himself, what he says and does, and retrospectively guessing whether and how it affects others and how they interpret it. Thus, the nonstop self-observation exhausts him – and the only comfort which interrupts the stream of (self)analysing thoughts for a while are drugs. Although we do not know whether he has been in this body versus mind state before, the inability to choose between parts of the self, the one that is more attached to the alienated body and silent, or the one that represents the speaking mind, is not permanent. At the end of the chapter, when Rob accidentally drifts with the river current, he has another level of out-of-body experience that is reminiscent of a clinical death. Whether it is his mind or indeed his "soul", one of them arrives at Sasha's room to say goodbye, and in that moment You finally becomes I, the unified voice of an identity that is no longer shattered. It is also worth noting that before Rob's decision to take a bath in the East River with Drew, it happens something similar to what Moose experiences in relation to his youth when he watches himself as a boy. However, in Rob's vision, it is the other way around: "[…] and for a second, the future tunnels out and away, some version of 'you' at the end of it, looking back" (209). Here, too, the present "you" and the future "you" are looking at each other, but Rob's momentary imagination does not extend further, for he cannot physically visualize the future identity he associates with a particular change, since he has not yet experienced it and, unfortunately, will not.

Time is most visibly manifested in the physical body, which we like to rely on for its permanence, yet, which unfortunately changes fastest. The body is an indicator of the gnawing minutes, "the record of out failures and exhaustion" (186), a picture of our fears and illnesses that have left its marks on it. Lou is the most striking example of this, formerly the lion of the saloons who used to like to surround himself with young people (especially Jocelyn and Rhea) so as not to acknowledge his own ageing: "I'm *your* age!" (58). But eventually it catches up with him too, and now, after two strokes, he is

bedridden, laced with tubes and waiting for the sun to set over the horizon, since it means the last hope in his fading. The aging body as an outward manifestation of identity then turns inward and affects also the human qualities. Consequently, it contributes to the incomparability to the memory of particular person one keeps, to the form of that person one has once known. Not infrequently, it evokes a fusion of feelings in the characters. For example, Jocelyn undergoes remorse, sorrow (but mostly with herself), and anger. She cannot understand how all this could have happened: “Who is this old man dying in front of me?” (93) Jocelyn cannot connect Lou’s current identity, outside and inside, with the one she remembers as her lover, she even refuses to *see* any connecting line between the two men into which Lou has split in her mind (“old Lou” versus “real Lou”, i.e. young[14]) because his body did not remain the same either: “It's not the same hand as before; it is bulbous and dry and heavy.” (95). These physical marks together with his bodily and subsequently personality weakness clash with a previous character of a man who had to keeping proving his power over others, who could stand any rivals in love nor business. The sharpness of such contrast catches both women off guard, even though Rhea tries to save the situation with an enthusiastic claim that nothing has changed (89). She is right only in some fleeting seconds in which former personality flashes through the Lou’s sickness, like when he smiles (95). It brings Jocelyn back to the hazy memories of their immature relationship in which also their age, ironically, plays the role – Jocelyn used to like being a centre of attention for the older, experienced man, the craziness of it, while Lou could forget the ticking clocks in the arms of the girl who could be his daughter. Yet, this is only a temporary reassurance, a temporary return to where it all started, when they were all united by friendship and – youth. For Jocelyn, this rather strange, nostalgic visit is poignant. Firstly, it is because that she and Rhea could not imagine Lou (like anyone, from their then point of view of girls free of the thought of age) would ever grow old or die. And secondly, Lou’s illness and evident approaching to death makes her to face her own aging, her own scars. She realises clearly she has lost too much time with this man (91) and also instinct for self-preservation, as she developed her addiction to drugs from which she still finds it hard to recover. In short, she gave everything up for the bright future she imagined with Lou, her youth and her identity, her chances for a normal life

[14] The name of the chapter, *You (plural)* which can be Lou’s addressing of both young girls can also point to Jocelyn’s addressing of Lou, since it implies this split between two identities of one person who can be thus only spoken about in the plural form of the pronoun.

she wishes for. Jocelyn is now forty-three and she remembers very little between the rehabs and relapses. She describes it as if she was forgotten by time itself, because she has lost ability to perceive it: “It's finished. Everything went past, without me.” (90) Jocelyn feels excluded and cheated, as if all events have passed her by without making any impressions in her mind while she enjoyed moments of intoxication in which time was irrelevant to her. That is why she cannot believe that Lou could have aged, she was not with him when it started progressing through his body, to his brain, and after the long absence it is even more of a shock to her.

However, Jocelyn is not the only one who suffers from feeling of being “out of time”. We hear similar phrases coming from the mouths of many other characters, such as the aforementioned Scotty, Bosco (“How did I go from being a rock start to being a fat fuck no one cares about?” (134)) Alex (“I don’t know what happened to me.” (348)) or Stephanie towards Jules (“I don’t get what happened to you.” (131)). They cannot comprehend the alterations that have taken place in their lives or in the lives of their loved ones, they feel that at the moment it happened they were somewhere else, probably too busy with own struggles (like Sasha says) that distracted their attentiveness. Bennie, for example, confuses five and two years from the last meeting with the band *Stop/Go* sisters, as if the repetitiveness makes the correct number of season that have passed extraneous.

On the contrary, some are aware that they cannot depend on the consolation of continuity, because the changes always influence, more or less, their identities. Sasha’s daughter comes to this realization after a family quarrel – looking at their house, she knows suddenly that in the future she will be someone else, a grown woman who will leave her home, which will then be entirely plunged into darkness then, subjected to time eating through it (like it befalls to the summer house in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*). This is not just a childlike providence, but almost an existential fear of the change that must always inevitably come, and which none of us can escape. The characters try to ignore it or, oppositely, they want to use these changes to their advantage. For example, Bosco, the former guitarist of the successful band *The Conduits*, made famous by Bennie, Stephanie’s husband, has been through cancer and now wants to base his entire new tour, more accurately a bit morbidly titled *Suicide Tour*, on his physical changes, “a shadow of [his] formers self” (135). Stephanie, who does Bosco’s PR, is aghast by his idea and tries to talk him out of it. In her view, it is simply out of question for Bosco to return to his former self precisely because his body

has been marked by a long illness, drugs, junk food and other pernicious influences, therefore, she does not think he will ever be able to shake any remnants of his old identity, passion or energy. However, as Leal argues, Bosco has already invested a lot of energy to maintain, yet not so successfully, his position as a rock star, his former self without properly coming to terms with the identity he possesses now (22). Mocking it with self-criticism, Bosco is convinced that he can restore the fame only by self-performance that would make his fans believe, that despite the breaking shell of body, nothing has changed. His naive notion fills Stephanie not only with rage, but with sadness. Bosco reminds her, rather thoughtlessly, that time has not left her unchanged either, since nothing can stop his forces. Because of it, he decides to fight this bully for what he still had in him, to catch the shadow of himself. For Bosco's sake, Stephanie recollects the frailty of her own body, the advancing years, and above all, the lost freedom of who she once was, or better said, of the period when she could still choose who she will become. She puts the "pre-responsibility" (139) state, which she experienced together with Bennie, in contrast with herself now, living in a wealthy neighbourhood while lying to his own husband that she tries to fit in with the arrogant people who look down on him because of his national identity. The impossibility to go back and change her decisions (which, at least in the choice of her unfaithful husband, turn out to be unfortunate) makes her fall into depression. She feels that, Bosco's life, hers, along with the whole world, is on the verge of doom (138), and what is by far the worst for her is that, just as she cannot predict when Bosco's death will happen on stage, she cannot know at what point to expect the end coming for her either. The period of openness and possibilities lying on the horizon associated with youth (or alternatively an age that was sparkling with success), when characters could plan dreams to be fulfilled, try on altering identities without having to immediately opt for one, is part of the nostalgic effect that the past has on the characters: Rolph ("awaiting a signal from their distant, grown-up lives" (63)), Jocelyn ("In 1979, that could be the beginning of an exciting story" (91)), Alex ("his young self, full of schemes and high standards, with nothing decided yet" (348)) and many others reminisce about a life stage when the die was not cast yet. Since then, the characters have made a commitment to one of the identities, sometimes lowering their sights; if they have not made any decision, or if each time they decide to discard their past identity for certain reasons, they are constantly at the beginning of such quest, linked to self-confusion and also to the question of authenticity.

4.3 Vocals

What is worth noting is that some of the characters also have their own theories about identity or a human being, which are meant to serve as either own solace or somewhat exaggerated way to explain own failures in opposition to others. In the first case, Scotty's hypothesis should function as follows:

> .. if we human beings are information processing machines, reading X's and O's and translating that information into what people oh so breathlessly call 'experience', and if had the access to all that same information via cable TV and any number of magazines […] then technically speaking, was I not having all the same experiences those other people were having? (102)

It can be argued that Scotty works on the presumption that people, especially their brains, can be taken into pieces, into a set of atoms that are no different from each other. It is a paradox that the person who approaches computers with distrust, nearly phobia (resembling Howard from *The Keep*, who rejects technology on principle and prefers brains instead microchips) considers humans "information processing machines" and shuns the world of data to not be one of them. People as machines are, at the same time, represented in a dehuméanized view, merely as superficial collectors of outer impressions which can be traded, medialized and made accessible to everybody around the planet. They are mediated to humans whose translated experience, then, ceases to be personal or unique, since it proceeds from an output which can come from any source (TV, radio, magazines, life, it does not matter, in the end) to anyone. Correspondingly, Scotty calls the conviction of uniqueness "the delusional faith" (103). However, if there is no happening that can be regarded as attached to one specific person, rather to millions, addressing their equality, the identity as the opposing uniqueness does not make sense. At the same time, Scotty takes into consideration that due to the absolute freedom in information selection and completion of the missing experience (not first-hand, but through media), one can become any identity he/she dreams of. What is more, as Leal points out, Scotty cannot be classified as one of the passive viewers; he leans on his ability to re-create the presented stories into a personalized adaptation, without being ironical about the original content which he tailors to own imagination needs (43). As a

result, on the one hand, Scotty's theory suggests disruption of the individuality lying in experience that are diminished to an undiscernible material that have only an overstated name; on the other hand, the accessibility to this "material" combined with an imaginative power can make the reading of X's and O's an individualized and thus individual act. Again, it is indicated that the body stands behind as secondary in Scotty's theory, at least in case of the mediated information; that it is the mind/brain as the main processor that creates the essence of a human being, filtering anything that comes from outside.

Still, the motivation behind his a little poetic and elaborate theory is simpler than ground-breaking revelation of human functioning. Insisting on the premise of sameness of identities with abandonment of differentiation logic, since there exists "only an infinitesimal difference […] between working in a tall green glass building on Park Avenue and collecting litter in a park. (98), is supposed to protect him from feelings of envy and discontentment. However, the more he navigates himself the idea of correctness of his theory, even by practical demonstration, the more he fails to be convinced by its functioning. He knows that this kind of biological-physical sameness cannot compensate for the difference between Bennie and him, the fact that they have now absolutely nothing in common, the first being in his heyday, and the second on the tail of society. However, it is exactly the difference, the "pureness" caused by Scotty's unsullied technological history that underlines uniqueness and exceptionality of his figure, nearly a being that has a connection to old myths. This is because he has been hiding before the computerization of self (whereas he invents the computers from people themselves) for a long time, and untraceable by any social media or internet searchers, and thus, in this sense, an unwritten sheet of paper.

For Jules, who inspects the personality of Kitty Jackson, a young actress, during their interview, identity takes usually the form of "a sandwich" (Leal 18): there lies a bottom side that refers to the "normal, or former, self" (179), overlaid with a middle part which is closest to the authentic, yet private self, and the whole is covered by an upper side which serves as the public self, modelling a continuity of that normal part, moderate and conforming to social norms and expectations. It echoes Alex's assertion about the "multiple personalities" whose multiplicity can be now seen with regard to both time and also the layered nature of identity Jules comes up with in his speculation while he does his sentence for attempted rape in which their appointment culminates. Funk notes that after studying the situation in a format of the article that was never submitted to

Jules's editor, Jules justifies his crime in terms of a search of Kitty's authenticity that he has no chances of achieving otherwise (175). It is protected on both sides with the two layers. This is also the reason that makes Jules angry – in his opinion, there is nothing real on the outside, only Kitty's learned, innocent charm (Leal 18) by which she wants to please everybody and sticks to the border of a certain type of public self-presentation the more people recognize her. At first, Jules makes fun of her gullibility during the interview, as Kitty tends to repeat the superficial praising statements about her colleagues. Gradually, he is disgusted by Kitty's upper self since he finds it predictable, interchangeable with any celebrity he has met, and in addition, empty. The frustration is stressed in Jules's growing impatience that he still has not stumble over an illuminative, unique fact about Kitty during their conversation that would act as the main argument of his article. After a series of disastrous failures in writing an influential piece for newspapers and also in his love life, he sees it as a need, the last opportunity to save himself before the personal ruin. What Jules overlooks is the fact that one always must manipulate with the public self to show only what is necessary for the moment. It is shown for example in Kitty's humbleness and that she never looks around in order not to make the visitors of restaurant more nervous about her presence. She balances between the self-consciousness that allows adjusting her behaviour and minimizing her effect of being famous in the room (even though Jules suspects her for thriving on the people's attention) and self-ignoring to enjoy the moment without being too much wary with everything she does (for example, licking a salad dressing from her finger which Jules translates as flirtation). In Kitty's eyes, Jules glimpses his invisibility, since she considers him only the next from the endless row of scribblers, which angers him even more. Yet, Jules is wrong about one next thing: the public self is not only "simulation" (181) of normality, but it overlaps with the private self too; therefore, they have an effect on each other. Kitty, ruined by this first practical example that people from movie industry do not do everything for her benefit, or for her nice face and acting, but primarily for their selfish goals, grows up prematurely from her girly naivety. The trauma is reflected from the violated inner, authentic self outside, to her (self)image, and under the light of publicity that is shadowed by this scandal, Kitty's fame is suddenly surrounded by an aura of "martyrdom" (152). Jules views it as an advantage for spreading her popularity, however, it will heavily impact who she will become years later when she meets Dolly, a 'publicist' tasked with deceiving the public with a flattering picture of the general responsible for the genocide by photographing him with

a favourite celebrity. Kitty is no longer the small girl, hidden in the past, nor the young surprise of the art landscape enthralled by her success, and also not the polite and obedient woman. This is why Jules's assumption that he, in fact, "helped" her career, proves to be false because "no one would hire Kitty anymore" (153), since after the rape attempt she "was one of those people who 'couldn't take the bullshit'" (153). Kitty represents a classic example of the premature sobriety from her credulity in the world, where everybody lies, and since she no longer intends to flatter anyone, her fame is at the point of waning. Paradoxically, Jules achieved that Kitty changes to the similar type of a person like him, disgusted with any form of public self that plays with unreadable cards and serves concealed purposes. Dolly, who hopes for her remaining youthful allure, is taken aback how this attitude has written in her face, transforming the appearance the general public, including herself, remembers: "She wasn't Kitty Jackson anymore." (156). It is ironical that Dolly involves her in the play between authenticity and faking it, which ends up fatally when they meet the general, whom Kitty begins to ask improper questions about details of the genocide. It can be claimed that this is why Kitty has accepted Dolly's offer, to show another person that in context of her values, it should be inappropriate to play along with or believe to someone who is lying about his true identity. For that matter, the line between true and fake is again thin in this chapter, since it can be stated that Dolly creates the fake image but does it through showing a certain part of reality, i.e. their first encounter documented by camera, the general looking more humane when he is smiling in the photos. On top of that, these photographs seem so exaggerated and unrealistic that when Dolly has them developed in the shop, the shop assistant does not at first believe her that they are not photoshopped (171). The final remark that the general's country is now in the process of transforming to democracy, still under his leadership, implies the short-term nature of human memory which can be affected in many, not only directly manipulative ways, that obliterate, distort or give lesser meaning to the original memories. It occurs to one's mind that this episode represents an illustration of a phrase that highlights the permeability between the two sides: "fake it, till you make it.

4.4 Echo

In the last chapter, which is set approximately in 2020s, the infamous past now, New York is presented as a type of over-technologized metropolis that at the same time gives an impression of an island encircled by an unclear atmosphere of danger, either environmental disasters or terrorist attacks. It is the last note, so far, that has been played by Egan on the topic of modern technology. What was a key, content-creating question for *The Keep* that Egan wanted to raise, the experience of "disembodied communication", is here a commonly accepted reality, in a communicating system of omnipresent handsets, and rising usage of a simplified, economical language that tries to overcome its tiring metaphorical nature by eliminating the ambivalence of meaning. The prediction by Kirby who claimed in 2009 that soon the boundary between online and offline would not exist, that one would be moving in these two worlds simultaneously, also has come true. This applies not only to younger generation of Lulu, Dolly's straightforward and ambitious daughter and current Bennie's assistant, and "older" generation of Alex and his wife Rebbecca, but also to the youngest ones, children, the so-called *pointers*, who "make consumer decisions as they can point their fingers at the screen" (Funk 177), thus, they belong to one of biggest and powerful group of consumers who can significantly influence the trends in supply and demand, as it is reflected in the music records that are remade to be acceptable and catchy for children's ears. Through the multifunctional cell phone-like *Starfish*, pointers are engaged in the marketplace, where they mark what they like only by a finger, often before they learn to walk, speak or even recognize themselves in the mirror. Rebecca's resolution to protect Cara-Ann from communication technology until at least age five evinces that she is aware of the consequences to which the early use of a lollipop-like[15] device can lead. This equals to today's smartphones, which with their "portability, interactivity and size" (Haughton et al. 509) attract not only toddlers like candy at their fingertips, but also parents who wish to quieten their little ones for a few seconds with the gadget, yet, they give them room to "overstimulation in early childhood" (Haughton et al. 513) too. Thus, it is likely that certain brain functions will thus develop slowly,

[15] In one scene, Cara-Ann asks Alex for *Starfish* and he explains to Rebecca, who does not yet figure out that he allowed Cara-Ann to use it before, that he has a lollipop in his jacket.

threatening several developmental milestones[16] and furthermore, as a social consequence, the pointers, when they wake up from the child's oblivion and *see* in their mirror phase, will get the impression that they can rule the world – that all they need is to point at it. These offspring will no longer remember the world as it was without the connection, and that they will grow up to be other Dannys who will struggle with their addiction to the connection, to the constant chewing of information in their brain as a processor. The image of New York that Egan has put forward is the one we live today in its many parallels, or we are about to live in the foreseeable future.[17]

However, whereas the consumer choices made by pointers can be seen more or less as genuine (but mostly unaware, and morally questionable), the opinions of another type of customers and sellers in one person, the *parrots*, can be described rather as often nontransparent in terms of truthfulness and authenticity. Perhaps it is almost unnecessary to mention how much they resemble today's influencers, who earn their money by promoting products that they themselves may not even believe in, and therefore it is increasingly difficult for us, as other consumers in the chain, to judge what to put our trust in and what is just artificial, false advertising (after all, all products aim to be sold, it is just a matter of how they do it). Under Lulu's lead, Alex must invisibly gather together people who would attend Scotty's concert and who would be paid for presentation of their excitement and spreading their plans of going there. Although it is, at first, difficult for Alex to find the required number of the parrots according to three criteria (Need, Corruptibility, Reach (322-323)) among his connections on social networks, he relies on the quality he reckons as the essence of parroting: "more people like him, who had stopped being themselves without realizing it" (324). This is a serious statement about the humanity that is, according to him, heading towards entrapment in "inauthentic self-reference, without the means to imagine and appeal to an authentic other, and therefore bereft of the ability to know itself" (Funk 178). Additionally, Alex articulates an insecure, even dismissive view of his identity, for he has lost track of who he is probably a long time ago, in the hustle of everyday family life. The inner discrepancy between authentic and inauthentic way of being results in the inability to know oneself, as Funk mentioned, and what is more, to

[16] The authors of the study mention, for example, object permanence or visual acuity (510), i.e. functions related to vision – in the first case it is a matter of presuming the existence of an object even if we cannot see it, in the second case, a problem with looking into the distance, i.e. myopia.

[17] In the interview with Rankin, Egan comments that, for instance (and except the obvious children's use of smartphones), the helicopters, which keep circling the Footprint during the concert (339), nowadays commonly fly over people's heads, especially when any protests take place (23:40-24:38).

know how each form of being even looks like – what is for Alex still an expression of authenticity and what is already not. This identity confusion brings only one advantage to Alex – he feels that because of it he is suited to the job Bennie offered him precisely; he will go for adopting opinions, likings and aversions with the most flexibility, since he mainly cannot acknowledge of what resonates with him or not, and thus, he will probably not doubt it for any reason. Simply, it rolls down his surface.

Contrarily, majority of people are aware and beware of the parrots (especially after the scandal connected to parroting on blogs (322)), and their reactions are ranging between humorous indulgence to too much excitement like a clear proof of parroting, and neutrality, either because they are one of them, or they respect it as another form of identity on display. Hence, it can be said, that this form of public self as an instrument for trading and selling should function separately from the private self and should be judged rather from the marketing point of view than morally. In Leal's opinion, Lulu represents a character that stands in opposition to Alex's distrust, as she believes that the authenticity is preserved in the inner core and thus cannot be touched by the exposition of public self that does "only" its job (41). However, what creates the tension that one like Alex can experience is the immense difficulty in ascertaining where the public self intended for marketing lies, and where are – if they exist – the points of it that actually overlap with the presupposed authenticity inward. As if Alex was right in the first chapter, people are truly multiple persons whose faces might be switched before one can blink. On top of that, the danger of parroting is due to its association with human emotions that are mimicked by real people (unlike traditional TV commercials, for example), and therefore they are relied on as more believable. Hence, this type of advertising is oftentimes sophisticated through simulation of feelings, uttered by an "'authentic' mouth" (322). Again, we can recall the social platform *Ordinary People*, where (albeit also manipulated) authenticity was mixed with the effort of corporations to implement their products into the "natural" environment, which was itself a violation of its naturalness.

Rebecca's conversation with her friend illustrates the tension, as Natasha remarks cynically that the stir about Scotty's upcoming performance is only because "'People are getting paid'" (334), while Rebecca takes to it a hesitant stance because she finds parroting incompatible with personality of her friends: "But these are people I know" (334). Both women are unaware that it involves their loved ones, their husbands, which again confirms how one cannot be sure of authenticity of others. On the other hand,

Alex cannot be condemned as a mindless adopter of everything – because it does matter to him. Right from the beginning, Bennie calls him "a purist" (317), a person who would insist on the quality of the thing he should propagate, thus, aside from his struggle to bring together enough parrots, he is worried a little more by the fear that they will not like Scotty's performance because it will be just "mediocre" (338). Even though he is "getting paid" for the work, he is concerned with the outcome of the recommendation that should be based on something deeper than only money. It does not say anything about his true likings, yet, despite our preceding assumption, at least, Alex cares about the product. Alex's bleak view of oneself is, therefore, balanced by Scotty's concert that gives rise to the magical connection of a crowd, self-awareness in the present moment, a vibration of the real, not parroted enthusiasm and admiration that reaches beyond a one-time pleasure to an event that will go down in history. While Scotty is playing his greatest hits, Alex sees it as already historicized, as over (344), which contributes to the nostalgic tone in which the rest of the day is enveloping. It is in the past, especially in the episode with Sasha, where the hero recollects, apart from personal story, also his lost sense of identity and remembrance of the taste of freedom of youth. All the time, Alex is moving between feelings of loss, of self and of authenticity, and looking for it without remembering how it feels like and whether his search is also merely copying, imitating it.

Authenticity is not the only concept whose content is unsettled in the chapter. A lot of other words are considered dead or emptied, such as the word "identity" which "had clearly been drained of life by their Web usage" (332). Whereas Lulu and her peers try to use *T-language* to clean the system from redundant words which would point to many different directions, some words that Alex's wife as an academic explores under the term "word casings" (331) have probably reached such an exaggerated deconstructivist stage of deferred meaning that their original meaning, under a barrage of refinement, of being inserted into various contexts according to particular needs, oftentimes deliberately manipulative (as we have seen, for example, in the chapter *Selling the General*) has been forgotten and blown like dust to all sides, scattered across an countless number of searchable and searched websites.

Although we have discussed the difficulty of defining this term precisely because of its ambiguity, in Rebecca's study, the word cannot even have any precise definition because it is not related to anything particular that would contain a pulse of life – it is just a combination of letters or sounds, existing for itself and only for a figurative use.

Unfortunately, if we accept Rebecca's proposition, it confirms the difficulty of orienting oneself in the world. If these words that have been the basis for human existence and for conceptualization of it have stopped working, it is quite possible that the reality (or rather, particular parts of reality) to which they once referred has also ceased to exist. This would be a dark scenario coming true – everything is just mutability and a play to fill the void in which such concepts are now floating. In a light of this, Funk's concern appears to be justified – if we do not have the tools, such as language, by which we can at least partially approach expressing the essence of ourselves and others, how can we relate to something real if we do not even know where to look for it?

It should be noted, too, that Alex sees a similar emptiness (and the desire to push it away) in Scotty like he observes in himself and other parrots: to him, Scotty is "a shell whose essence has vanished" (341), a revelation from the ancient, irretrievable past. It is marked not only by personal losses and wins, but by major national tragedies, like 9/11, imprinted in the place of concert, or minor scandals like a breakup of a popular celebrity couple (Smith 165). According to Funk, Scotty appears on the scene only as a shadow, a reflection of authenticity but not an expression of it in a world that operates on very different principles (179). His authenticity takes exactly the form that Alex unconsciously ascribes to him – he is just a time traveller whose shaky heritance of once "pure" times will not last long. This is also why the concert, in his eyes, shifts already in the moment of performance to the past, where he thinks Scotty and his purity belongs, too (and also Scotty himself is of the same opinion when he is paralyzed by the thought that he was defeated by time – goon). By this mental shift, Alex suggests that Scotty should stay in his "timeline" when was much easier to keep identity away from virtual dissemination. In just a little while, Scotty will be put at the mercy of internet search engines that will slowly envelop it in impenetrable webs of interpretations. Like any other event or person in the digital world he becomes "open to appropriation and exploitation" (Funk 179). Although Leal has emphasized Scotty's inner authenticity by virtue of his creativity (see above), even his work is subject to marketing, popularity rankings, and search. Scotty, who has for so long avoided technology, cannot evade being literally mythologized after this cultural event, and exploited for purely selfish purposes (people, like in the case of Dolly's party, claim to have been there to show that they were the chosen ones). In the end, his concert is just another information, processed in the world of X's and O's into an experience that is described, sought out, internalized by anyone, who was not even there, and thus deprived of its immediacy,

intimacy and genuine qualities. The uniqueness which was transferred to the waters of internet is slowly disappearing because “now that Scotty has entered the realm of myth, everyone wants to own him” (344). It turns into a metaphor for an authenticity that is no longer there. As a result, Scotty is closest to two characters: firstly, Bennie who is put by the public in past like a museum piece (319), and secondly, Alex, since they are both suddenly “*owned*” (324), although each in a different way. Scotty, as a mythical figure, is now known by everyone and thus everyone lays claim to him; Alex once posted ordinary yet intimate information on the internet that he knows can never be erased, and this knowledge presses somewhere in the back of his brain. Presumably, third parties do not know as much about Scotty as they do about Alex, but they can remould him to a commodity, targeting new customers, especially new pointers. Both of them have thus sold themselves, and parts of them are “stored in database” (324). The database, which is, in addition, not traceable itself, can anytime reveal some delicate parts of their identities whose privacy is thus infringed. Whether one is standing on a stage in front of eyes of thousand people or Alex is posting online, unknowingly, his real interests, goals, dreams, both are touched by the feeling that they are too exposed, somewhere, to whomever, and that they are no longer masters of the identity which can be spread through technology, bent, shaped into images they would have nothing to do with without their knowledge. What is more, their decision was not as conscious as in case of Charlotte, who could decide until the last moment whether to lend herself entirely to Thomas’s project, about which she had doubts since beginning. Moreover, as Alex points out, the sale of himself took place at a time when he felt “most subversive” (324). However, any of these three cannot predict the consequences. At this point, the reversal has occurred, and so Scotty and Alex are not the ones wading through an endless stream of information (no matter if through “traditional” media or the internet) and processing it into the framework of their experience, as Scotty assumed, but are themselves the data others can use. In the end, the pitfalls for virtual identity do not seem to have changed all that much since the time in which the previous novel was set and where the emergence of social networks was envisaged; only now those who have access to it do not even ask for permission to handle it.

Yet, the depiction of technology is not just unambiguously pessimistic, doom-laden but at certain moments, it is brightened with rays of optimism. Although its development has moved forward, the desire for real connection has not evaporated, whether it can be recognized in Alex’s wish to be with his wife and daughter at the

moment of the concert so they can be immersed in the vibration together (and the handset at least replaces the physical touch at that very moment), or in his relationship with Lulu, who is "a person who lived in his pocket" (335), disembodied but always present on the other end of line, and though their relationship is still more of a working character and their generations distant, the liking for each other grows into a friendship. And it is through technology that can convey a unique experience to all, who cannot hear it, and connect New Yorkers with a shared enthusiasm, at least in the early days after the event. People may have forgotten how to approach themselves and find their authentic selves, whatever that means to them, still, they are not completely deprived of that possibility. They can figure it out the other way around, through relationship with the other, and that has certainly not disappeared.

At the end of the day, Bennie and Alex stand outside Sasha's former apartment and reminisce, revisiting in their minds a person who was once an important part of their lives, or at least an encounter that, for some reason, resurfaced as a fleeting memory years later and turned out to have a meaning they did not comprehend back then. Bennie and Alex have been through a lot too, the former a refugee from a snobby neighbourhood where his national identity was questioned and suspected, and so he returned to New York, the latter who stayed here twenty years ago despite his aversion to the city and its people, yet, he is still ready to pack up his things and leave any day now. All stops, suddenly, in a nostalgic moment that hurts with the disappointed anticipation of the return to those days, the arrival of the object of their memories. The identity crisis reaches its peak, verbalized in the half-question, half-despairing sigh with which Alex turns to Bennie: "I don't know what happened to me." (348) Bennie has no particular answer to this, but in that moment he understands inside what Alex means, and he resonates with his well-known feeling of frustration and confusion. "You grew up, Alex," he said, "Just like the rest of us." (348)

The change is complete. And the story comes full circle as another young girl walks down the street, at the beginning of her adult life, where they once stood, where Sasha once stood as well. Still, that cyclicality is what can be comforting in that moment – time is not linear, it pulses and turns in various permutations, but it is actually still in some ways unchanging. Since the dawn of time, it plays a never-ending song, sometimes louder and mostly quietly. When Alex and Bennie are gone, everything around them will be renewed, perhaps in slightly different forms, but it will remain the same. And nostalgia, though painful, will fade in a sweet, saving obscurity. Finally, we

have no other choice than to pick up the pieces of ourselves and hit the road, into days that are yet to come.

5. *"Are you an angel, Anna?"*: Manhattan Beach and Secret Identity

5.1 Introduction

Egan's most recent novel, *Manhattan Beach* (2017), represents another example of the diversity of works by post-postmodernist authors, as well as the next evolutionary step in the author's career, which took a turn down a different writing road again. All of the bumps and stops in her lengthy, demanding, but incredibly rewarding research, which was to grow into a book of an dissimilar nature in the future, led her sometimes to questioning whether she would ever finish it[18]. Yet, thirteen years later, since the beginning of the investigations, during which she wrote two more books as "digressions" to help clear her head a bit[19], Egan's most comprehensive book up to date arrived on bookstore shelves. It may be, at first glance, a somewhat ordinary historical novel, which many critics have summarized as a return to the conventional form and the "traditional" novel. Still, there is much more buzzing underneath that label than a vivid description of New York in the 1930s and 1940s, hit by the stock market crash and later by World War II. In *The Book Review* podcast with Pamela Paul, Egan mentions that her book is again a blend of genres (Paul and Egan, 17:30-19:20) that crystallized gradually with her choice of setting and main characters. Thus, apart from the historical frame, we can find here various elements of noir, accompanied by shadows of the underworld; sea novel or the novel of sea survival that is connected to a marine world, diving to the seabed and voyages, interlaced by symbols of the sea and water; and last, but not least, the adventure novel for which, in Egan's words, the action is primary, unlike the *Goon Squad* where it was mostly suppressed in the plot and used chiefly in the narrative mechanisms (Paul and Egan 18:30-19:10). As Egan often declares, the most difficult part, except remoulding the raw, dry facts that she collected during conversations with contemporary witnesses, historians, experts in various disciplines, and during ploughing through a long reading list about then life, was to "sustain momentum" (Guardian). She did not need to address it in the preceding book too much. In *Goon Squad*, she could select particular pieces she wished to use for highlighting important traits of her characters without having to deal with perils of linearity,

[18] She stated that she was tempted to give up on writing of the book in a few interviews, for example with Schwartz or Messud (1:10:10-1:15:10) .

[19] For instance, thanks to *The Keep* she realizes that she is able to write about time which does not exist, while not sounding shallow (Schwartz and Egan)

especially the task of keeping the story attractive, credible and flexible in its speed, while the gradual evolvement contains the "slower" passages too.

The idea of writing a book like *Manhattan Beach* came to Egan when America was shocked and heart-broken by 9/11, the event that was foretold in *Look at Me* and after which only a hole of remembrance survived in *Goon Squad*. As many Americans, Egan had to ask herself what this critical point in history would mean for the future of America, which brought her also to the question of when and where the catastrophe could have its roots. Finally, she arrived at the conclusion that the atmosphere of tension and fear ensuing the event reminds her of the period of World War Two (Guardian; Schwartz and Egan, Paul and Egan 5:20-5:40), although this conflict was kept overseas and did not affect America as much as Europe. Yet, in 2011, the very heart of America was pierced. The attack made the great power uncertain about its supreme position in the world and, in addition, its ability to protect own inhabitants. Now that danger could appear at any time and any place, American's faith in the safety of their country was shaken to its deepest foundations. Richard Gray describes it appositely, when he remarks that America, which "had been impervious" (3) by international wars for a long time, was now "invaded. The homeland was no longer secure and to that extent, no longer home." (3). Thus, the event was repeatedly associated with the feeling of end (e. g. Schwartz and Egan), which Stephanie from *Goon Squad* experiences when she is confronted with time of her being, scarred by the abyss after the Twins. America's dominance and certainties that the permeable country had promised were called into question, but the end also related to, for the literates, language and literature which was caught in the absurdity of expression since no words could convey the heaviness and consequences of such tragedy (Gray 3). Even this book that is, in a sense, an exploratory reaction to 9/11 came out after sixteen years, a needed silence of a thorough research and gaining of the benefit of hindsight. Thanks to it, Egan later took advantage of a reversed view and focused on the era where she could let language blossom outside the contemporary conditions so overwhelmed by a sudden reluctance to write anything. In the time of her novel, all the information about conflicts was coming from outside; and leaving soldiers and mariners was disappearing *from* America, not vanishing or dying *in* it. However, the trauma was etched in American consciousness as well as 9/11. Egan conceives fiction, especially in the context of this book, drawing on many sources and true evidences, "a collective artefact", a collaborative effort to create a record for this and future generation of what the world once looked like from subjective point of

view which may interpret and explain its objective conditions, causes and effects (Dyg and Egan 46:28-47:14).

Accordingly, on the background of the hustle and bustle of a pre-war and wartime city, destinies of several human beings unfold, with three main characters coming to the fore through whom the narrative, otherwise told by the omnipresent narrator in 3rd person, focalizes. All three belong to almost different worlds, yet, as Towles points out, they are inevitably linked by the very first scene, set in 1934, in which they meet at Manhattan Beach, a small slice of beach joined to the villa of one of the main characters, Dexter. Their encounter anticipates that their paths will cross again, although it is not yet clear how or where (online). In the foreground, there is a family with Irish roots, the Kerrigans, who, after the stock market crash, are now struggling to make ends meet. The lack of money impacts most heavily on their ill younger daughter, Lydia. The father of the family, Ed Kerrigan, a former stockbroker, now employed by the corrupt union leader, Dunellen, looks for more profitable job and makes an agreement with a gangster and owner of nightclubs, Dexter Styles. He therefore becomes his man, supervising the goings-on at several of his clubs as an invisible visitor and doing various dubious jobs for him. When he disappears inexplicably a few years later and war strikes, Anna, his older daughter, has no choice but to go to work in a factory where she measures the accuracy of parts for battle ships. Later, in an almost epiphanic scene, she decides to join the ranks of the civilian divers who were widely hired at the time for works like underwater repair of sunken ships for the Allies. However, applying for the job as a woman is initially challenging for Anna. The view also turns to Dexter himself, who is portrayed here not only as a powerful and charming boss of an underworld group, but also as a man who is brought into a conflict with the power of others, such as his wife's wealthy family, notably his father-in-law. The latter one makes his superiority known not only through his better way of doing business, but also through demonstration of his "pureblood" origins – unlike Dexter, who is an immigrant of Italian origins, he is the so-called wasp.

Hence, rather the issues of national and gender identity are examined in the story, which introduces us to many obstacles one had to overcome owing to it, besides, in very uncertain times. Nevertheless, this theme which connects all the books so far is present also in the inconspicuous daily thoughts, dreams, moods and small tasks, and every figure, with their switching between identities, is a mystery no less than he/she was in a non-linear narrative of *Goon Squad*. This is because if we plunge straight into

discovering who Anna, Dexter and Eddie are, we may come to answers of different kinds, for in various contexts one can often find alternations of a self (Timmer 41). In this noir, nearly a spy/detective story, identity is one of the quests in which we, as readers, can embark on.

5.2 Waves

We can observe all main characters in their home and work environment where their identities are mostly manifested and where we can search for both intersections and noticeable differences between them. Towles argues that it is primarily at work where the heroes and heroine "can ultimately be themselves" without "the limitations prescribed by their gender, class and family role", that it is only there they can know who they are. If this is indeed the case, we should focus on how Anna, Ed and Dexter's identities function in both environments and whether they remain the same or change.

For example, Towles' argument does not quite hold true for Anna, or at least not in all her life periods we can glimpse. The domestic environment can be regarded as important as her job for her, and she associates it primarily with her sister Lydia, who suffers probably from cerebral palsy. Rachel Adams writes that Lydia serves as the connecting element, who, despite her disability and physical immobility, continues influencing others' behaviour, actions, and the entire plot even after her death (367-368). At the same time, however, she is a family member that also divides Anna's home into two worlds, since Eddie still cannot come to terms with Lydia's health conditions that do not get better after years of treatment:

> Each time Anna moved from her father's world to her mother and Lydia's, she felt as if she'd shaken free of one life for a deeper one. And when she returned to her father, holding his hand as they ventured into the city, it was her mother and Lydia she shook off, often forgetting them completely. Back and forth she went, deeper – deeper still – until it seemed there was no place further down she could go. (*MB* 29)

Hence, even at home, Anna does not find unity, for in her father's and mother's presence she is always on the borderline between two relationships, two worlds, and she tries to contribute the same amount of love and attention to each of them. It is only

when one parent is absent that she experiences a sense of liberation and a full commitment to the environment that surrounds her at the moment, which suddenly seems more genuine and meaningful. Yet, this unfortunately involves a rejection of the other part of identity that manifests fully again with the other parent, almost a kind of falling into eternal oblivion. Anna is only twelve years old in the first chapter, and each repeated adjustment to the situation of either Agnes or Eddie leaving the house causes Anna, as the opposite to freedom, almost physical pain and stirs up a range of emotions. Anna inwardly senses that this disparity of worlds is dragging their household down like a heavy rock, no matter how hard she tries to endure and settle it. Merely in the moments when she does not have to excuse her inattention or, conversely, attention to the other parent and Lydia, she can have a rest, being unburdened by this stone. Thus, on the one hand, Anna can enter a safe and calm shelter at home that is suffused with a feminine, gentle energy of nurturing and "emotional and physical intimacy" (Adams 368); on the other hand, she does not always feel herself and whole in it. On the contrary, her adolescent identity, still not finding its personal self-expression, is sometimes torn between the two sides of the family. Significantly, the relationship with her father is strengthened mainly outside the house, where most of the attention, according to Eddie, must be given to Lydia. "Venturing in the city" consists of not only trips around the city, but also Anna's accompanying her father to work "appointments", not excluding a visit to Dexter. Eddie appreciates the work as a frequent escape from the realities of home, where he must force himself to stay in Lydia's presence every day, but he is also aware of the shadow that hangs over them even outside the few rooms of their apartment, pervaded by Lydia's urgent need to be cared for. For Anna, the relationship with her father is a defining and very intense one, as the feelings she experiences after his departure suggest: "everything vital seemed to have gone with him […] an ache of uselessness, anger almost" (27). Without father's affirmation of her identity, it seems to be of no use or particular shape, without any inner flame of life that would protect Anna from her disappointed dependence. She comes back, therefore, to her mother's embracing identity, full of dreams she must have given up because of Lydia's disability. Their relationship does not lend itself to an emotional see-saw too much like the one between Anna and Eddie; it is filled with peace, joy, found in the ordinary moments like dancing, and mutual love for their immobile daughter/sister. Nevertheless, during the meeting with Dexter, it is the first time when a crack appears in that intense father-daughter relation. Because Eddie does not wish to fill his twelve-

year-old daughter in on the details of his deal with Dexter, he leaves her alone with Dexter's children for a while, and Anna feels instinctively that he "was gone" (15) which, for her, is the equivalent of betrayal, letting her to be exposed to dangers lurking behind the corner.

In the first scene on which most critics focus as the most important for the course of plot, together with its multiple indications of several topics of the book, one can notice (except the first bigger break between Anna and her father, which will lead to a gradual differentiation of self from the parental image and estrangement to each other), a similar hesitative stand that Anna takes at home, this time symbolized by the transition between childhood and adolescence. Dexter's daughter, Tabatha, owns several Flossie Dolls, the heroine's unattainable dream just a few years ago, and now an electrifying longing to hold one, if only for a few moments, returns to her (6). Although she is even offered the chance to take it with her, Anna acknowledges that doing so would compromise the self-image she has of herself, merged with the notion her father has about her: a grown-up, clever girl who can step into her father's business, with a charming wit that is half still childlike and half already unusually adult for her age. Moreover, she apprehends that the circumstances in which Anna lives and in which Tabatha lives cannot be equal and that therefore to accept the doll as a gift would be to admit and accentuate the difference. This unfulfilled longing and a harsh attitude towards herself, then, is put against Anna's observation of the childhood she leaves behind with every day of growing up, viewing it as "an earlier state, as if some freshness or innocence had passed from her" (12). The ease and intuitiveness with which Anna once made bright comments, is now dissipating, and moving her away from the children days that were not infused with the restlessness of lurching between the choices, between possible identities.

Anna's sensation of Ed's momentary absence from gangster's house is, after some years, like having a foreboding of her father's real and forever disappearance. Only a sum of money with no explanation is left. Since this point, then, there is only one world at home for Anna, the one where her father is no longer spoken of, where the recollection of him is vaguely and emotionlessly ingrained in her memory from which she has displaced him within days and years of vain waiting for his homecoming: "She no longer could picture him clearly." (60). Anne leaves the Brooklyn college to provide a regular income to her family from the factory job; however, she enjoys it only for a while, since it becomes monotonous and exhausting very soon. The participation in the

all-female team, engaged in work that, if it were not for the war, would have been done by men, elicits a sense of uniqueness and usefulness in Anna for only a moment. Ironically enough, female labourers in docks are hardly believable rumour for higher social classes (98). Walking with Nell on the piers, Anna is suddenly struck with a desire to become a civilian diver, as if it had always been her destiny. However, this is a purely male territory where she certainly cannot be "herself" from the start, for the limitation of gender that Towler talks about is felt there much more than anywhere else, and Anna could not avoid it. She must prove that she is as strong as men, if not more so, and yet her request for a job is dismissed by Lieutenant Axel, who justifies its decision appallingly simply: "Those are the facts." (170). Because Anna is a woman, none of the men in the group of divers trust her, rather they make her an object for flirting, insults, or evident ignoring, from the moment she arrives, and not even the accomplished tasks awaken faith in her abilities. She is not able to acknowledge such injustice, the more she feels compatible for the dream job, approaching the "men" qualities that are required for doing it.

Moreover, it can be remarked that except for a few occasional friends and the feminine home, Anna defines herself against her female co-workers, as she comments on them in a way that judges them by their emotions and despises their fragility. She considers their mourning for their husbands-soldiers overseas as exaggerated, and she becomes angry at those "who seemed so weak" (54). It angers Anna for various reasons – for the loss of her father that has "calcified" (67) over years and she never shed a tear for him because she still has kept a hope for his return; for the explicit expression of vulnerability that can be misused against women exactly like their weakness that would limit them qualified only for maternal duties; for love she has not experienced yet outside her family bonds. She herself does not admit any weakness, which is also evident in the way she is pictured. Compared to the "feminine", model-like Nell, in Anna's case, rather "masculine" features stand out, such as her "flinty, taut-shouldered bearing of a man" (67). Similarly, when Dexter visits Anna to take Lydia to the beach together, he senses that Anna does not quite fit into the tender atmosphere of the house, describing her as having a "man's handshake." (172)

Anna tries to get closer to the male world both in her job and in her personal life – she is attracted by the greater freedom she perceives in male behaviour and actions, and to some extent she attempts to escape the image of a "good girl" that others always ascribe her, especially her mother who wants to protect her from any vices. Thus, she

undertakes minor rebellions, either in her mind (almost accepting her aunt's offer of alcohol in the presence of her mother) or in reality (lighting a cigarette with Nell, who represents opposite of chastity). It is in the moment of smoking with Nell that the difference between the "truths" and assumptions circulating around society about what men can and women should be like, which provokes Anna's partial disgust at those who adopt these assumptions without any attempt to reflect on their content, and what Anna finds most distressing is how they are adopted by women themselves who are taught to take it as natural things. "Only boys had smoked on Anna's block – the girls had thought it dirty." (9) The symbolic act of sharing with Nell a moment of "dirtiness she liked" (9), both of them repudiating the image of themselves as good girls, highlights Anna's identity as a woman as opposed to these deep-rooted facts, which are not critically scrutinized but the groundlessness of which will be shown in the war in particular. In accordance with Carey, Anna's stubborn effort to prove that she is better than these claims about women in general is the central plot thread, the unfolding of which one can watch with suspense. It takes months of persuasion, practice and struggle with the diving team and with own limits, mental and physical, and Anna finally earns the respect from a majority of the group or at least a neutrality with which they approach Marle, the only Afro-American among them. Anna's wish to cross the line to the second gender, to its confidence, strength and straightforwardness she associates with it, is fulfilled in a friendship with Bascombe, who seems to mirror those qualities Anna wishes to have to her. Their conversation mediates her experience, in which she is "the closest she had ever come to feeling like a man" (241), bold, respected and not overlooked, treated like a partner and not a naïve companion. Yet, Anna's personality does not gravitate unconditionally towards the male side; instead, her feminine qualities (or, more accurately, those previously attributed mainly to women) like a tendency to an empathetic care are emphasized in her relationship with her sister, who, in addition to the division of the home environment, outlines the boundaries between heroes and heroines, for the two genders take different attitudes towards Lydia, active loving on the one hand and contemplating restraint on the other (Adams 368). What is more, Anna becomes aware of her physical side of identity specifically when he meets Dexter Styles in one of his clubs. His familiar name reminds her of the day at the beach, and Anna begins to wonder how he may be involved in vanishing of her father.

Everyone presumes that Eddie's departure has something to do with Lydia, whose presence he could no longer bear. Since her birth, the home he and Agnes once made in

the days of prosperity is no longer a safe harbour for Eddie, but a gruelling journey through the waves in which he must constantly prepare himself for the negative emotions that wash over him every time he has to interact with Lydia in some way. The days in which Eddie's money allowed him to let someone else take care of Lydia, providing her with special exercises and spa treatments, are gone, and with the society-wide frustration by the crash, Eddie is depressed by realization that the family, in his eyes, will never be normal. The growing repulsion and anger, in which he is unable to see anything but a wasted, pointless human life in Lydia, culminates in a mental eclipse when Eddie attempts to suffocate Lydia with a pillow (Adams 369; 303-304 in the book). Yet, when he sees that she is not just an empty, powerless shell, but that she is fighting against him, with an almost incomprehensible glow of vitality, Eddie stops at the last moment. However, that does not change the resentment and a quiet contempt he has learned to hide over the years. Each time at home, he has to put on a different face and accept the role of a responsible, caring father, even though it always takes a long preparation, nearly counting to the moment when he is finally able to look at Lydia: "A groan issued from the front room, lodging in Eddie's stomach like a kick. *Now*, he thought, before Agnes had to prompt him." (19) The identity, or at least the image of it, that the protagonist tries to maintain at home is full of friction points that creak in the immeasurable effort to keep the mask of at least a mild acceptance of his daughter, and thus ensure peace in the relationship between him and his wife, which has cooled into the mutual respect and repressed longing that was once common in their past life: "Turn and kiss Eddie, surprise him, forget Lydia for a moment – where was the harm? [...] But Lydia needed her too much." (23-24) So whereas Eddie must respond flexibly to the situation like following a script lest his wife be angry at his inattention and rudeness towards Lydia, Agnes, a former dancer, left her previous form of identity in the past as a once acquired but now only a dusty trophy (23), being inextricably devoted to her younger daughter. Caring for the ill filling all her days deprives her of any space for herself and she regards restoring of an old identity or finding a new one impossible. The care forms into her main life mission and it is not surprising that later in the story she travels to Europe to nurse wounded soldiers. The plasticity, with which the character of Anna is endowed, is not given to Agnes because she primarily occurs in the story together with Lydia; even the father-daughter bonds, between Anna and Eddie and also

Dexter and Tabby[20], are pictured more noticeably than those between the daughter and the mother. Dexter and Eddie resemble each other in their relationship with their older daughters in more ways than they know. They both notice how their daughters grow along with the change in their appearance – while Eddie is ultimately glad that Anna's face is not as strikingly pretty as Lydia's, Dexter would prefer that Tabby's appearance could not draw so much attention to her, because "beauty was an invitation to dependence" (92). He worries that for Tabby, it will be the only weapon she will rely on to gain her position between men. What stands out most prominently is that Anna and Tabby serve for them as a kind of shield against uncomfortable situations and encounters, their presence meant to soften them, but in the end, both always assess that too much is at stake when they draw their daughters into a world of hazardous games. However, trying to protect the girls will make them drifting apart, no longer understanding each other.

Besides, a fundamental difference between Anna's and her father's attitude to Lydia is expressed in the way they talk about her in public. Edward treats every sympathetic remark or expression of regret as a personal attack that seems to highlight his personal failure, and he never admits the real state of affairs, for instance, he tells Dexter that Lydia could not pay a visit too because she had just "taken sick that morning" (5), or he fudges calling her conditions by its true name in front of Dunellen, even though his employer and friend in one person knows it. Thus, in contrast to it, Anna's honesty appears almost out of place when she explains to Mr. Voss that her sister is "badly crippled." (59) It is the character of Lydia who brings another nuance to the story that cannot be classified in terms of any above-mentioned genres (Adams refers to this as sentimentalism (366)). In addition, her presence raises a series of questions considering identity of the disabled person whose possibilities of self-expression slowly deteriorate. If all protagonists are restrained by the (family) roles that are assigned them, the role of the disable, forever child to which the character of Lydia is manipulated is the most dismal and definitive one. The particular impairment is always matched with particular roles and stereotypes out of "normality" (Lejzerowicz 21) and Lydia is not an exception in this. For instance, Dexter thinks that the worsening state of her body would manifest in her smell, and Eddie's scepticism, contrary to Agnes's optimism, in improvement of her health grows into identification of his daughter with an animal that only acts upon

[20] It is worth mentioning that, in addition, the figure of father keeps coming back to memories of the main heroes, Edward and Dexter, too, both having rather a complicated relationship with him.

its instincts, a biological body that is kept alive only because it does not have to survive in wild nature. This stereotype alienates him from Lydia, but concurrently, it helps him to make minutes in her presence bearable. When she deviates from the average by expressing her amusement or babbling in language that is, in his view, understandable only to her, it exasperates him because outside the stereotyping, it is much more painful to accept her as a "damaged" (18) girl than an enfeebled animal. He grasps her state only when he himself is enervated, locked in his own weak body that is only a step from death. In this proximity to Lydia's conditions, he suddenly understands how Lydia must have felt (Adams 370), and longs to take his resentment back, shower her with love he was not able to give her – but now it is too late.

Usually, and outside the family, her disability overshadows and even creates her identity which stands frequently for a realm of fantasies of who she could have been were in not for a difficult delivery. Her beautiful, actress-like face takes people aback the more it is in contrast to the rest of her and the more it does not accord with their ideas about disabled people. One can wonder if the beauty mitigates the reactions of others from repugnance only to pity for these angelic features. Still, the beauty, as it is suggested, is not everything, and instead of amazement can invoke a greater sadness for its bearer and a gratitude for less perfect, but "functioning" human being, as it can be seen in Eddie's disparity in treatment of both girls: "She was good, his Anna. She pumped life into him as surely Lydia drained it." (23). While Eddie purposely ignores the signs of a living person in Lydia's immobile body, it is seen and deciphered by Anna. Despite seconds of doubts, Anna does not relinquish her hope that there is much more to Lydia as identity beyond her physical structure. Only at the moment of her death, she feels that there is nothing left in the stillness of this shell that would belong to her sister (196). Thus, while Anna and her mother take care of Lydia's appearance lovingly (Anna sees her sister's ravishing features in strangers' faces everywhere), they do not believe that it is the only thing that gives Lydia a sense of "self". According to them, it is hidden deep behind those blue, inquisitive eyes, although it cannot spring on the surface in an intelligible form. Her demise means the liberation of this self, yet a loss of Agnes's self too, since it has been immersed in the daily routine of care. Except the family circle (without Eddie), the loss is felt in "the collective grief" (199) by the entire neighbourhood, which connects metaphorically her death to the definitive end of one era, the last straw to all the precipitous changes when no one knows what will come next. It is a confirmation that the world will never be the same as it was before the war.

5.3 Under the Water

Manhattan Beach narrates also a story about secrets and secret identities. As Towler states, every character has a secret, and moreover, each has a certain face that he/she defends against discovery, like we have seen in case of Eddie, behaving with his family. In a broader sense, a mystery, which raises curiosity and queries, is for Egan a necessary part of every piece she writes (Messud and Egan 48:00-51:12), and it is no different there. The genre of noir and mystery novels, of which Anna is an avid reader, informs not only the way the plot is constructed (the contrast of darkness and light, appearing silhouettes and shadows, the dark and morally ambiguous figure of Dexter, the things happening behind closed doors that everyone prefers to walk past, the dirty business, the murders and so on) but also the way the characters think about themselves and others. Anna, for example, imagines her father's disappearance like a scene from a detective movie once she realizes it may be connected to Dexter (120). From the mouths of the characters, we hear statements that suggest the traits of the protagonists of such stories and movies, while pointing to an identity that is puzzling, hidden, and unfathomable: for example Nell tells Anna that "you could be a spy or a detective. No one would know who you really are" (85)[21] and Dunellen similarly communicates to Eddie his impression of him, "you should've been a copper" (33). Both Eddie and Anna, then, share similar abilities – either they can blend in with the crowd, which comes in handy to Anna's father working for Dunellen and Dexter, or they can successfully disguise themselves as someone else, like Anna who makes up a secret identity and borrows a friend's name – up to a certain moment, she acts as Miss Feeney to elicit as much information from Dexter as possible. Ironically, Dexter, who keeps the background of his business under wraps and makes every inconvenient person wiped off the face of the earth, is known by the public, which at least has heard of his existence, and recognized even in his clubs. In his opinion, it is not important to hide amongst others or copy another identity, but to give as little indication as possible of what is going on beneath the surface, so in a way it is similar to Eddie's attempts to suppress his negativity:

[21] Similarly, when Anna runs errands for Mr. Voss, who sends her from one building to other in Naval Yards, she feels „like a spy"(65).

> Maintaining an appearance mattered as much – more – than what was underneath. The deepest things could come and go, but what broke the surface would be lodged in everyone's memory. (109)

In his business that is on the verge of legality and illegality, Dexter has to control a certain image of himself that does not give his enemies a vulnerable spot or an excuse to destroy him, and this way of functioning carries over into his personal life where he shows his feelings subtly, and if possible, only in private, unseen by anyone. Aside from the scene with the almost-talking Lydia, which digs just under the Dexter's surface, trembling with emotion (Adams 369), which is hard to hide from Anna, we can remark that other scenes in which he tries to perform in a certain way are interspersed with hints of affectionate gestures, but also of his own insecurity about his position in the post-war world (as an Italian who will probably be despised by certain nationalities, even though he changed his name not to evoke the Italian origins), as well as of love (for his children) or resentment of the system he has been in for over twenty years and which gradually disgusts him, especially because of the constant servility and sycophancy. On the one hand, Dexter is a man who can send someone to death with pointing of his finger, on the other hand, a person whose upbringing has ingrained in him a natural sympathy for the weakness and hardships of other people (158), an admiring deference to women powers (he strongly supports Anna's dream of diving), and who longs for friendship like everyone else (157) in a lonely world of superficial acquaintances and careful balancing in relationships with business partners and enemies too. Until now, it is unclear whether he had known of Eddie's feigned unconsciousness before his compatriots pushed him in the sea, and whether his claim to Anna that he is dead is as much to protect her as he would protect his daughter. It is perhaps the fact that Dexter is not one of the typical gangsters and is more of an evasive, non-black and white personality that leads his life to a miserable end. For this reason, Anna finds his identity mystifying because his concealed compassion for Lydia sharply contrasts with the criminal background and the responsibility for her father's death. She cannot imagine how these two contradictory selves can be in one person; it is again difficult to put Dexter's (or anyone else's) identity in a box with clear, distinctive traits.

Something about the personality of Anna's father resembles the sea waves, the sound of which carries throughout the novel, and it is this ebb or flow, disappearing and spilling into different worlds according to the task assigned to him, without leaving a single trace of who he is. Putting his individuality away from attentive eyes proves to be

a "personal" trait useful for Eddie as Dexter's employee. Even since his childhood, which was marked by mother's death and a lack of father's love, Eddie excels merely in activities that somehow include disappearance or pretending, such as "ability to slip through doors locked only with a chain" or "do[ing] accents" (40). Thus, Eddie is familiar with identity hidden in plays and disguises very early, and years later, he uses this ability to his benefit. On the contrary, Anna is afraid of this dissipation. After Lydia's death and her mother's departure to Minnesota, she suddenly feels alone in New York and reflects on the risk that she might disappear like her father, "slide into a cranny of the dimmed-out city and vanish" at any moment (209). Since there is no one to perceive her on the streets where all pedestrians seem to have a goal of their walk except her, she could merge with the city itself, without anybody noticing, and this idea scares her nearly to death. In a similar manner, Anna often ruminates on general nature of identity that can dissolve in a void without the presence of others: "How did you know what kind of girl you were, with no one around you?" (264). Hence, the paradox, which Anna must concede to herself, occurs: the same gaze that limits woman characteristics to a certain picture is needed to affirm the very existence of it. Yet, it usually does not correspond with the reality, so it may, at the same time, distort the way in which this identity exists, or affect it to the point that the main heroine at one moment agrees with men's opinion that "she *was* weak" (330). However, Anna knows that without others and their notion of an ideal woman, there would be nothing to fight against, since ignoring of one's identity definitely means its decease.

For Anna, invisibility is a problem, threat, for Ed the advantage – until he mistakes it for an identity at home (also somewhat fake) and cheats Agnes on one of his business trips. The pretence he got used to during family time and on errands lulls him into a false sense of security, forgetfulness and also a distance from oneself, by which he reasons his infidelity that, thus, belongs to somebody else's life, only to "a human machine" (359) as Dexter praises him for extraordinary skills in spying and reporting. It parallels the creation of Anna's secret about which only Lydia knows – the first sexual experience in her fourteen, the secret that was unthinkable to be divulged to her parents, chiefly her father. As we have seen many times, Anna chooses a comparable distanced approach to the situation: "she felt as if it were happening somewhere else, to a different girl" (134). She does not want to spoil mentally the image of chastity the ruination of which would be entailed by a scorn and disinterest from the opposite sex. In the end, the "reputation" Anna's friend Rose refers to (148), is crucial for everybody, for Anna as

well as for Dexter who is, to his misfortune, known also as a smuggler of alcohol during prohibition. The social acceptance is dependent on the discourse that surrounds a person, and this is why Anna must hide her pregnancy and invent a story about the imaginary husband-soldier in order to eschew the public humiliation.

To sum up, each character does not behave the same in both environments, yet, it cannot be claimed which of those identities is more genuine, where they are more "themselves". One way or another, they participate in the role-playing, and since they always hide something at work or at home, a secret can easily form their identity, navigating it to certain behaviour (Towles). They never reveal all the facts, supressing themselves, vanishing or disguising to distract people from their real selves, inner doubts, insecurities and emotions, their family or work background. Even Anna does not avoid not telling the complete truth, even though she is not an angel who are "the best liars" according to Nelly (84), she appears to herself as the worst fraud who cannot bear the growing discrepancy between layers of her life. She conceals her pregnancy from co-divers, that she is not married from her mother, and identity of the baby's father, Dexter, from everyone. Dexter, for whom keeping the secrets is a habit, is the most contradictory character, like a night and day. His home environment both comforts and unsettles him, the security of the job he has devoted years to be a self-made man, a true American, starts slipping away like the ground beneath his feet, when he realizes that he is only a small wheel in the system. In contrast to complexity of Dexter, Eddie is thus the most illegible of the three because of his identity which is hard to capture, since he boundlessly adjusts it to the conditions around him (his wife's expectations, his boss's mood, gaming in the clubs, the sea voyage). Yet, it comes to the fore in his relationship to daughters where his dissatisfaction with his current life and his sense for dedication clash. Moreover, it is a fitting manoeuvre that a key to solving the greatest mystery lies at the bottom of the sea, in literary the deepest part of the novel – Eddie's watch as evidence of his violent death. Still, even this key does not belong to the right door but leads only to the dead-end, since Dexter refuses to spill the details of the event, and Eddie is not even dead after all.

Ultimately, the characters can encounter limiting obstacles everywhere, therefore, their identity is more a matter of self-expression, which is somewhere allowed more, somewhere less, but in the end always reveals a part of the personality and also how they manage to overcome the exclusion, even though they may not always meet with success.

5.4 Murmuring

It is a sad work of destiny, then, that when Anna finally comes to a feeling that she fits in the place (among other divers, at Rose's parents' house), she must give up that privilege and hastily travel to California because of the baby. The Naval Yards have become her second home (480), a community that finally makes sense to her, a trembling excitement every time she dives to explore what can be used or repaired once again for the next battles. Without earlier awareness, the war has formed one part of her identity, as well as it touched every American then: "Her life was a war life; the war *was* her life." (468) The war determines her life purpose like the care for Lydia determined the one of Agnes, and for that reason, there is an increasing concern in the heroine (like in Dexter too) about what will happen with her hard-won position in society when the war is over, how and where she will find a new goal or a place to belong. The birth of her son partially postpones these worries, but not indefinitely.

Leaving the city where Anna has grown accustomed to the murmuring sound of the sea and the rumble of docks means abandoning all previous life stages, both the one with her mother and sister, and the one with her colleagues and Rose (479). Contrarily, moving out will bring a reunion with Eddie, yet, Anna must find a way back to him.

When Egan was writing *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, and collecting the material and doing interviews for *Manhattan Beach*, simultaneous reflection on both books become entwined in a topic of time (Messud and Egan 1:15:47-1:17:16). Thus, the novel closes in the familiar cyclicality that can be detected in details of the first part, *The Shore*, and the last chapter. Although Egan focused on the enveloping of the plot without jumping back and forth in time, and almost no flashbacks and flash-forwards can be found in it, there are still small suggestions of them. We can mention, for example, Anna suddenly seeing her father as a stranger (49) who he will become for her after years of separation (480), as they both lose the awareness of the (inner) life of the second; the indication of Anna's growth (49) from a child to a woman which is completed nearly in unrecognizability and at the same time a confusing resemblance to Agnes (488); and last but not least the whole story ending in a symbolical scene that reminds of the time that is gone for both of them at the moment.

In thirties, Anna and her father are listening to a silence of the night, muted by the crisis that afflicted the incoming and outgoing cargo ships:

> "Hear that quiet? […] That is the sound of a harbor in Depression".

> “No ships,” she said.
>
> “No ships.” (49)

Standing on the shore after their reunion, both grown up and aged, they are looking at the fog slowly lifting to reveal several ships hooting at each other, signalizing that the war is over:

> “Look,” her father said. “Here it comes.”
>
> She was surprised to find him watching the fog. […] It reared up over the land like a tidal wave about to break, or the aftermath of a silent, distant explosion.
>
> Without thinking, she took her father’s hand.
>
> “Here it comes,” she said. (492)

The water is symbolized here in the fog, with which it merges, and the feeling of an end is replaced with the anticipation, suspense before the cloud of fog will disappear and pour into a promising future Dexter’s father-in-law foretold. The “distant explosion”, the war that happened as if somewhere else, far away behind the borders, slowly quietens down to peace; and Anna and Ed stay in an atmosphere of a fragile, but pleasurable reconciliation, knowing that in spite of everything, they survived. They are united – they are here and now.

Conclusion

Identity is a monumental topic for many disciplines, and it has been addressed by the authors for centuries, but until now it seems as if we have not been given a satisfactory answer as to how it could be summarized or defined. As we have shown in this diploma thesis, this is precisely because it is a multi-layered term which can be viewed from a lot of different perspectives, various aspects of it can be accentuated, and, above all, everyone can invent the definition for themselves. If we want to know ourselves and others who form an integral part of the world we live in, we often turn to literature that can shed light on some of these areas without having to experience it personally. Literary characters are the narrative element that comes closest to depiction of identity, and these representations can give us an idea of what our identities may or may not look like, often mirroring the very search and uncertainties concerning it. The fictional figures evolved over time in ways that filled the story with their inner lives – the subjective point of view and also the way how they deal with own identity by various mechanisms, most importantly, through the continuity of memory. While the inwardness and subjectivity stressed in the novel had not been unconditionally projected in the outward self, it made characters' uniqueness and richness more apparent. Personal identity is said to be even an intimate, private matter of every person, yet, its privacy together with the subjective outlook on the world always relates to the question that is shared universally – who is the "I" and how can this experience be expressed and then called the absolute truth? Can our experience of the "I" be related to the experience of others, connecting humanity in a modernist revelation of the lost-and-found treasure of identity, or are we forever locked in a spiral of disintegrating personalities that clash with each other and whose uniqueness is a curse put to them?

In post-postmodernism, the writers confront these inquiries once again while they free literary characters from their isolation and, through a focus on the inward nature from which the qualities closest to us, the readers, emerge, try to find the framing concept of identity. If it can be said that the complexity of post-postmodernist works still manifests itself in lurching between modernist and postmodernist approaches, in which, at the same time, the impulses of realism enter with regard to the social problems of the time, Egan's novels are a perfect example of the fusion of all possible heterogeneous influences, while transcending it with their originality.

In our detailed analysis of each novel, we have explored various themes through which identity can be grasped: in *Look at Me*, we focused primarily on the recognition of identity as both the subject and the object through others and one's (self-)image; in *The Keep,* we tried to capture how identity functions in a Gothic world of timelessness and virtual placelessness; in *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* our attention was aimed mainly to memory and time, which affects identities greatly, and sub-themes, such as the technology or authenticity, and in *Manhattan Beach,* we were concerned with more general topics, say, gender identity, identity of disabled people, and a secret identity in relation to the multi-genre of this novel. Furthermore, it should be noted that these areas appear in some way in all the novels analysed, for example, the influence of technology is examined in first three books, a secret or feigned identity that changes according to the environment can be related not only to *Manhattan Beach* but to characters like Charlotte, Mr. Z., Danny, or Bosco, and the authenticity versus inauthenticity, memory and time as the most general mechanisms by which and in which identity can be mapped, while at the same time being doubted by all characters, permeate the novels altogether, since in a broader sense, the character reflecting human characteristics is always faced with them.

More little motifs and subtopics that can be connected to identity formation in Egan's novels have crystallized through a detailed close-reading, including, for example, the relation between the real and the unreal, the illusion and truth of information. We can also note that the stories addressed all the thematic areas that were presented by Coulmas as the possibilities for literary adaptation of the topic. For instance, we saw a split of identity (Charlotte); the mind-body problem was examined as a relationship of inner and outer self (e.g. Charlotte, Danny); the identity of words and things was explored by the characters of Lulu, Moose, or Rebecca; and gender boundaries were experienced by the female protagonists in *Goon Squad*, and most obviously Anna in *Manhattan Beach*. Regarding the identity crisis, we might rather ask who of the heroes does not encounter it; mistaken identity as identity that is disguised or transforms due to a selected point of view could be traced in every novel, as well as national identity (we can mention Dexter, Mr. Z, or Bennie, for example) and social identities, which are additionally subject to historical traumas such as 9/11, war, or contemporary pressing issues, such as the environmental crisis or terrorism.

Let us recall that identity can be, at least, defined as constant balancing between what is the same and what is different, unique. It is this otherness and uniqueness that we can

only know in relation to other people, which suggests that identity cannot be known unmediated (after all, literature mediates the experience of identity too). Whereas in many scenes interpersonal relationships prove essential to grasping the self and also to liberation from a lonely captivity of one's own self, which sometimes wanders in self-seeking or over-identification with a particular attribute, they are not unproblematic. It is because in these relationships, we see ourselves not only as a subject, but necessarily as an object that enters into them and is, thus, observed. Identity cannot be formed purely in the self alone, yet, others have sometimes a significant influence on its formation. As we have seen in *Look at Me*, the perception of it can be reversed – from the position of the subject we automatically move into the position of the object, and this is the way we approach ourselves most of the time, whether in terms of contemplating the appearance or the inner side, everything is experienced from the outside. This most philosophically complex Egan's book (even though the character of Charlotte sometimes mocks its philosophical layer) shows how we balance between different forms of identity knowledge every day – between the one who sees and the one who is seen. On the one hand, the self-consciousness is needed to understand who we are; on the other hand, we thus lose the position of the person who can experience this identity. Moose, Charlotte, and Mr. Z are all aware of this fact at different stages in their lives, yet, they experience it in similarly painful ways, having had to sacrifice too much to it.

As some theorists have argued, identity is primarily social, only emerging from and determined within a network of relationships. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that all characters, although they may seem to us to be inclined rather to the mutability of identity and its adaptation to the environment, believe in some form of essentialism. They may not directly call it soul (like Mr. Z.), still, they are waiting and/or looking for something stable, a form of authenticity or "realness", a fixed inner point or simply the "I" by which they can anchor themselves in the world, and resist the influence of objectification, time, or forgetfulness of memory, in short, to withstand all changes. These two stands which are highlighted most evidently in *Look at Me* appear in each of the book. The fear of the illusory nature of identity comes to the fore, illustrated by the symbols of all kinds of mirrors and stylized photographs, or the problem of a metaphor within a metaphor (related not only to Moose, but also to the "new language" of Lulu's generation), the empty signs of faces. Despite all of this, there is also the belief in an

inner, inalienable part of our identity that no camera lens or flashlight can reveal, as the end of the novel proposes.

Assuming that there *is* an initial centre, the self (of which we should be aware as essential to identity, as Egan's quote from Proust suggests), and assuming that this self functions in the subject-object form of identity, it is often split into several possible selves, into "multiple persons", as *Goon Squad* illustrates the most. It is not only because of the narrative organization that allows the characters to become the narrators and the narrated, and thus we can look at them from several different angles, but also the fact that – again, like in all novels – the characters see themselves as past versions of themselves, to whom they have no or often a contradictory relationship due to the changes that have taken place in their lives and that have been etched into either their faces or their inner features. Self-objectification here, then, refers to their view of own self, which at the same time may (or may not) result in an alienation, detachment and fragmentation of personhood. *Goon Squad* can thus be described as a blend of modern and postmodern concepts; however, it bridges them into an ambiguous but reconciliatory post-postmodern stance. The latter restores to some extent, even in subtle hints, faith in possible coherence and continuity of identity, and also faith in us, the readers, for we can choose whether we will perceive the characters in each chapter separately, as they see themselves, or to synthesize them into one.

The relationship between the outer and inner self is analysed too, that is, between the appearance or body and what we can find behind it. Outer identity is treated differently in the novels – it serves as a means of earning money, a disguise, a mask or a protection, especially in the sense of self-stylization (*Look at Me, Manhattan Beach, The Keep*) and therefore does not refer to anything real; on the contrary, in many cases it shows, how tightly it is connected to an internal identity and that any change of it is therefore also reflected inwards, which is especially true of the gradual effect of time (*Goon Squad*) and dramatic changes (*Look at Me*) that make self-knowledge impossible. The outer self is ultimately what we see first, and it serves as a gateway through which we can identify with the inner self. This relationship is particularly disrupted by the loss of the body in virtuality of the internet and the telephone (*The Keep*) where the physical side loses all value or is treated as a manifestation of textuality with which one can manipulate. In the cyberspace, identity dissolves into forms that can move us away from seeing ourselves as a unified, whole identity – in this space, we have only seeming control over it and our internet image can never express us fully. However, the loss of body, time, or the space

in which we perceive us as the “I” is always balanced by the all-pervading hope that in a confusing world we can, after all, find ourselves in even the most ordinary moments, such as looking at the sun in a golden hour (*Goon Squad*). Identity, in whatever sense, can never be abandoned – and neither can the search for it.

In accordance with the earlier-mentioned O’Donnell’s argument, it is probably impossible to say what identity means for all post-postmodern writers, since their pieces of art are characterized by a synthesis of all sorts of traditions. While Egan’s postmodern background is very evident, and she herself often admits that the authors of the previous generation were a great inspiration to her, as she was growing up, over time, she has developed her own style of writing-experimentation – each of her books differs in genre and style and evades an unequivocal classification. However, in terms of universal topics, such as identity, they all are very similar. For Egan, delving in the fates of people quite different from her is the basis and fundamental method of writing; exploring identities is simply the essence of a creative process. Moreover, we can notice very clearly that the power of imagination and writing itself is emphasized in each book; literature is no longer just an imperfect image of reality, but a way of coming to terms with our identity, of simply writing ourselves out of it, like the figure of Ray does. Contemporary literature returns to the author and the reader, to the discourses which postmodernism rejected, and attempts to reformulate it. As Egan often remarks, it is necessary to never stop writing, since it is literature that can connect us together and make one attentive to issues we would overlook or not think about otherwise, hence, the importance of engagement and communication is underlined in her novels too – between the author and the reader, and among readers as a community.

Identity has always been, is, and will always be a question – a question we will return to throughout our lives many times, and one that may never be answered. On the one hand this is perhaps a good thing, as Egan’s novels imply, since revealing it completely would also mean its destruction, and since some mystery will always be a necessary part of it. On the other hand, literature gives us the opportunity to discover its various forms, to find an expression for what we experience in relation to it, and to identify with characters in which we find pieces of ourselves or others, images of the past and the future, reassurance that we are not alone in this searching for the self that can be sometimes exhausting. And although Egan’s stories hesitate to give us particular answers, they make facing the question of who we are much easier.

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