“Deconstructing Binaries?”
A Postcolonial Perspective on Selected Contemporary Slovenian-Northamerican Texts

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to offer a postcolonial reading of Ted Kramolc's novel *Potica za navadni dan/A Potica For an Ordinary Day* (1997) and Sarah Stonich's novel *These Granite Islands* (2001), as well as give some general insight into contemporary Slovenian diasporic literatures in the USA and Canada. The selected texts are analyzed considering narrative techniques, thematic structures, symbols, imagery, implied world views, and epistemological systems. The focus lies on the transfer of imperialist epistemologies, the concepts of hybridity, third space, the subaltern, and binary oppositions such as center-margin, civilized-primitive, past-present, self-other, especially with regard to how these ideas influence the formation of national and individual identities, as well as the dynamic nature of cultural heritage. The analysis shows that, despite initial appearances of the opposite, Kramolc's novel is an attempt at the deconstruction of binary oppositions, whereas Stonich's novel transports dualistic epistemologies.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Theoretical Background on Postcolonial Studies</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 General introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The history of 'postcolonial studies'</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Frantz Fanon</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Edward Said: 'Orientalism'</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Main Critics and Key Concepts</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Homi Bhabha: Third Space of Enunciation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1.1 Hybridity and Third Space</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1.2 Mimicry</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.1 Deconstructivism and Ethical Responsibility</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.2 The Subaltern and Strategic Essentialism</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 Michel Foucault and the Discourse of Power</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A Brief Overview of Slovenian History</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Basic Facts</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Slovenian and Other Languages of the Former Yugoslav Republics</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Important milestones preceding the Slavic settlement</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Karantania</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The Emergence of a Slovenian National Self-awareness</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 The Illyrian Provinces, Romanticism and the Revival of National</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Illyrism</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Political and Literary Developments in the 19th and 20th Century</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Yugoslavia between the First and Second World Wars</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 The Second World War</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.11 Slovenia and Yugoslavia After the Second World War

### 3.12 The Independent State

### 4. An overview of Slovenian emigration and New World authors of Slovenian origin

#### 4.1 Less Known Contemporary Northamerican Authors

#### 5. Biographies

- **5.1 Božidar Ted Kramolc**
- **5.2 Sarah Louise Stonich**
- **5.3 Ray McNiece**
- **5.4 Natasha Saje**

#### 6. Hybridity, Mimicry and the Power of Discourse in Ted Kramolc's *A Potica for an Ordinary Day*

- **6.1 Structure and Plot**
- **6.2 Conceptual Structures and Narrative Techniques**
  - 6.2.1 The Past as the Constant Present
  - 6.2.2 The Woman as the Eternal Other
  - 6.2.3 Color Symbolism
  - 6.2.4 The Juxtaposition of Internal and External Realities
  - 6.2.5 The Significance of Names
  - 6.2.6 The Potica as the Ultimate Symbol of Cultural Hybridity
- **6.3 Hybridity as a Survival Strategy - Sonja’s story**

#### 7. Binary Oppositions and Colonial Epistemologies as Impediments to Survival and Third Space: Sarah Stonich's *These Granite Islands*

- **7.1 Introduction and Plot Overview**
- **7.2 Conceptual Structures and Narrative Techniques**
  - 7.2.1 Gothic elements and Madness as Metaphors for the Other
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2 Foreshadowing</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3 The Manipulation of Perspective - Isobel's Subjectivity</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.4 Symbolism and Metaphors: A Woman Is an Island</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5 Matrilineage and Womanionship</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5.1 Cathryn and Louisa</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5.2 Isobel and Cathryn</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5.3 Patrilineage</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6 Thematic binaries - Structured Antagonism</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6.1 Migrants, Foreigners and Native Americans as the Created Other</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6.2 Social Class/Social Castes</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6.3 Gender-specific Binaries</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.7 Intertextuality / Intertextual references</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.7.1 T.S. Eliot</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.7.2 Wuthering Heights</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conclusion</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Bibliography</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Primary Sources</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Secondary Sources</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Appendix</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 Original text excerpts from <em>A Potica for an Ordinary Day</em> in Slovenian</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2 Suggestions for Further Essays</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

In the wake of the expansion of the European Union and the ongoing process of cultural, social, academic, and political coalescence we can observe a growing interest in the cultures, histories, economies and research of the new European states, whose descendants also constitute minorities in the USA and Canada. What is becoming increasingly more apparent is the need for a better and more complex understanding of the present state of these diverse cultures and the developments that influenced it, which need to be investigated in the light of recent scholarly findings. This dissertation aims to shed more light on selected texts by contemporary North-American writers of Slovenian heritage and analyze them from a postcolonial perspective. The texts are compared considering narrative techniques, thematic structures, symbols, imagery, implied world views, and epistemological systems. The focus lies on the transfer of imperialist epistemologies, the concepts of hybridity, third space, the subaltern, and binary oppositions such as center-margin, past-present, self-other, etc., especially with regard to how these ideas influence the formation of national and individual identities.

Postcolonialism is a current academic discourse that developed as a consequence of a complex, multicultural reality and a growing multitude of voices demanding a re-evaluation of value systems, history, the literary canon, art, and other concepts that have been formulated from an imperialist perspective in order to facilitate the political and/or economical exploitation of different regions, particularly of former colonies. Generally speaking, postcolonial literary criticism is applied to the study of literature by migrant authors from former colonies, for example the African and South-American continents, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, or their descendants. Slovenian diasporic literature may not seem an obvious subject for a postcolonial literary reading, but there are several arguments that support such an approach, primarily because any diasporic literature lends itself particularly well to the analysis of intercultural knowledge transfer, developments in interstitial space, and the interference of binary oppositions. However, it must be noted that multicultural existence per se does not guarantee any deconstruction of binary dualism and hybrid developments. In fact, a closer reading of the selected texts shows
that persisting binary oppositions are the key influence in identity formation, and that seemingly modern texts may still transport imperialist ideals, ethnic, social, and gender hierarchies, as well as artificial and misleading dualistic constellations.

Early postcolonial critics like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and contemporary theorists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and others, have taken up several post-structuralist ideas. The deconstruction of artificially generated concepts and ideas is what both academic discourses have in common. A critical reading of literary texts is one way of revealing such underlying concepts and thus contribute to their deconstruction. The goal must not be a mere reversal of the power positions, but the awareness that ideas and concepts about culture, heritage, identity, etc., are dynamic processes which are being continuously negotiated in multilateral interaction.

The analysis of the selected texts also points out the dangers inherent in relying on overly simplistic binary oppositions, the inability to re-evaluate epistemologies, anti-assimilationism, and cultural essentialism. Power inequalities result from essentialist assumptions about race, ethnicity, social class, etc. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that power inequalities are also based on gender prejudice and exist within the same group, which might be perceived as a homogenous entity if observed from a distance. In most groups, gender bias further undermines the power of women, who are experiencing double marginalization (Cf. Spivak, 1988). The goal post-structuralists and postcolonialists pursue is the deconstruction of such artificial binaries in favor of a more complex and differentiated perspective.

The question that arises is what concepts could account for the multifaceted, (post-) modernist perception of the human experience, if old binary oppositions are deconstructed? One of the possibilities for a concept that could replace artificial dualism are the notions of hybridity and third space, as proposed by Bhabha (1994), or the strategic essentialism of the subaltern, as put forward by Spivak (1988, 1990). Although both critics criticize viewing cultures as homogenous entities with defined boundaries,

1 For counter-essentialist arguments see Brah (1996) and Yuval-Davis (2000).
they nevertheless allow for some form of strategic essentialism if it is considered individually in each new context.

Considering the size of Slovenia, Slovenian diasporic literature has relatively much to offer in terms of (auto)biographies, diaries, missionary- and travel reports, fiction, as well as a wide range of other miscellaneous writing. Nevertheless, there have been comparatively few scientific studies published on this topic, in part probably because it was – and still remains – a politically sensitive issue. The first anthology of Slovenian-American literature was published in 1977 by Edward Gobetz and Adele Donchenko. The second - and only - comprehensive anthology of Slovenian diasporic literature was published in 1999, eight years after the Slovenian declaration of independence. This anthology was edited by Janja Žitnik Serafin et al. from the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SAZU) in Ljubljana. The anthology consists of three parts and gives an overview of authors of Slovenian origin who are writing in the Americas and in Australia. However, this anthology only mentions works published up to 1994/5. The only other consistent source offering information on Slovenian-American writing is the quarterly publication Dve Domovini/Two Homelands, which has been published in the USA for over five decades. Another important publication is the 1995 compilation of biographical listings Who's Who of Slovene Descent in the United States, which was compiled and edited by Joseph Velikonja and Rado L. Lenček.

With the exception of the works by and about Louis Adamič, the most famous Slovenian-American writer to date, only relatively short scholarly works have been published on the topic of Slovenian diasporic literature. During my research I was able to find three North-American authors of Slovenian origin who have published texts of significant literary value and have, to my knowledge, not been mentioned in any scholarly publication. These authors are Sarah Stonich, Natasha Saje, Ray McNiece, and Joseph Kalar. In addition to these authors I was also able to discover a number of other authors of fiction or autobiographical writing who have produced works of debatable literary value and are also not mentioned anywhere in connection to Slovenian diasporic literature. These authors include Carole Howley, Sue Eckert, Donald Kambic, Jim Klobuchar, Mark
Munger, Michael Novak, Katarina Tepesh, who is of Slovenian and Croatian descent, Marianne Wolf, Richard W. Zalar and Walter G. Meyer.

My discussion is centered around two exemplary texts: Ted Kramolc's novel *A Potica for an Ordinary Day* (1997), and Sarah Stonich's novel *These Granite Islands* (2001).

Ted Kramolc (1929 - ) is a first generation Slovenian Canadian who is internationally recognized as a painter. In addition to this, he has been sporadically producing works of fiction throughout his life, most of it in some way reflecting the migrant experience. He has written four novels, three of which have been published. His first novel, *Podobe iz arhivov/Images from the Archives* (1992), is an (auto)biographical account of his early life and the defining events during and after the Second World War. The 1997 novel *Potica za navadni dan/A Potica for an Ordinary day* is a complex text giving insight into the lives of a group of first generation Slovenian Canadians, narrating the life story of the hybrid protagonist Sonja. Kramolc's fourth and latest novel, which is still in the process of publication, has the working title *Karavana brez vprege*, for which he has received funding from the Slovenian government, which could be viewed as a sign of political reconciliation. His third novel, *Tango v svilenih coklah/Tango in Silk Clogs* (2002), earned Kramolc a nomination for the Kersnik Award, a prestigious national literary recognition awarded to contemporary Slovenian authors of fiction. The novel is an introspective account of a painter's obsession with a femme fatale and offers ample material for a psychological analysis of discursive power dynamics. However, because of its introspective nature the text is not ideal for a postcolonial reading. The novel *A Potica for an Ordinary Day* was chosen for this thesis because the narrative is more firmly embedded in a social context and addresses a wider variety of issues related to multicultural experiences.

The analysis of Ted Kramolc's novel *A Potica for an Ordinary Day* (1997) will show how diasporic hybridity is proposed as a survival strategy in a contemporary, multicultural environment. The novel offers ample evidence of how binary oppositions determine epistemological systems, indirectly criticizes dualistic concepts, and
investigates the implications of static center-margin constellations. Hybrid processes of continuous re-evaluation, re-definition, and re-claiming of heritage, of the past and the present, of self and other, are offered as the only feasible solution to questions of national and individual identity. Incessant multilateral exchange in interstitial third space is proposed as a vehicle that has the potential to replace monolithic notions of nationality, ethnicity, and gender.

The second text that will be analyzed in this thesis is Sarah Stonich's debut novel *These Granite Islands* (2001). Sara Stonich (1958 - ) is an American-born writer of Slovenian and Irish heritage whose paternal grandparents were first generation Slovenian Americans. Stonich has written two novels so far and is currently working on three projects; a selection of short stories titled *Vacationland*, a novel titled *Fishing With RayAnne*, and a family saga titled *American River*, all of which are to be published in 2010. Stonich's first novel, *These Granite Islands* (2001) tells the stories of two women who meet in the 1930s, their marriages, and the ambiguity of their relationships. It has been translated into six languages and short-listed for France's Grand Prix de lectrices d'Elle.

Stonich's lyrical writing style is reminiscent of Anita Shreve's work in the way it switches between the past and the present, and shows influences of Margaret Atwood in the way it gives insight into the many-layered workings of the psyche. It has been chosen for this analysis over her second novel, *The Ice Chorus* (2005), a story about a middle-aged woman who moves to a small fishing village in Ireland to try to process a recent divorce, a romance, and find out who she really is. Both novels offer material for a postcolonial reading, but *These Granite Islands* is the better crafted narrative. Stonich's first novel offers a more complex thematic structure, more subtle and effective literary devices, and is more firmly rooted in a socio-cultural context. Moreover, *These Granite Islands* (2001) is an example of a text that is modern, sophisticated, and of good literary quality, but also one that transports dualistic thinking and reiterates binary oppositions. The text would lend itself well to a rewriting from the perspective of the subaltern, or a postcolonial
parallel novel comparable to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which was written as a subversive prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

The analysis of both texts focuses on the binary concepts of Self and Other, which is essentially a question of perspective and recognition. In the context of race, Chow (1998) points out that only white culture recognizes non-white culture, i.e. that the recognition of the Other is unidirectional. The same perspective can be applied to the dualistic opposition of western and non-western, or European and Eastern-European. The analysis of both texts shows that narrative perspective is essential to guiding the reader's subjectivity toward any one value system and is also the key for recognizing attempts at manipulation. It is therefore important to examine who exercises the power over what is recognized and (re-)presented, and in what ways binary oppositions influence the implied world views. Finally, this thesis is also an attempt to further elucidate the literary heritage of one of the less known minorities in the mosaic that is the literary landscape of North America.
2. Theoretical background on 'postcolonial studies'

2.1 General introduction

Postcolonialsim as a discourse in literary theory is widely regarded to have emerged in the second half of the 20th century as an attempt to vocalize the friction and multilateral dynamics between the old European colonial powers, predominantly Britain and France but also Germany, Spain and increasingly so the USA, on the one hand, and their former colonies, countries where colonial structures still exist and states which gained independence after the breakup of the 'Eastern bloc' in the late 20th century, on the other. Broadly speaking it includes debates about 'ethnicities', 'borders', global, transnational and diasporic literatures, 'culture wars', nationalism, cultural essentialism and all debates that stem from them. Further focal subject matters of postcolonial studies are concerns with identity, i.e. the dilemmas inherent in the development and the voicing of national identities of the formerly colonized or otherwise subjugated countries, as well as the reciprocal influence between these countries and the (former) superpowers.

An important aspect of postcolonial literary theory is the re-reading of history, the literary canon, concepts of gender, race, racism, 'ethnicity' and the dynamics of national and individual identities. One of the prime concerns of this debate is the distortion of experience within colonizing countries, which resulted in an inscription of inferiority upon the colonized peoples by ways of the former attempting to appropriate 'indigenous' traditions, motifs, language, religions and so forth to 'Western' standards, thus invariably transporting the now heavily challenged binary opposition between the 'West' and the 'Orient', which has often been internalized by the colonies. By claiming their own voice, these peoples are reclaiming their own identity and the former colonizing countries are re-evaluating their view(s) of their own history, literature, and identity by allowing for a multivocal and multicultural perspective. In his seminal work *Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha describes the postcolonial perspective as “[departing from] the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or 'dependency' theory. As a mode of analysis, it attempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition.” (Bhabha 1994: 248).
While the postcolonial approach tends to be applied to the analysis of relationships between former colonies and the (former) colonizing powers, this thesis aims to examine a selection of literature from a former communist country by offering perspectives and applying techniques typical of postcolonial discourse, obviously with certain reservations and alterations. Steeping the analysis in postcolonial literary theory may, at first, not seem the obvious choice for the study of migrant authors of Slovenian background, because Slovenia never was a colony in the traditional sense of the word, which pertains to colonies of the former European empires such as Britain, France, Portugal and Spain, or what used to be regarded as 'Third World' countries. Nevertheless, up to the declaration of national independence in 1991, the Slovenian people had, with minor exceptions, experienced political and cultural hegemony of other nations throughout their history.² What is more, the postcolonial perspective aims to shed light onto all minority discourse, which becomes particularly relevant in the light of the political developments in Eastern Europe and the Balkans over the 20th century.

Particularly since the end of World War II, Europe has been marked by the divide between Eastern and Western states, between First World and Second World countries. This antagonism becomes even more apparent when viewed in the global context of the Cold War, the opposition between capitalist and socialist systems. The disintegration of the former Eastern Bloc, the spreading of capitalism in formerly socialist economies and the emergence of several new European states calls for a re-evaluation of epistemologies, value systems, and national identities in both Eastern and Western European states. This thesis aims to focus on the so far largely ignored Slovenian migrant discourse and position a small fraction of diasporic cultural activity on the margins of canonized literature.

Up to Slovenia's declaration of independence in 1991, the diasporic aspect of Slovenian literature and overseas culture has been largely ignored on this side of the Atlantic for

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² The first Slovenian state Karantanijsa existed in the 6th century AD. Slovenians also achieved some degree of national independence within the Yugoslavian monarchy and the Yugoslavian republic from 1918-1941 and 1945 – 1991, respectively. See chapter 3 on Slovenian history.
political reasons. Since postcolonial discourse is not limited to formal political dominance but is also concerned with issues of power relations in other contexts, such as language, art, the inscription of implicit/explicit value systems, and the interpretation of history, all of which contribute to the development of national and individual identity, it seems viable to apply this kind of approach also to authors of Slovenian, Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian origin. This is because in a time of 'global literatures', postcolonial studies aim to include all literatures affected by the process of colonization, be that political or cultural, formal or informal. This is why the postcolonial discourse encompasses the former colonies but also the colonial powers themselves, as well as other nations affected by the process if imperialism. Therefore, literatures from Asian countries, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Malta, the Caribbean countries, South Pacific Islands, Central- and South America, but also the USA, Canada, Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union can and should all be accepted as legitimate subjects of postcolonial studies.

The USA occupy a unique category in such nomenclature. They are a former colony, i.e., they belong to the postcolonial category themselves, but they are also a colonizing superpower, i.e. neocolonial, at the same time. The USA tend to see themselves as a morally superior force striving against oppression, of which the declaration of independence from the British Empire was a pivotal gesture. There is also a prevalent notion that the States are an agent of bringing 'civilization' to places of 'anarchy' and 'primitivism'. The focus, however, seems to be on postcolonial aspects of the USA, which are being compared to the Roman Empire, although its history as a former colony is equally important. The emphasis on the USA's status of a former colony is significant for this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian diasporic authors frequently write from a multicultural or a minority perspective. They are overtly or latently engaged in the intra-national dynamic between dominant and subjugated cultures. Generally speaking, they also constitute a part of the American and the Canadian literary scenes and therefore deserve attention as one of the pieces in the American and Canadian cultural mosaic. Secondly, the USA seem to draw on, but also struggle with, its cultural and ideological heritage connected to the former European
colonial powers, primarily that of Britain. The relationship between the UK and the USA remains complex and controversial, but also provides a pattern of implied world views which constitute the justification for one culture's hegemony over another's.

Viewing the USA as a neo-colonial power but also as a former colony may help us understand the assumptions about inter- and intra-cultural struggles and identity formation. The USA seek to define their national identity by foregrounding the differences between their European ancestry, ('Old Europe') and the American newness. At the same time, the sense of a cultural hierarchy within the USA led by Anglo-Saxon-inspired views on what the 'norm' or the 'standard' should be provides ideal nurturing ground for interracial and intercultural conflict.

Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian writers constitute a part of the American and the Canadian literary landscapes. Thematically, first generation immigrants are still largely concerned with questions of the diaspora, while second and third generation Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian authors have already largely assumed an American or a Canadian identity, which clearly alters the approach to cultural heritage. Particularly the texts of first generation Slovenian Americans or Slovenian Canadians, such as Louis Adamič and Ted Kramolc, deal largely with questions of cultural difference, immersion, national and cultural identity, memory and cultural translation.

This dynamic of minority vs. dominant culture and a later – sometimes problematic - identification with the 'American' or 'Canadian' views about the cultural and political values of the 'American Empire', or the metropolitan center over the rural periphery (the duality of center/margin, urban/rural) lend themselves very well to a critical approach based on postcolonial literary theory and an analysis using theoretical concepts such as hybridity, third space, cultural translation, depth/doubling and discourse of power, all of which are defined below.

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3 The concept of a national identity as such is problematic because of its complexity and escapes ultimate definition but will be used here for the sake of argument.

4 For a definition of cultural translation, see sub-chapter on Homi Bhabha.

5 I am referring to a cultural superiority complex which will be explained later in greater detail.
For reasons mentioned above, postcolonial studies seem a very suitable theoretical background into which to steep this thesis, particularly because of the field's wide-ranging investigation of overt and covert power relations which affect all cultural contexts, including that of literature.

Postcolonial cultural discourse seems to offer a voice for the marginalized and act as an agent for underappreciated cultural phenomena. It is the lens through which we can examine societies affected by imperialism, its effects on the interpretations of history, art and politics. The discussions stemming from this field critically examine the resistance to political or cultural imperialism and established knowledge systems, and highlight novel forms of imperialism. The more detailed aspects of interest are, for example, the distortion of perception, the appropriation of language, value systems, myths, symbols, and traditions.

2.2 The History of 'Postcolonial Studies'

2.2.1 Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon (1925 - 1961) set the ground for an important change in mainstream social, cultural and literary criticism. He was a dedicated writer and social activist. The political struggles of oppressed peoples he witnessed during his lifetime were an important influence on his work, for example the Algerian people's efforts to achieve national independence, which resulted in a war with France (1954-1962). The historical context of the beginnings of Fanon's academic activity is significant because it shaped his theories on the effects of imperialism on subjugated countries and the oppressed peoples. It is a lesson on the subjective nature of canonic history that even today historians in Algeria and France are still engaged in a heated dispute over the Algerian war and the interpretation of what actually occurred during that time. France, for example, acknowledged that there had been a war at all only as recently as 1999, and even later that there had been massacres on the civilian population (Cf. Gibson 2003, 28).

Fanon was born in Martinique, then a French colony, and fought on the side of France
during the Second World War. This offered him first-hand insight into much of imperial and post-imperial/colonial dynamics. He was a harsh critic of imperialism and soon became one of the most influential theorists, revolutionaries, and thinkers of his time. Fanon’s views on political hegemony, ethnic segregation, racism and colonial oppression have been inspirational for numerous anti-imperialist liberation movements up to the present day, and even found their way into contemporary pop-song lyrics\(^6\). His theories remain relevant to postcolonial discourse, and almost every postcolonial critic references his two major works, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1963) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967) in their treaties.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1963) Fanon uses psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theory to explain the assumptions about the racial and consequently experienced personal inferiority, dependency and inadequacy 'Black' people experience in a 'White' society. Although his focus is primarily the dynamic between the white and non-white races, these principles can also be applied to the relationship between immigrant(s) and their secondary/externally dominant culture. This approach will be used for approaching literature of Slovenian migrant authors, taking one of Fanon's central themes, i.e., the divided self-perception of blacks and other socially fringed groups, in our case Slovenian immigrants who are out of touch with their roots and their primary culture, yet not quite at home in their secondary culture. As a consequence, the sense of national and personal of their originality is weakened or lost, which results in feelings of inferiority and attempts to either appropriate and internalize the value systems of the dominant culture, or demonize and distance oneself from it. This oftentimes goes hand in hand with the idealization of the culture of origin. In the case of Slovenians who fled their country during or after the Second World War for political reasons, the nostalgia for the homeland is also connected to trauma, which makes attempts at national identification.

\(^6\) A song by the band Rage Against the Machine, who celebrated several high placements in pop- and alternative music charts during the 1990’s, features the lyrics:

“...Cause I’m cell locked in tha doctrines of tha right
Enslaved by dogma, talk about my birthrights
Yet at every turn I’m runnin’ into hell’s gates
So I grip tha cannon like Fanon an pass tha shells to my classmates...”

\(^7\) Both terms, of course, are over-simplifications but will be used here for the sake of argument.
even more complicated.

It is interesting that in his works Fanon observes this kind of dynamic particularly in upper-class blacks who have attained a degree of immersion into 'white' society. Because of their attempts to become a part of this society they are also more susceptible to adopting its value systems and the psychological trappings these entail. Again, a similar dynamic can be observed among immigrants and the dominant culture of the host country. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon analyzes the dynamics of class, race, and national culture, particularly with regard to violence and the anti-colonial struggle. What is important for our analysis is Fanon's perspective of the subjugated people(s) on the manifestations of imperialism, which will be compared to the subjugated immigrants and their perspective on the dominant culture.

Outside the field of postcolonial studies, Fanon's works are influential on a global scale, now deemed to be primarily influencing groups who struggle for political and cultural independence, such as the above mentioned African Americans, the Palestinians, the South African Blacks, and other subjugated African and non-African peoples. With regard to postcolonial studies, he was a major influence on critics such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. The latter even puts a quotation from *Black Skin, White Masks* at the beginning of his seminal work *Location of Culture*, which stresses the necessity to consider the historical context when analyzing any civilizational phenomenon: “*The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time.*” (Fanon, quoted in Bhabha 1994: 1).

The aim of this thesis is to position the Slovenian case, its cultural history, the diaspora and the recent political events in a broader context of a national 'coming-of-age', i.e., a global context. Therefore, it is necessary to consider them in the light of international political and cultural developments mentioned above and point to the parallels and differences between the dynamics discussed by Fanon and the modern migrant discourse.

Fanon's ideas about language and assimilation are particularly relevant when discussing
first generation Slovenian migrant writers, such as Louis Adamič, Ted Kramolc, Rose Mary Prosen, Paul Larič, Rajko Ložar, Cvetka Kocjančič, Ivan Dolenc, etc. While there is evidently a substantial difference between a situation where, on the one hand, people are being forcibly colonized and, on the other hand, migrants moving - voluntarily or not - to a new country where they are not directly forced to but rather feel the need to acquire foreign language skills in order to survive or become integrated into society.

Exceptions to this are more extremely isolated 'ethnic' ghettos, such as some parts of Chinatown(s), Russian/Ukrainian/Polish neighborhoods, etc., where migrants tend to interact mostly with each other and cling to their primary culture and mother tongue with more determination. Frequently, the result of such behavior is social and cultural isolation, but also isolation from the primary culture, which is removed in space and time and has since changed. Yet the fear of losing the sense of personal identity causes many immigrants to interact with the new cultural environment as little as possible and to refuse to speak a foreign language.

The argument at the core of this discussion is that by accepting a language, the person also accepts the value system of that particular culture. Immigrants are under pressure to acquire the foreign language as soon as possible for them to become fully functional in the society of the dominant culture. A frequent phenomenon, of course, is the abovementioned formation of immigrant communities. At times immigrants function only within the boundaries of these sub-societies and feel little pressure or desire to acquire the language and customs of the secondary culture, although there must be some sense of pressure resulting from the awareness of the spatial dissociation from the primary culture.

The characters described in the analyzed texts display exactly the opposite behavior. In some instances they over-internalize the values of their new environment and idealize the (European-) Canadian culture and/or the 'American way of life'. Problems arise when the internalization of new value systems and efforts to blend in with society clash with reactions of outsiders who continue to view the characters through the prism of
stereotypes about immigrant, and fail to recognize them as individuals. In the best cases, people are able to shake the negative feeling and get on with their lives, but the texts also describe characters that begin to develop internal conflicts, feelings of inferiority and alienation.

The alienation people tend to feel as a result of such reactions functions on several levels, depending on the individual in question. For example, the inscription of inferiority experienced by a white-male-middle class immigrant will be different from that of a white-female-middle class immigrant, both of which will differ from the experience of the lower working classes and members of non-white races – these have to be differentiated again with regard to gender, profession, the environment and other circumstances.

Gwen Bergner argues that Fanon and other theorists fail to include the female perspective by relying too much on Sigmund Freud in examining racial dynamics only through a male, heterosexual perspective. Fanon, she writes, “wrests the psychoanalytic territory from femininity.” (Bergner, 1995:76). According to her, the book's opening question, “What does the black man want?”, is symbolic of the dissociation of the struggle for identity along the lines of gender (ibid), an argument made also by other feminist critics, such as Spivak, Sinha, or Chatterjee.

Maxim Silverman makes another observation, namely, that while this particular publication is influential on a global scale, it remains only a minor work of no significant importance in francophone countries (Silverman 2006: 1), which is ironic, given that francophone countries are the central subject of the book, but perhaps this is also a sign that the issues Fanon discusses remain a sensitive topic in the francophone world and, therefore, a culturally particularly relevant one.

At last it can be said that Fanon's ideas are essentially a critique of the fixed and static forms of national narratives and their alleged monopoly on objective reality. In socialist countries, the questions of controlling historical, cultural and political narrative are a
complex and important aspect. The practical part of this thesis will focus on such controls of discourse and the power relations that dominate the implied world views manifest in the selected texts.

### 2.2.2 Edward Said: 'Orientalism'

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was another important publication with a catalytic effect on the mainstream academic debate that later developed into the field we now known as 'postcolonial studies'. Central to Said’s theories is his criticism of what he saw as an artificial divide (a binary opposition) between the 'Orient' and the 'West'. He argued that the concept of the 'Orient' was a delusive abstraction which was initially constructed by the colonial super-powers Britain and France in order to provide them with the moral grounds for the political, economic, and cultural colonization of foreign territories. He claims that this division was facilitating the distancing of the colonizing countries from the nations they subjugated or still subjugate\(^8\), because it created the impression that the European\(^9\) civilization was superior to the native cultures with regard to heritage, moral codes, and political systems. European colonizers would thus help the disadvantaged civilizations by governing and directing them. According to Said we must critically examine the origins and developments of such epistemologies and regard all activity – political, cultural, or other - from more differentiated views and in the context of the specific historic circumstances:

“*My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally and politically a doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided in the Orient's difference with its weakness. ... As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge.*” (1978: 204).

Furthermore, he writes:

“*[the] whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence – in which I do not for a moment believe – but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting.*” (*ibid*, 273).

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\(^8\) Subjugation may be formal or informal, i.e. political or economic.

\(^9\) Again, the term 'European' civilization is a complex one and escapes exact definition. Here it refers to the nations of Western, Central, Northern and Southern Europe that established colonies around the world.
The aim, therefore, is not to find out the objective truth but to realize that all discourse, particularly debates pertaining to culture and politics, are marked by ideological systems. This also suggests that all literary and non-literary texts are affected by the ideological context of a specific cultural framework, of a certain time and a geographical place. This is what needs to be remembered and critically examined when formulating an opinion on a specific issue.

In his publications Said developed many theories that became guidelines for the postcolonial debate. His ideas were a landmark in the sense that he permanently altered the perspective of academic contemplation, which had up to then been almost exclusively based on European ideological concepts and closely intertwined with the politics of imperialism. He addressed what he saw as the artificial and misleading contrast of the concepts of the 'Orient' and the 'West'/Occident', which we now know transport numerous misleading stereotypes and prejudice. Said's views on overgeneralization, the explicit and implicit stereotyping that underscore artificial oppositions are of central importance for this thesis, because of the questions they raise about the development of national and individual identity.

In *Orientalism* Said argues that much of academic and mainstream interpretation of culture, history, and politics is based on European epistemological systems which are self-perpetuating and continuously reiterating European knowledge paradigms. The result is an unconscious negative stereotyping of everything non-European. The tragedy of this dynamic is that non-European cultures have tended to accept this artificial and discriminating categorization. Accepting such a value system as the norm caused them to perceive themselves as deviations and adopt a negative self-image.

Said’s work remains very influential among contemporary critics. Yet his ideas have their predecessors in theories put forward by thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Carl Marx, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Michael Foucault. Gramsci was very influential for the entire field of culture studies. He, in turn, was also influenced by the Marxist tradition, but also by Machiavellian thought and Vilfredo Pareto's theories about the influence of the elite(s) on
the masses (Marx 1848, Machiavelli 1531, Pareto 1935). The hypotheses formed by these theorists were very influential not only in literary and culture studies but also in the fields of sociology, history, and economy. Said adopted some of Gramsci's ideas, especially his concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argued that elitist groups maintain their status quo in society by coercing the underprivileged masses to adopt their value systems and ideologies (Gramsci 1947). Said translated this concept onto a global scale, arguing that the imperialist elites of the 'West' were very successfully imposing their epistemologies upon what they deemed the uncivilized rest of the world and thus fastening their political and economic grip on these countries (cf. Said 1978: 3, 19).

The link between imperialism and cultural hegemony is at the core of Said's arguments and an underlying feature of the postcolonial analytical approach. According to Said, this transfer of knowledge paradigms occurs via different channels or modes of representation, such as television, cinema, music, advertising, painting, but most importantly through journalism and fictional narrative (ibid, 6). It is the subconscious and covert nature of this transfer and the subconscious internalization of such transported paradigms that make this dynamic so complex and a challenging subject of study. This hypothesis is also reminiscent of Fanon's theories on the subjugated peoples' adoption of the value systems of the colonial oppressors (cf. Fanon 1952, 1961).

The aspects of Said's writing that will be of main interest for this thesis are his arguments about the representation of the 'Orient' in texts, which will be extended to include other marginalized groups, such as Eastern-European immigrant communities. The conclusion Said arrives at is that such representations do not reflect reality. This approach to the perception(s) of reality is symptomatic of the fragmented nature of the zeitgeist in the second half of the 20th century and in keeping with the postmodernist distrust of the belief in objective truth. In Orientalism, he writes:

"In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little… on the Orient itself" (Said 1978: 21).
In this thesis, issues of the 'Orient'/ the 'Foreign'/ the 'Other' will be dealt with primarily when analyzing Ted Kramolc's novel *Everyday Potica* (1997) in which identity issues of immigrants from non-European countries in Canada and the perceptions of the irrational, feminine 'Other', respectively, are central themes. The approach could also be applied to the study of his novel *Tango in Silken Stockings* (2002). However, the latter focuses much more on an obsessive love relationship a character finds himself caught up in, the analysis of that text would prove more fruitful if approached from another literary perspective.

With other text selected for analysis, the abovementioned dynamic between the 'West' and the 'Orient' will be translated to the relationship between Slovenian immigrants and their descendants in Canada and the USA and the dominant culture of their host country, the complex relationships between different (immigrant) communities, and the perceptions of all this from the immigrants’ perspectives. Although the grinding of the Slovenian culture against the Anglo-Saxon tradition is less conspicuous when compared to some other migrant communities who may show more obvious cultural differences, yet its dynamics nevertheless heavily influence, if not determine, the lives of the protagonists in the selected novels. The chosen texts also describe the processes of internalization of the host country's dominant values systems, the sometimes problematic identification with another culture, and the resulting national and personal identity crises experienced by the characters in the texts.

When formulating his ideas, Said was also clearly influenced by Carl Marx's theories, particularly the alienation of the worker from his work and the destructive psychological processes which are set in motion when the labor force is being exploited by the elite, up to the point of complete disregard for human life:

> If the alienation of the worker consists of being a 'slave toward its object', the worker is *doubly* alienated [my emphasis]. First, he receives an object of labour, that is he finds work [as one says: 'I finally found work!'], and second, he receives means of subsistence. He thereby owes it [to labour] the possibility to exist first as a worker, second as a physical subject. The last straw of this servitude [or serfdom] is that it is only his quality as a worker that permits him to continue to conserve himself as a physical subject, and it is only as a physical subject that he
can be a worker”. In other words, the worker relies on labour to find money to be able to live; but he doesn't simply live, he actually only survives, as a worker. Labour is only used to create more wealth, instead of achieving the fulfillment of “human nature” (Marx 1844).

While there is an experience of alienation on the one side of the socio-cultural spectrum, be that along race, ethnic, or gender lines, there is also a side that benefits from this distancing exclusion. Said argues that the reason why the 'West' has been so eager to distance itself from what it called the 'Orient' or the 'non-West' is that by contrasting itself with another entity – regardless of how false this construct of the 'Other' may be – it strengthens the 'West's' sense of identity.

Since the beginning of the 18th century, Europe has seen a development of national hegemonistic tendencies which were utilized for territorial acquisition and, arguably, culminated in the two world wars in the 20th century. During the Romantic Movement in the 19th century we can observe a new interest in folk tradition and national histories, which were often contrasted with the perceived characteristics of other countries. It was a time when nationalistic tendencies began to mark political discourse. A sense of national awareness and national pride was continuously emerging across Europe, later also in the USA and Canada. Prior to this, people would have been aware of the fact that other cultures and lands exist; however, there had been relatively little information about them available. In the early 1800s, cartography and geography were also still comparatively crude and inaccurate for any notions of the 'West' to develop yet. Also, the educational standards of the times were still rather limited and formal education was not accessible for a large segment of society, so there had been little accurate information about other cultures and, therefore, little nationalistic sentiment.

Large-scale colonization of the Americas, Africa and Asia in the 18th and 19th century brought about significant changes in economic and political dynamics across the world. Technological developments and the industrial revolution permanently altered societal structures and the economy, while scientific findings undermined the authority of the

church and its doctrines. At no other time in history had European societies experienced such drastic change. Drastic technological developments, scientific findings, political power struggles within and among most of the European states, and the often arbitrarily drawn state borders which did not necessarily reflect national diversification resulted in much international friction, an ever-increasing flow of information about other states and cultures, and a sense of existential anxiety which would prove a catalyst for the development of national identities.

Comparing and contrasting themselves with other peoples and/or states facilitated the development of perceived national identities across Europe. National identity also became an important component of individual self-perception and fostered a sense of belonging. Generally speaking, if a group adopts a kind of 'us-against-them' by positioning themselves as a unit against another group, then this will enforce a sense of security among the members of that group. As a consequence, a group tends to nurture notions of its own superiority (or sometimes inferiority) when compared to other groups. Usually, however, groups primarily tend to assign positive attributes to themselves and negative attributes to the 'others'. This assigning of group (or national) attributes to other peoples mirrors a culture's epistemological systems of their own society and is oftentimes marked by negative stereotyping. We will see later how the process of assigning negative stereotypes to other cultures can lead to a negatively altered sense of national and personal identity of entire nations.

In Europe, the diversification along race, ethnic, and cultural lines has been a parameter of identification at least since the Renaissance, as many classical works of literature prove, for example Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, or Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. However, the 19th century saw an unprecedented strengthening of national identities across Europe and the emergence of the concept of the 'West'. This development was encouraged by each country's ruling elites because patriotism made it easier to mobilize the population for warfare, acquisition of colonies and other political advances against other states. Instilling a sense of superiority into a people also facilitated the moral and ethical justification for colonial subjugation of other groups because those
would be perceived as primitive, irrational and lacking the 'right' moral codes. Said criticizes these discursive patterns, pointing out that they were resulting in false and artificial representations of the 'Orient' and justifying the subjugation of 'non-Western' territories, while at the same time strengthening the Western perception of its cultural, moral, political and economic superiority: “*European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self*” (Said 1978: 3). On a more subtle but nevertheless conspicuous and significant level, this process of distancing was also practiced against countries of the former Eastern bloc. Both sides were engaged in intense propaganda aimed at portraying the 'other' side of the Iron Curtain as primitive, oppressive or degenerate. At the same time a sense of a common adversary helped unite a country under the governing political and economic elites.

These kinds of artificial oppositional dynamics between nations and cultures, Said argues, were initially closely intertwined with formally imperialistic political practices, i.e. a country formally claiming the territory of another, for example, the British conquest of India. Nowadays, however, the early rather transparent political imperialism has been replaced by much more opaque forms of economic imperialism, resulting in numerous countries enjoying formal political independence but being unable to escape the grip of economic exploitation by more developed countries or corporations.

The tragedy of these developments is that by accepting the either formal or informal hegemony of a (former) colonizing power, non-Western cultures subconsciously began to internalize the epistemologies perpetuated by 'Western' forces. Like Fanon, Said realized that by accepting – or being forced to adopt - a foreign political system, a foreign language, a foreign education system, new religious beliefs and moral values, the subjugated culture will begin to internalize the intrinsic epistemological systems and adopt the belief in the superiority of the aggressors. While this may have happened forcefully in the past, these practices continue today although official colonization has been abolished. Fanon was also the first, who pointed out that it was the educated elite of a colony, who was most prone to internalizing the new value systems out of the
seemingly attainable wish to become identified with the more highly valued social strata and share the privileges of the ruling colonizing power. It is these elites who decisively contribute(d) to the development of a negative self-image of the subjugated people. bell hooks observed similar tendencies among blacks who were complicit in perpetuating notions of a 'white supremacy' by accepting some institutionalized forms of racism (hooks 1992).

This kind of inscription of inferiority upon colonies and other marginalized groups facilitates subjugation and has been occurring not only along racial lines but also along national and gender lines, resulting in a group's negative perceptions of the 'self'. Because these inscriptions of inferiority are subjective, unrealistic and artificial, several theorists, such as bell hooks, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, have tried to expose these dynamics and criticize such discriminating discourse, while at the same time raising the awareness of the inherent dangers of such value transfers to 'non-Western cultures'. This thesis will focus on literary representation of such realities. It aims to give examples of the internalization of such value systems and the problems it creates for the protagonists of the selected novels, particularly in the texts by Ted Kramolc.

Although postcolonial studies remain a controversial field and tend to focus on cultural production from former colonies and their exchange with the colonizing powers, it can nevertheless be applied for an analytical approach to Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian authors, because its aim is not only to unveil the imperialistic ideological issues but also to offer new perspectives on what has so far remained on the mis- or underrepresented fringes of literary, or any other cultural activity. It offers us a suspension of the classical center – margin binary or at least a new appreciation for the bilateral influence between the two. Scholars associated with the field of postcolonial studies have been engaged in extensive discussions of diasporic literature and the phenomena that accompany it, such as hybridity, third space, mimicry, nativism, complicity, and others.

While the economic exploitation of countries may be somewhat palpable through the
monitoring of finances and trade, the transfer of ideologies and value systems remains elusive because it is infinitely more complex and difficult to measure by using scientific parameters. What is clear, however, is that channels like popular culture, the media, educational and religious institutions are instrumental — if often unaware of it — in spreading imperialistic ideologies. In Kramolc's novels the characters incessantly reference personalities from the American show business, Hollywood movies, a wide range of typically American brands such as Coca Cola or Levi's, as well as Canadian or American artists, such as the Group of Seven, the songs of Elvis Presley, the Rat Pack and others. This multitude of distinctly western references suggests that these characters are so fully immersed in their secondary cultures that they have adopted many of the respective epistemologies. If so, they must also have adopted an implied ethnic hierarchy that places them as Slavs in an inferior position to Americans and Canadians of Anglo-Saxon or French heritage.

The internalization of such epistemologies is so potent that oppressive governments make the control of doctrines and value systems one of their top priorities. Under communist regimes, much effort was spent on controlling the media, art production and other cultural activities. At the same time, the West fought its own ideological Cold War with socialist and communist philosophies, often going to extremes such as the 'witch-hunts' of the McCarthy era. Diasporic literatures and authors who have migrated between such diverse backgrounds are ideal for the analysis of the effects of epistemological system clashes on an individual subject level.

Although there has been no formal colonial relationship between the USA, Canada and the former Yugoslav republics there has, nevertheless, been considerable — if rather one-sided - transfer of ideologies, particularly through popular culture. Because Yugoslavia had not been as isolated as other countries of the former Eastern Bloc, this transfer was, in contrast, quite dynamic, as the numerous references to American and Canadian culture in the chosen texts will show. Nevertheless, Yugoslavia was regarded, if not part of the 'Orient' per se, still part of the 'Other'.
A further point Said makes is that this division between the 'West' and the East, the 'Orient' and the 'Occident', 'us' and 'them', 'Self' and 'Other', was not the result of a homogenous joint effort of all European colonial powers, but rather a predominantly British and French construct, and the result of the specific developments in these countries (cf. Said 1978:4). He explains this with the fact that since the late 19th and early 20th century, Islamic countries have been almost exclusively colonized by Britain and France. Since the Second World War they have been dominated by the political interests of the USA (Said 1978: 3-4, 17-18). The USA in particular have been known for largely isolationist policies toward the rest of the world, which was an ideal prerequisite for sustaining the 'West', i.e. the 'true frontier' versus the 'Orient', i.e. the 'Other'. This focus on Britain, France and the US as chief designers of the concept of the 'Orient' has since been challenged by theorists like Crowder (1982) and Harrison (1988), who point out that other nations have also had considerable influence in Islamic countries. In the wake of 9/11, particularly during the G.W. Bush era, the 'us'/them', 'good'/evil', Christian/Muslim dialectics grew in strength, particularly in viewing the Muslim world as the 'Other'. It seems as if after the Cold War, the 'West' had found a new old adversary against which to build its identity.

In the case of western Europe, the Center viewed itself as opposition to the more primitive cultures of Eastern European and Southern Slavic states. The economic migrations of the second half of the 20th century, and waves of refugees resulted in a multicultural nature of all European societies. This phenomenon has resulted in a heightened – and oftentimes politically abused – sense of national self and cultural differences.

The text chosen for this thesis provide us with a unique mixture of transported value systems and implied world views. The objective of the analysis is to investigate in how far the so-called 'old world' values and static binary oppositions are being transported or deconstructed. Almost all of the characters in Kramolc' novel Potica have internalized western value systems, including the negative stereotyping of certain types of foreigners. On the surface it appears that the reiteration of imperialistic epistemologies is reinforcing the status quo. However, by the end of the novel, the only character who survives with
any hope for a happy future is the hybrid protagonist Sonja. In Stonich's case, on the other hand, the breaking down of traditional societal values is romanticized, but in the end the characters who attempt to rebel against imperialistic ethics are punished by death or social stigma. Therefore, These Granite Islands is an example of a novel which transports and reinforces 'old world' value systems.

The literary canon is full of examples of how clichés and artificial binary oppositions are transported through texts which have become part of mainstream culture, and are taught in schools and universities around the world. This is why post-colonial literary theorists see it as imperative that canonized literature be continuously revised and re-read with respect to the newest insights into the social, cultural and political circumstances that shaped the texts and determined what was to constitute the canon.

In *Orientalism*, for example, Said stresses that all cultural products such as literature, music, movies, paintings, sculptures, etc., were produced in a certain historical and material context, and must therefore be interpreted considering these circumstances (Cf. Said 1978). In *The World, The Text, The Critic* he discusses the “necessary interplay…[between]… a text and its circumstantiality” limits “the interpreter and his interpretation” of the text in question (Said 1983, 34). In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) he offers examples of how literature can enforce stereotypes. He illustrates his point by analyzing 19th century literature including the works of Jane Austin and Rudyard Kipling, arguing that a “contrapuntal reading” was necessary to break the self-perpetuating cycle of colonial discourse. Such a new interpretation should account for both processes, namely, that “of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was forcibly left out” (Said 1993: 66-67). Austen's and Kipling's novels show the world beyond England only as “subordinate and dominated”, furthermore, they “refine and articulate…the status quo” of the British colonizers (Said 1993: 74-77). A similar dynamic can be observed in Stonich's novel. Although rebellious nature of certain characters is romanticized, the text on the whole actually reinforces imperialistic ideologies. Aristocratic behavior, appearance and language is idolized, the social classes remain impermeable and deviations from
conservative codes of conduct are punished. The upper classes are set up as role models, and anything foreign is viewed through prisms of peculiarity and anonymity.

The reinforcement of such colonial epistemological systems is not transported overtly. It is implied in the discursive practices, the often indirectly expressed world views, and becomes obvious when the reader considers which aspects of a story remain underdeveloped. For example, in Jane Eyre, the romantic hero Mr. Rochester had married a Jamaican girl when he was young, which he then kept locked away claiming she was mad. She is only mentioned briefly and the novel elicits little empathy for her, while hers could very well be the greater tragedy of this novel. Jean Rhys wrote a prequel to Jane Eyre with her novel Wide Sargasso Sea, which is narrated from a distinctly Caribbean perspective. If read in direct comparison to Austen's novel it becomes an elaborate example of a literary contrapuntal reading, and a lesson in how the same events can tell an entirely different story if narrated from a different perspective.

Similarly, Said points out that in Mansfield Park the material wealth of the Bertram family relies on profit from their sugarcane plantation in Antigua; yet this side of the plot remains extremely underdeveloped, which shows that such topics were largely marginalized in artistic production. However, these novels should also not only be read with regard to their implied colonial world views. Said suggests they should be viewed as examples of how a “body of humanistic ideas co-existed so comfortably with imperialism” (Said 1993: 82).

Austen and Kipling are by no means isolated examples. Karl May's stories which take place in the 'Orient' or in Africa feature the goofy Muslim servant Hadschi Halef Omar ben Hadschi Abul Abbas ibn Hadschi Dawud al-Grossarah, who is a projection surface for very negative stereotypes about Muslims (for perceptions of the Orient in Karl May's texts cf. Horner 1993 and Kappert 1993).

Said assigns much of the responsibility for perpetuating the concept of the 'Orient' to scholars of Orientalism, who created this artificial entity against which they could better
define themselves. This distancing does not occur against an 'Other' of the same status but against something supposedly inferior that is or needs to be dominated, controlled, and governed. It must be stressed, however, that Said focused on French and British colonial activities in Islamic countries, as well as the US and its influence. It should therefore be kept in mind that the term 'Western' does for the most part not include other colonizing nations, such as Germany or Spain (Said 1978: 323).

Certain parallels can be drawn between the artificially generated opposition between the Orient and the Occident, and western Europe's ambivalent attitude toward Eastern European and Balkan states. Despite the fact that many of the regions are historically and culturally intertwined with each other, it can be argued that western European identity is based on the original abendland ideology which constructs itself as the culturally superior Center, and reduces other European states to an seemingly peripheral, homogenous yet exotic counterpoint that helps the abendland solidify its sense of identity.

Furthermore, significant parallels can also be drawn between the ambitions of former colonial superpowers and much of present-day American ideology. One of the beliefs that are common, for example, is that democracy – at least the American variant of it and other American value systems, which are regarded to be superior to those of others - need to be spread around the world. In that same spirit, less developed regions are looked down upon, regarded with incomprehension, pity, or even contempt. The aim is, at best, to educate, enlighten, and direct these peoples in the supposedly right direction. To what extent this kind of ideology is being sold to the masses to disguise political aspirations is debatable but there is a definitely a correlation between ideological and political/economic objectives. What is more, Said also claims that while this kind of distancing and condescension against the 'Orient' may have begun because of imperialist agendas and the need to legitimize colonial conquest, such epistemology has since become internalized by 'Westerners' and non-Westerners alike. This means that the negative stereotypes of the 'Orient' have been accepted as the reality around the world (cf. Said 1978).
Particularly since events like September 11, 2001, the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the continuous terrorist attacks around the world, and the paranoia and prejudice that emerged from them show a dire need for a critical examination of our knowledge and the ways it was acquired. Therefore, a postcolonial approach remains very much relevant to current issues, because it aims to expose the interplay between ideology and power and critically examine the subconscious transfer of stereotypes.

The obvious question arises as to what exactly these stereotypes are. The literary texts selected for this thesis are filled with discourse that is defined by stereotyping. At this point it should be stated that some manner of stereotyping is psychologically necessary for a person to be able to think and communicate in the categories typical of their environment and make sense of the world around them. It is important, however, that we have some insight into how this knowledge was acquired, who transmitted it, how and why this process took place, and how it affected us or others. Said summarized the characteristics of the 'Orient' as follows:

It [the Orient] is a European construct, one that was largely constructed by Britain and France, initially to legitimize their colonial advances. This agenda became blurred with time, and the transferred epistemologies became self perpetuating and internalized by 'Westerners' and non-'Westerners' as facts. (Said 1978, 3)

What is more, the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' are neither natural nor homogenous entities. They are “man-made” and tend to ignore the complexity of regional and temporal circumstance (cf. Said 1978: 4). The 'West' sees the 'Orient' as a deviation from the norm, backward, uncivilized, irrational, rather passive but also oppressive, fatalistic, exotic, sensuous and associative of the feminine. In direct contrast, the 'West' is considered to be the norm, rational, civilized, active, productive and associative of the masculine.

Said traces the development of the image of the 'Orient' by critically examining a variety of texts from the 18th to the 20th century. He points out that the term 'Oriental' was/is largely but not exclusively equated with Islamic culture (cf. ibid, 203). He also notes that the division between 'East' and 'West' helped European countries and the US develop and solidify a sense of identity. This is why the 'Orient' is to be considered an integral part of European culture, although it is often regarded as a rather distant and foreign entity (cf.
Said’s focus, however, is not on a realistic representation of cultures summarized as 'Oriental' because of the inherently subjective nature of any interpretation, which would result only in yet another misrepresentation. He is much more interested in the development of the concept of the 'Orient' as the 'Other' in the 'West' (cf. *ibid*: 6). Questions about the objective reality are not the central issue. The interest lies with the development of 'Western' perceptions of what reality is and how the emergence of these representations is directly linked to colonial agendas and intertwined with past and present political as well as economic power structures (*ibid*, 201).

### 2.3 Main Critics and Key Concepts

Despite the rather early emergence of this novel way of thinking over a century ago, postcolonialism - the term obviously being chosen later - did not become popular in literary criticism before the 1980’s with publications by critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Bill Ashcroft et al. Over the past three decades, different schools have emerged out of this or parallel discussions allowing for a multitude of theoretical perspectives, sometimes resulting in a misleading or unclear array of classifications and naming of disciplines, partly because of the overlapping nature of the subjects and methods in question. However, there are several schools and theoretical approaches that are central to postcolonial studies, these being the so-called cultural studies, American studies, borders studies, new ethnicities, a division in feminist studies, trans-Atlantic studies, studies of transnationalism and diasporic writing.

The following concepts have been put forward by theorists who have contributed to several of the fields of study mentioned above. This is a selection of concepts central to postcolonial literary theory that will be particularly relevant for the analysis of the texts chosen for this thesis.
2.3.1 Homi Bhabha: Third Space of Enunciation

Alongside Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha is one of the most important contemporary theorists in the field of postcolonial studies. His prime concerns lie with the construction of identity within the context of a postcolonial world. He is particularly interested in a critical examination of the ambivalence of (post)colonial dynamics that are marked by opaque power relations between the different parties. His central thesis, which is also in keeping with Said's theories, is that the colonial identity depends on the existence of an 'Other', but that this notion of identity is perceived to be threatened by that same 'Other'. The goal, according to Bhabha, is the creation of an in-between space, a cultural interstice, where different cultures can exist and develop together, grind against each other and thus produce something new and original. This third space, or in-between space, is hybrid and can also be interpreted as a place of contemplation and fruitful discussion, but it is also a space which needs to be negotiated. This hypothesis can be complemented with Spivak's theories on the subaltern and that understanding only transpires when contact between center and margin occurs on an intimate level where both parties are equal. (See subchapter on Spivak)

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and his other publications are an obvious influence on Bhabha's work. He takes up many of Said's theories, develops and criticizes them. One of the points of criticism for Bhabha, for example, is that Said builds his theory around the artificial 19th century-rooted divide between 'Orient'/Occident', 'East'/West' (Cf. Said 1978). Bhabha, who is clearly a post-structuralist, opposes any such binary opposition and rejects them in favor of a more differentiated perspective. In a manner that is typical of deconstructivist thinking, he criticizes polarization and argues that the relationship between these allegedly mutually exclusive sides is actually marked by a continuous bilateral influence. Such a rejection of categorical oppositions is inherently a classic post-structuralist approach, and Bhabha acknowledges this. He also concedes his debt to Jacques Derrida's deconstructivist theories and Lacanian psychoanalysis, but he appropriates these theories further. On the one hand, he rejects the above explained binary oppositions: “*Must we polarize in order to polemicize?*” (Bhabha 1994: 28); on the other hand, he does allow for some divergences but stresses the need for their
continuous renegotiation. He speaks of “negotiation rather than negation... [which facilitates] the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements: a dialectic...beyond the prescriptive form of symptomatic reading” (Bhabha 1994: 37). One of the reasons for this is that a certain degree of categorization is necessary and facilitates discourse, another reason are the current global political and economic power relations, which are marked by abysmal differences between the more and the less developed territories, as well as socio-economic strata:

“I am convinced that, in the language of political economy, it is legitimate to represent the relations of exploitation and domination in the discursive division [my emphasis] between the First and Third World, the North and the South. Despite the claims to a spurious rhetoric of 'internationalism' on the part of the established multinationals and the networks of the new communications technology industries, such circulations of signs and commodities as there are, are caught in the vicious circuits of surplus value that link First World capital to Third World labour markets through the chains of the international division of labour, and national comprador classes.”

Bhabha (1994: 29-30)

This excerpt also shows that Bhabha's theories, however complex and linguistically challenging they might be, are still rooted in current real-life circumstance and very critical of the unequal distribution of wealth/power and the exploitation of Third World countries. Bhabha opposes a strictly reactionary rejection of binaries, arguing that a simple inversion could possibly even reinforce it. He claims that the mutual exclusion of theoretical and political agencies also prevents the less-privileged masses to partake in the discussion that is essentially about them and for them. Referencing Fanon's influential publication, he writes: “The Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labeled pure theory are assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth.” (Bhabha 1994: 28) At the same time, enforcing an alleged bilateral exclusion of fields like art and politics is misleading, because “it fails to draw attention to the specific value of a politics of cultural production...” (Bhabha 1994: 29). He continues to criticize what he sees as an artificial opposition of theory and politics, claiming that academic discussion should and does not occur within the confines of abstract ivory towers but is rooted in the real life issues of the disadvantaged.

There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the
elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West. (*ibid*, 28)

What is ironic is that Bhabha has been criticized for exactly those characteristics he himself condones, such as elitism or Eurocentrism, as his critics have pointed out.

Nevertheless, Bhabha contributed several new perspectives to the field of postcolonial studies and introduced terminology which has become widely used in academic discussion. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha elaborates on concepts like hybridity, third space, interstice, mimicry, and others, all of which have had an enormous impact on the postcolonial debate and are central to the analysis of the texts discussed in this thesis.

2.3.1.1 Hybridity and Third Space

Discussions about hybridity, liminality, interstices and third space are becoming increasingly important in mainstream academic discussion as cultures, social strata, genders and political systems are mingling and grinding against each other on an unprecedented scale, both globally and in regional/local contexts. Different theorists have interpreted the concept of hybridity in different ways. Furthermore, the term is used in a number of disciplines and has been subject to change in connotation over time. It originates from biology, where it refers to offspring of mixed breed or heritage. The definition of *hybrid* according to the OED is as follows:

> “f.L. *hybrida*, more correctly hibrida (ibrida), offspring of a tame sow and wild boar; hence, of human parents of different races,, half-breed. […] A few examples of this word occur early in the 17th c.; but it was scarcely in use till the 19th. The only member of the group given by Johnson is HYBRIDOUS a […]”

Alternatively, it also describes *anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements.* (OED 1989: 523).

In the 19th century the term 'hybrid' took on negative and racial connotations. The *OED* provides an example of this from the late 19th century which, on the one, hand implies an
idealized view of the exotic, but at the same time expresses the negative attitude toward individuals of mixed heritage which is typical of the colonialist discourse: “[N]egroes from the Soudan, not such sickly […] hybrids you see in Oxford Street […] but real down-right Negroes, half naked, black as ebony.” (OED, ibid).

Monika Fludernik (1998:10) quotes Liselotte Glage on the origins of the term in the context of the postcolonial debate:

“…the term hybridity in its ‘postcolonial’ connotation was first used in 1980 (1995:81), [but] the general notion of hybridity was around even earlier though referred to, variously, as creolization (Brathwaite 1971) or syncretism (JanMohamed 1985).” (Fludernik 1998: 10-11).

Both authors, Brathwaite and JanMohamed, refer to the joint space that goes beyond the binary oppositions of Self and Other, Orient and Occident, which are central to creolization, syncretism, hybridity, and mimicry. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also draw the parallel between creolization, syncretism, and hybridity and situate these phenomena in a socio-political context, albeit in an unmistakably poststructuralist and deconstructivist fashion. In The Empire Writes Back, they define syncretism - which can be compared to but not equated with hybridity - as a characteristic feature of all postcolonial literatures and point to the political component of such dynamics. (cf. Ashcroft et al 1989: 33-7). The connection between the politics of imperialism and the dichotomy of Orient/Occident can be traced through the works of nearly all important postcolonial theorists including Fanon, Said, and Bhabha who, each developing a slightly different interpretation, agree that the nature of postcolonial existence is essentially a hybrid one, and requires the deconstruction of binary oppositions.

In the seminal postcolonial work Location of Culture (1994), Homi Bhabha interprets the concept of hybridity on several different levels. He sees hybridity and the Third Space of Enunciation as the pivotal space where identity is constantly formed and re-formed. It is the social, cultural, and linguistic interstice where reflection, discussion, and interaction can take place. In a truly deconstructivist fashion and in the tradition of poststructuralists like Foucault and Derrida, Bhabha dismisses the dichotomies of Self and Other.
Therefore, Third Space is considered to be a continuously changing hybrid space where identity is being incessantly constructed and reconstructed but never fixed.

The thesis of the renegotiation of realities is not new. Bhabha, for example, cites J. S. Mill, who wrote that the problem of political judgment was to find a rhetoric that would be able to “represent different and opposing political contents not as a priori preconstituted principles but as a dialogical discursive exchange; a negotiation of terms…” (Bhabha, 1994: 34). Other writers he concedes his debt to are Montesquieu, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva, to name only a few. (Bhabha, 1994: 45pp). Other important theorists who have contributed to the discussion of Third Space and hybridity are also Spivak (1990; 1999), Soja (1996), Gutierrez (1999), Routledge (1996), Hollinshead (1998), and Khan (2000). Investigating literature in the light of these findings is becoming increasingly important, as voices from the margins are beginning to grow in discursive strength. At the same time it is important to remember that these margins do not only pertain to migrant discourse but also to feminism, albeit feminist theorists have discussed Third Space from a different perspective.

Both novels discussed in this thesis will be investigated with respect to the abovementioned critical approaches. Both texts offer the possibility of either a superficial/traditional, or a more critical postcolonial reading. Kramolc's novel examines situation of Slovenian immigrants in a contemporary Canadian context, and offers a more differentiated perspective of what is simplistically considered a homogenous social group and is marked by extensive stereotyping. She views identity as in “a space of always becoming” (Khan 2000: 129), which is very much in keeping with Homi Bhabha's views on the progressive temporality of Third Space.

Robert Young gives a helpful outline of the usage of the term hybridity in Colonial Desire (1995). He traces its development from 1813, when it was first employed in reference to humans, and points to the negative racial connotations that were also mentioned above. One of the most prevalent topics in early discussions of hybridity pertained to the dangers of racial mixing and equated non-white races with animal
species. (cf. Young 1995). This may sound primitive from today's perspective, but if we remember that, for example, Australian aboriginal peoples were considered part of the continent's flora and fauna up until the referendum on Aborigines in 1967, it becomes clear that this issue remains controversial and relevant for the present time. Mercer (1988), Hall (1990) and Young (1995) go even further and apply the term hybridity to diasporic contexts. Hall and Young also draw parallels between the mixing of cultures with political conflicts (cf. Hall 1990, Young 1995).

Initially, theories about postcolonialism and hybridity referred merely to African, Asian, and other non-European cultures. This becomes apparent with Simon During's definition of postcolonialism, which he defines as “the need, in nations and groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images“ (1987: 33). This, obviously, does not apply to Slovenia and other Central and Eastern European countries, which share a European heritage and have been under the rule of European monarchs for centuries. Slovenia, for example, holds a unique position. It is a Slavic nation with pagan origins, and throughout history it has been influenced by very diverse neighboring cultures like those from the regions of today's Italy, Croatia, Hungary, and Austria. Furthermore, it has been under Germanic, Italian, French (Napoleon) and Yugoslavian rule, which contributed to a unique and hybrid nature of its character, making it an ideal subject for the study from a postcolonial perspective.

Homi Bhabha is probably the best known contemporary theorist who contributed to the debate around hybridity. He already began to make a name for himself as a theorist during the late 1980's and early 1990's. When Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) were published in the UK, where he was lecturing at the time, he went on to become one of the most important contributors to the debate concerning this controversial book. He also began to publish increasingly more about his views on identity, ethnicity, fundamentalism, liberalism, and other subjects of postcolonial studies. He drew parallels between the agenda of the dominant imperial discourse via subaltern channels and the dynamics of diasporic communities in the West. By doing so he showed that postcolonial
studies are very well suited to be applied to the study of diasporic literatures, including literatures that are produced in and by authors from Eastern Europe. He points out parallels between the identity issues countries of the former Commonwealth are dealing with and the need for a re-interpretation of political systems, national identity and culture Eastern European states were facing. By doing so he also shows incredible foresight, because the political turmoil in Eastern Europe during the 1980's brought about some of the greatest changes in the European political landscape and eventually resulted in the fall of the Berlin wall, the breakup of the former Soviet union, in Yugoslavia the declaration of independence by consecutively Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the subsequent wars in Croatia and Bosnia and, more recently, Kosovo's declaration of independence and several other political, national and ethnic struggles across the continent.

“...if you just begin to see what's happening in Eastern Europe today - that's a very good example: people are having to redefine not only elements of socialist policy, but also wider questions about the whole nature of this society which is in a process of transition from a communist-state, second world, iron curtain frame of being. Socialism in both the East and the West is having to come to terms with the fact that people cannot now be addressed as colossal, undifferentiated collectivities of class, race, gender or nation. The concept of people is not 'given', as in essential, class-determined, unitary, homogenous part of society prior to politics; 'the people' are there as a process of political articulation and negotiation across a whole range of contradictory social sites. 'The people' always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed.”

Bhabha: "Third Space. Interview". In: Rutherford (1990: 220)

This was also one of the first instances when Homi Bhabha was cited on his ideas about 'third space', which are generally mistakenly regarded to have entered academic discussion with his 1994 publication Location of Culture, where he also frequently references socialist theories and systems, as well as the binary oppositions of “socialist or materialist (as opposed to neo-imperialist or humanist)” Bhabha (1994: 37).

Nevertheless, Bhabha argues against monolithic divisions, such as progressive/reactionary, right/left, East/West, etc. The existence of such opposites, he argues, is static and only reiterates oppositional elements without any progression or development. The central characteristic - and probably the most important point he makes
in his publications - of what he calls 'third space' is that it is not a place of mere static negation but a site of negotiation, which means that a temporal component is added to the dynamics of discourse.

This temporal component is of key importance for Bhabha's theories because it shifts the perspective to the development of epistemologies and stresses – in true post-modern fashion – that there is no permanent objective knowledge we can pin down with (comparison-based) definition. Because culture is constantly changing, the objectives and the concepts pertaining to it must continue to be re-negotiated and re-interpreted.

“[D]iscursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized anew” (Bhabha 1994, p. 55). This implies that “third space is a place where we negotiate identity and become neither this nor that but our own” (English, 2005), i.e. it is something new, unprecedented and inherently hybrid. A similar definition is offered by McLaren in his essay “Multiculturalism and the post-modern critique”, where he states that:

Third space is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where identity is constructed and re-constructed, where life in its ambiguity, complexity, and hybridity is played out. The notion of third space opens up possibilities for new structures of authority and for new interpretations of identity as contingent, temporary, and fluid. (McLaren, 1994: 16)

The 'in-between' and the 'unhomely' are spaces, where “newness enters the world”, to quote Bhabha (cf. Bhabha 1994). They are the result of change, development and of the mimicry of the other. As the words suggest, they are a departure from what used to be home and are not finite but permanently changing. In that, the migrant is permanently nomadic, however, the new environment changes with them. All sides that partake in this process re-invent themselves and are part of the re-negotiation of the self and the other.

The problem with the concept of the 'Other' and of binaries, as critics like Fanon and Said have also pointed out, is that of articulation. What the other is depends on perspective. Also mere negation of something by proposing or advocating a contrasting opposite
actually reiterates and thus solidifies the former. A progression or development is thus halted because the concepts are again suspended in limbo. Bhabha cites Fanon from *Wretched of the Earth* (1963: 168) and points out that it is in periods of great change that people experience instability and insecurity and that it is during these times that value systems can be influenced by outside fractions, who manage to seize control over discourse:

“But [native intellectuals] forget that the forms of thought and what [they] feed … on, together with modern techniques of information, language and dress, we have dialectically reorganized the people’s intelligences and the constant principles (of national art) which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing extremely radical changes…. [W]e must join the people in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to….which will be the signal for everything to be called into question…it is to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come.”


In a post-colonial and/or a post-socialist context – the latter being more relevant to this thesis – in times of great change or revolution is when epistemological systems are being extensively re-evaluated and re-organized. The binary divisions of past and present, tradition and modernity harbor a potential for the solidification of culture through its translation to a new context. However, particularly during such times of change the (re-) inscription of foreign value systems can be imposed more easily onto subjugated cultures. The danger of such transitional periods, Fanon and Bhabha point out, is that knowledge is controlled by authority and that it is these dynamics that must be continuously critically evaluated so that artificial epistemologies are not imposed upon entire societies in order to subjugate them politically or culturally.

This line of argument is in keeping with Foucault's theories on the discourse of power (cf. Foucault, 1994). Said also makes this point in *Orientalism* by stating that intellectuals from territories summarized under the term the 'Orient' are particularly responsible for spreading European value systems and causing their cultures to adopt a negative self-image because the often Western-educated academics internalize and reiterate European – mainly British, French or American – interpretations of the world, which see them as culturally inferior to Western societies, which again fastens the Western economic grip
on these countries (cf. Fanon, 1978: 19).

Furthermore, the above quotation also shows that Fanon implies a temporal dimension to the interpretation of culture, a point Bhabha continues to expand on in his arguments. He also stresses the need for intervention, which is in keeping with his insistence that academic discourse and political action are not mutually exclusive.

Bhabha continues that this imposing of an allegedly homogenous, temporally consecutive historic and/or cultural narrative might come in the guise of tradition that is actually only a reflection of antecedent power dynamics and an imposing or a reiteration of foreign epistemologies:

“It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.”

(Bhabha 1994: 51-2).

The concept of the Third Space of Enunciation disrupts the homogenous historical narrative, which is marked by a singular, consecutive timeline that is typical of the – now challenged - European/Western concept of history:

“the Third Space of Enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process... challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People.” (Bhabha 1994: 54).

Third space is essentially hybrid. In this cultural interstice the past and future are continuously intermingling while identity, history and culture are being continuously re-negotiated and thus become relevant for the present. Not only is third space important because it is regarded to be the space where different worlds meet and mingle, it is essentially the space that affects and changes both sides – the colonizers and the colonized, the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West, capitalist and socialist, Inländer and Ausländer – depending on where one might be tempted to draw the line. It is always the dichotomy of Self and Other, norm and deviation, center and margin, which manifests itself in a variety of categories: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social strata,
religion, political persuasion, etc.

We can observe that the trend in the postcolonial debate has become increasingly inclusive of a variety of socio-cultural fractions. While earlier the terminology pertaining to hybrids, creolization and syncretism has been limited to the development of African peoples and cultures, Ashcroft et al but even more importantly Homi Bhabha have begun to apply concepts of hybrid developments to other cultures, as well. Bhabha, for example, devoted much of his time to the study of Indian diasporic writing but acknowledged the importance of the postcolonial debate for other nations, including the Eastern European states. As Elisabeth Bronfen also points out, Bhabha's concept of hybridity centers around the dichotomies of inside/outside, us/them, dominant/dissident, mainstream/subculture, global/local (cf. Bronfen 1997: 3), although such divisions are actually highly subjective, volatile, and dependant on perspective and interpretation. The decades after WWII were marked by Cold War politics and the Iron Curtain was one of the symbols of such divisions, similarly like official colonial rule was an open indicator of the power dynamics in a given region. Since the – at least formal – declaration of independence by the former colonies after WWI, the disintegration of the Commonwealth, the fall of the Soviet Union and the wars in the Balkans in the 1990's, these divisions have become more opaque and its intricacies more visible. This leaves researchers with ample ground for a differentiated view of developments in the postcolonial era, much like Homi Bhabha proposes in LOC, thus attempting to refute charges of overly complex elitist discourse, which reverberate among his critics.

Bhabha takes up Lacan's concept of the imaginary, according to which the two sides undergo a splitting of their respective interpretations of their identities. Here, Bhabha uses his concept of mimicry to explain this split, arguing that it is the (partial) mutual identification that causes the split in perceived identities between the Self and the Other. This echoes preceding theories Frantz Fanon, Derrida and Bakhtin, whose influence Bhabha openly acknowledges in his publications.
2.3.1.2 Mimicry

The term mimicry originates from the Greek term 'mimesis', which is most commonly translated as *imitation*. It was initially used in biology to describe a species imitating the appearance and/or behavior of another's to gain an advantage or improve its protection in a given setting. It has since been adopted by anthropologists, behaviorists, cultural scientists and theorists from other fields. Dictionaries, lexica and individual theorists offer several definitions of mimicry:

Mimicry, **noun:**

1. The act of mimicking; imitative behavior.
2. The resemblance of an animal species to another species or to natural objects; provides concealment and protection from predators. *(Webster, online document)*
3. The similarity of two species for advantage. *(wordnet.princeton, online document)*

Mimicry is one of the key concepts in Bhabha's texts and has since become a widely referenced ideas in literary criticism and culture studies. In defining his version of the concept Bhabha was influenced by several schools of thought, among them the above mentioned theorists like Fanon, Derrida, Bakhtin, schools like Marxism, semiotics, to some extent Freudian psychoanalysis but primarily by Lacanian psychoanalysis, which he acknowledges as an appropriate method of analysis for issues of identity, language, and culture, because it focuses on the workings of ideology and epistemology within cultures. At the beginning of the chapter “Of Mimicry and Man”, he quotes Jacques Lacan's definition of the concept of mimicry, which shows the transfer of the concept from nature to humans, deliberately employing warfare-related vocabulary, to imply the antagonistic nature of inter-cultural co-existence:

"Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage…. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.”
(J. Lacan: “*The line and light*, Of the Gaze.” In: Bhabha 1994: 121)
Bhabha offers his own definition of mimicry, stressing the doubling nature of imitation, which consequently results in a splitting of perceived identities. He also gives a reason why mimicry is employed by the Other, it mimics what it perceives as powerful in an attempt to acquire more control and alleviate its disadvantages in the persisting power-struggle:

Mimicry is, then, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers.

(Bhabha, 1994: 122-3)

This kind of doubling and division, which results from mimicry, is symptomatic of the modern(ist) state of mind. If a society or a culture senses that what had been considered objective standard is essentially subjective, it begins to question its identity. Such uncertainties may lead to an even greater desire to view the world in simplistic, easy-to-understand categories. Paul Gilroy, who wrote about such a “fragmentation of the self [i.e. a fragmented sense of identity, of history and of culture] which modernity seems to promote” (1993: 5), came to the conclusion that in a given society, particularly in the American culture, such a differentiated and, consequently, more complex view of the world was not at all desirable and that society favored the more easily accessible, simplistic and many times arbitrary categories of binary oppositions.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry can be compared to Derrida's deconstructivist concepts of 'dissémination', 'trace' or the 'au-dela', the beyond (cf. Derrida 1967, 1968, 1972): “Nous savons, disions-nous plus haut. Or nous savons ici quelque chose qui n'est plus rien, et d'un savoir dont la forme ne se laisse plus reconnaître sous ce vieux titre.” (Derrida 1972:30).

These strategies of mimicry, of the in-between and of constant re-negotiation stand in direct opposite to essentialist articulation of cultural differences and rigid constructs of binary oppositions. “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition.”
For Bhabha, mimicry is a channel through which the colonized or the otherwise disadvantaged and marginalized can influence – i.e. write back to – the centre. The underprivileged therefore use imitation, adoption and ultimately – be that conscious or not – subversion of existing power dynamics. Bhabha also suggests that this kind of imitation is very unsettling for the centre, i.e. the dominating segment of society, who feel that the foundations of their constructed superiority are being threatened. It is also unsettling, because it mirrors back the behavior of the Center but is never completely identical. Such imitation stresses certain behavioral patterns that may have been followed on a subconscious level, makes them more conspicuous and elevates them toward conscious reflection. The consequence of forced conscious reflection of predominantly subconscious behavior, automatisms and epistemologies is a questioning and, thus, undermining of such principles, is what makes them unsettling for the Center, whose perception of identity feels destabilized. This results in ambivalence, rejection or a sense of antagonism, fuelled by focusing on the contrasts and differences between the different worlds, cultures, races, ethnicities, social strata, etc. in order to (re-)stabilize one’s own identity.

The mirroring principle has been used in psychology and psychoanalysis since Freud. Lacan appropriated and reinterpreted Freud’s work on this subject and introduced the idea of the ‘Mirror Stage’. It was a concept applied to the analysis of the early development of children, who begin to develop the notion of Self after they seeing themselves in a mirror or their bodies reflected in a parent. The image the child perceives becomes the basis of identification and sets off the process of identity formation. Lacan sees the ego as being fundamentally dependent upon comparisons with an Other, but because the actual experience of the Self will never be completely the same as the initially adopted image – or ‘imago’- of the self. According to Lacan this is also the cause of internal friction and possibly neuroses an adult will experience throughout their life. At the same time, the same dynamic transcends the elementary bodily identification to include other areas like language and social behavior, helping a person to function in
society by being susceptible to symbology and power relations. (cf. Lacan 1977). This is significant for the postcolonial debate because it suggests that our perceptions of identity are fundamentally unstable.

Another relevant concept is that of the 'gaze', which has also been derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis with particular reference to the 'Mirror Stage' during which the infant sees itself mirrored in the mother and the subsequent first sense of the Other when it realizes the distinction between itself and the parents. The same dynamic applies to the formation of subjectivity and it represents power. The side that looks, i.e. the center, is in the position of power, and the side that is looked at, i.e. the margin, is in a disadvantaged, subordinate position. This concept will be taken into account when analyzing the selected primary texts with regard to the power of discourse proposed by Michel Foucault, as well as the importance of perspective for the solidification of gender-specific evaluation patterns that are being transported in the texts.

One of the motivational factors for mimicry – the admiration and the desire to acquire some of the power a superior group enjoys in society – has been discussed above. Another side of mimicry, however, is also mockery, which is particularly unsettling for the group that is being mimicked, as Bhabha points out: “Mimicry repeats rather than represents” (Bhabha 1994: 125). At the same time, this ambivalent space facilitates the development of a new discourse and gives way to progress, because, according to Bhabha, production is most productive when it is ambivalent:

“It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. [...] The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.” (ibid, 123)

The rather narcissistic nature of the Center’s perception of its own identity can therefore be challenged on several levels; culturally, historically and racially. This ‘gaze of
‘otherness’ (Bhabha 1994: 126) undermines the colonial perception of superiority and unity and a displacement of authority. Bhabha quotes Foucault on this subject: “[the gaze of otherness] liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty” (ibid), resulting in feelings of alienation, insecurity and/or aggression. From a subordinate’s perspective, however, mimicry must produce this kind of slippage in order to be effective and that way functions as a device for an almost ironic commentary.

2.3.2 Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak

Another important contributor to the postcolonial debate and several other fields like deconstruction, feminism, subaltern studies or ethics is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She began to make her mark on the academic world through her engagement with Derrida and Marx in the mid 1970's and has since introduced many fundamental concepts and ideas that have become part of the standard terminology of literary and cultural discourse today. She has been widely praised and criticized but the importance of her contributions to contemporary academic debate remains undisputed. She has published on nearly every significant cultural, social or political topic and is one of the most often referenced theorists in postcolonial studies but also other fields. Perhaps one of the reasons why she is cited so often by theorists from such diverse backgrounds is that she cannot be indentified completely with any of the aforementioned groups but takes on a holistic and critical stance toward all academic currents. She says of herself:

“My position is generally a reactive one. I am viewed by Marxists as too codic, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western Theory. I am uneasily pleased about this.” (Post-Colonial Critic, 4).

Her most famous publications include In Other Worlds: Essays on Cultural Politics (1987), The Post-Colonial Critic (1990), Outside the Teaching Machine (1993), und A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward the History of the Vanishing Present (1999). The first interview with her was published in 1963, when she was only 18 years old and it was already then that she referenced the multifaceted identity that influenced her academic views and illustrated her commitment to a complex and differentiated analysis of discourse. In the Newsweek interview she defines herself as an Indian, Brahmin,
female, attractive, a student, a communist and a foreigner, which testifies to all the different categories she was 'othered' by. Yet at the same time she refers to her interviewers – white, middle-class males – as “blokes”, signifying her empowerment against a group who probably regarded themselves superior to her. (cf. Spivak, 1990: 84-5).

2.3.2.1 Deconstructivism and Ethical Responsibility
Her commitment to deconstructive thought becomes visible in her preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) but it would be overly simplistic to reduce her to that school alone. Primarily it is her adamant insistence upon the great personal responsibility toward a text both author and reader are trusted with that stands out:

“[If] the assumption of responsibility for one's discourse leads to the conclusion that all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity, this need not be cause for gloom.”

(Spivak: Preface to "Of Grammatology": 2)

Similarly, her commitment to deconstruction has oftentimes been interpreted as “anti-historical” but, as Amritjit Singh points out, her agenda is a deconstruction of hegemonic discourse and historiography. Much like Said argued in *Orientalism* (1978), she criticizes the artificial, arbitrary and sometimes downright wrong depictions of the Orient/the colonies/the Other, linking them to imperial practices:

“Her ‘anti-historicism’ (if at all it could be called that) does not exclude the project of deconstructing imperial history, but she is committed even more to destroying the ideology of a ‘hegemonic historiography’ that presents the history of colonialism as a coherent Western narrative. […] she would like to promote heterogeneous discursive representations that create the space for a new 'worlding of the world'."

(Singh and Schmidt, 2000: 25).

Spivak's perspective will be of central importance for this thesis. The four novels by Kramolc and Stonich that will be analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters feature characters that have been othered on several levels, which becomes manifest in the choice of narrative techniques used by the authors. Women are very much at the
center of all four novels, but their depictions range from third-person accounts of a silenced, one-dimensional femme fatale, introvert housewives, a traumatized painter to an immigrant, who finds herself a widow in an intercultural interstice. Spivak's definition of the subaltern was initially concerned with subjects from former colonies, nevertheless, her work on ethics, gender issues and the deconstruction of Western epistemologies makes her concepts very much relevant for the analysis of the selected texts, particularly with reference to stereotyping and marginalization.

Her aspirations to deconstruct elitist interpretations of economically and politically disadvantaged countries have often been associated with a group of academics who called themselves the Subaltern Studies Collective. The group took their name from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1971), interpreting the "subaltern" as being "one who is of inferior rank" (qtd in: Singh and Schmidt, 2000: 26). Their ideas have become the basis of what developed into an academic branch named 'subaltern studies', and has since become part of mainstream academic repertoire. Spivak is one of the most important contributors not only to the field of postcolonial criticism but also feminism, deconstructivism, cultural studies, etc., to which she introduced concepts such as the subaltern, ethical responsibility/ethical singularity, margins/outside, strategic essentialism and the idea of unlearning one's privilege as one's loss.

The concept of responsibility is derived from her premise that discourse occurs between speaker and listener and that it depends on the response of the listener, an act that acknowledges the existence of the other (cf. Spivak 1988). This idea echoes the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who also argued that the act of speaking is only of importance if it received by an addressee and their response (cf. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981). Bakhtin's concepts like answerability, heteroglossia and dialogism can be compared to Spivak’s understanding of responsibility.
2.3.2.2 The Subaltern and Strategic Essentialism

The term subaltern is very complex and can be interpreted from different perspectives. Webster offers the following definitions:

Sub*al"tern, (a).
[F. subalterne, LL. subalternus, fr. L. sub under + alter the one, the other of two.

1. Ranked or ranged below; subordinate; inferior; specifically Mil., ranking as a junior officer; being below the rank of captain; as, a subaltern officer.
2. Asserting only a part of what is asserted in a related proposition.

Sub*al"tern, (n).
1. A person holding a subordinate position; specifically, a commissioned military officer below the rank of captain.
2. A subaltern proposition.¹¹

The term subaltern, which Spivak borrowed from Gramsci, is used to refer to all marginalized, disadvantaged, subordinate groups that are put into the position of the Other by categories such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, political or religious persuasion, colonial history, economic factors, etc. Spivak, very much like Said, is adamant in her insistence that the concepts of the Other, the Third World, the Subordinate, etc. are artificially constructed by currents motivated by imperialism. Furthermore, she argues that the only possibility to alleviate this predicament is the creation of a space where genuine dialogue between several diverse groups is viable and different voices are able to speak from equal positions.

Strategic essentialism, on the other hand, is a technique of empowerment. Spivak’s idea was that the marginalized, underprivileged or anyone whose environment has marked them by defining them in terms of pre-determined roles or clichés consciously choose to adopt these roles and use them for the privileges and empowerment that comes along with them. Spivak herself also openly admits to doing so: “I use positions of power.” (Spivak, 1990: 89). In the analysis of the texts chosen for this thesis, the concept of strategic essentialism will be of key importance. Most of the protagonists of the selected novels are women, who try to come to terms with the expectations their environment

¹¹ [Online source: www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/subaltern, (online document, accessed 15.1.2009)]
bestows upon them. They are marked by gender, age and national stereotypes and try to find survival strategies and coping mechanisms that will allow them to develop as individuals and find personal fulfillment, one of them being strategic essentialism.

However, the subaltern may be the concept Spivak is associated with the most. She coined the term early in her career and used it in a very specific context, which has now been transcended, sometimes to her chagrin. In her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) she defines the subaltern as those who are marginalized, underprivileged or in any way outside the hegemonic power structures. Initially, the term was used within the framework of postcolonial critique and as a reference to the colonized peoples of the South-Asian subcontinent and was an attempt to represent the historical and cultural perspective of the colonized rather than the overly-simplistic and cliché-ridden perspective of imperial forces. However, it quickly transcended those boundaries and is now being widely used in fields as diverse as literature, history, anthropology, sociology, economics, philosophy, psychology and others.

The approach itself had already been used by Marxist scholars who criticized the hegemonic power structures and the condescending attitude of the capitalist ruling classes toward the working class. Their goal was to interpret sociological and historical circumstance from the perspective of the proletariat. From the perspective of postcolonial criticism, the Marxist approach would still have been regarded as unsatisfactory because it was confined to a Eurocentric perspective. However, it was an important step toward the diversification of academic perspective.

The exact meaning of the term subaltern is a source of dispute among scholars. While it is generally recognized to refer to groups or individuals rendered powerless by their gender and/or social status, Spivak uses the term more carefully and more specifically. She defines it also by pointing out what may be mistaken for the subaltern but is actually a different social phenomenon:

[The subaltern is not ] "just a classy word for the oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. [...] In postcolonial terms,
everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern. [...] Many people want to claim subalternity. They are at the least interesting and at the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, the don’t need the word ‘subaltern’... They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are [my italics]. They’re within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.” (Spivak, 1990: 89-90).

Although some groups cannot be defined as such, they must nevertheless recognize the dynamics of subalternity and its relationship with hegemonic power structures. Other scholars, however, use the term differently and in different contexts. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for example, defines ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ to describe the struggle of oppressed groups against social exclusion, globalization and other hegemonic practices. (cf. Santos, pp 458-493).

Homi Bhabha is among the scholars who frequently emphasize the importance of cultural and economic power relations, as well as the dynamics between the center and the margin. He sees subaltern groups as “oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.” It is the dualistic nature of the Other that makes it such a complex idea of study and understand. To put it in simplistic terms, the center needs the margin/the Other do define itself against, by contrast its function is to define the center’s identity. At the same time it holds great subversive potential through mimicry and other indirect modes of challenge to behavioral patterns and identity structures. (Bhabha, “Notes on vernacular cosmopolitanism”: 193). However, Bhabha’s critique is directed toward static definitions of cultural characteristics (cf. Bhabha, 1994).

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988), she criticizes Western academia and explains how Western intellectuals have taken upon themselves to explain and mediate cultural heritage and epistemological systems of underprivileged groups, usually formerly colonized regions. Such representations are illegitimate, artificial and, at best, second
hand interpretations and reinforce imperialistic power structures, which have led to the oppression of such groups in the first place. However, because Spivak has become a member of the establishment she set out to criticize – she has lectured at almost all significant universities, published widely and is currently an Avalon Professor at Columbia – she is sometimes criticized for having become a part of the structures she aimed to deconstruct. Similarly to Homi Bhabha, who has been accused of ivory-tower, overly-academic discourse that is virtually inaccessible to the public he is writing about, Spivak has also become an integral part of the western academic scene, thus positioning herself quite closely to the Center. One could argue that this has only occurred in an attempt of west academia to clear its conscience by allowing voices of the Margin to be part of the ongoing discourse. There is no definite conclusion to be reached on this topic but one must certainly recognize the immense contributions of these scholars to academic debate, which the left permanently altered and deconstructed, making way for numerous new perspectives and positions that, in the end, immensely enrich the sometimes stiff structures of academic discourse.

However, Spivak also points out that although it is an important premise of postcolonial criticism that the center should not speak for the margin in order not to falsely appropriate and represent disadvantaged groups and thereby reinforcing imperialist dynamics that have led to such situations, one should also avoid the other extreme, namely, to categorically deny any reference on behalf of or pertaining to marginalized groups, as if to say: “OK, sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the blacks.” (“The Intervention Interview”: 327). Instead, the imbalance of power structures should be critically examined in an attempt to overcome it by de-centering the center and de-marginalizing the margin.

Spivak's work has been influenced by Derrida. Her translation of and preface to Derrida's “Of Grammatology” (1976) was her first major publication and an indicator of the deconstructivist tendencies that would become characteristic of her work. One could argue that both Derrida's and Spivak's attempts at deconstruction of existing academic concepts, the highlighting and criticism of existing hegemonic structures could be
understood as an attempt to refute the allegation of complicity with social institutions and dynamics they set out to criticize in the first place.

As Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out in his writing, the premise of meaningful speech rests upon the presumption of bilateral contact. In other words, the act of speech itself is not enough, it has to be received by a listening counterpart. Bakhtin's premise was also that identity and consciousness is fundamentally heterogenous, that language and meaning are multiple in character, which is always created within the exchange that must be bilateral at the least. Already at the moment when ideas are formed, they are formed with the addressee in mind. Therefore, the condition of dialogism is the awareness of an equal yet independent other, another consciousness that receives and responds to ideas, which is the basis of individual and cultural identity (Cf. Bakhtin 1981).

A similar presumption can be applied to Spivak's discussion of subaltern speech. According to Spivak, such exchange can only be successful if it takes place on an intimate, private level where both counterparts are regarded equal. However, these are only the external parameters. Another issue that may arise with subaltern speech is the question of utterability. What if the speech act clashes with dominant speech standards, or norms in general? Spivak uses the so-called widow sacrifice, the suicide of a young Bengali woman as an example of the dire consequences of a failed representation of the self. She fails at her attempt at speaking (successfully) outside the dominant patriarchal structures. She is not understood and thus her speech becomes futile. In her essay, Spivak comes to the conclusion that “the subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak, 1988: 312).

While some critics may point out that the subaltern – in this case the widows being sacrificed at the stake – do cry out in an act of anguish that is essentially protest but the fact that there is no reciprocal relationship in their speech act is what makes them fail at dialogue, which is the only way of (productive) communication. Spivak makes it clear that sometimes that societal and linguistic power structures sometimes prevent speech in that they do not provide a receptive listening counterpart. She says that a successful speech act is “a transaction between speaker and listener” and that while the subaltern
may talk it oftentimes does not reach the level of a bilateral conversational exchange (Spivak, 1996: p 26).

Viewing exchange from the perspective of dominant groups one can also recognize that privileged positions also prevent access to certain kinds of experience and knowledge because of the insular quality of privileged existence. A coping strategy suggested by Spivak to overcome such setbacks is the 'unlearning one's privilege as one's loss. The often quoted example is that of the role of Audrey Hepburn in the 1953 movie *Roman Holiday*, where a princess is denied certain experiences and knowledge despite her very privileged existence. In realizing that there is great potential in the 'other' she grows as a person and her life is enriched by the knowledge she would otherwise been excluded from. The strategy illustrated by this example and the attitude Spivak is advocating is that, firstly, one must try to recognize and critically examine the limitations our environment imposes on us and others, and secondly, try to overcome these limitations by being aware of and challenging its dynamics. This requires a great amount of self-reflection because our beliefs, attitudes, habits and prejudice are oftentimes subconscious and mostly naturalized so we do not experience them as artificial concepts or behavior. A critical reflection of these structures, however, enables an individual to increase their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. This is not to say that groups from the center should stoop down in a condescending gesture to include the experience and knowledge from the margins but rather view this strategy as a way of increasing one's knowledge and refining the subjective epistemological systems that differ immensely across time and space.
2.3.3 Michel Foucault and the Discourse of Power

Michel Foucault (1926-84) began his academic career under the influence of existentialist and Marxist thought. He later rejected these perspectives and began to articulate strong criticism of subjectivity and objective historicism. In that his philosophy can be seen in alignment with Fanon, Said and other critics of imperial historicism and the westernized literary canon. The main concepts in his work are discourse, power and the subject, and the dynamics these three fundamental facets of life are subjected to. Foucault has always been very critical of bourgeois culture and interested in marginal groups such as homosexuals, prisoners, artists, etc. Although these are not subaltern groups per se the interest in the marginal can be compared to Spivak's and Bhabha's interest in margins and liminal space.

The questioning of knowledge and experience is not a modern phenomenon. Since the times of Ancient Greece, philosophers have been challenging the current definitions, limits and origins of epistemological systems. However, in modernity the questioning of reality and experience reached new dimensions. Philosophers like Locke, Hume and Kant expanded on the critique of knowledge. Kant, for example, argued that although our experiences and knowledge may be limited, it is the awareness of these limits that clarifies the nature of human experience and constitutes the conditions for it. I use the term awareness intentionally because it could be seen in parallel to Spivak's concept of awareness. Spivak is less mathematical in her definition than the philosophers of the Enlightenment but her concern with existing epistemological concepts and their influence upon perception could be compared with Kant's thesis that our understanding of the world is not defined by experience alone but also by certain a priori concepts, both of which are necessary truths. (Cf. Spivak 1988, 1990; Kant 1781[2009]; Seung 2007).

Foucault, on the other hand, rejected Kant's notion of the objective truths that the human experience centers around, although Kant went as far to insist that despite the premise that there are a priori truths they must nevertheless be questioned and critiqued, which foreshadows the modernist skepticism about epistemological systems. Foucault argued that rather than asking which experiences are necessary – the necessary truths in the
Kantian sense – we should be asking what of the apparently necessary might be part of our experience. (Cf. Foucault 1986, 1994).

Foucault's ideas are rooted in the critique of modern sciences. According to him, we should be critical toward the premise that modern sciences such as biology, sociology, psychology, etc. offer objective and universally relevant truths about the world around us. We should be aware that despite the claims about objectivity, what the sciences actually promote are subjective views that are woven into quite specific ethical and political agendas that are dominant at a certain time in a particular society. This is also why historicism and the claims of its objectivity are to be questioned because they are not accurate descriptions of universal truths but the result of an endless chain of political and social coincidence and circumstance. (Cf. Gutting 2005: pp 224-261). This is in accordance with the postcolonial perspective and the criticism of westernized historiography, although postcolonial theorists like Fanon, Saïd, Bhabha, Spivak and others focused on different and sometimes broader subjects than Foucault, whose attention was mostly directed toward western middle classes and the role of social institutions in discursive power dynamics.

According to Foucault, discourse determines knowledge. He rejects the premise that language is not only an expression of existing truths. Things around and within us do not exist a priory in Kant's sense but are constituted by language. We cannot know what we can not express and the way we express something determines the way we perceive it. Language automatically determines the things it refers to and in this way it knowledge. Whoever controls discourse is therefore also in a position of power. (cf. Foucault 1969[1972], 1971[1981]).

Broadly speaking, Foucault was interested in two areas of philosophy and sociolinguistics. One of them is the analysis of discourse in social contexts, its laws and the inherent power dynamics that are based on strategies of inclusion or exclusion. The other is the critical examination of historical models and the genesis of theory itself. One of Foucault's premises was also that by controlling discourse institutions determine and
control general behavioral and moral standards, not, however, individuals. (Foucault, 1971). The influence of individuals occurs indirectly. Institutions who control discourse are schools, councils, government bodies, etc. Those who speak for these institutions channels quite specific value systems that are tied to existing power relations within a certain society or a segment of it. This hypothesis can be compared to the postcolonial premise that western/imperialistic epistemological systems are being channeled to (formerly) colonized territories and thus influence the respective perceptions of reality. This dynamic has always been harshly criticized by postcolonial theorists. Bhabha, for example, describes how education and religion have been the main tools for the transfer of ideologies: “Nuns, priests, and ministers went overseas to convert and to make Christians of the natives.” (Bhabha, 1994: 215).

Foucault describes how an individual can gain control over their existence and define their identity by articulating positions and finding a way to function within the frameworks of discursive laws. Discourse constitutes identity, it determines who we are and what our social position is. In this respect Foucault can be compared to Spivak, who has criticized the inability for successful speech by the subaltern. As stated in the chapter on the subaltern and strategic essentialism, the speech act itself – the cries of the widows – does not suffice for successful communication. It has to be received by a hearing and reacting counterpart. Because the cries widows – which are a metaphor for their inability to influence the patriarchal social system – are not heard Spivak concludes that the subaltern cannot speak, i.e. have no power within the male-dominated society.

This is in keeping with Bakhtin's premise of reciprocal communicative acts and Foucault's hypothesis that language can only help an individual or a group assert themselves within society if they master the power dynamics of discourse and, effectively, make themselves heard. (Foucault 1969, 1971; Spivak 1988; Bakhtin 1981). The laws of discourse differ with social settings. However, discourse always also systematically creates knowledge. Therefore, the control of discourse is also the control of knowledge and of social circumstance. Power relations determine the formulation of ideology and within this context discourse determines individual and group identity.
(Foucault 1961, 1969, 1971). Foucault sees history, theory and other knowledge throughout time determined by power structures and authoritative bodies that battle for dominion rather than ideas and meaning that are being discussed on an intellectual level:

Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (langue) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.


In conclusion it can be said that there is no absolute truth. Any assumptions that are made about it can never be objective but are rather the result of dominant authoritative bodies and institutionalized forms of discourse:

At this level it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification.


These alleged truths are enforced by existing power structures and institutions that strive to permanently generate themselves. Such power structures and authoritative bodies are the academia, schools, the justice system, professions, religion, and others.

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power ... truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it includes regular effects of power. [...] 'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. [...] 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth.


This is precisely the point postcolonial critics make although it could be argued that the difference between Foucault and postcolonial critics like Ashcroft et al or Bhabha is that Foucault focuses on European and western epistemologies whereas postcolonial theorists tend to apply a broader perspective and consider the dynamics on a wider, international,
global scale. Nevertheless, there are cross-sections where significant parallels can be drawn between Foucault's theories and the postcolonial perspective.

There have been several attempts at dividing Foucault's work into stages, some critics have also drawn parallels between the shifts in his theories and developments in his personal life (J. Miller, 1993)

Foucault's academic focus has shifted over the course of his life. In his earliest publications, from *Madness and Civilisation* to *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he is primarily concerned with the origins of epistemological systems, which he sees as inseparably connected to dynamics of discourse. He writes that *The Archeology of Knowledge* is not about questions of structure, which was a popular issue in academic writing at the time, but rather “like those who precede it, [it] belongs to that field in which the questions of the human being, consciousness, origin, and the subject emerge, intersect, mingle and separate off” (Foucault, 1972: 16). This focus on the intersection, mingling and separation echoes Bhabha's hypotheses of the Third Space of Enunciation, where structure is suspended in favor of a continuous friction and renegotiation (Bhabha, 1994).

The hypothesis Foucault formulates in *The Discourse on Language* (Cf. Foucault, 1971) is that society controls discourse in order to avoid certain dangers, which could potentially subvert the status quo. The production of discourse is organized, distributed and subjected to selection through institutionalized channels, whose goal is to “avert its powers, its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.” (ibid, 23) He goes on to distinguish between different forms of control of discourse. He examines external control, internal sanctioning and the conditions under which discourse can be employed.

The first category of analysis, the external determinants of discourse, consist of a variety of components. They are determined by prohibition, which includes social rules about what can be said when, by whom, to whom and how. The areas that subjected to
particularly strong prohibition are those of sexuality and politics, both of which are strongly linked to desire and power and consequently harbor the most subversive potential. The other area of prohibition is the binary opposition of reason and madness, an age old division, which is reinforced by institutions, psychiatrists and other instances of power within a society. The question that arises here is whether the definitions of reason and madness were different, if defined within a different framework of social power structures.

This can again be seen in parallel to postcolonial criticism of westernized epistemological systems. The third category of institutionalized control if discourse is the opposition between true and false, which functions on the premise that there is an universal and objective truth and that mankind only need to chose the appropriate tools for grasping and reiterating it. The search for truth, however, is also determined by a system of exclusion, which is determined by its respective historical and social circumstance and constrained by institutions that hold the most power within a certain society. This, in turn, makes truth the subject of politics, determined by discourse and limited by political, philosophical and religious doctrine. The reason, Foucault argues, that this dynamic is present in society is mankind's fear of chaos and unrestrained discourse which harbors subversive potential and is generated by the human fear of the unknown (Cf. Foucault 1980).

In the textual analysis the fear of the unknown and the sanctioning of everything different – i.e. the discrimination of the other, the construction and deconstruction of binary oppositions – is a fundamental leitmotif in all of the chosen texts. The strategies of how individuals deal with such predicaments and how difference is valued are also the subject of this thesis.

Similarly to the postcolonial evaluations of the present, the questioning of canonized literature and of objective epistemologies, Foucault also places great emphasis on the historical perspective. Although he is not a historical determinist, he insists that the modern subject is determined by history but, at the same time, continuously constructs its
history. History, to him, is an essential component that determines the present, but insists that it is not simply a retrospective of an objective past. The question of identity of the modern subject can be determined on several different levels and modern academic discourse tends to gravitate toward what it perceives as rational sciences. Foucault, however, points out that these different conceptual fronts are the result of very specific political power struggles, which have shaped them and determine present epistemological systems, which could have been very different under alternative historical circumstances and our interpretations thereof, which again echoes postcolonial criticism of western historiography and canonized literature. In that respect, Foucault's philosophy is very closely tied to historical criticism and historical forms of inquiry.

At the beginning of his career, Foucault was very much concerned with questions of ontology and critical of modern sciences, who he felt are being perceived as too static in their alleged objectivity. Furthermore, he investigated the relationship between the concept of the self and the way it is determined by epistemological systems. Foucault later shifted his focus from the discursive practices and the subject to institutions and institutionalized power. He becomes interested in the politicization of knowledge and the effect of judgment on the perceptions of the self. In Discipline and Punish, for example, he declares that it is a “correlative history of the modern soul [i.e. of the modern subject, the modern individual] and of a new power to judge.” (Foucault, 1972: 23). He notes that discourse controls judgment, that judgment is politicized and institutionalized and that the individual is being judged and controlled through institutionalized channels.

Control is being exercised on two levels. One is through the external threat of sanctions, i.e. institutionalized punishment and the other – arguably the more effective one – though internalized self-sanctioning. The latter will be particularly important for the analysis of the texts at hand because the focus in all of them is on the subject, its identity and the way it is determined by society. The analysis of the texts will attempt to answer questions about constructions of identity, the knowledge of ourselves in the present moment, how the subject is determined by social and political processes and what kind of ethical forms we generate in terms of individual psychological dynamics and the subject's relations
with the outside world.

Toward the end of his career, Foucault concentrated increasingly on the subject with particular regard of gender and sexuality, which is effectively an analysis of power dynamics that are being carried out over the body. The female body in particular is at the center of the textual analysis, it seems that the female characters are defined through the corporal and the sexual or lack thereof. This also provides us with a theoretical intersection with Elisabeth Bronfen's publications about the female body and the power struggles it has been subjected to since the beginning of western civilization.

When it comes to literature Foucault is particularly interested in the representations of liminal experiences and in subject that find themselves on the margins of society. Similarly as Spivak, Bronfen also finds the female at the margins of society and it is often the female experience that is also the marginalized one. What is particularly interesting when comparing Kramolc's and Stonich's novel is that both put female characters at the center of the narrative. However, Stonich also offers a female perspective but Kramolc's narrates the stories of female protagonists from the perspective of male narrators, highlighting the characters' double marginalization. The questions the analysis will ask is whether the chosen male perspective is a way of highlighting the social determinism women are faced with and therefore the ultimate criticism of a white/male-dominated society or whether it is merely an indifferent reflection of the present status quo.
3. A Brief Overview of Slovenian History

In order to comprehend the events that transpired in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century and, consequently, to understand the key themes of contemporary migrant literature, an overview of the complex historical developments in the entire Balkan region is necessary. This is also necessary because of the ambivalent relationship Europe has with this geographical area. On the one hand, the Balkans are perceived to be the Other, and are viewed as the antithesis to European civilization. On the other hand, the diverse and distinct cultures from this region have played an important part in European history for many centuries, and are integral constituent of European identity.

The examination of historic facts shows that in reality 'the Balkans' do not exist as an organic entity, despite the widespread usage of this expression. The expressions 'Balkan' or 'the Balkans' can only be used as a geographical reference albeit with some reservations. However, historically, politically and culturally it is an artificial construct, and the implied homogeneity of this hypernym can be very misleading. Much like the Orient was artificially constructed by the political and economic imperialistic forces of colonizing states in order to facilitate a psychological distancing from the diverse regions that were being colonized, 'the Balkans' is also a synthetic umbrella term, encompassing a variety of nations and cultures with extremely diverse backgrounds. These have been artificially joined in an abstract conglomerate which functions as a contrast to western European culture. In postcolonial terms, western Europe is set up as the Center, and the Balkans as well as other Eastern European states have been forced into the position of the Margin.

This kind of binary opposition facilitates the construction of the Center's identity but at the same time it positions the remaining cultures and ethnicities on the obscure periphery of what is deemed to be advanced civilization. Political developments over the past two hundred years have facilitated the emergence of this binary oppositions and political forces on all sides have gladly utilized national antagonisms to mobilize the population for their respective agendas.
This overview aims to briefly sketch the most important milestones in Slovenian history, as well elucidate the main political developments that led to the Declaration of Independence in 1991. The historical and cultural intricacies of Slovenian heritage are a recurrent topic in migrant literature and a defining factor in the construction of national identity. A better understanding of Slovenia's complex heritage is vital for any thorough analysis of its diasporic literature, especially for a postcolonial approach to literary criticism.

3.1 Basic Facts
The Republic of Slovenia is a young state in central Europe, bordering on Austria in the north, Hungary in the east, Croatia in the south and Italy in the west. The capital is Ljubljana, other important cities are Maribor, Celje, Kranj, Velenje, Koper, Portorož and Piran. In 1991 Slovenia declared independence and implemented a democratic parliamentary system. It has been a member of the EU since May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 and adopted the Euro as the official currency on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. It covers the area of 20,273 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 12670 ml<sup>2</sup>) and on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010, Slovenia's population estimate according to the Slovenian government's 'Population Clock' was 2.053.535<sup>12</sup>. The latest census estimated that on September 30th 2009 the Slovenian population was made up from 96.0% Slovenian citizens and 4.0% foreign citizens.<sup>13</sup> The ethnic structure of the country is relatively homogenous. The official language is Slovenian, in some ethnically mixed areas it is also Italian and Hungarian. According to the 2009 census, the ethnic makeup is 87.5 % Slovenians, 0.32 % Hungarian (i.e. 6243 people), 0.11 % Italian (i.e. 2258 people), and approximately 7.000-10.000 members of the Roma community.<sup>14</sup> The census defines the remaining 15.8 % (i.e. 324,172 people) to be of 'other' or 'undeclared' nationality. (<i>ibid</i>) The reasons for the relatively high percentage of people not identifying with any one particular ethnic group escape exact definition but among them are surely the mixed marriages between people from the former Yugoslav republics and the resulting ethnic hybrids, the relatively unproblematic migrations within the former state,

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.stat.si/preb_ura.asp](http://www.stat.si/preb_ura.asp), online document

as well as a possible social stigma that is sometimes attached to nationals from the south of the former Yugoslav state. It must be noted here that 'Yugoslavian' is not an ethnic category but a relatively recent political coinage, and can therefore only be used in the discussion of political issues. The religious persuasions in Slovenia are largely Christian. The majority of Slovenians are Roman Catholic but there are also other confessions. 57.8% declare themselves Roman Catholic, 2.4% Muslim, 2.3% Orthodox, 0.9% belong to other Christian churches, 26.5% consider themselves unspecified, and 10.1% declared no religious affiliation.\(^{15}\)

Following the plebiscite on sovereignty and independence on December 23\(^{rd}\), 1990, when the overwhelming majority of Slovenians voted for independence, the Yugoslav army attacked Slovenia in a 10 day conflict which resulted in the retreat of the federal army from Slovenian territory. Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991, and the following wars in the Balkans left a lasting mark on the entire area of the former Yugoslavia.

The present Slovenian constitution was adopted on December 23\(^{rd}\), 1991. The government is headed by a Prime Minister (since 2008 Borut Pahor of the Social Democratic Party, SD) and consists of 15 ministers and 3 ministers without portfolio. The National Assembly is made up of 90 deputies (88 elected representatives of parliamentary parties, one representative from the Italian and one from the Hungarian ethnic community). The National Council consists of 40 elected representatives of employers, employees, trade-unions farmers, the self-employed, of local interest groups, and representatives from the non-economic sector. The President of the Republic is Dr. Danilo Türk, who has been in office since December 2007. His function is a formal one; he represents the Republic of Slovenia at state events and abroad but has only limited political influence. Slovenia is a member of NATO, the UN, and other international organizations.

\(^{14}\) http://www.unv.gov.si/si/o_uradu/podrocie_dela_urada_znarodnosti/, online document

\(^{15}\) http://www.slovenija.si/slovenia_facts/, online document
3.2 Slovenian and Other Languages of the Former Yugoslav Republics

Comparative linguistics scholars place Slavic languages in the Satum group which, like the contrasting Centum group, developed from the now lost ancient Indo-European language. The living Slavic languages are usually divided into South Slavic (Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Bulgarian), West Slavic (Polish, Czech, Slovak and Sorbian) and East Slavic (Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian). (cf. Grafenauer, 1994: 83-85).

There seem to be some misconceptions about languages spoken in the former Yugoslav republics, mainly pertaining to the similarities between the different languages. Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, and Macedonian are languages in their own right and by no means interchangeable. They are also not similar to the extent that they could be regarded as dialects of one 'umbrella' language. The most linguistic similarities can be observed between Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian. Only in this case one could argue that these three languages are essentially different dialect forms of one language with some differences in vocabulary. Slovenian and Macedonian, however, are quite different. Many citizens of the former Yugoslav republic, primarily the generations who grew up in post-WWII Yugoslavia, are to some extent fluent in Serbo-Croatian, which was the official language in the former Yugoslav Republic. However, one must not assume that speakers of Croatian, Serbian or Bosnian can automatically speak or even fully understand Slovenian or Macedonian. Although these languages are related to each other and part of the greater Slavic language group they are by no means interchangeable. In analogy, Italian and Spanish, English and German are also considered to be individual languages within the Romance and Germanic language groups, respectively, although they may sound somewhat similar and share a common linguistic history. Similarly, Slovenian can not be equated with other languages spoken in the former Yugoslavia, nor any other Slavic language. There are also significant differences between the languages spoken in the former Yugoslav republics and other Slavic languages, e.g. Russian, Polish, Czech, etc. It would therefore be wrong to assume that a speaker of one Slavic language could automatically communicate with speakers of other Slavic languages, although the linguistic similarities could facilitate the acquisition of a new foreign language within the
3.3 Important milestones preceding the Slavic settlement

250,000 BCE: The first evidence of human habitation on the territory of present-day Slovenia (two implements made of stone from Jama Cave in Loza Woods near Orehek)

120,000 to 1,300 BCE: Remains from the early Stone Age - the Palaeolithic, among them the oldest musical instrument in the world, found in Slovenia. Evidence of hunting and 'Urnfield culture'.

4th and 3rd century BCE: The arrival of Celts, the Noricum Kingdom

Around 10 BCE: The Roman Empire, the appearance of the first towns

5th and 6th century CE: Invasions by the Huns and Germanic tribes

After 568: Slavic peoples dominate on the territory of present-day Slovenia.\(^{16}\)

3.4 Karantania

At the beginning of the 7\(^{th}\) century Slavic tribes from the greater Alpine and Pannonia region united under the rule of their leader Samo in a state union, the kingdom Karantania (\textit{Carantania, Carentania, Carinthia or Karantanija}), which was the first stable, independent Slovenian state. Historians believe it was one of the most democratic and modern states at that point in history, according to some sources Thomas Jefferson took the example of Carantania when founding the modern American state.\(^{17}\)

The ceremony at which Karantanian dukes were crowned took place on the Duke's stone (\textit{Knežji Kamen}) at the Gosposvetsko Field (\textit{Gosposvetsko polje}) in today's Austrian Carinthia. The ritual was performed in Slovenian and remained a steady cultural fixture until the 15\(^{th}\) century. It was allegedly also a source of inspiration for Thomas Jefferson in writing the \textit{Declaration of Independence} in 1776, after reading about it in Jean Bodin's \textit{Six livres de la Republique} (cf. Pivko, 1990: 53-56).

Between the 8\(^{th}\) century and 1990 there was no form of an independent Slovenian state.

\(^{16}\) http://www.slovenija.si/history/, online document.

\(^{17}\) http://www.slovenija.si/history/, online document., and Pivko 1990.
In the 9th century Karantanians accepted the Bavarian and, consequently, the Frankish rule, which also meant the advance of Christianity in the region (cf. Pivko 1990: pp 58-60). Over the course of the following centuries, Slovenians were ruled by different regents. Slovenians living in the area of today's Slovenia and Carinthia remained under the rule of the Germanic and Frankish aristocracy. As a result, the Slovenian territory was again divided onto several independent regions (cf. Božič, 1990, pp. 23-26).

The Frankish rule lasted until the 14th century when most of the territory of modern Slovenia was taken over by the Habsburg dynasty. The Slovenian competitors of the Habsburgs were the Counts of Cilli, a large and politically important family. After they died out in 1456 their estates and possessions were taken over by the Habsburgs, who retained control of the area well into the 20th century. The rise of the Habsburg dynasty went hand in hand with an accelerated development of the Slovenian regions. The Habsburgs encouraged trade and the development of towns and ruled over Slovenian territory up until the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Božič, 1990, pp. 31-33).

3.5 The Emergence of a Slovenian National Self-awareness

In the Middle Ages, Slovenia did not exist as a geographical concept. The territory of today's Slovenia was divided onto the regions Carniola, Styria, Carinthia, Goricia, Istra and Triest. Neither had there been a sense Slovenian national self-awareness. The 16th century was marked by the Reformation movement and saw a development of national sentiments across Europe. An increasing number of books was being written in national vernaculars, and Slovenia was no exception.

The time under the Habsburg Empire was a very positive period for the Slovenian people. Maria Theresia and Josef II. implemented a number of different reforms that significantly influenced the economy and culture and facilitated the appearance of a Slovenian bourgeoisie. The monarchs introduced a compulsory elementary education in the people's mother tongue. Around that time a movement began among Slovenian intellectuals that encouraged the use of Slovenian not only in private but also public life. Among them were the scholars, writers and aristocrats such as Marko Pohlin, Ožbalt Gutsman, Jurij
3.6 The Illyrian Provinces, Romanticism and the Revival of National Pride

The French Revolution was a further catalyst for the development of Slovenian national sentiments, especially after Napoleon founded the Illyrian provinces, which included western Carinthia, Carniola, the area of present-day Croatia south of the river Sava, Istria and Dalmatia with the capital being Ljubljana. Napoleon's policies had a positive effect on the regional economy and also encouraged the use of local languages (Cf. Božič, 1990: 70).

In the 19th century nationality became an increasingly important factor in Europe and the rest of the western world. This was also a period of great inventions an extensive colonization, resulting in a heightened interest in anything exotic. At the same time, the idea of the Other had become a defining constant in the perception of national identities, as well as a wide range of other constructed binary oppositions which are still reflected in everyday life, as well as artistic production of any kind, including literature. This was also the time when the idea of Slovenia as a nation was being discussed more and more. The circle of artists and intellectuals around the authors France Prešeren and Matija Čop is credited with raising the position of the Slovenian language from the vernacular of farmers to a level of a bourgeois discourse. Until then the Slovenian language had been regarded as unfit for great works of literature and too crude for poetry. In bourgeois circles, however, German still prevailed as the language of conversation, even among Slovenians (Cf. Grafenauer 1994: 286 – 290).

3.7 Illyrism

Illyrism was a political and linguistic movement that developed in the 19th century among southern Slavs. Its objective was the formation of a common language that would be shared by all southern Slav peoples who would be joined together as one nation. Most Slovenian intellectuals and artist rejected this idea, they warned of the loss of national
identity, history, language and culture, and staunchly opposed the attempts to merge it with an artificial, Illyrian, pan-Yugoslav language (Cf. Grafenauer, 1994: 318-319).

The idea of a unified Slovenia remained the constant focus of cultural and political activities within the Habsburg Empire and later within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, and culminated in the declaration of an independent Slovenian state in 1991.

3.8 Political and Literary Developments in the 19th and 20th Century

Literature has played an important role in the formation of a Slovenian national identity. The cultural achievements also raised the self-confidence and improved the self-image of the Slovenian people. The poetry of Valentin Vodnik, France Prešeren, Simon Gregorčič, and the prose of Josip Jurčič, Ivan Tavčar, Fran Levstik, Ivan Cankar, and others testify to that.

During this time the Slovenian political scene was marked by a radical division between the conservative religious and the liberal camps. The former was under a strong influence of the Catholic church and had most of its supporters in rural areas. The liberal groups, on the other hand, were supported by intellectuals, artists, and the liberal bourgeoisie. The antagonism between these two camps was deepening and eventually turned into abysmal hatred, which marked the end of the 19th and the entire 20th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, a third - socialist - movement further deepened the divide between the liberal left and the conservative right (cf. Božič 1990: 97-99). This animosity reached a tragic peak in the killings during and immediately following WWII.

At the beginning of the 20th century, nationalistic tendencies were growing stronger in the entire Austro-Hungarian empire. In 1917 the Carniolan state council passed the May Declaration according to which Yugoslavia would become an autonomous region within the Austro-Hungarian Empire (cf. Melik, 1994: 67-70).
The Slovenians were mostly attached to the Habsburg Empire. Despite continuously growing nationalistic sentiments that were causing tensions among the different political groups, there was also room for discussion and a willingness to compromise. Some Slovenians were advocating a politically independent South Slav state, but the majority accepted Austria as the only realistic option. It is difficult to say whether the political future of the region would have been a reformed Austro-Hungarian Empire or its disintegration if the First World War had not happened (Cf. Melik, 2002: 696-670 and Cf. Mikuž, 1995: 23).


During that time Europe was facing some precarious circumstances and political instability. The newly founded state had not been internationally recognized, and its territory was coveted by neighboring states, which left the country's leaders feeling threatened. The political leadership initiated talks with the Serbian Kingdom, which was part of the alliance that won in WWI, hoping that the more powerful neighbor could protect the South Slav peoples against its enemies (Cf. Mikuž, 1995: 51-53).

3.9 Yugoslavia between the First and Second World Wars
The State of Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs was merged with the Serbian Kindom and the Kingdom of Montenegro on December 1st, 1918. The new state was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians and was ruled by king Peter Karadžordević (Cf. Mikuž, 1995: 54). The countries that joined the new political conglomerate had very diverse cultural, historical, and religious backgrounds, and their economies were at very different stages of development. The kingdom now consisted of the former Kingdom of Serbia, the Kingdom of Monenegro, Slavonia, Croatia, Carniola, southern Styria, parts of Carinthia and Dalmatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, the former Austro-Hungarian dominions Kosovo-Metochia and Vardarian Macedonia, which had been conquered by Serbia in the
Balkan Wars from 1912-13.

The respective peoples spoke different languages, were using the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, and were of different religious persuasions. The biggest religious groups were Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Protestant and Jewish. Some parts of the new kingdom were ethnically homogenous and others were ethnically very mixed. In addition to that, there were also great differences in the economic and cultural sectors. For example, in 1921 the percentage of the illiterate in Slovenia was 8.8% but in Southern Serbia and Macedonia it was as high as 83.8% (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 14).

After the First World War, the newly founded state was economically drained. The political leadership also seemed to lack a vision as to how to ensure the country's economic development and political progress. It was therefore not surprising that very quickly after the state declared independence the tensions among the different nations and regions arose again. The conflict was particularly severe between Serbs and Croats. There were also tensions between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethnic conflicts were also arising in Kosovo and Macedonia where the population was predominantly Albanian (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 12-16).

Before the end of the Second World War, Slovenian politicians had been propagating that all Slovenian regions should be joined in an autonomous national unit within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the empire disintegrated, there was a political and economic void that was filled by seeking political security in the Balkans. It is likely that Slovenia would not exist today had it not joined Yugoslavia after WWI. However, Serbia had little sympathy for a nation that had remained loyal to an empire they had been at war with until the very end. The new state did not provide the necessary conditions for economic and cultural development, and Slovenians were unable to preserve the way of life they had been accustomed to. Slovenia began to be exploited and discriminated against by the increasingly stronger, centralist Serbian government (Cf. Bučar: 70-74).

The interests of the non-Serbian population were completely neglected within the
monarchy (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 23-24). The political situation in Yugoslavia between the First and Second World War was marked by undemocratic rule, a suspended parliament, an arbitrary attitude toward legislature and the constitution, corruption, and overall instability (Cf. Božič 1990: 130). Soon further inter-ethnic tensions emerged and the country was divided by abysmal civilisational differences between the eastern and the western parts. The western regions had been influenced by European culture, whereas the eastern part of the country had been under Muslim rule of the economically deteriorating Turkish Empire for over 500 years (Cf. Božič 1990: 131).

The relations between the different nations within Yugoslavia were not only marked by great cultural differences but were also strained because of other reasons, including religion. Slovenia and Croatia were entirely Roman Catholic, whereas in Serbia and Montenegro the majority of the population were Orthodox Christians. The population in Macedonia, Kosovo and Metochia was mixed Orthodox Christian and Muslim, and in Bosnia all three confessions were present. The relations between Christian and Muslim groups had never been particularly good, however, neither were those between the respective Christian confessions.

There were dramatic differences in economic development between the different areas, and no programs were being implemented that would counteract these conditions, which also greatly contributed to the dissatisfaction among the population (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 31-32).

After the Second World War there was a wave of political emigration from Slovenia. The majority of these emigrants settled in North America and Argentina. Political differences and the dire economic conditions in Slovenia were the main causes for the emigration abroad. The economic emigration had already begun before the First World War and it continued between the First and Second World Wars. Many emigrants went to look for work in mines across Europe or elsewhere where they had the possibility of employment. A large part of them left for America, where there was need of a workforce.
Slovenians who settled in North America preserved strong ties with their homeland and preserved their traditions for several generations. This can particularly be observed in places where larger groups of Slovenians settled, e.g. in Cleveland, Chicago and New York. These communities founded cultural societies and clubs where people would socialize, dance traditional dances, sing traditional songs, and speak Slovenian. Over the following decades the Slovenian language was being spoken less and less. Some second-generation Slovenian Americans would sometimes still be able to understand Slovenian, but were unable to speak it and already identified themselves with American culture. The vast majority of second- and third-generation Slovenian Americans considered themselves Americans and spoke English as a first language.

The areas of Yugoslavia where Slovenians lived were the least plagued by inter-ethnic conflicts because the population was very homogenous with regard to nationality and religion. However, the political situation was far from being uncomplicated. A ruthless struggle for power was raging in Belgrade, particularly after King Aleksander was assassinated in Marseille in October 1934. Corruption was rampant and involved the highest state ranks. The industry was controlled entirely by foreign investors, who had no interest in improving the population's living standard (Cf. Božič 1990: 130-145).

Political life in Slovenia was dominated by two parties, one was a far-left wing and the other was a far-right wing party. The Communist Party, which was banned and was forced to operate from the underground, further inflated the conflict and hatred. Communism was becoming a threat to capitalist society, and the Church regarded it as its greatest enemy that threatened to compromise its privileged status (Cf. Bučar, 2007: 78).

3.10 The Second World War
After Yugoslavia was attacked, its territory was divided among Germany, Italy, and Hungary. Slovenia was also divided among the three occupying forces. The occupation of Slovenia was not a mere territorial dominance, it was also an attempt at a systematic elimination of an entire people. Not keeping in accordance with international law, Italy declared its part of Slovenia an Italian province and integrated it into the Italian state. The
Germans began to systematically relocate the Slovenian population to other areas, especially the intellectuals. All teachers, professors and clergy were immediately expatriated, as were other academics. The remaining Slovenian population and the remnants of the Slovenian government were paralyzed from the occupation. Not knowing how to react they merely observed how the situation would develop. The Catholic Church declared loyalty to the Italian government in the zone that was occupied by Italian forces (Cf. Božič 1990: 142-145).

The only fraction that did not remain static under the occupation was the communists, who saw an opportunity in the newly transpired events to change their status as an illegal underground opposition force (Cf. Bučar, 2007: 84-91). The Communist Party, backed by other left-wing supporters in the population, initiated the creation of the Liberation Front, whose goal was to fight the occupying forces. Communists, Christian Democrats, Sokoli\textsuperscript{18}, and liberals joined the Liberation Front.

All political factions of the left and the moderate middle joined the Liberation Front, which initiated a large scale resistance against the occupying forces. In that they were met with opposition from wealthy landowners and other affluent Slovenians whose objective was to continue to generate profits under foreign rule. They also faced resistance from the Catholic Church, particularly from the archdiocese of Ljubjana. The Clerical Party did not join the liberation movement because it was lead by communists, which was unacceptable for the political Right and the Catholic Church. At the same time, the communists were not inclined to cooperate with the Church because the grudges the two groups carried against each other were too deeply rooted. The communists were calling for a people's resistance but the Church was warning against a communist threat, instigating resistance against the Liberation Front and openly advocating collaboration with the occupying forces (Cf. Božič 1990: 150-154).

\textsuperscript{18} An athletics and cultural youth organization in Slovenia. Not to be confused with some other guerilla, self-styled liberation forces in the eastern Balkans.
That way the communists in the Liberation Front were not only battling the occupying forces but were also engaged in fighting supporters of the invading armies, who were backed by the Catholic Church. Consequently the LF began liquidating collaborators among the population. However, behind many of the allegations of collaboration were politically motivated killings or private retribution.

In order to protect themselves against such killings the right wing began organizing the Bela Garda (Vaške Straže). The Home Guard (Domobranci) and other anti-communist groups grew out of the Bela Garda. All of these fractions were placed under direct German command (Cf. Gow and Carmichael, 2000: 49). The Home Guard and the Clerical Party were backed by the Roman Catholic Church, and allied themselves with the occupying forces. These provided them with arms, clothes and other goods that would help them fight the partisans. This resulted in a tragic and bloody civil war within Slovenia. On the one side there were the partisans and the Liberation Front, who were led by communists and supported by the Left. On the other side were the Clerical Party and the Home Guards, who were backed by the Catholic Church, and were involved in German and Italian attacks on the partisans. The collaborators with the Nazis were also providing the German and Italian military with information about the partisans, which resulted in many members of the Liberation Front being imprisoned, tortured, sent to death camps and killed (Cf. Bučar, 2007: 123-4, 143-4). Partisans, on the other hand, were trying to eliminate as many members and supporters of the Home Guards as possible, and used the people's liberation movement as a pretence for private reckoning with adversaries (Cf. Repe, 1995: 217; Mlakar, 2005: 837-9). There were many casualties on both sides, and the war deepened the hatred and conflict among Slovenians which still echoes in the present day Slovenian society.

As the war was coming to an end in 1945, it was becoming apparent that the communists would triumph so members of the Home Guards and their supporters were growing increasingly anxious for fear of partisan retribution. This was why many of them fled Slovenian territory together with the German forces after Germany capitulated. The refugees were flooding into British-occupied Austrian Carinthia, where the civilians were
subjected to violence and indignity by British soldiers (Cf. Corsellis and Ferrar 2005: 207). The Home Guards and other anti-communists were hoping that the British and American troops would consider them allies in their fight against the communist regime Yugoslavia and grant them refuge. However, British troops returned them to Yugoslavia where they were killed without trial in 1945. There are no exact informations about the numbers of victims in these killings, and estimates range from 8,000 (Gow and Carmichael, 2000) to 200,000 (Corsellis and Ferrar 2005: 205; Reindl 2001).

In the decades following the Second World War the communist regime in Yugoslavia tried to silence reports about these killings. However, a number of Slovenian politicians, writers and journalists have worked for a recognition of the massacres and a reassessment of the legacy of WWII, among them Spomenka Hribar, who began publishing articles about the topic in the mid-1970's, the writer and politician Drago Jančar, and the Slovenian president Milan Kučan (1991-2002), who was especially striving for an ambivalent reconciliation.

During the Second World War, the communists under the command of Josip Broz Tito organized a resistance against the German and Italian occupation. However, a liberation of the seized territory was not their only objective. The resistance against the Nazis was also an opportunity to overthrow the king, who had fled to London after the country was attacked, and start a socialist revolution (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 140).

“The communists won the war in Slovenia and in the rest of Yugoslavia. They did so with considerable amount of popular support, maintained through much of the war, codified in the AVNOJ political programme [Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobodjenja Jugoslavije. According to this programme Yugoslavia would be organized as a socialist, federal republic consisting of six republics and two autonomous regions within Serbia]. This offered the Slovenes what they had sought on joining the South Slav state in 1918 – sovereignty, self-determination and statehood, albeit in the context of communist rule. [...] The borders resulting from the Second World War would in effect become the borders of the first independent Slovene state.” (Gow and Carmichael, 2000: 50).

The communists gained control of the country already during WWII, so in 1945 the Communist Party was able to singlehandedly form a government. All opposition and other political groups were gradually excluded from the political arena (Cf. Vodopivec,
3.11 Slovenia and Yugoslavia After the Second World War

Over the decades following WWII the Slovenian economy developed rapidly. It was being industrialized and was approaching a market economy despite the restrictive economic and social legislation that was passed predominantly under Serbian influence, whose centralistic agenda was based on the less-developed republics. Nevertheless, Slovenia managed to preserve higher economic standards, a better educated and skilled workforce, as well as a better working discipline and organisation compared to other Yugoslav republics.

In 1945 the government held elections that failed to meet the standards of democracy. The communist United People's Front dominated the election and used it to reaffirm its power. Later, a constitution was passed that abolished a multi-party system and implemented a proletarian dictatorship. However, the communists did not stage a Soviet-style revolution in all areas. The majority of the population were farmers, who played a key role in the resistance movement during WWII. This is why they divided the land among the farmers in an agrarian reform that adhered to the principle that the land should belong to those who work on it (Cf. Frucht, 2005: 681).

Over the following years, Yugoslavia kept close ties with the Soviet Union, which was at the head of the communist bloc. In 1948, however, a conflict between Tito and Stalin developed. As a consequence, the communist bloc countries introduced a total economic blockade of Yugoslavia, which in turn forced Tito to cooperate more closely with the west and facilitated Slovenia's transition to a free market economy in the 1990s (Cf. Repe, 1995: 281-3).

Josip Broz Tito was the undisputed leader of Yugoslavia and very popular among the people, despite his position as a dictator. Although he introduced communism to Yugoslavia, he also protected it from Stalin, who managed to subjugate other countries of the eastern bloc, where he imposed a Soviet-style - 'stalinistic' - totalitarian regime. Tito
also implemented a totalitarian communist regime but liberalized it over the years. He tried to shed the communist legacy, and create a new political and economic system.

1950 saw the introduction of self-governed labor. The Yugoslav experiment generated great interest worldwide. Self-management led to major changes in the economy and society. It meant the end of collectivization, of the Soviet-style state planning, and a step toward decentralization. It was a significant development because it introduced certain elements of market economy, which would later facilitate the transition from communism to capitalism. Self-management socialism was an experiment. Initially it seemed like a good idea, but in the end it proved to be very inefficient (Čepič, 2005: 961-5).

The tensions between the republics and the ethnic groups in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia culminated in the wars of the 1990s. These conflicts were the result of a number of issues. The different republics and interest groups had different views on the role of the Federation, the status of the respective republics, and the economy. Particularly Slovenian representatives were convinced that the Yugoslav economy needs to be opened to the global markets. Supporters of centralism, however, were very much disinclined to reforms (Cf. Čepič, 2005: 1039–48). Apart from the republics' different economic interests, the tensions were also arising in other areas such as education, culture, language, etc.

During the 1970s, everyday life began to change significantly. The political situation and cultural activity had become liberalized. The liberal political leaderships in Slovenia and Croatia began to openly resist federal authorities, because although the majority of foreign currency was acquired by the Slovenian and Croatian economies, this did not have a significant impact on the distribution of federal funds, which left the two republics economically disadvantaged and often lacking means for production. (Cf. Gabrič, 2005: 1066-8).

After Tito's death in 1980, the nationalistic antagonism he had been controlling became rampant, because there was nobody influential and powerful enough to keep a lid on the
growing conflicts and separatist tendencies (Cf. Gabrič, 2005: 1148-50).

In early 1990 Slovenian communists had prepared proposals for democratic reforms which were rejected at the Yugoslav Communist Congress. After the Slovenian representatives left the summit, their Croatian counterparts followed, which effectively disintegrated the Communist Party system and the Yugoslav state (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 400-1).

In the first Slovenian democratic elections in April 1990 various parties were allowed to participate with their respective political programs, something that had previously been impossible in Yugoslavia. Milan Kučan, a former leader of the Slovenian Communist Party who played a significant role in Slovenia's road to independence, was elected president of Slovenia.

The winning political party Demos formed a coalition and took over power in Slovenia. First, the party passed legislation that determined which federal laws would be suspended. They also decided to organize a national referendum about Slovenia's declaration of independenc. 93% of elegible voters partook in the 1990 referendum on Slovenian independence and 88,5% of them voted for an independent Slovenian state. (Cf. Čepič, 2005: 1287-90, 1294-7).

In 1990 significant changes and movements emerged in other Yugoslav republics as well. Election results across the country showed a strong shift to the right and a reinforcement of nationalistic attitudes. In addition to that the country was plagued by failed economic reforms and corruption various scandals.

On June 26th 1991, an independent Slovenian state was declared in front of the National Assembly in Ljubljana. The Yugoslav army responded by sending tanks to the Slovenian border crossings and intended to prevent Slovenia's separation from Yugoslavia by force but failed in the attack on Slovenian combatants (Cf. Pirjevec, 1995: 408-18).
After a 10-day state of emergency the Yugoslav army units surrendered to the Slovenian forces. After a few months the Serbian leadership withdrew its troops from Slovenia and severed all ties to the former republic. Over the following years, Slobodan Milošević directed his efforts to the acquisition of parts of Croatia and, particularly, to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cf. Guštin, 2005: 1338-44).

3.12 The Independent State
After the Second World War, Slovenia’s economy had been developing rapidly, particularly in the fifties, when it was heavily industrialized. It was already heading towards a market economy and managed to maintain constant economic growth rates (Cf. Frucht, 2005: 547). In December 1991 the Slovenian National Council passed a Constitution which defined Slovenia as a democratic republic with a multi-party system, a social state governed by the rule of law and granted its citizens the freedom of speech. The EU acknowledged Slovenia as an independent state in January 1992, and it became a member of the UN in May 1992.

The Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) led by Dr. Janez Drnovšek won the election in December 1992, which was held under stable political circumstances. A coalition was formed by a left-wing party (LDS, consisting of former communists) and a right-wing party (Christian Democrats), which balanced the political arena. The LDS governed for 12 years with alternating coalition partners. It managed to pass a series of fundamental laws which enabled a liberal political culture and the transition to a market economy. Slovenia became a member of the EU in 2004 with considerable popular support.

In the 2004 parliamentary election the right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party headed by Janez Janša won and formed a centre-right government with Christian Democrats, the Slovenian People's Party and the Democratic Party of Pensioners. Since 1991, the governments have managed to sustain a constant economic growth (averaging around 5%) and reformed tax systems. Slovenia met the Maastricht criteria and was the first transition country to join the Eurozone on January 1st 2007 (Cf./http://www.15let.gov.si/15-let-samostojnosti/, Kodelja, 2004:71).
After having lost the Yugoslav market Slovenia faced serious economic difficulties because it had been exporting most of its products to the remaining Yugoslav republics. Of these republics Slovenia was industrially most advanced. Sales on the Yugoslav market had been declining since Milošević banned Slovenian products from being imported to Serbia. After the collapse of Yugoslavia the market was lost completely. Although Slovenia was by far the largest exporter in the former Yugoslavia the transition was nevertheless difficult. Companies who had previously focused on trade with the West began to increase their exports and in this way tried to minimize the loss of southern markets. Despite the difficulties the Slovenian economy recovered relatively quickly and established successful trade relations with world markets, particularly with Europe and is considered to be among those new EU member states who have achieved the most political and economic stability (Cf. Skok, 2004: 54-55).

In order to understand contemporary migrant literature, it is of vital importance to have insight into the historical dynamics that led to the tragedies of WWII. Ted Kramolc's writing deals with the social, cultural and psychological issues that emerged from this troubled period in history. His protagonists are migrants who had been displaced or had to flee from oppressive regimes in search of better lives, or sometimes merely to save their life. Almost all of the characters in his novels had lost relatives or friends during or immediately after the war. They are plagued by unresolved trauma and struggle to reconcile the conflicting aspects of their personal and national heritage within the context of a second homeland and the issues a migrant existence entails regardless of issues in the old world. The psychological burden of national and personal histories is a recurring topic in conversations, thoughts, and nightmares. The complex historical baggage and/or personal trauma further complicates the individual's struggle to reconcile old- and new world values, make sense of oneself and of the world. This is why the understanding of Slovenian history, especially the 20th century history, is imperative in order to grasp the full complexity of the selected texts.
4. An overview of Slovenian emigration and New World authors of Slovenian origin

The literature of a nation is the result of an infinite number of historic, socio-cultural, economic and political factors. A closer look at these developments over time can give valuable insight into the present state of a culture and facilitate a better understanding of its literary canon. The dominant themes, ideas, formal and linguistic features are the product of a specific socio-cultural context at a particular point in time. But it is not only important to approach literature - or any kind of narrative for that matter – with respect to the circumstances it was produced in, but also to look at which discourse has survived over time, and why. The latter is not the aim of this dissertation but a short overview of Slovenian immigration to the Northamerican continent will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the more recent developments in Slovenian diasporic literature.

The first Slovenian settlers arrived in the New World already during the early periods of colonization. Janez Stanonik divides the earliest stages of Slovenian immigration to the Americas into three categories: The colonial period (1492 – 1776), the period marked by the American Revolution and the war against the British colonial system (1776 – 1848), and the period during which the USA emerged as an independent state, as well as the years leading up to the First World War (1848 – 1914) when immigration from Europe reached its peak (Cf. Janez Stanonik, In: Žitnik et al., 1999: 15-16). The most popular literary forms during the early periods were letters, travel reports, autobiographies, and religious texts.

Around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the emigration of Slovenians to the Americas reached its peak. The reasons were primarily economic and the number of Slovenian settlers were large enough for a Slovenian community to develop. This went hand in hand with a growing demand for literary texts that would reflect the life in the community and facilitate identification processes. There have been several re-prints of

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19 See The Anthology of Slovenian Diasporic Literature (1999), Edts. Janja Žitnik et al., for a comprehensive overview of the history of Slovenian emigration and diasporic literatures.
classic Slovenian authors, but also some original writing in the form of newspapers, for example Amerikanszki Szlovencov Glasz/American Windish Voice, memoirs, as well as the abovementioned literary forms.

Generally speaking, the dominant themes of early diasporic literature were (auto)biographical experiences, religious messages, and pragmatic texts, all written primarily in realistic style. After the Second World War, another wave of Slovenian immigrants came to the USA and Canada, whose exodus was primarily politically motivated. The literary activities in the second half of the 20th century included the publications of scientific writing, journalistic writing, semi-fictional writing such as (auto)biographies, memoirs, and a variety of prose, poetry and dramatic texts. In 1990, 124,437 people declared to be of partial Slovenian heritage, out of whom 87,500, (70.3%), declared only Slovenian heritage.\textsuperscript{20}

A more significant wave of Slovenian immigrants came to Canada only after 1924, when the USA limited their immigration quota. It is estimated that there are 40,000 – 50,000 Slovenians living in Canada today (Cf. Mirko Jurak, In: Žitnik et al., 1999: 381). The dominant literary forms among them were also (auto)biographies, memoirs, poetry and travel reports. There are at least 10 societies and clubs for Slovenian-Canadians across Canada, radio stations and some periodical publications. It was my impression, however, that the Slovenian community in the USA is more active and closely knit than in Canada, especially in Ohio, Illinois and Pennsylvania. There are more institutions dedicated to Slovenian heritage in the USA, for example the Center for Slovene Studies in Euclid, Ohio, the Slovenian Farm in Pennsylvania, the Slovenian Polka Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and several others.

\textsuperscript{20} http://cleveland.konzulat.si/index.php?id=841, (online document, accessed on 24.2.2010)
4.1 Less Known Contemporary Northamerican Authors

The following is a list of authors and their works, who are not mentioned in any anthology. To my knowledge, there have also not been any other scientific publications about them, and their names do not come up when searching databases for Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Canadian authors. Part of the reason for this might be the questionable literary quality of their works, but some of them have simply not been discovered by literary critics, for example the early 20th century poet Joseph Kalar, whose poetry is only now being discovered. Other authors are listed here primarily for the sake of completeness.


5. Biographies

5.1 Božidar Ted Kramolc

Božidar Ted Kramolc was born on March 27th, 1929 in Podgora pri Šentvidu, some 20 miles to the north of the Slovenian capital Ljubljana. Today he is mostly known under the name Ted Kramolc. His father, Luka Kramolc, was a musician who made his living by adapting folk songs for sheet music and was among the first influences who nurtured his artistic sensibilities. Ted Kramolc attended a grammar school (Realgymnasium) in Ljubljana, where he studied under artists like Nikolaj Omerza, A. Koželj, and Mario Pregelj. Of the latter he said that it was he who inspired him to become a professional painter. (cf. Mislej. In: Kramolc, 1997: 324). He was unable to attend the Slovenian Academy of Arts because of the outbreak of WWII. Instead he enrolled in the still available program for architecture at the University of Ljubljana, where he was a student of Jože Plečnik. In addition to his study of architecture, he continued to paint extensively and attend private classes held by famous painters such as Božidar Jakac (1940-43), Mitja Švigelj (1942 – 43), Matej Sternen (1942-44), and France Gorše (1943 – 1945). In his free time he oftentimes headed outside of Ljubljana to paint with his friends Marjan Pleničar, Lojze Perk, and Marjan Tršar. During the Italian occupation of Slovenia he was sent to the concentration camp Gonars twice, where he produced a cycle of sketches and drawings. Some of them were on display at his 1994 exhibition in Ljubljana.

Before the war ended, he fled with his brother Nikolaj to Austrian Carinthia. He lived in

21 The biographies differ with regard to the amount and type of content, which is a direct result of the amount of information I was able to obtain about the authors.

22 Jože Plečnik is arguably the most famous Slovenian architect to date (1872 – 1957).
Spittal for three years, where he worked as a book illustrator and put on three exhibitions. He emigrated to Canada in 1948 and spent his first year there working on the railroads, as all immigrants were obliged to do. Afterwards he enrolled in the Ontario College of Art, received his degree in 1951 and completed a postgraduate education specializing in graphic design. He became a Canadian citizen in 1953. Until his retirement he worked as an interior designer and architect, writing and painting in the evenings and on weekends. Besides working full time as a project developer for an interior design company, he continued to exhibit his paintings, often to national and international acclaim.

Ted Kramolc left Slovenia as a political emigrant, together with thousands of others who fled because of dislike or fear of the communist regime that had gained power in Yugoslavia by the end of the Second World War. These communities of expatriates (the majority of them are in the USA, Canada, Australia, and Argentina) were considered politically and ethically opposed to the socialist government of Yugoslavia, as well as a threat to national interests.

The issue of political emigration was and is a very sensitive one and was not publicly discussed in the former Yugoslavia until around the mid- to late 1970s, when reporters like Spomenka Hribar began to publish on related topics. The cultural figures who stemmed from these communities were therefore not considered to be part of or related to the Slovenian or Yugoslavian cultural heritage. It is probably for this reason that Ted Kramolc was introduced to the Slovenian cultural scene only after the regime in Yugoslavia had crumbled and Slovenia had declared independence. It was also after Slovenia's break with Yugoslavia that Kramolc held his first exhibition in the country of his birth. This was also an important milestone for his reception among a wider readership, because it was after this exhibition that articles about his paintings and literary activity began to be published more widely in the Slovenian media.

23 His paintings are exhibited in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Slovenian National Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Art in Ljubljana, among others.
His first show was at the Slovenijales Gallery in 1991, followed by a retrospective exhibition of his work at a gallery in Celje in 2001, which was later displayed in Slovenj Gradec and Ajdovščina. At the same time he was establishing himself as a writer as well. After the publication of *Tango v svilenih coklah/Tango in Silk Clogs* in 2002 he received very good reviews and was among the finalists for the prestigious Kersnik Award.

Kramolc uses the events in his turbulent life as a thematic source for his writings, oftentimes claiming that writing had a therapeutic and cathartic effect on him. His body of work includes short stories which show influences of the American short story tradition, poems, and novels. Most of his poems and short prose were first published in the most important Slovenian cultural publication of post-WWII migrant communities, the magazine *Meddobje*, which continues to be published to this day in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Over the past years he published increasingly in the Slovenian media, among others a hard-cover collection of short prose writings *Podobe Iz Arhivov (Images from Archives, trans)* from 1992, which he illustrated himself. The novels *Potica Za Navadni Dan (A Potica)*25 *for an Ordinary Day, trans.*), a semi-hardcover, and the hard-cover *Tango v Svilenih Coklah (Tango in Silken Clogs, trans.)* followed in 1997 and 2002, respectively. He is now working on his third novel,

Ted Kramolc writes in Slovenian and English, oftentimes switching between languages within the same text. He wrote most of his poetry in English; Janez Papež, an editor of the magazine *Meddobje*, translated it into Slovenian. His short stories are written in either English or Slovenian, while in his novels he employs both languages alternately, which mirrors the hybrid nature of the diasporic experience.

He remains a constant critic of the Slovenian communities abroad, of politics and culture. His critical views have oftentimes earned him the label of being anti-Slovenian (cf. Mislej. In: Kramolc 1997: 324). Furthermore, his realistic writing style and the oftentimes graphic depictions of brutality seem to have inhibited his success with the

24 From a private interview with the author.
wider reading public. Being a political migrant of right-wing convictions, he was ostracized by the Slovenian media under the socialist government in Yugoslavia. Being critical of traditions, customs and behavior of members in Slovenian communities around the world, as well as of the Catholic Church, he never shed the role of an outsider in the Slovenian community in Canada, either.

In his works he analyzes mostly current issues. His writing focuses on topics related to migrants, multicultural societies, cultural translation, the role of symbolism, ritual, memory, language, and the psychological aspects of trauma. However, his second novel _Tango in Silken Clogs_ does not solely deal with the experience of migrants. Although the narrator is an immigrant from an Eastern-European country, this fact is only mentioned in passing. At its core, the novel is a psychoanalytical analysis of a violent love-affair between a painter and a femme fatale. His poetry, on the other hand, deals with a variety of subjects and employs a variety of stylistic tools and mostly reflects the style of lyrical impressionism.

**Publications:**


*Potica za navadni dan/A Potica for an Ordinary Day* (1997), novel


He is currently working on a new novel, the working title is *Karavana brez vprege*.

Kramolc's novel *A Potica For an Ordinary Day* can be read in direct contrast to Sarah Stonich's *These Granite Islands*, because it appears as if the text were transporting binary oppositions, but it actually deconstructs them. In *Potica*, the dialogues between the characters, the narrative commentary, and the quite directly verbalized world views are deeply rooted in imperialistic epistemologies, characterized by binary oppositions, static center – margin dualism, and transport prejudice including race, ethnic, gender, political,

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25 Potica is a traditional Slovenian pastry, with dough and filling (usually a walnut or poppy paste) rolled into each other to achieve a concentric design.
and religious bias.

However, despite the apparent reiteration of static binaries, the story that is conveyed at the core of Kramolc's novel is the story of a hybrid character who is able to transcend such growth-impeding bias by acknowledging the contradictory experiences of her life but not letting herself idolize either the past, nor adhere to any particular ideology. She manages to translate the Slovenian heritage to the lifestyle of her second homeland, and refuses to be defined by adversity or personal tragedy. When she is faced with binary oppositions she intuitively refrains from siding exclusively with any one particular group.

She is an immigrant but she socializes outside the Slovenian community. She has been traumatized by the experiences during the Second World War but refuses to play the role of the victim. She belongs to the middle class but is not intimidated by either the enormous wealth of her second husband, or his ethnically prejudiced socialite friends. Sonja is the only hybrid character in the novel. She claims the different worlds that constitute any modern existence and thus claims for herself the constantly changing cultural interstices that enable genuine personal growth.

The novel is packed with binaries and old world epistemologies, but by making Sonja the only character who survives, Kramolc is actually deconstructing them and offering hybrid existence as the only viable strategy for survival. All of these factors make *A Potica for an Ordinary Day* a better choice for a postcolonial reading than Kramolc's other texts, which are not as firmly embedded in a contemporary socio-cultural context.

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26 From a private interview with the author.
5.2 Sarah Louise Stonich

Sarah Louise Stonich was born on March 9th, 1958 in Duluth, Minnesota. Her parents were Katherine Burger (1926 – 1981) and Matthew Stonich (1910 – 1977). She has five siblings; Mark Stonich, Mary Matson, Matthew Stonich, Valerie Schooley and Julianne Pope.

Stonich has been married three times, her first marriage with the teacher Keith D. Brakke ended in 1985 after six years of life together. She married the independent freelance television and cameraman Kenneth W. Smith in 1987, they were divorced in 2000. She has been married to Jon Ware since 2006. In 1987 she gave birth to her only child, Joseph Samuel Smith.

Her schooling began at St. Rose of Lima, where she was a pupil from 1963 to 1970, followed by the Jedlika Middle School 1970 from to 1974, both in Proctor, Minnesota (Duluth). Afterwards she attended the Marshall University High in Minneapolis from 1974 to 1976. In 1977 she enrolled at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, to study art.

Her political affiliation is with the Democratic Party, of which she is a registered member. She considers herself to be at the far left of the political spectrum and describes herself as an atheist.

Stonich has always been very active socially and remains a supporter of the fine arts, the Campaign Finance Reform, DFL Party, Greenpeace, NARAL, Amnesty International, Public Radio, Darwin Research Center and the St. Paul Historic Preservation Alliance. She supports causes like pro-choice resources and literacy programs.
Her artistic foci include literature, independent film, historic home renovation, and gardening. She spends most of her time renovating old houses in the historic section of St. Paul, near the Mississippi. In addition to that, she is interested in activities as diverse as ethnic cooking, beachcombing, outdoors, stone-building, masonry, yoga, swimming, hiking, kayaking, and canoeing.

So far she has travelled extensively to Southeast Asia, China, Japan, Europe, South America, Galapagos Islands, Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Central America, Mexico, and Canada. She insists that “travel is especially vital to the writer”.

The list of authors she considers to be of greatest influence on her writing includes Ian McEwan, William Trevor, Ivan Klima, Jamie O’Neill, Flann O’Brien, Alice Munro, Zadie Smith, Iris Murdoch, Vladimir Nabokov, Tessa Hadley, and Dermot Bolger.

Stonich started writing when she was in her thirties, at first producing articles and essays on travel, visual arts, food, and sports. She then turned to short stories and finally to novels.

**Work history:**

’83 – ’85: Zenith City Arts Monthly, reviewer columnist.

’85 – 89: Dayton Studio, prop team designer, producing stage and room sets, painting backdrops, faux finishes, building props and sculpture.


’95 – ’05: Freelance writing, essay and travel articles, novels.

’08 – Present: Wordstalkers editing and publication support services.

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27 [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/these_granite_islands2.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/these_granite_islands2.asp), *(online document, 5.8.09)*
**FULL LENGTH PUBLICATIONS**


*Fishing With RayAnne*, novel (forthcoming) 2010

*Vacationland* stories, (forthcoming) 2010


**ARTICLES, STORIES, ESSAYS, REVIEWS:** (partial listing)


**AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS:**

2004 Loft McKnight Career Development Grant.

2002 Shortlisted for Grand Prix Lectrices d’Elle for translation of *These Granite Islands.*

2001 Friends of American Writers. Best New Novel award

2001 Jerome Travel Study Award for *China Essays* in collaboration with painter Po-Lin Tong.

2000 Minnesota State Arts Board Grant.

1999 Loft McKnight Award For Fiction.

**RESIDENCIES AND FELLOWSHIPS:**

2008 *Kimmel Harding Nelson Center*, Nebraska

2007 *Ragdale* Fellow, Chicago (annually since ‘92).

2005 *Centrum Residency* program, Port Townsend, WA.


2002 *Gibraltar Point Centre*, Toronto.

2001 *Tyrone Guthrie Centre*, County Monaghan, Ireland.

2001 - ’03 *Art Omi Ledig House*, NY.

1992 *Ucross Foundation*, Ucross Wyoming
**EMPLOYMENT/OTHER:** (PARTIAL LISTING)


2008: Editor and writing consultant with newly formed **WORDSTALKERS:** a consortium of editors and writers that develop copy, press releases and content development. Clients include Duluth Visitors and Convention Bureau, Emedia, Aspen Institute, Artspace Online, The American Literary Translators Association.

Consultation for individual writers, including manuscript prep, agent search, presentation, voice coaching, etc.

2002-2008: Presenter, speaker, reader in schools and universities such as John Abbot College (Montreal) Brown University, (NY) University of Minnesota (Minneapolis), NDSU, Mankato State, etc.

2001-2008: Readings and appearances at many international conferences and reading series, such as *Harbourfront, Toronto, Edinburgh Festival, Aran Isands Writers Festival*, etc.

2005: Moderator and Facilitator for the *Aspen Festival of Irish Authors and Books*.

1989-1992: Director of *New American Writing*, providing support services to authors and non-profit literary presses, including representation at international book events in Frankfurt, London, Prague, Barcelona, and Paris.

Sarah Stonich is currently working on a new novel for Little, Brown, which is to be a multi-generational saga about a family with members originating from both ends of the Mississippi. The working title is "American River", but – to quote the author – “titles can change with the wind…”28

The plot of her second novel *The Ice Chorus* (2005) is slightly more straightforward than that of *These Granite Islands*. It narrates the story of Liselle, an American who moves to a cottage in a small Irish fishing village, in order to process her recent separation from her husband and wait for Charlie, a painter she had had a romance with. By the end of the novel, Charlie has not turned up, but Liselle has grown enough through her experiences to realize she does not need him after all.

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28 [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/these_granite_islands2.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/these_granite_islands2.asp), (online document)
The subplots of the novel are actually more complex and intriguing. While Liselle is mulling over her affair with Charlie, her marriage, her tragic relationship with her father, and his infidelity, she begins to film and interview her neighbors from the village. These characters are lively, eccentric, and sometimes unintentionally comical. However, sometimes they warp to archetypes and clichés, for example, the apparently grumpy but still good-natured old man, the beautiful and wise old woman, the rebellious teenager, the ladies man, etc., and the affair with the painter Charlie lacks originality. Nevertheless, the emotions are narrated in an authentic way and the central characters are described with a sufficient amount of realism. The story which unfolds in front of Liselle's camera eventually reaches an intriguing level of sophistication. It transcends the echelon of mere romance and investigates how love affects every part of life, all relationships, the way people live, and the choices they make. It also shows the fragility of women and the raw hurt of loss, but at the same time it also shows the immense strength of women, and the way they are able to survive hardship. Furthermore, it is an account of love relationships between couples of all ages, and the oldest couple actually has the most meaningful, loving, and passionate relationship.

The most important themes of the novel are love, betrayal, redemption, hope, and healing. The main theme, however, is the telling of stories. Many characters find peace of mind, or at least some comfort, by telling Liselle their story. As Liselle pieces together the intricate mosaic of the lives of four generations of a family, she realizes that she is also telling her own story, which ultimately helps her to really come into her own, find strength, peace of mind, and closure with her past.

From a postcolonial perspective the novel is problematic for a number of reasons. It reiterates several conservative clichés about gender roles and relationships, and implies that social classes are still quite impermeable. There is a subtle colonial attitude toward workers and natives from non-white cultures. The back-flashes to Liselle's time in Mexico also show the Latino staff and servants in subordinate positions and not really interacting with the main characters, who all belong to an academic, artistic, or financial elite.
The reason I chose *These Granite Islands* of *The Ice Chorus* for this thesis is that it offers more material for analysis. Both are well-crafted texts but *These Granite Islands* is more complex in terms of plot and language if compared to *The Ice Chorus*. The literary devices in *These Granite Islands* are more subtle. The symbolism, the imagery, and the metaphors are denser, and the range of social implications is wider than in Stonich's second novel. This positions Stonich in direct contrast to Kramolc's novel *A Potica For an Ordinary Day*. 
5.3 Ray McNiece (1966 - )

Ray McNiece is a poet, actor, singer, guitarist from Cleveland, Ohio. He is probably known best for his performance poetry, which has earned him nationwide recognition and a number of awards, including the National Poetry Slam Championship, and the Grand Slam Championship of the Arkansas Celebration of the Arts. As an actor, he appeared in numerous productions in Cleveland at Dobama, the Ensemble, the Cleveland Playhouse, and the Cleveland Public Theater, where he directed the play “Junk Bonds”, and was co-writer of an adaptation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, “Blue Sky Transmission.” He is pursuing his interest in music by playing and singing in the band Tongue-in-Groove.

McNiece's performance style and the thematic structures of his poems and stories are reminiscent of Woody Guthrie and the Beat poets, but have a much more modern edge. Other influences include Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, and literary traditions from across the world, most notably of Zen poetry.

He tours regularly across the USA and internationally. His accomplishments so far include a keynote address with Robert Bly at the First Coast Writer's Conference, a featured reading at the opening of City Lights Italia in Florence with Beat poet and editor Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and a performance with his band Tongue-in-Groove at the Starwood Festival, opening for legendary African drummer Babatunde Oluntunje. In the summer of 2000 he toured Italy with Anne Waldman, John Giorno and Ed Sanders as part of the City Lights Italia Festival. In the summer of 2001, he performed in Moscow, at the Polytech, the Russian poets Hall of Fame, and in Zima Junction, Siberia, with Yevgeny Yevtushenko. While there he performed on Good Morning Russia.

In 1999 he received the Award of Excellence for his writing from Northern Ohio Live, as well as the Lyricist Review Song contest. He chaired a panel on performance poetry for
the 2000 National Folk Alliance Conference, and was honored writer for the 1998 and 2000 Writers and Friends Celebration sponsored by the Poets’ League of Cleveland. He was awarded an artist residency at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in 2001, and at the Kerouac House in Orlando in 2002. His song “I Can See the City” was featured in the WVIZ documentary Faces of Steel aired in 2002. ²⁹

5.4 Natasha Sajé

Natasha Sajé was born in Munich, Germany and grew up in New York City and Northern New Jersey. She earned a B.A. from the University of Virginia, an M.A. from Johns Hopkins, and a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland. Presently she is an associate professor of English at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, and at Vermont College MFA, where she teaches writing classes.


She published her first book of poems, *Red Under the Skin* in 1994, for which she was awarded the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize and the Towson State Prize in Literature. Her second collection of poems, *Bend*, was published in 2004 by Tupelo Press, for which Sajé was awarded the Utah Book Award in Poetry.

Her thematic foci include physical and emotional hunger, sexuality, the body and its movement, food, and the ambiguity of relationships. Her poems are creative, quirky, insightful, and sometimes a challenge to understand. Sajé investigates the essence of vocabulary, unusual usages of language, unusual words, and discursive power dynamics. The relationship between the lyrical I and the addressee is direct and immediate, which contributes to a more intimate experience of her poetry.

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30 For more information see Natasha Sajé's homepage at Westminster College, Utah: www.people.westminstercollege.edu/faculty/nsaje. (online document, accessed on 17.2.2010)


**Education**

Dissertation: "Artful Artlessness: Reading the Coquette in the Novel, 1724-1913"
1995  Ph.D. University of Maryland, English
1980  M.A. Johns Hopkins University, Writing Seminars
1976  B.A. University of Virginia, English Honors

**Teaching Experience**

Westminster College, Salt Lake City, UT 84105
Assistant Professor of English, 1998-2002; Associate Professor, 2002 to 2008; Professor, 2009-present. Director of the Anne Newman Sutton Weeks Poetry Series

Vermont College MFA in Writing, Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, VT 05602
Faculty, Poetry: December 1996 to present

Johns Hopkins University, Part-Time Graduate Division, Washington, D.C., 1994 to 1998

Maryland State Arts Council, Poet-in-Residence, 1989 to 1998

Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, 1993 to 1998

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1996 to 1997

Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, Virginia.
Margaret Banister Writer-in-Residence, Fall 1995

University of Maryland English Department, 1988-1994

Goucher College, Maryland, 1982-1987

Business Writing at Its Best, 1985-1990
Books-in-Progress

Windows and Doors: A Poet Reads Literary Theory
Chapters on Etymology, Syntax, Rhythm and Sound, Surprise and other Emotions, Figurative Language, Form, Narrative, Ethics, Self and Identity, Structuring Books, Literary Evaluation

untitled as yet
collection of poems spurred by etymology and the alphabet

Articles

“Poetry and Ethics: Writing about Others,” forthcoming The Writer’s Chronicle
“Metonomy, the Neglected (but Necessary) Trope,” American Poetry Review Jan/Feb 2009
"'The Assurance to Write, The Vanity of Expecting to Be Read': Deception and Reform in Mary Davys' The Reform'd Coquet." Essays in Literature 23 (Fall 1996): 165-177.

Reviews and Interviews

Interview with Kamau Brathwaite, forthcoming Ariel: A Review of International English Literature.
Interview with Derek Walcott (with George Handley), Ariel: A Review of International
English Literature 32 (2) April 2001: 129-144.

Personal Essays

“Reading Sula in Salt Lake City” (forthcoming Twentieth-Century Literature, “Academic Orthodoxies,” edited by Lisa Ruddick)
“On Reading Mr. Mani,” New Ohio Review Fall 2008

Selected Poems since 1992

“Against Chronology” and “Two Thieves” Cerise Review (inaugural issue) Summer 2009
“Anathema,” forthcoming New Ohio Review
“Friendships” The Café Review Winter 2009
“G” and “Š” Denver Quarterly Fall 2008
“O” and “M” Pool (#7, 2008)
“The Sheep’s Tail” Antioch Review Fall 2008


“C” and “Q” *Cincinnati Review* (Summer 2007)

“D” *Paper Street* (Fall 2007) issue includes interview


“Sacrifice: An Interview” (*Wheelhouse* Summer 2007)

“J” (*Salt Flats Annual* 2007)

“W” VOLT (February 2007)


“L,” “P” and “T,” *Gettysburg Review* (Fall 2005)

“B” and “H,” *Pool* (#4, 2005)

“Y” and “S,” *Puerto del Sol* (Summer 2005)


“Marcel at the Station House,” *Paris Review* (Summer 2003)

“Dear One” and “Seven Types of Ambiguity,” *Quarterly West* (Summer 2003)


“Pink Parken,” *Tar River Poetry* (Fall 2003)

“Chicken Scratch” and “My Secret Life,” *Shenandoah* (Fall 2003)


“Flying Home” and “Tale,” *Prairie Schooner* (Fall 2002)

“Song of the Cook,” “trouble,” and “Bad News,” *Exquisite Corpse* (Spring 2002)

“Leave No Trace,” *Antioch Review* (Summer 2002)

“I See,” “Reading the Menu,” and “Thanksgiving,” *Beloit Poetry Journal* (Summer 2002)


“The Philosopher’s Name Was Misspelled Everywhere,” “The Statues,” and “Graphology,” *Ploughshares* (Spring 2002)

“We Saw No Caribou,” *Parnassus* (Winter 2002) rptd *Poetry Daily*


“Marble Steps,” *Crab Orchard Review* (Spring/Summer 2001)

"Theme and Variations for Flute, Snail, and Bird," *Colorado Review* (Spring 2001)

"Vice," *Chelsea* (Fall 2001)

"Bend" and "Reading Henry Fowler's Modern English Usage in Salt Lake City in November," *Kenyon Review* (Fall 2000)


"Beyond Good and Evil" and "White," *Gettysburg Review* (Spring 2000)
"Story of a Marriage," Two Rivers Review (Spring 1999)
"A Minor Riot at the Mint," Ploughshares (Fall 1998)
"Goodbye To Robert Graves," The American Voice Anthology 1998
"I am peeling four pink grapefruit," Shenandoah (Spring 1998) rptd. Poetry Daily
"Walking Dream," Bloomsbury Review (Fall 1998)
"Fruit," Gargoyle (1998)
"Heloise to Abelard" and "Night Writing," Luna (Spring 1998)
"Astrology" and "Why I Won't Pierce My Ears," Crab Orchard Review (Fall 1997)
"I Want But Can't Remember," Shenandoah (Fall 1996)
"Scrabble," Shenandoah (Spring 1996)
"Fable," Harvard Review (Fall 1995)
"Gravity," Denver Quarterly (Fall 1995)
"Then What Is the Question?" Feminist Studies (Spring 1995)
"Agoraphobia," The Virginia Quarterly Review (Fall 1994)
"Edith Wharton after the Death of Henry James," Gettysburg Review (Spring 1994)
"Appetites" and "Salsify," Salmagundi (Spring 1994)
"What I Want To Make For You," The American Voice (Spring 1994)
"Red under the Skin," Ploughshares (Spring 1994)
"A Male in the Women's Locker Room," Ploughshares (Fall 1993)

"Tongues," Prairie Schooner (Fall 1993)
"Game" and "Eating Crabs with Bob and Jim," Shenandoah (June 1993)
"A Short History of the Sybarites," Poetry (May 1993)
"What Difference Does It Make?" Ploughshares (Spring 1993)
"Reeling," Chelsea (Fall 1992)
"L'Oustau de Baumanière," The American Voice (Fall 1992)
"Rampion" and "Chocolates," Antaeus (Fall 1992)

Work in Anthologies and Textbooks, Reprinted Poems and Essays.

Contemporary American Women's Poetry (Autumn House, 2008)
Words Overflown by Stars: Creative Writing Instruction and Insight from the Vermont College of Fine Arts M.F.A. Faculty (Writer’s Digest Books, 2008)
Poetikon 15/16 (November-December 2007) selected Saje poems translated into Slovenian
Best American Poetry 2007
Manthology (Iowa, 2006)
Rough Places Plain (Salt Marsh, 2006)
Mona Poetica (Mayapple Press, 2005)
Sweeping Beauty: Contemporary Women Poets on Housework (Iowa, 2005)
Contemporary American Poetry (Autumn House, 2005)
Sustenance and Desire: A Food Lover’s Anthology of Sensuality and Humor (Godine, 2004)
Poetry Speaks (Source Books, 2003)
Mercy of Tides (Salt Marsh, 2003)
Are You Experienced? Baby Boom Poets at Midlife (Iowa, 2003)
O Taste and See: Food Poems (Bottom Dog Press, 2003)
Proposing on the Brooklyn Bridge (Grayson, 2003)
The Poets’ Grimm (Storyline, 2003)
Poets of the New Century (Godine, 2001)
Adirondack Review (Fall 2001)
The American Voice Poetry Anthology (Kentucky, 1998)
Everyday Creative Writing (NCTE, 1996)
Hungry As We Are (Washington Writers House, 1995)
What’s Become of Eden: Poems of Family at Century’s End (Slapering Hol Press, 1994)
Poetry Daily (Fall 2005; Fall 2003; Summer 2002; Winter 2002; Spring 1998)
Verse Daily (September 2002)

Honors

2009 Merit Leave, Westminster College
2008 Utah Original Writing Competition, First Place, Poetry
2008 Gore Summer Research Grant
2008 Alice Fay di Castagnola Award (for ms in progress), Poetry Society of America
2006 Gore Summer Research Grant
2006 Westminster College Faculty/Student Research Grant
2004 Utah Book Award in Poetry
2004-2005 Fulbright Grantee/Slovenia
2004 Utah Humanities Council Colton Research Fellowship
2003 Merit Leave, Westminster College
2003 Distinguished Teaching Award, Vermont College
2002 Utah Humanities Council Friend of the Humanities Award
2002 Campbell Corner Poetry Prize
2001 Utah Original Writing Competition, First Place, Poetry
2001 Gore Summer Research Grant
2000 Westminster College Faculty/Student Development Grant
1999 Utah Individual Artist Grant
1999 Judith Siegel Pearson Poetry Award, Wayne State University
1998 Robert Winner Award, Poetry Society of America
1996 White River Writers Conference Fellowship
1995 Towson State Prize in Literature for *Red Under the Skin*
1995 Banister Writer-in-Residence, Sweet Briar College
1995 Worcester County Summer Arts Grant
1994 Baltimore CityArts Community Development Grant
1993 Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize for *Red Under the Skin*
1993 Paumanok Poetry Award, Runner Up
    (Visiting Writer, SUNY-Farmingdale)
1993 Maryland Individual Artist Grant in Poetry
1993 Academy of American Poets Prize
1992 Squaw Valley Community of Writers Award

**Publications about Natasha Sajé**


Ted Kramolc's 1997 novel A Potica for an Ordinary Day/A Potica za navadni dan (from here on referred to as Potica) is a classic example of diasporic literature. Kramolc, a first generation Slovenian-Canadian immigrant, left his home country during the Second World War as a political emigrant. He settled in Toronto, where he studied and made a career as an architect and painter. The thematic foci in most of his published work centers around cultural diversity, cultural difference, intercultural contact, the building of national and individual identity, the impermeability of modern social classes, and the dynamics of love and relationships. In Potica, he describes the lives of a group of first-generation Slovenian-Canadians, particularly that of Sonja, a middle-aged woman on a path to self-discovery and self-determination. Kramolc plays with cliché and stereotype, which he questions and often shatters. The examination of multiculturality, construction of the Other, and the fragmented postmodern realities lend themselves well to a postcolonial reading of Kramolc's texts, particularly of Potica for an Ordinary Day.

From a postcolonial perspective it is interesting to observe in how far the novel transports the so-called 'old world' values and imperialistic binary oppositions. On the surface, the text is a vessel of old world ideologies. The descriptions and conversations the characters engage in are full of cultural essentialism, gender stereotyping, and the implied world views reflect a total immersion in western epistemological systems. At first, it seems that Kramolc is reiterating the same value systems that conservative and imperialist forces gradually imposed on the non-western world, i.e. former colonies, political and economic adversaries, and the Other in general. It also appears that aristocratic ideals, the impermeability of social classes, and traditional gender roles are being promoted. The novel shows characters, who isolate themselves within an ethnic community, are fixated on the past, have internalized ethnic hierarchies that place them in an inferior position compared to native Canadians, and have no intimate contact with other ethnicities. They do not influence anyone and seem to be stuck in communicative ruts. First generation immigrants are set up as a margin to the contemporary western center. However, it is they
who place themselves on the periphery of the Anglo-Saxon and French Canadian center, which they seem to idealize. At the same time, there are very strong racist sentiments and prejudice toward blacks, Asian, and Middle-Eastern immigrants. In this respect the center – margin binary is repeated, but in this case, the white, Slavic immigrants who have already spent several decades in Canada identify themselves with the superior 'truly Canadian' center, and view more recent arrivals of non-white races through the same prism of prejudice they fall victim to themselves under different circumstances.

Despite the density of imperialist binary oppositions, racial, ethnic, and social prejudice, the text is anything but a vessel for transporting such colonial ideas. As the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that all characters who are caught up in static binary thinking either die, remain unhappy, lonely or childless. The relationships between people from different ethnic backgrounds or social classes that are burdened by colonial prejudice and imperialist hesitation to embrace novelty, are the ones that fail.

The only character who survives with some prospects of a happy future is the protagonist Sonja, who is also the only hybrid character in the novel. She is the one who acknowledges the positive and negative aspects of the past, but does not allow it to become the determining force in her life. She is a victim and a survivor, but she does not let herself be defined by this. She is quite unencumbered with regard to her ethnic background, social class, and gender stereotyping. Her relationships with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds are genuine, and she remains quite unimpressed in interactions with the upper classes. Perhaps most importantly, she does neither reject nor idolize her heritage by compulsively repeating old traditions, instead she alters old world rituals and symbols to appropriate them to the new environment. That way she actually claims her heritage for herself and, by doing so, keeps it alive.

The fact that Sonja is the only character who survives in the end, the only one with a prospect of a happy future, and the one who seems most at ease with her own personality, is a lesson in deconstruction of colonial binaries. Despite appearances of the contrary, Kramolc's novel is an appeal for hybridity, for authentic bilateral interaction within a
third space where different ethnicities, social classes, and age groups interact, influence, and continuously redefine themselves in an exchange that is not marked by static hierarchies and obstructing prejudices of any kind. It is an attempt at deconstruction of binary oppositions and static center – margin constellations. In that Kramolc's novel stands in direct contrast with Stonich's novel, which is marked by imperialist value systems and ultimately reinforces the binary oppositions that postcolonial critics have always vehemently criticized.

6.1 Structure and plot
We follow a group of first generation Slovenian Canadians who emigrated from Yugoslavia after the communist regime took over after the Second World War. Although seemingly well-settled in their new homeland and professionally successful, they tend to socialize mostly within the expatriate Slovenian community. In their conversations they deal mainly with issues from the past, Slovenian politics, the trauma that led to their exodus, and gossip about other members of the Slovenian community in Toronto. They are all very dissatisfied and battling their personal demons.

The main plot narrates the story of Sonja, a middle-aged woman whose husband commits suicide in the course of the novel, and her seemingly perfect-romance with the Canadian Tyrone. The latter is eventually killed by an anonymous Middle-Eastern/Asian immigrant, and his affection toward Sonja is exposed as only an attempt to relive memories of his late wife, who resembled Sonja. Sonja Zavrtanik is the only quintessentially hybrid character of the novel and the only character who undergoes a personal development. She is hindered in her development by her migrant background and the men in her life. Nevertheless, she manages to transcend the conflicting aspects of her primary and secondary homelands and internalizes both cultures as her own in a uniquely hybrid third space where she creates a life that is not determined by either background but is shaped into something new. She is able overcome the gender and cultural discriminations that continue to exist on an external societal level, and to find her own hybrid identity. The hybrid nature of migrant existence is symbolized by the potica, a traditionally Slovenian pastry whose symbolic connotations change over the course of
the novel. The book could be read as the coming-of-age narrative of a middle-aged woman and lends itself to a feminist, or an anocritical reading as well.

The text was originally conceived as a short story but was later developed into a novel. The published version consists of 64 numbered sections and smaller subsections, which vary in length and create an impression of a fractured reality, a typically postmodern phenomenon. The beginning of the novel is set in Toronto on October 31st, 1996. Many of the sections are equipped with place and time references, reminiscent of diary entries. This technique evokes a sense of factuality and underlines the novel's neo-realistic style. The events are set in a very specific and narratively significant historical frame, namely, the psychological aftermath or the decades following the Second World War. However, it could not be considered a historical novel, because the references to historic events remain fractional and anecdotal throughout the text. Although a disclaimer at the beginning of the novel denies any similarities to real-life characters and events, the reader cannot help but find parallels in history and the Slovenian diasporic community, something which caused controversy among the readers and a very critical reception of his texts. Nevertheless, continuous references to historic events and figures underline the perception of factuality and realism.

With regard to content, the novel consists of two parts. In the first part (sections 1 – 16) the reader is introduced to four middle-aged couples who are part of the Slovenian community in Toronto, all emigrants from post-Second World War Yugoslavia. They socialize at a private soiree, during which a lively debate about political issues ensues. The dinner party could be regarded as an independent text and has the qualities of a short story. All characters but one are introduced, the ground for all relevant topics is laid. The symbology is introduced, and there is an escalation of plot followed by a twist and a sort of cathartic yet unhomely calm. Since Kramolc, by his own admission, originally intended the text to be a short story, it seems that the sections 1 – 16 are the remnants of the original concept, because the narrative cycle could have ended with the juxtaposition of the four couples and the suicide that ensues.
A brief plot summary of the first section – the dinner party - is as follows. The attending guests are members of the Slovenian community in Toronto and have arrived in Canada during or shortly after the Second World War. They are Milena and Jože Dolžan, Sonja and Štefan Zavrtanik, Helena and Dr. Anton Čemažar. They have been invited to the home of professor Gorazd Prunk and his wife Valentina. The first part is a 3rd person narration reviewing the events from the perspective of the host Gorazd Prunk. The longest part of the first section consists of the conversations at the dinner table, which mirror the issues the characters are caught up in. The civil small talk soon turns into a heated political debate about the topics of emigration, the dichotomy of the old and the new world, politics, etc., and introduces the characters' different perspectives on the issues at hand. The host's thoughts help to give insight into some of the hypocrisy and inner struggles of the guests at the dinner party.

In the second part of the novel the narrative focus shifts from Gorazd Prunk to two of his guests, the married couple Sonja and Štefan Zavrtanik. Over the days following their evening together, Štefan begins to act increasingly strange, locking himself into his cellar which he has furnished as a military bunker, and eventually commits suicide by throwing himself under a train.

From these events his widow Sonja emerges as the unexpected protagonist of the novel. Sections 29 – 66 are devoted almost entirely to her and constitute the central part of the novel. Sections 17 – 28 function as a link between the two major narrative strands. There is no clear division in terms of the two plots. The first narrative strand is centered around the recently retired professor Prunk's unease about growing old, and the second narrative is a kind of belated coming-of-age account of the recently widowed Sonja Zavrtanik.

The narrative of Sonja Zavrtanik's fate is intertwined with sections describing the past and her memory flashes mostly take her back to the time during the Second World War and shortly after.

After her husband’s death, she feels the need to re-define her identity, which she feels
had been lost over the course of her marriage and the time in Canada. She sets out to slowly but systematically reorganize her life and find out who she really is after she had been defined by her marriage during her entire adult life. She sells her house and moves into another neighborhood, takes up a job at an art gallery and begins to piece her life together anew. She keeps remembering the Toronto native Damian Kane, a lover from the time just before her marriage, who seems to have been the true love of her life. It is implied that he did not want to settle down with her, which is why she decided to marry Štefan Zavrtanik, a respected member of the Slovenian community who would provide her with stability, security, and social status. The glimpses into the unhappy love-story between Sonja and Damian cast a light of banality upon the marriage, dissolving all idealistic assumptions about the married couple’s relationship but they also lay the groundwork for the romance that ensues.

Eventually Sonja meets Tyrone Harrington, a retired colonel whose wife had died some years prior. He begins to court Sonja and appears to be quite perfect. He is portrayed as handsome, well-educated, refined, experienced, witty, respectable, courteous, and of ‘old money’. Their relationship seems to be based on romantic clichés, there are several stock elements of traditional romance. Tyrone is set up as a noble prince charming who is smitten with the damsel Sonja. The oddness is achieved by contrasting traditional elements of romance with the obvious lack of genuinely strong emotions on Sonja's and Tyrone's parts. This discrepancy between appearance and reality is preparing the reader for the disillusion that follows after a somewhat unexpected twist of the plot at the end of the novel. It seems that Kramolc criticizes old world nostalgia, traditional myths about gender roles, and at the same time warns of mindless idealization of the new world.

However, the dynamics between Sonja and Tyrone is more significant for our analysis than the tragic end of their romance. After a rather promising start to her new life as a widow – and a single, independent woman for the first time in her adult life – appears to become increasingly passive and receptive as her relationship with Tyrone is getting more serious. He, on the other hand, is portrayed as the active one in the relationship, as the one who takes charge and is in charge of things. Nevertheless, his character never
acquires depth, the narrator never gives direct insight into his thoughts. Despite his dominance the text does not give him a voice. He remains a type, shifting from a kind of mature prince charming to the archetypal 'older mentor' (cf. Campbell 1949/2008). He takes her to society events, on excursions, and introduces her to the Canadian upper-class milieu. In the text, the Canadian high society is portrayed as of almost exclusively of Anglo-Saxon, proud, noble, uptight, and very skeptical of anything foreign or other, which would include other races, ethnicities, lower social classes, even the nouveau riche strata of society. However, the attitude the narrator and the main protagonist, Sonja, have toward such behavior is key for the interpretation of these sections and determines the power-dynamics presented in the text.

Sonja and Tyrone's relationship seems to become even more serious when he takes her on a trip across Canada. This section of the novel is most problematic and has been criticized by a number of critics. (Cf. Večer, 1998) The descriptions of Tyrone's and Sonja's travels across Canada consists almost entirely of Tyrone's endless monologues on Canadian history, politics, geography, economics, and art. It sounds as if he were reading out of school textbooks and there is no bilateral exchange between him and Sonja. He assumes the position of the enlightened center that must educate the more backward margin about civilization and ethics. What may seem an ideal relationship to an outsider is rapidly deteriorating because there is less and less genuine exchange between the partners. Tyrone assumed the superior position and is unidirectionally transferring his knowledge to Sonja, or at least attempts to. The novel reaches an odd climax with the final disaster that gives way to a cathartic dissolution of events. In a modernist swift turn of the plot, Tyrone is shot dead when he tries to stop two foreign thieves from robbing a bank. All of these events lead to the final narrative peak of the novel, the surprise ending when Sonja discovers a painting of Tyrone's late wife only to realize that she is the spitting image of the dead woman. The novel ends as Sonja once again begins to piece her life back together.

In keeping with the postcolonial approach, the text is also very well suited for an analysis of subaltern dynamics, Spivak's understanding of awareness and Bhabha's theory of
hybrid space. Alternatively, the coming-of-age narrative of a middle-aged woman would also lend itself to an anocritical reading of the novel or to a focus on the corporal, gender- and age-related exclusion (cf. Greer 1992; Pasero 2007; Backes 2007; Maierhofer 2007).

It is interesting, however, that regardless of how much Tyrone tries to establish Sonja as an inferior, marginalized counterpart, she does not seem to be too bothered about it. She refuses to be pushed to a subordinate position simply by not reacting to Tyrone's displays of discursive strength and control. She is the only character in the novel who does not define herself through her otherness. The other characters fail to do so and must suffer feelings of inferiority, resentment, or alienation.

The first section of the novel focuses on the life of Gorazd Prunk, his identity which is defined by his foreignness, something he has not been able to truly overcome, despite having lived in Canada for over four decades. It is interesting, however, that his otherness and his foreignness is never once addressed by a non-Slovenian character in the novel, and there is only one instance when racism – or rather 'ethnism' – toward any of the characters is mentioned. In section 2, at the very beginning of the novel, Gorazd Prunk remembers his early years in Canada. He recalls “a stiff, Anglo-Saxon attitude and social reservations toward him, an immigrant with a foreign accent” (8), which is also the first example of cultural essentialism, an us vs. them attitude, described from the perspective of a character who has often felt like an outsider in his new home.

Nevertheless, all characters are caught up in internal struggles resulting from a multicultural and diasporic existence and the psychological pitfalls of political exodus. The only notable exception is Sonja Zavrtanik, who also has to battle personal demons and discrimination; but she seems to acknowledge the cultural contradictions inherent in migrant existence and brushes off ethnic stereotyping. Her neutral reactions to conflicting issues seems to be set up as a possibility to transcend the impediments resulting from traditional center – margin binary oppositions.

The narrative focus remains on the characters' psychology, which implies that otherness
is an internalized category and as much an internal psychological issue of an individual as it is a factor in intercultural communication. This is also why the theoretical postulates of Spivak and Bhabha seem more appropriate for the analysis of the text. Theorists like Ashcroft, Tiffin, Griffiths, who published the seminal books on postcolonial criticism *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995), and *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* (1998), seem to direct their focus more toward the external factors and their criticism is based on a more action-oriented agenda that is to be applied on a broader social scale. Theirs is a more pragmatic, socio-cultural and socio-historical approach. Although Bhabha's and Spivak's theories are also inclusive of the wider, abstract social categories of race, gender, and social class examined as cultural and historical phenomena, they are more interested in private, immediate and elusive interaction. This is why their approach is better suited for the analysis of individual psychology, and therefore, of the novel at hand.

The psychological unrest of Gorazd Prunk is set in stark contrast to his controlled appearance and composure. He is apprehensive about the farewell ceremony preceding his official retirement that is planned for him at the college. He struggles with the idea of old age and is increasingly plagued by suppressed memories of trauma and other recollections of his past, which surface in his dreams and nightmares.
6.2 Conceptual Structures and Narrative Techniques

6.2.1 The Past as the Constant Present

The binary opposition of the past and the present is at the core of the narrative timeline. The frequent shifts from past to present and back reflect the intensity with which past experiences shape the lives of the characters in the novel. At the same time, the frequent back flashes and constant discussions about the past illustrate how caught up the characters are in the tragic events that have shaped their lives. Although the past is constantly present either as private flashes of memory or as a topic of conversation, it is also constructed as something that is entirely removed from the present. The characters seem to feel that embracing the would automatically lead to an irreversible loss of the past, as well as their core identity. This implied dualism is causing the characters to continuously choose sides – with all the prejudice such tribal thinking entails – rather than embracing the pluralistic and hybrid nature of diasporic, multicultural existence. Such dualistic epistemologies that can be reduced to old world binary oppositions are what Kramolc's text is actually criticizing. This is achieved by thoroughly exploring the effects static binary thinking has on the characters, and deconstructing it by revealing the tragic outcomes of hybridoresistance.

The novel's subsections 9 – 25 narratively precede the dinner party and consist largely of Gorazd's flashbacks and dreams. Some of the subsections are written in the style of diary entries and equipped with specific time and date reference, probably to signify that these are actual events and not fantasies. The diary entries stand in contrast to the narrated dream sequences, which seem to be a direct link to Gorazd's suppressed emotions. Section three is devoted entirely to Gorazd's memories and nightmares. It is extremely erratic in structure, which reflects the character's inner turmoil. The flashbacks alternatively take him back to his time as a refugee in a displaced persons camp in Villach, Austria, the years in Spittal/Drau, the years just before and after the end of WWII, the deaths of strangers and people close to him, political deceptions from all sides and, finally, his escape to Canada in 1948.
The memories of distant trauma are intertwined with erotic dreams of his former student Jennifer Davies. Kramolc employs the narrative technique of juxtaposing contrasting contents and styles for dramatic effect. It also reflects the contrast between a character's conscious and subconscious processes, reality and dreams, in Freud's terms, the contrast between logos and eros/tanatos. Kramolc stands in the classical tradition of assigning the rational, the real and the present to the daytime and the irrational, emotional, the a-temporal, the threatening and the surreal to nighttime. This opposition of rational/irrational, light/dark, etc. can be traced back to the beginnings of European literature, e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Judeo-Christian religious literature, Shakespeare, etc. It also reflects the simplistic binary oppositions that characterize imperialist epistemological systems. By dividing the world into good and bad, male and female, civilized and primitive, rational and instinctive, erotic and pure, reality becomes more easily fathomable. The dualism between eroticism and purity, as well as the opposition of youth and old age, becomes especially apparent with the female characters. These binary oppositions demonstrate how potent the 'either/or' rationale is with the majority of the characters. The revealed pathology of such thinking is indirectly also an attempt at their deconstruction.

The erotic, for example, is suppressed into dreams and the subconscientness. It does not have a place in everyday reality. This suppression and sporadic eruption of erotic fantasies can be read in analogy to the suppression of past trauma, and demonstrate that denial, emotional obsessions, and thinking in circles defines the inner lives of many of the characters.

The titles of the dream sequences – both of the traumatic flashbacks and of the erotic fantasies are highly symbolic and the symbology is usually revealed within each section. The respective titles are The Clock Above the Door, Star Gauges, Masks, A Porch With Broken Windows, The Hammer and Purple Darkness. The dream-like quality of these sequences enhances the impression that they are directly connected to issues that lie heavy on the Gorazd's subconscious and are the main cause of his internal turmoil.
There seem to be two types of recurring dreams. The erotic fantasies seem to reflect unfulfilled desires, and the nightmares seem to circle around unresolved issues, memories, and deep-seated trauma. The level of symbolism pertaining to the objects and people who appear in these dreams and memory flashes is very significant. Both, the opulent fantasies and the haunting memory flashes, deviate from the novel's overall realistic style and plunge the narrative into a kind of expressionist pathos. The main plot, which is kept in a neo-realistic style, is set in Canada in the late 1990s, but the dreams and memory flashes are all set in the distant past, in Gorazd’s youth and early adulthood in the late 1940s.

Through these scarce but intense memory flashes the reader gets a rough sense of the traumatic experiences Gorazd and his peers went through during and after WWII. Judging from the fractional accounts of his flight and the references to the political killings that happened during that time, he and his family were not supporters of the partisan resistance that was gaining strength in what was to become the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and had to fear for their lives. The post-war killings of civilians and collaborators with the German and Italian occupying forces is a historical fact that has only recently been discussed publicly in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Also the role of the allied forces, in this case particularly the British troops in the post-war killings has long been a taboo in mainstream media. There is a strong autobiographical parallel between the protagonist's fate and that of the author, although Kramolc insists the novel is a work of fiction. Like several of the characters in the novel, the author also had to flee his homeland and escaped to Canada. Prior to that he had spent two years living in Spittal a/d Drau in Austrian Carinthia, and was transferred to the displaced persons camp Gonars in Gorizia. His wife, whom he met in Canada, also fled Slovenia for fear of political persecution. Her four brothers, however, had become victims of the post-war killings. This experience was extremely traumatizing for her and also significantly affected Kramolc.

31 for details, see chapter 3, the Historical Overview
Gorazd Prunk's memory flashes are equipped with dates and place references, which enable a chronological sequencing of the events. Despite the realistic contextualization of the episodes, the narrative style remains erratic, the language cryptic, rich in symbology and powerful, expressionistic images:

Ljubljana, Friday, October 20th 1944

“The nights are cold now.
Darkness everywhere. Stars are perched inertly in the sky.
Water spills across the moor, in it, a young soldier is rotting away.
Who killed him? Why? Where is he from?
Ailment everywhere, only the slight swish of the fogs obscures the monstrosity of night.” (Potica, 11)

There is a distinct lyrical quality to many of the passages which further enhances the proximity to the emotional and the irrational. The unsettling imagery is evoking the feeling of loss, which is heightened by the rather detached tone in which the situations are conveyed. The seeming detachment borders on nihilism but does not quite adopt it, there is a quest for reason, a lamenting of the tragedies and of the loss of meaning:

Ljubljana, Wednesday, March 14th 1945

“[…] The acrasia of night!
Full of sweat, dread, silenced sighs.
The days we spend in dank basements supported by bulky logs, what are they?
Shadows crawl across the walls. We sit motionlessly, thinking […]
It's probably light outside, here but despair.
[…]
All knowledge, all truths have been turned upside down. Truths have been spat at so we're guessing now. Evil everywhere, cynicism, hatred because it's been ordered so.
ACRASIA everywhere.
Children are the only ones sleeping. Where is – God?” (Potica, 12)

The questioning of truth and epistemologies is a modernist phenomenon and a recurring theme in post WWI and WWII literature. Michel Foucault is one of the best known theorists to have analyzed the role of knowledge, more precisely, the role of knowledge in the buildup of social power structures. According to Foucault, the ones who control knowledge also possess social power (Cf. Foucault 1972, 1981). Knowledge is created through discourse, so those who control the discourse also define knowledge and truth.

Kramolc's reference to knowledge and truths being “upside down”, evil and hatred
existing because they have been “ordered [to hate]” (12) addresses precisely these questions of power and control. It also implies that there is some sort of abstract, invisible, external culprit for the described atrocities, which would take away the individual’s responsibility for war crimes. Alternatively, it could also suggest that there were some civilians who were only victims of history and circumstance. However, according to the premise that truth is defined by knowledge, the characters described in the novel were all victims of rather abstract human evil, which came in the guise of groups that are defined as the ‘other’, always distant, never exactly defined, never given a voice or a precise image. The ‘other’ is never entirely personified, yet it is always there. The villains in the first part of the text are British troops who knowingly send fugitives to their death, the hypocritical clergy who assists the allies but selectively warn only certain people to save themselves; and the homeland in general. Štefan Zavrtanik is afraid of an omnipresent yet undefined treat from ‘them’, and Tyrone is shot by masked anonymous immigrants with heavy yet undefined foreign accents.

6.2.2 The Woman as the Eternal Other
The male - female binary is particularly prominent in the novel. Just as the West occupies the position of the Center, so does anything male. On the other hand, anything non-western, non-white or female occupies the position of the Margin. The women are constructed as another type of Other in the novel. All of Kramolc’s texts are marked by a preoccupation with gender and the juxtaposition of male and female characters. In a way, this perspective is reminiscent of the division of all aspects of life between either the male or the female. During the age of Enlightenment in 18th century Europe, the scientific debate began to increasingly define all living things, objects, ideas, concepts, and activities as either male or female. This trend continued well into the 20th century and resulted in a further solidification of binary oppositions, which implied false assumptions about the homogeneity of such abstract concepts. This dynamic contributed significantly to positioning women as the inferior margin and forcing them to assume the position of the subaltern. According to a view of the world that is dominated by such binaries, males had an undisputed monopoly on reason, objectivity, action, power, intellect and
knowledge. The male sphere was associated with the light, the daytime, and was regarded to be the norm. The female sphere was, in contrast, regarded as irrational, passive, subjective, powerless, emotional, intuitive, and in need of guidance. It was associated with the dark, the nighttime, and was generally regarded to be the deviation of the norm. The sphere of influence for women was the home whereas the men were increasingly more directed toward paid occupations which were taking them away from the family residence. The same dynamic of a superior, independent center vs. an inferior margin that was in need of guidance was then transposed onto the colonies.

From a historical perspective this development resulted from the discoveries of new territories and later the industrial revolution. Prior to the industrial revolution, the majority of the population were farmers, women and men had been working together on agricultural and other chores. There was less opportunity for a distinct separation between the male and the female spheres. With the progression of the industrialization process the work began leading men away from home to work in factories, leaving the women in charge of the children and the household. A very differentiated viewing of gender began to develop, which was supported by arguments about the biological and, consequently, the alleged psychological differences between the sexes.

This division between the male and the female was transferred to the viewing of the entire world, to science, medicine, education, politics, geography, etc. The Orient and the colonies were classified as the exotic and the irrational, a deviation, i.e., belonging to the female sphere, while the Occident, the white, male-dominated West began to be regarded as the norm and belonging to the rational male sphere. In Kramolc's text, the women and men are painted in very antagonistic hues, their worlds seem to frequently collide, but they never really merge. Constant references to gender and a clear differentiation between the male and female characteristics underline this distinction.

The omniscient narrator alternatively gives the reader insight into either the male or the female protagonists' minds. In the beginning of the novel, the events are narrated from the Gorazd Prunk's perspective. He is quite fascinated with women, he is even somewhat
obsessed with their appearance, their behavior and actions. However, he remains an observer and thus at a distance to the women in his life, perhaps with the exception of his wife Valentina, although even her behavior sometimes mystifies him. His obsession, however, is directed toward a former student of his, Jennifer Davies, whom he continuously dreams and fantasizes about. These dreams of the young student are recurring and sometimes even have qualities of nightmares; they are narrated in close sequence and alternate with the flashback to the wartime, although they are temporally decades apart, which is an indication that time as a category is suspended at the subconscious level. Jennifer and other women in Gorazd's life remain a mystery to him, they are viewed as sexual but almost impersonal beings. There seems to be fascination but no real understanding, acceptance or egalitarian closeness between the men and the women.

Gorazd’s erotic fantasies about Jennifer Davies seem to be almost complete fantasies about a student-teacher flirtation that was, according to the narrator, never acted upon. The eighteen-year-old student attended Gorazd's classes but there is no indication that anything physical happened between the two, although - judging from Gorazd's memories - there had been erotic tension, and the student comes off as a sultry seductress, at least that is how Gorazd perceived her. In a Foucaultian fashion one could argue that whether the student actually intended to flirt with the professor was irrelevant; what counts are Gorazd's reactions and interpretations which forever marked the relationship between the teacher and the student. The readers are left to make up their own mind about it, although the narrator is almost overconscientious to supports Gorazd's interpretation of events.

On the surface, Kramolc's text is an account of a comfortably settled group of first generation immigrants, which shifts the narrative focus from external social dynamics to the psychology and internal struggles of the individual characters. The nature of Gorazd's and James' conversations, as well as such a private kind of retirement present, suggest a close relationship between the two men and disproves the 'ghettoization hypothesis'. James Ulman's character is used to further emphasize the narrative focus of the novel,
which are predominantly characters from the Slovenian community. In analogy to painting, which is Kramolc's primary occupation, a color or a detail can be drawn into the foreground by placing it aside a contrasting element that will emphasize the individual features of both sides. In that sense, James Ulman serves as an external social marker that shows that the Slovenian protagonists of the novel are very much embedded into a specific social fabric of present day Canada. Although they are well-integrated by all external standards, the main characters are emotionally nevertheless very caught up in the dynamics of their community. Although many of them dislike each other they very much fixated on each other, and seem to reiterate and perpetuate social constellations that focus on issues from the past rather than on the future.

If contemplated from the perspective of Foucault's theories about utterances determining reality and creating knowledge (Cf. Foucault 1966/70, 1969), one could conclude that the same endless, circular conversations the characters have been having for decades keep them in a kind of temporal limbo state which prevents them from developing further and finding any sort of personal fulfillment. This approach also reflects a modernist/postmodernist skepticism about objective reality and the endless number of individual universes that grind against each other in what Bhabha termed third space of enunciation and, in this case in particular, cultural interstice. Not only are the characters described in the novel as immigrants and the 'other' in the country they made their home, but they are also the other in their homeland, from which they are removed through time and space. They might cling to their memories of the old world, yet they are nevertheless hybrids and in constant effort to determine their identity. Their goal, however, seems to evade them despite, or rather because of, their efforts to define it in static terms.

Gorazd Prunk is an integral part of this tightly knit community. At the same time, judging from the narrative perspective his character provides us with, he also seems to be a bystander, contemplating the events that transpire with curiosity but from a critical distance. This kind of skepticism makes him a good observer, and it makes sense that the first part of the novel (sections 1 – 15) is narrated from his perspective, because overall the novel is written in a neo-realistic style. His narration seems to be reliable because of
his critical approach; however, Gorazd’s views and behavior are oftentimes condescending and overly negative, which makes him a less reliable narrator. The other three male characters at the dinner party share Gorazd's male-chauvinist sentiment, and their patronizing view of women shimmers through repeatedly in their conversation. (pp 33, 35, 36, 50). They dominate the conversation and alternatively set the increasingly hostile tone at the event. The social power dynamics of the party become visible as the women unsuccessfully try to steer the conversation away from the sensitive topics and are trying hard to keep up a kind or at least civil atmosphere. It is also the women who fill the uncomfortable silences and conversation gaps in an effort to calm each other down and prevent an escalation that might lead to irreparable breaks among the acquaintances. Alternatively, one could argue that they are trying to ignore the already existing antagonisms between the guests and would like to ignore, repress, or forget the controversial topics which prevent the individuals to come to terms with them in the first place.

Before introducing the other couples, a significant section of the text (section 3) is devoted to Gorazd’s dreams. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, our dreams give us insight into the subconscious. If this is the case, then Gorazd Prunk is a troubled individual who is haunted by painful memories and unfulfilled desires. The analysis and interpretation of dreams is a recurring practice across cultures since the beginning of civilization, dating back to ancient Egypt and ancient Greece. While the interpretation of dreams was then motivated by religious beliefs, it was the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud who introduced theories of dreams and the subconscious to the scientific canon, oftentimes using not only real life case studies but also literary characters to support his findings. In his book *Die Traumdeutung (The Interpretation of Dreams, trans.*)* he argued that dreams, among other things, frequently depict unfulfilled wishes and desires. (cf. Freud, 1899).

Jennifer Davies is an attractive student in her senior year and appears regularly in Gorazd Prunk's dreams. Her appearance is erotic and full of symbolic connotations. She is always described as the seductress, a type of women we can find both in this novel and in *Tango.*
She never rises above the level of a type, her character never gains any depth, nor does she ever obtain a voice; this is the case of all sexually charged characters in Kramolc's novels. It is as if these women were reduced to their sexuality, a point of criticism for any gender-sensitive reader. Kramolc's female characters who are portrayed in more depth, such as Sonja or Gorazd's wife Valentina, show a much more subdued sexuality or are portrayed in otherwise virtuous or even a-sexual terms. Kramolc's text shows two extremes of female characters. On the one hand, we can observe the virtuous, humble and rational women such as Sonja, or the rather conceited yet proper woman Valentina. On the other hand, there are the femmes fatales, women with exuberant sexuality which gives them a certain power over men, such as Jennifer or Alanis in Kramolc's novel *Tango in Silken Clogs*. It is the classical split between the two archetypes, the Virgin Mary and the prostitute Mary Magdalene.

The descriptions of Jennifer Davies are confined solely to her appearance and border on the pornographic. In Gorazd's dreams she wears either “a buttoned-up, see-through blouse, sometimes a tight-fitting red pullover that accentuated her breasts and a varicolored miniskirt...[...] white sandals and red nail polish. [...] ...lips painted red [...] ...thick, dark and well-groomed eyelashes.” (Potica, pp19-20). It would be an oversimplification to say that all female characters in Kramolc's novels are either of the two aforementioned types, either the saint or the harlot. Kramolc seems to operate with a variety of clichés, which he then twists or fractures as the novels progress.

The way Kramolc uses cliché and stereotype in his writing could be explained by using Bhabha's concept of mimicry. According to Bhabha, mimicry is imitation that is “*almost the same, but not quite*”, a “repetition rather than a representation” (Bhabha, 1994:123,125). This kind of imitation is perceived as odd and menacing, although the intention of mimicry need not be. Similarly, there is always something *unhomely* about the stereotyped characters in the novel. They remain distant, never rise above the level of a type. They are cryptic and flat but infinitely mysterious. Because they are never given a voice, there is also no identification taking place and the characters remain abstruse but they also seem to give off an aura of menace. Jennifer Davies sexuality seems
overwhelming to the point of being threatening. The sexual dreams Gorazd has of her resemble nightmares.

Despite the sexual energy these women exude and the power this gives them over the men, there is something quite deprecating about being reduced to sexuality, a point feminist critics have been making for over a century now. Even if the perspective were one of admiration, there is a certain implied inferiority pertaining to such characters. The eroticism is mostly present in dreams, which are charged on all sensory levels, mostly the visual. The narrative technique Kramolc frequently employs mirrors painting techniques, particularly image composition and color symbolism.

6.2.3 Color Symbolism
Color symbolism is significant in all of the sections describing Gorazd’s dreams and memories. Its analysis is a potent device for assigning a more multifaceted meaning to the texts and evoking emotions in the reader. Color-coding is an ancient practice present throughout all cultures, although the meaning ascribed to different colors varies strongly with time, place, and culture. However, historically and culturally speaking, a specific color may also be used for relating different concepts because it changes with the context and time, which requires rather subtle interpretation. To use a straightforward example, in North America and most of Europe, red is the color associated with danger, aggression, and may serve as a warning signal. At the same time it is also used to signify love, lust, passion or warmth, depending on the context. In China, on the other hand, it evokes different associations altogether and is mostly correlated to displays of wealth, ceremony, luck, even weddings or funerals. In India, for example, it is the color of purity, the exact opposite of what it is associated with in the west (Cf. Colville, 2005: 7-9).

The color red is very prominent in Gorazd’s erotic fantasies. Jennifer oftentimes wears red, her nails and lips are also painted red. Biologically, red lips suggest an enhanced blood flow and a higher sensitivity in more sensitive areas of the body. While makeup has been used for thousands of years across civilization, the ideals and interpretations
have changed over the centuries. For example, in Western society in the 19th century it was believed that only promiscuous women and prostitutes wore makeup. The social acceptance of makeup changed and became more neutral during the 20th century. The focus on Jennifer’s lips and physical appearance is significant because lips are a very sensual. They are a very sensitive tactile organ, an erogenous zone, and play an important part in acts of intimacy. Lips are often regarded to be a symbol of sexuality and sensuality. The narrator makes references to Jennifer’s lips on every page of this particular subsection (p 19 – 21). Other physical attributes are also foregrounded, such as her hair, chest, toes, eyelashes, hips, hands, tongue, all of which suggest that Gorazd is physically very attracted, almost obsessed with the young student. However, Jennifer's character does not seem to be of any interest, she is confined to the role of a seductress, which she seems to play with the clear intention of seducing her teacher. Almost all descriptions of her show her in motion, suggesting a lively, dynamic and vibrant young woman who is very much aware of her own sexual magnetism and employs it to manipulate Gorazd. In his dreams she plays with him, teases him and winds him up, only to give in to him at last. However, these fantasies could also be regarded as wishful thinking of an ageing man who is unsure about his position in the world and plagued by insecurities related to the end of his professional career.

The section on Jennifer is titled Purple Darkness, evoking associations of the hidden and the luscious. These dreams are narrated from a distinctly male perspective. Jennifer is reduced to her physicality. She is a very attractive sexual object, however, she is only an object. She never speaks. The lack of voice suggests a lack of personality, a lack of a personal story or the lack of ability to voice her own story. In Spivak's terms she is the subaltern. Although Gorazd is greatly affected by her demeanor, she ultimately remains powerless. There are several categories according to which she harbors subalternity. She is young, female, a student and stands in opposition to Gorazd in all of these categories, who is older, male and, by being her professor, is also her superior. However, as Spivak pointed out herself, none of these categories qualify somebody to be the subaltern per se. It is the imbalance in the power dynamics in a certain context that determine the subalternity of an individual or a group. She explains that the subaltern is not “just a
classy word for the oppressed,... for Other” and that “just by being a discriminated-against minority” a group is not immediately defined as subaltern. “Many people want to claim subalternity,” because in a way that could give them additional leverage in the struggle for power. The means for improving the imbalance is, according to Spivak, the seizure of hegemonic discourse. (Spivak, 1990: 89-90) This is also in line with Foucault's argument that the control over discourse can be equated with socio-political and cultural dominance. However, in the selected literary examples, certain characters are denied the access to discourse. They are denied a voice and thus deprived of power and can be regarded as subaltern. This is the case with all femmes fatales in Kramolc's texts and to some extent with other female characters, as well. Although Sonja, for example, is the true protagonist of the novel and we are given insight into some of her thought processes, the perspective the narrator adopts is inherently a male one. The question that arises is to what extent this male dominance in the implied moral judgments and world views is a reflection of gendered discrimination or a reflection and critique of a society that is still very much marked not only by ethnic but also gender-based bigotry.

The psychoanalytical aspect of Kramolc's writing becomes increasingly obvious as the novel progresses. Much of the text's symbology pertains to the subconscious, which is mostly narrated by using dreams and underground settings. The subsection “Kladivo” (“The Hammer”, trans) is Gorazd's internal monologue during which he struggles to make sense of his dreams:

“...in dreams, the gauge of daytime is blurred, enlarged, condensed and deformed [...] you don’t know where you’ve been or where you’re going. Was what you’ve seen ever the truth? Colors, infinitely more vivid, sharper, fading into gray, spilling over the borders of the spectrum, a thousand rainbows, intertwined like limbs in love's fountains of the great deep…” (17)

The usage of biblical phrasing, in this case the reference to Noah's flood from Genesis 7:11, is only one example of references to Christianity in Kramolc's texts. Although he shows himself very critical of the Catholic doctrine and moral hypocrisy, his writing and the implied world views in his texts nevertheless show a strong influence of Catholic thought. The reference to the flood could be regarded as an illustration of the all-engulfing lust, but it may also be foreshadowing the impending tragedy.
When Gorazd is dreaming of Jennifer the setting is usually dark and suggests underground locations:

He was looking out into the darkness of the night, puzzled for not knowing whether to fear or crave these dreams. What was the meaning of these steep staircases, the dark and narrow couloirs leading deep down to the basement rooms, where he followed her without any questions..." (21).

The basement functions as an important symbol in another situation concerning two other characters, namely Sonja and Štefan Zavrtanik. Sonja's husband, who also seems to be struggling with many unresolved personal issues, is introduced at the dinner party as a restrained man, who becomes increasingly agitated as the conversation turns to political topics. We learn that his behavior has changed over recent time, he is acting increasingly strange and distant. He spends more and more time in his basement room, which resembles a bunker. He furnished it with only the barest necessities, including maps, a table, and an old red telephone, which he becomes increasingly obsessed with.

In his dreams of Jennifer, Gorazd follows her into the cellar (Cf. 21), which might be an indication of the subconscious nature of his fantasies and dreams. However, the component of ethical judgment and moral culpability is always present. In a manner that is reminiscent of the ancient Greek tragedies, a choir of professors and members of the faculty look down upon him as he follows Jennifer to the basement, and soon after his erotic dreams turn into a nightmare in which he is running over desecrated corpses and hallucinating about the flight from his homeland. The dominant colors here are purple and yellow. The purple seems to be associated with the luscious and the erotic, and the yellow seems to be akin to the merciless light his nightmares are full of, which cast light onto unpleasant memories which he would rather not remember at all. The purple darkness seems symbolic of a hideaway, a place of indulgence and passion, whereas the yellow light brings forward surpassed memory and trauma connected to the past. It also seems to cast a light, so to speak, upon all sorts of ethical predicaments and solidifies erotic fantasies within an ethical matrix, which requires the subject to develop guilt over sexuality. As the dream progresses, the colors of settings and objects continuously move away from any sense of realistic portrayal and adopt an existentialist quality:
The desert is blue
Horizon is yellow,
The Sun turned black
Everywhere, you...

Years passed until he finally calmed down.
Eventually even the dreams of Jennifer joined the memories which, reborn into translucent shrouds, ragged silken veils, the rustling of leaves of drained autumn flowers – wandered the hazy vedutas of his subconscious. (21)

6.2.4 The Juxtaposition of Internal and External Realities

The conduct of almost all characters often seems to be in stark contrast with their inner life. Much of the emotional turmoil is suppressed, yet the powerful emotions, thoughts and memories continue to burst to the surface, which suggests several unprocessed and conflicting issues. The reality of Gorazd's everyday life in present day Toronto is described as very much detached from his internal turmoil. He has recently retired and is now struggling with the new circumstances. His wife Valentina insists they have to invite two other couples for a dinner and promptly begins to plan a sophisticated soiree, which is clearly intended to show off her culinary skills and solidify her reputation within the Slovenian community in Toronto as an accomplished hostess.

The three couples at the dinner party, Gorazd and Valentina Prunk, Milena and Jože Dolžan, and Sonja and Štefan Zavrtanik are old acquaintances, but despite their efforts they never became true friends. As Valentina admits when deciding on the guest list, she would not spend any time with most of the people in the Slovenian community had she met them in her hometown Ljubljana (Potica, 23), an indicator that immigrant communities have different dynamics than groupings without a shared migrant history.

The evening conversation very quickly turns to politics, and the impression is that this is a topic that had been discussed on numerous occasions. Despite the obvious inability to come to an agreement over the hot political topics, the men seem to be very keen on making their opinions heard, which had probably happened on every such occasion before.
The conflicting psychological processes the characters are dealing with are a result of conflicting epistemologies, an unprocessed past, the confusing present, and an unstable sense of personal identity. This unresolved grinding of different ideas can be transferred from the micro-psychological level of the individual to the macro-psychological level of multicultural societies. As a result of global migration, most cultures around their world see themselves immediately confronted with the previously distant and indefinable Other that they utilized to define their own identity against. Now the Other has now become an integral part of everyday life and the cultural interstices have grown in dimensions and become infinite. This, in turn, demands a new re-evaluation of Self and of reality. If the changing nature of multicultural coexistence is not embraced as a source of strength rather than a threat, then the internal conflicts can never be resolved, neither on the individual nor the societal levels.

6.2.5 The Significance of Names

The surnames of the characters are significant because they offer clues about their respective personalities. Gorazd and Valentina Prunk both try very hard to create the impression that they are elitist in their lifestyle. The word *prunk* is a German noun signifying pomp, pomposity, and showiness. It is quite a good indicator of the married couple's snobbish airs and attempts to outshine their friends. The Dolžans, on the other hand, are a more subdued couple. The name Dolžan is almost a perfect homophone to the Slovenian word *dolžen*, which is an adjective expressing a state of debt, a person owing something to somebody else. However, it is a male attribute, the female adjective would be different – *dolžna* – but since Milena remains in her husband's shadow and under his influence it seems that she also adopted this kind of submissive air, paired with a latent aggression which is a result of resentment and a feeling of having been wronged in life, just as she adopted his last name. The first name Jože was also among the most widely spread first names in Slovenia in the 20th century. It is the Slovenian equivalent of the English name Joseph and is as widespread as, for example Joe, John or Jack are in the English speaking world. It is not the quintessentially Slovenian name as Janez is, the equivalent of the English John, but still so widely used that it suggests the quality of a
John Doe, which would imply that Jože's fate and views are symbolic of many Slovenians' fates. The first name Milena is etymologically derived from the noun milina, signifying gentleness, and the adjective mila, meaning gentle. This mirrors Milena's quiet character. She does not speak much, but when arguments escalate she tries to smooth things over and pacify the opposing parties. (Potica 52, 54, 62).

Anton Čemažar and his wife Helena are the least conspicuous couple at the dinner party. The surname awakes associations in Slovenian with the adjective čemeren, Čemažar being a derived personification of the adjective. These characteristics reflect his personality and the seemingly negative air he has about him. He calls the Slovenian community a ghetto (Potica, 34) and continuously brings the mood of the party down, first by mentioning tragic historical events, like the Turkish invasions of Europe (ibid, 35) and is about to read out an entire letter from a Slovenian Argentinean politician. To the relief of the women, Valentina stops him from this by serving the first course.

Sonja and Štefan Zavrtanik are also not in the foreground in the first part of the novel. They are introduced as an ordinary, middle-aged married couple, and Sonja remains rather quiet throughout the dinner party. The narrative centers much more around the other guests and the political discussion of the men. Štefan Zavrtanik, however, is mostly silent during the evening, but at times he aggressively blurts out comments which indicate a latent aggression and internal turmoil. The name Zavrtanik is reminiscent of the adjective zavrt, (uptight) or the derived noun zavrost, Zavrtanik being the derived personification of the two. At dinner his comments are scarce but intense, in conversation he either “bursts”, “blurbs”, “hisses” or “screams” (cf. pp 43, 47, 48, 50). Over the course of the following sections Štefan Zavrtanik's behavior is becoming increasingly strange and indicative of severe psychological problems. He is also at pains to ignore the worries and advice from his surrounding, seemingly ignoring the problem and locking himself into the basement for hours, even days at a time. He eventually commits suicide by throwing himself under a train. The choice of the surname seem appropriate when viewed from this perspective and indicative of the suppressed psychological trauma Štefan was not able to overcome. Perhaps one of the reasons that we only learn little of
Štefan Zavrtanik is that Gorazd, from whose perspective the first part of the novel is narrated, dislikes him. He mentions fleetingly that they were both members of the Home Guards, but is quick to “close the ragged old albums with faded photographs. Let them lie in dust, wherever they are.” (25). The impression is created that something happened during the war that made Gorazd loose respect for Štefan but this is never elaborated upon. All characters are plagued with memories of the past, and everyone of them has a different way of dealing with them, suppression being one option.

Politics is the main topic of conversation that evening, it seems that whenever these men get together the same debate ensues. We gain the impression that all social events of the Slovenian community in Toronto rotate around political issues and gossip. A point that is made repeatedly in the novel is that the expatriate community is stuck in a conversational rut regarding politics. The reason Gorazd agrees to invite the Dolţans to dinner is that he feels that Jože Dolţan is among the few who do not reiterate expatriate dogma but has “a mind of his own” and is not afraid to use it. (23).

The impression that is being created continuously is that the guests are a very select group of people and represent a kind of social elite within the Slovenian community, either by intellectuality or by lifestyle. The manner in which the hostess Valentina organizes the evening and the lengths she goes to prepare only the most exclusive gourmet dishes, the wine that Gorazd selects for each course, and their 19th century Meissen china set that has been passed on for generations in Valentina's family are slightly reminiscent of the elaborate social events described by Edith Wharton or Henry James, although on a much smaller scale. The guests also try hard to display the best behavior, and Sonja is rather embarrassed when she realizes that she forgot her gift for the hostess at home (Cf. 31). At the same time, it seems that the staged exclusivity of the get-together is making many of the guests slightly uncomfortable. The women in particular try to keep their husbands on their best behavior and are quick to react when they feel they are not acting appropriately. The speak Slovenian but also switch to English, German, French, or Serbo-Croatian. However, when any of the men slide into an inappropriate register, the women are quick to scold them. When Dr. Dolţan quotes his
uncle saying: “Wein nach Bier, das rate ich Dir, Bier nach Wein trinkt aber nur ein Schwein,” his wife Milena accuses him of being out of line and showing off (32).

The conversation is dominated by Slovenian and Slovenian-Canadian politics, despite the efforts of the women to steer it into another direction or calm the atmosphere. The men cannot seem to wait to plunge into political debate and criticize their peers. The rest of the evening is marked by long dialogues between the men that sometimes resemble monologues transporting previously formulated opinions on topics related to the diaspora.

The men criticize the Slovenian political scene and the Slovenian community, who they see divided between the conservatives and liberals. Dr. Čemažar compares the divide in the Slovenian community to the antagonism between conservatives and liberals that was a catalyst for the fighting during WWII and resulted in thousands of deaths and a politically motivated exodus from Slovenia. (Cf. pp 30-38). However, the guests imply that the dinner party is one of the rare occasions when they can voice criticism freely without being judged for independent thought, as they are by the rest of the Slovenian community. These, they feel, are preoccupied with social hierarchy, gossip, intra-communal politics and “sucking up” to visiting Slovenian politicians (33). Valentina and Gorazd are proud for allowing all kinds of opinions and criticisms being voiced in their home, Valentina even jokingly reminds the guests that the only thing that will not be criticized is her cooking (Cf. 38). It is ironic, however, that there is concern with social hierarchy and status within the group that criticizes this kind of narrow-minded thinking in the rest of their peers.

The conversation, however, never reaches the level of genuine exchange. It seems that the guests, mainly the men, are merely looking for an opportunity to voice their opinions. The speakers oftentimes only wait for a pause in the conversation or for somebody else to finish in order to begin to speak. The atmosphere never really warms up among the guests, despite the heated discussion. Although there is sympathy between some of them it is obvious that these are not real friends but that they socialize because they found
themselves in similar circumstance.

The evening is narrated from Gorazd's perspective and he regards himself to be superior to the rest of the party. He and his wife feel that their guests do not properly appreciate the exquisite cuisine and the wine selection and are, generally, too used to mediocrity to be able to appreciate the so-called finer things in life. After the guests did not finish Valentina's hors d'oeuvre consisting of smoked salmon, steamed gherkins stuffed with spinach, bacon and garnished with parsley, celery, lemon slices and caviar, she complains to her husband that “unless they get garlic-drenched Carniolan sausage, salami, greasy ham or a homemade stinky cheese these people don't know what to do with themselves”. (trans, 36). This comment shows Valentina's condescending attitude toward the guests she handpicked to show herself off. At the same time it also illustrates her feelings toward traditional Slovenian cuisine, which may also be interpreted as a condescending attitude toward her heritage and her fellow countrymen in general. Both she and her husband have a condescending air about them and often instruct their guest on how to best enjoy a dish, or which wine to serve with which kind of meat. Especially Valentina's elitist behavior is exposed as an act at the end of the evening when it becomes clear that she is only putting on a show to impress her peers. To the surprise of her husband, when she is asked for the recipe for a dish she tells her guests that employees of the British Airways sent it to her after she and her husband flew to Scotland first class and enjoyed the service on board so much. Through Gorazd's astonishment the reader learns that the luxurious journey she is telling her guests about was only a charter flight which they got for half the price off season (38).

The attitude most of the guests have toward Slovenia and toward Canada is rather complex, if not schizophrenic. In a way they idolize their homeland and grieve the fact that they left it, or were forced to leave. After several decades away from home, their country of origin became intertwined with memories of youth, making it even easier to idolize the old world. They refer to it as the 'holy land' that had been desecrated during the war (Cf. 51). At the same time, the Prunks and the Dolžans seem to have an inferiority complex regarding their Slovenian or Slavic origin. This is in keeping with
Said's theories and writings of other postcolonial theorists who claim that economic and political imperialism affected epistemological systems around the world, causing disadvantaged peoples and nations to adopt Western value systems according to which these were inferior to Western nations. Although Said's division between countries of the Orient and Occident does not strictly apply to Slovenia one can nevertheless observe some psychological dynamics that are similar to those in former colonies of the West. Slovenia lies at the intersection of Eastern and Western Europe. It was part of Frankish and Habsburg empires for centuries and has adopted much of the mentality prevalent in the regions under Germanic rule. At the same time it is a Slavic nation with Eastern influences, its territory was occupied during both world wars and eventually found some autonomy within the Republic of Yugoslavia.

It is difficult to assess the status different Slavic and other Eastern European peoples have with regard to those of Western Europe, or to say anything concrete about the nature or intensity of stereotypes Slavic nationals have around the world. The status of an ethnicity changes with time, place and societal background but, on the whole, there seems to be quite some prejudice against Slavs. As Said observed with scholars from the Orient who came to study and live in the West, they internalized the value systems and prejudice prevalent in the West and spread it among their countrymen. Similarly, Kramolc's novel shows how this group of immigrants admires Canada, its political system, its values, manners and history but tend to look down upon their own heritage. The only person who does not seem bitter about it is Sonja, who later emerges as the protagonist and the only truly hybrid character of the novel.

The fervent debate at the dinner party is actually a series of monologues vented by each of the four men. The author goes to great lengths to underscore the intellectual nature of the conversation and to create the impression that the men are well-educated and well-read, as if to give their arguments more weight. The men, especially Gorazd Prunk, Jože Dolžan, and Anton Čemažar all embellish their speeches with references to classic and contemporary authors. Over the course of the evening the reader is presented with quotes by and references to works by John Stuart Mill, Louis St. Laurent, Pierre Trudeau, Henry
Adams, Alexis de Tocqueville, Milton Friedman, John Maynard Keynes, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Jefferson (Cf. 32-51).

The portrayal of the women at the dinner party reveals an imbalance in the interpersonal power dynamics. They speak very little in comparison to the men, they are gentler, but seemingly intellectually incapable of participating in the discussion. When Jože Dolžan explains the intricate political nature of the notorious sports club Sokol, the narrator states that although Milena came from a bourgeois background she did not have opinions on such matters. “She listened to him because she loved him and got along with him.” (Cf. 41).

History and politics are the preferred subjects among the men; the women tend to small talk about everyday events, private matters and, to some extent, their feelings, although they do not go to great lengths in disclosing their emotions. This kind of gender specific distribution of roles is quite conservative and indicative of gender stereotyping, a frequent feature of Kramolc's writing.

The main issue that seems to be upsetting the men and causing inner tumult among many in the Slovenian community in Canada but also in other communities across the world, such as Argentina or Australia, is that most of them are the result of the political exodus from Slovenia after the end of The Second World War. The expatriate communities around the world, particularly first generation emigrants, defined their identity through their antagonism to the communist regime that came to power in Yugoslavia after WWII. They were the opposition abroad and saw themselves as morally and ethically superior to the supporters of what they regarded to be a totalitarian regime. They were also proud of being more openly religious, and the Church was an important part of the social infrastructure. In contrast, religion played no significant role in Yugoslavian public life, although the population continued to follow Christian traditions and attend service.

So one of the core characteristics that defined the identity of Slovenian emigrant communities around the world was that they were the opposition to the communist
regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. After the Slovenian declaration of independence in 1991 and the subsequent disintegration of the Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovenia implemented a multi-party parliamentary system that allowed for formal and open political opposition. This made the opposition abroad redundant almost overnight, and one of the key parameters according to which Slovenian emigrant communities around the world defined themselves disappeared, resulting in a destabilized sense of identity among expatriates around the world.

According to Bhabha, there is no such thing as a stable sense of identity. He defines identification as a continuous process of multilateral accommodation of ideas in a cultural interstice he terms third space, which is the result of different cultures and groups grinding against each other, and it is never static (Cf. Bhabha, 1994). However, seeing their old homeland, which has been their constant reference-point, change so dramatically, the expats’ sense of identity, which had been defined by their role as the opposition abroad, was undermined by the new circumstances. Not everybody has been able to come to terms with the changes, as the conversation at the dinner table shows. Those who find it hardest to accommodate the changes are the ones who remain stuck in a rut, symbolized by the eternal conversational rut in which the characters find themselves.

6.2.6 The Potica as the Ultimate Symbol of Cultural Hybridity

Diasporic existence is always hybrid. Regardless of how much emigrants cling to the memories of their homeland, they must eventually come to terms with the fact that not only are they removed from it spatially but also temporally, and that their homeland has changed since they left it. The motif that repeats itself in Potica is that of the 'secondary state', an imaginary Slovenian state that has been populated by emigrants around the world. In it there are (informal) hierarchal structures, political dynamics, a sense of national identity, and national symbols that are strongly tied to Slovenia but are nevertheless different in meaning from what they are to people who actually live there. Of this imaginary secondary state, the artists, politicians, and others who populated it
after emigrating from Slovenia Jože Dolžan says:

"Those who left Slovenia settled down across the world but did so as workers in factories, offices, companies. They naturally wanted to keep their status so they created a kind of homeland abroad, where they could proclaim themselves president, minister, professor, etc. " (41)

In addition to a shared language and culture this seems to be another reason why so many migrants tend to socialize within their ethnic communities, namely, the preservation of a certain social status they only seem to be able to reach within the hierarchy of that community.

Another striking feature of diasporic communities is the unique development of symbols and the meaning with which they are charged. It is interesting to observe that Slovenian communities abroad have a different appreciation of national symbols. The national garbs, for example, seem to be more highly appreciated in Slovenian communities abroad. Slovenian folk music, which has a rather low status and is synonymous with low-brow events within Slovenia, is celebrated as a national treasure and unifying force in diasporic communities. Similarly the polka, which Slovenians view as their national dance and national music, is not very revered within Slovenia and associated with low-key, informal events. Abroad, however, the polka has enjoyed much more success and formal acknowledgement. In Cleveland, for example, there is a Slovenian Polka Hall of Fame and the Slovenian Farm in Pennsylvania houses a remarkable museum of folk heritage, including sources on the history of polka music in the USA. Furthermore, although it is difficult to measure scientifically, the general sentiment surrounding polka music seems to be stronger, more emotional and nostalgic abroad than it is in Slovenia. One of the reasons for this might be the stronger need of emigrants to feel connected to their homeland and preserve a sense of cultural identity in a new environment. Slovenians who were born Slovenia and spent their lives there seem to have more abundance in their selection of national symbolism and platforms for national identification. Having spent their lives in their homeland they perhaps do not feel the need to preserve their heritage as strongly because it is ever present.
The question that remains is how it came about that the same national symbol can have a different significance in the country of origin and the emigrant communities. One of the reasons for this might be that diasporic communities across the world are so diverse and heterogeneous among and within each other that emigrants tend to seek out the smallest common denominators that connects them and allows them to build a network that will develop a sense of social and cultural stability, and consequently a more stable sense of national and personal identity.

The potica is a traditional Slovenian pastry. It is a roll made of yeast bread with one or two fillings. The filling is usually a nut paste or, alternatively, a poppy seed paste. The dough is smeared with the filling, rolled up in a log shape and baked. When sliced the potica reveals a swirled design of dough and filling layers. Although its popularity spread to most of Eastern Europe and beyond, the potica is still considered a Slovenian national dish. It is served on holidays, particularly at Christmas, Easter, or at weddings.

The novel is titled *Potica for an Ordinary Day*, which already implies a change in tradition and custom. In Slovenia, the potica is a symbol of festivity, joy and plenty. So a 'potica for an ordinary day' initially seems almost an oxymoron, because to a Slovenian this is a symbol of the exact opposite.

Symbols are vital for the construction of identity and an integral part of every culture. Contrary to popular belief, symbols are subject to continuous change and the investigation of the meaning they adopt over a course of time is an indication of change in the society. The change of symbolism in migrant communities can therefore be regarded as a symptom of the modernist cultural fragmentation and hybridity.

Symbols have a function of representation of a community and facilitate the integration of individuals within it. References to and the use of symbols, rituals and adherence to traditions are ways of establishing and strengthening an individual's role within that community, as well as constructing its identity in opposition to multiple Others. A certain tradition and ritual is usually associated with important dates, events, periods in life, or
passages from one period into another. Rituals and the symbolism connected to them can be either of religious or nationalistic nature and are shared by the entire community at the same time. On the other hand there are traditions and rites of passage individual celebrate separately but still in keeping with general cultural codes, such as baptisms, marriage, graduation, etc. Other traditions again have less joyous connotations, such as funerals or other family tragedies; but these, too, follow very specific behavioral patterns and include fixed elements typical of a certain community or culture. Any drastic change in tradition, ritual and symbolism is therefore indicative of significantly altered circumstances a community experienced.

A symbol can change in two ways. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign consists of two levels, the form and the content, or the signifier and the significant (cf. Saussure, [1916] / 2006) Saussure was referring to linguistic signs, but it is possible to transfer his differentiation to the analysis of cultural symbols. So in analogy, a symbol such as the potica could change either in visual appearance and/or with regard to the meanings the symbol is associated with. In Kramolc's novel we can observe that both components have developed significantly, making the Canadian-Slovenian potica a hybrid symbol indicative of the dramatic experiences to which this community of migrants have been subjected. The development a culture experiences is inevitably contextualized by the new environment, which is changed by any new group or culture that settles there. These groups are in turn also changed by the new environment and the new cultures they encounter. It is a continuous process which occurs in diasporic third space, somewhere between localism and nationalism, and represents a link between traditional historical and cultural continuity and newness.

When personal and national memory are marked by trauma, as this was the case with many people who fled from Slovenia after the Second World War to escape genocide, then national symbols are not only experienced in a positive identity-defining way but may also have negative associations and trigger suppressed memories. At the dinner party, Valentina serves a fresh, home-made potica as a special treat to finish off a gourmet dinner. The narrator explains that Slovenian immigrants began to serve the
potica, a traditionally festive dish, at everyday occasions and praise it emphatically as the best dish in the world that only Slovenians are able to make to perfection (Cf. pp 63, 87, 95). However, this self-praise is not quite believable, and it seems that a constant reiteration of self-assurance reflects a need for reassurance that is ingrained deeply in the migrant subconscious and is the result of dramatic experiences and changes most migrants have experienced during their lives.

When Sonja is served a slice of potica, the dessert and the symbolical meaning it is charged with flash her with an array of images from the past and trigger a spontaneous inner monologue. The omniscient narrator gives insight into her thoughts:

"What strange folk we are, she thought. How odd our national character is. [...] Our rosy vision of our importance, mixed with traditional envy and a tinge of inherited hatred. This is our core. Our potica. This is why the potica we've brought across the ocean isn't sweet, as a real potica ought to be. The potica that fortune packed into our travel suitcase at parting, when we held hands and fled in fear, is without stuffing. We said our goodbyes in haste, no time for embraces. In our hearts we hope that we will see each other again. Little did we know that we said goodbye forever. Not only those they captured and annihilated together with the returnees, we – the living – left forever also. What we left behind was never the same again. We, too, were killed. The potica we carry in the ragged bundles of our memories, has lost its traditional form, the one it has after it is lifted from the furnace. Our potica is a loaf of nothingness. [...] This is our potica and every refugee knows it. They carry it in a special place in their heart. It lies heavy in their stomach. It clogs the arteries. It weakens the mind so they remember only the happy days and all that was beautiful. This potica we brought with us from home half a century ago, carefully wrapped in white cloth, sweetened with memories, is a source of comfort we offer each other, not only at feasts but every day. [...] We praise it as the best dish in the world, something only Slovenians can make and devour it ceremoniously, licking our fingers and wiping our mouths." (trans, 62-3)

The potica triggers old memories in Sonja and in this short excerpt the reader gets the first insight into her thoughts and a glimpse of the experiences most immigrants choose not to speak of, because the worst kind of trauma often renders a person speechless.

This inner monologue provides an insight into the hybrid nature of diasporic existence. It shows how the past and present mingle and define national and individual identity. The present state and the new associations that this old symbol awakens, force Sonja into a comparison of the present and the past which results in an almost surreal intermeshing of
memories of past events that are determining the present of these characters. Brief references are made to historical events experienced through the eyes of an individual, making the trauma more immediate and intuitively comprehensible to the reader.

The captivity and murder of returnees Sonja briefly touches upon is a controversial chapter in European and Yugoslavian history. Toward the end and in the months following the end of the Second World War when it became clear that the partisan liberation movement under the command of communist groups had defeated the occupying forces of Germany, Italy and Hungary, the groups that opposed partisan fighting, were against communist rule and collaborated with the occupying forces began to fear retribution from the communist government. Especially members of the collaborationist Domobranci (Home Guards) militia were in a precarious position. Many of them had fled to Austria or Italy where they were intercepted by British forces, who had taken over control of the region. They were captured and sent back to Yugoslavia where thousands of them were killed without trial and buried in mass graves all around the country, such as Rog, Tezno, Huda Jama and numerous others. So far, around 600 secret mass graves have been registered across Slovenia. Estimates about the number of people killed range from a few thousand to over 100,000 (cf. The Slovenia Times, April 2009). No one has yet been charged or brought to trial in connection with these killings, and public discussion about these events has only developed after Slovenia's declaration of independence in 1991. During the communist rule in Yugoslavia between 1945 and the late 1980s this subject was silenced and addressed openly almost exclusively by Slovenians in exile. Strangely enough, the conversation at the dinner table indicates that the opening of this subject matter for discussion in their home country caused insecurities among emigrants around the world, because they see their role as the morally superior elite and opposition to totalitarianism undermined by the recent political changes.

Sonja's inner monologue touches on this identity crisis among those who fled their homeland in the wake of the Second World War. The fact that their exodus was not voluntary but forced, and that almost all of them have relatives and friends who were killed during or shortly after the end of the war left them traumatized for life, resulting in
a feeling of emptiness. The metaphor that is used for this identity crisis is a “loaf of nothingness” which “lies heavy in their stomach, clogs the arteries, weakens the mind.” Once a positively charged symbol related to festivities, the potica has now become a reminder of the plight they endured, although constant attempts are being made to turn it again into an object of self-assuring comfort. This new potica is a hybrid symbol and quite different from the pastry served in Slovenia, which did not undergo this process of change. It nevertheless has the function of solidifying a community. For the Slovenian immigrant community in Toronto, it still has the function of a unifying ritual, helping individuals to feel part of a community with shared traditions and experiences, although theirs are hybrid and differ from those of their countrymen who stayed behind in their homeland.

The interactions at the dinner party show that these individuals were brought together by fate. Many of them do not seem to genuinely like each other, which becomes obvious from Valentina's attempts to show off in front of the others. Gorazd's condescending comments about some of their guests, Štefan Zavrtanik's aggressive outbursts, and the overall nervousness of the women, who try to calm the atmosphere and leave a good impression, contribute to the overall tension. (21-45).

The inability to speak is a frequent motif in diasporic literature and turns up several times in the novel. It seems that however static the endless discussions may be, they must have a sort of cathartic function for the characters, voicing their inner anguish.

Over the course of the novel it becomes clear that the only character who undergoes any development is Sonja, the only one who acknowledges her trauma but moves beyond it to create a new life for herself. She is the true hybrid of the novel, emerges as the protagonist, and is the most positive character in the novel. She is the most genuine character, too. The others strive to mimic the behavior and speech of the Canadian Anglo-Saxon upper classes which they do more or less successfully but by doing so they appear discontent. Sonja, on the other hand, seems to be the least pretentious character of the novel. She has distanced herself from any kind of strained mimicry and does not seem
to have an inferiority complex about her national heritage nor the social class she is from. It therefore makes sense to view the hybridity of the potica from her perspective and the inner monologue the dessert triggers in her gives the reader the first insight into the thoughts of the novel's true protagonist.

The potica appears as a symbol of change several times in the novel. On another occasion, Gorazd has a flashback to a time at the end of the Second World War when the image of the potica strikes him as an oddity in his home, a result of tragic but seemingly surreal circumstances. The situation is narrated as a diary entry: “Ljubljana, Easter, April 1st 1945/ This is the fourth Ascension in this war. […] The scent of potica in the kitchen. It's different than it used to be, overfilled with nuts and raisins, but edible.” (13).

In both instances the characters are struck by the change the potica came to symbolize. Their lives have changed dramatically by the war, the exodus, the loss of friends, family, and their homeland. As a symbol, the potica changed with regard to form, the associations it evokes, and the meaning it transports. It used to be charged with positive, festive and homely associations, but now it tends to trigger painful memories or reminds of the fact that the homeland occupies a strange third place somewhere between the homeland of the past and the new environment they spent most of their adult lives in.

A critical mind such as Sonja's notes the irony and absurd staging of ritual that has developed in this third space and now serves as a source of comfort and self-assurance to a community that still struggles to come to terms with their tragic past and their new hybrid identity. It is through Sonja's eyes that the reader perceives the existentialist dilemma the characters are facing, the identity crisis, and the inability to successfully cope with the changed circumstances.

It is highly interesting, however, that as the novel progresses and the story focuses entirely on Sonja and her new life, the protagonist reclaims the old symbology of the potica and reverses the spiral of negative associations when she makes the potica for her new partner. She invites him over to cook for him and lets him watch her as she prepares
the potica. The atmosphere is a happy and light one, there is a sense of celebration of life in the air, the conversation among the two people seems natural, and it is clear that they enjoy each others company. When Tyrone jokingly challenges Sonja why she is making the famous festive pastry on an ordinary day, she replies that although it was not a holiday it was still a very special occasion because it was the first time he visited her in her new home (cf. Potica, 188). It is also Sonja's birthday, and for a while Tyrone pretends he does not know it before he surprises her with a gift. So in a strange reversal of events, the Slovenian national symbol regains its original function through the relationship of a Canadian and a Slovenian.

6.3 Hybridity as a Survival Strategy - Sonja’s story

By definition, all diasporic existence is hybrid. Slovenians who left their homeland and settled in Canada adapted to their new environment, adopted Canadian ways, the English tongue, and epistemologies that are prevalent in their new homeland. The adoption of these value systems meant that many of them also internalized a kind of racial and ethnic hierarchy which places them as Slavs in a category that is inferior to older European settlers of Anglo-Saxon heritage. The mimicking of upper middle class Anglo-Saxon culture, the characters in the novel practice to different extents results in a unique mix of Slovenian-Canadian national pride and feelings of inferiority and envy toward Anglo-Saxon culture but also condescension toward races of color, immigrants from the Middle East and Asia. The phenomenon of older immigrants being hostile toward younger groups of immigrants can be traced back to the earliest settlers of the North American continent and remains the source of inter-cultural or inter-ethnic tension up to the present day.

Judging by appearance, this group of Slovenians has become fully immersed in the fabric of Canadian life in a kind of interactive third space in which the Slovenian community developed into a hybrid culture. Nevertheless, the characters in Kramolc's novel appear to be static and to struggle with their sense of identity and place in life. It must be noted that the struggle to cope is an internal one. The characters all lead seemingly normal lives,
have jobs, careers, are reasonably well-off, and for the most part like their new homeland. The anguish most of them experience is therefore the result of an unprocessed past and the difficulties to grow, change and develop with regard to their national and personal identity. The inability to let go of the past is indirectly criticized in the novel, and the motif resurfaces again when it becomes clear that only those who are able to accept but also let go of the past are the ones that undergo any kind of personal growth. On the other hand, those who are stuck in static circles of inflexible thought, outdated nationalistic tendencies, and endlessly repeated conversations are the ones who experience the deepest feelings of emptiness and insecurity. Progress, growth, and life are hybrid and subject to constant change. Those who try to fight this are the ones who die, either literally or emotionally, the ones who are wrestling with inner anguish and feelings of displacement.

Sonja initially considers herself to be among those who cannot let go of the past. At the dinner party she thinks to herself:

“We are like madmen in an asylum where bars on the windows mark the unheated halls, where everything is black and white (Criticizing binary opposition!!!!). But in an asylum at least the doctors and guards know they are dealing with patients who will never get well again. We lunatics, however, praise all that was and is gone. We praise what has died and curse those who contradict us." (trans, 63)

This insight into her thoughts shows that she is able to critically observe herself and the unhealthy psychological dynamics among her peers. She also recognizes her husband's changed behavior and tries to help him; however, she finds herself unable to do so. She even seeks the help of a psychiatrist (102-104) but Štefan's paranoia makes her unable to get through to him. Whenever she suggests they seek professional help he starts screaming at her (67, 101-102), refuses to speak and disappears to his bunker where he stays for increasingly longer periods of time, his stare becomes absent and empty, his appearance scruffy and untidy (cf. Potica, 45, 98 102-3). Štefan's language also indicates an increasing paranoia. Despite Sonja's attempts to find out what is wrong, he continues to shut himself off and accuses her of nagging, stupidity and madness (Cf. 101) He is convinced that the entire community has conspired against him: “Didn't you hear them, all of them! […] They all had a go at me!” (102) He exclaims: “Everything is pointless –
completely pointless!” Despite his inner struggle he refuses his wife's help and considers himself smarter than any psychiatrist: “...no Canadian shrink will ever tell me what to do!” (102). The delusions and paranoia combined with feelings of superiority over everybody else are further indicators of his mental problems.

Štefan Zavrtanik is an extreme example of a character who never successfully processed past trauma. Decades later his mental condition deteriorates and he puts an end to his life. Up until this point, Sonja has mainly been described as someone who is worrying about her husband's increasingly erratic and irrational behavior. The reader learns that they met in Canada after they both escaped from Slovenia. Before she met Štefan, Sonja had a very passionate and emotional affair with the Toronto native Damian Kane. However, because he did not want a steady relationship with her, they ended the affair, and the impression is created that Sonja married Štefan for social status. In the years following the Second World War it was still expected of a woman to marry and not lead a single life. In the farewell note Damian left her, he wrote:

FOREVER – is not my game.
We’re of sinew, of water.
Even the Stars above –
become a Nova.
Good luck, my sweet Russian! (Potica, 81)

The fact that he sometimes referred to her as “my sweet Russian” is indicative of his affection for this girl from Eastern Europe, but more so of the lack of differentiation between different Eastern European cultures. Even though Damian claims this was “only a figure of speech” (79) and harmless, it nevertheless upsets her, because it is a sign of a false view of Eastern Europe as a homogeneous Other.

With Štefan, on the other hand, Sonja shared a language, a culture, a similar past and a circle of friends. Despite the similarities, the narrator never mentions harmonious interaction between Sonja and Štefan, and the impression is created that Sonja was unable to fully develop in the presence of her husband. The lack of displays of affection and the lack of mutual understanding between the partners indicates an unhappy marriage.

155
Sonja remembers her upbringing in a Catholic boarding school where nuns taught her that “a woman must suffer her husband because a man's nature is different to that of a woman” and that “a woman's only purpose and fulfillment in life is motherhood” (75). It seems that this kind of rearing influenced Sonja in her choice of husband and the role she played her entire life. Although this is never plainly stated, there is nevertheless an undertone of criticism of this kind of dogma, because it left Sonja feeling “an emptiness colder than the snow” (75). What is remarkable is that this woman, who is slowly approaching old age and beginning to rediscover herself, shrugs off the oppressive dogma and thinks to herself: “Is that supposed to mean that I'm worthless now? But then again, what do nuns know of these things?” (75). It is interesting that the segments of society Kramolc chooses to present are all very traditional and conservative, but the obvious failure of the relationships and the lack of happiness are strong indicators that the overtly presented conservative values are in fact the subject of harsh criticism.

Whenever Štefan is mentioned he seems to be experiencing great tension; he is either sullen or rants about other characters: “I'm sick of them all! Sick up to here!” (74). His wife and other members of the Slovenian community in Toronto are his only reference points, and although it is becoming increasingly difficult for him to come to terms with himself and his social network, he never seems to attempt genuine contact with people outside the community. He never even mentions them. His deteriorating mental state can be read as a warning of becoming too engrossed in issues of a small social group, or to dwell too much on past trauma. Štefan is not able to break the cycle of constant reiteration of the past without any emotional progress. Because he continues to isolate himself, refuses to acknowledge a pluralistic view of the world, and begins to regard himself as the only reference point, he fails to notice that his obsessions are the result of paranoia and a possible clinical condition. Furthermore, he does not notice that his behavior is alienating him from other people and thus worsening his situation. Although Sonja makes attempts to communicate with her husband (63, 74, 101-2) she also resorts to sarcasm to counteract his verbal aggression (84).

The lack of response from Štefan is indicative of the dysfunctional communication
between the two. On the level of language the switching between English and Slovenian, even in private conversation is evidence of linguistic hybridity in immigrants. The use of dashes signifies short pauses in conversation, which is unusual in narrative texts. This kind of punctuation is reminiscent of poetry where the dash signifies the end or the beginning of an important idea and allows the reader to better process the input. Overall, the imagery, the sometimes erratic language, and the frequent poems in the novel bring a lyrical quality to the text. The mixture of narrative elements is further evidence of hybridity on the level of discourse, just as third space and hybridity are recurring themes on the level of content.

What is striking with regard to all the couples presented in the novel is that there are hardly any references to their children. They either have none, like Milena and Jože Dolžan, or they moved away and have little contact with their parents. The only time the next generation is mentioned in the novel is after Štefan Zavrtanik's suicide, when Sonja's children Tanja and Peter come to visit her. This is also the only time any child is mentioned by name and the only time we hear one speak, even though it is only briefly. Although Tanja calls her mother “old-fashioned” and “out of touch with the realities of modern life” (187), there is a caring quality about their teasing, which suggests a healthy relationship between Sonja and her two children. The fact that the children “rush to be at their mother's side” after their father's death (186) is further evidence of a caring relationship, and the only example in the novel of a parent interacting with their children. This is significant because Sonja will emerge as the only character with prospects of a somewhat happy future.

After she comes to terms with her husband's suicide and the guilt that plagued her because of it, she slowly begins to build a new life for herself. She is in charge of her own life for the first time, and her personality is beginning to shine through. She is also the only character in the novel who has very intense private relationships with other Canadians, such as Damian, her best friend Heather, and later Tyrone Harrington. This makes her the only character that truly transcends cultural barriers and who continues to develop. Only with her does the reader get the impression that she will be able to come to
terms with the future.

According to Gayatri Spivak, the antagonism between the center and the margin, between the subaltern and the center can only be overcome through close interaction on an intimate level. (Spivak, 1990; 1996). Sonja's network of friends is a good example of such interaction, and this makes her a genuinely hybrid character.

Hybrid characters are particularly noteworthy in literature, but also in real life, because they positively address the multicultural co-existence and co-influence that defines societies around the world. Hybrids also reconcile the continuation of the past with present change and newness. All coexistence, all cultures, and all coexisting social spaces are essentially hybrid and subject to constant change. As a result of altered spatial and temporal contexts, a culture continuously changes, as do its symbols, rituals and notions of identity which become hybrid when they grind against other cultures and influence each other.

It must be kept in mind that there is a danger inherent in the theoretical discussion of hybridity, namely that by referring to the elements that are fused into hybrid phenomena, we are reiterating and strengthening the essentialist notions of culture that in fact we seek to overcome. When we, for example, speak of Canadian and Slovenian culture, we must do so with the full awareness of the dangers cultural essentialism transports. Canadian or Slovenian cultures are by no means bounded and homogenous entities. Culture is nothing concrete, it is not mapped to a specific area, nor is it confined to a group of people. However, sometimes is seems easier, for the sake of argument, to operate with essentialist notions of culture. Such notions, which can also be defined as cultural stereotypes, are prevalent in commonsense knowledge and popular ideology as a whole, but must be applied with care and differentiation in any scientific discussion.

Sonja is integrated in the Slovenian-Canadian community, she shares similar traumatic experiences with her peers, and insights into her thoughts show that she is occasionally still plagued by painful memories. In addition to that, she experiences another personal
tragedy when her husband's mental health deteriorates and he eventually commits suicide. Despite the misfortunes in her life, Sonja somehow manages to put the negative experience behind her and make a new life for herself, quite detached from the bitterness, resentment, resignation, and social posing the other characters seem to be caught up in. It is even more remarkable that she does so at such an age. The narrator never specifies how old she exactly is but we know that she dies her grey hair (29), and one can assume that she must now be at least in her late fifties or early sixties, even if she left Slovenia as a child.

After her husband's death she decides to sell the house they lived in since they got married, together with almost all of their belongings, which she auctions off to the surprise of everybody. It seems that by selling her house and moving away she wants to leave the past behind and start a new life on her own, on her own terms. The only things she chooses to keep are the kitchen furniture, her clothes, some souvenirs, photos, and a box of books. The reason she moves the kitchen furniture to her new home is that “a long time ago she chose it herself, without Štefan's interference and paid for it out of her own pocket” (135). This shows two things, firstly, that her husband controlled her to a great extent and, secondly, that she is very proud of her own accomplishments. This sense of satisfaction that she gets out of being independent is probably also the force that drives her to start a new life on her own and thus continue her path toward self-discovery. Although there is no climactic epiphany with regard to self-discovery in the novel, it is important that Sonja is undertaking steps that lead her in that direction. She is the only character who displays such behavior, and also the character who undergoes the most personal growth. She is also the only character who reaches some state of happiness and contentment, despite her inner struggles.

Her relationship to the wealthy retired colonel Tyrone Harrington marks another phase in Sonja's life. The liaison of these two characters has many elements of a classic love story, and the clichés that are being applied to it at times resemble the unrealistically romantic style of telenovelas. In the tradition of the classic literature of the era of Enlightenment and Victorian literature, the female character plays the passive and receptive part whereas
her male counterpart is presented as active, dominant, superior in social status and experience which he chooses to share with the woman of his choice in order to educate her, improve her life and better her social standing. On the surface, the relationship to the retired colonel is everything a woman could possible want, but by walking the fine line between ideal and parody, Kramolc actually exposes the futility of one-sided relationship dynamics, romantic ideals, and the tragedy of characters who cease to grow. Kramolc allows cliché to come to life but also lets it crumble. He paints the hopelessness of static personalities, outdated world views and the inability to truly connect with the other, which is probably the reason why the romance between Sonja and Tyrone comes to a tragic ending.

Tyrone Harrington is introduced relatively early in the 22\textsuperscript{nd} section of the text, which is comprised of 66 sections. The sections describing Štefan's suicide alternate with accounts of Sonja's life after his death, which is in keeping with the novel's non-linear temporal structure. The dinner party is a rather closed section of the text and is interrupted only with the occasional flash back Gorazd has of his past. After that the text's structure becomes dominated by a layering of several narrative strands. Sonja's story remains at the center of the novel, but the narrative is interrupted again and again by other storylines. The individual plots progress linearly but are constantly interrupted with memory flash backs of the characters. However, the different narrative strands are layered upon each other so that the main plot, Sonja's story, is interrupted by accounts of past events as well as descriptions of events that are unfolding at the same time as her story. For example, she meets Tyrone Harrington after her husband's suicide and after she had spent some time living on her own, has gotten a job, moved to a new house and begun a new life. However, this narrative is interspersed with passages which tell of Štefan's suicide. At the same time we learn that Gorazd Prunk died and his wife Valentina found love-letters suggesting a long-lasting affair with his student Jennifer.

From section 48 onwards the side-plots are abandoned without having reached any kind of closure. The remaining third of the book centers solely around Sonja and her gradually developing relationship with Tyrone Harrington. The two meet in a museum in Kleinburg
where Sonja began to work as a tour-guide. She has moved to this area and bought a new house, which she is now decorating on her own. This is the first time that she is able to decide for herself what her most intimate environment will look like, and is enjoying the newly found freedom. The white colors, curtains, and modern furniture symbolize the beginning of a new life and a clean slate from which her personality can develop freely. The spatial removal from the area where most Slovenian-Canadians live also symbolizes the internal distancing from this closed group of people who are preoccupied with old issues, have ceased to develop, and began to stagnate emotionally, mentally and physically. Sonja, on the other hand, only now begins to come out of her shell. She takes charge of her own life and makes some dramatic changes to it, but without much fuss. It comes very naturally to her, and the reader is able to really see her personality for the first time. She meets Heather Lenihan, a vivacious colleague from the museum, and the two women become good friends. Heather encourages her to dress more fashionably and change her hairstyle, which Sonja does and seems happy with the results. She also enjoys being on her own, sipping coffee in the afternoon and listening to classical music, which “stops her from thinking in circles”. She is content because she is no longer plagued by the feeling of "impending doom" and has found “her own little place in the sun” (Potica, 189).

The national symbol is a projection surface for cultural ideals and a source of national pride. It is also the smallest common denominator for the people in the expatriate community, which is why Slovenian Canadians tend to cling to it and exaggerate its praise, despite the bitter connotations the symbol has become charged with. Sonja, however, breaks with the negative associations. Her 'potica for an ordinary day' is a genuine act of creation and celebration of ordinary everyday life. With her, the potica now ceases to evoke negative associations and subconscious feelings of bitterness over life and fate. She becomes the link, which connects a new ritual to the old Slovenian tradition of authentic celebration and joy. She is a hybrid, and the tradition she continues is hybrid, too, because it is not simply a continuation of an old national ritual but also marks a development that can be attributed to the changed historical and cultural circumstances. Sonja's potica is no longer a symbol of national holidays and other special
occasions but a celebration of everyday life.

Changes in ritual and symbols are sometimes perceived as problematic because change is also a subversion of the old tradition. At the same time, an adaptation and reinterpretation of symbols and rituals is the only way for a tradition to survive. This seemingly paradoxical quality of cultural heritage is what makes cultural phenomena so complex. As Homi Bhabha points out, all progress, life, and growth result in such third space of constant re-negotiation, where different cultures but also different eras grind against each other to create something hybrid and new. It is not only a 'contact zone' of self and other, it is also an intersection of the past and the present. This is mirrored on the narrative level of Kramolc's novel, which allows for the past to exist hand in hand with the present. It shows that all characters are a product of their respective pasts, which influence their actions in the present. At the same time it also shows that the only character with prospects of a future is the one who is able to come to terms with her past, acknowledge it but also let it go. She is also the only one we see, if only briefly, to interact with her children, suggesting that there will be some sort of continuation of her legacy. The other characters either do not have children or there is no mention of them having contact with them after they moved away from home. The deaths and the emotional stagnation of the other members of the Slovenian-Canadian community suggest that there is no future for those who became caught up in the past, in circular psychological and behavioral patterns.

Sonja is the only character who embraces change and also the only character who reaches a state of inner contention and fulfillment. It is important that she does so on her own, that the feeling of freedom and satisfaction is a result of her taking her life into her own hands and distancing herself from all that is stagnant and had been an obstacle to her happiness. Her growth had been constrained by the difficult political circumstances in her homeland, a dominant and sometimes abusive husband with whom she spent her entire adult life, and an emotionally and mentally closed community of fellow Slovenians. The irony of her story is that her new relationship to a seemingly perfect man is also about to turn into a stifling and oppressive bond, which will render her passive and secondary
again. In terms of Gayatri Spivak she is the subaltern, but only when she is in relationships with men. Regardless whether the men are Eastern European or of Anglo-Saxon descent, as a woman she becomes powerless and marginalized when confronted with their dominance. The fact that these relationships all fail could be read as a criticism of the binary oppositions by which they are characterized.

Colonel Tyrone Harrington is portrayed as an elderly but vigorous and handsome gentleman of high social status and equally high moral standards. In keeping with the alinear temporal structure of the novel, his character is introduced while Sonja is still married to Štefan. The beginning of the narrative strand describing the slowly developing relationship between Sonja and Tyrone is occasionally interrupted with descriptions of Štefan's last days, Sonja's conversations with Milena, Valentina, and a psychiatrist about her husband and Štefan's suicide. From a narrative perspective it is significant that these interruptions of the main storyline cease completely in the third part of the novel, which begins by Sonja making the potica for Tyrone, which becomes symbolic of a successful closure of the past and a new beginning. Nightmares of the past cease to plague the protagonist and are therefore no longer part of the main narrative.

Tyrone is introduced as a kind of prince charming who appears out of nowhere to sweep Sonja off her feet. He is a retired colonel who fought in Vietnam and has been awarded several medals of honor. He unexpectedly lost his wife Rosemary some years ago, something with which he has never quite managed to come to terms. As a distraction he took up painting and has developed into an accomplished artist whose exhibitions are held on a regional level. He approaches Sonja at the museum of modern art in Kleinburg, where he became mesmerized by her looks and demeanor. He courts her, and she initially appears hesitant but soon agrees to meet him, after which other dates ensue. He is always a perfect gentleman and the conversations between him and Sonja are spiked with references to history, literature and art as if to underline the intellectual elitism of the two. However, he is always the one who dominates the conversation, and Sonja's contributions to the dialogues are becoming increasingly shorter and scarce as the story progresses and their relationship becomes serious. When he takes Sonja on a trip across Canada, her
utterances are reduced almost to the role of an audience who passively witness the main character's long monologues. There does not seem to be any bilateral exchange between Tyrone and Sonja. Throughout the trip he decides where they will go, how they will travel, where they will stay, and what they will talk about. There is an air of lecturing about the long monologues which evoke the impression that Sonja needs to be educated about Canadian history, politics, literature, and geography. Sections 50 – 55 describe the trip across the continent and are completely dominated by these long speeches, which are reminiscent of schoolbook texts and seem to serve as Tyrone's podium where he is able to convey his personal opinions and judgments at great length. He is never rude toward Sonja and appears protective of her, but the complete disregard for her suggestions, the assertive answers to her questions, and a general air of intellectual and cultural superiority speak volumes about his condescending attitude toward his partner.

In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *The Order of Discourse* (1971), Michel Foucault addresses the social power dynamics which he sees in direct correlation with conversational power dynamics. According to Foucault, those who control discourse also control societal dynamics and consequently create and re-shape epistemological systems. The value systems and what we regard to be the truth are intrinsically connected to and conditioned by language and discourse. We cannot know what we cannot verbalize. Those who determine what will be verbalized, how, and to what extent, control the perceived reality in a given society and thus control the individuals in it.

Tyrone Harrington sees himself in the enlightened position of the Center. He considers his view of the world to be objective and takes Sonja's consent for granted, which is the ultimate form of condescension and arrogance, because a real discussion or even a violent argument would signal at least some sort of social and discursive equality between the two parties. If Tyrone disagreed with Sonja, and even if the difference of opinion was to leave both of them frustrated, it would still speak for a more balanced distribution of discursive strength. The succession of Tyrone's monologues, however, is reminiscent of the dysfunctional discursive patterns that surfaced at the dinner party and becomes increasingly conspicuous as the relationship between Tyrone and Sonja develops.
Another possible interpretation is that Tyrone's condescension is symbolic of the western assumptions about their monopoly on epistemological systems. Tyrone can be read as a symbol of the center and Sonja as a symbol of the margin. Sonja is an immigrant from Eastern Europe and a woman, which makes her doubly marginalized. Tyrone, on the other hand, seems a personalized critique of Anglo-Saxon mentality and the imperialistic tendencies of the west that regards all that is 'other' as secondary, underdeveloped, and in need of help and enlightenment, but is not willing to agree to the reciprocity of learning and influence.

Another argument in support of reading Tyrone's character as a critique of the imperialist western mentality is the very obvious racial discrimination that dominates his views of non-white races and other immigrant groups. The more he opens up to Sonja and the more he reveals of himself, the more evidence of cultural essentialism and very crude racial and ethnic stereotyping surfaces. His discriminating world views reflect the ethnic hierarchy that had been promoted by western imperialistic forces in their conquest of colonies and has been the subject of much debate in postcolonial criticism. What makes Tyrone's arrogance even more apparent is the fact that his ethnic and racial discrimination is not veiled or merely implied in his speech. It mostly takes the form of straightforward expression of opinion, of direct derogatory statements and generalizations about a variety of ethnic groups, cultures, and nationalities. The final sections of the novel are full of such deprecatory judgments and reveal a deep-seated dislike of other ethnicities. At the same time they also expose Tyrone's lack of differentiated knowledge or appreciation of different cultures, paired with an extremely condescending stance toward what he regards to be inferior, primitive, and sometimes evil ethnic groups. What makes it even more frightening is his unapologetic diction, which assumes ultimate superiority toward all marginal groups and is further evidence that his character can be read as the personalization of the discriminatory western imperialistic mentality. He refers to the Chinese immigrants as “the bloody yellow bastards”, claims they “attack our culture by building brothels in our neighborhoods”, that they are “sneaky”, “corrupt” and that “bribery is an ancient Chinese tradition” (254). He then goes on to say that Lester Pearson and Pierre E. Trudeau “opened Canadian borders to let African, Asian and South
American primitives in” and that now “blacks from Jamaica control prostitution and trade with crack”, that “Iranians and former Soviet spies control the heroin trade and the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Colombians control the cocaine trade” (255). He also criticizes the greed and corruption of colonialists and politicians but at the same time he feels irritated by what he calls “the arrogance of oriental immigrants” (257) It is ironic that his abysmally racist rhetoric is a sign of his own condescension and arrogance toward everything oriental.

Tyrone's friends are also of Anglo-Saxon descent and equally prejudiced. Upon meeting Sonja for the first time, they immediately notice that she is “foreign born, a stranger” because of her slight accent. Behind her back they go on to agree that they can consider themselves lucky that Tyrone “didn't bring an Indian girl in a sari or – God forbid – a Jamaican with fat pouty lips, dark and dumb as night.” (157) This crude and unapologetic racism stands in stark contrast with the attempts to portray Tyrone as an ideal man and deconstructs the implied notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. The arrogance and xenophobia of the self-proclaimed elite is a critique of the socio-cultural center and raises questions about the general applicability of the frequently internalized western imperialistic value systems.

In a way Tyrone and his friends are the personification of the western imperialist mentality. The frequently cartoonish portrayal makes these characters rather flat but also a projection surface for critique of crude center/margin, orient/occident binary oppositions. It is significant that even in very private conversation there is no room for Sonja's response to Tyrone's monologues, which illustrates a very uneven distribution of discursive power and can be read in analogy to political, economic and epistemological dominance of the western elite over the rest of the world.

There is a distinct parallel between the discursive patterns and the development of the plot. The more the characters become self-contained in their thoughts and speech, the less they are able to genuinely communicate with each other. When genuine communication deteriorates, the characters grow estranged from each other, which repeatedly results in
literal or metaphoric death, or in the absence of life. Thwarted communication, death, and the absence of life are symbolized by darkness, ash, the cold, bad weather, and the absence of children. Whenever a deterioration of multilateral discursive patterns can be observed, the weather is cold, gloomy, or it is dark. Gorazd's retirement, the subsequent insomnia and nightmares occur in late fall when the days are already noticeably shorter (subsections 1-4). At the dinner party the topics of the past, tragedy, discontent and death, constitute the undercurrent of the conversation (subsections 5-15), which takes place at the beginning of winter. That night Toronto saw the first dramatic drop in temperatures and was engulfed by the first severe snowstorm that year.

Later in the novel, when Gorazd suddenly dies of a “massive coronary,” his wife Valentina compares his life to the fleeting dry snow the wind is blowing away outside: “We have but one life. But once only do we leave footprints in the dust of time, never again. They are the trail of someone unknown, left behind in the first dry snow that is whirled up and blown away by the hiss of winter winds and is no more.” (174).

When Tyrone loses himself in long monologues during his trip with Sonja across Canada, the narrator notes that “he wasn't speaking to Sonja nor to the world, he was talking to himself.” (232) This self-centeredness is stifling the discursive exchange between the two, which is mirrored in the icy landscape, warnings of “avalanches and heavy snowfalls” (234), and leaves Sonja feeling intolerably cold. When Tyrone and Sonja discuss fine art, Sonja eloquently analyzes one of Edward Munch's paintings, but in response Tyrone condescendingly compliments her but also swiftly changes the topic: “Well said. No wonder they like you at the Kleinburg museum. Now, it's noon and time for lunch.” (243) This exchange shows that Tyrone is quick to divert the conversation to another topic even on those rare occasions when Sonja attempts to match him in the distribution of discursive power. The rigidity of discourse is reflected in the descriptions of the cold weather, and on the level of plot, it eventually leads to tragedy or even death. This impression is further underlined by the song Waltzing Matilda that Tyrone and Sonja join in singing. Ironically, the figure Waltzing Matilda is the personification of death (244).
Growth and life, on the other hand, seem to occur during warmer seasons. When Sonja moves to Kleinburg, the winter is almost over and the days have started to get longer again. The house she decorates is painted in soft, off-white colors. There is frequent reference to light, which is mirrored in Sonja's feelings of content and placidity (137-140). When Tyrone visits her for the first time in her new home she is making a potica for him and the mood is still pleasant and quite peaceful. When they embark on the journey across Canada, however, the descriptions of weather begin to be dominated by the cold, the snow, and vast winter landscapes that appear alienating rather than inviting. Tyrone seems to be enjoying himself, but Sonja grows increasingly silent and passive as the trip progresses.

The passages describing their trip across Canada are dominated by Tyrone's long monologues. These are only sporadically interrupted by Sonja's short responses to his rhetoric, which never significantly affect the conversational dynamic. Sonja is progressively losing her voice, and at the same time her personality is becoming increasingly stifled and passive. As they continue to travel to British Columbia, the descriptions of snowy landscapes and winter blizzards dominate the settings more and more (200-203, 218-224). They stay at the Icefield Chalet close to the Athabasca Glacier (225), watch a short movie titled snow war (235) and are caught in a blizzard in which Sonja adopts the role of the damsel in distress who is in need of Tyrone's help and guidance (247).

Although Tyrone proposes to her at the end of their journey and Sonja agrees to marry him, the reader cannot help but note the obvious lack of passion and genuine exchange between the two partners. This dynamic eventually also leads to disaster. The narrator sets Tyrone's sudden but heroic death up as an unexpected twist of the plot. However, if we take a step back and compare the development of the different subplots, it becomes clear that the motif of unexpected death is a recurring one throughout the text and repeatedly marks the end of a dysfunctional relationship in which there had been no real communication between the partners. Gorazd suddenly dies of a heart attack, Štefan
jumps under a train, and Tyrone is shot as he tries to stop a bank robbery.

There is a discrepancy between the story the narrative voice is telling, and the implicit evidence suggesting an alternative reading of the developments. It is as if the reader was being deliberately misled by the narrator. If one chose to read between the lines, then the final twists of plot would not come as a complete surprise, because there had been signs of impending doom all along the way. It seems as if the fact that the omniscient narrator is eventually exposed as an unreliable voice were a lesson teaching the reader not to trust any one voice, regardless how objective it may portray itself to be. It is a lesson in modernist skepticism and a reminder that stories are always told from a subjective perspective, that they reflect subjective experience, interpretations, and agendas. Although the narrative gives insight into almost all of the characters' thoughts and feelings the seemingly omniscient narrator is not to be trusted. The narrative voice is also exposed as a subjective and manipulative party that can only be trusted to a limited extent. The implicit elimination of any kind of narrative authority is an indirect assertion of the plurality of voices that is also advocated by postcolonial criticism. What is more, it invites readers to make up their own opinion, construct their own story, and remember that it is but a story, of which there are a myriad coexisting throughout space and time.

The tragedy of Tyrone's death and the discovery of Rosemary's portrait shocks Sonja deeply and triggers old painful memories in her. She struggles for a long time and finds herself tormented by past trauma once again. When her friend Heather advises her to be patient because "all wounds heal in time," she ponders upon this premise and comes to the conclusion that "Heather was just repeating an age-old saying. But it's not like that! Time only numbs the first grief so we don't despair. Time may be God's gift but it is only an ointment we put on open wounds, that's all. It cannot heal us." (322)

After a period of mourning Sonja eventually finds some solace and comfort by interacting with other people, especially her friends Heather and Miriam. The beginning of her recuperation is symbolized by the description of a sunbeam that momentarily
gleams from behind a dark cloud (cf. 322). The novel ends with Sonja writing a letter to her cousin in Slovenia, whom she had not seen in almost 50 years. In response to her cousin's Christmas telegram, Sonja tells her that she is going to visit her in Slovenia. It is significant that she initially writes that she was “coming home,” but then changes her mind and writes “coming to Slovenia” (322) instead. This may suggest that she finally embraced Canada as her home and is about to reconcile her two identities by symbolically reaching for the past but at the same time owning the present by being at peace with herself in her new homeland. Sonja is able to claim and amalgamate the different cultural traditions and identities and make herself a unique and hybrid individual. The suggestion that the future rests with her and that she will find her way again seems to be a strong case for any social, cultural or national cluster as well as any individual to embrace the seemingly opposing, irreconcilable aspects of modern identity and recognize hybridity as the ultimate vehicle for survival.
7. Binary Oppositions and Colonial Epistemologies as Impediments to Survival and Third Space: Sarah Stonich's *These Granite Islands*

7.1 Introduction and Plot Overview

*These Granite Islands* is Stonich's debut novel. It was published by Little, Brown in 2001 and has since been translated into six languages and sold into seven countries. The first printing amounted to 75,000 copies and Stonich has been the recipient of a number of awards. Her Slovenian heritage is not in the foreground of her work and she tends to identify more with her mother's Irish background. Stonich's first novel was published in 2001 and the last comprehensive anthology of Slovenian-American writing was published in 1999 which partially explains why there is no mention of her there.

Stonich's debut novel describes the life of Isobel Howard, a milliner from the small mining town of Cypress in Illinois. The narrative timeline switches back and forth between Isobel's final days and her recollections of a summer sixty years earlier that was marked by her friendship with an extraordinary but troubled woman, Cathryn Malley. Cathryn is married to Liam Malley, an independent mining engineer who comes to Cypress for the duration of the summer to oversee the work in the town's mine. Cathryn begins a tumultuous affair with Jack Reese, a local ranger and amateur botanist. Isobel becomes a reluctant accomplice to the affair and agrees to occasionally be on guard for the two of them so that they could keep their relationship secret. The friendship to Cathryn tests Isobel's loyalty and definitions of proper moral conduct, but it also serves as a catalyst for Isobel's personal growth.

The central narrative strand takes place in 1936 in a small town in the American Midwest. The arrival of the unusual woman from Chicago causes numerous rumors to spread and contribute to the dramatic unfolding of the events. The situation eventually dissolves in tragedy and Isobel spends her entire life dwelling over the mysterious events of that summer. It also drives her to reassess her marriage to Victor, her role as a mother, and her future life.
7.2 Conceptual Structures and Narrative Techniques

7.2.1 Gothic elements and Madness as Metaphors for the Other

The sections of the novel that describe the defining summer of 1936 are full of seemingly quite random gothic or macabre elements, whereas the other sections are completely void of them. This narrative technique creates an uncanny atmosphere which marked that summer. The impression is created that those months occurred in a different world in which extraordinary things were possible. This way the intense events that unfolded seem more plausible and authentic, because they occurred in a very dramatic setting.

For example, after Victor and the boys left for the island, Isobel and Louisa began to clean the house. As if by scrubbing it free from dust, dirt and clutter they were claiming it for themselves and making it their own. Several gothic elements appear in the descriptions of places and objects. Some appear seemingly at random, such as “a chipped glass eye that must have belonged to some previous tenant“ (45), and some are woven into the text more subtly to underline the atmosphere. The first description of the house that the family lives in is conveyed when the two women remain alone. The house is personified and referred to as female, perhaps a projection of the inner life of the female characters. The home also takes on more eerie qualities, as if to foreshadow something magical about the time that is coming.

\[\text{With the boys away the voices of the house began to make themselves heard. She and Louisa took to pausing when faint whisperings interrupted their tasks. [...]. Bats seethed, settling in the eaves each morning. A low chorus of water pipes sang odd rhythms in the walls. The structure seemed a nervous giantess, shrugging and shifting her beam-and-rafter bones, as if trying to better fit into her garment of clapboard and cedar shakes. (45)}\]

The tailor shop also seems to feature some eerie elements. At one point when Isobel was cleaning shop she opened a cupboard and “a mannequin head rolled out at her like a macabre prank.” (80) The mannequins that were kept in closets could also be symbolic of the unprocessed events from the past, the so-called skeletons in the closet. Over the course of the summer Isobel, primarily because of Cathryn's help, would clean up the

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32 See Stonich's biography.
dark and cluttered back rooms of her parents' former bakery and make peace with some of the troubling events from her past.

Another quite random example of odd, gothic detail are the wooden dolls that are placed in unusual places throughout the house and the tailor shop. This comes about because during the depression Victor takes to exchanging tailoring services with food and other goods with the townspeople. One of their odder gifts includes “ten sour-faced carved wooden dolls the children refused to play with” that were “eventually put to use propping open windows around the house and the shop” (107-8). Not only does this illustrate the eccentricity of the townspeople, including Victor and Isobel, but details like these inconspicuously contribute to the peculiar atmosphere of the tailor shop and the family home. “One of the wretched things still glowered naked on Victor's desk, a nail driven through its neck, a paper cravat of bills jammed onto the point.” Oddly enough, decades later when Isobel leaves Cypress to live in St. Paul, that wooden doll with the nail through her neck is one of the few things she decides to bring with her. (Cf. 279-80).

There are a number of morbid references, and gothic imagery throughout the novel. Two episodes even take place on a cemetery. Cathryn insists Isobel teach her to drive a car. Later on we learn that she wanted to be able to meet Jack Reese more often. Isobel takes her to an old cemetery outside Cypress, because she thinks that she could do the least damage there. It seems to be a slightly odd choice of practice ground, but Cathryn is very excited and eager to begin her lesson. Her high spirits, the joy and the excitement she is experiencing are juxtaposed with the somber atmosphere of the cemetery. The odd combination gives the driving lesson an air of peculiarity and eccentricity.

Isobel backed away and sat down to watch from a distance, jumping up after realizing she'd settled on a tombstone. Cathryn leaned into the car's open hood. Isobel pulled at the quack-grass engulfing the limestone angel on a child's grave. The hood of the Ford crashed back into place and Cathryn calmly wiped her fingers, stuffing her blackened handkerchief nonchalantly into the pocket of her immaculate skirt. She called out to Isobel, who had moved down the long row of headstones to tidy another neglected grave. […] Cathryn tested the brakes, pressed the clutch, and put her foot to the accelerator. The car lurched a few times and veered from the road into the grass. Isobel covered her eyes, regretting their location. 'Please, please, please don't hit anything.' 'Anyone, you mean.' (131)
Isobel is the one who is more respectful toward the somber surroundings, but Cathryn actually perceives the tombstones as personifications of people. Significantly, Cathryn relates to the deceased, whereas Isobel is more focused on the material damage. The entire scene is alive with contrast. A bustling machine in a place of rest, lively language where there is usually silence, contemplation and grief. In a normally very quiet place, there is noise and lively activity. Cathryn's sophistication and elegance are oddly combined with her eagerness to engage in traditionally male or working-class activities, such as checking a car's engine. The dirty handkerchief which she tucks into her immaculate skirt is a symbol thereof. There is also the contrast between the two women. One of them looks stylish and vivacious while the other is reserved, dressed in plain clothes, and worried.

The choice of language also contributes to the gothic atmosphere. Objects and nature are personalized, and their demeanor ranges from melancholic to downright menacing. The movements of the car are described as “lurching” and the quack-grass is “engulfing” a limestone angel(130). The image of a child's grave is haunting and is foreshadowing the deaths of Isobel's children.

The next image of the two women at the cemetery also has distinctly gothic features about it, as well as an eccentric component with an angel statue that is oddly humanized by wearing a straw hat. In a way the angel with the straw hat becomes a symbol of a space that exists at the intersection between the worlds of the living and the dead, a kind of gothic third space.

The two women are observed from the distance and through the eyes of a solitary maintenance man, who thought he was hearing distant birds. He put down his tool and shaded his eyes to peer toward the noise. Loons? One of the marble angels at the base of the far knoll sported a broad-brimmed straw hat, its long ribbons ticking in the breeze. Beyond the statues, two women reclined under the trees, half-sitting, propped on their elbows. Thin strips of smoke rose from the cigarettes in their hands. The man was upwind, couldn't make out what they said, heard only a singular cough and the audible wails of laughter as the women fell out of sight behind the tall grass. (134)

The choice of language gives subtle clues about the impending tragedies. The ribbons are
“ticking in the breeze” (134), as if they were clock hands and the time was running out, and the women's laughter is described as “wailing” (ibid). This could be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the intense emotions of pain and grief that both women are about to experience soon. The Maze where Cathryn and Jack die is also personified. When Isobel is on the boat and watching out for anybody who might be headed out to Jack's cabin, the atmosphere grows increasingly spine-chilling.

She scanned the north corridors yawning toward her, eddies singing, Come in, Isobel. The wind caught hard at the bow and the canoe slipped backward. [...] Rain dammed in the brim of her hat suddenly ran in a gush down her back, a sinister caress. To shiver and drift, lost. For hours. [...] Isobel grabbed for her whistle, but couldn't find it. Struggled out of the canoe. groped at her soaking dress. Taillights of the car receded, red eyes of a night animal racing backward. Isobel clawed up the rough boards. Five pale buttons cascaded to the water as she tore the whistle from her dress. She held it to her lips and blew. No sound came out. Of course no sound came out. (208-9)

The passages that describe Isobel's long hours on the boat often have a distinctly dream-like quality about them, in some cases they also resemble nightmares. Nature is always described as a mysterious, uncontainable force of wild disorder that sometimes offers shelter but most of the time is depicted as menacing in its irreverence for humans.

The tower from which Liam Malley jumped to his death is also described in eerie tones. It becomes a test of courage for the children of Cypress, who would dare each other to climb it, because they “always knew that fire tower was haunted” (169). However, none of them knew any details, only that a man had died up there” (ibid), which allowed them to project their own fears into the story. Withheld information, secrecy, and limited accounts of events or people allow the imagination to run wild with speculation and is a frequent technique for heightening tension and suspense in a narrative text (Cf. Fill, 2003).

The use of macabre imagery and the sometimes odd word choice evoke an atmosphere of the uncanny and create tension. The metaphors, similes and symbols are constructed, using vocabulary that is traditionally associated with surgery, the human anatomy, death and the supernatural. However, these narrative techniques are limited to the sections
pertaining to Cathryn Malley and those who were close to her during the summer of 1936. The eerie atmosphere of these passages elevates them from the remaining narrative strands and highlights Cathryn's extraordinary character.

Upon visiting Jack's cabin, for example, Isobel describes the small shack in human terms. She finds that the “logs were aged”, a narrow counter was “bowing under the weight of stacked food tins”, the shelves held “a disparate family of plates”, the cups and saucers were – in analogy to Cathryn and Jack – “mismatched”, the lantern hanging from the ceiling “sprouted ringlets of amber flypaper thick with corpses” (193). She also picks up on the general atmosphere of the place which she finds “imbued with an overall darkness”, as well as on the somewhat odd details such as the many jelly glasses filled with plant specimen, one of which she “cradles [peering] at the red, veined interior”, which she compares to “a human heart opened up” (193-4). Later on they offered Isobel “another spear of asparagus” and the smell of the food Cathryn prepared “bled through the ironed linen cloth”(195).

When Victor returns from the island he takes Isobel away on a vacation where she could recover from the emotional stress she has been under. They stay at a hotel at lake Michigan where the absence of guests contributes to the place's ghostly atmosphere. “Much of the hotel had already been shut up for the season, and the hallways had ghostly airs, as if the footfalls and laughter of departed summer guests were held in the thick carpets.” The absence of guests and liveliness is an echo of Cathryn's disappearance and with it the absence of happy times the women shared during the summer months, just as the friendship was terminated with Cathryn's sudden vanishing. In the wake of the dramatic events, Isobel still feels the influence her friend had on her, just as she imagines hearing the laughter of the departed guests.

The extraordinary summer of 1936 has all the elements of a gothic tale. It culminates in three tragic deaths, all of which are shrouded in mystery. The exact circumstances of Liam Malley's death are never fully clarified. After the firefighters manage to control the raging fire that left the Malleys' home, Jack's cabin and a large area around Granite Point
in ashes, Liam Malley's body is found in the woods at the bottom of the fire tower. According to the sheriff, it is uncertain how he died or whether he was killed. “Maybe he fell. Might have been pushed. Could've jumped.” (253)

Cathryn and Jack are also never heard from again, which results in numerous speculations about the mysterious events. At the end of the novel we learn that Isobel intuitively guessed what really happened to Jack and Cathryn. Sixty years later her son Thomas decides to try and find any information about her mother's friends. However, when he wants to tell about his astonishing findings, Isobel refuses to know, perhaps because she fears the truth could destroy the magic of her memories. Keeping Cathryn and Jack in the realms of the imaginary preserves the extraordinariness of the events that so dramatically influenced her and, by extension, made her own life more extraordinary.

During the course of her life Isobel comes up with a number of scenarios of Cathryn's and Jack's possible fate. Her obsessive thinking of them is evidence of the strong impact they both had on her, and that Isobel was never quite able to completely process the events of that summer. All of the scenarios, however, share one common denominator. In all of them Cathryn plays a role that makes her in some way superior to others. It is either a dramatic death, the reverence others have for her, or her sheer inability to come to terms with common life. In one of the imagined plots Isobel imagines Cathryn teaching art or French at a private school in New England, “an elegant character who walks the campus on moonlit spring nights reciting dead poets. More tired than usual at the close of each dusty August and never sure why”. This excerpt shows that Isobel is subconsciously projecting her own experiences with “the body's memory” (296) onto her lost friend. Isobel's body, for example, reacts with symptoms of suffocation when circumstances resemble the night Louisa died (Cf. 285).

In another imagined version of Cathryn's and Jack's story, Liam kills the two lovers and buries their bodies in the forest. Isobel pictures this in gruesome detail:

Blood seeps through the makeshift shrouds Liam has fashioned from a one-man tent, or perhaps the lattice quilt from Jack's cabin. With his camp shovel he
battles roots and stones at the base of a white pine, his task hampered by
darkness, his vision clouded by tears. [...] He hacks at the stony soil until finally
two graves gape up at him. Deep enough that they will not be disturbed by
animals. Found. Jack's body rolled in, propelled by Liam's boot and landing with
a thud. Cathryn laid tenderly, as if only put down to sleep. (297)

Another disturbing vision has Cathryn eventually succeed at suicide. Isobel imagines how
she “found another razor to drain herself with. A horrified landlady or one of her
students finding her, slipping backward on the tile floor, weak moon lighting Cathryn's
pale face, the dark pool of blood at her lovely throat growing” (296-7). Other possible
developments feature the two of them emigrating to Europe or moving to an odd state in
the USA, such as Alabama. Isobel finds this the least likely possibility, because “Cathryn
would have abhorred the weather, the lazy drawl of the natives, the abysmal food”.
However, it is conceivable that these judgments reflect Isobel's prejudice more than
Cathryn's.

The dream of the lovers committing suicide together haunts Isobel the most and is
described in the most vivid detail. This recurring fantasy of Jack and Cathryn is the
ultimate gothic motif, namely that of the ill-fated lovers united in death. Details of the
dream are distributed over several sections of the novel so the reader has to ultimately
piece the entire image together.

The prelude to the dream: They sit in Jack's boat at dusk, Cathryn wearing her
beautiful silk robe. An open vial of some botanical potion passes from his mouth
to hers. A bitter cocktail he has extracted from purple night-shade or hemlock.
Lengths of rope around their waists, tied to the same heavy stone so they will not
be separated. A hand ax ready to punch a hole in the bottom of the boat. A final
kiss, long and dreamlike, as the poison begins its end. (298)

At the very end of the novel the reader learns that Isobel's fantasies are eerily accurate,
although she has never received any clues about what really happened with Cathryn and
Jack. The recurring images she continues to have for the rest of her life are
characteristically gothic, and the atmosphere reflects an almost mystical uncanny. The
morbidity of the motif is obvious and contributes to the sense that these episodes are
elevated over any mundane existence.
Perfectly preserved in the icy waters, the bones of Jack and Cathryn lie entwined on a ledge, as casually as if they'd tumbled back into bed some lazy Sunday. The colours of Cathryn's Chinese silk wrapper are still vibrant, the seams intact. The tail of a lake trout turning near Jack's temple creates just enough stir to cloud the pale bone with silt. They embrace undisturbed. Safe in the tomb of Lake Cypress. Safe. (293)

As Edgar Allan Poe once asserted, the most poetical topic in the world is the death of a beautiful woman (Cf. Poe, 1848). This principle of gothic aesthetics could be extended to the death of two beautiful lovers. The air of greatness about Cathryn's and Jack's story is not evoked by the short time the two were able to live out their passion. Their love becomes poetic because of the tragic ending that thwarted its potential. Just like the love between Romeo and Juliet became immortal only after their extraordinary deaths, so does the poetry of Cathryn's and Jack's relationship lie in its inherent impossibility. The deep emotions and strong response are not evoked by what had happened but what was prevented from happening. Ironically, whatever perishes is generally perceived to be more valuable than that which continues to exist, because in death it transcends to the level of the unattainable and of myth. The possibility of what could have been, had fate dealt the lovers a slightly different deck, is so powerful because it escapes exact definition, so everybody is able to project their own dreams and desires into the story.

Cathryn's and Jack's romance is poetic because it was inherently flawed. Their death removed them from reality and preserved the idea of a fairy-tale romance within the realms of the reader's imagination. A happy, long-lasting romance would eventually shatter on the rocks of mundane reality. It could never be as poetic as a tragic love story which allows the audience's imagination to run wild with possibilities of what could have been but was destroyed by unfortunate circumstance.

Another point in support of linking tragedy to poetry is that if Cathryn had not suffered from her condition, her personality and actions might have been completely different and probably mundane. If she were not married to Liam then the dynamic of her relationship with Jack would lack the allure of the forbidden. Her friendship with Isobel would have developed in another direction, which maybe would have been less tragic but also not as unique. Jack's and Cathryn's suicide made them martyrs of love, whereas if they had
merely ran away to start over somewhere else, that would have made them common adulterers and their story would descend into middle-of-the-road ordinariness.

The motif of dead lovers floating underwater is part of an intricate string of motifs and images that depict people in death or dying submerged under water, trapped under ice or some other transparent substance. A passage describing Isobel's near-drowning experience explains her deep-seated fear of water but is also a variation of a recurring motif. The fact that this traumatic experience happened because her father accidentally dropped her into a lake although she could not swim probably also contributed to her distrust of men in general.

Isobel flew from his arms, a projectile. [...] Hadn't she just been laughing and flying? As suddenly she was sinking into blackness. Her arms, so limber in the air, made lazy wingbeats as she descended. Water flooded her nostrils. Instinctively she kept her eyes open. She sank to the bottom. The way out. Way out. Where? [...] The instinct to inhale broke her, and as she took in water white pain hammered her chest, her breath a betrayal. [...] Leaving. Sadness backing away now, just as a fierce comet exploded into the water and her eyes opened against her will. (218-9)

The images of somebody drowning, swimming too deep or dying under ice are scattered throughout the novel. Essentially unrelated passages contain comparable similes and metaphors featuring water or ice. The color white also seems to be connected to this web of imagery. In the sequence above, Isobel describes the pain she feels as white. Ice is often described as white, Jack explains that “most forest plants bloom white” (194), and when Isobel moves to St. Paul she only chooses to bring seeds of white flowers from the garden (Cf. 280). What is more, during the twenty-five years in St. Paul Isobel makes a point of wearing “a fresh flower on the lapel of her overcoat, even in winter. Always a white flower” (285).

At the age of ninety-nine Isobel is in a hospital and requires an oxygen tent, which she sometimes mistakes for water surface or ice. Her dreams and thought are echoes of events from a distant past. “She stared through the plastic for a long time; its crinkled surface warped in light and shifted contours. She had imagined it a thousand times.
Dying underwater. She raised her stronger hand to touch the plastic.” (215) When Louisa dies she is fifty and Isobel is seventy-five years old. She spends the remaining years of her life grieving for her dead husband and daughter.

The image of Louisa dead under water is the one that haunts her the most and causes a string of hallucinations, nightmares, and panic attacks.

It had been so cold, the kind of winter night Isobel found eerie for the dry, cloudless skies, silent save the distant reverberations of a world freezing: boughs snapping, stones fissuring, the unearthly gong of lake-ice cracking. The trilling of car tires skidding on ice. The lake had opened up, had taken her in. Ice formed quickly again over the car, so that by the time the rescuers reached the lake the next day, they'd had to take axes to the sheet, a jagged oval framing the top of Louisa's green Chrysler. A jade trinket in glass. She'd died with her eyes open. Looking straight ahead, calmly touching the windshield, as if pointing to something interesting. [...] The ice above was already thickening into a shroud, a wretched weaving of water and cold. (216)

During the following years Isobel's health held, but with an odd exception. On three nights in three consecutive years, Isobel was hospitalized with breathing difficulty. Thomas took her to the emergency room after she called him in the middle of the night, gasping for air and nearly incoherent. The doctors could never determine the cause of Isobel's attacks, but Thomas eventually grasped the connection. “All of those nights were threaded together by the possibility of ice, the air cold enough to freeze lakes, even rivers. All shared the same sapphire cold stillness as the night Louisa died.” (285)

After her daughter's death Isobel moves to St. Paul, where she spends the remaining years of her life lost in daily routines that take her mind off the people she has lost. During all these years Isobel would go to the library on three or four days a week at exactly eight in the morning and spend hours in the same corner reading, solving crosswords or just sitting. She refers to the library as her “asylum” (283) and soon becomes a steady of slightly eccentric fixture of the library. Over time “the sting of Louisa's death diminished and grief became less stabbing” (ibid). However, one day an event triggers repressed memories in her, causing her to have a panic attack. As Isobel is sitting in her usual spot she notices that the glass panels of the high vestibule were being covered with opaque
tiles, blocking the natural light that was coming through the ceiling, which reminded her of the traumatic time in Cypress. “Suddenly her underarms were damp, her throat closed against the smell of old books and she was swept backward to see herself awaiting a storm, gazing up to count the panels of tin ceiling in the tailor shop.” (289) She never returned to the library, which is indicative of the intensity of the memories from that defining time in her life.

The parallels in imagery used to describe Isobel's near-drowning experience, her dreams of the deaths of Cathryn, Jack and Louisa, as well as her nightmares of herself drowning echo throughout the novel. They are a powerful stylistic tools that connect the different narrative strands and relate past events to the more recent ones which makes death by submersion the leitmotif of the novel. The image of a child submerged under water is reminiscent of the imagery in Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* (1972).

During their first brief encounter with Cathryn, Isobel already notices “some reflection in her eye aside from the odd lightness” which she found “unsettling” (56). This is a foreshadowing of the mental breakdown Cathryn was about to experience by the end of the summer, but also of the behavioral pattern that the two women will establish in their communication. Cathryn would display a symptom of mental illness and Isobel would choose to ignore it. When they meet for the first time, Isobel is embarrassed about her own scruffy appearance which stands in stark contrast to Cathryn's understated stylishness. Isobel exclaims: "Look at me! You'll think I'm mad. Well, I'm not. Really, ask anyone." (54) The irony of the very first statement she utters to her future friend is that madness will critically influence all of their lives and it is Cathryn who is truly suffering from severe psychological issues.

In an interview Stonich revealed that Cathryn Malley's character was based on a Chinese-American artist friend of hers, who suffered from a bi-polar disorder.33 Clues about Cathryn's psychological condition are present from the very beginning of the narrative strand, describing the friendship between her and Isobel, who was soon taken by the

33 From a private interview with the author, February 16th, 2010
unusual woman.

She was glad for Cathryn's company. After the first weeks of nearly frantic chatter, they had settled into a more relaxed routine, one that included silences, companionable for the most part. But sometimes Cathryn's silences seemed less easy, as if accompanied by some heaviness descending, as if she'd stepped away to some low inner plateau. (108)

There are also other signs that something is wrong. Cathryn is normally very articulate and well-mannered, but sometimes she unintentionally strays away from the traditional dynamic of conversation by either not pausing for the other parties to speak, overreacting, not reacting or inexplicably failing to react to outside stimuli. With another character, these deviations could be interpreted as bad manners or poor knowledge of general conversation rules. There are many people who have poor social skills but are otherwise perfectly normal, which is why they might break conversational codes by not pausing frequently enough for other people to partake in a conversation. Cathryn, however, is much more sophisticated, eloquent and versed in conversational imperatives to accidentally break them. Her deviations are a sign of mental turmoil. Isobel, for example, had learned early on that “when Cathryn began [speaking] it was not worth interrupting her – anything Isobel might say butted up against Cathryn's phrases like strings of hackneyed words competing with birdsong.” (273). The comparison is as beautiful as it is tragic, because it shows how much Isobel loved and admired her friend, but it also hints at Cathryn's condition.

She had attempted suicide at least twice before coming to Cypress, but this is not stated explicitly until the end of the novel. Cathryn claims that the scars she has on her body are the result of a surgery, although it soon becomes obvious that the many different scars can not be the result of medical care. One day, when Isobel and Cathryn are sunbathing in the grass, Isobel notices a conspicuous scar on her friends throat, who is quick to dismiss it as a trifle.

As Cathryn rolled over, Isobel noticed a pearlish cord running through her flesh, a wide scar just over her collarbone, silvered with light. 'What's that on your neck?'
She reached quickly to touch it. 'Oh, my surgery?' As her fingers drummed over the mark, alarm fluttered across Cathryn's face, and Isobel had an image of a
dark curtain falling.
'My, I'd almost forgotten it. I had a little cyst there. Maybe the sun will fade it.' She reached for the wine, and when she turned back she was smiling again. 'More anesthetic, nurse?' (133-4)

Cathryn uses humor and ignores all that is troubling. This is indicative of the fact that her issues are probably quite severe and that she has grown accustomed to hiding them from others. In the early 20th century depression and bipolar disorders had not been extensively researched, and psychological illnesses were still very much a taboo. It is unclear, however, if Cathryn's ability to momentarily switch from sadness to liveliness is a reflection of authentic mood swings or whether she is just very skilled at masking her true emotions. When Isobel and Louisa notice "strangely uniform white hatches on her thighs just below the hem of her swimsuit," Cathryn dismisses them as ancient, "some old bicycle crash or fall." (234) It is obvious that Cathryn tries to keep her self-destructive behavior secret, even in front of her friends. It is quite possible that she tries to ignore it herself.

The following episode is a good example of one of Cathryn's sudden breakdowns and the subsequent sudden switch to normal behavior. These kinds of amplitudes begin to occur with increasing frequency from the moment Cathryn meets Jack Reese. It seems that she has been able to keep in check whatever emotions had been bubbling under the surface, but that the intensity of the love affair jolted her frail mental health out of its strained equilibrium.

Monday morning Isobel walked into the shop to find Cathryn standing over the shards of a broken vase, palms pressed to her eyes as if to hold them in place. Purple columbine and white iris lay amid a pool of water slowly soaking into the floorboards.
Isobel knelt. The vase was shattered as if it had been hurled to the floor, not merely dropped. The stems of the flowers were broken and the irises looked as if they'd been crushed.
'They were so beautiful, and the vase... and now it's broken. I've broken it.' Cathryn's shoulders convulsed. 'I've ruined it!' Isobel stood and looked curiously into her friend's swollen face, but Cathryn turned away. 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry.' When Cathryn began to rock, shifting from one foot to another, Isobel saw white petals sticking to the heels of her shoes.
She steered Cathryn to a chair near the window.
'Cathryn, it's all right.'
She covered her eyes again.
'Do you hear me?'
'I'm sorry.'
'It's all right. It's just a vase. See? Look.' She pried Cathryn's hands downward. It's just a broken vase and some silly flowers. It'll only take a minute to clean it up.'

By the time she'd swept and mopped up the mess and made a pot of tea, Cathryn had washed her face, reapplied her lipstick, and was doing the crossword puzzle in the Cypress Tribune as if nothing had happened, her voice steady and bright when she asked, 'Izzy, what's a five-letter word for fanciful journey?' (122-3)

The way Cathryn seems caught up in a situation but then turns around as if it never happened is a standard pattern in her behavior. In addition to that she also tends to lose herself in a chore or activity, which probably occupies her mind and lets her forget her heavy thoughts. She does so quite frantically, too. She will work ceaselessly, even under impossible conditions and at odd hours, which leaves Isobel and Louisa wonder about her strange behavior.

Cathryn would burst into the shop, flushed and cheerful, always bringing treasures for Louisa [...] She would stay only a short while, reading, helping Isobel with the finer tacking or beadwork, sometimes working on Louisa's frocks, ripping out entire sections for one mislaid stitch. She talked either a great deal or not at all. [...] Isobel was reading aloud from the serial novel in the paper. She got nearly to the end of the column when she realized no one was listening.

'Yoohoo, anybody?'

When there was no response, she glanced up to see Cathryn staring blindly at the wall, twisting her fingers around an imaginary object.

'Cathryn?'

She continued staring. Isobel watched for a moment and observed the almost imperceptible rocking motion of Cathryn's upper body. [...] She crouched in front of the chair and stilled Cathryn's hands with her own.

'Cathryn. What's wrong?'

Cathryn blinked as through trying to clear a fog from her eyes.

'Cathryn!'

She blinked again, this time focusing on Isobel's face. She saw her hands covered by her friend's and looked up with a faltering, puzzled smile.

'Yes? What is it, Izzy?' (151-2)

However odd their friend's behavior might be, neither Isobel nor Louisa seems to be keen on openly addressing her erratic conduct. It is possible that they are simply unaware of the severity of Cathryn's disorder that remained a secret until the tragic climax. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that something is wrong with her, and Isobel refuses to act on it. Both Isobel and Louisa choose to ignore it, perhaps out of fear that they could ruin the delicate equilibrium between them and lose a beloved friend. Louisa is obviously too young to be able to comprehend psychological disorders, but Isobel resorts to merely watching Cathryn, “waiting for the days to pass, hoping that Liam's
return might calm her” (153).

In her old age Isobel wonders about the things Cathryn had not told her and the graveness of her abysmal mental state. She remembers several clues she did not act upon, for example, the day she found Cathryn on the floor under a table, “curled into a C and red-faced, claiming she’d only just fallen asleep there” (163), or the time when she found her holding Louisa tight, “her limbs taking on some sort of rigid somnambulance.” (164) She would not let the girl go and it seemed as if she was unable to, “as if her embrace was involuntary, robotic. Louisa only laughed, thinking it was a game” (ibid).

While Isobel, Cathryn and Louisa were visiting a mine, the tour guide tuned all the lights off so that the visitors could experience complete and utter darkness. This caused Cathryn to panic, scrape open her shin and end up screaming to be pulled out of the cave. When she reached the surface she was immediately gained composure as if nothing happened. We later learn that Cathryn does not suffer from claustrophobia per se, so it was probably the immersion into complete darkness and the resulting absence of external stimuli that triggered her attack. After the three of them they get out, Cathryn is completely normal again. “Isobel and her daughter locked eyes, their shrugs minute” (269). It is obvious that they both find the behavior odd, but none of them chooses to act on it. “By the end of the picnic Cathryn had taught the fiddle player an Irish reel and showed Louisa all the steps, as though she had forgotten her panic in the mine, as if nothing had happened.” (270) Such episodes must have happened before, and in a way it seems understandable that Cathryn prefers to ignore them. However, Isobel is also in denial about her friend's condition, as if she were afraid that digging deeper would burst the happy bubble she found herself in.

Cathryn, on the other hand, would incessantly devote herself to any kind of chore or activity that would keep her mind occupied and focused on something other than herself. Also, if she was manic depressive or had a bipolar disorder, periods of depression would alternate with phases of hyperactivity in a never-ending pattern.

When Cathryn wasn't busy at some task she would drag a chair to sit near the
windows to read or embroider. She explored and reexplored the dim recesses of the L-shaped storage hall of the back entry. [...] But the darkness and claustrophobic dimensions of the hall did not seem to bother Cathryn, who would disappear into the space for hours, clutching a rag and a can of Brasso to attack the half-moon drawer pulls and latches tarnished to molasses. Once Isobel went back to find that Cathryn had climbed the rolling ladder with her sleeves pushed high and was scouring furiously at a particularly stubborn handle. (98)

Isobel never uses the back part of the shop that is simply left it to its clutter. She had spent most of her childhood in the bakery and the room reminded her of the solitude and sadness of her youth. “She had been two years old when her parents bought the building. Her childhood was distinctly mapped on the floor in front of her in pattern and shadow.” (ibid) But Cathryn becomes an effective catalyst for the changes Isobel has decided to make to her life. Cathryn cleans the giant and filthy storage room of its clutter, scrubs the floors, cupboards and windows, as well as pedantically organizes the remaining items. She creates a space where Isobel can really pursue her dreams of a millinery, a place where she can be creative, independent, and herself.

The panes of glass shone, and behind the glass fonts, all of Victor's supplies had been rearranged. The teetering stacks of boxes were gone, and all fabrics were folded, stocked and, tagged. The blackened floor had been stripped of ancient wax to reveal poppy-red linoleum. A dozen years of grime and disarray had been replaced by a gleaming order. (147)

Cathryn pushes Isobel to claim more space for herself. She is instrumental in helping her friend acquire it, literally and figuratively. This way she aids Isobel in finding a purpose in life, other than being reduced to a wife and a mother. Cathryn's influence helps Isobel define her individual identity and alters her entire outlook on life. On her deathbed Isobel tells Thomas that Cathryn showed her that “life was bigger” (244). Cathryn essentially assists Isobel in her pursuit of what could be viewed as a career. She also gets Isobel interested in poetry and painting. The newly instilled thirst for knowledge does wonders for Isobel's self-confidence. She finds fulfillment in her work and creates the foundation of what would eventually become a business spanning over three generations of women and symbolic of their matrilineal heritage.³⁴ By claiming her parents' place for herself, Isobel decides to metaphorically get rid of her emotional baggage and overcomes the trauma of her youth. Ironically, what helps Isobel deal with her past is also a symptom of
Cathryn's continuously worsening condition.

The gradual mental breakdown that eventually culminates in suicide is accompanied by a number of symptoms, such as Cathryn's abrupt and extreme mood swings, mental absences, temporary loss of control, denial, and paranoia. The fact that she is paranoid is indicative of her past experiences, which included being hospitalized and watched because of her psychological issues. This causes her to occasionally overreact when she is reminded of the times when she felt patronized and controlled. When she tells Isobel that she had time to clean up the shop because she does not sleep, her friend is understandably worried and inquires further about the insomnia, only to see Cathryn snap and suddenly switch from happiness to anger.

'What are you, my mother? My husband? My nurse?' [...] 'Has Liam put you up to watching me? I'm sick to death of being watched. I'm a grown woman I do not need to be baby-sat!' [...] 'Can't I be left in peace for one moment? One goddamn solitary minute?' (148)

There is something child-like in her assertions that she is old enough to take care of herself and the mention of the nurse is probably an association with the medical institutions she had been in.

After she disappears, Liam discloses the full extent of his wife's self-destructive behavior to Isobel in the attempt to extract further information from her regarding Cathryn's whereabouts. He reveals what really caused Cathryn's scars, and how he is constantly anxious about what her suicidal tendencies might drive her to do.

'You've seen the scars?' He reached up to his collar. 'The one she calls her 'surgery'? She tried cutting her own throat. I was only out for fifteen minutes, gone out for milk. She said she wanted a milkshake.' He inhaled. 'You cannot conceive how much floor a few pints of blood can cover. The bottle fell from my hands, and then there was the milk mixed in. Glass everywhere … her head on the edge of the tub, just resting, like. She could have been sleeping there, her neck dripping, dripping … the whole floor grown pink with milk and the blood. Rivers of it between the tiles.' (233)

The ghastly image haunts Isobel for years to come as her thought revolve around the

tragic events of that fateful summer. The narrative technique of combining a neutral everyday element with a horrid one is very effective in creating a chilling atmosphere, because it unites an image of horror, such as blood streaming from a woman's throat, with the milkshake, which is normally something enjoyable and perhaps even evokes associations with childhood experiences or innocence. This way the horror enters into the comfortable realm of everyday life and increases the proximity between the literary scene and the reader, resulting in a stronger emotional response.

7.2.2 Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a narrative technique used primarily to heighten the tension of a literary tense and subtly influence the perception of the reader. The author provides clues about what could happen later in a text. This way the twists of plot, themes, motifs and imagery of a literary piece appear more congruent and the entire text aesthetically more pleasing. On the other hand the reader can be influenced in their expectation of future events. This kind of guidance can occur in two directions. The clues given in the form of seemingly insignificant details, imagery or language can prepare the reader for what is about to happen. Sometimes characters also utter clues about the future chain of events. So when the reader builds up anticipation of certain events and those eventually transpire they can experience a sense of satisfaction or pleasure. Another technique of foreshadowing intentionally gives the reader misleading clues, the so-called red herrings, so that any unforeseen twist of plot may come as a bigger surprise. Another literary device employed to provide clues about the plot to fast-forward to future events or use flashbacks to inform the reader about the past.

The novel These Granite Islands begins in the year 1999 when Isobel, the protagonist, is ninety-nine years old. As she is recalling events from the past the narrative timeline frequently jumps back and forward in narrated time so most events need to be chronologically pieced together by the reader. The central narrative strand, the events of the summer of 1936, are also scattered throughout the text but the frequent use of foreshadowing as a literary device gives ample evidence about forthcoming
The text offers conspicuous but vague clues about the tragedies that would befall the characters from the very beginning. The narrative is set off by a brief impressionistic depiction of two anonymous women laughing at a cemetery. Then it jumps to six decades later to the protagonist lying on her deathbed. Isobel has been hospitalized after a heart attack and her youngest son Thomas comes to visit her. Isobel's old age and an early stage of dementia have caused her to dwell mostly on events from the distant past rather than recent developments. Her recurrent surprise at finding herself in the present moment and then losing herself in the memories again give the reader clues about the main storyline but omit enough to invoke curiosity.

The novel is narrated from Isobel's perspective, which also transposes the reader to the events Isobel is reliving. Her thoughts and memories foreshadow almost everything the reader is about to learn over the course of the novel and set the tone for the narrative that is about to unfold. For example, looking at her sixty-year-old son Thomas she is surprised by how old he is. “She'd expected a gap-toothed nine-year-old to emerge from behind the comics to snap his gum. She'd expected the green-eyed boy who'd been able to wring her heart with a wink. He could do that before things shattered for him. For all of them” (20).

The anticipation of impending gloom is achieved by allowing the reader partial insight into the characters' thoughts, comments, random details in the descriptions of the settings and the characters' actions. The systematic omission of extensive information invites the reader's imagination to fill the information gaps and further contributes to the text's tension. The gothic atmosphere of some of the settings, the macabre detail, sinister imagery and morbid language which are discussed above also contribute to a heightened sense of anticipation. This way, the tragedy that eventually unfolds appears more plausible and the plot's structure seems more organic. What is more, some of the details that were initially perceived as insignificant suddenly become charged with meaning and provide the text with more depth.
The detailed descriptions of settings and the characters' reactions to them are often indicative of wider connections that the characters may not even be aware of. They can also give clues about the characters' personalities through illustrating the way each of them deals with a specific predicament or bad omen. For example, when Cathryn, Isobel and Louisa go on a bicycle tour to the edge of town Louisa notices that the animals have gone quiet and that the birds are gone.

Isobel began to listen for them over the next days. She watched the woods and gardens during her travels from her house to downtown and back and was surprised that Louisa was right. [...] In bed she strained to hear night birds. The owls and manical-sounding loons that usually announced the nights ceased announcing them. (111)

The odd absence of bird sounds could suggest either an approaching storm or some other imminent danger that the creatures sense and react to instinctively by seeking shelter. It may also be read as a bad omen and prepare the reader for the tragedies that would soon befall the characters. The subsequent violent storm that hits the town is raging at the same time as the plot is building up to the novel's climax so the extreme weather can be read as a metaphor for the dramatic twists in plot and mirrors the violent emotions the main characters are experiencing.

It is interesting that the women resort to ignoring the ominous silence by putting on music and try to engross themselves in various activities (Cf. 111). Distracting oneself from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, as well as ignoring obvious predicament is a recurring theme in the novel.

The subconscious usually surfaces when a character finds themselves in a stressful situation or are somehow forced to deal with themselves. For instance, a situation that lacks external distraction will cause suppressed emotions to explode quite violently. Once Cathryn, Isobel and Louisa take a tour of one of the mines the tour guide decides to turn off all lights and let the visitors experience complete darkness, void of any visual distraction. This lack of outside stimuli causes Cathryn to panic and throw a violent fit. When pulled out of the mine she brushes the incident off with a giggle and offhand comment, and continues as if nothing had happened. This reaction suggesting that she had had such attacks before and was used to hiding them from others but even more
significantly Louisa and Isobel, who have witnessed their friend's behavior from up close, react by looking at each other and slightly shrug. This subtle but telling reaction of the two is important despite its ambiguity. The mutual shrug could either imply bewilderment, which seems as the natural reaction to Cathryn's fit, but it could also imply that the women shrug their friend's behavior off and choose to ignore signs of Cathryn's madness. This incident could be read as another example of the recurring motif of the characters choosing to ignore the writing on the wall (Cf. 269-70).

In a case of flash-forwarding the reader is transposed to the distant future. Louisa is a mature woman, has two daughters and happily runs a tailoring business together with her mother. A little detail triggers Isobel's suppressed memories and they burst out of her, although she has been quite successful in ignoring them for a number of years. It happens when Isobel sees one of her granddaughters wearing one of Louisa's old dresses that Cathryn began to embroider but left unfinished. The unexpected encounter with a seemingly insignificant little object triggers an extreme reaction in Isobel, who is suddenly taken back in time and reminded of her lost friend. What is more, her granddaughter must also have reminded her of Louisa when she was young and the way Isobel was compensating for her own unhappy childhood by focusing on Louisa's upbringing and happiness. “After staring a moment at Cathryn's unfinished embroidery, Isobel burst into rare tears. Louisa put an arm around her mother, whispering into her grey curls, 'Momma, I haven't forgotten her either.'” (110) The excerpt is indicative of the strong and intuitive bond between mother and daughter. It also shows that even though Louisa was only ten years old at the time, she nevertheless understood how important Cathryn was to her mother. Even though Isobel appears to have left the drama of that summer behind there is still much unprocessed emotion suppressed in her subconsciousness that surfaces when she least expects it to. The embroidered dress is also a symbol of the emotional heritage that has been passed down the maternal line. There is no explicit evidence to suggest that either Isobel or Louisa spoke of Cathryn to Isobel's granddaughters but nevertheless the matrilineage has been defined by their friendship. Now the two young girls are growing up with a steady and nurturing support system and their personalities are being indirectly influenced by that legacy.
A few years after Louisa's death Isobel walks into a souvenir shop in Como Park and notices that the shop assistant resembles her daughter. She is taken aback and rushes out of the store in an overwhelming rush of emotion. However, over time the shock wears off and “Isobel's refrigerator door grew crowded with little magnets and postcards emblazoned Como!” (282), which is further evidence of how Isobel's controlled behavior only masks the intensity of her emotions and the depth of her grief.

7.2.3 The Manipulation of Perspective - Isobel's Subjectivity
The first scene that introduces the protagonists is significant because it defines the reader's first impressions of the characters and sets the tone for the entire novel. In the first scene that introduces Isobel, Victor and their three children Isobel is portrayed as a good and patient mother who is devoted to making the Christmas Evening as enjoyable for her family as possible under the very simple circumstances. Victor, on the other hand, is depicted as a neglectful father and an egotistical husband. He comes home from work late and smelling of alcohol, and then proceeds to inform his wife that there will be no Christmas presents for the children this year. Instead he spent the money on purchasing an island without ever mentioning this to his wife, who happens to be terrified of water. In response Isobel is livid but nevertheless desperately tries to save the evening. She instructs Louisa to watch the turkey and yams, makes sure the boys were out of range to hear the short argument with Victor and storms out of the house furiously to spend the little bit of money she had saved doing seamstress work to “stretch her bit of savings into a decent Christmas for her family” (8).

Another example of Victor's egotistical behavior are his preparations for the summer on the island a few months later. As he is packing he only takes the best things from the house, some of which are either much too valuable to be used in a primitive cabin or hold a sentimental value for Isobel.

Victor began preparations to outfit the island. Isobel watched from the back porch as he and Henry loaded the flatbed trailer. Onto it went precious sacks of flour, salt, rice, cornmeal, dry macaroni, a case of tinned beef. She crossed her arms, silent as half her kitchen went onto the trailer – pots, cutlery, jelly glasses, most
of her blue willow dishes. She waited. When Victor went into the cellar, she
dashed out to retrieve a painted china teapot, slipping in a chipped brown
replacement. She winnowed through the box of bedding, pulled out the better
linen sheets that had been wedding gifts, and tossed in cheaper flannel. (38)

The novel is clearly written from a woman's perspective. If viewed from a historical or a
feminist standpoint this narrative technique could also be read as an attempt to give voice
to a segment of society that otherwise would not have been heard. It speaks for Stonich
that she chose not to portray a flat, saintly character suffering nobly because of her
gender and social background, but instead created a complex and believable character
with qualities and flaws the reader can identify with more easily.

Isobel's character could be viewed as representative of a multitude of other women of her
day and age, who did not have the opportunity to have their story told. In some contrast
to most of today's western societies, women at the beginning of the 20th century were
usually defined by their relationship to the men in their lives and lived the roles of wives,
sisters and mothers However, the novel's perspective is not quite as simple. The narrative
voice allows for a more complex view of the coexistence and communication between
men and women. It is not completely biased in any direction and there is no categorical
condemnation of neither gender, because this would massively undermine the relevance
and literary quality of the novel. The novel shows intricate interactions between
individuals, the predicaments that emerge from conflicts and unresolved issues as well as
the characters' complex inner life framed by a specific social setting.

Nevertheless, the bias in Isobel's favor continues to dominate a large part of the novel.
However, as the narrative unfolds, more and more clues surface that suggest that Victor is
anything but the neglectful husband and father that he was initially portrayed as. The
novel is a third person narrative focusing on Isobel and her perceptions of the events that
shaped her life. It becomes increasingly apparent that her perspective can not be relied on
for objectivity although the seemingly omniscient narrative voice seems to steer the
reader's perception in Isobel's favor.
The family is introduced at a time when Isobel and Victor are going through a rough patch in their marriage and the narrative perspective reflects Isobel's bias on the issue. It soon becomes obvious that Isobel is by no means a saint and a martyr making the best of the difficult circumstances she found herself in but that she also significantly contributes to the failed communication, misunderstandings and conflicts. She is neither the villain of the novel but the reader must take into account that the narrative voice is biased in Isobel's favor and that they must often read between the lines in order to grasp the full complexity of the story.

Isobel, for example, is envious of Victor because she feels that he is a better parent than she is. "From the beginning he [Victor] had been an eager father. She'd envied that, never felt herself to be a very natural parent." (47) Nevertheless, the first impression the reader gets of Victor suggests that he is anything but a good father. However, the flash-forwarding and other narrative devices soon allow for enough insight into other characters and Isobel's own thinking providing the reader with a different perspective.

Victor's behavior when Isobel is in labor with their last child is indicative of his empathy for his wife's suffering and his eagerness to somehow stand by her. "Toward the end her cries were drawn with agony, and when those cries began Victor moaned along with the awful sound and pressed his head into the doorframe, so that for weeks afterward he had a strange, ridged bruise running from his temple to his eyebrow" (47). The reason he was unable to be with his wife during labor was that the midwife had "locked the door against him" (48). The situation is also a reminder that in the early 20th century the domains of men and women were still very strictly separated and childbirth was still a taboo.

After the baby was born, Victor rushed into the room and despite the midwife's orders not to touch the baby scooped it up, kissed Isobel and was immediately in his element again. This in turn caused some resentment in his wife, who did not seem to be comfortable with the idea he had better paternal instincts than she did: "Isobel's fingers thrummed the table. Yes, Victor had always been very at ease with the children." (48) It is quite obvious
that she is envious of his natural ability to handle children, although she would never admit to it.

At the beginning of the novel Isobel's attitude toward Victor is clearly very critical. She ponders what she perceives as injustices, differences, trauma. This eventually gives way to more sympathetic memories but toward the beginning the overall impression of Victor is a rather negative one. This discrepancy is an effective narrative tool for evoking the sense of the current tensions between the married couple.

There would be no more babies if she could help it. It didn't matter what she had promised years ago. She wasn't filling an order. Victor had made promises, too. She clearly remembered his pointing to the sunny corner of the shop and saying, 'That's where you can do your hat business, Izzy, right here.' (52).

The clear implication here is that Victor does not keep his word. So the reason Isobel denies him in bed seems justifies and an understandable consequence of Victor's unfair behavior.

In that same spirit, the perspective is manipulated in Isobel's favor again when she decided to take matters into her own hands and start to pursue the trade she learned. In the summer following the allegedly disastrous Christmas Eve Victor decides to take the boys to the island and spend some weeks there. Isobel stays behind with Louisa still sulking about the island. She decides to claim a small space for her millinery in a corner of the tailor shop but does so in fear of her husband's reaction. Her thoughts suggest that Victor is likely to be angry about her plans, although he had promised her that she could start a millinery in the shop. “She had moved most of Victor's things from this corner and had incorporated them as neatly as she could into the rest of his clutter. She sighed. He'll skin me alive.” (80) Such thoughts and language suggest his utter disregard for is wife's hopes for the future, a tendency to break promises and possibly a violent temper. Such subtle constructs cast an unfavorable light on Victor's character but over the course of the novel this perception changes completely and it becomes obvious that his actions were always aimed at benefiting his family, that he was a loving husband and father, as well as well-liked by almost everyone in Cypress.
Another time Isobel recalls how he crashed her bachelor party, implying that he was more interested in having a good time himself and entertaining her friends than in her. To illustrate her resentment she points out that in the excitement he had poured all the attending girls his black market wine but had forgotten about her (Cf. 69). She also tells Thomas how Victor would let Isobel do the bookkeeping for the tailor shop for years because his dyslexia rendered him useless with numbers but never thanked her for her help. (Cf. 61)

Soon after Isobel and Victor got married her parents retired from the bakery business, moved to St. Paul and entrusted the newlyweds with the now closed family bakery. After the parents' train left the station “Victor blew a riot of insincere kisses to the back end of the caboose, until Isobel thumped him hard. When the train was out of sight, he nearly sprinted to the old bakery to begin remodeling.” (76) This anecdote serves as evidence of Victor's alleged insincerity and implies that he unabashedly snatched Isobel's heirloom away for his own purposes.

When Isobel recalls Victor's proposal it seems as though he was only concerned about his own plans and dreams of marriage, which suggests a high degree of egocentricity. He tells her:

‘Okay, here it is. I want a wife who laughs at my jokes, but only the good ones. I want my children to have lots of brothers and sisters. I want a real house. In a town, not a city. I want someone to talk to about the things I'm interested in.’
In the months they'd been together this was his second display of sincerity. (70)

Evidently, there is hardly a sentence in Victor's short monologue that does not begin with the words 'I want', which can easily be interpreted as a complete disregard for his future wife's preferences. Furthermore, the subsequent comment about his (in)sincerity casts an even worse light on Victor. Although it is revealed later in the text that he then went on to inquire about Isobel's hopes for marriage. Interestingly enough she had none, which makes this another example of the narrative is biased against Victor but is clearly only a reflection of Isobel's resentments toward her husband and other personal issues.
The entire narrative is largely defined by Isobel's feelings and despite appearances should not be considered objective or fair. As time progresses Isobel's feelings toward Victor change and the narrative attitude toward Victor shifts completely to a much more benign viewpoint. These changes in perspective are evidence of the narrative subjectivity. Ultimately, there is much more evidence that suggests that Isobel and Victor loved each other very much and that the initial skepticism toward Victor was only a reflection of Isobel's feelings during the first months of that fateful year.

Despite numerous examples suggesting insensitivity on Victor's part there is continuous evidence that he is much more insightful and kind than he is initially given credit for. He says to Isobel: “See those colours? There, just before the wave crests, where it's blue and grey and green all in layers? The lake only looks like that before a storm. [...] You're like that water. You don't give away much, but it's there all the same, just underneath” (72). It is as if the narrative was set up in a way that was urging the reader to question opinions, perspectives, to be generally more attentive to the effects of personal bias and subjective evaluation. Although the novel is narrated from Isobel's perspective, the narrative voice is inviting the reader to make up their own mind by leaving numerous clues suggesting that neither Isobel nor any one character in the entire text can be relied on for objectivity.

The conversation between Victor and Isobel on the evening of her thirty-sixth birthday is another example of how Victor attempts to understand his wife's behavior and ease the tensions in the family. Isobel has been sulking for five months because of his purchase of the island. Despite apparent efforts to make the reader side with her, this episode shows that it is really Isobel who is being difficult. She refuses to talk to her husband and seems to expect him to instinctively grasp her thoughts and feelings. She is also able to carry a grudge for months when he fails to do so. The prevalence of dialogue gives the scene a dramatic quality and the reader is invited to judge the characters as if they were performing a theatrical play. The narrative voice gives additional insight into Isobel's thoughts and further illustrates the fact that Victor is rendered helpless by Isobel's stubbornness and refusal to share her thoughts with her husband. The reader is unaware of the reasons behind her behavior but it is clear that she significantly contributes to the
problems by keeping her thoughts and feelings to herself.

When they were in bed Victor pulled the magazine from Isobel's hands. 'What is it?'
'Harpers.'
'No, I mean what is it?'
'What is what?'
'Izzy. You've been short with the children, you're...'
'I'm what?'
'I don't know. You tell me.'
'There is nothing to tell, Victor.'
Victor stared at her.
'It's my birthday. You know I never liked my birthday.'
'It hasn't been your birthday every day for the last five months.'
Isobel sat up and gathered her nightgown around her ankles. 'Fine. Do you want to have one of your talks?' She pursed her lips and examined the lace of her sleeves.
He struggled to his elbows. 'You've lost your sense of humor.'
She laughed.
When he asked her the third time what was bothering her, she shrugged and gave him a pained smile. 'Don't worry about me.'
'I'm not just worried about you, I'm worried about all of us.'
'Oh Lord, Victor. Please.'
Victor suddenly heaved himself to the edge of the bed. 'I don't know what's going on with you.'
Guess, she wanted to say. Guess what's going on with me.
He snapped off his light and snorted into his pillow, 'Haphy birfday.' (144)

It is interesting to observe how Isobel displays behavioral patterns that are traditionally attributed to men and vice versa. It is Victor who insists they talk about the problem and Isobel who shies away from discussion, resorting to silences and sulking. On another occasion when she is sulking about the amount of time Victor is going to spend on the island she even considering that he might be taking the boys away for an entire summer so that he could get back at her for her indifference over the past months. She is wondering how he could still be unaware of her fear of water and other things that are bothering her. Ironically it doe not occur to her that she never made it clear to him what was troubling her. “She had walked away from Victor, ignoring him as she had every time he'd started a conversation regarding the island” (44).

Isobel is sometimes very passive aggressive and this is by no means a likeable trait in a character. Although the insights into her thoughts sometimes explain why she is acting in a particular way, her ambiguous behavior is often a conundrum to the reader. At the same
time this makes her character more complex because it steers away from kind of black and white portrayal of her as a noble heroine. Isobel is a good person but she is not a martyr. She is also not very exceptional in her thoughts and feelings, although she consider herself to be superior to others. Especially in her old age her thoughts reflect a kind of elitism resulting from her contemplations of architecture, her appreciation of poetry and a general thirst for knowledge.

She feels that Cathryn's uniqueness rubbed off on her and that her friend taught her that “life was bigger” (244) than the common existence. Such condescension, justified or not, clashes with the sympathetic view of Isobel, who is the protagonist of the novel and the character the reader is allowed to empathize with most. This ambivalence makes her character complex and speaks for the literary quality of Stonich's novel.

On the whole, Isobel is mostly portrayed in positive terms, the way she probably views herself. However, it soon becomes apparent that there are things she conveniently ignores or hides, even from herself and she is by far not as reasonable and patient as she considers herself to be. She can actually be quite difficult and her behavior often understandably puzzles the people around her. A careful reader will soon notice that her assessment of Victor is initially anything but fair and that the criticism might only be a reflection of Isobel's current state of mind.

Despite her wariness of long speeches or dramatic displays of emotions Isobel nevertheless often manages to communicate with her family quite effectively, although rarely in verbal form. When Victor and the boys are on the island over the summer she responds to the letter they sent her in ways that show her understanding an ability to relate to each of the men's particular personality. To the older son Henry, who had written her a short note telling her about their daily routine and complaining of his younger brother and expressing his yearning for his favorite chocolate bars she sends a package of chocolate. To the more sensitive Thomas, who compared her to a dragonfly fairy in his little note, she replies with a slightly longer note and decorates its margins with a sketch of a dragonfly with the profile of a woman's face in its wings (Cf. 113-5). Her inability to
express herself verbally becomes more obvious when she struggles to reply to Victor's letter in which he is telling her what he and the boys are doing and that they are enjoying themselves very much. “As usual her writing did not express her emotions, as if there were a stutter somewhere between her thoughts and the hand moving the pen, a missed connection.” She nevertheless manages to enliven her letter by slipping a piece of old paint into the envelope, as a reminder of an old private joke she and her husband share. She considers this to be “better than words.” (116)

Cathryn and Isobel were friends. There was genuine love and support among the women and Isobel has never managed to process the loss of her companion. During their time together Isobel seems grateful for having a person she can trust, admire and learn from and who takes her mind of her other worries. When Cathryn's visits to the shop become more sporadic and she eventually admits to her affair with Jack Reese Isobel feels betrayed, almost jealous. Nevertheless, she goes to great lengths for her friend and even overcomes her deep-seated fear of water. She would sit in a small boat out on the lake for hours in the scorching heat and keep watch so that Cathryn and Jack could be undisturbed in and around his cabin.

Cathryn and Liam obviously had a dysfunctional marriage and were dealing with several tribulations. It remains open, however, what other issues were at play other than Cathryn's mental health. Isobel and Cathryn were friends. They confided in each other, shared secrets and helped each other with a number of issues, both personal and other. Although Isobel is always portrayed as Cathryn's ally there are a number of clues that suggest that despite the love for her friend Isobel was also jealous and envious of Cathryn, although she would never admit to it, perhaps not even to herself. The evidence that suggest a less than altruistic thinking on Isobel's part is present from the moment Cathryn confesses her affair with Jack Reese to Isobel. She feels betrayed because Cathryn has not been honest about where and how she has been spending the past two weeks and seems appalled at her friend's actions. Isobel's first response is shock, some terse remarks and a complete reassessment of propriety so over the next few days she avoids Cathryn entirely. Isobel's reaction somewhat resembles that of a scorned lover.
She wanders around on the outskirts of Cypress and is constantly trying to make sense of the situation. She eventually tells Cathryn to come to the tailor shop and bring Jack so she could meet him. She finds herself quite smitten with the unusual man, although she never admits this to herself. She agrees to be on guard for them so they could spend time together undisturbed.

The short acquaintance with Jack also leaves an important mark on Isobel. Seemingly inconsequential details from that summer have permanently altered her perception of the world, as did little things Jack did or said in passing. Jack's character is associated with nature, freedom and lust. His actions are guided by his instincts and he has profound knowledge of the natural world. It was Jack who pointed out that most plants in the forest bloom white, which became charged with symbolism for Isobel, who developed an obsession with white flowers. When she moves to St. Paul she only takes seeds of white flowers with her and always wears a fresh white blossom on her overcoat. Despite her love for Cathryn Isobel seems to have been jealous of her friend's passionate affair. She never really admitted it but there is evidence that she was envious of the couple's lust and intense emotions for each other.

She had been momentarily unbalanced by Jack's frailties, even envious of Cathryn's possession of Jack. She'd fought having feelings toward him, but now she knew it was the ownership of Jack's heart she envied. A possession she'd never had with Victor. That was as much as she was willing to admit. (200)

However, Isobel's envy does not stem from a genuine infatuation with Jack as a person. She is jealous of her friend because of the power she has over another human being and of the fact that another person is so unconditionally devoted to her. Isobel never acts on her impulses and remains Cathryn's loyal friend but her longing nevertheless reflects some selfish and acquisitive character traits.
7.2.4 Symbolism and Metaphors: A Woman Is an Island
The central metaphor of the novel and the key to the choice of title is the comparison between a woman and an island. The metaphor serves an important function because its variations occur throughout the text and amalgamate the different sections into an aesthetically coherent unit. The concepts of women and islands are connect through a *tertium comparationis*, a quality both subjects share. In this case it is the characteristic to have the main part hidden from direct view. With women it refers to their personality and the subconsciousness and with islands it pertains to the actual submerged mass. The title *These Granite Islands* refers to the enigmatic female characters that come to life in the novel. The choice of granite is also not coincidental. It is a reference to Cypress' granite mine but also symbolic of the women protagonists' strong characters. The comparison between women and islands is conveyed explicitly (Cf. 49, 152) but also indirectly. The indirect manifestations vary in detail and composition which contributes to a complex variety of different images and implied meanings. The metaphor linking women to islands also expresses the idea that women are enigmatic and complex individuals whose inner life unfolds mainly unnoticed by their immediate environment and society.

If viewed from a feminist perspective it could be interpreted as criticism of the lack of female voice in society but it could also suggest a conscious individual decision or character trait. It implies that even though a woman might not say much or be overly dramatic, for whatever reason that may be, her thoughts and emotions can take on exceptional dimensions that can only be speculated about but never fully grasped, perhaps not even by the woman herself. In that respect Stonich aligns herself with the tradition of other great women novelists who explored the female subconsciousness in the context of social intricacies, such as Louisa May Alcott, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Virginia Woolf, Willa Carter, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Sylvia Plath, to name but a few.

As the focus of Stonich's novel shifts from the relationship between Isobel and Cathryn to Isobel and Louisa, the mother begins to see her daughter in a new light. At the same time the reader is able to discern other deeper facets of the female characters. After Victor and
the boys leave for the island, Isobel and Louisa clean and tidy up the entire house. The cleaning of the house is symbolic of an act of cleansing and claiming space. It is a metaphor for the slow emergence of the women's personalities which begin to show several parallels and similarities. The island is a recurring metaphor for the subconscious and the veiled character traits of the female protagonists. In addition to that it also illustrates the similarities between mother and daughter, who begin to find comfort in their likeness.

“Louisa was a strangely reserved child, making only the softest impression with her presence. Isobel realized that her daughter was not, as she had suspected overwhelmed by her boisterous brothers, nor was her spirit trodden in the chaos created by them. Alone with only Isobel, the girl seemed to take on a new dimension, quiet but happy, deliberately quiet, an observant child with an expansive inner life. Like an island, Isobel thought. Most all of her hidden. [my italics]” (48-9).

The metaphor is also taken up by Cathryn, who articulates similar ideas from a more poetic perspective. The two women share the same outlook on the nature of women, although they never explicitly discussed it with each other, which implies that they were kindred spirits despite their different backgrounds.

Sweeping up one afternoon after Cathryn had gone, Isobel found a dusty scrap under the desk, the hand unmistakable.

_In saline seas we are formed, born standing distinct – we don't so much make our way as stay rooted to let life churn around us. Sky and clouds shifting above, tides stirring at our hems. Do we ever touch? Or is it merely the air and water we touch that shifts over to others, the ebbing ripples that reach them, diluted and wafting-weak. All our essence intended, but so little of our true selves divulged._ (152)

The differences in language between Isobel's and Cathryn's formulations illustrate the social differences but also imply a strong bond between the three women and an appreciation of each other. In addition to that Cathryn's letter also foreshadows her death by the numerous references to the ephemeral nature of human existence and the natural cycle of birth and death. The context in which the letter is found also implies that life is transitory and the mention of dust could be interpreted as a reference to the Biblical quote “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19) emphasizing the transience of human life.
7.2.5 Matrilineage and Womanionship

In the absence of men and after Cathryn's arrival in Cypress the female protagonists establish a close and unique kind of bond between each other. As a result, as system of kinship and fellowship emerges from the situation which, for the lack of a better term, I describe as 'womanionship'. Similar terminology like fellowship, companionship, kinship are etymologically derived from expressions describing male networks. Although the semantics of these terms makes them applicable to relationships between women this is merely by extension and there is a lack of terminology that would describe different types of distinctly female networks. I use the term 'womanionship' to describe a relationship between a group of women that goes beyond mere friendship and is not confined to family ties. It refers to a wider yet loyal system of support in which the women are very involved in each others' lives, naturally able to be themselves and encouraged but never forced to develop and grow as individual personalities.

The concept of matrilineage can not be fully applied to the dynamics of cultural heritage in *These Granite Islands*. Although there is a rich and nurturing network between Isobel, her daughter and granddaughters, the positive legacy of the lineage is disrupted with the dysfunctional relationship between Isobel and her mother. The legacy Isobel's mother left her daughter with was one of sadness, loneliness and low self-esteem. She instilled a fear of marriage and skepticism of love in Isobel, as well as indirectly provided her with a matrix of negative communicative patterns that defined Isobel's character and caused problems in her marriage.

Cathryn, on the other hand, is not part of the biological matrilineage but she nevertheless becomes a vital constituent of the kinship between the women and a defining influence on their lives. The influence between the women occurs in two directions. One is based on admiration and affection, the other is a drive to avoid a certain kind of behavior. So Cathryn, Isobel, Louisa and her two daughters recognize themselves in each other. They draw strength and self-confidence seeing themselves mirrored in each other. On the other hand, Isobel also recognizes herself in her mother and tries desperately not to become like her biological role model. She is determined to eradicate any similarities in order to
avoid the misery that was her mother's life and her own childhood. Ironically, her mother thus became the central defining influence on her behavior because most of Isobel's actions were driven by the wish to be different than her mother. She tries fiercely to escape her mother's aura and is constantly afraid she could become like her. One of the reasons why she decides to leave her parents and not take over the bakery as her parents planned she would is that “when she saw her mother, flushed and muttering into the ovens, she envisioned her future self” (102).

During a very uncomfortable visit to Isobel's parents Victor asks them for her hand in marriage. They agree but made it clear to Isobel that she is disappointing them with her choice of husband. Upon leaving Victor again proves that he is able to put his own resentment aside and to empathize with his shaken fiancée. He manages to cheer her up by announcing: “Those people aren't your parents. Your true mother and father were stolen by gypsies - he nodded up the narrow staircase - 'and were replaced by that pair of wayward pallbearers'” (105-6).

In another situation Isobel's mother sat her daughter down to tell her what to expect on her wedding night and managed to scare her to the point that she almost broke up her engagement. She told her: “There's vorse tings in marriage, I suppose. But in the bedroom? There's blood and there's pain.” (180-1) As a result, Victor was left to repairing the damage.

Another image illustrating the joyless existence of her parents and the haunting presence of Isobel's mother is an incident in which Isobel pauses to examine a picture of her parents' and realizes how dreary and unappealing her mother's life must have really been.

Faint light glinted of the convex glass of two oval portraits, Isobel's parents: her father, handsome in spite of his sternness, and her mother, looming and sunken-eyed, her black dress straining over a dowager's hump so prominent even the photographer's sympathetic angle could not obscure it. She was sixty-five and looked eighty, spent from stillbirths and embraced bitterness. Isobel turned to the dresser and caught her own reflection in the mirror. (34)

At sixteen, when she was finally old enough to get an apprenticeship, Isobel left her parents' home and moved to Duluth to work for a milliner. She returned to Cypress two
years later when she got engaged to Victor but spent the rest of her life guarding her
composure for fear her parents' behavioral patterns and the misery of her childhood might
surface.

Isobel projects many of her own personality traits on Louisa and both women have
naturally very introvert personalities. Just like her mother, Louisa is also a very
constrained character and even more reserved than her mother. In contrast to Louisa, who
seems to be a naturally quiet child, Isobel exercises very much conscious control over her
emotions and often has a hard time expressing them adequately.

The reasons for her fierce control of herself and a deep reluctance to raise her voice or
throw any kind of temper tantrum even when she is upset become clear when the
narrative allows the reader one of the rare glimpses into Isobel's childhood. Isobel's
parents, first generation German or Austrian immigrants, are portrayed in a very
unfavorable light. They argued a lot and there does not seem to have been much affection
between them, nor toward their only child. As a girl Isobel was not considered to be
worth much. “Isobel's parents saw no advantage in wasting good money on educating a
girl, and they made no bones of saying so” (101).

Isobel remembers that as a child she often escaped into daydreams, which were often
“perforated by […] her mother's tired rail, her father's defensive retorts echoing against
the hard surfaces.” (99). It seems that her resolute determination to spare her own
children from the same fate caused her to become so controlled in the expression of her
emotions.

The harsh tones of her parents' voices changed only when customers came in,
smoothing to a fleeting civility that quickly curdled after the customers left and the
jangle of the bell-rope over the door had stilled. Isobel had vowed that when she
grew up and had her own family, she would always speak in reasonable tones,
even when furious. (99)

It is ironic that even though she succeeded in her attempts to curb her anger she also
succeeded in muting the expressions of love, joy and happiness. On top of that she was
not actually able to completely conceal her resentment. The irritation nevertheless
surfaced in the form of passive aggression and Isobel resorted to more subtle but nevertheless violent tactics of silent treatments, sulking and sarcasm.

Isobel is worried that her children would experience the same unhappy and lonely childhood as she did so she tries very hard to raise her children differently. She tries to make her daughter aware that she is lucky because she does not have to grow up in solitude because she has two brothers to play with: “You see, that way no one is left alone” (49). However, Louisa's reply shows an entirely different perspective on solitude and insight into the girl's personality.

Louisa, pointed chin shelved on a palm, looked at her mother and with her chewed nails tapped a tattoo over the freckles on her cheek.

'But I am alone.'

Isobel frowned. 'What do you mean?'

'I'm alone. Even when they're here. Isn't that why I'm staying home and they're all out on the island? 'Cuz the boys are just like Papa, and I'm just like you.'

She was smiling as she declared it so." (ibid)

They also share another trait that defined both of their lives, namely, their fear of water. In that they are different from Victor and the boys, who “all swam like otters” (113). Isobel, however, had been afraid of water ever since her near drowning experience when her father accidentally dropped her into a lake. Louisa inherited this fear from her mother. Ironically, when she was fifty years old her car slid off an icy stretch of road and crashed into a frozen lake. Louisa died trapped in her car under a sheet of ice (Cf. 216-7).

Isobel sees herself in Louisa, which is in important factor in the construction of personal identity. By comparing and contrasting themselves with each other, be that consciously or not, the two seem to draw on the similarities for feelings of security. These similarities are a source of comfort, stability and at the same time makes them understand their own respective personalities better. For example, when Isobel is watching Cathryn and Louisa arrange a bouquet of flowers she notes how eager her daughter is to learn the names of the flowers Cathryn is reciting.

Louisa's eyebrows snailed in effort as she paired the names with the flowers, pursing her mouth and watching Cathryn's lips, holding back until she was sure she could pronounce the Latin words properly, speaking only when she could do
so precisely. Isobel [...] saw herself in the girl's efforts, realizing how often she herself held back when it came to new things, taking on new situations. Victor accused her of being cautious to a fault, but she'd never really understood what he meant. It touched her how Louisa wanted so badly to pronounce the words right for the first time. She saw they had this in common; both would choose not having a thing if it involved risk. (134)

In an almost completely mirrored action Isobel observes on another occasion that, like her daughter, she “tested new vocabulary aloud only after sure of putting it to proper use” just like “a dinner guest waiting to see which fork the hostess will pick up next.” (118) These excerpts, especially that from pg 134, illustrate what really facilitates intrapersonal epiphanies. Oftentimes is not a rational explanation nor a string of arguments that will prompt a person to genuinely learn something about themselves. Isobel, for example, did not understand what Victor had been saying about being overly cautious. To her, her behavior probably seemed perfectly reasonable and normal. It was seeing herself in her daughter that triggered the important realization and helped her understand another facet of her own personality. Cathryn's presence helps the mother and daughter learn more about each other. Louisa starts coming out of her shell and Isobel seems be on the right path to make peace with her distant past.

Louisa was Isobel's favorite child. Her personality resembled her mother's most and the women saw themselves mirrored in each other. When Cathryn saw Louisa for the first time she thought that “the girl was nearly a miniature of Isobel” (92). It is likely that Louisa reminded her mother of her childhood, which was never a happy one. Isobel was therefore trying to compensate her own childhood loneliness by making sure her daughter would have it better.

Isobel's parents had been quite miserable ever since she could remember and she blamed herself for it. “Long ago she stopped wondering why her parents had been so unhappy, though early on she suspected herself, naturally, being born a girl after a string of stillborn baby boys.” (99) Another reason why Louisa was so special to her was that when she was pregnant with her, an Ojibwa woman told her she was carrying a “still baby” (8), which led Isobel to believe that her child would be born dead. Instead, Louisa was born in the caul, which prevents the infant from screaming as it comes out of the
womb. Traditionally it is a sign of good luck if a baby is born this way and given the fact that Isobel had expected Louisa to die at birth it made this child even more special to her. On her deathbed she remembers Louisa the most and repeatedly whispers her name in her sleep. Thomas, who visits her in the hospital daily, somewhat sadly concludes that “every parent had their favorite” (79).

There is a sense of fellowship between Isobel and Louisa. The two women are clearly very much at ease with each other and cherish each other's company. Proof of that is that after having lived in New York for some years, Louisa decides to come back to Cypress with her husband and run the tailor shop and millinery together with her mother, because she enjoys her company and appreciates her skills. Louisa's two daughters are born in her home town and the women spend several decades happily working and living together. The matrilineage is strong with these three generations of women. Despite the similarities they complement each other, draw on each others' experiences and regard the small differences between them with amusement and acceptance.

It is not a coincidence that one of the books referenced in the novel is Louisa Alcott's Little Women (Cf. 98). There are parallels in style and atmosphere between Little Women, which portrays the childhood of four sisters, and the sections in These Granite Islands that describe the harmonious time Isobel, Cathryn and Louisa spent together. The women in both novels love and support each other despite their different characters and aspirations. They are very involved in each others' personal lives and have to face different predicaments. Alcott's second novel Good Wives, which is considered to be the continuation of the first novel, describes the sisters' passage into adulthood and their respective marriages. Similarly, Stonich's novel also follows the protagonists as they grow older and deal with their marriages and children. The most striking similarity, however, it is the romantic atmosphere in the descriptions of female companionship and mutual involvement, despite the very distinct plots and settings of the respective novels.

Another point suggesting Alcott's influence on Stonich's writing is a biographical detail from Alcott's life. After Alcott's younger sister May died, Alcott took in her sister's two
year old daughter Louisa May Nieriker. The little girl was given the same nickname Alcott had, Lulu. In *These Granite Islands* Louisa was Isobel's favorite child and she never stopped grieving for her after she died. When she recalls how she chose the name Louisa for her daughter the atmosphere had a magic quality to it. “The name came to her in a whisper. Louisa” (79). Incidentally, when Louisa was young Isobel also called her “Lulu” (238).

7.2.5.1 Cathryn and Louisa
There is a strong bond between Isobel and Louisa that seems to be the exact reversal of the relationship between Isobel and her mother. When Cathryn comes into their lives she fits in perfectly into the nurturing bubble of female kinship and acts as a catalyst for Isobel's and Louisa's individual developments. Cathryn seems to be very intuitive with the serious and silent little girl, who soon becomes quite mesmerized with the beautiful stranger. There is a kind of silent understanding between Cathryn and Louisa. When they first met Louisa was reserved and hesitant but Cathryn was perceptive enough to pick up on the maturity of the little girl and politely inquired whether she could spare any free time to help her with a project. Cathryn mimicked Louisa's behavior and thus instinctively managed to win over the silent and introvert girl.

Louisa nodded, and Cathryn pointed to the cutting table. The girl followed her and settled onto a stool. There was a mound of discards from her earlier chore of trimming bolts; scraps too short for a vest or a sleeve were heaped and ready to be thrown out. Cathryn reached into this mass and fished out a fistful of fabric. She found a small scissors, fetched a piece of paper, and did a few sketches, handing the girl the pencil every so often so she could add her own lines. Referring to this paper they quietly spent the rest of the afternoon cutting and sewing by hand.

Isobel occasionally looked up from her desk to see Cathryn gesturing or indicating with her scissors, or directing a line with a finger, mute as Louisa. If Isobel walked by on her way to the bathroom or the storage hall, they shielded their project as though it were a great secret. At dusk they finally let her look. As far as Isobel could tell, they had accomplished their collaboration with less than ten words between them. (93-4)

By the end of the summer Isobel and Louisa grew very attached to Cathryn. Louisa was following her silently and emulating each of her moves.

If Cathryn was working on a watercolour, the girl would stand patiently until Cathryn would give her a piece of paper and a brush of her own. If Cathryn arrived with a flower tucked over her ear, Louisa would also dash out and return
with a roadside bluebell […]. Most of the time the girl sat blended into the bolts of fabric, sewing on a sampler or drawing a picture, but always watching Cathryn from the corner of her eye. (112)

It is fascinating to observe the hypnotic effect Cathryn had on Isobel and Louisa. Interestingly enough Isobel genuinely does not seem to be jealous of the stranger who apparently enchanted her child to the extent that she was copying everything Cathryn was doing. “Isobel watched all this while pretending not to. She noted her own gladness at seeing her daughter and a new friend form a charming if odd bond and left it at that.” (ibid) If there was any kind of jealousy involved Isobel managed to put it aside because she saw how beneficial the new influence was for Louisa. Her daughter was slowly coming out of her shell and Isobel knew that “speaking of it might make Louisa draw back in shyness, or become more self-conscious than she already was.” (ibid) This speaks volumes about Isobel's maternal instincts and her insight into her daughter's emotional world.

Despite the difference in age, Cathryn and Louisa become friends and share secrets with each other. Although Louisa is only ten years old Cathryn does not seem to patronize her but tries to explain the events that are unfolding as if she were speaking to an equal but in a language Louisa is able to understand. Cathryn also never undermines Isobel's authority as a mother, nor does she speak condescendingly of her friend. She does not do anything which might alienate mother and daughter and strengthens Isobel's attachment to her.

However, the relationships Isobel and Cathryn have with Louisa are very different. Cathryn does not have paternal responsibilities toward the girl which gives her the freedom to disclose perspectives to the her which a mother would not for fear of bad upbringing and negative influence. Despite the predicament Cathryn has found herself in with Jack she extracts a positive lesson from it for Louisa. It is quite possible that Cathryn also tries to believe in this dogma in order to dismiss possibly tragic repercussions. In a dramatic fashion that reflects her personality she tells Louisa that “love can save souls” (169). She tells the girl that love is something which can help a person overcome trouble and save souls “from sadness, […] like when you're crying and
sad and can't make it stop” (ibid). Cathryn does not try to hide from Isobel the fact that she is in trouble and “has to fix the mess she's in” (ibid). However, she uses simplification and emotions that the girl is familiar with, such as crying and sadness, because any kind of further detail about her mental illness or her doomed love affair would either be too complicated for a child to understand or could possibly scare her. This speaks of Cathryn's intuition and honesty toward Louisa, as well as of her role as an odd kind of mentor for the little girl.

7.2.5.2 Isobel and Cathryn

The friendship with Cathryn was undoubtedly one of the defining influences on her life. Cathryn helped her start her millinery and was instrumental in motivating Isobel to set herself higher professional, as well as aiding her in the reassessment of her entire life. What is more, she was there to listen, share stories, secrets or even silences with Isobel, who “realized that she hadn't had a real friend in years” (108).

They share the same humor, which they both often use to disguise a more bitter truth. Isobel is able to confide in Cathryn about the problems she and Victor had been having but eventually she has to realize that there is a vast amount of information Cathryn chooses not to share with her. After one of her conversations Isobel looked up to see Cathryn staring into the distance and immediately regretted her confession.

'Ooh, you see? Now I've said too much, I've upset you too.'
Cathryn took her hand. 'No, you haven't. I was just thinking it's good to be able to listen to someone else, help ease another's troubles for a change.'
'Of course, exactly. You have your own troubles.'
Cathryn's look was wry. 'I have a husband, don't I?'
There was only a briefest pause before they started laughing. (97)

Isobel admires Cathryn for her liveliness, friendliness, sophistication and elegance. Her friend contributed to the setting up of the millinery both with ideas and physically but most importantly the elegant woman from Chicago became Isobel's confidante. One could even go as far as to say that Isobel envied her friend. For example, when she realized how deep, passionate and unconditional the love between Jack and Cathryn was. The narrative voice also makes it clear that Isobel will not admit to all of her feelings not
even to herself. She plays down or even completely ignores inclinations which would be too hard to reconcile with her ego and moral standards. Some of it permeates the text nevertheless.

Her [Isobel's] hand trailed languid figure eights in the water while Jack and Cathryn made love in the cottage. In her years with Victor, she had never thought of another man with desire. She’d been momentarily unbalanced by Jack's frailties, even envious of Cathryn's possession of Jack. [...] she knew it was the ownership of Jack's somber heart she envied. A possession she'd never felt with Victor. That was as much as she was willing to admit. (200)

It is interesting to observe how objectified the men are in Isobel's thoughts, a process that is traditionally associate with a male chauvinist view of women. Here, however, Isobel is clearly envious of Cathryn because in comparison Victor's love for her seems feeble, because he has always maintained a degree of emotional independence from his wife.

Here, the affections the two men feel for their respective partners is quantified and compared, which seems a strange paradox when applied to such complex emotions as are love and lust. Isobel's perspective is materialistic and very egocentric in the way she feels and at the same time suppressed desire to be in control of a man on such a level. Both Jack and Victor are objectified, their personality reduced to their relationship to their partners. This is conveyed symbolically in Isobel's desire to own the men's hearts and the metonymy further underlines the objectification of both Jack and Victor. This dynamic is a conversion of the traditional objectification of women and a subtle usurpation of male chauvinist condescension. Nevertheless, Isobel's hesitance to admit to her sentiments still reflects the moral and ethical code of the early 20th century western society, in which the viewing of men as objects of lust was not reconcilable with the ideas about what was virtuous for a woman to feel and think.

Despite Isobel's admiration for Cathryn and the envy she never really admitted to, she also feels pity for her friend, especially toward the end when signs of Cathryn's inner turmoil became increasingly obvious and her condition worsened.

Isobel envied Cathryn's bravery but in the end was perplexed by its irony. For all Cathryn's despair – those days when blackness visited her and she struggled to find some clear way through her shadowed mind – she stood unbowed by her misery like some heroine in a performed tragedy. [...] Cathryn trilled and smiled and shifted her shoulders in her beautiful clothes and kept her character in
Isobel admired Cathryn's determination to carry on as if nothing were wrong but there is also a subtle sense of mockery of her behavior. The comparison with a dramatic actress performing a tragedy suggests that Isobel thinks that her friend is exaggerating and putting on a performance that bordered on the pathetic, which is a sign that she lacks compassion. There a number of clues about Isobel's negative character traits such as envy, jealousy or the desire to manipulate. However, these characteristics are only implied and the reader is invited to formulate their own opinion. In any case, a diverse range of personal traits renders a characters more intriguing and the text more complex.

7.2.5.3 Patrilineage

In the tradition of binary oppositions the nurturing environment is complemented with a similar constellation between Victor and the boys. The narrative voice gives no direct insight into Victor's thoughts and emotions, although his voice is heard through sporadic excerpts featuring his direct speech. He is perceived almost exclusively through Isobel's eyes and the narrative voice generally underlines this bias. However, there are several passages which suggest that he is much more sensitive, romantic and perceptive than Isobel would have us believe. For example, the letters that Victor and the boys wrote to her from the island reflect three very distinct personalities and the kind of connection each of them have with Isobel. Henry's letter is short and void of emotion, he briefly states his achievements and concludes with “I'm fine how are you? Must be bored without us, huh?” (113). Victor's letter was rather short too. He reported on their activities, their eating habits and told her how he enjoys spending time with the boys. His letter is friendly but there is nothing passionate or romantic about it. Isobel also noted that he did not sign of with 'Love' but with “Miss you”, which probably still reflects some of the resentment the couple had been feeling toward each other (ibid).
He [Victor] had temporarily relieved her of her motherhood, but if the act had been malicious she could not imagine it. It occurred to her for the first time that he had taken the boys not so much deliberately away from her, but to gather them to himself. Because he wanted to be with them, show them a time. Be one of them. Because he could. (46-7)

However, Thomas' letter allows a glimpse into Victor's true feelings for Isobel and the way he perceives his wife. It also shows the reader that whatever issues the two of them were having, he was not disclosing them to the children in order to make them side with him, which is indicative of Victor's personal integrity and benign nature.

_Dear Momma,_
_Sometimes we sleep out side. There are Lightening Bugs and the dragonflies are like fairies. Henry says No Such Animal. Daddy says yes there is, and that If I'm lonely for you not to be too sad, maybe you fly over the water and visit us while we sleep. So now you are a Fairy over my bed! Love and lots of Kisses,_
_Thomas Arthur Howard (114)_

On the island they do boys things. They come of age. Despite Isobel's impression that Victor acted egotistically in purchasing the island and took the boys with him to take them away from her, there is evidence that suggests that Victor's intentions were not that bad. In front of his sons he speaks fondly of his wife and the letter he wrote her could be interpreted as a sign of him wanting to share the experience with his wife. Nevertheless, he does not explicitly mention his thoughts about her, their feelings for each other, nor does he address her subtle hostility. Nevertheless, Isobel notices that signing off with “Miss you” (Cf. 114) is a clue that things are not as good as they could be. He writes:

_Fishing was good, we've had Walleye or Perch for dinner nearly every night. They complain a little and ask for chicken and cheese and cold milk, but mostly they are good sports. We are reading Twain aloud each night. I carved a cribbage board from a piece of maple I found, but it was too green and it warped before I even finished sanding it. The thing rocks on the camp table every time someone pegs a point. They think it's hilarious, that's the thing about kids, Izzy, they'll laugh at the same joke a thousand times. Miss you, V. (114)_

The letter is very pragmatic, almost as if he were reporting to an authority this was expected of him. Isobel also noted that the letter was short and despite its neutral content
she could sense a deviation from their normal exchange, reflecting the strained atmosphere between the couple. Victor is not rubbing the fun he is having with his sons into Isobel's face by exaggerating their adventures or idolizing himself as a parent. He also mentions the boys' complaints and his mishap with the carved wood but also reassures his wife that they are all doing fine and enjoying themselves. However, the comment about children toward the end could either be interpreted as his attempt to share an insight with his wife, but it could also be understood as an example of a lesson that Isobel has not yet learned. Given the fact that she is very self-conscious about herself as a parent and does not trust her instincts it is likely that she would have understood the hint in such a way.

The reference to Mark Twain (114) suggests that Victor and his sons are on an adventure which they all enjoy tremendously. It is a bonding experience between men. They create their own memories and live in immediate contact with nature. By mastering the primal forces the young boys undergo what could be compared to a ritual of initiation into manhood. Like Huckleberry Finn, they have to rely upon themselves, live under the most primitive of conditions. The important point, however, is that they are also free and independent. They relive some of Twain's stories and at the same time create their own adventure, write their own story. The boys are separated from their mother for the first time in their lives and with only their father at their side they take the next step toward adulthood. Victor takes good care of his sons but his is a different kind of nurturing than that of their mother. When they return home Isobel finds that her boys have grown up over this summer and notices how the time in their father's care had altered them.

Thomas, his front milk teeth gone, had also lost much of his baby fat. Henry had grown two inches in as many months. Both were in need of haircuts, and the fine shag over their eyes had gone platinum from the sun. Their faces had browned to burnt butter, Thomas’ eyes more green than ever. Legs and arms were bruised and perforated with insect bites and scrapes. Victor had mended and washed their clothes the best he could, but the frays and stains of bacon grease and berry were immutable. [...] The pale softness of spring had left their bodies, but as ragtag and scraped as they were, the boys were smiling, had flesh on their cheeks. (253-4)

Despite their scruffy appearance, Isobel has to realize that her sons survived quite happily
without her. They even had what Thomas would later describe as “the best summer of my life” (211). Seeing the three of them manage on their own must have shown her that they are progressing toward independence. At the same time she also needs to get her mind around the fact that Victor managed to handle the situation quite successfully on his own, which plays into her insecurities about her maternal instincts and capabilities.

None of the men is explored extensively as a character but it nevertheless becomes obvious that Henry and Thomas are very attached to their father. Victor is a solid and nurturing parent who enjoys his role as a father. The bond that the men formed in their isolation during the summer on the island can be viewed in juxtaposition to the friendship that grew between Isobel, Louisa and Cathryn. Henry and Thomas crossed an important threshold into adulthood by drawing on their patrilineal influence, while Louisa, Isobel and Cathryn found a source of strength in the womanionship that developed between them.

7.2.6 Thematic binaries - a Structured Antagonism

The friction occurs on several levels. There are conflicts between husbands and wives, mothers and children, friends, the individual and the townspeople, the immigrants and descendants of earlier settlers, between the different immigrant groups, between different societal strata and finally the inner conflicts the characters have to deal with on their own.

7.2.6.1 Migrants, Foreigners and Native Americans as the Constructed Other

There is sporadic mention of 'foreigners' in the novel because the mineworkers are predominantly first generation Finnish and Welsh immigrant workers and their families. From a postcolonial perspective their role in the novel and the way they are portrayed is significant because it lends itself to the analysis of colonial stereotype. They are marginalized on several levels – geographically, linguistically, socially, culturally and financially. They represent the constantly present yet anonymous other neither the reader nor the characters are invited to identify with. They are associated with poverty, exotic customs and cuisine, opaque and unpredictable behavior and a latent potential for
violence and physical aggression. They reinforce the center-margin dichotomy by being set up as a seemingly homogenous group they represent the Other and help the Self solidify its sense of identity. The margin consists of a nameless mass of people whereas the center is given a clearer voice because it is portrayed through individual and unique characters. Ironically, the Native Americans are treated as an equally exotic and removed group, although they are portrayed with sympathy.

Both the immigrants and the Native Americans are continuously constructed as Other. They are spatially, linguistically and financially removed from the townspeople of Cypress and there is no interaction between them and the protagonists of the novel. They are always referred to as homogenous groups, “a nameless mass of Finns” (172), Welsh and other foreign nationalities. The following excerpt is an example of the aforementioned qualities that position the immigrants as removed from the protagonists and a homogenous mass of sometimes charming but mostly rather curious Other.

She [Isobel] looked out over the trees of the angled yard. Just beyond the vegetable garden and the narrow creek was a dense barrier of woods. Past the woods, several alleys of cheap houses sat apart, neatly sequestered from the rest of Cypress by the geography of a ridge, a cliff of weedy clay. Built for the Finnish families, the shacks listed on the outcropping of terraced soil. This area had been dubbed Finn Row, and children were warned to stay away by parents wary of the Finns' socialist learnings, their strange-smelling food, and communal bathing. Most of their houses were shingled in raw cedar softened by weather to a pale driftwood colour. A few had been painted the childish sharp blue of the Finnish flag, and these structures were strewn chockablock over the grey landscape. [...] Tribes of stony immigrants who made the same thin wage mining alongside the Welsh, spending their days bent together underground among conflicting accents and the shatter of hydraulic hammers. They emerged from the shafts each night to split off into distinct lines, Welsh veering off to their boardinghouses and dinners of pasties and dark beer, and Finns to their tidy shacks and broad-faced wives cooking potatoes and fish. While the Welsh slept, the Finns rallied in furtive meetings to voice distrust for mine management, clergy, or non-Finns, and to read manifestos of questionable doctrines. They sat naked on the wooden benches of their saunas, drinking liquor distilled from fetid chokecherries, and sometimes deep in the night Isobel could hear them singing, liquid, foreign melodies curling upward on smoke and steam rising from cinder-brick chimneys. (32-3)

There is also some conflict among the different groups of immigrants. One time the Finnish and the Welsh disagree over the security in the mine to the point that any work
on the mine becomes impossible. This argument gets resolved within a few minutes by the intelligent and experienced overseer Liam Malley. In a slightly naive fashion the workers show loyalty to him after the tragedy struck by cancelling the order of mining uniforms to Victor thus punishing his wife, whom they partially blame for what happened to Liam Malley. Isobel's parents were first generation German speaking immigrants, who had done well in Cypress. The sense that Isobel belonged to a kind of upper working class that was socially of better standing than mineworkers and other menial laborers is prevalent throughout the novel and adds to a very conspicuous division of people along societal lines.

"Isobel had always felt a little guilty to be better off than the immigrant children who lived in the crowded shanty neighborhood or along the reedy south shore of the lake. In school she often felt awkward and overclean, the skirts under her stiff pinafore crinkling too precisely as she sat next to the girls wearing faded cotton jumpers. Year after year, her classmates tended to be plagued with sagging stockings, grimy necks, and pidgin English." (100)

Although she is herself an immigrant child she never refers to herself as such, nor does she give any impression that she in any way identifies with them. She is obviously socially a little better off than they are but she is portrayed as superior to them on other levels, as well. The immigrant children are described as poor, scruffy, lacking hygiene, speaking poor English and absolutely unwilling to befriend her. There was another school in Cypress to which the merchants sent their children but despite Isobel's wish to go there her parents decided it would be a waste of money (Cf. 101)

The social division in Cypress is visible in all areas of life, even in the educational system. However, at a formal, political and administrative level there are strong efforts to erase any appearance of inequality and integrate the different nationalities and social strata according to what used to be know as the melting pot theory. The reality, however, shows considerable deviations from this paradigm. The school to which the merchants send their children is a Catholic school run by the church and financed by the parents of attending pupils. The fees make it impossible for the poorer workers to enroll their
children in it and the economic division predominantly places immigrants at the lowest level of society. The state school which Isobel attended was therefore attended almost exclusively by poor immigrant children with a bad command of English and a suspicious attitude toward other nationalities. When Isobel tried to befriend them they would “tighten the knot against her” (101) even though she tried to bribe them with cookies.

An incident from Isobel's schooldays illustrates the big discrepancy between the official integration policy and the realities of everyday life. After several failed attempts to make friends with “foreign girls” whose “indecipherable patter defined [her] exclusion” (101) Isobel decided she no longer wanted to sit with them.

In fourth grade she tearfully asked her teacher if she might be moved to another desk. 'Can I please sit with an American girl?' The teacher sat her down. 'They are all American girls, Isobel. You should be ashamed of yourself.' She was given a lecture on equality, all the while fighting the blush that raced up her cheeks. Her punishment had been to sweep the school sidewalks clear of snow for an entire month. (101)

Pity, hardship, namelessness but also empathy for mothers like herself, suggesting some degree of identification but primarily guilt. She is not in their place, distancing herself from them, they are the other. Isobel is looking at newspaper pictures of an area devastated by a storm in Oklahoma:

“She pitied the mothers in the grainy photographs, dead-eyed migrants bending in blighted fields or leaning against unpainted buildings. They peered at the camera so unabashedly Isobel knew there was no vanity left in their gaunt faces. The women were hollowed by merciless winds and nursing babies. Their exhaustion groaned from the pages and Isobel felt a twinge of guilt for her own full belly, her comfort.” (46)

“The Finns were silent as ever.” (83)

Liam Malley, Cathryn's husband is summoned to Cypress to evaluate the security of the mines. Isobel thought him “handsome, at least from afar” but “the mine owners' wives had whispered Irish as if it were an affliction. [...] He was a formidable but otherwise unremarkable man who only became remarkable after his extraordinary wife arrived.” (84) During a standoff between the Finnish and Welsh mine workers Liam Malley comes
in and settles the dispute over the security of the mine by first listening to the concerns of all groups involved, acknowledging their points. It seems that the men trust his judgment not only because of his expertise but because is straightforward and honest with them. He is also not a representative of their authorities like the union or mine management. It is rather an air of natural authority that he has about him which makes the men respect him. He used to be a miner himself and speaks plainly to the workers, putting them at ease but also telling them that the Welsh workers, who refused to work in the mine further for safety issues, were perfectly right to do so. (83)

The portrayal of Native Americans is a good example of a romantic view of native peoples. They are set up as mysterious, exotic and clairvoyant. During a brief stop at a roadside market, the pregnant Isobel meets an old Ojibwa woman, who prophesizes her that she will give birth to an “Abinoojis. Bizaan” (77), a quiet or still baby. Isobel is shocked and spends the remaining months of her pregnancy expecting her child to die at birth. As it turns out, Louisa is born with a caul, which is traditionally considered to be a sign of good luck, which makes Louisa even more special to her mother.

There are quite a few other instances where colonial aesthetics and implied world views become apparent. Cathryn, who is of a higher social class, is the most beautiful and alluring character. She is also the one who assumes the role of teacher and guide for Isobel and Louisa. She transfers her knowledge to them, some directly and some indirectly and acts as a kind of mentor, whose presence over a single summer so drastically influenced the lives of everybody around her. Cathryn teaches Louisa Latin names of flowers (134), she orders and pays for some exquisite hat boxes and material for Isobel, designs the logo of the millinery in the image of Isobel and is instrumental in propelling the business to a successful start with smart marketing strategies. She shows Louisa how to paint with watercolors, cooks dainty dishes that are sometimes perceived as odd by the common folk (213), is always well-mannered and displays conspicuously sophisticated mannerisms. All of these factors solidify her superior status among compared to Isobel and Louisa, and she differs even more from other people in Cypress. They gossip about her and she chooses to have as little contact with them as she can.
because they make her feel uncomfortable (162).

Her superiority could be viewed in analogy to imperialist powers who allegedly brought a better and more advanced civilization to more primitive cultures. In a process that Edward Said (1978) already drew attention to, these conquered cultures adopted the value systems that positioned them in an inferior category with regard to their imperialist counterparts.

5.3 The Importance of Social Class/Social Castes
Cathryn became the topic of the town as soon as she arrived in Cypress. She was from Chicago, wore very elegant clothing, had a sophisticated demeanor and mostly kept to herself just like her husband. Although nobody gossiped about Liam for not socializing with the townspeople in his free time everybody was quick to label Cathryn posh and unfriendly, referring to her as “that Chicago woman” (54).

Some of the women are amazed by the amount of luggage Cathryn has brought and quick to point out that there is no way her husband could afford this lifestyle. The critical remarks reflect financial and social envy, paired with a deep-rooted skepticism of small-town people about city folk, despite the fact that the two women speaking are mine owners' wives and therefore at the very top of the local social hierarchy. It is also one of the rare instances in the novel that any of the townspeople are mentioned. None are referred to by name but some individuals are given the voice to express their thoughts and feelings, none of which seem to reflect positive personal traits. One time, Isobel overheard two of the mine-owners' wives gossiping, who are obviously very envious, lack any sort of empathy. They blow a minor event out of proportion and add their own assumptions, which is a good example of the snowball effect rumors can result in:

'Malley, you know him, that big Irishman, he's brought his wife from Chicago – to get her out of the heat, I suppose.'
'Seven monogrammed trunks full of clothes. You've seen her, like some duchess.'
'How she affords that on an engineer's salary.'
Their voices rose in excitement.
'And haughty, too. After I followed her into the pharmacy I said, 'Welcome to
'Cypress,' and if she wasn't stiff as a board to me!'
'Did you say seven trunks?'
'Full of gowns, I s'pose. Furs, who knows what else…' […]
Isobel learned that the Malleys had no children [upon which the mine owners' wives concluded that] '… there must be something wrong with her … he certainly looks healthy enough.' (80-1)

The short exchange above is indicative of a small town mentality and an example of the kind of gossip that is already going around in Cypress at the beginning of the summer when no significant events have happened yet. By leaving the gossipers nameless they are also rendered void of individuality and stand for the entire population of Cypress, which is thus are converted into a homogenous mass of small-minded people. In contrast, the protagonists are portrayed as if they were in some way elitist, be that on account of their social class, education, or strength of character.

When Isobel and Cathryn meet for the first time, Cathryn looks attractive and very posh in her understated elegance. Isobel however is in the middle of cleaning the tailor shop and appears quite messy. Cathryn, who has just entered remains silent and scans the interior. Isobel's apologetic response and nervous chatter about her dirty appearance and the state of the shop immediately put her in an inferior position to Cathryn, who commands the situation merely with her presence. She also leaves without saying a word but leaving Isobel to wonder about this extraordinary woman who seemed “a little distracted and slightly familiar” (57). Nevertheless, their second meeting is extremely warm and the two soon become genuine friends (84-5). Isobel is happy that Cathryn is having such a positive influence on Louisa, the millinery and herself. The women enjoy each other's company and soon begin to identify themselves as a unit in opposition to the other people in Cypress, who are portrayed as common in their envy and “blatant curiosity” (94). At the same time, Cathryn likes to mock the behavior of the upper classes, seemingly unaware of the fact that she is perceived to be a representative of the very social strata she is making fun of (103). Despite her efforts not to appear upper class her behavior regularly proves that she is socially and financially very much removed from other characters.
The following excerpt implies that Isobel has an inferiority complex with regard to Cathryn's higher social standing and upper-class demeanor. The tenor of her memories of Cathryn is that this kind of conduct and state of being is beautiful and desirable. Isobel and Louisa both strive to learn from Cathryn and emulate her behavior.

At night Isobel lay in bed, holding the slender bindings tentatively, afraid she might not understand or even like what she read, afraid she would be expected to talk about the poems with Cathryn in a vernacular she did not possess. [...] she sometimes felt a delicate chasm between herself and Cathryn which exhibited itself not in the disparity of their social standings, but in language. In the same way she felt set apart from the immigrants in Cypress, with their accents and odd phrasing, she felt duly separated from Cathryn's world. 118

She is to Cathryn what immigrants are to her… a class lower than her own. However, by learning and determination Isobel manages to somewhat bridge the gap between Cathryn. She acquires a taste for poetry, begins to express her creative drive by working as a milliner and begins to ponder aspects of human nature that seem to her larger than life. At the same time the immigrants remain static in their remoteness. As a result of Isobel acquiring an appreciation of poetry, a drive to learn and contemplate the world from a different perspective Isobel begins to feel superior to the mainstream. Over the years she becomes increasingly selective in her preferences and there is a slight air of arrogance about her judgments. She once tells Thomas: “I never cared for that e. e. cummings, for instance. I always wanted to take a red pen and correct those silly stanzas falling of the page. What was the purpose of all that, anyway?” (136) While the comment could be interpreted as haughty but it also testifies to the fact that Isobel did not follow all of Cathryn's guidelines in a kind of brainless reverence for the upper classes and also relied upon her own judgment.

Isobel and Cathryn looking at a picture of Cathryn's and Liam's wedding. Looking at Liam Isobel observes: “'And your groom, how handsome, he looks so ...' / 'Happy? Yes, Liam was happy. In love then.'” (127) The obvious implication here is that now he is neither happy nor in love anymore, which further underlines Isobel's suspicion that their marriage is everything but a happy one. It seems that Liam is very worried about his wife, and he seems to have adopted the role of a watchman or caregiver, somebody in a superior position due to his wife's unstable mental health. Although he is technically in
the position of power he feels helpless against his wife's behavior. At one point he tells Isobel: “I dread leaving her in the morning and I dread coming home at night. […] I don't know when it's safe to leave her alone.” (233) After Cathryn disappears Liam suspects that she might have run off with Jack Reese. Liam feels superior to him, confident that the years he has spent with his wife made him understand her better. It is almost as if he felt entitled to her because objectively speaking he and Cathryn are a better fit: “Jack Reese can't help her like I can. He can't know how. You see, Cathryn denies her own illness even to herself. She needs ... she needs to be taken care of.” (232)

7.2.6.3 Gender-specific binaries
There is no explicit bias toward either gender but both men and women seem to undergo leaps in personal development primarily when they are among themselves. Nevertheless there is no overtly implied hostility between men and women. Although Isobel sometimes likes to make Victor seem egotistical and herself the victim, a careful reader will nevertheless realize that, on the whole, the two are happy with each other. During months prior to the fateful summer the couple had been going through a rough patch in their marriage, yet their understanding of each other's subtle hints, non-verbal messages and the willingness to communicate in the first place are signs that their relationship still has a solid base. This is further illustrated by Victor's reaction after he returns from the island and finds the entire town in uproar about his wife and her company. Instead of confronting her with the events and demanding to know what happened he recognizes immediately that his wife has been through a lot and now desperately needs his support.

After carefully replacing the lid, he gently took the beret and needle from his wife and settled his hands upon hers.
'Hello, Izzy.'
When she began sobbing he wrapped his arms around her and rocked her, his next words a whisper nearly lost among her cries. 'There's my girl. There's the girl I married.' (258)

Victor truly trusts his wife. He is able to empathize with her and intuitively guess what she needs at the moment speak. This speaks volumes about the quality of their relationship and the mutual understanding. In the aftermath of that summer Victor
emerges as a genuinely good character who truly loves his wife. He realizes what a toll the past months have taken on her so he borrows money although the family already has to struggle financially and takes Isobel on holiday where she can recover. He does not force her to talk and there are days when they don't talk at all, only lie in bed or walk on the beach. When Isobel decides to share anything, Victor is there to listen to her. In a way his silent support, the way he assessed and took over the situation after his arrival positions him again as the strong head of the family, the caretaker and protector of the weak and needy. Having been reassigned the traditional male role the micro-social dynamic has regained its old balance. He has just returned from what could easily be compared to a rite of passage with his sons and immediately steps in to support his wife, who still appears strong but is actually on the edge of a breakdown. Although this novel is written from a female perspective, the messages hidden between the lines prevent it from being too biased and overly critical of men in general.

There are neither generalizations nor simplifications. Each character is accountable for their actions and its consequences, regardless of whether they are male or female. This contributes to the complexity of the narrative and makes it better reflect certain facets of individual personalities in a given societal framework. However, there is a continuous underlying dualism between men and women. The characters who do undergo a development do so almost exclusively when they are among members of the same sex. The boys grow up during the summer they spend on the island with their father, just as Isobel's and Louisa's lives are permanently altered after the extravagant and eccentric woman from Chicago entered their lives. This kind of male – female differentiation is implied in all aspects of life. The gender roles and standards of propriety are very strictly assigned regardless of ethnicity or social class. Anyone who breaks these behavioral codes and relationships between people from different social classes are punished either by unhappiness, social exclusion, psychological intimidation, or even death. The fixity of gender roles and the impermeability of social castes function as a reiteration of old world values and imperialist value systems, and makes Stonich's novel reverberate with static binary oppositions.
It is possible to view the return to the traditional family structure as a point of criticism. By establishing the man as head of the family and assign him the superior position of protector, guide and provider, the women are rendered secondary and their weakness becomes their defining characteristic of contrasted with the strength of the men. Such reasoning would be a reflection of reactionary, imperialist definitions of gender roles and characteristics, as it would also allow for severe criticism from the perspective of feminist literary theory. However, at closer inspection the underlining message of the novel is not that women without men are at peril from societal pressures and prone to succumb to hysteria. The text rather captures a defining period in the lives of the female protagonists and the way their lives have been affected by it. The focus is obviously on the women and the bond they share. Isobel, Louisa and Cathryn do isolate themselves over that summer but their friendship gives them a sense of security and companionship. The closeness between the unique characters acts as a catalyst for Isobel’s and Louisa’s personal growth, as well as provides Cathryn with a refuge from her psychological turmoil. The tragic ending of that friendship is not an example of female solitude leading to a destructive frenzy. It could easily be argued that the downward spiral begins with the introduction of Jack Reese into the equation. In conclusion it could be said that the events that are depicted in the novel illustrate the personal amplitudes of two individual women and their relationships with other characters that are significant to them. It does not assign guilt to either gender but speaks to readers on a universal level.

The garden is another recurring symbol associated with female characters, but it can also be read in analogy to life and human nature in general. Cathryn and Jack’s relationship develops in the wilderness, which symbolizes a space that is removed from society and strict codes of proper conduct. By running away to the wilderness, Cathryn and Jack attempt to escape the reality of social regulations. Isobel, who has internalized these codes, struggles hard to accept what she initially perceives as completely deviant behavior. Over time, however, her attitude changes and as the years progress she seems to grow increasingly weary of any kind of externally imposed rules of conduct. This development is symbolized with her plants and garden, as well as her attitude toward gardening. When she was a young woman she used to be very meticulous and fussy about
her plants, and spent much time grooming her garden so that it would look exactly as she imagined it. Yet later in life her attitude becomes more relaxed and less compulsive. “Instead of trying to control it, she let it grow around her.” (271) She relinquished her attempts to control life an nature, but she nevertheless kept herself occupied with her plants “that bloomed in hues of eggshell and bones” (281) so would not linger over the deaths of her loved ones. However, the references to white flowers and the comparisons with bones or ice suggest that memories of her daughter's death still haunt her. “The cold midnights of February were the worst. The whine of tires skidding, the sounds of sheet-ice cracking, invaded her dreams” (281). Her attempts to develop a more ambivalent attitude to life, could be a way for her to overcome the pain of grief. Perhaps the attempt to avoid being obsessive as she used to be, resulted from the realization that fate is beyond her control, regardless of how much she tries to control it. After Victor and Louisa died, Isobel spent the remaining years of her life mourning them, but she did so very quietly and privately.

Like the central metaphor of the novel suggests, most of her emotions were hidden, just as most of an island is submerged. The only outlet she had was literature, and she enjoyed reading authors like Tennessee Williams, Horton Foote and Edward Albee, because she could identify with the intense emotions of grief, loss, and desperation expressed in their works. She particularly liked Thornton Wilder and went to see his plays again and again, because she felt that “of all he seemed to have the best insight into the human condition, could understand the depth of grief” (280-1).
7.2.7 Intertextuality / Intertextual references

7.2.7.1 T.S. Eliot

The intertextuality in *These Granite Islands* contributes to the complexity of the story and associations with other authors complement the ideas that are expressed in the text. The author that is referenced most often is T.S. Eliot. Passages from his poems are often used as a commentary about a particular situation, as an underscoring of a sentiment, or to complement the implied meaning of the text.

For example, when she is on her death bed and already quite immobile, Isobel mentions to her son that she is reading a poem “about a patient etherized upon a table” (290), which is a clear reference to Eliot's poem Alfred J. Prufrock, an conveys a rather static, gloomy atmosphere that reflects Isobel's deteriorating health and loss of lucidity.

On another occasion her son finds her muffling something under her plastic oxygen tent: “And woodthrush calling through the for/ My daughter” (220) The lines are a reference to Isobel's grief for her daughter and the occasional apparitions she has of her while lying on her deathbed.

7.2.7.2 Wuthering Heights

*These Granite Islands* is a unique novel that stands its own in literary criticism. One of the possible readings of it is the comparison with one of the English classics, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. The text is never explicitly referenced but there a number of parallels between the two novels in structure, narrative technique and motifs. If thematic essences were extracted from *Wuthering Heights* and used as an interpretative matrix for the analysis of *These Granite Islands*, then Stonich's novel would offer an even wider variety of possible readings.

There are a number of parallels in themes, motifs and the setup of conceptual dichotomies between *These Granite Islands* and *Wuthering Heights*. For example, the irrational and passionate love relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff could be read in analogy to the relationship between Cathryn and Jack. Both relationships are marked by violence, intense physical sensations, psychological pressure and proximity to
death. Both relationships develop in proximity to nature, especially in the wilderness which is symbolic of the wild, irrational and uncontrollable nature of the respective relationships. Wilderness also symbolizes freedom, emotional and physical abandon, lust, danger, the subconsciousness, as well as the suspension of societal regulations and codes of propriety. In *These Granite Islands* this freedom and wilderness is symbolized by the Maze, and in *Wuthering Heights* the most meaningful interactions take place outside in the inhospitable heath, both of which are unchartered territory and escape society's rules.

Both novels feature a distinct gothic style. There is macabre detail, ghostly apparitions, although in *TGI* the only ghostly episodes occur in Isobel's dreams of the Maze, and a the constellation of a woman of higher social rank entangled in a relationship with a villain from a lower social class. Both novels feature the mysterious, brooding male character, although Heathcliff is more Byronic and more vicious than Jack. However, both brooding, passionate heroes seem to lack a fully developed personality, which is especially true for Jack in *TGI*. Another parallel is the significance of names. The obvious similarity between Catherine and Cathryn is plain to see, but also the names Heathcliff and Jack Reese imply a proximity to nature, i.e., the uncontrollable, passionate, wild, and primal.

The Maze and the heath are symbolic of the human subconsciousness. They are wild, dangerous, mysterious, unknown, unchartered territory, controlled, and exist outside of the boundaries of regulated society.

But the wild lake below captured Cathryn's awe. Even at such a height she couldn't place the far shore. Directly west were many huge bays, some so peppered with islands as to seem solid land with only a line of water scrawling through. This part of the lake was called the Maze, and Liam had warned Cathryn never to row into it alone or she would most certainly be lost. Even if one was able to find the actual shoreline, it was apt to be either mosquito-infested bog or granite cliffs too sheer to scale. Beyond the Maze, open water stretched for undetermined miles before the patterns of islands and bays began again. The lake shone black, and only near its edges did the water lighten to a bluish grey (*TGI*, 156-7).

Similarly, the Yorkshire moors in *Wuthering Heights* are the realm where Catherine and Heathcliff can run wild and be themselves. Their relationship shares several characteristics
with the raw, uncontrolled nature of the feral landscape, and Catherine compares their intense, enduring love for each other to the “bare rocks underneath” (WH, 123), which are symbolic of their relationship.

Just like Heathcliff, Jack is also associated with the wild. He is a ranger and knows a great deal about the environment. He lives in the rugged outdoors and seems to be in touch with the natural cycles. To underline this aspect of his character, his simple cabin is located outside Cypress, it features many botanical specimen and is described using natural imagery: “The bed was covered by an intricate field of frayed flowers, an old pink lattice quilt, appliquéd with roses and vining stems thin as tissue, petals opening at burst seams to breathe out cotton batting.” (193)

The gothic motif of the ill-fated lovers united in death can also be found in both novels. The eerie image of Cathryn's and Jack's skeletons floating underwater united forever can be compared to Heathcliff's obsession with Catherine's grave, and the image of their tombstones next to each other after Heathcliff's death. Both deaths are connected to nature. Cathryn and Jack commit suicide in the Maze where they could not be easily found, and after Heathcliff runs away to the Yorkshire moors Catherine follows him only to catch a deadly pneumonia in the raging storm.

Both couples display childlike behavior, which is indicative of their severed connection to reality. Jack and Cathryn “play house” (TGI, 278) and enjoy each other's company with childlike excitement, and approach reality as if it were a game to be played. Cathryn is completely lost in her fantasy world and Jack is so mesmerized by her that both of them lose a sense of a world defined by adult rules and moral codes.

The town's tarred, shimmering roofs lay scattered among the treetops and steeples in the distance. The unpaved roads blurred into ribbons of sepia whenever a vehicle sliced through the grid. Cathryn laughed to herself. The whole of Cypress looked to be a child's board game laid out in a patch of wilderness. (156)

Catherine and Heathcliff also roam the moors like children in search of adventures. They pledge oaths of loyalty, much like young children do, they play hide and seek, and there
is no indication that their relationship ever included a physical component. The disregard for reality and social conventions is a characteristic both couples share, just like the tragic outcome of their relationships. At the same time it could also be argued that Catherine married Edgar in an attempt to escape the adult sexuality of Heathcliff.

In both novels we can also observe a second constellation of a couple which echoes the relationship of the primary ill-fated lovers, but one that is calmer, less violent, and less passionate than the first. In *Wuthering Heights* this lesser peak is reached with young Catherine and Hareton, while in *These Granite Islands* the relationship between Isobel and Victor is solidified again.

Another parallel is the motif of marrying out of convenience and the emotionally detached wife. There are some parallels between the relationship of Edgar and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, and Liam and Cathryn in *These Granite Islands*. Cathryn comes from a wealthy family. Her appearance, education and conduct underline this and set her character in stark contrast with the middle- and working-class environment of Cypress. There is no further information about her family and background, which make her seem even more lost. This might also be the reason why she bonds with Isobel and Louisa so quickly and the almost become a surrogate family to her. Liam Malley comes from a working-class family but worked his way up the career- and social ladder by making a name for himself as a “structural mining engineer” (81) who was respected by workers and professionals alike. Nevertheless, he always felt socially inferior to Cathryn. On the other hand, he was socially superior to most of the people in Cypress and made a point of not socializing with anybody, which in a way made him seem relatively better suited for Cathryn.

In *Wuthering Heights* it is implied that Catherine married Edgar and moved to the Grange because she wanted to live a comfortable life, and settled for a man she did not really love. In *TGI*, it is obvious that Liam Malley loves Cathryn but it is equally obvious that she does not reciprocate the intensity of his feelings. Although Cathryn had inherited much money and is financially secure, this security does not translate to an emotional
level, as her frequent attempts at suicide show. Liam is always there for her, he protects her, and is willing to put up with her eccentric behavior. It is also implied that he knows about his wife’s affair, but chooses not to address it until Cathryn and Jack disappear (Cf. 230-4). At the same time, the question of social class is a recurrent one in both novels, and relationships between members of different social backgrounds fail tragically. The failed marriage between Cathryn and Liam could be interpreted as an indirect criticism of inter-class marriages, which would be in keeping with reactionary imperialist world views.

Similarly, the relationship between Cathryn and Jack also ends tragically. Jack works as a ranger and is a member of the working class. Despite their love for each other the two run into awkward obstacles in their everyday activities when Cathryn’s upper-class habits clash with Jack’s simpler lifestyle. When Isobel visits the two in Jack’s one-room cabin for the first time, she is shocked by the poverty of his dwelling and has trouble imagining Cathryn living in such conditions for a longer period of time.

A soap-stone sink anchored the tiny kitchen. A run of small screened windows opened over a narrow counter bowing under the weight of stacked food tins and a pie safe. Open shelves held a disparate family of plates, assorted jelly jars, and mismatched porcelain cups. Iron skillets hung from rusted hooks over a blue enamel cookstove. [...] The mattress sagged in the middle, deep as a hammock, and Isobel nearly laughed, shaking her head. Cathryn sleeping here? (193)

Jack spends long periods of time in solitude, which makes him somewhat of an outsider and a mystery. He is from the working class but his extensive knowledge of botany and his thirst for knowledge make him seem more intelligent, special and therefore suitable for Cathryn. However, aristocratic norms, appearances, and behavior are idealized in both novels. The affluent seem to be the desirable standard, i.e. the norm, and the poor are the deviation. This kind of center – margin duality reiterates colonial binaries and imperialistic ideologies.

Just like Catherine in WH, Cathryn in THI is able to entirely change her behavior depending on the company she has. However, whenever Heathcliff is mentioned her true nature comes through, just as Cathryn’s condition becomes increasingly more apparent the more time she spends with Jack. Like Catherine and Heathcliff, Cathryn and Jack find
fulfillment in their love. Through each other they all find meaning in their lives which had, arguably, been void of it before they met. In their relationships they find solace, comfort and escape from isolation, be that social, physical, or emotional. Together they are able to transcend the isolation and be free, but at the same time their attraction has all the characteristics of a powerful and fatal addiction.

The question of the unreliable narrator is also present in both novels. In *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Lockwood is almost comical in his detachment from the events, and he narrates the events that unfold through a very specific prism of personal beliefs. Nelly, on the other hand, is very much involved in the action of the novel, and her motives sometimes seem less than altruistic. For example, when Heathcliff overhears Catherine telling Nelly how she could never marry him, it remains open whether Nelly knew he could hear them but chose not to tell Catherine because she was jealous. (Cf. *Wuthering Heights*, 80). Similarly, when Isobel narrates the events from her perspective, the reader is initially led to trust her judgment but by the end of the novel Isobel's narrative obviously manipulates the perceptions in her favor. Her motives for trying to talk Cathryn out of her relationship with Jack may also be motivated by jealousy of her friend's passionate affair. Sometimes Isobel behaves like a scorned lover, which also suggests that she would like to have something like ownership over Cathryn. The way Isobel storms out of the house to roam about in nature after Cathryn discloses the affair (*TGI*, 163), bears some resemblance to the way Heathcliff took off upon hearing Catherine say that she has chosen Edgar over him.

All motifs, character constellations, and twists of plot reinforce traditional binary oppositions. The only escape is fantasy or death, which implies that disobedience and deviations from prevailing social standards will be punished either by tragedy, social stigma, financial ruin, emotional or physical death. There are no clear attempts at deconstructing binary oppositions or imperial value systems. However, the thematic complexity of *These Granite Islands* including friendship, love, infidelity, family, grief, and the search for self discovery, the carefully crafted plot, as well as the intricacies of poetic language make the novel an important contribution to literature.
8. Conclusion

The primary goal of postcolonial debate is to re-evaluate epistemological systems, and critically examine how the dominant current ideas about linear history, objectivity, culture, art, the economy, politics, and the human experience in general came into existence. At the center of postcolonial criticism is the attempt to expose the underlying binary structures that influence modern thought, and are a consequence of political and economic imperialism. The lesson that must be learned is that the construction of binary oppositions is subjective and entirely dependant on perspective. Concepts like the Other, the Subaltern, the margin, etc. are a result of artificial, essentialist assumptions about the homogenous nature of certain groups. They are problematic because they escape exact definition and transport progress-impeding prejudice.

Just as the Orient became an artificial construct so that the Occident could solidify its identity against it, the cultures from the Balkan peninsula were also constructed into a homogenous, inferior and subordinate contrast to western Europe. The same is true of other countries of the Eastern bloc and the former Soviet states. They are perceived as the eternal Other on the periphery of European culture, although Eastern-, Central-, and Southern-European regions have always been an integral constituent of European history, tradition, and culture.

The concepts that have been proposed to counter the problems of static binaries include hybridity, a constantly re-negotiated third space, strategic essentialism, and a partial acceptance of cultural essentialism if its ideas are critically re-assessed with each new context. A hybrid, multicultural third space is the interstice where interaction an influence is multilateral, and were power do not consistently favor the same groups. Ideally, it is an intimate exchange between equal partners. Hybrid developments are also the only feasible possibility for culture and heritage to stay alive, because the interstitial space that is free of the impediments of binary oppositions allows for a constant re-definition and adaptation of tradition that can thus be adapted to new contexts.
Diasporic literature has always been a focus of the postcolonial debate, because it offers first hand insight into issues of multicultural experiences. However, it must be noted that multicultural existence is not necessarily also a hybrid one. The analysis of the novels chosen for this dissertation shows that static binary oppositions can be transported even in multicultural and multifaceted (post)modernist contexts.

Slovenian diasporic literature is still a relatively unknown area of literary studies, although it offers interesting material for literary, and socio-cultural analysis. The novels chosen for this dissertation show the dynamics of knowledge transfer, the role of binary oppositions for the development of identities, and how they define epistemological systems have become accepted as the norm.

*A Potica for an Ordinary Day* and *These Granite Islands* both show survival strategies of individuals who are confronted with socio-cultural adversity, or have to battle their own personal demons. The final conclusion that can be drawn from a critical reading of interpersonal dynamics and implied world views is that ideas about culture, identity, heritage, history, and epistemological systems in general need to be constantly re-assessed and re-negotiated.

What comes across clearly in both novels is the individual's need to confront society and reorganize the perceptions of their particular reality. The reader is presented with characters who confront social restraints, collective myths, historical plight and personal trauma. Their perception of their particular reality might not necessarily change but the perspective of the reader allows for a critical evaluation of binary oppositions and the opportunity to reinterpret the big picture in a novel way.

Both texts deal largely with failed coping strategies. At the same time they offer some glimpses in potentially successful strategies for overcoming the traditional conflicts that have marked western culture and have been embodied in the literary cannon. The main difference between the two texts is that Kramolc's novel appears to be a reiteration of binary oppositions. However, the only character who survives is the hybrid protagonist.
Sonja, who does not let herself be defined by others' preconceptions about ethnicity or gender. She never identifies entirely with any one group, but she engages with them just the same. By doing so she constantly moves in interstitial third space where identity and heritage can be re-claimed, and adapted to new contexts without the sense of loss or endangerment.

Stonich's novel, on the other hand, is also a modern and sophisticated text, but also an example of implicit transfer of imperialist value systems. The plot, the character constellations, and the implied world views are based on binary oppositions. The indirectly transported essentialist notions about ethnicity, gender, and social strata are defined by dualistic constellations. The text indirectly transports aristocratic ideals, remnants of imperialist epistemological systems of hierarchy, and suggests the impermeability of social class. Although it seems at first that the breaking of social codes is romanticized it becomes clear that, by the end of the novel, all characters who have rebelled against social conventions have been punished either by death, social ostracizing, or personal unhappiness.

The ultimate underlying message of both novels is that subjective perception creates knowledge and reality, which is in keeping with a postcolonial reading of literature and culture. A raised awareness of the processes of a multifaceted postmodern existence can be a coping strategy, as can the insight into the power dynamics of discourse. However, the embracing of hybrid developments – even though they might not always immediately lead to the desired outcome – is suggested as the most natural and beneficial approach.

A postcolonial reading of the selected texts implies that the ultimate metaphysical goal of human development is a transcendence of the imaginary split between the Self and the Other, that keeps Center and Margin in an existential isolation from each other, and allows for a continuous exploitation of the groups who are not in the position to exercise control over discourse and thus gain political and socio-economic leverage.
The novels show what happens when characters succumb to societal dogma that is suggested to be the objective truth. They show the potential dangers inherent in the unfiltered transfer of epistemological systems that have been imposed on the individual and economically weaker groups by western imperialistic elites.

Just like the individual is continuously in conflict with the society and its institutions of power, the Margin is also forced into a permanent opposition to the Center. However, the texts also suggest that it is possible to transcend the static nature of binary oppositions and an elitist center-margin rationale, if the individual assumes the responsibility for their own perceptions and there is a general awareness of the effects discursive power dynamics have on every aspect of life.

The second half of the 20th century has been marked by a never-before seen debate about migration and the different facets of ever-increasing multicultural quality of state demographics. Particularly the liberal end of the political spectrum has been stressing the need for a peaceful, orderly and harmonious co-existence of different cultures. This, however, also requires the need to articulate and define what is different about the other, which can potentially be experienced as negative stereotype or simply hurtful. It also requires a more detailed analysis of cultural and national identity, both of which defy precise definition, particularly in the wake of what is elegantly termed globalization. Nevertheless, this multicultural debate foresees no other ethically and morally acceptable alternative to a peaceful co-existence.

On the other hand, postcolonialist discourse suggests that co-existence is as a result of an awareness of difference, and a continuous re-negotiation of identity which takes place in the hybrid third space. This articulation of difference might also be marked by aggression, but this can be viewed as a natural development in all diversified societies.

This rationale can be transposed to a critical reading of literary texts. In this dissertation the focus was primarily on ethnic, national and gender stereotyping resulting from binary oppositions. The conclusion drawn from such an approach is that the dynamics of
dualistic thinking must be exposed, but also that certain forms of cultural and strategic essentialism are a necessary tool for the perception of the complexities of the world around us. The key issue is a critical attitude toward the transfer of epistemologies and the realization that they are subject to constant change, re-evaluation and re-claiming.
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10. Appendix

10.1 Original text excerpts from *A Potica for an Ordinary Day* in Slovenian

PG 11:

Ljubljana, petek, 20. oktobra 1994

Noči so zdaj mrzle.
Povsod tema. Premrle žde zvezde sredi neba.
V vodi, razliti čez barje, trohni mlad vojak.
Kdo ga je ubil? Zakaj? Od kod je?
Bolest vsepovsod, le pritajen šelest megla zakriva pošastnost noči. (*Potica*, 11)

PG 12:

Ljubljana, sreda, 14. marca 1994

"[…]"
Te ekrezitne noči!
Polne znoja, bojazni, pridušenih krikov.
Ti dnevi, ki jih preživljamo v zatohlih, z debelimi hlodi podprtih kleteh, kaj so?
Po stenah se plazijo sence. Sedimo nepremično, premišljamo, uganemo ničesar. […]
Vsa spoznanja, vse resnice so postavljene na glavo. Resnice so opljuvane, zato zdaj ugibamo.
Vsepovsod zloba, cinizem, sovraštvo, ker je tako ukazano.
Vsepovsod EKRAZIT.
Otroci so edini, ki spijo. Kje je – Bog?" (*Potica*, 12)
10.2 Suggestions for Further Essays:

“Third Space Identities:” The Concepts of Hybridity, Mimicry, Third Space applied to Ted Kramolc's *A Potica for an Ordinary Day*.


“Finding and Chasing Identity:” The Power of Discourse and Strategic Essentialism in Sarah Stonich's *These Granite Islands*.

“Frozen Identity:” Hybridity, Memory and Cultural Essentialism in Sarah Stonich's *The Ice Chorus*.

“Populating Utopia:” Slavoj Žižek's concept of utopia read in analogy to Homi Bhabha's Third Space