

## THE ROLE OF CLOTHING IN THE PRE-BOURGEOIS AMBIENCE OF KERSNIK'S NOVELS

Ana Perović  
ana.peroviceva@gmail.com  
University of Maribor, Slovenia



### ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the analysis of women's and men's clothing appearances in the pre-bourgeois ambience of Kersnik's novels. Particular clothing items and clothing appearances indicate the presence of specific spiritual and social characteristics, typical for the cultural and historical environment in which the two literary works were created. The methodological approach of the analysis in terms of theory is based on general semiotic theory (Eco, Lotman), cultural semiotics (Barthes), literary theory and literary history, Lotman's symbol theory, clothing culture, discourse analysis and Bourdieu's theory of habitus. The article discusses separately the clothing appearances of male and female characters. The descriptions of clothing appearances reveal the socio-historical background of the literary works as well as many other abstract categories such as characters' mental states, their ideologies, political beliefs, positive and negative character attributes as well as their moral virtues and vices. Clothes as part of the pre-bourgeois habitus try to establish a balance between the urban and the rural, between prestige and humility, between refinement and coarseness. Irony is often a result of the contrast between the physical determinants and the associate variable, i.e. the clothing. The author uses a range of various clothing appearances to characterize and mock different classes of people; the trivial conversations about fashion denote the banality of social life; the differences between the "true" bourgeoisie and those who strive to reach and fit into that social class are already strongly indicated in the descriptions of their external appearances.

**Key words:** Janko Kersnik, habitus, bourgeoisie, semiotic theory, cultural semiotics, clothing culture.

An analysis of the roles of clothing or clothing appearances in literary texts (in the novels of the Slovene writer Janko Kersnik, 1852-1897) requires knowledge of an accurate definition (denotative meaning) of clothing items, which includes a thorough knowledge of their purpose and morphological characteristics; studying a certain clothing item from the historical and sociological perspective of a specific period; examining the author's personal relationship to clothing (if relevant sources are available or if we can generalize the habits of the social middle class representatives on the basis of the writer's social class or if this is important for the analysis and deepens it); studying the motif-thematic connections in which the clothing appears; studying clothing as a literary "symbol"<sup>30</sup>; observing how the traditional symbolism of clothing preserves, modifies or

<sup>30</sup> Clothing is a part of the external, visible image of a person, while the personality is something that cannot be perceived with sense organs. If clothing as a symbol unites visible with invisible, then it mostly signals the physical, spiritual nature of an individual or of the society. Moreover, the same is claimed by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant (1993) in the *Slovar simbolov* (en. *Dictionary of Symbols*) (p. 392).

entirely changes; examining clothing items as a part of the literary character's description; discovering clothing or clothing appearance as means of characterization which can grow into an irony and satire and helps to draw caricatures. The main question is which items appear most frequently and what are the reasons for their frequent appearance. The analysis of clothing from the cultural-sociologic point of view and within the time and place in which the literary work was created is as expected much easier than fitting the same appearances within literary-theoretical categories which can be more complex, preclusive and most certainly less plastic than historical sources, which enable the study of the visual material and therefore give us an authentic image of fashion in a particular period. When analysing Kersnik's novels we rely especially on historical data (on the clothing culture of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) as well as on the motif-thematic units of the literary work. The contents will be structurally divided in the study of clothing appearance of male and of female characters.

Clothing itself expresses its own symbolism. In Kersnik's novels, we expect to encounter inherent symbolism which according to Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman is a part of "collective memory" and which subconsciously influences our understanding of the world. Y. M. Lotman (2006) believes the symbol existed long before and independently of the literary text. The writer "revives the symbol from the depth of the cultural memory" and gives it new extensions by interweaving it into the text (p. 161). This means that "the symbol is a mediator between the synchronicity of the text and the cultural memory" and can enter unexpected connections which influence its primary essence, the one "from the depth of the cultural memory", and unexpectedly and in an innovative way change the literary text (p. 169)<sup>31</sup>.

Our prediction is that clothes will not assume the roles of literary symbols, as J. Kersnik was oriented towards realistic matters, towards realism, and has therefore used the narrative techniques and features characteristic for realistic prose in which strong symbols are unlikely to be found (perhaps the only exception is the symbol of "cyclamen" in the novel *Ciklamen* [1883]). The main expressive means are "description" and "dialogue" which are used to demonstrate the internal and external position of characters (Paternu, 1993, p. 44). Clothes appearing in texts should be considered as functional objects (more on this below with reference to Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes). Therefore it is reasonable to regard them as signs. We should, however, start by examining some main semiotic theories, for instance Barthes' and Eco's semiotics. The line between clothing as a symbol and clothing as a sign should be set. Every symbol is a sign, yet every sign is not a symbol. In other words: if clothing only fulfils its primary function – covering/protecting the body – than it is a sign. However, if it appears without any realistic connection to the events – it does not fulfil its primary function and its purpose cannot be explained, then it indicates a psychological or spiritual content/idea and is probably a sign with a stronger symbolic value or a literary symbol. Nevertheless, due to the fact that all clothing items have their own symbolic value, it is difficult to define a strong system which would be fit to categorise every single occurrence in every single situation. The general symbolism of clothing, however, does not influence its primary function and does not necessarily mean that clothing functions as a literary symbol in the text. For instance, the wedding dress is a traditional symbol. In Romanticism, it was

<sup>31</sup> All translations in this article are made by the author.

white<sup>32</sup> and it symbolized the bride's virginity (O'Hara, 1994, p. 188). The writer could also use the wedding dress as a traditional (religious) symbol to show the virginity and purity of a female character. The symbolism would definitely be understood, the reader would easily recognize it, as he "has learned" its meaning through experience – however, the dress would not function as a literary symbol. In any case, Elza's wedding dress (in Kersnik's novel *Ciklamen*) does not function as one but it is a predictable sign in a sign system which co-creates the meaning of the traditional ceremony.

The main occupation of the French semiotician R. Barthes was the study of sign fields of privileged classes (semantic fields of clothing, food, furniture, architecture). One of his most comprehensive studies is his work *The Fashion System* which discusses the language of fashion magazines and examines the ways in which clothing items are described/introduced in fashion publications. He understands clothing culture as a language composed of codes, signs, and significations. The same kind of study can be made in literature. Although clothes are, according to the study, originally still treated as linguistic signs, as parts of a rhetorical system, their concrete "function" is the same as the function they have as semiotic signs (actual garment). According to R. Barthes, signs are socially constructed and they become meaningful only through shared relations people have with each other and only inside a precisely defined social and cultural context (this approach corresponds to the principles of our approach when analysing clothing items as signs in literature). Most of the phenomena from everyday life have their own pragmatic (functional/useful) functions – qualities we can identify as denotative meanings. However, they also have secondary meanings in another context. These secondary meanings, connotations, are the main point of Barthes' interest. Connotation is considered a phenomenon that an individual can decode only if he employs the overall knowledge of his environment. Connotative meanings are the products of codes which individuals can understand and respond to. Connotative markers – connotators – consist of signs of a denotative system. More denotative signs can join into one connotator. Even though connotation transforms and changes the denotative meaning, the latter does not get lost: a part of denotative meaning always remains (Barthes, 1990b, p. 201-202). Barthes' semiotics is useful for our analysis as a means to understand how the upper classes affect the lower classes with their fashionable clothing. It is obvious that every class tries to imitate those more privileged. However, R. Barthes claims that luxury items (clothing) are also means of manipulation through which the representatives of the upper classes give credence to the inferiority and powerlessness of the lower classes. Eco claims that the meaning of the sign is in its content and not in its label. The meaning of the sign is culture related. The content can also be referred to as semantic content, whereas semantic meaning can be denotative or connotative. The denotative meaning of the sememe is the content of the expression and the connotative meaning of the sememe is the content of the sign function. In other words, in a culture, the denotative meaning is a generally recognized characteristic of possible sememe

<sup>32</sup> Only one image of the Immaculate Virgin had far-reaching consequences. When the church dignitaries in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, they also restricted the selection of figurative symbols, which have for instance accompanied the medieval and renaissance Immaculate Virgin. With the new image of Maria (white dress and veil) (...) her abstractness and divinity was emphasized. This change affected the wedding dress fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gombač, 2011, p. 41).

references, while the connotative meaning of the sememe is not necessarily culturally recognized as one of the “possible meanings” (Eco, 1979, p. 84-86).

Regarding the principles of semiotic theories, the extra-textual backgrounds like the cultural atmosphere and the literary and aesthetic orientation of the author are of even bigger interest. Moreover, we have to define the conceptual network of the bourgeoisie, consider Bathes’ semiotic fashion analysis and study the clothing culture of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After his romantic literary beginnings, J. Kersnik later focused on realistic and contemporary topics. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century his attention turned to the world of the provincial intellectuals with which he was very familiar. He is one of the rare Slovene writers (at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century) who came from a very wealthy environment (he inherited an enormous property of his ancestors when he was thirty). He was born in the Brdo Castle near the village of Lukovica (central part of Slovenia) in a well-respected and intellectual Slovene family: his father was a judge and his mother an aristocrat, the granddaughter of the nobleman Burger and the co-owner of the castle and the large estate in Brdo. He studied in Vienna and Graz and later worked as a lawyer in Ljubljana and Brdo. The Slovene petit bourgeoisie is most graphically depicted in his novels *Ciklamen* (1883) and *Agitator* (1885). Both novels critically discuss the habits and customs of the new noblemen as well as their behavioural patterns (from language to gesticulation) – their ignorance, the luxury material world and their imitation of the bourgeois customs that reflect their spiritual emptiness, moral handicap, hypocrisy, conformity etc. The constantly present love relationships are hidden behind the critique of social, cultural and moral position of literary characters, which are always engaged in political goings-on on separate poles. The issues of Slovene language and of general revolt against the dominant German culture appear regularly and repeatedly (Pogačnik, 1998, p. 32). The socio-historical conditions of the period in which the novels were written were a turning point in a spiritual and political sense: the equality of all nations was demanded and the Slovene language was successfully introduced in schools and offices. Slovene towns and villages were rising together with the tendency to form a Slovene bourgeois and town culture.

It is therefore important to distinguish between the concepts of “*bourgeois characteristics, bourgeoisie*” and “*petit bourgeoisie*” as well as to define who belongs to the bourgeois class and to roughly study the background of the bourgeois culture in Slovenia, the development of which differed from that of the bourgeois structures in the wider European area. The development of this class with all its specifics has also affected literature. *Bourgeois characteristics* principally refer to the “culture”, to some kind of culturally formed habitus<sup>33</sup>, the joint effort of a specific philosophy and behaviour. The concept of habitus shows that the categories of intellect, opinion, the schemes of perception, the system of values etc. are products of inherent so-

<sup>33</sup> According to Pierre Bourdieu (2003), habitus is “the product of history”, which produces “individual and collective practices”. It includes all the past experiences which are present in every organism in the form of “schemes of perception, thinking and practices» (p. 93) and tries to ensure informal “correctness” and “invariability” of practices. These unwritten rules of social pattern and behaviour exceed any standardization and stem from the past and continue into the future (p. 93).

cial structures (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 60). *The bourgeois habitus* provides self-images and self-confidence which is attained through material possessions, in relation to mental values and cultural behavioural patterns. *Bourgeois* culture expresses itself through its own forms and by its own norms; however, it ascribes a double function to "the culture". It appears as a model of identity and means of distinction (Ovsec, 2006, p. 129). *Bourgeoisie* first represents a certain form, standards, already approved values, etiquette as well as the inner relation to lifestyle: what is appropriate and what is not. A *Bourgeois* is definitely a tactful person with "good manners" and definitely not just someone with banal behavioural patterns or someone using worn clichés. "The rules" in the bourgeois world consist more of considerations and constraints, of course the positive ones, than of different privileges to interfere in the life and work of other people (Ovsec, 2006, p. 131-132). *Petit bourgeoisie* is a pejorative term for various vaguely defined ways of thinking and of lifestyle (Ovsec, 2006, p. 128). R. Barthes who was particularly interested in the French bourgeoisie, its culture and behavioural patterns believes it is appalling how easily specific groups can become untouchable. Due to superficial interpersonal relations, the members of the society can be ranged into individual social classes simply on the basis of their external appearance. Clothing culture has always been very important in the bourgeois world; it was almost made to hierarchically divide different social classes (Dežman, Hudales & Jezernik, 2008, p. 171). P. Bourdieu (2002) believes that habitus tries to form "all reasonable behaviours" possible within the accepted laws of habitus and eliminates all the "weirdness" as it is not compatible with the objective circumstances referring to the concept one could sum up as "this does not suit us" (p. 95). Moreover, fashion also has its "rights" and "wrongs" which are regulated by those who have the easiest access to it.

The overall diversity of Slovene regions in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was reflected in clothes and clothing models. In rural areas the changes were slower than in bigger towns and cities. At that time, special and previously unknown events spread through the Carniola region. Cultural events were organized especially for the bourgeois and the town upper class. Adherents gathered in local cultural centres and shared patriotic ideas. The most enthusiastic were the bourgeois which were of different origin. After all, the ones from towns or villages had the required conditions to be more sophisticated in maintaining their bourgeois lifestyle considering their property and accessibility of culture than the less wealthy workers from bigger towns. The unwritten social laws dictated the fashion. If someone became rich or married upward and therefore acquired new social status, he was allowed to change his clothing style. The bourgeois followed trends from Vienna and Prague while the dressmakers copied foreign fashion magazines. The rich ladies mostly gave their worn-out dresses to their maids and cooks, who either wore the dresses themselves or took them home to the countryside. Well preserved noble dresses were luxuries, however, and when worn by lower class women were not supposed to appear noticeable or "noble" (Dežman, Hudales & Jezernik, 2008, p. 173-174). After the study and on the basis of the theories mentioned, we can analyse and classify the discussed phenomena. Then we can define the functions of the analysed clothing elements within the literary work.



## CLOTHING APPEARANCES OF MALE LITERARY CHARACTERS

J. Kersnik (1993) uses a wide range of different clothing appearances to sarcastically characterize various groups of people attending the wedding of the local nobleman: "(...) the gentlemen all carried big bunches of flowers and were dressed in all sorts of clothes, as is the custom on such occasions here, in these small towns and villages: next to the latest tailcoat you could see a worn-out black overcoat worn with a red spotted shirt; and because the road was all muddy, the court clerk was wearing high boots and of course white gloves" (p. 102). The social structure at the time when the novel was written was exactly as described by J. Kersnik: the social stratification of the Slovenian society had begun.

In Kersnik's novels, the social group corresponding to the clerical class seems to be the most preoccupied with its clothing appearance. The author made use of the clothing culture and the attitudes of this group towards clothing to create a petit bourgeois ambience which is already introduced in the first chapter of the book. The conversation about clothes reveals a strong desire of belonging and a tendency to instantly conform to social conventions. The conversation between two average people about the upcoming local and in many aspects modest social event (which is presented as a splendid affair of grand importance) functions as a clever introduction into the spiritual and material simplicity of the provincial petit bourgeoisie (Paternu, 1993, p. 42).

Belonging to the upper class in terms of education and wealth is for an insignificant clerk, Josip Megla (Mist), unreachable. However, the clerk, whose insignificance is already indicated by his name, found a way to satisfy the primary human need – "the need for social support" which can be achieved by faithful amendment to the dress code. Clothes also enabled him to feel superior to the socially equal secretary Andrej Koren (Carrot) when he borrowed his black elegant trousers. The preparations for the township gathering take up almost the entire first chapter; in it, the court clerk is presented, the social background of the narrative is revealed and the further developments are announced.

J. Megla is nervous that his husky voice will let him down during his singing performance. But the appearance of his outfit and shoes somewhat calms him down: brand new dance shoes, a new "virgin" black overcoat, a pair of buttery yellow gloves, a white, stiff collar, and a tall black top hat with an unusually wide brim. The described clothing appearance actually corresponds to the prescribed dress code for the bourgeois gentlemen; however, the dress code awareness was not fully and also not equally developed among the people of this small town. This gives a good insight into the social structure of the population which in its essence was of peasant origin and extremely heterogeneous in economic terms and in terms of education. A hat in its basic symbolic meaning is associated with eminence and grandiosity. Top hats gave the impression of nobility and were mandatory clothing items worn at formal events to which eminent guests were invited. The fashion of bourgeois top hats allowed wealthy farmers living in the vicinity of towns to imitate the style of the city gentlemen (Žagar, 2004, p. 117-118).

Megla's extravagant (forced and ludicrous) character is also displayed through the choice of his hat which personifies a slight exaggeration as it was unusually broad

brimmed. A. Koren is surprised that J. Megla plans to attend the party with a top hat which brings us to a conclusion that this was not something people were accustomed to at the time. J. Megla is dissatisfied with his shoes which he has had made (together with the top hat) in the city, in this case in Ljubljana, as was the practice of the bourgeoisie. The dissatisfaction and the exaggerated disapproval show Megla's need to receive confirmation for his fashion knowledge. J. Megla reveals his almost obvious extravagant and swaggering nature: the exaggerated shape of his shoes (in his opinion the shoes are too pointed) indicates that he wants to be noticed and that he actually "likes the shoes his shoemaker has made". A. Koren confirms that such shoes are very fashionable at the moment which is, however, simply a courteous remark. The chatter about the shoes soon becomes wearying and the purpose of Megla's chatter unclear. It seems that he wants to justify his vanity and to show off his new shoes at the same time. He also pretends that his shoes are too big. The reason for that is not clear as having small feet is a female "virtue" and definitely not something men desire. The narrator suggests that Megla's shoes were actually too small rather than too big.

However, no pain no gain is a well-known proverb and perhaps J. Megla only wanted to give the impression that the prestigious shoes fit perfectly and are not unusual at all. He is going to wear the shoes with great comfort as one would expect from a well-behaved gentleman. Unintentionally, the Cinderella story comes to our minds. Only Cinderella's feet were gracious enough to fit in those elegant shoes; her crude step-sisters could not put the shoes on no matter how hard they tried. Indeed, Megla's personality does seem slightly feminine as well as a bit unstable. According to the psychology of fashion, people who do not have enough courage or imagination to stand out on their own, follow the set rules and guidelines of fashion. Extremely boring people are the most devoted followers of the fashion rules. They simply cannot and do not know how to function in society independently and on their own. The description of the shoes confirms this mediocrity which is verified by his attitude towards clothes: average looking, not very educated and clumsy. Trivial conversations about fashion stereotypically include only women but in Kersnik's novels such conversations involve men and contain a great deal of cynicism and mockery. These meanderings with "no core, no witty grain", as the narrator puts it, imitate the superficial relations of the petit bourgeoisie.

The clumsiness mentioned previously is also evident in the way Megla wears his noble suit. He metaphorically does not fit into his shoes; likewise, his suit does not quite fit as his tailcoat flaps ridiculously around his skinny body. Comic elements are expressed through his physical defects which are accentuated by clothes that emphasize the clumsiness of a peasant man wearing a bourgeois (albeit new) tailcoat. Neither does the highly valued top hat "make the man" as it is pushed quite low onto his ears rather than to sit upon his head. The contradictory elements of the famous proverb "clothes make the man" function humorously and escalate into a mild irony. The tax clerk is a completely irrelevant and unrespectable person in the story. The opening scene vividly depicts the mentality and the simplicity of the Borje clerical class as J. Megla and A. Koren spend the same amount of time and words to discuss the educational content of the event in the community cultural centre they are helping to organize as they do on deciding what to wear for the event.

The structure of the town population is certainly not homogenous which is clear from Koren's request addressed to the tax clerk towards the end of the first chapter. A. Koren wants to borrow a pair of black trousers from him because his are already worn-out. He also adds that his gloves are still in quite good condition although nobody actually cares about them. With regards to Megla's previous swaggering, the latter remark could be doubtful. Soon, however, we realize that the remark is sincere and genuine. The majority of the guests attending such cultural events did not really care for white gloves (eating greasy chicken wings, which were the key part of these evening gatherings, was extremely difficult with white gloves). A. Koren borrows Megla's trousers, though "a bit ripped", for every formal event which indicates a low, pre-bourgeois level of the appropriate dress code. The people, not having much experience with the world outside their small towns, were not prepared for the "bourgeois" events. Megla's "vindictive" behaviour when arguing with A. Koren is also quite comical as he immediately demands his trousers back. Truly, Megla's only weapon are his clothes.

Although the novel *Agitator* is an independent novel, J. Kersnik kept the majority of his main characters and a few secondary ones from his previous works. A. Koren, an unsuccessful student and a junior clerk, is a secondary character in Kersnik's novel *Ciklamen*; in this novel he becomes one of the main characters. He obtains a serious social role - he is an attorney candidate working for Dr Hrast (Oak) - which is also reflected in his attitude: "He was almost thirty now /.../ his long hair was combed back and gave the impression of seriousness /.../ His outfit was elegant now, as it is appropriate for an attorney candidate" (Kersnik, 1997, p. 12).

The district judge Majaron (Marjoram), one of the most prominent persons in town, is a true rebel in terms of his choice of clothes. He does not meet the criteria of being appropriately dressed; he breaches the dress code and his wife is frequently embarrassed on his account. He is aware of that but he remains true to himself. Despite all that, his character is anything but positive since his actions are politically and opportunistically motivated. His casual outfit which he wears to a formal "elegant" event shows he is nothing like J. Megla. His character is somewhat provocative, relaxed and self-confident; he is not one of the misty grey people that blend with the crowd; his personality is colourful. Indeed, he also proves to be provocative when communicating with others. At the renowned event, this colourful and provocative judge can be seen wearing a thick hunting coat and high boots reaching over his knees. Although casual and relaxed, this clothing appearance fits the judge perfectly.

Even though the narrator is not ironic or critical towards his wardrobe - we might even get the feeling of a tacit approval - his wife strongly disapproves of his "coarseness": "You could have left your pipe at home! And you could have worn your black overcoat! And these boots! Are you not ashamed?" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 18). The judge pays no attention to his wife's remarks and this attitude precisely mirrors his personality. Thus, the judge's political conformity (vividly expressed on the occasion of the event at the cultural centre) is not presented through his clothing appearance. His hunting outfit at the classy event (as it was considered) certainly indicates his peasant roots. Cankar's philistines, clearly originating from Kersnik's petit bourgeoisie, show the political conformity of their characters through their clothes and



appearance; i.e. through a faithful imitation of the bourgeois dress code. In terms of their clothing, Kersnik's characters are less obvious and predictable, especially less stereotypical. Exaggeration is one of Kersnik's strong writing tools but it is not elaborated and perfected to the extent that one would anticipate it. The judge does not conform (at least not in terms of his choice of clothes); for the occasion of the next important public exposure, he wears the same outfit as he did for the previous one: high boots and a hunting overcoat.

Anton Meden (Honey), a Borje nobleman, is one of the wealthiest residents of the town. He is dressed fairly elegantly; according to the narrator, his clothes were carefully chosen. He obviously likes gold, as his watch hangs on a thick golden chain and he wears several gold rings on both hands. He is the only man wearing jewellery which stresses his material wealth and power. The writer paid special attention to the character's physical appearance too (a thick neck), which together with his choice of clothes creates a number of significant semantic indicators. Meden is a stout man with peasant roots. Money can buy splendour and fame but it cannot buy taste: "This man inherited from his father, a peasant rich man, nothing more than money; and never in his life did he care for what the educated people call tact; for it is also something that a man must inherit!" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 53). Sarcasm, mockery and ridicule grow from the contrast between the physical determinants (body) and the variable that is determined by money, i.e. clothes. The grotesque and rough dissimilarity creates a feeling of false superiority and roughness of his character (Paternu, 1993, p. 42).

His carefully cultivated appearance is especially accentuated when A. Meden visits the Bole family to discuss and arrange the marriage. This provides an insight into the emerging bourgeois class and their awareness of what comes with money, reputation and opportunity. The effort to achieve the tact, as J. Kersnik calls it, is perhaps most evident here: "He was dressed in the most elegant manner; a tailcoat, white collar, a top hat and gloves, all brand new". In *Agitator*, Meden's arrogance escalates. He is awaiting his guests wearing a tailcoat, yellow gloves and a tall, silk crush hat. His thick neck does not fit into his tight, stiff collar, which emphasizes his coarse ruggedness. J. Kersnik refers to the wedding splendour and Meden's nice and elegant clothes as "glowing arrogance and peasant bragging" (Kersnik, 1997, p. 35). In recent centuries, overweight and obesity in literary works of the western world are not only associated only with the traditional abundance but also with greed. It is no coincidence that here both characteristics are emphasized with a clothing item that is too tight. In *Ciklamen*, A. Meden manages to hide his thick neck with a beard, in *Agitator*, however, he reveals all his lavishness. Likewise, he reveals and even strengthens his fondness for the Germanisation of the Slovene culture and society.

Kersnik's clever description of Meden's wedding guests reveals that the dress code criteria were only fulfilled to a certain extent: "(...) many guests were invited to the wedding, as many as he had acquaintances; but only as long as they owned a long overcoat" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 101). He could not, however, avoid inviting his relatives who clearly revealed his peasant roots: "Nearly all of his relatives were peasants; he did not allow them to attend the religious ceremony in the church" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 102).

Other upper-class residents of the town are described as elegant and neat. Although Dr Hrast originated from a family of peasants, he was familiar with the adequate code of conduct and the appropriate dress code. "A man dressed in black, holding a pair of white gloves in one hand and a collapsed crush hat in the other", as described by the author, complied with all of the rules of the social dress code: black suit (trousers, a tailcoat or a long overcoat) and white gloves (though a new variety of buttery yellow gloves was emerging). In addition to that, he also wore a top hat, more precisely a crush hat, a collapsible top hat with a wire frame and coated with fabric. The description of Dr Hrast's clothing appearance expresses his successfulness in terms of professional career and material prosperity. Dr Hrast wants to be perceived as a reliable and firm man; he complies with social conventions with great ease and almost automatically.

As expected, J. Kersnik did not pay much attention to the clothing appearance of the peasant population, except when describing the guests attending Meden's wedding. At the wedding, the court clerk wears high boots and white gloves which reveal his complete lack of sense of aesthetics and good manners. This absurd image leads to the conclusion that the majority of the town residents did not actually know when and how to wear white gloves or what their essential purpose is. The same holds true for other bourgeois items and notions, be it a lecture on astronomy (*Agitator*) or a prestigious alcoholic beverage. People wore white gloves because they thought they ought to wear them. They did not wear them for personal reasons or on the account of the acquired sense of the abovementioned "tact". It was mere imitation that drove them to put them on; with their gloves on, they fit into what was considered a privileged middle class.

Another fashionable clothing item distinctive of aristocracy and prosperity appears in the novel *Agitator*, i.e. fur. However, the presence of this item is strongly connected to the season the story is set in, i.e. winter.

Kersnik's petit bourgeois gentleman is the predecessor of the famous Cankar's philistines who were portrayed and described so meticulously that they developed into a type.

J. Kersnik describes principally the clothing appearances of the (petit) bourgeois gentlemen. There is no detailed description of the peasant clothing appearance. The clothing items that are most frequently presented are shoes, trousers, hats, jewellery and other fashion accessories such as gloves. These items denote the social stratification (according to financial and intellectual capacities), the petit bourgeois underdevelopment and the entrapment in trivial social conventions the literary characters cannot cope with. Clothes indicate the character's social status and their descriptions change according to their movement up or down the social scale. J. Kersnik often uses these descriptions to differentiate between various members of the same social class, where the financial criterion is not as relevant as the character's spiritual virtues or intellectual properties. The differentiations between and within classes function as comical, whereas the external deviations from conventions indicate personal characteristic of individual characters (conformity, though unsuccessful, represents a lack of person's true self on one hand, and arbitrariness and rigidity of beliefs on the other). The differentiation of clothing appearances within a class reveals that

members of the same class do not share the same values (patriotism, open-mindedness). As a result, the author separates businessmen from the intellectual élite. Clothes and clothing items that are too tight, too small or that do not fit mostly appear in comical scenes and function as travesty or mild irony; combined with physical anomalies (excessive over- or underweight, disproportional body) these elements appear extremely grotesque. In contraposition to the elite event, which at its core focuses on appropriate clothing, these elements emphasize the underdevelopment of the bourgeois habitus in the Slovene territories of that particular time period.

## CLOTHING APPEARANCES OF FEMALE LITERARY CHARACTERS

Different clothing appearances characterize women who differ in class, financial capabilities or personal characteristics. The social determinants of male characters can be shrewdly observed at Meden's wedding but they are so obvious in female characters: "The female guests were quite diverse as well. The district governor's wife and Mrs Bole were dressed according to the latest fashion from »Bazar« and they were the centre of attention when they alighted from the carriage, dragging a good part of the silk dress with lace trim along the ground. The pharmacist's wife was looking at them with envy, for she wore a skirt made of a special »tibet« fabric with no train" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 102).

The modern era has brought very dynamic forms of presenting fashion rules. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century new dimensions of fashion emerged. Until then it was limited to the courts but now its influence has spread into cities and towns. The town ladies browsed through the fashion magazine Bazar and searched for ideas for their new dresses which they had had made in the city. The wealthiest ladies even had their own dressmakers.

Mrs Bole is the fashion icon and - considering her husband's wealth and at least until Elza's wedding - most probably also the wealthiest lady in the small town of Borje. As soon as a new lady appears in town, Elza, the teacher of the Bole children, the focus shifts to her. Elza is a German governess and is actually the only person (apart from Milica who appears in *Agitator*) whose bourgeois origin is explicitly expressed. Her bourgeois habitus triggers "something" that overshadows all the luxury and glamour of Mrs Bole's wardrobe: "Mrs Bole and the governess were the centre of attention; everything revolved around them. Tonight Mrs Bole wore a beautiful and exquisite dress; but despite her simple dress it was Elza who was the best dancer on the dance floor" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 49).

The social system dictated the simplicity of clothes, which means that it prohibited the lower classes (which included teachers of bourgeois children, even if they were from bourgeois families) from wearing the clothes that were worn by the upper classes. Elza's uniqueness and foreignness was reflected in her attitude which despite her simple clothes was full of dignity and grace: "Tonight she was even more splendid, despite her simple clothes/.../" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 33). Marrying a nobleman facilitates her climb up the social scale; in accordance with her newly gained status, her clothing appearance changes which is already evident at the wedding where she wears a skirt made of brocade. The bystanders sarcastically mention

that she could never have afforded such a skirt on her own. Similarly, the townspeople keep a close eye on the barmaid Ančka (*Jara gospoda*, 1893) who marries the judge Andrej Vrbanoj. Everyone paying enough attention notice that she wears her new hat "just as it is supposed to be worn", leaving envious girls surprised over how educated she became and disappointed because of it at the same time.

Vicious tongues of the petit bourgeoisie even found an evil remark inside the semantic field of clothing - the expression "to wear the trousers" which refers to Elza's modest prenuptial financial situation; it is elaborated in a very humorous way: "I say, she is going to wear the trousers in the family, (...) but trousers without pockets" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 102).

Elza also climbs the social scale in the novel *Agitator* where her outfit ultimately exposes the luxurious new life she has acquired. Her dress made of heavy grey brocade, ornamented with fresh flowers, is tasteful but nonetheless modest. Elza possesses a special kind of sophistication, an elaborate refinement which is quite different from Mrs Bole's. Elza decorated her dress with fresh flowers and not with lace or precious stones. She has an exceptional sense of aesthetics which she had discovered early in her childhood. Subtle hints expressed through Elza's clothing appearance give us an understanding that she is different in many ways.

Another female character that plays a significant role in the novel *Ciklamen* is a Czech woman named Katinka. Her clothing appearance is the second most frequently described (Elza's being the most frequent) but tells us little of her personality and focuses rather on her ungrateful marriage with an elderly, terminally ill man, whom, considering Katinka's clothes, the author buried long before he actually died. Katinka is mainly dressed in dark colours, namely in black. Her character is not entirely perfected, its traits are poorly drawn, without any unique characteristic, and the same can be said about her clothing appearance which indicates only that this young woman is sad and worried about her ill husband. His fatal illness robbed her of her youth and optimism; her life turned colourless. She doubts the sincerity of her love for her fatally ill husband and she feels guilty. That is why she always wears black which in a way also consoles her guilty conscience. Moreover, the black colour could also be understood as an indication of death; the reader knows in advance Katinka is going to become a widow.

Another one of the already known characters the novel *Agitator* presents is Milica, the eldest daughter of the Bole family and a former student of Mrs Elza. Milica is now an adult woman who during her study abroad acquired the necessary manners and developed a good taste in clothing. The "young and slender woman" wearing "a long coat trimmed with fur" and a cloak "made of silk in light yellow" enchanted the promising attorney candidate A. Koren.

An indispensable fashion accessory which is a necessity for all prominent ladies of the town is a fan. It is probably the most absurd and the least functional object of all of the accessories. It is used for swagger and flirting; at the ball fans even end up as toys in the hands of men who patiently wait at the tables for their dancing partners.

A valuable source of information disclosed in the novel *Ciklamen* is the description of women's clothing from the men's point of view, which confirms the characters' relations to their clothing appearances as described above. When the arrogant Megla mentions how beautiful the wife of the newcomer Mr Ilovski is ("And how

beautiful his wife is!" shouts Megla from the other end of the table; "she changes her clothes three times a day" [Kersnik, 1993, p. 63]), judge Majaron, indifferent to dress codes and extremely pragmatic, answers in his style: "That is not enough for beauty!" (Kersnik, 1993, p. 63).

J. Kersnik does not pay much attention to peasant women. The only woman from the lower class mentioned in more detail is the blacksmith Barba who was quite offended by and disappointed with the housekeeper of Mrs Ilovska for not giving her a worn-out bourgeois dress. J. Kersnik focuses on bourgeois women and the habitus determinant which dictates the taste in fashion, compares Slavic bourgeois women with a German woman and asserts that Slavic women are always a few steps behind. The narrator also comments on the clothing appearances with which he directs the reader's attention and influences his evaluation. A great deal of attention is paid to prestigious fabrics (only female characters), such as silk, brocade and tulle; dresses are decorated with lace and flowers. Women's clothes create femininity, depict social hierarchy and emphasize the life abroad, which are all determinants for a perfected and sophisticated bourgeois tact.

## CONCLUSION

The pre-bourgeois or rural-petit bourgeois social, spiritual and moral environment of Kersnik's novels places the reader in the position of an observer and of a moral and ethical arbiter of the interpersonal relations and of the relations to Slovene identity and Slovene heritage by demonstrating the role of wealth and social class (e.g. money and culture, capitalistic ambitions of the nouveaux riches, social climbing); the problem of the Slovene ethnic existence (language and culture); the political discord (party conflicts, pre-election battles, desire for power); the relations between genders (love entanglements, traditional roles of men and women in society and family); the stereotypes and prejudices (often in connection to bipolar relations urban - rural, central - marginal, domestic - foreign, known - unknown, educated - uneducated, wealthy - poor). Clothing and clothing appearances reflect numerous things and have the function of labelling and exemplifying the abovementioned phenomena. This article places the clothing signals of the (pre-)bourgeois elements connected to the abovementioned interpersonal relations, general human errors and universal comic (sometimes ironic) situations, in the bourgeois or town apartment or in the social cultural events within the small town environment. The discrepancy between what the characters wish to be accepted as reality (polished appearance) and the "naked" truth is the primary determinant of the comical and ironical vision of the limited topos and it occurs with male characters only. We believe that clothes are like "the second skin" or a reflection of an individual (on conscious and unconscious level) and of his social class. Moreover, they are powerful tools that the writer uses for characterization which through the creation of a range of social and sociological relations give an authentic and valuable image of the most general social phenomena which are broader than mere fashion whims. The novels *Ciklamen* and *Agitator* are space novels: they contain explicit components of time and society which are also reflected in the clothing appearances of the literary characters.



## REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. (1990a). *The fashion system*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barthes, R. (1990b). *Retorika Starih, Elementi semiologije* [The Old Rhetoric, Elements of semiology]. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- Bourdieu, P., Chartier, R., Ginzburg C. (2011). *Sociologija, zgodovina, književnost* [Sociology, history, literature]. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- Chevalier, J., & Gheerbrandt A. (1993). *Slovar simbolov* [Dictionary of Symbols]. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.
- Dežman, J., Hudales, J., & Jezernik, B. (Eds.).(2008). *Slovensko meščanstvo: od vzpona nacije do nacionalizacije (1848-1948)* [The Slovene bourgeoisie: from the rise of the nation to the nationalization (1848-1948)]. Celovec: Mohorjeva družba.
- Dorfles, G. (1997). *Moda* [Fashion]. Zagreb: Golden marketing.
- Eco, U. (1979). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1999). *Šest sprehodov skozi pripovedne zgodbe* [From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation]. Ljubljana: Labirinti.
- Eco, U. (2005). *O literaturi* [On literature]. Ljubljana: Učila.
- Gombač, M. (2011). »Modni pêle mêle« slovenske družbe v obdobju med svetovnim vojnama [»Fashion pêle mêle« of the Slovene society in the era between the World Wars]. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino.
- Kersnik, J. (1993). *Ciklamen* [Cyclamen]. Ljubljana: Karantanija.
- Kersnik, J. (1997). *Agitator* [Agitator]. Murska Sobota: Karantanija.
- Lotman, M. J. (2006). *Znotraj mislečih svetov: človek – tekst – semiosfera – zgodovina* [Universe of the Mind: human-text-semiosphere-history]. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- O'Hara, G. (1994). *Enciklopedija mode: 1840–1990* [The encyclopaedia of fashion: 1840-1990]. Ljubljana: DZS.
- Ovsec, D. (2006). *Nekaj o razvoju in pomenu meščanstva* [Something on the development and importance of the bourgeoisie]. In: I. Novak Popov (Ed.), *Mesto in meščani v slovenskem jeziku, literaturi in kulturi* [The city and the bourgeoisie in Slovene language, literature and culture] (pp. 124-134). Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete.
- Paternu, B. (1993). *Razpotja slovenske proze* [The crossroads of the Slovene prose]. Novo mesto: Dolenjska založba.
- Pogačnik, J. (1998). *Kersnikova »Jara gospoda« kot model slovenskega realizma* [Kersnik's »Jara gospoda« as an example model of Slovene realism]. In: J. Zoltan (Ed.), *Janko Kersnik in njegov čas* [Janko Kersnik and his era] (pp. 29-33). Ljubljana: Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.
- Vidmar, J. (1976). *O Ivanu Cankarju* [On Ivan Cankar]. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.
- Zdravec, F. (1991). *Cankarjeva ironija* [Cankar's irony]. Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete.
- Žagar, J. (2004). *Pokrivala: zbirka Slovenskega etnografskega muzeja* [Headwear: the collection of the Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia]. Ljubljana: Slovenski etnografski muzej.