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If one could leave oneself, depart from self, forget oneself?¹ The rhetoric of transmedial narratology in the play *John Smith, Princess of Wales* by Tomislav Zajec

Kad bi se moglo napustiti sebe, otisnuti od sebe, zaboraviti sebe?

Retorika transmedijske naratologije u drami
John Smith, princeza od Walesa Tomislava Zajeca

Summary: The narrative turn in the social sciences and humanities has brought about the expansion of narratology to many other scientific and cultural fields. In particular, the theoretical dialogue of the 1990s and 2000s on postclassical narratology as a multidiscipline that, under the influence of new technologies, stepped beyond literary narratives into new media and narrative logic, raised the awareness that narratives in different media and different cultures did not work the same. Given this turn, this paper analyses the transmedia storytelling techniques in the drama *John Smith, Princess of Wales* (1998), their functions and effects in a broader cultural context.

Keywords: drama, transmedial narrative techniques, postclassical narratology, Tomislav Zajec

Sažetak: Narativni obrat u društvenim i humanističkim znanostima doveo je do širenja naratologije na mnoga druga znanstvena i kulturna polja. Teorijski dijalog o postklasici naratologiji, multidisciplini koja je pod utjecajem novih tehnologija tijekom 1990-ih i 2000-ih iskoračila onkraj književnih pripovijesti u nove medije i narativnu logiku,

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osvijestio je činjenicu da narativi u različitim medijima i različitim kulturama ne funkcioniraju isto. Na temelju spomenutoga obrata, ovaj rad analizira transmedijske pripovjedačke tehnike u drami *John Smith, princeza od Walesa* (1998.), njihove funkcije i učinke u širem kulturnom kontekstu.

Ključne riječi: drama, transmedijske pripovjedačke tehnike, postklasična naratologija, Tomislav Zajec

In the mid-1980s, narratology stepped outside of the privileged framework of literary theory never to return again. However, the reversal was first visible in France (Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva), but it soon became internationalized in English-speaking countries (Prince, Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan). It was particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s that the turn spread to new media studies with heterogenous directions and methodologies of postclassical narratology². The multiplication of narrative methods and fields of applicability does not contribute to an ontological definition of the concept of narratology, but it does elevate the metatheoretical discussion on narration as a transmedial phenomenon. Consequently, narrations are seen as symbolic practices with different functions in different media and cultures. Narrative functions may have diverse effects, from social and historical to cognitive and metaphysical ones, such as those researched by Monika Fludernik, David Herman, Marie-Laure Ryan, Meir Sternberg, Susan Sniader Lanser or Paul Ricoeur.

Transmedial narratology is directly linked to other directions in postclassical narratology that emphasize the performativity of multimodal nar-

² The term postclassical narratology was presented by David Herman in his *Narratologies: New Perspectives and Narrative Analysis* (1999). He expands the paradigm of classical narratology with interdisciplinarity. Even though postclassical narratology aims to illuminate theoretical blind spots, gaps, and limitations of classical narratology, this does not mean that it has not inherited its insights, views of narrative forms, and functions. In the postclassical stage, not only boundaries are tested but also the abilities of earlier structuralist models; their concepts are reshaped; applicability scopes are revalued. In terms of methodology, theoretical insights are tested that, for example, produce a variety of sub-disciplines such as narrative theory of speech acts (Pratt); psychoanalyst narrative approaches (Brooks, Chambers); deconstructing narratology (O' Neill, Gibson, Currie); feminist narratology (Lanser, Page); post-colonial narratology (Pratt, Spur, Doyle, Aldama, Hale); rhetoric narratology (Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz); cognitive narratology (Fludernik, Herman, Jahn), and other directions. On the broad range of new approaches, compare Ansgar Nünning's diagram (NÜNNING 2003: 243–244). Apart from the work of David Herman, to grasp the broader scope of narratology, the work of Slomith Rimmon-Kenan and Gerald Prince is indispensable.

rations which use different narrative platforms in producing an image of the world. Following the theses of Marie-Laure Ryan, who states that the important perspectives of transmedial narratology lie in the manner narrations are evoked, presented, communicated, and consumed (how we experienced them), three semiotic areas can be singled out: semantics, syntax, and pragmatics (compare Ryan 2005: 1–23). Semantics deals with the plot, the story; syntax studies discourse or narrative techniques; whereas pragmatics focuses on usages of narration. On the level of semantics, different media use different cognitive patterns. The discursive level in different representations of a story requires different interpretative strategies of users. Finally, cultural usage suggests a heterogenous approach to narrations. Therefore, transmedial narratology devotes attention to narrative technologies of media that form cultural experience. These approaches of extending narratological strategies and areas of their implementation, however, have also become the ground for meta-reflexive inquiry³. Besides, in the afterword of her study *Narratology*, Mieke Bal advocates for the inevitable intertwining between cultural studies and narratology. Her concept of narratology implies cultural analysis, and instead of the *worn-out* questions on whose voice this is and what it responds to, Bal suggests asking ourselves not only where the words are coming from and who is uttering them, but also what they are trying to persuade us in or talk us into; what to love, hate, what to admire, what to fight against, and what to fear (Bal 2002: 224). On the other hand, Marie-

³ The term transmedial narratology was introduced by Henry Jenkins in 2003. This relatively young discipline undoubtedly has a hybrid interdiscursive status, substantiated by the facts that there is no unified or unique theoretical school or a non-problematic definition of transmedial narratology. Even those theoreticians who attempt to offer different definitions, such as Carlos Albert Scolari, do not offer a firm ontological definition of transmedial narratology since they are aware of the fact that it is a transgressive discipline which has been addicted for years to many other concepts such as transmediality, multimodality, multiplatformity. In simple terms, transmedial narrations are told in multiple multiplied media (i.e. film, television, novel, comic strip or computer game). Each of the stories has to guarantee independent reception. This means that it is not necessary to see a film in order to enjoy a novel or a computer game based on the same template. In this sense, transmedial narratology presents a narrative structure propagated through different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.), as well as different media (cinema, comic strip, television, videogames, etc.), and it is not a mere adaptation from one medium to another. A story told in a comic strip is not the same as the one told on the TV screen or the big cinema screen since different media and languages contribute to the construction of the transmedial narrative world. In contemporary popular culture, these worlds are extremely complex exactly due to the dispersion of the textual. One of the possible definitions of transmedial narratology is Scolari's, taken from Bechmann Peterson, which implies the experience of the production of meaning and interpretative practice based on narrations that combine languages, media or platforms.

Laure Ryan closely links transmedial narratology to media studies believing that extending narratology beyond the textual brings narratology closer to beliefs, values, experiences, interpretations or meanings of acts, temporalities, causalities, and constructs of the world (compare Ryan 2003: 3).

In Croatian, even in European cultural space, it is still not common to analyze a play using the methodology of transmedial narratology. However, Alber and Fludernik point out that this very literary genre has become interesting for this type of interpretation in the last several decades (Richardson, 1988, 2001, 2007, Fludernik 2008, Nünning/Sommer 2008, Hogan 2014)⁴. Transmedial readings of a play bring out to surface the performativity of narrative techniques in the play discourse, but also the representations of the play narrator (Jahn 2001)⁵ as compared to, for example, the film narrator. Transmedial narratologists like Marie-Laure Ryan, Jörg Helbig or Werner Wolf see narrative potential not only in the dramatic text but also in other art and cultural practices such as photography, music, comic strips, ballet, videoclips or commercials. Cultural theory is obviously inundated with the *story* of the narrative: everything is an act of narration, from personal identity to national history and computer software.

This broad concept of narratology, which does not define narration primarily as a linguistic object but more as a mental image, is a fitting methodological framework for the analysis of Tomislav Zajec's debut play *John Smith, Princess of Wales*⁶. Two years after it was first published, the play premiered

⁴ Compare B. RICHARDSON: *'Time is Out of Joint': Narrative Models and the Temporality of Drama*. "Poetics Today" 1987, 8.2, pp. 299–310; B. RICHARDSON: *Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and Author's Voice on Stage*. "Comparative Drama" 1988, 22.3, pp. 193–214; B. RICHARDSON: *Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama*. "New Literary History" 2001, 32, pp. 681–694; B. RICHARDSON: *Drama and Narrative*. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Eds. David HERMAN. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 142–155; M. FLUDERNIK: *Narrative and Drama. Theorizing Narrativity*. In: "Narratologia", 12. Ed. J. PIER, Á. JOSÉ L. GARCIA. Berlin–New York, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 355–383; A. NÜNNING, R. SOMMER: *Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity: Some Further Steps Towards a Transgeneric Narratology of Drama*. "Narratologia", 12. Ed. J. PIER, Á. JOSÉ L. GARCIA. Berlin–New York, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 331–353. P.C. HOHAN: *Emplotting a Storyworld in Drama: Selection, Time, and Construal in the Discourse of Hamlet*. In: *Storyworlds across Media. Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. Eds. M.-L. RYAN, J.-N. THON. Lincoln–London, 2014, pp. 50–66.

⁵ Compare: M. JAHN: *Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a Narratology of drama*. "New Literary History" 2001, 32, pp. 659–679.

⁶ The play was published in 1998 in the tenth issued of the theatre and theory magazine T&T, and it was awarded the Dean's Prize. It has been published and performed at home and abroad and translated to numerous languages, Polish among others. The translation of the play to Polish was published in 2012 in *Kroatywni. Dramat chorwacki po 1990 roku*, vol 2, translators: M. Stanisiz and P. Karbownik, eds. K. MAJDZIK, L. MAŁCZAK,

on 1 April, 2000 at the Zagreb Youth Theatre, directed by Dražen Ferencina⁷. I start from the assumption that this text⁸ borrows narrative strategies from other media to a large extent, examining the issues of the definition, meaning, and functions of narration. To be clear, the introduction of narrative facilities of other media is not aimed at denying priority to the text, but simply to complement its multimodal narrative tone (Lanser), the way music does, for example⁹. Naturally, the narrative tone depends on the audience, but also on the circumstances and the narrative modalities and media. Here these modalities produce narrative sub-worlds, with boundaries that are indistinct since the firm oppositions between fiction and reality are often transgressed, as are those between the diegetic world of the past (in my example, the history in which Princess Diana's story happened) and the extradiegetic present (the character of John Smith as a narrator who invites us to envisage the world of Princess Diana at the present moment). These are the narrative modalities that build transgressive narrative worlds, and their mutual contamination and effects are responsible for the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic illogicality to which the dramatic actors and everyone who will experience the text as a meta-representation are equally exposed.

In Zajec's text, I naturally understand the concept of narration very broadly, having in mind the necessary role of narrative in exploring and forming the nature of identity and the wider social community (compare Utell 2016: 86)¹⁰.

A. RUTTAR, 2012, at the University of Silesia in Katowice, where a congress was held where this paper originated. In our literary science, to my knowledge, there have been papers on the aspects of intertextuality of the dramatic text (Nikčević), the relationship between popular culture and drama that the text is problematizing (Baković), and how it affects the problem of the creation of peripheral identities (Rafolt).

⁷ Starring: *John Smith* – Pjer MENIČANIN; *Patrick Bennet* – Filip NOLA, *Kathie Lee* – Ksenija MARINKOVIĆ, *Will Kronck* – Branko SUPEK. Scenography: Drago Turina; costumes: Edita Žagar; music: Matej Meštrovic; lighting: Aleksandar Čavlek.

I would like to thank Ozana Iveković from the Archives of the Zagreb Youth Theatre on providing a videotape of the play (sign. XII/2000) for the needs of this paper.

⁸ The paper analyzes the relationship between a dramatic and performance text, but neither is privileged over the other. Furthermore, the dramatic text is not seen only as the basis for the performance text; one could say that both the reading and the performance are presented as symbolic practices invoking specific cultural usages of narrations and narrative techniques.

⁹ Ryan confirms it through Kierkegaard's thesis that don Juan's desire for not dying, which he cannot renounce, is best expressed by Mozart's music (RYAN 2005: 10).

¹⁰ The digital context has provided new ways of defining the relationship between narrative and community: we share stories, we create networks and communities through stories, we collectively turn our lives into stories (UTELL 2016: 86). We can use stories to explore the nature of community and identity. Issues related to gender, race, and ethnicity can shape our storytelling practices and how we read, and awareness

John Smith, Princess of Wales examines the heterogeneous forms of narration and deliberates on the effects of combining diverse narrative worlds that may be paradoxical in nature. I believe that this problem area failed to establish itself within Croatian philology and theatre studies even after the turn towards the cultural theory examination of drama in the 1990s¹¹. Both disciplines are still distrustful about the transmedial narratological analysis of the dramatic discourse to this day, and usually fail to recognize the role of narrator in this genre. However, regardless of not having a classical narrator, a play is still definitely narrative defined by other means and construed in other ways. In this respect, I refer to the ideas of American theorist H. Porter Abbott, according to whom a play tells a story even without a classic narrator; the representation of a plot must include a story and a narrative discourse (Abbott 2009: 361). Marie-Laure Ryan also finds Abbott's definition of narrative as a representation of events or a series of events appropriate for transmedial narratology since it is media-independent. Therefore, a dramatic text is not only the words we read but also the images we see, the cultural gestures we decipher, and particularly the story we follow.

John Smith, Princess of Wales is a one-act play that brings "an event from British life in a single scene" (Zajec 2007: 31). The text portrays a car mechanic from an English suburb who is in his late 30s and indulges in an unusual pastime. The plot, however, cannot be reduced to the description of the night of 31 August 1997, when John Smith, dressed as Princess Diana, learns about her death from TV news. The layered, complex plot does not allow the reader to unravel the motivation of the dramatis personae easily and quickly and to connect them into a coherent, meaningful whole. Bearing in mind that narrative is necessarily transmedial, it is always an act of representation that encodes specific meanings. Anyone who interprets representative acts builds a mental image about them (Ryan 2005: 6). Nevertheless, a story that is repeated, as much as we may be familiar with the plot, is partly always the same yet also different. A one-act play brings events that happen to Princess Diana in the present of the plot, but they are created in reference to the well-known story of her life. Housewives,

of those issue can give us radically new ways of telling stories. Stories can be used to engage people through interactivity as digital media becomes just as important a mode of telling stories as books and film. And stories can fulfill an ethical purpose. They can demand that we exercise ethical judgement, that we view others through a lens of ethical wisdom, that we appreciate difference (UTELL 2016: 8).

¹¹ For example, in our literary and theatrical historiography, the turn of the Croatian teatrology towards cultural anthropology and ethnology is visible primarily thanks to Lada Čale Feldman's studies *Teatar u teatru u hrvatskom teatru* (1997) and *Euridikini osvrti* (2001).

public media, and cultural theory equally obsessed over Diana, and there is probably no other existence that has repeatedly been the topic of both mass media and scientific papers. Speculation on Princess Diana's past and new details about her life has not ceased until this day, 22 years after her death. Zajec's drama version of Princess Diana's story is yet another one of its turns. This is rather obvious if we take into account the stylization of the protagonist. He assumes the identity of Lady Di, whereas other indications about him are scattered in the text. Since we condemned to them, we attempt to add meaning to the *bulk cargo*, which includes the relation of the character towards communities such as family, class, and profession. John Smith belongs to lower middle class (Rafolt 2011: 38). As I have already mentioned, he lives in a cramped apartment in an English suburb, and after a hard day at work at a car shop, he combats boredom by dressing into Princess Diana. By assuming her identity, John Smith becomes a homodiegetic narrator as it were, who "doesn't always have to narrate about himself" (Grdešić 2015: 96). In fact, he narrates about Princess Diana, so the fact that he wields knowledge about the story he is retelling should not be neglected. His position is ambivalent; it is a paradoxical experience of identifying and refusing to identify with the character of the princess. The narrator/character is addicted to the previous version of the story and its necessary betrayal in its repeated performance. Both as a character and as a narrator, John Smith is stylized as someone who intimately relishes some of the infamous plots of the royal family, but he is also disheartened by what he deems as untrustworthy narratives in various media formats. The text, therefore, opens up the problem of the complexity of relationship between the character John Smith and the metacharacter Lady Di. Metamorphoses take place unexpectedly, and occasionally it is not clear who is talking and who is being talked about: the mental, physical, and emotional profile of anonymous mechanic John Smith from a British suburb or the profile of a member of the glamorous court culture and royal family, Princess Diana. Apart from that, the question is who is enjoying the narrative experience that blends the melodramatic style with its parody in one of the most media-covered stories – the rich princess or the poor worker, man or woman? This ambivalent class, gender, and economic stylization of the protagonist indicates the transgressivity of the projected identity, that is, the inability of representing it as a self-understandable and non-conflicting.

Running from reality into narrative is equally unbelievable:

If one could leave oneself, depart from self, forgot oneself, stop being a mere shadow on the old plaster façade of a suburban house, stop being just a stranger nobody recognizes in the street, nobody notices while he passes by ... If one could travel far enough so that every-

hing ceases to be important and yet close enough to avoid loneliness (Zajec 2003: 360).

Stories are not pure escapism and they are not neutral. In the text, they are presented as having real effects. Furthermore, it is not arbitrary that Zajec's drama was based on a story almost unmatched in the entire world in terms of cultural mobility, media exploitation, popular science or hard science analyses. Namely, apart from printed and other mass media such as television and the internet, the story about the life and death of Princess Di has become a very serious topic in academic handbooks and introductions to cultural and media studies. An introduction of this kind, *Media Student's Book* (Branston; Stafford 2010), tried to bring narrative theories closer to students by using exactly the story of Princess Diana, which, according to the author, functions as a classic fairytale. The life of Lady Di is melodramatically structured narrative; it portrays events with excessive pathos and emotion; the characters are exaggerated; narrative situations and plots almost incredulous. Audience around the world loved the tale of an unhappy childhood and deficient education of a common girl abandoned by her mother, who despite everything, magically transformed into a princess with a happy end. On the other hand, famous visual studies theoretician, Mirzoeff (Mirzoeff 1999: 235), read Princess Diana's admittance into the British royal family as narrative that brought the common man closer to the monarchy. Therefore, this story, and stories in general, are not in any way politically neutral.

In that sense, Zajec's artistic repetition of the story retold countless times in various media outlets is not disinterested, nor is the cultural experience it attempts to mobilize in a reader. It would be wrong to say that the magical transformation of John Smith from a middle-age, not-so-well-off British mechanic into Princess Di repeats the functioning of a fairytale. Quite the contrary; the metacharacter of Princess Diana assumed by John Smith is shaped like a person of flesh and blood, whose very existence was ruined by banal stories of her. Zajec's story deviates far from a soap opera about a princess, that is, the mass media representations that countless readers around the world have devoured.

Leaving aside the question whether the displayed identity switches are conscious or not, what has been suggested to us is that the Princess Diana story is very real in John Smith's mind. We are certain that it is equally dangerous for Princess Di and car mechanic John Smith, and that finally, we as readers have to fear it as well. In other words, the crucial question of Zajec's play is what do narratives do to us and what do they teach us? Naturally, it is possible to ask different questions, such as how the events were represented: is John Smith, a lonely representative of the English suburbia,

a killer or an anxiety-ridden Princess Di or both? Are there two narrations, two points of view? Whose is more reliable? Who should be trusted? Or who is competent for what has been narrated?

In the play, the behavior patterns of the metacharacter of Lady Di are regulated by the dominant contemporary mass-media myth of the real Princess Diana. Therefore, her intimacy and privacy are displayed in a vulgarized manner, as if she were in a reality show of sorts, where it is impossible to be yourself while you are in the limelight:

And the next morning I had an omelet of six eggs and vomited all six, and went to the charity functions, visited four hospitals, comforted the patients, kissed pink-cheeked little girls, *smiled at cameras*, laughed a little more, opened the new Harrods' and vomited in their bathroom, as their first customer, all over the marble tiles, cried leaving my prints on the mirror, then came out and shook hands with three top models, good morning Naomi, Claudia, how are you, darling, good morning Cindy, gave a speech at a charity lunch where they were collecting funds for a dog shelter chain, *cried while saying* "Animals are like people, only people who have difficulties understanding or are slightly retarded," yes I cried because I realized this was another of Charles's plots to undermine me, of course; I threw up my lunch and then arranged a visit to Pakistan with my secretary, tried to see my sons but they told me I was not to disturb them as they were with their nanny, so I went out again, again laughed at cameras and at that moment precisely I had this weird, terrifying vision, while smiling into the silent light, I lost all the clothes I was wearing that day, and it was Lacroix (perhaps that's why), I lost all my jewelry, even my wedding ring, lost my skin, my flesh, turned into a skeleton, living bones, ceased to exist, melted, vanished completely and, amazed at myself, went to the premiere of Phantom of the Opera, kissed Elton John and his faggot friend, praised the show although I had no idea what was going on the stage, then praised the show some more, went home and finally passed out (Zajec 2003: 352–353; my emphases).

The metacharacter of Princess Diana has obviously been portrayed as if it is under absolute control of the mass media, which monitor her behavior to the extent that she is unable to see her own sons whenever she wants to. She is literally withering physically and mentally *in the limelight*, commodified through the selling of her own banal daily life. This cheap story is then cloaked into an obsessive global spectacle. The mass media story literally outlines her daily life.

It is all too known that Princess Diana was one of the most photographed persons in the world. The first stage direction of the play makes it clear that photography as a medium also recounts her life¹². This is confirmed by clumsily framed photos from the “Sun” scattered around John Smith studio apartment: “photo of the wedding of Diana and Charles in St. Paul’s Cathedral; Diana as a little girl in West Sussex; Diana on a trip to Canada; the official royal photograph taken after William’s baptism; the princess with her sons, etc.” (Zajec 2007: 32). These tabloid photos are primarily stage props, which, along with the life-size cardboard cutout of Lady Di, emphasize the intrusion of visual elements in the spoken narrative. The clothes and gestures of the metacharacter of Lady Di represent the role of the media in the visual portrayal of Princess Diana’s life. Both the TV cameras and the photography cameras put a mask on her face and make her look like a dead body:

dressed in the same, two sizes too small, cheap imitation Chanel suit, with a false pearl necklace and a blonde wig. His face is grotesquely made up, not because of too much make-up, but rather because it was obviously applied in a hurry, with an inexperienced, clumsy hand. With his face mask-like, John Smith stares intensely at a point somewhere above the audience, *apparently not breathing*, time passes excruciatingly slowly, his hands rest motionless in his lap. First to move on stage is his head that turns right, then his right hand goes up as John waves to imaginary passer-by and imaginary reporters hidden somewhere in the wings left, while the black limousine drives through the streets of London towards Kensington Palace (Zajec 2003: 346–347; my emphasis).

The visual code of the plot clearly illustrates how the regurgitated image of Princess Diana in mass media (tabloids, internet, TV) hides her identity, petrifies her face, and makes her look like a cadaver for various commercial and ideological motives. The manner in which the visual and textual mass-media portrayals of the metacharacter of Diana were formed indicate the fact that the Princess’s fate was actually a media conceptualization¹³. There-

¹² Until recently, we used to retell our own lives using photographs in family photo albums, offering a slightly fairytale-tinted version of it.

¹³ “I... I... I, Diana, Princess of Wales.... the people’s princess, the princess of the heart... the mother of the future king, I... I have it all, I really have it all, all except happiness. (*He stands up. A pause.*) That’s what I read this morning in today’s *Sun*. (*Pause.*) The illiterate journalist wrote that the Queen Mother said so over her birthday cake on which they had been lighting the candles for three days and still nine of them were left unlit. It’s a lie. Like all the rest of them anyway, all stupid useless lies. That I have it all

fore, the story has performative force both in the play and in life, and that is why the metacharacter of Diana attempts suicide and suffers from bulimia, insomnia, depression, nightmares, and anxiety attacks:

And how much must one pay for what the papers wrote, that Diana seduced her husband with her charm? A tumble down the stairs? What is the price of the ruthless ridicule Camilla was subjected to at the Sunday service in the cathedral? Untreated bulimia? What's the price of the fact that nobody, I mean nobody takes Elisabeth seriously? A cut with a glass silver? One or two pukes? How much? I don't know the answer. And who could? It's all so sad. Princess Margaret once told me, "For many girls this is a dream that can never come true. And you're squandering it so senselessly, Di. Get used to the fact that your life has to resemble the cheapest vaudeville (Zajec 2003: 352).

It is clear that the representation of Princess Diana in newspaper and other mass media outlets imposes a vision of her life as the cheapest short drama. Since Zajec's play is actually a short drama, this self-reflection spot points to the fact that life is always a representation, a formal conceptualization, and that human identities are necessarily parts. The play is not only a portrayal of the life of a mechanic who believes he is a princess, but also a literal force of language that persuades the audience to assume responsibility for the interpretation of identity transformations, the meaning of utterances, and their effects. Furthermore, the format of a short one-act play witnesses to the fact that the so-called high literature today is influenced by tabloids and adapted to quick and easy *consumption*.

Along with other mass media, television is also portrayed as a performative in the play. John Smith's ex-wife Kathie Lee was watching something on TV the moment she first saw her husband dress as Lady Di. Will Kronck, John Smith's boss, turns on the TV to pull his employee and friend out of an identity crisis with a sufficient dose of TV football. The TV broadcasts news of the death of Princess Diana. In memory of Princess Diana, the TV plays the national anthem, and during the broadcast of the anthem, all characters that were previously killed come to life. Television is used as a prop, which indicated that it is, on the one hand, an inseparable segment of daily life of both real people and play characters. On the other hand, the play

except happiness is something I made up first, I said it first, which means that the Queen Mother must have read it somewhere and noted it in her diary and turned it over to the press now, for some malicious and quite unfathomable reason. And I said that ages ago, ages" (ZAJEC 2003: 347–348).

travesties TV narratives and narrative techniques such as swift changes of viewpoints, episodic melodramatic soap operas with multiplied plots or reality shows in which reality is promoted into a spectacle. The function of television in the play is to refer to the effects of fabrication it had in real life. However, when protagonist John Smith fails to believe is documentary character: "This – is not – possible. I mean, they can't be spreading such silly untruths in the media" (Zajec 2007: 57), it is as if he starts suspecting the power of media representation and forming of reality. In a very stimulating text *On television* (1996), Bourdieu interpreted television as a medium guided by the principle of selection: "the search for the sensational and the spectacular. Television calls for dramatization, in both senses of the term: it puts an event on stage, puts it in images. In doing so, it exaggerates the importance of that event, its seriousness, and its dramatic, even tragic character" (Bourdieu 2005: 276). In the tragic event, the play protagonist, in a Bourdieu manner, recognized the inevitable sensationalism as a form of *pernicious symbolic violence* of television (Bourdieu). The death of princess Diana has, apart from the drama context, been cause for TV dramatization. Her funeral was broadcast live and followed by 2.5 billion viewers worldwide. However, television narrative strategy is not alone in sensationalism; it is offered, for example, in print, in the form of crime news. The search for melodrama in mass media has in general become a form of a universal, mobile, and global narrative experience.

Kathie Lee, John Smith's ex-wife, is portrayed in the play as a reader who enjoys such a narrative experience; she does not doubt the credibility of the TV news on Princess Diana's death. Let me focus on the moment Kathie Lee interprets the murder of Patrick Bennet¹⁴, a rich man whom John-as-Diana believes to be Camilla, Prince Charles' mistress, as her former husband's unforgettable love gesture.

¹⁴ I shall briefly outline the events that had taken place prior to this. John Smith's pleasure in playing the role of Princess Diana is postponed by the doorbell, the arrival of a car shop client, Patrick Bennet, and car shop owner and John's employer, Will Kronck. Bennet clearly does not live in the suburbs. He happens to find his way there for cheaper repair services, and he ends up at a car mechanic's apartment just for compensation of damages. He had accused John Smith of scratching his pricey car with a key during repair. Although John Smith denies the accusations, Bennet would not stop accusing and insulting him. At the moment he calls him a pervert, a "creep" and a "faggot", Smith's employer and friend, Kronck, attacks the arrogant client, who storms out, threatening to come back. Coming back armed, Patrick Bennet enters the mechanic's apartment. He finds John Smith with his former wife Kathie Lee, whom the arrogant client mistakes for a man, even a transvestite; he grabs her by the hair, thinking it is a wig. The mechanic uses the moment to take his gun and kills him.

I know perfectly well that being Kathie Lee does not amount to much. Well, if you insist – a divorced woman that has rather dejectedly entered middle age, a semi-alcoholic, I don't know, did you realize that I tend to drink more than I should? But, the fact that I admit it must be worth something, mustn't it, and oh yes I must not forget, an unemployed seamstress, because I lost my job, did your mother tell you? *But Johnnie, Johnnie, at the moment you put a hole in his stomach, that sick bastard's stomach, I swear that at that moment I deeply needed everything I am and that alone was enough for me to be completely and fully satisfied*" (Zajec 2003: 374; my emphasis). [...] "I refuse to believe, not after what happened tonight, that is too late for everything. *There's something in your eyes, you may call me melodramatic or unreasonable or foolish, there's something that tells me, day in day out it is telling me not to give up, not to surrender* (Zajec 2003: 375; my emphasis).

At the moment she becomes beguiled by the sensationalist plot that adds the oh-so-desired air of melodrama to her idle life, Kathie Lee agrees to entering the fictional world of her former husband. At that moment, she obediently and willfully writes a letter to Al Fayed, Princess Diana's lover, as dictated by John Smith. Her illusion is shattered by the TV announcement of Princess Diana's death in Paris. Due to this disillusionment, Kathie Lee refuses to take part in the story, after which John Smith / Princess Diana kills her.

When it comes to Princess Diana's death, the play rewrites endless meanings of heterogenous media representations, offering its own denouement, which through narration, as Baković states, punishes some of the individuals the public usually recognizes as accomplices in the Princess's death (Baković 2012: 198). On the other hand, cultural and media studies theoreticians Gill Branston and Roy Stafford recognized that the meanings of the events oscillated from those originating on the internet (which transformed the traffic accident into a conspiracy and made jokes about Diana's reckless lifestyle that could only end in an accident while intoxicated); television (which preferred her sanctity and left flowers at the spot of the accident in Paris), and many other brought by mass media. What all these narratives have in common is the constant transfer of roles in the story. For example, Prince Charles would occasionally move from a villain to a hero, portrayed in the role of the father to Will and Harry or publicly acknowledging his relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles. The role switching in the story is ironically repeated in the play as well.

Zajec's play, although a mimetic narrative, mocks literal imitation. Since it cannot, in terms of poetics, blend into the existing practice of "in-yer-face" theatre (comp. Baković 2012: 188) nor repeat the elements of kitchen-sink

drama (comp. Rafolt 2011: 48), and since the analyzed text does not give a universal recipe of the cultural use of narratological strategies of other media that is copies and combines, I believe that the play indicates that the understanding of a variety of communication platforms, tools or media, such as television, film, radio, cellular phone, internet or online social networks, does not guarantee its correct interpretation. On the contrary, the multiplication of various fictional and metafictional frameworks and obscuring their boundaries in the play suggests that we are doomed to a faulty reading regardless of our transmedia literacy. Combining and permutating at time irreconcilable narrative logics with heterogenous functions in the play confirm the inability to approach the story presented in a unique manner.

It is implied that the theatrical version of the story by Dražen Ferencina changes to some extent the uses of language and thus the communication with the play. I shall stress it again: both the theatrical staging and the dramatic text as meta-representations construct different mental processes. They both do it through language, but through other media as well. Staging is a theatrical representation of the dramatic text, even though it repeats it. Ryan believes that the theater does it primarily using the bodies of the actors, costumes, and props (Ryan 2005: 16). The brilliant gestures and facial expressions of actor Pjer Meničanin visually represent the body language of Princess Diana that has been seen on TV or tabloid photos on countless occasions. Since the play is based on the spatial, temporal, and kinetic abilities of the medium, the story of John Smith / Princess Diana is presented with different visual and auditive stimuli than those in the dramatic text. This is why the theatrical version puts greater emphasis on the invisible boundary between the dialogues between the protagonist and other characters and the monologues. Due to the specificity of the theatrical monologue, the speech act seems compulsive. The nature of the theatrical monologue enabled, on the one hand, the *perceptible* separation (using the tone and timbre of voice) of the speech of metacharacter Princess Diana from the speech of character John Smith, whereas on the other hand, it allowed for a strong embodiment of their identity overlap.

John Smith: Oh, it's perfectly all right. I forgive you, although this was the night from hell. In fact, one of those nights when you feel that it's not only your life that you're living, that there's someone else breathing under your skin, if you know what I mean, dear Horace (Zajec 2003: 380).

Therefore, a sort of an identity turmoil in the play is convincingly presented using a narrative technique that to some extent resembles the film technique of the direct speech of the character's mind (Chatman 1978: 202).

This speech is formed as a neurotic, unbearable need to repeat words, gestures, and moves that materialize the otherness of the protagonist.

When it comes to the use of musical narrative in the play, it should be noted that the British national anthem is placed at the beginning and the end as the framework of the plot¹⁵. Bearing in mind the development of the anthem or the hymn, which was originally a song of praise or invocation of the gods, one has to ask what is being emphasized with this narrative framework. We have to also be aware of the fact that the British national anthem is the oldest, titled *God, Save the King (or Queen)*. In Zajec's version of the story, however, the queen is killed, and the text ends with the sentence: "Well... fuck it. The Queen's to blame for everything". At the end, the anthem is performed by a chorus, which is deemed a paratextual element in more recent teatrology handbooks (Rafolt 2009: 409). Therefore, it is not directly involved in the world of the play, but rather exists beyond it¹⁶. The established musical sub-narrative worlds are not only a figure of irony but also a new metafictional level where unexpected turns of events do not have to be justified. So, if the anthem and the patriotic tunes ironically invoke a spectacular and glamorous court culture and life in Kensington Palace and its protocols, it is also ironically mirrored in the English suburbia, the shabby studio apartment of John Smith at house number 12 in a street significantly named *Coalminer's Street*. As a non-drama instance, the chorus is also a system that does not subordinate itself to the world of drama in a dramatic text, whereas on stage it becomes a play within a play. During the final chorus performance, as if in a category that is temporally unrelated to drama, the dead characters of Patrick Bennet / metacharacter of Queen Elizabeth and Kathie Lee / metacharacter of Camilla Parker come to life¹⁷. This separate constructed narrative world is both in the play and outside of it. At the metafictional level, we are offered a different denouement, in which character Patrick Bennet and his metacharacter Queen Elizabeth and Kathie Lee and her metacharacter Camilla Parker are not dead. This para-

¹⁵ The play begins with the British national anthem performed by a small brass band, which the main protagonist hears from the street; it ends with the anthem played on TV, joined in performance by a chorus of boys.

¹⁶ For example, during Diana's reception at the White House in the play, a chorus of boys in white shirts murmur *Greensleeves* by Ralph V. Williams at the bottom of the stage, followed by Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory*. The first celebrated pastoral English landscapes, whereas the other is a representative patriotic tune.

¹⁷ This part in the drama was similarly interpreted by Rafolt: "The final scene of the symbolic resurrection of the characters accompanied by the sound of the British national anthem and Diana's *in memoriam*, is located in an isolated space both in terms of composition and semantics; furthermore, it is laid out using exclusively non-dramatic means, as a sort of a metafictional window in a dramatic text" (RAFOLT 2011: 45).

framework, marked with the simultaneous chorus performance of the British national anthem and its broadcast on the TV, annuls the previous events and we are left to wonder whether they even happened.

If the chorus was given the role of a commentator, I do not recognize it as a singular guideline for the interpretation of the staged play or the dramatic text. A reader of viewer expecting to receive unambiguous instructions for use of the staged play or the drama text is placed in an awkward position. It is primarily due to the fact that he cannot be a disinterested silent witness to the events but has to delve into the decoding of numerous representative narrative worlds with the bitter awareness that the unmistakable truth about them is unreadable.

Apart from the previously mentioned musical compositions, *Greensleeves* by Ralph V. Williams and Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory*, narrative parts of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and the wedding march (only in the performance part) are also *stitched* into the text. At first, they may seem as analepses that bring to life former episodes from the life of Princess Diana (i.e. the ballet as Princess Diana's childhood dream to become a ballerina). However, the dance is not particularly burlesque nor lyrical as musical stories in films. One could say that they function as a parody of contemporary myths, with one of the more *exhausted* ones being Diana's life story, which we all know too well, whether we want it or not. Relying on our previous knowledge of the myth, musical narrative episodes have a different role; they question the melodramatic, mobilizing, sensationalist, moving, international, functional aspects of themselves. For example, Marie-Laure Ryan emphasized that we as viewers find it easier to cry during the musical episodes in a film than while reading a literary text. Even if we deem this thesis unconvincing, we shall agree that in a dramatic text, where music that should follow monologues and dialogues is announced only in stage directions, it finds it harder to produce our emotional or melodramatic reaction than in a theater play. Naturally, according to Ryan, the conventions of the theater media and other dramatic arts such as film or dance are mimetic narrations, which condition the specific use of musical parts. I hereby do not wish to establish dichotomies in the relation between a dramatic text and a theater staging or favor the text or the staging; I simply wish to warn that the media dictate a different use of narrative, just as different cultures suggest their different interpretations.

In contemporary culture, whether we call it late capitalist or the *too long; didn't read* culture, the audience is, I believe, primarily trained for consumerism. And is there a more fitting story for it than the life of Princess Di, which has been regurgitated so many times in the most heterogeneous of media; from mass media (TV, internet) to magazines, from photography to the obscurest tabloids. Her story entered the daily life of people and became an

all-too-known narrative. However, in Zajec's performance, repeated narrativization does not give us what we already know about the *worn-out tale*; what is pushed to the forefront is the effect of media-heterogenous narrative methods on *dramatis personae* and on us as actors in the material reality (which is theatricalized and shaped by the media).

Apart from the narrative techniques borrowed from other media, the play displays narrative techniques from computer games as well. Protagonist John Smith assumes the position of a player who *unpacks* the story of avatar / Princess Diana in real time. In other words, the fictional framework of a computer game is very real for meta-protagonist Princess Diana. John Smith manipulates Diana as a sort of an avatar and creates his own story through actions that do not have to be logical or causal, and it is not important who the opponent is (Patrick / Queen Elizabeth, Kathie Lee / Camilla, or Will / secretary Horace). The dramatic text employs gaming narrative techniques: the ceremonial holding of the avatar, its ritualized movement, the formation of identity through role-playing. Akin to the narrative technique of a computer game, John Smith acts like a player, who, once drawn in by the narrative scenario, usually forgets whether he is fighting terrorists, evil aliens, or whether he is a terrorist himself. Of course, this again opens up the question of the effect of the narrative techniques. Are they mere amusement or fun, a means to release built-up energy after returning from work, after which the user, in this case John Smith, "takes a gulp of beer and burps" (Zajec 2007: 62)? What addictions to stories do they produce, and do they satisfy the constant need for new fictional worlds? Or are they simply an act of exposing the capitalist corporate society in which players are granted only limited access, in specific parts of the narrative world, and allow to act only at a certain level. Computer games give us access to narrative worlds, but our abilities in creating the game are limited. Besides, John Smith does not control Princess Diana; it is as if it is done by a computer software, made unavailable to him and intended to save time playing the game:

Well, if we take it in an orderly fashion, yes, of course, it's quite clear what things will be like tomorrow, quite clear, because, you see, I'll first have breakfast, that's right, and then I'll pop into my car, wave to the paparazzi because they will certainly be hiding in the bushes, sitting in the back of the car I'll sign four letters, three greeting cards and five personal telegrams, visit the zoo, and cry over the dying panda, give a little speech against China because it says so on my agenda, only to have the press attack me immediately and to realize that this was yet another piece of sabotage by Charles's agents ...*I'm again behind in my daily duties* but I'll pull myself together and read a speech about the need to ban landmines, although it will be the

wrong one again, after which kind Mrs. Chirac will tell me to lie down a bit because I'm obviously unwell, *but I won't have time*, I'll hop into my car again and whiz over... (Zajec 2003: 380–381; my emphases).

If we see John Smith as a user of the game, and if we see the game as a sphere in the field of culture which connects rhetoric, metaphor, myth, and cult on multiple levels, he is both the audience and the consumer, but also the subject who uses the existing stories about Princess Diana to create new content.

I do not see the new content at all in deviating from the allegedly classic textual narrations, but in the critical distance in coming to terms with heterogeneous stories and its political and ethical repercussions. Day by day, we all crave various mass-media narratives on the one hand, but their cultural overconsumption benumbs us. By denying reality mediated by breaking TV news, John Smith embodies an audience confronting established meanings, ones the civilized eye is accustomed to. The dramatic text in that sense is not a mere reflection of the culture we live in, in which we are all inundated with media representations, but a critical review of the reflexive and auto-reflexive poverty we all consume and deplete.

The rhetoric of Zajec's play confirms that narration is always transmedial. The play draws within, but it also travesties narrative techniques of heterogeneous media. The meanings and effects of these narratives may change as a consequence of a change in the audience. As stated in the introduction, Marie-Laure Ryan defines their functions in reference to what the stories entice, how they are represented, why they are mediated, and what cultural experience they produce. The dramatic text of *John Smith, Princess of Wales* forsakes final answers, but it problematizes the form, the nature, and the effects of narration and combining media-heterogeneous narrations. This seamless blending of narrative registers and codes points to the multidirectional rhetoric of the play. It produces a hybrid and contradictory cultural experience – on the one hand, romanticized pleasure in repeating a story and playing with its different modalities, and on the other hand, frustration due to the inability to escape semiotic, technological, and cultural limitations of discursive and non-discursive narrations that are not politically nor ethically neutral.

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