Elements of Crime Fiction in Martin McDonaghs's Play "The Pillowman"

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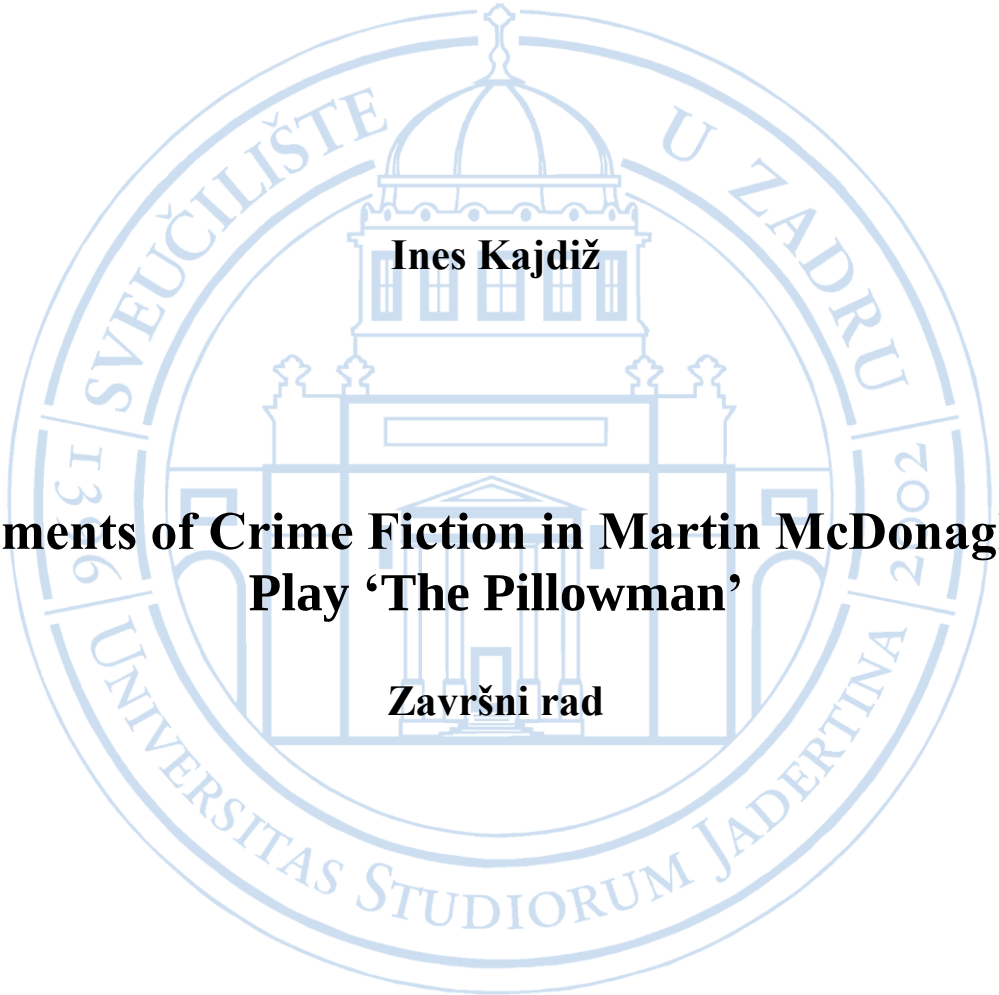
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Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)



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Završni rad

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Zadar, 2017.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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1. Introduction

The main focus of this paper will be Martin McDonagh's play *The Pillowman* and the elements of crime fiction present in his work. Even though *The Pillowman* is a multilayered play that emphasizes a number of social and political issues, the main concern of this paper is the recognition of elements that can be connected to the crime fiction genre. In addition, this paper will explore certain deviations from the genre in the play. However, in order to discuss the elements of crime fiction one must firstly be acquainted with its main aspects as well as its history.

The genre of crime fiction is a rather new genre. Compared to other literary forms it has a shorter history and is substantially less analyzed and studied, hence, it is less known. Even theoreticians and critics cannot agree over its valorization. What is more, the crime fiction genre has been linked to detective fiction genre because both the crime novel and the detective novel have a number of elements in common. Consequently, it has been difficult to separate them and determine a clear boundary between them. As far as this paper is concerned, the two terms will be used as synonyms in order to avoid any misunderstandings. According to Heta Pyrhönen, the most obvious distinction one can notice is the different focus of the story in each novel. Regarding detective novel the focus is on the detective (as the name says) and the process of crime investigation, while the crime novel focuses more on the crime, the killer and the truth about the crime. In addition, it is important to emphasize that the genre of detective fiction was discussed more among the critics and because of that it is more understood and familiar to a broader public (44). On the other hand, crime fiction genre is still a quite unknown and ambiguous territory for most theoreticians.

2. The Pillowman

The Pillowman is Martin McDonagh's first non-Irish play of which the setting is in an unknown Eastern European totalitarian country. This is interesting because it is McDonagh's first deviation from using Irish identity as a theme and Ireland's setting as a significant element of the play. Without a certain sense of location the reader is, in a way, lead to believe that anything is possible in this fictional world. By doing so, McDonagh created a level of uncertainty which emphasized the tension in the play. It seems that McDonagh wanted to try something completely different and move the focus of his work to more universal problems such as violence, freedom of speech, storytelling, mental illness, child abuse, and so on. The play premiered on November 13, 2003 at Royal National Theatre and won the Laurence Olivier Award in the category of Best New Play in 2004.

The action of this play begins *in medias res* where we find the main character, Katurian, in a police station being interrogated by two policemen, one of which plays ‘'the good cop'’ and the other ‘'the bad cop''. Throughout the interrogation process the reader finds out what happened and why this man is a suspect. The reason behind this lies in the stories he wrote about murders of children. The murders that are described in the stories are almost exactly the same as the murders which are investigated in the play. This link between the stories and the ‘real’ murders is what causes Katurian's arrest. Later, the readers discover that the writer has a mentally unstable brother – Michal – who is actually responsible for those murders. In order to protect him from what he thinks is a worse destiny, Katurian suffocates him with a pillow. In the end, he falsely admits the murders of children, as well as the murders of his brother and parents, which results in his execution. However, besides the main storyline, Katurian's stories are also featured in the play, which not only gives us more information about what actually happened to those children, but also serves as an insight into Katurian's psyche.

Furthermore, as it can be expected from the author, the play begins and ends with violence. Maria Doyle described it best when she said that: “Martin McDonagh’s approach to theater hinges on violence – violence recalled, violence threatened, violence narrated, and violence enacted.” (92). The type of violence that is mostly referred to in this play is murder. Although violence is one of recurring themes in his work and is depicted in numerous ways, McDonagh still succeeded to shock the audience. The depiction of crime or any other kind of violence in novels is not necessarily a clear indicator of crime fiction genre because the element of crime can be found in other works of literature as well. However, combined with suspense and particular characters (the investigator and the killer) it creates an obvious link to the genre of crime fiction. Therefore, these elements will be mentioned in this paper and applied to the play.

3. The Genre of Crime Fiction

3.1. The Historical Evolution of the Genre

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the genre of crime fiction is quite new. The first indications of this genre can be traced backto the 19th century and the person who it is most often traced back to is Edgar Allan Poe. He is known as the inaugurator and the first person to introduce a genuine detective-related work to the public. His short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* was first published in 1841 and is believed to be the first detective story. The reason for that is the fact that E. A. Poe's main character – detective C. Auguste Dupin has some of the same qualities that can be found in other detective stories which came later (for example: detective as the brilliant but eccentric individual). In other words, the character of C. Auguste Dupin is seen as a prototype of future fictional detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, among others. However, the fact that E. A. Poe created this prototype does not immediately mean that he was the first writer who used crime as a theme in his work. In the article "From *The Newgate Calendar* to Sherlock Holmes" Heather Worthington highlights that there were writers before Poe who used crime in their literary works, and one of the most important to mention is Daniel Defoe. In his novel *Moll Flanders* crime plays a big part of the story, which is interesting because the novel was published in 1722 (16). That was the time when the English novel was starting to become recognized as a literary form and Defoe was one of the first writers whose works helped affirm it. Naturally, it is not surprising that the genre of crime fiction is considered to be closely linked with the rise of the novel. Nevertheless, the only connection that *Moll Flanders* has with the crime fiction genre is the crime itself and it is important to mention that when it comes to other elements (such as the investigation process) similarities disappear (16).

The writer who continued in Poe's footsteps and defined certain elements of the genre as well as brought more attention to it is Arthur Conan Doyle. He is considered to be one of

the most appreciated writers of detective fiction and the stories he wrote about Sherlock Holmes are his most known work. Since their first appearance in 1887 Sherlock Holmes stories have, in a short amount of time, became wildly popular among readers and with that they made the genre of crime fiction more popular as well. This is why, when talking about this genre, the first association that comes to mind for most people is – Sherlock Holmes. Also, according to Lee Horsley "(…) it was the British tradition inaugurated by Doyle that established the defining features of analytic detective fiction (…)."(14).

Another important person who contributed to the popularization of the crime fiction genre, as well as its development, is Agatha Christie, with her very charming yet very clever characters: Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. Thirty years after the Holmes stories were serialized there was a shift in the crime fiction genre from short stories to novels and Agatha Christie's novels were received rather well. This period is also known as 'the golden age' and it lasted between the two world wars. Some of the most notable writers of that time were Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Michael Innes and Nicholas Blake (Horsley 37-38).What is interesting about the genre in this period is that some of the elements from previous detective stories were used more consistently. This enabled the genre of crime fiction to evolve and became more coherent.

3.2. The Audience and Status

Regarding the audience of crime fiction genre, one can say that people who like to read crime novels have similar characteristics and moral values. In brief, people who value truth above anything else and enjoy deconstructing 'the rules of the game' tend to be the main admirers of crime novel. This type of people can see similarities between their world and the world that is described in a crime novel. In other words, they can identify not only with the characters but with the system of values which is presented in the crime novel as well.

Furthermore, the only people that can truly appreciate this genre are the ones who know that the truth is hard to find and that nothing is ever how it seems. The process of investigation and the attempt to distinguish right from wrong,which is a part of every crime fiction novel, represents an exciting experience for people who love crime fiction (Pavličić 7).Although this genre raised more interest with a particular audience it still managed to become very successful and well-known to a broader public. However, the substantial popularity this genre gained in a relatively short amount of time did not help in getting the approval in academic circles. What is more, the popularity actually worsened its chances of gaining more credit among the literary elite because the status of 'high' literature was reserved only for those literary works which "appealed to a limited rather than to a mass readership" (Black 76).

Also, mass interest was not the only factor that played a role in the trivialization of the genre. Due to the fact that crime novels have a certain scheme or certain well-established rules that need to be carried out in order to be seen as a crime fiction, they have been considered trivial. *Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories* by S. S. Van Dine can serve as an example of such a scheme. There is no denying that crime fiction is based on default rules which present a serious challenge for the writers because a lack of creativity in a writer can result in cliché storylines. However, the scheme is not the only aspect of the crime fiction genre. The other, equally important aspect is the ability to surprise the reader. Despite how paradoxical it may sound, in order to write a successful crime fiction story one must combine the general scheme with the elements of surprise. Thus, the ability to write interesting and exciting work of crime fiction is truly something that should be appreciated more. According to Martin Priestman, the general opinion of crime fiction genre being a 'lower' form of literature lasted until the 1960s when "the presumed barriers between 'high' and 'low' literature have been progressively dismantled" (1). In the second half of the 20th century the

genre was starting to be analyzed more and certain negative beliefs started to lose their power. On the other side, Joel Black argues that:

> Despite the canonization of crime literature – and, indeed, of popular literature in general – by the academic community over the past two or three decades (Priestman 1990; Ascari 2007), and despite the fact that many of the most revered masterpieces of world literature are centrally concerned with the subject of crime, practitioners and proponents of the genre continue to find themselves on the defensive regarding its artistic status (76).

Overall, the reception of crime fiction literature has been divided. While there are people who underestimate the genre and think of it as a 'low' literature form, there are people who admire it and consider it to be quite intellectually stimulating. Taking into consideration that a crime fiction writer must abide by the rules of the genre as well as create a level of uncertainty in his work, only proves that the genre is more elaborate than it seems at first. As S. S. Van Dine states: "The detective story is a kind of intellectual game" (1). Therefore, it provides more than just entertainment to the reader. In most cases, the genre of crime fiction serves as an excellent device for exercising one's cognitive processes.

4. The Narrative of Crime Fiction

4.1. Fabula and Sjuzet

One of the most important distinctions one needs to understand when talking about the narrative in general, is the difference between "the order of events in the story and their chronological sequence in the fabula" (Bal 79). The order of events in the story is called fabula and it refers to the events that happened in 'real' time. In other words, when it comes to the fabula the chronological order in real time is very important. When one refers to the fabula

they refer to the events in the story as they would happen chronologically. On the other hand, the order of events in the text which does not correspond to the chronological order in real time is what is commonly known as the sjuzet. This narrative formula can be applied to any literary genre, and that includes the crime fiction genre as well. According to Horsley, when mentioning terms such as the fabula and the sjuzet in the context of crime fiction narration there is one name that should be mentioned as well. That name is Viktor Shkolovsky. In brief, Viktor Shkolovsky was a Russian formalist critic who explained the narrative formula of the detective story by identifying these ways of looking at the story as – the fabula (or the first story) and the sjuzet (or the second story) (23). *The fabula*, or the first story as Shkolovsky says, conveys the events as they happened and is related to the crime that was committed while *the sjuzet*, or the second story, refers to the events as they are narrated from the detective's point of view and focuses on the investigation process (23). It is important to state that both sequences deal with the same situation but from a different point in time, which means that there is a certain temporal distance between them. Still, the distance disappears at the end of the story when the two sequences overlap. According to Horsley: "They come together only as the detective puts the pieces of the puzzle in place and reveals the guilty party, in the process explaining both the nature of his own reasoning and the manner in which the crime was committed." (23). To put it more simply, the temporal distance between the fabula and the sjuzet disappears at the end of the story when everything is explained.

4.2. Narrative anachronies

Due to the fact that every linear structure can be analyzed according to two perspectives, the sjuzet and the fabula, the same can be applied to narration in crime fiction. What is more, it is not unusual that the series of events in the story does not chronologically correspond to the events that happened in 'real time'. In fact, there are frequent deviations in

the presentation of the written text and the events as they happened. Thus, the crime fiction genre provides a suitable environment for playing with sequential ordering of those two stories (Bal 82). These deviations are also called anachronies. As Bal explains: "(…) the event presented in the anachrony lies either in the past or in the future. For the first category I use the term retroversion; for the second, anticipation." (83). Retroversion is a narrative technique which is used when the past events are recalled. This technique is commonly part of every detective novel because throughout the entire story someone is trying to reconstruct what really happened before the present investigation, that is, what happened in the past. The interesting fact about retroversion in any detective novel is that retroversion is not complete till the very end when all consequences of the crime have been discovered and explained. "Only then has the entire development of the retroversion, from its starting-point to its conclusion, been presented." (91).

Anticipation is another narrative technique which, unlike retroversion, is fairly less used in literary works; however, it is not less important (93). The term anticipation refers to the type of anachrony where the future outcome is being hinted at. Due to the fact that this technique is mostly covert and restricted to a single allusion it is less frequently used. Nevertheless, it serves as a great device for creating tension in the novel and because of it plays an important role in story-telling (93). The anticipation creates tension because it raises certain questions in the reader's mind which keeps him engaged and interested in the storyline. Also, by alluding to specific situations the writer can steer the readers in whichever direction he wants (94). For example, the readers can wonder whether a certain character is the real killer or whether one clue is more important than the other and so on. In other words, allusions create a level of uncertainty in a crime fiction novel which, thus, creates a level of suspense – the essential element of this genre.

4.3. Embedded story

Another narrative technique which is equally important as the ones previously mentioned is the embedded story. According to MiekeBal, the embedded story is a term used for text interference with another text. In other words, it is a narrative technique that allows the 'primary' text to be interrupted by the 'secondary' text (57). The term 'primary' text refers to the "fabula of the primary narrative" (57) while the term 'secondary' text refers to the fabula (or text) of the embedded story.By introducing the embedded text into the narrative the author has the opportunity to tell the story on two or more levels which, as a result, has the power to deepen the meaning of the whole story (57). As far as the relationship between the 'primary' and the 'secondary' story is concerned, the level of interference can vary, that is, the 'secondary' text can be strongly or loosely related to the 'primary' text. The example of texts which are loosely related can be explained by the following sentence: "When the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually forget the fabula of the primary narrative" (57). However, it is important to emphasize that even though the level of connection between these two texts can appear rather loose, it is still relevant for the story and its development. Obviously, a stronger relationship between the two texts is formed when there is more connection between them – when the embedded story either explains the primary story or it resembles one (58). As far as the first is concerned, the primary fabula is often quite short and the situation that is presented in it cannot be changed by the embedded story. The embedded story is simply giving more context to the situation and explaining it, but does not have any real influence on the primary fabula. However, in a situation where the embedded story does not only have an explanatory role, but actually affects the outcome of the primary story the relationship between the two is even stronger. In that case, the embedded story is more than a narrative device; it is an indispensable part necessary for the understanding of the whole story (59).

4.4. Suspense

Turning to the element of suspense in the crime fiction novel, it is generally associated with a psychological process or a state of mind that the reader is in when reading a novel belonging to this literary genre (Bal 163). Generally, suspense in a novel appears in the very first moment a reader or character begins to question something. In her book *Naratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal explains that, whether the questions are answered in a short amount of time or in the last chapter, the moment they are answered they lose all of their power and suspense disappears (163). Obviously, the longer the answers are postponed, the more suspense is built. Not only that, another catalyst for suspense is anticipation – announcement of something that will happen later. When it comes to crime fiction, there are different ways in which suspense can manifest itself in the novel, and they all depend on different types of questions that are being raised in a certain storyline. In most cases of detective fiction, neither the reader nor the character can find an answer. However, when referring to crime fiction, in most cases the reader knows the answer even though the character does not. Because of that a different type of suspense is created – the one where the uncertainty lies in *when* and *how* will the character find out. The third type of suspense is when the character knows the answer but the reader does not. What is more, the answer can be revealed gradually, or offered rather abruptly, depending on the author's preference and style. Nevertheless, when the reader and character are both informed of the answer, there is no suspense (164).

5. Archetypal Characters in Crime Fiction Genre

The main focus of this chapter will be put on the typical characters ofthe crime fiction genrefrom a psychological standpoint. However, the reception of the characters will be discussed as well. The characters of the crime fiction genre have well-established roles which differentiate them from other characters in other genres of literature. The most important characters to mention are the killer and the investigator. Even though each character has his authentic role in the crime novel, there is still a specific kind of bond which connects them. This bond is very important for a better understanding of the characters. Besides the killer and the investigator there is another role which provides a deeper understanding of the genre and that is the role of the victim. This role is important to mention because it explains the emphasis this genre puts on the intellect as opposed to emotions.

5.1. The Killer

One of the most important and most essential characters of the crime fiction genre is the killer. The reason for that lies in the fact that every crime fiction story revolves around him. He is the perpetrator of the crime and without him there would not be any investigation. In addition, the role of the killer needs to be skillfully elaborated because the character of the killer has influence over the whole storyline. The more elaborate his role, the more interesting and challenging the plot can be as well. For example, the killer can propel the narrative by trying to hide his trail and make diversions. Besides this, there is another important trait which every well elaborated character of a killer should have, and that is the ability to be relatable (Pavličić59). This trait is important because it can evoke certain emotions in the reader which can make him become more invested in the story and the chase. In order for killer to be relatable he must be portrayed in a light that shows his side of the story and reasons for the

crime. By giving the reader relatively understandable reason for the killer's gruesome act, the reader enters into a world of questioning. Not only does one question the character's motives and their validity but his own morality. In other words, the reader can identify with the killer in a crime fiction novel because he serves as an example of what would happen to him if he were to commit a crime (59). Because of that, the reader can find himself more interested in this fictional story than he expected. This only proves that the crime fiction genre is more than a trivial genre; it truly is an intellectually stimulating literature.

5.2. The Investigator

Another character of great significance to the crime fiction genre is the investigator. This character is almost of equal importance to the crime fiction novel as the killer. And the reason for that lies in his portrayal. According to Pavličić, there are two distinguishable traits of *a good investigator*: his strength and his mind. When referring to the older works of crime fiction, more emphasis was put on the detective's supernatural intellect and less on his bodily strength which is something characteristic for Holmes and Poirot, who are often perceived as typical detectives in a crime fiction scenario. However, in more recent crime fiction novels the opposite is more common, which can be seen in the character of Mike Hammer (61). Also, another trait that the detective is required to have is very high moral values. Due to the fact that the investigator is ought to be hyperbolized figure in the novel he needs to have certain exaggerated features (64). Not only is the investigator presented as a highly moral individual, he also embodies the role of an eccentric or someone who is different in some way. For example he could be different in a physical way, by behavior, by certain type of hobby he has and so on (67). As Malmgren states: "The investigator in classic detection must become a larger – than – life Character in order to be distinguished from the character types." (155). This eccentric nature that every crime fiction investigator has is something that the reader can

relate to. The feeling of being the only one (the only wierdo) who cares that deeply about justice correlates to the reader's strong desires about revealing the truth and restoring peace.

5.3. The Fair-play

The common rule of crime fiction genre is that every crime fiction novel with a smart killer is required to have a proportionally smart detective in order to catch him. The easiest way to explain the relationship between the killer and detective is through the notion of fair-play. Fair-play is a form of a balance between the killer and the investigator. In order for 'the fight' to be fair both characters need to have the same opportunities and the same odds (Pavličić 76). That is why they are both very smart and calculative individuals. Another trait they share is the fact that they are both loners. Nevertheless, the reasons behind their isolations are completely different. For example, the killer is a loner because he is the one that committed the crime and, therefore, broke a certain social and moral norms. He is not an average person because the crime distinguishes him from the rest of the society (75). On the other hand, the investigator shares the role of a loner because he stands alone in his quest for satisfying justice and discovering the real truth (73). Even though he may have some assistance from secondary characters, the investigator's motives for finding the truth are unique because he is the only one who seeks truth more than anything else in his life.

5.4. The Victim as a Prop

As far as the role of the victim in crime fiction novel is concerned, it is seen as a rather negligible part. To put it more simply, the victim is treated rather as a prop than a 'real' character. Even though almost every crime fiction story begins with the victim, that is, with the discovery of the victim's body, not much attention is payed to the tragedy of the situation. In fact, the matter of tragedy is treated quite lightly and with little emotion. The reason behind

that lies in the fact that the main point of crime fiction novel is mystery and, not unfortunate incident itself. As Malmgrem explains: “The real storystarts when the body appears, for that is when the unknown quantity is inserted into the narrative and the quest for knowledge begins.” (153). The reader cannot feel empathy for the victim because the narrative style of crime fiction genre does not allow an emotional description of the events. Also, this neutral relation towards the victim comes from the presentation of the murder itself because it is depicted as social, as well as moral excess. The murder cannot provoke compassion in the reader’s mind because the emphasis of a crime fiction novel is not on evoking emotion in the reader, but on encouraging his intellect. In other words, the goal of crime fiction genre is the solution of the problem via deduction and other intellectual processes, and not a depiction of the emotional effects of crime. What is more, the victim has to be morally suspicious because that is another feature which prevents the reader from getting emotionally invested. This is why, according to Žmegač, the victim cannot be a child or someone completely innocent because that would cause the reader’s emotional response (193).

6. Crime Fiction and *The Pillowman*

Since the overview of crime fiction genre was given in the previous chapters, the discussion of this paper will now move on to an analysis of the elements of crime fiction in Martin McDonagh's play *The Pillowman*. The main focus of the following subsections will be on the most evident crime fiction element used in this play, which is suspense. The notion of suspense is achieved through various narrative techniques which include: embedded stories, retroversion, and anticipation. By creating the notion of suspense using these elements McDonagh moved one step closer to the genre of crime fiction. Besides this, one can notice obvious departures from the crime fiction genre in this play as well. In particular, the roles of the characters which are depicted in a rather different way when compared to the roles the characters have in the crime fiction genre. This unusual combination of elements that affirm the genre of crime fiction and the elements that subvert it shows the talent McDonagh has when it comes to writing interesting and powerful plays.

6.1. Suspense

One of the first noticeable elements of crime fiction genre related to this play is suspense. Creating suspense begins with creating mystery or uncertainty. In the beginning of the play the mystery lies in not knowing why the main character is a suspect. Through the dialog with the police officers – Tupolski and Ariel - the readers discover that Katurian's stories are seen as strong evidence against him because they contain a detailed description of the recent murders. Even though Katurian, the writer of these morbid stories, is held as a suspect, the reader is not convinced that he is really the killer. The similarity between the written stories and the real murders is not strong enough evidence for the reader to believe that Katurian is the real killer. This suspicion that Katurian is not the real murderer is proven

as justified later in a conversation with Michal, his mentally unstable brother. At one moment in the story Michal admits that he is the one responsible for the murders. “MICHAL. (…) I know it was wrong. Really. But it was very interesting.” (McDonagh34). Meanwhile, the question that crops us is – Who is the real culprit in the play? Is his mentally ill brother the only one who is responsible for the murders, or is the crime Katurian’s responsibility since he is his brother’s guardian, and the author of the stories which inspired Michal to kill the children? After all, Michal plainly states he was influenced by Katurian’s stories when he decided to commit the murders. “MICHAL. (…) Every story you tell me, something horrible happens to somebody. I was just testing out how far-fetched they were. (…) They ain’t all that far-fetched.” (35). Due to the fact that different questions are being raised on every page of this play, one can say that a sense of tension and suspense envelopes the entire play. In other words, the reader is constantly in a state of uncertainty about the development of the story.

6.1.1. Embedded stories

As it was explained in the previous chapters, the term ‘embedded story’ refers to the ‘story within a story’. To put it simply, embedded stories usually interrupt the main storyline and switch the reader’s focus on something else. This deviation from linear narration is something that amplifies the tension in every literary genre and the same is with crime fiction. In *The Pillowman,* Katurian’s stories are actually embedded stories, which serve as yet another device for creating suspense because they digress from the main plot. It is important to mention that not only do Katurian’s stories prolong the plot they also provide more context for a better understanding of the whole story. Also, the relationship between a certain embedded story and the ‘primary’ story in the play is different, and varies according to the story. Some are loosely connected because they have their own fabula and do not affect the outcome of the ‘primary’ story such as *The Tale of the Town on the River*. Katurian wrote this

story as an explanation of the myth about the Pied Piper.In brief, the myth is a medieval story about a piper who came to town of Hamelin as an exterminator for rats. The rats presented a big problem in this town because they were the carriers of the plague. Later, after all the rats (and the epidemic that came with them) were gone, the major of the town refused to pay the piper. Out of furry, the piper found a way to punish the major as well as the people of Hamelin. He lured the children of Hamelin out of their houses by playing the pipe. Because they were fascinated with the sound they followed him and, thus, left their homes. In the end, the Pied Piper got his revenge because the town people never saw their children again.

On the other hand, some stories are autobiographical and strongly connected to the 'primary' story. For instance, the story *The Writer and the Writer's Brother* is overtly autobiographical because it is based on Katurian's childhood. The boy in the story is raised to be a writer by parents who strongly believed that "great suffering creates great art" (Russell 138). Because of that, they tortured his older brother in the next room and traumatized them both. When the boy finally discovers the truth he also discovers that his severely tortured and damaged brother wrote a far better story than he ever could. In the end, the boy destroys the story and kills both of his parents by suffocating them with the pillow and by doing so saves himself and his brother. At the end of the story the question about who is the writer and who is the writer's brother is also raised, since the story does not give a clear answer. This embedded story is strongly connected to the 'primary' story because it provides a potential explanation of what happened to Katurian and Michal. By reading this, one can question whether *The Story of Writer and the Writer's Brother* is a description of what really happened or is it just fiction, which is another way of creating suspense. Later, the play reveals that the story is actually based on real events, which gives the reader more insight into the psychology of both Katurian and Michal:

ARIEL.*(Pause.)* You killed your mum and dad? *(Katurain nods.)*

> This may seem a ridiculous question, but, er, why?
>
> KATURIAN.Um... There's a story in there called "The Writer and the Writer's Brother." I don't know if you saw it ...
>
> ARIEL. I saw it.
>
> KATURIAN. Well... I kind of hate any writing that's even vaguely autobiographical. I think people who only write about what they know only write about what they know because they're too fucking stooped to make anything up, however "The Writer and the Writer's Brother" is, I suppose, the only story of mine that isn't really fiction. (McDonagh 52)

Moreover, the play is rich in unexpected twists and turns which are also crime fiction elements that keep the reader interested and eager to find a rational answer.

6.1.2. Narrative anachronies (Retroversion and Anticipation)

Turning to other narrative devices that provide a sense of suspense, anachronies play an important role in amplifying the notion of crime fiction mystery. As explained previously, anachronies are time deviations in the storyline which can refer to the past or the future. Anachrony such as retroversion is referencing or recalling past events. Also, retroversion amplifies the level of suspense because it informs the reader about certain moments in a character's life which the reader then may perceive as a clue for solving the mystery. The elements of retroversion in the play are evident in parts where Katurian and Michal talk about the murders of the children, and when Michal explains his reasons for committing the crimes. In that moment the question of who killed the children is answered, but other questions like how the police would punish them is still unanswered, which creates another layer of suspense. Due to the fact that from that point on the killer is known, and the emphasis is put on the character's psychological states, the features of crime fiction genre become even more

evident. As can be expected, from then on the uncertainty lies in not knowing whether or not they will be punished (more so in Katurian's case than Michal's).

Anticipation is a narration technique that is used for hinting of future result. It is a form of anachrony that has an emphasis on the future. In terms of creating suspense by using anticipation one can interpret a line said by Katurian, "It's a puzzle without a solution" (14), as a subtle hint of what is supposed to happen in the end. After reading this, a reader can wonder if this is the author's way of hinting at that the end will not result in a satisfactory answer, or if it is simply a red herring and his way of creating a more complicated plot. Another example of anticipation or 'foreshadowing' can be seen in a statement made by Tupolski: "Oh, I almost forgot to mention… I'm the good cop, he's the bad cop." (11). Even though this statement alludes that Tupolski will be taking a role of the good cop throughout this play, in a genuine McDonagh's style, this anticipation is actually transformed into a twist because the end implies that Tupolski is not good after all. This implication is made when Tupolski mentions the death of his son who drowned in the lake. It is obvious that McDonagh left this as a reference to Katurian's fictional story about the Pillowman and, once again, used retroversion to create tension, but this time bringing Tupolski's character into question.

Now, the Pillowman is a fictional character from one of Katurian's stories. He is a man made of soft pink, pillows who has a "special ability" of going back in time. His main purpose in life is finding people who are at the verge of committing suicide and convincing them to go back in time when they were children. Once they agreed to go back in time the Pillowman would be obligated to carry out his very sad duty: "(…) the Pillowman's job was to get that child to kill themselves, and so avoid the years of pain (…)" (31). However, the children's suicide would always have to be made to look like an accident. This is the reason why the story about Tupolski's son seems odd and raises questions about his character as well as morality. There are strong indications that Tupolski was a bad father and that his son's

death was probably made to look like an accident just like the story about the Pillowman suggests. What is more, the reference to *The Pillowman* is mentioned right before Tupolski explains his tragic loss:

> TUPOLSKI. *(Pause.)* There was something about "The Pillowman" that stayed with me. There was something gentle about it. *(Pause.)* And the idea of, if a child died, alone, through some accident, he wasn't really alone. He had this kind, soft person with him, to hold his hand and whatnot. And it was the child's choice, somehow. Made it somewhat, reassuring, somehow. That it wasn't just a stupid waste.
>
> KATURIAN. *(Nods. Pause.)* Did you lose a child?
>
> TUPOLSKI. *(Pause.)* Unilke old Ariel, I don't go into those sorts of things out of condemned. *(Katurian nods. Sad pause.)* Son drowned. *(Pause.)* Fishing on his own. *(Pause.)* Silly. *(Katurian nods. Tupolski puts the battery back into the cabinet.)* (McDonagh 62)

Therefore, the reader cannot interpret the reference to the Pillowman and the 'accident' as a coincidence. The two are obviously connected. Due to this completely unexpected shift the plot takes a turn in yet another direction and consequently, leaves the reader in a state of surprise. Tupolski, from the beginning portrayed as the good cop, is now seen in a considerably horrific light. As one can tell from reading this play, one of Martin McDonagh's great talents is the ability to create unexpected reversals and produce a level of suspense worthy of crime fiction novels.

6.2. Deviations from Crime Fiction

6.2.1. Atypical Roles of Investigators

The most noticeable deviation from the crime fiction genre in this play is in the ambiguous roles of the main characters (the investigators as well as the killers). They are not typical crime fiction characters because they do not posses all the typical crime fiction genre traits. However, they possess some of the characteristics typical of crime fiction characters. Firstly, Ariel and Tupolski both have a strong motivation for doing their job. Ariel suffered a great physical and emotional trauma in his childhood – his father abused him – and because of that he feels strongly about punishing those who do the same, especially those who harm small children. On the other hand, Tupolski's motive for catching criminals does not come from the need to restore justice, but from the need to help. As he says:

> (…) I shall save that idiot from the train, I shall save my fellow man from those criminals, and I won't even get a word of thanks for it. (…) But that doesn't matter, I don't need thanks. All I need is to know that because of me toiling away with my detective work, that little boy is going to be safe from that train. (McDonagh60).

When one takes this quote under consideration it can seem that Tupolski is better suited for the role of the 'typical crime fiction investigator' because his pursuit against crime is prompted by something more moral than Ariel. However, when the implication about Tupolski's child is brought up on the next page, his role as a typically moral crime fiction investigator loses its ground. From that moment the roles are reversed. Tupolski is 'the bad cop' while Ariel is 'the good cop'. At the beginning of the play Ariel is portrayed as 'the bad cop', that is, he is physically and emotionally aggressive towards the suspects. Also, his irritable nature and short temper only amplify his 'bad cop' role. However, towards the end

when another plot twist is revealed, Ariel suddenly becomes more humanized and his actions seem less disturbing to the public. From the moment the reader finds out that Ariel himself had a very troubled childhood he develops more sympathy and understanding for this particular character. In addition, the last scene, in which it is explained that Katurian's stories are not burned after all, paints Ariel in a more positive light, as opposed to the beginning. Katurian made a deal with the investigators. They agreed that they would save his stories and store them somewhere safe and he will, in turn, confess his crimes to them. Later, the plot unfolds in an unexpected way. The character that the reader expected to be more sympathetic (Tupolski) is actually the one who wanted to break the agreement while the character that was considered to be more aggressive (Ariel) turned out to be the one that showed more respect to Katurian. The following quote can serve as evidence to that:

> And maybe it was best that the story didn't finish that way, as it wouldn't have been quite accurate. Because, for reasons known only to himself, the bulldog of a policeman chose not to put the stories in the burning trash, but placed them carefully with Katurian's case file, which he then sealed away to remain unopened for fifty-odd years. (McDonagh 69)

So, if one applies the roles of typical crime fiction investigators to the characters in the play they will clearly see that the two clash. The classical role of crime fiction investigator driven by some higher moral values simply cannot be found in *The Pillowman*. Even though Ariel and Tupolski have their reasons for wanting to imprison criminals they do not possess the true virtues of crime fiction investigators. In other words, they are portrayed as flawed, damaged and psychologically more layered characters. Also, they are depicted as morally dubious characters because they change their roles and go form 'bad cop' to 'good cop' very quickly, which can be seen from the previous quote. These unconventional roles that Tupolski

and Ariel have are one of the arguments that show obvious departures from the genre of crime fiction in McDonagh's play.

6.2.2. Multiple killers

Another argument that confirms Martin McDonagh's deviation from crime fiction genre is the fact that there is more than one killer in this play. What is more, almost every character (besides children) has committed some kind of crime for which they had a relatively understandable reason. Katurian killed his parents because they tortured his brother and he later killed his brother as a way of showing him mercy, considering the situation he was in. His brother was about to be brutally executed and he wanted to make sure that, at least, his brother dies a peaceful death. In regard to Michal, Katurian's mentally unstable brother, he killed two children because he wanted to see if Katurian's stories were valid. However, the reader still cannot feel a complete disgust towards the killer – Michal – because the act of murder was done as a result of his mental illness. Furthermore, when it comes to the real reason behind Ariel's violent behavior and the fact that he killed his father, the reader once again cannot blame the character because it was a case of self-defense. From that moment on the reader is given more insight into the psychology of the character and cannot help but feel sympathy for him and justify his reason for killing his abusive father:

> ARIEL. I've never said a word about my problem childhood. I would never use the phrase "problem childhood" to describe my childhood.
>
> TUPOLSKI. What phrase would you use? A "fucked by your dad" childhood? That isn't a phrase. *(Ariel starts shaking slightly.)* (McDonagh 54)

Interestingly, the only character who did not have a relatively justified reason for doing something horrific is actually Tupolski. As it was previously stated, Tupolski was

depicted as the good cop throughout the majority of the play. However, when the indication about the abuse of his son is made at the end of the play he is the one who becomes the real villain. Therefore, one of the biggest twists comes from the character who had little voice in the play – Tupolski. Because of this, one can see that even though Martin McDonagh successfully incorporated elements of crime fiction in his play, he also broke some of the genre's conventions. Not only are the roles of investigators changed, but the roles of the killers and victims as well.

6.2.3. Children as Victims

As it was previously mentioned, the victim has a rather neglected role in the crime fiction genre. Namely, the victim exists simply as a problem that needs to be solved and it does not generate any emotions in the reader's mind. So, when Martin McDonagh used children as victims in his play *The Pillowman* he obviously broke one of the rules of crime fiction and, thus, subverted the genre once again. Not only did McDonagh depict children as victims, he also described their torture and murder in a rather disturbing and detailed way. Probably the most disturbing is the story of *The Little Jesus*. In this story a little girl is convinced that she is "the second coming of Lord Jesus Christ" (McDonagh 46). Her foster parents, who are not religious people, torture her because she keeps behaving in a way that irritates them. In the end, they torture the girl by recreating the crucifixion from the Bible and by doing so, they kill her.

This story is just one of many examples of McDonagh's departure from the crime fiction rules. Not only does the involvement of children create uneasy feelings in the reader's mind, the gruesome description of the murders amplifies those feelings and creates an even stronger emotional reaction to this play.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the play *The Pillowman* and the discussion of the elements of the genre of crime fiction with respect to the play has proved several points. Namely, not only does Martin McDonagh's first non-Irish play contain some elements of crime fiction, those elements are creatively and skillfully incorporated in the plot. The most relevant element of crime fiction that appears in this play is the element of suspense, which evokes feelings of uncertainty and excitement. The element of suspense is evident from the very beginning when the reader starts to wonder about the perpetrator of the crime. After this question is answered rather early in the narrative, another set of questions start to arise. That is, for a large section of the play, the emphasis is not put on the pursuit of the criminal, but on the journey to discover the truth, which is another connection to the crime fiction genre.

Even though the play has a rather strong connection to the genre of crime fiction, there are some aspects of *The Pillowman* that deviate from it. For example, the depiction of the investigators (Ariel and Tupolski) was not done in a typical crime fiction manner. They are not morally superior to the killer because they have committed crimes in the past as well. Also, the conventions of a typical crime fiction killer have been subverted by including multiple killers in the story. Not only are there multiple killers in the play, but the reader is given a rather rational explanation for their crimes, such as: self-defense, murder out of mercy or mental instability. What is more, the crime fiction element of the fair-play is missing due to the fact that there is no clear balance between the characters. The investigators, as well as the killers, are morally suspicious characters. Because of that, one can say that every character in the play is portrayed in a light different from typical crime fiction characters. In addition, the children depart from the typical role of crime fiction victims because they evoke strong emotions. By including children into this narrative, McDonagh evoked the feelings of disgust

and sadness towards the characters, which is something that every writer of crime fiction genre avoids.

Overall, by taking all information into consideration, one can conclude that Martin McDonagh succeeded to write a fascinating cautionary tale about the circle of violence. Even though the elements of crime fiction are an important part of his play, the elements that deviate from the genre are equally important and interesting to discuss. By borrowing elements of crime fiction and combining them with elements that subvert this genre, McDonagh created a literary amalgam of a compelling, complicated and controversial subject matter. With that, he affirmed his role as *enfant terrible* of theatre.

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9. ELEMENTS OF CRIME FICTION IN MARTIN MCDONAGH'S PLAY 'THE PILLOWMAN': Summary and key words

Summary:

The focus of this final paper is on the analysis of Martin McDonagh's first non-Irish play called *The Pillowman*, as well as on the elements of crime fiction genre which are present in the play. Due to the fact that the genre of crime fiction is rather complex and vaguely defined, the emphasis of the first part of this paper is on the description of the development of the genre and its most notable elements. The most relevant elements of crime fiction genre for the play are: embedded story, anticipation, and retroversion. They are mostly used for the creation of the notion of suspense. However, the interesting aspect of this literary work lies in the fact that *The Pillowman* is also rich with deviations from the crime fiction genre. These deviations are most evident in the subversion of the archetypal roles of crime fiction characters. Furthermore, the treatment of the characters in the play is different from the treatment of typical crime fiction characters because there is no fair-play balance between them. Every character is morally dubious and changes his role throughout the storyline. Overall, the combination of crime fiction elements as well as their deviations is something that makes this play one of Martin McDonagh's most interesting works.

Key words: Martin McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, crime fiction, narratology, suspense, crime fiction characters

10. ELEMENTI KRIMINALISTIČKOG ŽANRA U DRAMI MARTINA MCDONAGHA ‘ČOVJEK OD JASTUKA’: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Sažetak:

Fokus ovog završnog rada jest analiza prve ne-irske drame Martina McDonagha pod nazivom *Čovjek od jasuka* kao i elementi kriminalističkog žanra koji se pojavljuju u njoj. S obzirom da je kriminalistički žanr prilično složen i nejasno definiran, naglasak prvog dijela rada biti će na opisu evolucije žanra i njegovim najznačajnijim elementima. Najznačajniji elementi kriminalističkog žanra u ovoj drami su: umetnuta priča, anticipacija i retroverzija. Ovi elementi su korišteni u svrhu stvaranja napetosti i suspensa. Međutim, zanimljivost ovog književnog djela leži u tome što drama *Čovjek od jastuka* obiluje elementima koji odstupaju od kriminalističkog žanra. Odstupanja se najbolje mogu vidjeti u subverziji arhetipskih likova kriminalističkog žanra. Štoviše, likovi u drami su tretirani drugačije od likova u kriminalističkom žanru jer nema 'fair-play' ravnoteže među njima. Svaki lik je moralno sumnjiv, a funkcije likova mijenjaju se kroz radnju drame. Na kraju, ova kombinacija kriminalističkih elemenata i njenih devijacija je nešto što čini ovu dramu jednom od najzanimljivijih djela Martina McDonagha.

Ključne riječi: Martin McDonagh, *Čovjek od jastuka*, kriminalistički žanr, naratologija, suspens, likovi kriminalističkog žanra