

- There is one thing I want to add (just, like).
- This is very expensive (to be honest, seems, quite).
- That is impossible (actually, would, difficult).

It is important to process information and verbally express implicit logical operations through reacting, adding, combining facts, emphasizing, indicating the person/people, their possessions, opinions, attitudes, emphasizing, selecting, focusing on the topic. One of the most frequent and typical reactions is that to the partner's failure, hesitation or uncertainty. Extraversion, positive thinking and emotional balance as some of the most valuable qualities of a successful intercultural communicator may be explicitly displayed in the form of encouragement. When a person sets out on a challenging endeavour, it is commendable to say, sometimes to yourself, «You/I can do it», «You/I will learn how to do it», «If you/I fail I'll get up, learn and move on», or «You/I'll seek help» [2].

Thoughtfully selected case studies are a great tool of teaching diplomatic and politically correct language. During all the stages – introduction of the incident, analysis of the situation, activating vocabulary and ideas, research and study of additional materials, group discussion, finding and formulating the solution, comparing it to the real outcome – students are exposed to authentic texts, videos, recordings, they are given leeway to analyse and look for more details, they collaborate with mates to find out the solution. While presenting their ideas, they use different strategies to convince the audience. Hopefully, they practice diplomatic language as well.

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CULTURAL CONTRASTS AND CULTURAL DISPLACEMENTS IN THE FICTION OF BOBBIE ANN MASON

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Bobbie Ann Mason is an American writer who was born in 1940 in Kentucky and whose collection “Shiloh and Other Stories” (1982) won the Ernest Hemingway Foundation Award for outstanding first works of fiction. Since then Mason has published four more short story collections, five novels, non-fiction and

a book of memoirs (“Clear Springs”, 1999) that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Regardless of the critical recognition received by “Shiloh and Other Stories”, it was Mason’s novel “In Country” (1985) that brought her nationwide popularity, mainly due to its film adaptation in 1989.

Mason’s spare, laconic style and her attention to working-class characters and the drudgery of their lives have led critics to describe her works as ‘minimalist’. For example, Kathryn B. McKee defined Mason’s works as “minimalist portraits of life in a twentieth-century South, increasingly carpeted by fast food restaurants and discount chains” [1, p. 35]. However, Mason’s minimalist style is combined with strong moral and social concerns: “...despite the apparent bleakness of her views, the writer also provides readers with a moral meaning and an ethical demand that escape from the valueless universe of minimalism” [2, p. 99]. According to Mason herself, style is an important aspect of her literary aesthetics: “Creative writing is not to me primarily theme, subject, topic, region, class, or any ideas. It has more to do with feeling, imagination, suggestiveness, subtlety, complexity, richness of perception – all of which are found through fooling around with language and observations” [3]. As a result, scholars such as Candela Delgado Marín find in her works a combination of “meticulous realism, grotesque images, lyrical reveries, irony, popular culture and landscape contemplation” [4].

One of the major themes of Mason’s writings is the idea of life as a quest of learning and (self-)discovery. It’s the state of searching for identity, of being in-between identities, of undergoing a transformation of identity that fascinates her as a writer. But ordinary people who live in a consumerist and standardized society do not actively concern themselves with the issue of self-definition, so Mason’s narrative strategy is to place her characters in particular, often traumatic, situations that require decision-making or reconsidering life priorities. The idea of personal development through responding to life’s various ‘zigzags’ found its metaphoric expression in the title of Mason’s 2002 collection of stories “Zigzagging Down A Wild Trail,” winner of Southern Book Award for fiction. Each of the protagonists in this collection is captured in a moment of identity crisis, when one stage of life is over and another is about to begin. Michiko Kakutani in a review of “Zigzagging Down A Wild Trail” in the New York Times notes: “Ms. Mason <...> seems to have complete access to her characters’ inner lives, channeling their hopes and dreams and fears with unassuming ease, building tension in her stories not so much through conventional plot points – though there are plenty of events like snowstorms and burglaries to speed the narratives along – but through the drama of seeing which choices her men and women will make” [5]. Mason herself in an interview described the characters in this collection as “poised for possibility” [6] thus foregrounding the idea of identity as something fluid and dynamic, shaped by changing life circumstances, shifting cultural patterns and gender roles.

In some of the stories in the collection the opportunities for self-redefinition are associated with geographical mobility and cultural displacement. Discovering the differences between “here” and “there” stimulates Mason’s characters to reflect on who they are and where they belong. For example, in the story “The Funeral Side” the protagonist Sandra returns to Kentucky for the first time in two years because her father has had a stroke. Recently Sandra has been living in Alaska with a boyfriend, Tom, and now she has to decide whether to stay in Kentucky with her aged and ailing father (her brother has a family and responsibilities of his own) or go back to Alaska. The author represents this choice not only through Sandra’s father and her boyfriend, but also through different geographical and cultural settings. Back in Kentucky Sandra finds herself thinking more and more about the unique landscape of Alaska and the joys and hardships of Alaskan life (the magic of the Northern Lights, Tom’s sled dogs). She feels that she is attached to Tom more than she realized, she actually writes “I love you” in a letter to him [7, p. 126]. “She missed Alaska. In her memory it was warm” [Ibid, p. 129]. Kentucky on the other hand, seems to her provincial, “small and tame” [Ibid, p. 117], she feels that if she stayed here “she would just keep sinking until she lost all feeling, like someone in a sensory deprivation tank” [Ibid, p. 119].

Sandra’s choice is complicated by her difficult relationship with her father. She has always hated her father’s profession (he is an undertaker, and the first floor of their house is divided into two sections: “McCain’s Furniture” and “McCain’s Funeral Home”), and she never quite forgave him for what she perceived to be his purely professional behavior during her mother’s funeral (Sandra was a teenager when her mother died). After school she quickly went to college, then got married and divorced. Now Sandra’s painful memories of the past and old feelings of resentment are brought back as her father opens up “the funeral side” of the house to give a proper burial to one of his old friends. Helping her father and seeing him perform his work makes Sandra notice how people appreciate her father’s professionalism and personal kindness, how organizing the funeral and preparing the body for burial becomes for him a way to express his love and care. Because she is more mature now, she sees her father’s business and his personality in a different light. She also learns from older relatives that some of the things she held against her father are simply not true.

Sandra’s psychological change is represented in the narrative through a series of epiphanic moments. She realizes that it takes not less, but more courage to bear with grief and routine, as her father did after his wife’s death, than go through challenges and hardships associated with journeys and adventure, as she did when she left home and later started living in Alaska: “Life seemed to her so strange, suddenly – the way people carried on, out of necessity, and with startling zest, at the worst of times. It was the stamina required by a bold adventure, a trek into the snow” [8, p. 138]. Sandra seems ready now to accept her father’s gift – the furniture made by her great-great-great-grandfather Thomas McCain, a carpenter who started both businesses. Sandra has always thought of this old furniture as

“a collection of ratty old pieces” but to her own surprise, she likes “the modern simplicity of the furniture” [Ibid, p. 137], lovingly restored by her father, an objectification of history, memory, familial connection and continuity in the story. “I want you to have it when you know where you’re going” [Ibid, p. 127], says Sandra’s father, and although at the end of the story she still doesn’t know “where she’s going,” Sandra has established a deeper emotional connection to the place and people she once neglected or even hated, including her father.

The theme of cultural contrasts and cultural stereotypes is also evident in the story “Proper Gypsies”. For Nancy, the protagonist and narrator of the story, her trip to London is a chance to forget about past disappointments and losses and to reflect upon the direction her life has taken. She is separated from her husband, she doesn’t have a job, her grown-up son is away at college and she broke up with the man she was seeing. In London, Nancy is excited by the differences between English and American cultures, although this is not her first visit to England: in 1966 she came to London with her friend Louise. Now Louise lives and works in London, and it is in her apartment that Nancy is staying while Louise is away on business.

Roaming around London, Nancy registers numerous cultural differences: the English say “starters” for “appetizers,” “bobby” for “policeman,” “telly” for “TV,” “queue” for “line,” they have another number to call the police [7, p. 165]. Remarkably, it all makes her aware of her own cultural and national identity, her Americanness: “I was so self-conscious about being an American – a wayward overseas cousin, crude and immature” [Ibid, p. 152]. That Nancy is going through an identity crisis and is looking for answers is revealed through her repetition of the phrases “I kept wondering,” “I wondered” [Ibid, p. 152] and her questions such as “Where had I been all these years? Why didn’t I know this? Did this mean I was old?” [Ibid, p. 162].

On the one hand, London seems to Nancy to be the center of everything new and exciting (“an explosion of revolutionary energy”), just like back in 1966 when she was a fan of the Beatles. On the other hand, she perceives it as a quintessence of tradition and stability that she herself needs. This psychological projection makes her notice things which confirm the stereotypes about the conservatism of the English (“I wondered if tea built character” [Ibid, p. 152] and she unquestioningly accepts Louise’s words that “England is not like the States, Nancy. It’s safe here. We don’t have all those guns” [Ibid, p. 156].

But Nancy’s cultural stereotypes shatter when once she comes back to Louise’s apartment to find that it has been broken into and burgled. She helplessly tells the policeman: “I thought London was supposed to be safe. <...> I never expected this” [Ibid, p. 157]. She is further surprised to see that the policemen, the locksmith who comes to change the door lock and even Louise on the phone all automatically assume that the burglary was performed by some Pakistanis, Hindus, blacks or gypsies. Louise doesn’t believe, though, that the burglars were the neighboring gypsies as those are “proper gypsies,” which

reminds Nancy of the American expression “a good nigger”. Nancy realizes that crime, poverty and racism exist everywhere, as well as thinking in stereotypes – something she herself has been doing all along.

The idea of cultural hybridity and diversity characteristic of the contemporary world is revealed in another episode in the story, when Nancy happens to be in Trafalgar Square in the very center of a demonstration against unemployment. “With my plastic bag of laundry, I squeezed among a bunch of punks with electric-blue and orange Mohawks. <...> I saw turbans and saris, and I heard hot, rapid Cockney and the lilt of Caribbean speech and the startled accents of tourists. <...> Although it was scary, there was something thrilling about being carried along by the crowd. <...> The scene blurred and then grew intensely clear by gradations. It was like the Magic Eye ... <...> The surprise image that jumped into the foreground was myself, transcendent. <...> It was like an illusion of safety, the myth of one’s on invincibility” [7, p. 166–167]. Amid punks, immigrants and the London poor, with their different accents, colors and smells, Nancy is both inside and outside, deeply involved and curiously detached, suspended. Such moments of suspense and transition in “Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail” echo the characters’ life situations and allow them to defamiliarize the familiar, to feel the strangeness and beauty of life and see their place in it.

The theme of cultural contrasts is prominent in Mason’s recent novel “The Girl in the Blue Beret” (2011) which was inspired by her father-in-law’s experience during WWII. An American pilot of the Allied Forces, Barney Rawlings was shot down over Belgium near the French border in January 1944. Local farmers helped him escape from the Germans and with the help of the French Resistance he made his way through occupied France to Spain and back to his base in England. Before writing the novel Bobbie Ann Mason studied her deceased father-in-law’s memoir and visited France and Poland to gather information about other American pilots and French civilians who saved them from the Nazis. She found out that between 1942 and 1944, more than three thousand British and American downed flyers successfully evaded capture with the help of ordinary citizens. Mason managed to contact and visit Michèle Moët-Agniel, whose family sheltered Barney Rawlings in Paris and whom he referred to in his memoir as “the girl in the blue beret”. She learned that Michèle and her parents had been arrested in 1944 for helping aviators. She and her mother were sent to Ravensbrück and later to a labor camp at Königsberg (now Chojna, Poland), and Michèle’s father had died at Buchenwald. After being rescued by the Red Army and spending four months in a hospital in Poland, Michèle and her mother returned to Paris.

In Mason’s novel the protagonist Marshall Stone at the age of 60 finds himself lost, without a sense of purpose: his wife died two years ago, his children have families and interests of their own, and because of his age he has to retire from his job as a commercial airline pilot. Stone decides to return to Belgium and France to track down and thank properly those who helped him escape from the

Nazis and to survive during WWII when he was an Allied aviator and his B-17 was shot over occupied Europe. This includes finding the Vallons – a family active in the French Resistance who was sheltering him from the Germans in Paris for several weeks, and specifically Annette Vallon, a teenager whose blue beret he remembered as a guiding sign in his movements through Paris.

So Stone in the novel comes into contact with the French culture twice – first during the war, by force of necessity, in the circumstances of fear and uncertainty, and later, willingly, when he rents a room in Paris and tries to bring together disorganized fragments of information and code names. In fact, Stone is searching not only for the Vallons, but for his own self. As Mason writes, “Marshall felt his own history emanate from him, as if he had been holding it condensed in a small spot inside himself” [8, p. 12].

In Paris during the war Stone became acutely conscious of his otherness, Americanness. Among Frenchmen he felt tall, awkward, out-of-place, guilty that he could not pronounce properly a few simple French words, that he held his cigarettes wrong, and that his boots left an imprint wherever he went: “USA” written backwards. His memories of the wartime Paris are dim and uncertain: “As he walked through the city now, his mind turned the noise and color into tense, quiet, bleached-out scenes, garnished with grim red-and-black flags, the swastikas cartwheeling in the breeze, ubiquitous cow-manure color of the German uniforms standing in stark relief. One afternoon after school Annette had taken him on a zigzag tour of the sights of Paris. With most of his time spent indoors, he found Paris that day fleeting and bewildering – the grand plazas, the ornate, ancient buildings, the bizarre long-necked Eiffel Tower wearing a gigantic Nazi flag like an apron. Or did he remember that flag from a photograph? He wasn’t sure” [Ibid, p. 72].

In 1980, on the other hand, Stone comes prepared (he has studied French) and he eagerly absorbs the sounds, smells and sights of France. He is fascinated by the French cuisine (“baguette”, “Tatin”, “langoustines”, “quiche Lorraine”), by the beauty and elegance of the French women, by the melodious sound of the French language, by the extravagant three-cheek kiss. Some critics suggested that Mason is too stereotypical in her description of the French culture [9], but this seems to be her strategy to represent the emotional and psychological awakening of her character, who after the war has largely remained emotionally aloof.

The image that brings together both of Marshall Stone’s exposures to the French culture (in the past and in the present) is Annette, the girl in the blue beret whom he eventually manages to find. She is a lovely middle-aged woman now, living on a farm. A former teacher, she is, like Stone, widowed and retired. Stone is astonished to learn of the incredible hardships she and her family faced as a result of their work with the Resistance. Like many American soldiers, he had little sense of the risks their hosts were taking. Just like Michèle Moët-Agniel, the real “girl in the blue beret,” Annette and her family in Mason’s novel were arrested and imprisoned in different German concentration camps. Stone too has painful

memories to share with Annette – especially of the physically and emotionally devastating passage across the Pyrenees to Spain, when some of his companions died. His feelings that he largely tried to repress, can best be described as “survivor’s guilt”.

Annette becomes a symbol of France in the novel in several ways. Her destiny is symbolic of the suffering and courage of ordinary French civilians who fought back in innumerable ways against the Occupation. She is also in a very straightforward way a symbol of the French character with its “*joi de vivre*” and artistic temperament (symbolized by her beret). No wonder a romantic feeling develops between Marshall and Annette towards the end of the novel when they set off to cross the Pyrenees with a group of hikers.

To conclude, negotiating their identity for Mason’s characters often involves sorting “through the scraps of the past, looking for the patterns of [their] quilted-together lives” [10, p. xi]”. Her short stories and novels deal with the dialectic of past and present, of pain, guilt and suffering and the regenerative force of memory, of lost hopes and promises of second chances. In this context representing geographical displacements and cultural contrasts is especially meaningful because they create a need for a sense of belonging and stimulate a quest for identity.

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INTERVIEW WITH ROGER CRAIK

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Roger Craik is Emeritus Professor of English at Kent University, Ashtabula (USA) and a well-known poet. His poetry books *I Simply Stared* (2002), *Rhinoceros in Clumber Park* (2003), *The Darkening Green* (2004), *Those Years* (2007), *Of England Still*, 2009, *Down Stranger Roads* (2014) are known in many countries of the world. Many poems are also published in the journals *The Formalist*, *Fulcrum*, *The Literary Review*, *The Atlanta Review* and *The Mississippi Review*. Craik's books *Those Years* and *Of England Still* are translated into Bulgarian and some poems are translated into Belarusian.

Roger Craik is one of the influential representatives of the contemporary literary process. His poetry is characterized by a diversity of themes, topics and problems related to human existence, cultural and historical memory and immigration. His philosophical and metaphorical mind has a strong expressive force which produces powerful, vivid, colorful and unforgettable images and creates a paradoxical reflection of reality. The description of common things includes a high degree of philosophical abstraction. The real and the imaginary, the common and the universal, facts and fantasy are combined in Craik's original works which reveal a specific atmosphere and an unusual richness of meanings. Craik's poetry has a strong emotional influence and evokes in readers responsive feelings.

L.P. Roger, in our rapidly developed globalized world creative power of a personality is becoming increasingly important. What is creativity for you? How important is it to you?