THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OTHERNESS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SENTIMENTAL CHARACTER'S IDENTITY

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Abstract: *Our research paper is about the importance of otherness in constructing the characters in sentimental novels and we mean here the two criteria of otherness:* ***class and gender otherness.*** *This article attempts to discuss the role of "otherness" in constructing the character's identity in the sentimental novel focussing on the connections between two sociological concepts: identity and alterity. We start from the idea that every person, every identity is the product of others. By others we can understand partners or enemies, men or women, rich or poor people, etc., all of them having a great importance in creating, shaping or adjusting an identity.*

Keywords: *otherness, identity, character, sentimentality*

1. Identity vs. Otherness – A Sociological Approach

First we have to establish what means *identity* and what means *otherness*, two modern sociological concepts. It is generally known that "otherness" is the way of defining an "identity" in relation to others. The identity is mainly a product of social, cultural, political and other ways of construction through different approaches. The idea of *otherness* is representative to sociological analyses of how majority and minority identities are built. The representation of different people within any given society is controlled by powerful social groups no matter the historical period of time. In order to understand the concept of *the other*, sociologists put a critical focus on the ways in which social identities are constructed. Identities are often considered as being natural or innate – something that we are born with – but this idea is not supported by sociologists considering this point of view being not true.

E. Levinas[††††††††††††††] thinks that "otherness" is not simply the opposite of the "self" or the correspondent of "you", but their transcendence, because the "Other is the one whom we may not understand, but whom we cannot help meeting."[‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡] Sociologists focus on *social* identities which reflect the way individuals internalize established social categories within their societies, such as their cultural (or ethnic) identities, gender identities, class identities, and so on. These social categories develop our perceptions about who we believe we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong.

The idea that an identity cannot exist without the other is expressed by George Herbert Mead, one of the founders of social psychology, in his work *Mind Self and Society*, where the author ascertains that "identities are created through our ongoing social interaction with other people and our subsequent self-reflection about who we

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[††††††††††††††] Levinas, E., *Altérité et transcendance*, Fata Morgana, Paris, 1995.

[‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡] Minerva, S., *Identity, Otherness and their Postmodern Ethical Discourse*, in European Journal of Science and Theology, June 2007, Vol.3, No.2, 31-39

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think we are according to these social exchanges"[§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§]. Mead's sociological concepts show that identities are created through interactions and self-reflection about these interactions. This means that people adjust their behaviour based on their understanding of how others perceive them. This is also known as *the looking glass self* [**********] concept.

In our research paper we would like to demonstrate that the identity construction is performed by the interactions with the otherness. In other words every character is shaped by the actions of the others which make him/her more visible, powerful, more active and why not more readable.

2. The sentimental novel: class and gender otherness

In the opinion of Bennett and Royle "literature […] has always been concerned with aspects of what can be called the unconscious or 'not me' or other: it is and has always been centrally concerned with […] kinds of impersonality or absences of self." [††††††††††††††††] Every genre, especially the novel, encounters the presence of otherness strongly determined by representation of the social stratification.

Many studies are carried out on the issue of otherness: some are carried out in the terms of skin and colour by which we mean racism. Others are brought in terms of human geography and this is what Edward Said called "orientalism" [‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡], referring to westerns' thought that all that is from the East is inferior and that the Orientals need the westerns' intervention to civilize them and to shed light to their darkness and obscurity.

In the eighteenth century English society, as in all other societies, there seems to be a certain cultural, traditional belief that men and women are different from each other. Whatever its origin, this belief has persisted throughout centuries in almost all civilizations.

The 18th century is a very significant period in order to analyse how the society at that time dealt with women for whom a marriage was their only career. The idea of the superiority of men and their ownership of women is powerfully based on the English laws involving women. They were ignorant of politics and other important matters. In addition to financial pressures, the severe restrictions, laws and customs of eighteenth century, England made them look to marriage as a means of stability and made women even more dependent on men. Middle class women in the eighteenth century were not expected to think of themselves as members of the nation of individuals. It is found that society has generally favoured one sex over the other. And due to its favoured position, this one sex was able to excel in public life, that is, science, philosophy, religion and politics, which in turn justified its preference to begin with. The women's identity is constructed through the struggle with the men's social power.

[§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§] http://othersociologist.com/otherness-resources/

[**********] Cf. Ch. H. Cooley the social psychological concept *looking-glass* states that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others.

[††††††††††††††††] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, Harlow Pearson Longman, 2009, p. 136.

[‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡] *Orientalism* is the concept defining the difference between east and west in the opinion of Edward Said who argues that the Europeans divided the world into two parts: the east and the west or the occident and the orient or the civilized and the uncivilized.

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Women used to occupy an inferior position and enjoyed limited freedom in the patriarchal society though a reappraisal of the status of women was attempted initially in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The degree of attention, which women received, was unprecedented, as they had remained so long in obscurity as the second sex. Women were thought to have keener nerves than men and it was also believed that women were more emotional than men.

The sentimental novel of the 18th century provides a vivid scene where the modern reader could be the witness of the construction of women's identity built on the struggle with the men's social power. First, women characters seem week and dependent on men, but during the development of the story they reveal a strong nature and a very complex identity created by the relation with the *others* – men, family, society, rich people, etc.

In our research paper we shall illustrate how the otherness can become an identity by interacting with other characters. We took as support for our analyses a significant sentimental novel of the 18th century, *Pamela* of Samuel Richardson. Pamela is an essentially religious character, both in terms of her thorough Christian education and the manifestations of this belief in her actions, language, and dealings with other characters.

The central conflict of the novel is the struggle for dominance between the female protagonist and her master. After the death of Lady B, her son, Squire B., attempts the virtue of the maid, Pamela Andrews. She finds no protector, even in the young cleric, Mr. Williams. With his coarse aide, Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B unsuccessfully tries to make Pamela his mistress, even offering a contract. She makes useless efforts to escape and suicide. After Mr. B has imprisoned her, he secures the journal she kept; and in reading it, the persistent libertine is transformed into the men of feeling. The identity of the main male character is shaped by the help of the other – a poor young and virtuous girl. But in the same time, the identity of Pamela character is constructed during this tensioned "fight" between a rich and insensitive man and a poor young woman. The result of this confrontation is the completion of the two characters: Pamela becomes a strong woman marring her master, and Mr. B changes into an impeccable gentleman towards the poor maid whom he finally gets married. So the other helps the characters to build their identity within the narrative thread.

In the second part Pamela is a model wife for a country gentleman. She even forgives the odious Jewkes. The *other* influences also the construction of minor characters of Richardson's novel: Pamela's letters melt also the noblewoman's heart, Mrs. Davers – Mr. B's sister.

Pamela comes from a lower middle-class family that has slipped to the lower classes but that is ambitious to rise. Her only item to merchandise is her jewel of chastity, and she will barter it for nothing but the top price - an unexpectedly good marriage. Beneath Pamela's fragile exterior is the rocklike English middle-class determination to get ahead in the world.

Pamela's writing covers the distance between the heroine and her parents, fills the empty time of isolation and imprisonment, and "is sewn into clothes as a metaphorical barrier between the female body and prying male hands"§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§; it catches the overflow of emotion and experience, and it converts a villain. At the most basic interpretive level, Pamela's letters and journal seem to signify a certain space into which Pamela directs her confusion and frustration, a space where she can inscribe and

§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§ http://etd.fcla.edu/UF/UFE0014316/williams_m.pdf

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The woman/ the servant/ the poor succeeds to change Mr. B's behaviour from a seducer into a good person, it's about the reeducation of the seducer.

Richardson does not seem to invest his protagonist with a distorted sense of social reality, however. Pamela knows she is a servant, dependent first on Lady B, then on the "wildish" son for all her material possessions and for any advantage in education and manner that did not derive from the Andrews' example (I.160). She frequently refers to herself as "poor Pamela," poor in financial terms since she did not receive wages in addition to her maintenance as a lady's waiting-maid and because her parents are in debt after the failure of her father's school, as well as in the sense of vulnerability and her own, over-modest measuring of her strength and intellectual ability.

Certainly, Mr.B's feelings toward Pamela become affection and love at a time generally consistent with his reading of her journal, but prior to this, his actions can only be construed as betraying a desire to penetrate and master her, mind and body.

Pamela is the first great character creation of English prose fiction. As much as we may dislike her prudential morality, we must recognize here a complete human being. She writes down exactly how she felt only moments after each of her enumerable crisis. The manipulations of the letters from a story of their own, even to the device of addressing letters to the wrong party; but especially fascinating is the effect of intimate revelation in reading someone's private correspondence. The minor characters are, essentially, caricatures. Mr. B is conceivable in an age that believed a gush of sentiment could transform a lecher into a man of feelng.

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