Sleep, Dream, and Reality in Jonathan Coe's *The House of Sleep*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu novely *Dům spánku*, kterou napsal Jonathan Coe. Práce zpočátku popisuje život autora knihy a jeho díla. Teoretická část obsahuje základní informace o postmodernismu – o původu a důvodech jeho vzniku, včetně populárních spisovatelů této doby. V neposlední řadě teoretická část zahrnuje poznatky o fázích spánku a poruchách spánku zmíněných v *Dům spánku*. Následně je v bakalářské práci podrobněji popsána již daná novela – děj, a postavy, které se v knize vyskytují. Cílem analýzy v praktické části je poukázat na veškeré charakteristické znaky postmoderní literatury, které se v novele objevují.

Klíčová slova: *Dům spánku*, Jonathan Coe, postmodernismus, poruchy spánku, novela

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the analysis of the novel *The House of Sleep* written by Jonathan Coe. Initially, the thesis describes the life of the author of the book and his works. The theoretical part provides information about postmodernism's origins and its influences, including popular writers of that period of time. Last but not least, it also comprises findings on sleep stages and the sleep disorders mentioned in *The House of Sleep*. Later on, the thesis discusses the novel's plot and characters in more detail. The aim of the analysis in the practical part is to point out all the characteristic features of postmodern literature that appear in the novel.

Keywords: *The House of Sleep*, Jonathan Coe, postmodernism, sleep disorders, novel

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis deals with Jonathan Coe's novel *The House of Sleep*. Its main goal is to portray various signs of postmodernism that can be found in the book. Not all of the features can be interpreted, therefore only the major ones will be singled out. *The House of Sleep* made me think of how important it is for all living species to sleep. Sleep is a vital part of health as it influences metabolism, learning, and performance. An adult should optimally sleep for nine hours however it is often reported that many do not meet this requirement. Insufficient sleep is therefore a public health issue and if not resolved, it can lead to multiple health problems.[1]

The author of the book that deals with sleep, Jonathan Coe, is a contemporary British writer born on 19 August 1961 near Birmingham. His interest in writing has been apparent since he was a small child. Coe remembers the time when he began to write stories, as early as an eight or seven-year-old child. He decided to follow this passion of his and become an important novel writer.[2] His career as a writer significantly took off around 1994 after he published the novel *What a Carve Up!* Coe's works consist of novels with elements of satire, as well as a few biographical pieces. Some of the major literary pieces he wrote are for instance his first official novel *The Accidental Woman*, *The Rotter's Club*, and the postmodern novel *The House of Sleep*.[3]

Postmodernism began to spread around the 1960s, and that is when its primary goal was to try to deny the assumptions of modernism. Postmodernism is certainly a term that was used not only to describe literary works of that time, but also other disciplines, such as visual arts, history, and social theory. The movement also had an impact on people's perception of life and their thinking.[4] Postmodern literature reflects the insecurities of its time, the futile hunt for the truth, and the belief that there is no definite meaning of reality. Not only that, postmodernism was inspired by other styles and literary movements, namely dadaism, surrealism, as well as parts of magic realism.[5] A few of the most popular authors of this time include John Barth, John Fowles, and Samuel Beckett. Generally speaking, postmodernist

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[1] Geraldine S. Perry, Susheel P. Patil, and Letitia R. Presley-Cantrell. "Raising Awareness of Sleep as a Healthy Behavior." *Preventing Chronic Diseases* 10, no. 133 (August 2013): 1. http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.130081.

[2] Philip Tew. *Jonathan Coe: Contemporary British Satire*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1-2.

[3] Nick Rennison. *Contemporary British Novelists*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 34-36.

[4] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-2.

[5] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 189-190.

works employ features like metafiction, irony, fragmentation, intertextuality, pastiche, and hyperreality.

Jonathan Coe's novel which consists of some of these elements, *The House of Sleep*, was published in 1997. The book is divided into six sections, which represent the stages of sleep, along with several smaller chapters inside them. For the most part, the plot is centered on four characters who are all closely related to each other – Sarah, Robert, Terry, and Gregory. There are two main timelines – one when the characters are schoolmates and the other one when they are all grown up. The story takes place in Ashdown, which in the past used to be the student hall and later on became a clinic for treating patients with sleep disorders. There is no doubt that sleep plays a major role in the story. Sarah is narcoleptic and cannot tell her dreams apart from reality which causes her a lot of trouble throughout her life. Sarah is friends with Robert, who is greatly influenced by her sleep condition and devotes himself to making Sarah his partner no matter what it takes. Terry is a film critic who loved sleeping for long hours in his teenage years but later on, suddenly struggles with insomnia. And finally, Gregory, Sarah's first boyfriend, who runs the Ashdown clinic, believes that sleeping is pointless and hopes that one day people will learn how to live without it.

This thesis offers an overview of the novel's most significant postmodern features that rise to the surface, namely metafiction, fragmentation, and intertextuality. Sarah's dreams serve as a dominant example of metafiction as they blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. Additionally, the examination of the two separate timelines within the book illustrates the presence of fragmentation. Lastly, the novel's text seems to consist of other writer's texts, which underlines that there is no reality behind it. By exploring these themes, this thesis sheds light on the novel's postmodern elements.

1 JONATHAN COE

1.1 Biography

Jonathan Coe was born on 19 August 1961 in a small village located near the city of Birmingham, England. He gained interest in writing at a very young age. In fact, one of his most famous novels is called *What a Carve Up!* It contains a few pages of a thriller story he wrote when he was eight years old. He kept on writing throughout his school years, realizing that writing was indeed his passion. While he was working on his postgraduate thesis at the University of Warwick, he simultaneously managed to finish his first novel to be published – *The Accidental Woman*. The novel was highly influenced by his university thesis about intrusive narration in Henry Fielding's novels. In his late twenties, he moved to London, mostly to make a living by becoming a writer. At that time, he was interested in music as well as literature. Temporarily he was a part of a band that went by the name The Peer Group and he wrote songs for the local cabaret group called Wanda and the Willy Warmers. After publishing *The Accidental Woman* in 1987, he wrote *A Touch of Love* and *The Dwarves of Death*. These novels were not as popular as Jonathan might have hoped for. [6]

However, he kept on writing, and not too long after that, he published his fourth novel, earlier mentioned *What a Carve Up!* It tells a story about British politics and the changes which Thatcherism brought upon the United Kingdom. This work was an international hit that got translated into many languages and made his name known. Over the years, Jonathan Coe wrote many fictional, but also non-fictional books, as well as a couple of children's stories. For instance, *The House of Sleep*, which will be discussed further on, contains a mixture of dark comedy and a story about patients who are trying to treat their sleep disorders. *The Rotters' Club*, named after Jonathan's dearly loved music album in his teenage years, incorporated fragments of the author's memories related to King Edward's School in Birmingham he used to attend, intertwined with a fictional story.

For the most part, Coe's non-fictional works include biographies. Among them, is a description of Humphrey Bogart's life, titled *Humphrey Bogart: Take It and Like It*. Followed by the first biography's success, came two more biographies – *James Stewart: Leading Man* and *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson*. So far, his last non-

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[6] Jonathan Coe. n.d. "Biography – Jonathan Coe." Accessed January 5, 2023.

https://jonathancoewriter.com/biography/

fictional work *Marginal Notes, Doubtful Statements: Non-fiction, 1990-2013* comprises the author's earliest journalistic pieces and essays about his favorite movie directors and writers.

Regarding Jonathan Coe's children's books, there are two of them – *The Story of Gulliver* and *The Broken Mirror*. *The Story of Gulliver* was created through a special project that had multiple writers from around the world re-tell their most liked pieces of classic literature and turn them into bedtime stories for children so that they will not be forgotten. Therefore, Jonathan picked *Gulliver's Travels* as his favorite book and recreated Swift's version, originally published in the 18th century. *The Broken Mirror* was inspired by the Narnia book series from C. S. Lewis, only compiled into a shorter story, accompanied by illustrations from Coe's friend Chiara Coccorese.[7]

Since then, he has been publishing books, experimenting with his writing style, and receiving a number of literary awards, such as the Samuel Johnson Prize for Best Non-fiction Book of the Year or Costa Novel of the Year.[8]

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[7] Jonathan Coe. n.d. "Books – Jonathan Coe." Accessed January 6, 2023.

https://jonathancoewriter.com/books/

[8] Jonathan Coe. n.d. "Biography – Jonathan Coe." Accessed January 5, 2023.
https://jonathancoewriter.com/biography/

2 POSTMODERNISM

2.1 Origins

Postmodernism as a term was coined in the 1940s, but despite that, it started to be commonly used around twenty years later, in the 1960s to describe a different approach to literature. Since then, it gradually began to appear in several academic disciplines, such as history, philosophy, music, social theory, etc. Due to the term being widely used in multiple areas, its meaning quickly became overloaded and unclear. Some might define postmodernism as a strange and avant-garde contemporary movement following up on modernism, or straightforwardly a combination of the previous styles.[9] It might have been created as a reaction against modernism as well, nevertheless, it does not mean that modernism as a literary movement would completely cease to exist. Some of its characteristics can still be found in postmodernist works.[10]

The word postmodernism can be morphologically broken down into three parts: prefix "post", root "modern" and suffix "ism". This is quite interesting as postmodernism is a part of contemporary art, which means that it is being produced in the present day. The root "modern" suggests that it is something up-to-date. The term modernism already existed at that time, therefore it needed to be further modified. That is where the prefix "post" comes into effect. It implies that modernism became fairly more experimental and shifted due to historical events that occurred and carried a certain level of influence on the writing style of that time. Meanwhile, at the same time, some claim that the prefix "post" may simply refer to the future, indicating a new upgraded attitude towards writing and other forms of art.[11]

There is no specific date that could signal the start of postmodernism, however, sometimes it is discussed to be in 1941, the year of the death of novelists James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. It is also possible that it was the literary works that marked the beginning of postmodernism. The suggested publications include notably the novel *The Cannibal* written in 1949 by John Hawkes, or the 1953 premiere of the play *Waiting for Godot*. Among other major figures that by some means contributed to postmodernist literature are for example William S. Burroughs, Gabriel García Márquez, and Samuel Beckett.[12]

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[9] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

[10] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 552.

[11] Nick Bentley. *Contemporary British Fiction*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 31.

[12] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 191.

2.2   Influences

Postmodern literature was undeniably influenced by multiple factors, such as historical events, cultural changes, changes in readers' preferences, or overall, the progress of time. Some of the examples of significant historical and cultural events that impacted British postmodernist writers during the late 20th century were for instance: Margaret Thatcher becoming the leader of Conservative Party in the UK in 1975, The Falklands War in 1982, Britpop reaching its peak around 1995, or the Civil Partnership Act in 2004.[13] An example of that would be Jonathan Coe's focus on Thatcherism in *What a Carve Up!* through which he tried to bring political awareness and use satire to mock the entire ideology.

Additionally, postmodernist writers were often inspired by fabulation and the art of storytelling with elements of magic, noticeable in previously published collections of stories, like *1001 Arabian Nights*, or *Don Quixote*.[14]

2.3   Basic concepts

As already mentioned, postmodernism is difficult to define because of the term's diverse meanings in various fields of study. As a result of that, it is similarly hard to pinpoint its characteristics in literature. Not all postmodernist writers use all of these common elements and techniques of writing concurrently, they use a mixture of a few they feel comfortable with using.

One of the main characteristics of postmodernism is its playfulness, which includes literary techniques such as black humor, or irony. Meanwhile, both concepts were already made use of in the period of modernism, it became more apparent in this era.[15] Black humor, or in other words black comedy, tries to make a serious and somehow painful topic seem lighter and amusing through the use of humor. It became more widely known during the 20th century, consequently during postmodernism.[16] Irony as a rhetorical figure explains the truth by using words that are the exact opposite. In literature, direct irony is used quite often. It occurs to a greater extent in situations where the characters either perceive certain situations ironically, or express themselves by using an ironic tone of speech.[17] Speaking of irony, another element that provides a comical effect is a parody. It aims to imitate the style,

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[13] Nick Bentley. *Contemporary British Fiction*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), Chronology.
[14] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 189-190.
[15] Ibid., 193.
[16] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 80-81.
[17] Ibid., 371-372.

expressions, or attitude of a different author, or genre by exaggerating the main traits. It is difficult to demonstrate it successfully because it needs to be subtle but at the same time recognizable.[18] In connection to playfulness, a potential form of parody that appears in postmodern works on numerous occasions is pastiche. The term describes a form of art that combines many components – such as genres, or styles, together. In postmodernism, pastiche can either serve as a type of parody or on the other hand, depending on the context, it can be viewed as an acknowledgment, paying respect to someone else's work.[19]

Metafiction is a rather unique practice that often occurs in postmodern literature. It is commonly defined as "fiction about fiction", a self-aware fiction which does not pretend to be real whatsoever.[20] To outline the purpose of this concept, it means that the author consciously and willingly reminds the readers that they are in fact reading a fictional piece of work. The writers use this technique to surprise the readers and deliver a new shocking experience, or to distinctly point out all artificial content to the readers by drawing a clear line between reality and fiction.[21] Metafiction is the opposite of realist fiction, where the readers can mostly notice rich characterizations and descriptions full of details that make the story feel more genuine and evoke emotions. Fiction is not supposed to act as a reflection of the real world. Commonly used techniques of metafiction are for instance: the author being a part of the story or characters being aware of the fact they are only characters inside a story.[22]

Focusing on the themes which interfere with the timeline of narratives, there are a few. Generally, fragmentation and non-linear narratives are likely to appear in postmodern works. These two features can be described by the collective term – temporal distortion. In postmodernism, this phenomenon is primarily used to indicate an ironic tone and it is expressed by sudden changes in time. It means that the author of a literary work may use an ongoing time loop, jump forwards and backwards in time, or write about numerous events overlapping at the same time. There is also a possibility that there is not any correct timeline and the reader picks their preferred outcome out of various proposed options. An example

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[18] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed.* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 514.

[19] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 194.

[20] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.

[21] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 195.

[22] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed.* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 431.

of temporal distortion is for instance historiographic metafiction since it plays with the concept of time, history, and imagination.[23] Historiographic metafiction is perhaps the most representative category of fiction in postmodernism. As the term suggests, the genre combines history and fiction. In this case, based on Linda Hutcheon's theory, history is argued to be an artificial construct – therefore a fiction which is not identical to the past. The historical figures or events which appear in historiographic metafiction are only inspired by documents that come from the past. Writers who dedicated themselves to this genre were for example Graham Swift and John Fowles, who will be mentioned further on.[24]

Another frequently used element of postmodernism, in many cases also featured in historiographic metafiction, is intertextuality. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva who believed that there is no original literary text because one text mostly borrows words from a different, already existing text.[25] In postmodern literature, intertextuality is a tool which can help authors face the past and rewrite it into the present situation.[26] A number of critics claim that intertextuality shows how postmodernism lacks its original content. The concept of intertextuality in postmodernism is usually tied to other literary pieces and their authors, or it takes inspiration from different movements.[27]

Last but not least, along with the rest, hyperreality is widely represented in works of postmodern literature. A sociologist from France, Jean Baudrillard, studied this concept and shared his ideas on how he perceives it. His theory is based on the belief that hyperreality portrays a smooth fusion between reality and fiction without any signs of their beginning or end. Baudrillard states that hyperreality consists of three main parts, which cannot be separated – simulacrum, simulation, and hyperreal. Hyperreality draws the illusion of a real, possibly even more real world, which is a complete fake in reality. In this case, the reality is disguised by nostalgic memories, fantasies, or hallucinations. Therefore, in contrast to metafiction, people are not able to tell the difference between reality and fiction.[28] Speaking

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[23] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 196.

[24] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99.

[25] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 367.

[26] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. (Routledge: New York and London, 1988), 118.

[27] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 194.

[28] Dea Anugrah Santoso, and Mamik Tri Wedawati. "Hyperreal Identity in William Gibson's Neuromancer." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 380* (2019): 70-71. https://doi.org/10.2991/soshec-19.2019.15.

of hyperreality, it is important to briefly mention two more styles of fiction that are closely connected to postmodernism – magic realism and fabulation. The term magic realism was coined by Franz Roh and it is characterized by the use of imaginary hence fictional, fantastic, and unique elements which make the story feel like a dream.[29] Fabulation is based on a similar premise. It rejects realism and welcomes the false and unconventional, such as mythical creatures or magic.[30]

2.4   Postmodern authors

Postmodern literature introduced many authors but not all of them had the same style of writing and delivering of their message. This section describes the lives and some of the most important works of a few of the most significant writers of postmodernism, more specifically postmodern fiction.

Samuel Beckett is a widely popular writer of postmodern literature, arguably its pioneer, predominantly known for his play *Waiting for Godot*. He was born in a village near Dublin in 1906. After graduating from Trinity College Dublin, he was appointed to give lectures in Paris, where he also met and befriended James Joyce. Beckett's writing career began around the late 1920s and his early creations were greatly inspired by contemporary authors he admired, such as T. S. Eliot or his friend James Joyce.[31] In 1938 he published the comedy called *Murphy*. Afterwards, he admitted it was progressively getting more difficult for him to keep writing in English, so he decided to write in French, which felt easier and more appealing. In 1946 his writing style evolved and he started to experiment with fictional monologues instead of writing stories and novels in the third person.[32] Not too long after, Beckett started working on *Waiting for Godot*, in other words, *En attendant Godot*. Initially, the producers in theatres kept turning him down because the play did not have a plot and would not be lucrative enough. In the end, the director Rogen Blin accepted Samuel Beckett's work to be played.[33] Beckett's works are considered essential because of the

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[29] John Anthony Cuddon, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 5th ed*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 416.

[30] Preety Chaudhary, and Ramen Sharma. "Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare." *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 1, no. 2 (2011): 195.

[31] Lawrence Graver. *Beckett: Waiting for Godot, 2nd ed*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-2.

[32] Ibid., 5-6.

[33] Ibid., 8-9.

distinctive way they are written. He tried to make use of paradox by giving a voice to silence or adding meaning to empty words.[34]

John Barth is yet another author who left a mark on postmodernism. He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1930. He is known for his essays, such as *The Literature of Exhaustion* but also for the stories and novels he wrote.[35] In 1968 he published a collection of stories called *Lost in the Funhouse*. The stories present multiple elements of postmodernism, they are introspective and contain a considerable amount of metafiction. The title story goes by the collection's exact name. The so-called funhouse in the story is a maze full of mirrors.[36] An insecure teenage boy, Ambrose Mensch, is the protagonist. The character of Ambrose is featured in Barth's other works as well. The funhouse he enters represents a metaphor for opening the door to adolescence. Ambrose recognizes how his body is changing and how inexperienced he is when it comes to exploring his sexuality. This anxiety and lack of self-confidence make him avoid direct communication with others, mainly women. Ambrose is well aware of the fact that he is lost and trapped in the labyrinth, and he goes through his memories to find out what went wrong and where.[37] *Lost in the Funhouse* provides several key features of postmodernism, such as self-reflexivity, self-awareness, and metafiction.

Similarly, John Fowles managed to significantly contribute to postmodern literature as well. He began his career as a writer in 1963 when he published the nowadays internationally recognized novel *The Collector*. In 1968, he got the idea to recreate the form of usual novels. He wanted to keep some of the principles of realism while adding more experimental ways of storytelling. Linda Hutcheon claimed that by this statement of his, Fowles was describing the features of historiographic metafiction. Based on this expressed desire of his, he indeed possibly published Britain's first work of historiographic metafiction *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It starts as a realist novel, however later on the author includes pastiche and comes in as a narrator to certainly point out all the fictional parts of the novel.[38] This was not the only popular postmodern novel written by John Fowles. *The Collector* is about Clegg, a man who one day kidnaps a woman named Miranda. This book is divided into two

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[34] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52-53.

[35] Hans Bertens, and Joseph Natoli. *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002), 32.

[36] Ibid., 34-35.

[37] Martin, W. Todd. "Self-Knowledge and Self-Conception: The Therapy of Autobiography in John Barth's Lost in the Funhouse." *Studies in Short Fiction* 34, no. 2 (1997): 151-155.

[38] Hans Bertens, and Joseph Natoli. *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002), 141-142.

sections, one depicts Miranda's point of view – how she feels while being imprisoned, and the other portrays Clegg's perspective – information about his past and preparations for Miranda's kidnapping. The novel itself is self-conscious, inspired by Daniel Defoe's detailed style of writing fiction, and oftentimes it refers to Shakespeare's work *The Tempest*.[39] These characteristics indicate common features of postmodernity, such as self-awareness and intertextuality.

As the last example for postmodern writers, it is worth mentioning Julian Barnes. He was born in the city of Leicester in 1946. At one point he studied modern languages at Oxford, which brought him to join to work on the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a lexicographer. After that, he tried many other jobs, such as being a TV critic, or a reviewer. The novel *Flaubert's Parrot* may be Barnes' most prominent book that made people remember him.[40] It was published in 1984. The story is divided into numerous randomly interchangeable sections, which points to fragmentation of the narrative – one of the many signs of postmodern literature. *Flaubert's Parrot* is about a doctor called Geoffrey, who is a passionate fan of Gustave Flaubert and his work. His goal is to try and find a stuffed parrot which appears in one of his stories, namely *Un Coeur Simple*. Geoffrey attempts to introduce readers to an unconventional Flaubert's biography, which does not necessarily have to be fully real. The writer himself sometimes interrupts the story to comment on the main character's actions and thought processes. All of these attributes indicate the presence of metafiction, more precisely historiographic metafiction in the novel. [41]

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[39] James Acheson. *Modern Novelists: John Fowles*. (New York: Macmillan Education, 1998), 10-11.
[40] Nick Rennison. *Contemporary British Novelists*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 24.
[41] Bran Nicol. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 116-117.

3 SLEEP

3.1 Stages of sleep

Sleep is a state of unconsciousness when individuals show a decreased awareness of their surroundings and calm behavior. It is an essential process that repeats itself every day.[42] When the scientists were trying to understand the cycle of sleep, they uncovered that sleep has its own stages. In 1937, the first person to describe sleep stages assigned by letters A-E, was the scientist Alfred Loomis. These stages are nowadays collectively referred to as non-rapid eye movement sleep, in other words NREM. In the 1950s, another significant development followed. It was Nathaniel Kleitman's discovery of rapid eye movement sleep. REM sleep is mainly characterized by fast movements of eyes during sleep, irregular heart rate, and dreaming. Sleep stages are repeated in approximately 100 minutes long cycles in the same sequence.[43]

Stages of healthy sleep can be divided into three parts – awake, NREM sleep, and REM sleep. The awake stage represents the time before a person falls asleep. NREM sleep includes four stages. Stage one begins when a person becomes drowsy and it lasts around 5-10 minutes. The signs of drowsiness include physiological changes such as muscle relaxation, slower heart rate, and a lower blood pressure. Stage two marks the beginning of drifting into unconsciousness and in stage three, the sleep gets slightly deeper. Stage four sleep predominates in the cycle. It is recognized by the presence of most restful and deepest sleep, commonly known as core sleep. It is claimed to be the most important thing that leads to a healthy sleeping routine. The individual's body barely moves and it is difficult to wake them up. After deep sleep follows the rapid eye movement sleep stage. As the term suggests, the key feature is speedy eye activity since the closed eyes roll from side to side. REM sleep takes approximately 90 minutes. However, the segment can repeat itself multiple times during a single night.[44]

3.2 Sleep disorders mentioned in The House of Sleep

Two of the characters from *The House of Sleep* show symptoms of sleep disorders. One of them is the teacher Sarah Tudor, the second one is the film critic Terry Worth. Sarah's life

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[42] Wallace B. Mendelson. *The Science of Sleep: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 10.
[43] Ibid., 14-15.
[44] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 145.

is greatly impacted by her sleep disorder, which is narcolepsy associated with cataplexy. She gets into multiple uncomfortable situations full of misunderstandings which enables her schoolmates to make fun of Sarah and give her insulting nicknames without knowing about her health condition whatsoever. The reason behind that is because she was never directly diagnosed with narcolepsy even though she had these problems since around the age of fourteen. In contrast, Terry has never had any problems with sleep. In fact, as a teenager he could sleep for at least fourteen hours a day, far more than the average person – which might also point to oversleeping. Nonetheless, as an adult Terry begins to suffer from insomnia, meaning that he finds it difficult to fall asleep. He spends his nights watching videos so that it imitates the feeling of happily dreaming in his sleep as he used to when he was younger.

Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder which causes excessive sleepiness, mostly triggered by relaxing activities, for instance watching the TV, or reading. An individual suffering from narcolepsy becomes drowsy throughout the day and then falls asleep for short amounts of time. It is possible to have dreams in these momentary naps as well. The naps, in other words also referred to as sleep attacks, cannot be prevented and are quite dangerous since they occur suddenly. Narcolepsy is often followed by with cataplexy, such as in Sarah's case, but also hallucinations, and sleep paralysis. Cataplexy is a strong, abrupt muscle paralysis in reaction to emotional changes in people – anger, laughter, even surprise. Sleep paralysis represents an inability to move and speak while waking up from sleep. It occurs during the REM sleep stage known for being the stage where people have dreams. That is why people can have scary hallucinations including noises during sleep paralysis.[45]

The term insomnia is used when a person has a difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep for a longer amount of time. Not being able to sleep influences a person's functioning throughout the day. Those affected by insomnia experience problems like low energy, poor concentration, mood swings, and difficulty keeping up with family and professional relationships.[46]

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[45] Charles P. Pollak, Michael J. Thorpy, and Jan Yager. *The Encyclopedia of Sleep and Sleep Disorders – Facts on File Library of Health and Living, 3rd ed*. (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 139-140.
[46] Wallace B. Mendelson. *The Science of Sleep: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 146.

4   THE HOUSE OF SLEEP

4.1   General information

The novel *The House of Sleep* written by Jonathan Coe was first published by Viking in 1997. The book has six sections – Awake, Stage One, Stage Two, Stage Three, Stage Four, and REM Sleep. The sections refer to the scientifically researched stages of sleep. All of these are further divided into smaller numbered chapters, in total 18 of them. The chapters are marked with an asterisk when there is a change of perspective so that the reader knows which character the text focuses on.

The book has two timelines which interchange after each chapter. The odd numbered chapters take place in 1983-1984. On the other hand, the even numbered chapters unfold the story happening in June 1996. It is therefore up to the reader to gradually unravel the story by reading the whole book. For the most part, the novel's plot is focused on four characters – Sarah, Robert, Gregory, and Terry. The story takes place in Ashdown. In one timeline it houses university students and in the other one it serves as a clinic for people suffering from various sleep disorders.

4.2   Storyline summary

In the 1980s, the relationships between the characters are as follows: Sarah and Gregory are students sharing a room together at Ashdown. Sarah is a narcoleptic who keeps getting in trouble because of her inability to distinguish dream from reality. Gregory becomes her first boyfriend who constantly enjoys analyzing her narcolepsy symptoms. He has a fetish for watching people, especially Sarah, sleep as they are unconscious and completely helpless in that state. Robert is also a student staying at Ashdown. From the moment he unexpectedly meets Sarah there they become friends, and he falls head over heels in love with her, willing to do whatever it takes to make her his girlfriend. Terry is Robert's best friend who loves to watch and review movies, but most importantly adores to sleep for countless hours. He spends many years trying his hardest to find a lost movie seen only by a few people. One day, Terry tells Robert that Sarah is interested in women and recently started dating Veronica. Robert is devastated, but does not give up hope. As time passes by, Sarah breaks up with Veronica. All the students are supposed to leave Ashdown. So, they hold a party, after which Sarah wants to get closer with Robert to make Veronica jealous, but he declines. The next morning, Sarah tells Robert that he is her best friend and if only he had a twin sister, she would get together with her. After this conversation, Robert disappears for years and no

one can find him anywhere. Throughout the years, Terry ends up living with Sarah for some time until an incident happened because of Sarah's dream that costs Terry his job. He makes Sarah proofread his manuscript and remove a footnote to put all used sources in the correct order. However, Sarah feels sleepy and takes a short nap. She dreams of successfully finishing the task Terry gives her. In reality, the act of her correcting Terry's article never happens, therefore Terry gets dismissed. He becomes devastated, loses interest in looking for the lost movie and stops sleeping. Sarah and Terry slowly drift apart after moving out. At some point in 1984, Robert starts to understand his feelings of self-hatred and decides he will undergo a surgery to become a woman in hopes of meeting Sarah and getting together. He does research and one day, upon realizing that Sarah is narcoleptic, he chooses to study sleep and narcolepsy. Years later, when he is confident in his new body, he arranges a meeting with Sarah, however it does not end up well. In a dark room, upon finding out that Sarah is marrying a man soon, Robert runs away crying.

In 1996 the story is primarily based around the sleep clinic at Ashdown owned by Dr Dudden, in other words Gregory. Dr Madison who works there has an interview with Terry suffering from insomnia. He receives accommodation at the clinic in order to be observed because he claims he has not slept for years. In the course of time, Dr Dudden tells Terry that his results are getting better and he invites him to a secret basement. The basement is full of creepy experiments on animals. Dr Dudden then admits he is jealous that Terry does not require sleep, because to him having to sleep is a sign of weakness. Terry then talks to Dr Madison about Robert who he believes to be her twin brother. Dr Madison then coincidentally finds out something important that makes her visit Sarah, who wishes to treat her narcolepsy at the clinic. Dr Madison reveals that she is actually Robert in a new body.

5 ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSE OF SLEEP

5.1 Postmodernism in the novel

5.1.1 Temporal distortion

Temporal distortion in the form of non-linear narratives and fragmentation is one of the most distinctive features of *The House of Sleep*. It is important to mention that fragmentation is a sign of modernism, however postmodernism in the novel takes it one step further. As earlier mentioned, the chapters of the novel are divided into six sections relating to sleep stages and further chapters inside them that take place at different time, years apart. The author added a note at the beginning of the book, stating that the odd numbered chapters describe the characters' lives throughout 1983-1984. Meanwhile, the even numbered chapters are set in the summer of 1996.

The story shifts every chapter with the additional feature that the end of every "sleep stage" ends midsentence and continues in the following chapter. One character starts an idea, and the next character finishes the blank at a different time, in another place. The syntax stays intact however the character's identity might change. The upcoming excerpts indicate the presence of temporal distortion and identity distortion in the novel:

> (AWAKE) …. about his parents, about his home life, that he had never **thought**[47]
> (STAGE ONE) **thought** there was something strange about the rooms at the Dudden Clinic.[48]
>
> (STAGE ONE) … unbidden, to her reminiscent eye that evening: Veronica **sitting**[49]
> (STAGE TWO) **sitting** in the Café Valladon, reading a book and chuckling quietly to herself …[50]
>
> (STAGE TWO) … her limbs were stiff and tightened, and her eyes were open, as wide **open**[51]
> (STAGE THREE) **open** and ushered Terry into a darkened room …[52]
>
> (STAGE THREE) Sarah's eyes were stinging with tears again, as she **wondered**[53]
> (STAGE FOUR) **wondered** where she could possibly be.[54]

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[47] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 55-56.
[48] Ibid., 59.
[49] Ibid., 114.
[50] Ibid., 117.
[51] Ibid., 165.
[52] Ibid., 169.
[53] Ibid., 221.
[54] Ibid., 225.

(STAGE FOUR) Sometimes she liked to **believe**[55]

(REM SLEEP) **believe** that I may have known your brother.[56]

The first example presents how the ending of the Awake chapter links to Stage One's opening by the word "thought". This phenomenon occurs between all the chapters. Similarly, the remaining sleep stages are connected by "sitting", "open", "wondered", and "believe". It is clear that in *The House of Sleep*, temporal distortion is employed to create the effect of mimicking the shift between sleep stages while creating a smooth transition from one timeline to another. Jonathan Coe shuttles from present to past, and the way he structures the novel through the sleep stages like a dream, points towards fictionality. The readers can notice that there is no reality behind the story whatsoever, making it a metafictional self-irony.

There is one more section that occasionally disrupts the two timelines. It is the conversations between Sarah – the analysand, and her therapist Russell Watts – the analyst, such as:

ANALYST: *What was it about the game you found so disturbing?*

ANALYSAND: *I don't know whether "game" is exactly the right word.*

ANALYST: *It was the word you chose yourself, just a moment ago.*

ANALYSAND: *Yes. I just don't know if it's the right one. I suppose what I meant… [chat]…*[57]

The short discussions visually differ from the rest of the novel. They are written in the form of a play script which includes the character's "roles" in the "play". The paragraphs are in italics and the text contains additional notes in brackets, such as "chat" in the example above. These segments are a sign of postmodernism since the story is presented to the readers as a dialogue with lines of the characters featured in the book. Drama scripts commonly serve as a helpful tool for actors performing a play. Therefore, Jonathan Coe tries to once again demonstrate to the readers that this is merely a fictional story where the characters are not real.

It is worth mentioning that the novel blends multiple genres. Just as shown, even though *The House of Sleep* is a novel, it comprises elements of drama. Additionally, the book combines romance, science fiction and psychological thriller. Romance can be seen mainly in paragraphs about Veronica and Sarah, as well as sections which describe Robert's

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[55] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 275.

[56] Ibid., 279.

[57] Ibid., 9.

unrequited love towards Sarah. Science fiction is portrayed in sections about Gregory, where he talks about the advancements in medicine and his innovations. And finally, there are also parts that point to the thriller genre. For instance, when Gregory introduces his obsessive character, and turns into a mad scientist towards the end of the book. This means that there are no strict boundaries of the genre, which corresponds with the postmodern ways of rejecting the ordinary and embracing the unusual.

5.1.2   Metafiction

The House of Sleep is built on the basis of metafiction. Metafiction self-consciously reflects upon itself. The fictional element is formed by Sarah's dreams, which completely blur the boundary lines between fiction and reality. Sarah has narcolepsy and often falls asleep throughout the day, suddenly and without any warning. In her day-to-day life, she finds it very difficult to tell what is reality and what is not because "her dreams are so real that she could sometimes not distinguish them from the events of her waking life".[58]

In fact, many times dream does become reality for Sarah. For instance, when one of the most realistic dreams of hers causes her friend, Terry Worth, to lose his job at *Frame*. At the beginning of chapter 15, the readers unravel the story behind this accident. Sarah and Terry live together at the time. At some point, Terry has to leave for Italy for an interview with a famous director. He has no choice but to call Sarah and give her an easy task to fulfill while he is gone – to read his manuscript, correct any possible typos, take out the third footnote, and renumber the rest of the footnotes so that they match. Sarah assures Terry she will get the job done. She crosses out footnote three and changes the rest just as he wishes. Right at that moment someone delivers a letter written by Robert who no one has heard from for a very long time.[59] After reading it, Sarah falls asleep and dreams about proofreading and finishing the correction of Terry's article. She soon wakes up from this dream, swiftly places the papers into an envelope, and then throws the envelope into the postbox across the street. However, this is only her reality. The reality she manages to make up in her narcoleptic dream. None of this ever happens. Sarah never actually takes out the text of the footnote and renumbers the rest of the footnotes in Terry's article. She only dreams of it all happening, she believes in her own reality which is purely fictional. In this case, it is the reality that is substantial, a dream is a lie. *Frame* publishes the article. Consequently, more than seven people sue the journal for slander, her friend Terry is immediately fired, and the publishing

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[58] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 18.
[59] Ibid., 264-267.

house closes down because of the highly inappropriate content Sarah accidentally produces.[60] The article in the novel creates an entertaining experience for the reader, for instance:

> "We had a fair old chat about matters cultural and political (his reminiscences about a recent encounter with Larry Olivier were, I have to say, brief but tantalizing)"

This section is initially supposed to link to footnote 14: "They had met for the first time only a few weeks earlier, to discuss their shared enthusiasm for Jamaican cigars and eighteenth-century erotic drawings." Nevertheless, Sarah's mistake makes the text connect to footnote 13: "Extremely well-hung was Amis's only recorded verdict on this occasion."[61] Coe features the humorous article full of accidental jokes by a wrong reference for the readers to enjoy.

Additionally, Sarah starts inventing a new reality for herself through her dreams around the age of fourteen or fifteen. Chapter three reveals an incident that makes Sarah question her health state, thinking she might be going crazy. At that time, she is supposed to write an essay about the Franco-Prussian War and present it the next day in front of her class. She finds the task incredibly difficult so she rather decides to go to sleep. She then proceeds to dream about finishing a neatly written essay that is over four pages long. The following day, moments before her teacher asks her to share the contents of her work, she finds out that the high-quality essay in question is nowhere to be found. Sarah cannot believe it is missing, so she starts looking through her bag, and later on rummages through her locker, however to no avail. Her teacher thinks Sarah just came up with an excuse and so she puts her in detention for trying to cover up her incompetence.[62] Sarah finds out more about her realistic dreams many years later when she starts dating Gregory. One night, they go out for someone's birthday dinner, however, her recollection of the evening is very different from Gregory's. Sarah and Gregory sit down to analyze Sarah's memories that are far from reality. She believes the two of them had an argument, and she never attended the birthday dinner but instead went to a restaurant on her own. In order to sort out the situation, Sarah opens up to Gregory about her imaginary dreams while he carefully writes down all of the symptoms she describes, claiming it is fascinating.[63]

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[60] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 269.
[61] Ibid., 273.
[62] Ibid., 38-39.
[63] Ibid., 44-45.

Sarah Tudor's narcoleptic dreams which blur the boundary lines between fiction and reality are not the only postmodern feature in the novel. Jonathan Coe also adds a playful, ironic self-reference to *The House of Sleep*:

> "Veronica was reading: *The House of Sleep*, by an author neither of them had ever encountered before, whose name was Frank King."[64]

The author mentioning the exact title of the novel inside the novel is considered a sign of metafiction because it draws attention to the fact that the reader is engaging with a constructed work of fiction.

Another sign of postmodernism in the novel is Terry's hunt for a lost movie *Sergente Cesso*, which has never been shown to the public. Or in other words, what seems to be Terry's lifelong and absurd quest for truth on the run. One day, Terry watches a movie from Salvatore Ortese called *Il Costo della Pesca*. Before that, he has never seen any of his work and he becomes fully captivated. He visits the university library the same day and reads his biography. The moment he finds out that only a few people were able to watch his last movie, he becomes obsessed with the thought of doing research and digging deeper into the mystery. Terry strives to find the truth behind the movie no matter what, based on a single photograph he manages to find. His friends are not certain whether the film even exists since there are no viewing prints of the movie, nor any proof that someone has seen it.[65] Therefore, the characters are questioning the relationship between fiction and reality. As soon as Terry loses his job, his interest in finding the unknown film subsides. In the end, he calmly comes to terms with the fact that he will never get to know the truth:

> 'So, you're going to start looking for this film again, are you? That's going to be your life's work?'
> 'Actually, no.' Terry slid the photograph into a manila envelope and laid it on the table. 'I don't think that's the point any more. I'd rather just know that it's out there, somewhere… maybe waiting for me – I don't know… In the meantime, anyway, I've got to think of something to do with myself: something worthwhile.'[66]

5.1.3 Intertextuality

Not only does *The House of Sleep* feature metafiction and fragmentation. It also offers countless references to the works of other authors. Possibly the most notable one is the

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[64] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 118.
[65] Ibid., 128-131.
[66] Ibid., 316-317.

reference to Harold Pinter's literary works. The British playwright is mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter when Veronica is arguing with her peer:

> 'People who don't know anything about theatre,' Veronica continued, '*always* talk about Pinter as if he's the one of the greats.'[67]

In addition to this direct reference to Pinter, the novel also points to his postmodern writing approach. In his plays, such as *Silence* and *Landscape*, there are noticeable monologues of people who try to describe the past. However, they are disrupted by others who share their versions of the past. Everyone remembers past events differently, and there is no way to go back in time and validate who is right and wrong. The fragments of memory are unreliable. The borderlines of truth get blurred as time passes, and the postmodern quest for reality begins. In connection with this book, Sarah also remains in a place where she cannot distinguish the real from the fake. She is a dreamer lost in two worlds.

The novel carries a strong feminist theme – Veronica often lends Sarah her favorite books, some of the titles include *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett and *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, she brings up her opinion on gender that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". She is inclined to the view that gender is a voluntary choice and a "process of constructing ourselves".[68] This is connected to the topic of transsexuality, mentioned in *The House of Sleep*, since Robert undergoes surgery to change his gender to a female. It fits into the postmodern discussion as it blurs the boundary lines of sexual identity. It shows that gender can be fluid and diverse, challenging the idea of a fixed system of society.

Another piece of intertextuality featured in the novel is John Donne's *Go and Catch a Falling Star*. In chapter 6, Sarah and her colleague Norman ask their pupils to rewrite this poem and read it in front of the class. Each of them eventually comes up with their own version. Andy writes a rather rap-like ungrammatical poem that contains profanity. He associates the word stars with getting punched, figuratively speaking "seeing stars":

> "Gonna go down on the street, gonna get me a hit
>
> Then I come round your house and I beat you to shit
>
> You gonna see stars, motherfucker, see stars"[69]

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[67] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 5.

[68] Judith Butler. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex." *Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century 72* (1986): 35. https://doi.org/10.2307/2930225.

[69] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 99.

Alternatively, the next presenting student poetically compares the stars to herself and her family members. She reveals how she copes with grief after losing her mother:

'There was a little star and two big ones. One of the big stars died and turned into a black hole. The other two stars were very lonely…So they just stayed there in the sky, looking sad, and although they twinkled sometimes, all the darkness and emptiness made them very scared.'[70]

There is also a reference to Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Once again, the book is mentioned in the story. Terry uses it to hide a ten-pound note as a fallback in case he ever needs money. Other than that, there is a hidden reference for the readers to find in chapter 17. The section is about Robert's recovery, and settling into his new body, now living as a woman – Cleo Madison. When he feels comfortable, he arranges a first meeting with Sarah after five years of barely any contact. He invites her to Ashdown to show her his new identity. However, moments before he can reveal the surprise, Sarah mentions she is getting married to a man in the upcoming days. It breaks his heart, and he leaves the building crying, seeing "no shadow of another meeting".[71] This makes the reader think that Robert will never capture Sarah's heart regardless of how drastically he changes himself. Despite the dramatic ending, Jonathan Coe adds the final 18th chapter, which might raise the reader's hopes for a possible happy ending for their love story:

the moment she saw her, Cleo knew that she had been lying to herself; knew that she could not do without this woman at all. It wasn't possible, and never had been. 'Sarah?' It was all she could manage to say, at first. Sarah stared back at her, not recognizing, not yet guessing. 'Do I know you?' 'Of course you do,' she said. 'It's me: Robert.'[72]

Similarly, Charles Dickens's first version of *Great Expectations* builds up to Estella's and Pip's parting. However, at the request of Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens then wrote an additional second ending, this time creating a positive outcome for the couple.[73] Therefore, both writers leave it up to the readers to pick their favorable conclusion to the story. It can be argued that the plot is also inspired by *Great Expectations*, because Estella is an unreachable star Pip keeps chasing, identically to Robert who cannot seem to give up pursuing Sarah.

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[70] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 102.
[71] Ibid., 311.
[72] Ibid., 330.
[73] Albert A. Dunn. "The Altered Endings of "*Great Expectations*": A Note on Bibliography and First-person Narration." *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 9, no. 2 (June 1978): 40. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45290602

The novel might carry a reference to William Shakespeare as well, specifically the playwright's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Hamlet's monologue about life and death includes the phrase "to die, to sleep – to sleep, perchance to dream".[74] This means that Shakespeare describes death as eternal sleep and life as a dream. Dream supposedly becomes reality equally as it oftentimes happens to Sarah in *The House of Sleep*.

In general, there are many references to literature, music, and film. All these media can be considered texts because they can convey messages through audio or images. They are representations of reality, they refer to each other, but they are never able to arrive at reality. They frequently refer to texts which refer to other texts. The cycle keeps repeating but never settles on anything solid.

The appendix 3 section in *The House of Sleep* references to James Joyce's widely used narration style, the so-called stream of consciousness. The concept of stream of consciousness is that the storytelling is constructed in a way which represents human thought processes. In the featured transcript of Ruby's feigned sleep talking, her thought process flow is irregular. The spaces indicate her pauses to think of what to say next, and some words repeat, the same way as the human mind does not immediately interpret and organize all information in a fixed order:

> never quiet never quiet this house I remember that years ago always the waves never quiet sitting upstairs with her sitting with you I remember I was listening I remember it all the beach the day at the beach the things you said no limits you said no limits do anything anything to earn her[75]

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[74] Barbara A. Mowat, and Paul Werstine (Eds.). *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 127.
[75] Jonathan Coe. *The House of Sleep*. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), Appendix 3.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis focuses on postmodernism in Jonathan Coe's novel *The House of Sleep*. Postmodernism is a broad and diverse genre. Therefore, it is difficult to identify a single set of criteria or signs that definitely prove that the novel is postmodernist because many times postmodernism overlaps with other artistic and cultural movements, like modernism and dadaism. Some of the most common characteristics of postmodern works include playful literary techniques such as black humor, parody, irony, and pastiche. Furthermore, metafiction, fragmentation, and intertextuality play an important role in the creation of postmodern literature. The literary practices encourage readers to engage with and think about the text rather than relying solely on the storyline.

The analysis part concentrates on some of the most convincing features of postmodernism in the novel. Beginning with temporal distortion, demonstrated through the dream-like constructed narrative in two timelines that are around ten years apart. The story is a blend of romance, psychological thriller, and science fiction, pointing towards the fluidity of genre in postmodernism. The following subchapter is metafiction oriented, with the main focus on Sarah's dreams which are so vivid, that she struggles to distinguish them from reality. The mentioned examples explore the blurry boundary lines between fiction and reality, and challenge the readers to question the nature of reality and the role that imagination and memory play in shaping people's perceptions of the world around them. The last subchapter of the thesis addresses the presence of intertextuality in *The House of Sleep*. The novel consists of a number of references to a diverse range of literary figures, including Harold Pinter, John Donne, Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and James Joyce.

In conclusion, Jonathan Coe effectively uses postmodern conventions to play with the readers of *The House of Sleep*. Throughout the text, fragmentation, metafiction, intertextuality, fragmentation, and genre blending were proficiently used in ways that challenge conventional ways of storytelling, proving that the book serves as an example of postmodernist literature.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TV   Television

NREM   Non-rapid eye movement

REM   Rapid eye movement