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**ESCAPISM IN MICHAEL CHABON'S NOVEL THE
AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY**

**BĒGŠANA NO REALITĀTES MAIKLA ŠABONA GRĀMATĀ
“KAVALIERA UN KLEJA BRĪNUMAINIE PIEDZĪVOJUMI”**

MASTER THESIS

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ANOTĀCIJA

Šajā darbā tiek pētīta terminu “bēgšana no realitātes” un “literatūra bēgšanai no realitātes” nozīme, un tiek parādīts, kā laika gaitā ir attīstījusies šo jēdzienu uztvere. Darba galvenā daļa ir veltīta tam, lai analizētu, vai Maikla Šabona darbs “Kavaliera un Kleja brīnumainie piedzīvojumi” var tikt kategorizēts kā literatūra bēgšanai no realitātes, izpētot dažādus bēgšanas no realitātes veidus, kas parādās šajā grāmatā, kā arī izpētot attiecības starp fantastikas literatūru un Holokausta literatūru. Darba galvenais secinājums ir tāds, ka bēgšana no realitātes ne vienmēr ir bezjēdzīga un “Kavaliera un Kleja brīnumainie piedzīvojumi” ir grāmata, kas parāda bēgšanas no realitātes transformējošo spēku, vienlaicīgi atzīstot bēgšanas no realitātes trūkumus.

Atslēgvārdi: bēgšana no realitātes, literatūra bēgšanai no realitātes, fantastikas literatūra, postmodernisms, transformācija

ABSTRACT

The present research deals with the meaning of the terms “escapism” and “escape literature” and showcases how the perception of these terms has evolved over time. The main part of the research is devoted to analyzing, whether Michael Chabon’s novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* may be categorized as escape literature, exploring different types of escapism, which are present in the novel, as well as investigating the relationship between fantastic literature and Holocaust literature. The main conclusion of the research is that escapism does not necessarily entail mindless flight from reality, and *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is a novel showcasing the power of transformative escapism, while at the same time acknowledging the drawbacks of escapism.

Key words: escapism, escape literature, fantastic literature, postmodernism, transformation

Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
1. ESCAPISM AND ESCAPE LITERATURE	8
1.1. The origins and the meaning of the term “escapism”	8
1.2. Escape literature	11
1.2.1. Escape literature and interpretative Literature.....	12
1.2.2. Escape literature and fantastic literature.....	15
1.2.3 Postmodernism	17
2. THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY – ESCAPE LITERATURE OR INTERPRETATIVE LITERATURE?.....	18
2.1. Escape literature	18
2.2. Realism and interpretative Literature	21
2.3 Fantastic literature, magic realism and the Holocaust literature	27
3. ESCAPISM IN THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY.....	39
3.1. JOE’S ESCAPISM	39
3.1.1. Physical escape	39
3.1.2. Psychological escapism	44
3.2. SAMMY’S ESCAPISM	52
3.2.1. Physical escape	52
3.2.2. Psychological escapism	56
CONCLUSIONS	61
THESES.....	63
REFERENCES	65

INTRODUCTION

Michael Chabon is an American-Jewish author, whose works are highly regarded and known for their vibrant and unusual style. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is no exception in this regard – the novel was published in 2000 and in 2001 it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. This novel is a colourful blend of several at first sight incongruous concepts: World War II and escape art, Holocaust and comic books. The novel features two Jewish cousins – European refugee Josef Kavalier and true New Yorker Sammy Clay, whose common creative effort gives birth to a legendary comic book entitled *The Escapist* after its crime-fighting protagonist. However, while the Escapist courageously fights Nazis and ends tyranny of Hitler, Joe's world comes to a crashing halt, when his efforts to save his family left behind in Europe suffer a tragic and abrupt end.

All throughout the novel, the theme of escapism is ever-present, either through the behaviour of the novel's main characters or through the embedded storyline about comic books. Accordingly, it raises serious questions regarding the ethics and the acceptability of escapism, especially in connection with such a serious theme as the Holocaust. Escapism itself is an extremely complicated notion, which is difficult to pinpoint precisely, however, most of the time in the present day society it is viewed as a negative and thus eradicable occurrence. Despite that, the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* unabashedly celebrates escapism. Therefore, it requires an in-depth investigation, to reveal the meaning and manifestations of escapism, as well as to discover different viewpoints. Since the novel features escapism, escape art, superheroes in comic books, and also mentions Houdini, it also begs a logical question, whether this is a work of escape literature.

The **goal** of the Master Thesis is to analyze different layers of escapism and different manifestations of escapism through the main characters in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

In order to achieve the research goal, the present research sets the following **objectives** for the theoretical and the empirical part:

1. To analyze the meaning that the term *escapism* encompasses and determine different possible types of escapism;
2. To investigate what constitutes escape literature, how it differs from interpretative literature and how escape literature is perceived;
3. To establish the ethics and conventions regarding the use of magic realism and fantastic mode within the work featuring the Holocaust;

4. To explore and determine whether the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* may be classified as escape literature or interpretative literature;
5. To establish, whether *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* crosses an ethical boundary by featuring the Holocaust alongside superheroes;
6. To determine the types of escapism, which are present in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* and to show how they manifest through the main characters.

In order to achieve the research objectives listed above, the present research paper combines both theoretical and empirical research methods. Theoretical methods include the examination of the main theories pertaining escapism, escape literature and interpretative literature. In addition, the major theories and views regarding the use of magic realism and fantastic mode in a work featuring Holocaust are considered. The empirical part of the present paper is then accordingly devoted to literary analysis, namely, applying the theoretical findings to analyze escapism in Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, as well as to determine, whether this novel can be classified as either escape literature or interpretative literature.

The first chapter introduces the notion of escapism, presents differing views on how escapism is perceived, and provides the main ideas regarding the classification of escapism in different types. The views of several prominent researchers in the field, such as Yi-Fu Tuan and John L. Longeway, are highlighted. The first chapter also deals with the notion of escape literature and establishes the link between the escape literature, interpretative literature and fantastic literature. In this regard, the assessment of professor Laurence Perrine is presented and analysed. Lastly, the first chapter deals with the notion of postmodernism, as it is defined by Linda Hutcheon, and this chapter also reflects on whether the postmodernism has any effect on division of literature into the escape literature and the interpretative literature.

The second chapter contains the analysis of whether the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* falls into a category of either escape literature or interpretative literature. In addition, the second chapter also deals with theoretical and practical aspects of the appropriateness of literary works that contain both the elements of the fantastic and of magic realism, as well as deals with such tragic issue as the Holocaust. After the reflection on the main theoretical views, it is determined, whether *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* has transgressed any boundaries. The theoretic works of James E. Young and Rosemary Jackson are relied upon in the second chapter. Thus, the second chapter fuses together the

theoretical analysis with empirical analysis of the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

The third chapter contains analysis of how escapism is portrayed and brought to life in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* via the two main characters – Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay. The chapter deals with the manifestations of the physical escape, as well as psychological escapism of these two characters, based on the theoretical framework provided in the first chapter.

1. ESCAPISM AND ESCAPE LITERATURE

It is first necessary to establish the meaning of the terms “escapism” and “escape literature” in order to investigate, whether these are interconnected notions and, also, to understand different types of escapism presented in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Also, an in-depth research is required in order to ascertain, whether, the fact that this novel features characters, who deal with escapism, automatically means that it may be considered as escape literature. Thus, this chapter deals with theoretical texts on the notions of “escapism” and “escape literature” and provides insight into differing views in this regard. The chapter also introduces the notion of postmodern literature and explains its impact on the division of literature into escape literature and interpretative literature.

1.1. The origins and the meaning of the term “escapism”

According to Miriam Webster dictionary, the term “escapism” encompasses the following meaning: “Habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine” (Online 1). Thus, as transpires from the cited definition, escapism is achieved either by a purely imaginative activity or by entertainment, which serves as an escape from reality. This appears to be a rather broad definition and, moreover, it is clear that the term “escapism” definitely exceeds the boundaries of literature and is applicable to other fields of entertainment as well. However, for the purpose of the present thesis the main focus will be granted to the escapism in connection with literature.

According to some sources, escapism is probably as old as the existence of mankind (Krehan, 2014:1). Nevertheless, as it turns out, the term “escapism” itself is rather recent and was created and added to the major dictionaries only circa 1930s (Heilman, 1975:439). Already in a literary magazine printed in 1936 the term “escapist” is used, when referring to “modern thinkers” who “are happy to be escapist” and to whom “reality holds no interest” (Durkan, 1936:168). Thus, even as early as 1930s escapism received a disdainful criticism.

“Escapism” stems from the much older noun “escape”. Pursuant to Miriam Webster dictionary “escape” may be either an intransitive verb defined as: “to get away (as by flight)”, “to issue from confinement” or a transitive verb, defined as: “to get free of: break away from”, “to get or stay out of the way of: avoid” (Online 1).

As transpires from the citation above, the dictionary entry on the verb “escape” does not suggest any negative connotations. Fundamentally, “to escape” means to get away from something, which is usually bad or unpleasant, or to avoid something. On the contrary, the examples provided in Miriam Webster dictionary on how this verb may be used include

“efforts to escape poverty” (Online 1). This suggests a positive meaning of the verb “to escape”.

The citation from the Miriam Webster dictionary of the terms “escapism” and “escape” does not, however, reveal the connotation that the word “escapism” carries, or the social stigma surrounding it (Young, 1976:377). Escapism has been often charged with loaded accusations. Just to name one of the many, escapism is often perceived as an activity that takes a person’s mind away from the crushing weight of everyday responsibilities, suffering and struggle, while at the same lulling a person into false belief of freedom and peace. This tranquil indulgence into escapism contributes to mind numbing and complete inertia (Osofisan, 1975:140). People, who indulge into escapism too much are then often viewed as passive and disengaged with the real world.

In our society escapism carries mainly a negative connotation, largely because it implies the incapacity to perceive the cold facts and to face the real world as it actually is (Tuan, 2000:5). When escapism is described, it is very often accompanied by the term “wishful thinking”.

Generally, according to psychologists, escapism may be either healthy or unhealthy. (Evans, 2001:75). Healthy escapism is characterized as activities that directly or even indirectly contribute to a certain level of productiveness. Unhealthy escapism, on the other hand, is an activity, which is completely counterproductive (Klein, 2012:281).

In the 21st century it is rather easy to pinpoint the main culprits of unhealthy escapism – the social and visual media that suck their users right in the artificially constructed reality and do not let go for hours. Some people may be addicted to the use of Facebook, others may be completely immersed in the world of videogames. Whereas an example of healthy escapism, according to Klein, may be going to the gym (Klein, 2012:281).

The examples of healthy and unhealthy escapism mentioned above may seem like the total opposites, which have nothing in common, yet, it is essential to understand that there exists a continuum from healthy to unhealthy escapism (Klein, 2012:281).

Most of time, when we think about what escapism actually is, we tend to focus more on the unhealthy forms of escapism, such as excessive gambling, playing videogames practically 24/7, addiction to TV shows and movies, extreme daydreaming. All these activities have in common one feature – they occupy a significant amount of time, which humans could otherwise devote to the “real” world and to solve “real” problems.

While the division of escapism into healthy and unhealthy may seem very neat and comprehensible, it unfortunately does not provide any in-depth insight into the various and complicated manifestations of the escapism. One of the authors, who has actually conducted

an extremely detail oriented and in-depth research on escapism, is John L. Longeway. In this essay *The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception* Longeway defines escapism as “the attempt to avoid awareness of aversive beliefs” (Longeway, 1990:1). Longeway does not divide escapism into healthy and unhealthy, instead, he goes much deeper and suggests classification of escapism and offers several types of escapism ranging from mild escapism to extreme escapism: self-deception and entrenched escapism (Longeway, 1990:1).

Longeway begins his essay by observing: ““Escapist” entertainment’s essential purpose is to draw us away from our everyday troubles, to help us to fantasize ourselves as more important and better than we really are. Indulgence in such entertainment helps us avoid, temporarily, unpleasant truths that we must live with, and it is this escape from unpleasant reality that gives us the terms “escapist” and “escapism”” (Longeway, 1990:1). Such escape into the world of entertainment is a rather mild form of escapism, however, there are also situations when escapism is employed not as a form of entertainment, but rather as a “defense against reality itself” (Longeway, 1990:1).

He applies the term “entrenched escapism” to “the habitual and unconditional avoidance of belief, so that reflection on it need not occur at all” (Longeway, 1990:6). Whereas self deception is characterized as a technique that may either completely change a belief, or which, more commonly, results in a habit of pretence, which may manifest so strongly, that a person may even lose the understanding of what he or she actually believes in (Longeway, 1990:6).

Further, Longeway explores the rationality of escapism and notes, that while in some cases an individual may have good pragmatic reasons for keeping out of mind unpleasant beliefs and then revisiting the belief, when the time is right, a true escapist avoids the belief even when it is necessary to consider it, thus avoiding the reality completely instead of taking a rest from the reality (Longeway, 1990:6). The latter type of true escapism, according to Longeway is impractical and irrational (Longeway, 1990:6).

Focusing only on the unhealthy or extreme forms of escapism unfortunately significantly narrows our understanding of what essentially constitutes escapism and, as it turns out, escapism is all-enveloping term, which encompasses most part of the human activity.

As Yi-Fu Tuan, cultural geographer and the author of *Escapism*, provocatively asserts, human culture in reality has much closer links with escapism and “with human tendency not to face facts than we are accustomed to believe” than with the reality (Tuan, 2000:6). He even goes further in his assertion by stating: “escapism – in its various cultural, imaginative and metaphysical forms- is an inevitable and often healthy human response to the exigencies an

limitations of our physical surroundings” (Branch, 1999:234). In essence this means, that all cultural activities involving imagination and creating something, which did not exist before, is a form of escapism. From this viewpoint it transpires that all forms of art, such as paintings, theatre, cinema, architecture and so on are enveloped by the term “escapism”. Even the “high” art is then merely a form of escapism.

Yi-Fu Tuan in the course of his work has come up with a new and escapism-based definition of what it is to be a human: “A human being is an animal who is congenitally indisposed to accept reality as it is” (Tuan, 2000:6). On the other hand, John L. Longeway has stated in his essay *The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception* that “we are not designed to be escapist” (Longeway, 1990:17). Thus, this is an interesting collision of opinion between two prominent thinkers and experts in this field, and it duly illustrates the lack of consensus, whether humans are essentially escapist and whether we can practise escapism in a long term.

Since it is so difficult to pinpoint exactly as to what is escapism and what constitutes it, perhaps the most fitting definition of escapism is the one crafted by Usherwood and Toyne that describes escapism as “a complex idea with many connotations, often contradictory and not always positive” (Usherwood, Toyne, 2002:34).

To sum up the foregoing, escapism is a multifaceted notion – according to some thinkers it applies to all cultural activities, whereas according to other it is limited to the entertainment field. The degrees of escapism can range from mild, to severe – such as entrenched escapism and self-deception and escapism can be either rational at times or mostly irrational, healthy or unhealthy.

1.2. Escape literature

When escapism is mentioned, it is often followed by examples of entertainment and among those examples such terms as “escape literature”, “escapist literature”, “escapist readings”, “escapist literature” often crop up (Longeway, 1990:5). For this reason it is mandatory to take a closer look at what meaning the term “escape literature” actually holds and to establish and understand the connection between escapism and escape literature.

Escape literature is presumably the type of literature, which has been berated the most by literary critics. One of the accusations, that has been thrown at the escape literature is that it “offers blind, passive enjoyment”, which essentially makes us “disengage with the real world in order to engage these comforting illusions” (Hume, 2014:80). Each time, when escape literature is compared to a more superior alternative – realism – escape literature ends up being considered as inconsequential (Hussain, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to

investigate this matter further, in order to ascertain, whether the criticism devoted to escape literature has any standing and whether there are any alternative views about the escape literature.

1.2.1. Escape literature and interpretative Literature

Traditionally two types of literary works are distinguished in literary theory: “escape literature and interpretative literature” (Walker, Newton, Strzpek, 2013:29). This distinction was first created by professor Laurence Perrine, who during the 1950s wrote several literature textbooks that were very well received and became standard works in the United States (Angell, 1960:24).

In his famous work *Story and Structure* Perrine emphasizes the polar opposition between the escape literature and interpretative literature,

Escape Literature is that written purely for entertainment-to help us pass the time agreeably. Interpretive Literature is written to broaden and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life. Escape Literature takes us away from the real world: it enables us temporarily to forgo our troubles. Interpretive Literature takes us, through the imagination, deeper into the real world: it enables us to understand our troubles. Escape Literature has as its only object pleasure. Interpretive Literature has as its object pleasure plus understanding. (Perrine, 1966:3)

According to this distinction the escape literature is defined as literature, which is meant purely for the readers’ enjoyment and, thus, while it is rather pleasant, it is also viewed as somewhat mindless and without any added value, unlike the interpretative literature, which “takes us deeper into ourselves” (Walker, Newton, Strzpek, 2013:29). Based on the definition of the escape literature cited above, it can be concluded that escape literature is one of the forms of entertainment, which enable escapism.

Although professor Laurence Perrine wrote the abovementioned influential textbooks more than half a century ago, even nowadays there are several literature textbook authors, who faithfully subscribe to his views regarding the distinction between the escape and the interpretative literature. Namely, the distinction of two types of literature is echoed in the textbook *Teaching English in the Block*, written by Dan Walker, Jeff Newton and Joe Strzpek (Walker, Newton, Strzpek, 2013:29).

Another author, whose literature textbook seems to echo the findings of Perrine, is Margaret Janice Turner. She also adds some further characteristics and insights as to how different escape and interpretative literature are. Namely, Turner defines escape literature as a work that takes our imagination out of the ordinary life, simultaneously aiming to entertain and escape reality. (Turner, 1998:29).

She further lists some of the most common elements, which feature in an average escape novel,

Characters are heroic and extraordinary; settings are exciting and appealing; conflicts demand superior ability and are overcome; themes are almost negligible but self-satisfying and ego-building; plot dominates and is dependant on surprise and suspense. (Turner, 1998:29).

Logically, interpretative literature is then described as a polar opposite,

Characters are true-to-life and not particularly heroic, settings are within our experience and are realistic, conflicts are result of human problems and endeavours, often shocking reader out of his complacency, and plot is secondary to characterization and theme, placing value on human values and understanding. (Turner, 1998:29).

The general sense created by this distinction between escape literature and interpretative literature is that escape literature is normally considered as lowbrow, and is mostly read by immature people craving easy escape into exciting fantasy world. Whereas interpretative literature tends to be viewed as highbrow and is read by intelligent readers, craving to understand more about the human condition and to find a deeper meaning of the existence.

Thus, the traditional view of literature theory rather harshly dismisses escape literature as a type of literature, which is meant for masses and which, once read, may be forgotten and put on a shelf to gather dust, since it does not carry any important messages about the human condition and thus does not require to be re-read and re-analysed. Some critics even go so far as to refer to escape literature as cesspools, in which writers often tend to fall (Osofisan, 1975:140).

Nevertheless, the simplicity of division of literature in escape literature and interpretative literature begs a question – can any given work of literature indeed be easily dismissed as escape literature or praised as interpretative literature ?

Laurence Perrine, after establishing the dichotomy between the interpretative literature and the escape literature, also hastily inserts a disclaimer to his theory: “Having established a distinction, however, we must not exaggerate or oversimplify it. Escape and interpretation are not two great bins into one or the other of which we can toss any given story.” (Perrine, 1966:3). He further suggests that interpretative literature and escape literature are two polar opposites, between which the world of fiction resides.

Perrine goes on to say that the difference between these two opposite types of literature is not even determined by such factor as presence of fantasy elements in the novel. According to him, the escape story may on surface appear as a day-to-day reality, whereas a fantasy story may contain unexpected truths (Perrine, 1966:4). Taking into account that Perrine himself has backtracked and softened the harsh distinction between escape literature and interpretative

literature, it is somewhat unlucky that even 50 years after he first published his ideas, other authors still continue to quote his theory about all literature belonging either to escape literature or interpretative literature, without stopping to mention or explain the fact that a literary work generally falls on a scale somewhere between these two polar opposites. In effect, this means that the line between the escape literature and interpretative literature is blurred and any given work of literature should be carefully analysed in order to determine, in which direction it leans more – towards the escape literature or interpretative literature.

Fortunately, in recent years several opposing views have been put forward in essays and in textbooks, which are aimed to redeem the perception of the escape literature. These authors try to offer a different perspective on the escape literature and to argue that escape literature is not only something that is silly and superfluous and which does not involve any active thinking and participation on the part of the reader.

The defenders of escape literature point out that some critics appear to dismiss or avoid the fact that escape literature does not automatically equal denying or dismissing real life issues and problems, instead, escape literature may be viewed as a complex and layered tool, which presents a more complex approach of looking at the world and at the problems existing therein (Hussain, 2014).

In this regard it is imperative to mention the paper *Readers' Advisory And Underestimated Roles Of Escapist Reading* written by Soheli Begum. In this paper she notes several important aspects of escape literature. Firstly, Begum observes the paradox, how on the one hand, escape literature disconnects readers and allows them to escape from the real world, while on the other hand allowing them to relax emotionally and at the same time to engage intellectually, hence escape literature is a tool stimulating intellect and creativity (Begum, 2011:741). Secondly, she also offers a notion, which at first may appear as oxymoronic: escape literature may be used not only to distract oneself from unpleasant or monotone everyday life circumstances, but it can also be used to actually re-establish a link with real world (Begum, 2011:743).

Soheli Begum concludes her article with several powerful statements regarding the escape literature and escapist reading. According to her the readers of escape literature do not always seek mindless indulgence, more often than not such readers also want to experience meaningful transformation (Begum, 2011:744). Begum goes on to conclude:

Even if the typical reader does not immediately realize it, by seeking escapist literature, he or she does not simply create a buffer zone between the “real” and the fictional world; more importantly, he or she fills this space with vital reflections, new perceptions and self-discovery. (Begum, 2011:744).

Readers of escape literature are not merely complacent masses that only crave comfort and illusion, instead, they may also be seeking for change and transformation (Begum, 2011:744). In essence, this means that escape literature is indeed capable of touching the readers in very profound ways, as well as able to make the readers stop and think about what they have just read and what lessons may be drawn from it.

Other authors go a step further and stipulate that escape literature at times may be even more representative of reality than other works of literary fiction (Hussain, 2014). Moreover, it must also be noted that situations may occur, where the following statement turns out to be completely true:

While literary fiction's way of dealing with reality is undisguised and unambiguous, escapist fiction takes more of a circuitous route to achieve the same. In many cases, writers opt for a more subliminal and indirect method of representing the realities of life. (Hussain, 2014)

1.2.2. Escape literature and fantastic literature

It is probably not a coincidence that Perrine mentions fantastic or fantasy literature, when he speaks about the escape literature (Perrine, 1966:4). Fantasy literature is presumably a literary genre that has come under attack for being "escapist" more often than any other genre. On the one hand, it seems as a completely logical action to assume that fantasy literature is escape literature, because it obviously takes readers on outlandish adventures outside the confines of the real everyday world and allows readers to immerse themselves into artificially created universe of the fantasy world. On the other hand, one of the most famous fantasy works to date, *The Little Prince*, created by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, however, to classify it as pure escape literature bereft of any deep meaning, would constitute a crime, since it is one of the most profound works on what it means to be human.

Already as far back as 1939, J.R.R Tolkien in his work *On Fairy Stories* defended the fantasy genre and considered that the "escape" label belittles fantasy stories and argued that it is also applied incorrectly and uncomprehendingly:

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which "Escape" is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong

word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter. (Tolkien, 1983:148)

Other authors reflect that fantasy is never too far removed from the reality, due to the fact that fantasy and reality have very complex relationship, where fantasy interprets the reality, while simultaneously expanding it (Sander, 1996:63). Thus, reality or realism is actually a foundation, upon which different layers of fantasy may be applied.

Kathryn Hume in her work *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (2014) observes that very often “fantasy literature is dismissed by certain critics as “escapist” and most escape literature is dismissed as “fantasy”” (Hume, 2014:79). This confusion of fantasy literature and escape literature needs to be sorted and, as Hume points out, escape literature and fantasy literature are two separate realms, which do sometimes overlap (Hume, 2014:79).

Kathryn Hume reinforces the idea of separating escape literature and fantastic literature by creating a distinction between the different types of escape. Namely, she introduces such concepts as mimetic escape and fantastic escape (Hume, 2014:80).

There is a crucial difference between these two types of escape. According to Hume, mimetic escape acknowledges the world around us, but at the same time it also implies that we can actually succeed within this world by beating the system either with the help of unexpected luck or through the hard work of cultivating a special talent (Hume, 2014:80). The fantastic escape, on the contrary, is not bound by any material rules of the real world; instead, author of fantastic escape literature is able to create his own value system on which to draw (Hume, 2014:80). Thus, the fantastic escape literature “does not necessarily accept man’s limits or status quo” (Hume, 2014:80).

It is, however, of crucial importance, how the departures from reality are utilised by an author – they may be either very stimulating and exciting or extremely boring and non-special (Hume, 2014:80). It all depends on the fantasy of a writer and whether he uses the fantastic elements and departures from reality just for the sake of mindless entertainment or in order to convey a deeper meaning. Hume sums up by stating that the main disadvantage of the escape literature is “neither the presence of fantastic elements, nor the lack of realism, but rather the fact that it rarely challenges us to think” (Hume, 2014:81).

Rosemary Jackson, who is one of the most renowned authorities on the subject of fantastic literature, has concluded that fantastic elements may serve as an expression of protest against the present reality (Jackson, 2008:75). Consequently, escape stories and fantastic stories can be the means of showing objection and dissatisfaction towards the existing establishment or politics.

The main conclusions that may be derived, based on Hume's and Jackson's theories, is that the presence of fantastic elements does not necessarily entail the obligation to classify any given fantastic novel as escape literature, and, moreover, a distinction needs to be made between the fantastic elements, which are presented in a novel just for the sake of it, and those fantastic elements, which carry a deeper meaning and represent a certain view and thought process of an author.

1.2.3 Postmodernism

Taking into account the fact *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* was published in the year 2000, it is thus mandatory to explore the meaning of the term "postmodernism" and what it entails in a literary work.

Linda Hutcheon is an author of *Poetics of Postmodernism*, a work, which to this day is viewed as handbook for explaining the postmodernism. At the very outset of this chapter it must be noted that pinpointing the definition of postmodernism is an extremely difficult task, and the main focus needs to be directed toward the features, which characterize the postmodern literature.

Although there are several features, which characterize postmodernism, for the purposes of the present research only one feature will be investigated. Namely, one of the main features, which characterizes postmodernism is that it breaks boundaries between the high and the low forms of art and mixes it together, at the same time ironizing both (Hutcheon, 1988:44). Thus, one of the defining features of postmodern literature is that it can mix and fuse together the high mode of literature together with what is typically considered as low mode of literature.

The fact that different modes of literature can be blended together thus significantly problematizes the division of literature into escape literature and interpretative literature. If one literary work can contain both the elements of the escape literature alongside elements of the interpretative literature, is it even possible or necessary to categorize the literary work as one or the other? A probable answer to this question would be that true postmodern literature in a way defies and challenges this classification, however, at the same time it also acknowledges the existence of high and low forms art.

2. THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY – ESCAPE LITERATURE OR INTERPRETATIVE LITERATURE?

Based on the theoretical works discussed in the first chapter, it is now necessary to analyze *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, in order to establish, what features are more prominent in this novel – those pointing toward this work being an escape literature, or those, which indemnify this novel as belonging to interpretative literature. In this regard it is also important to discuss the elements of the fantastic and of the magic realism, which are present throughout the entire novel, in order to understand, whether the use of these elements justifies the classification of this novel as escape literature, or, whether in contrast these elements promote the novel's classification as interpretative literature.

2.1. Escape literature

Based on the descriptions of the escape literature and interpretative literature provided above, an easy and hasty assumption would be to definitely classify Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* as escape literature, which is good only for entertainment and does not hold any true value in itself.

If viewed only on a surface level, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* seems to tick all the boxes of escape literature. This novel does feature characters, who are heroic and extraordinary – Joseph Kavalier indeed is handsome, athletic, performs magic tricks and overall has incredible adventures throughout his life: “He was a good-looking Jewish kid, with large blue eyes, an aquiline nose, a strong chin.” (Chabon, 2010:213). At the very outset of the novel he is introduced as a young man, who is extremely quick on his feet and who possesses a wide range of talents, that may not be within reach of every regular person. Even the way Joe manufactures a cigarette for himself and his cousin Sammy Clay, is viewed as elegant and extraordinary: “Quickly, but not without a certain showiness, Josef split open seven butts, one-handed, and tipped the resultant mass of pulpy threads into the wrinkled scrap of Zig Zag. After half a minute's work, he had manufactured them a smoke.” (Chabon, 2010:12).

Moreover, the comic book characters, such as the Escapist and Luna Moth in embedded stories, are definitely heroic and extraordinary. The Escapist, first comic book character created by Joe, is a fictional character, who keeps on saving the day in Europe, which is torn apart by the Second World War:

In his first three appearances, the Escapist along with his eccentric company had toured a thinly fictionalized Europe, in which he wowed the Razi elites of Zothenia,

Gothsylvania, Draconia, and other pseudonymous dark bastions of the Iron Chain, while secretly going about his real business of arranging jailbreaks for resistance leaders and captured British airmen, helping great scientists and thinkers out of the clutches of the evil dictator, Attila Haxoff, and freeing captives, missionaries, and prisoners of war (Chabon, 170).

Together the Escapist, Luna Moth, and other comic-book characters represent the fantastic elements in this novel. Even though they are featured only as a part of the embedded story, nevertheless, they play a prominent role in the novel. They are fruits of Joe's creative work and, as the usual superhero story goes, they were once upon a time ordinary people, who suddenly became all-powerful and decided to join the battle against everyday criminals, as well as against the evil dictators in Europe. Thus, the Escapist, Luna Moth and other superheroes introduced in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* represent the element of fantastic escape in the novel, as defined by Katherine Hume.

It is an extremely interesting twist and original take of Michael Chabon, who, within the novel about escape features embedded stories, which can be categorized as belonging to fantastic escape literature. Nevertheless, as outlined in the sub-chapter 2.3. below, these fantastic elements are not mindless and dull, instead they serve a special purpose, which will be described in more detail below.

Now, turning to the setting of the novel. The action in the novel mostly takes place in The United States of America, more precisely in New York. Some storylines also take place in Prague, Czechoslovakia, as well as in Antarctica. While one may argue that setting a novel in New York City is not a big deal, and does not allow assuming that the surroundings are unusual and stimulating, it would not be completely true in this case. New York as a setting for a novel may seem pretty mundane, however, it is very important *how* this city is represented in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. The New York that appears in the novel is a truly extraordinary place of dwelling. At times it appears as a grand stage, set up for Joe's and Sammy's adventures. Joe's and Sammy's New York is full of possibilities and chance encounters. Within a brief period of time they get to meet Salvador Dali, bump into Orson Welles, and so on. This is definitely not an experience that an ordinary New Yorker encountered every other day in the 1940s.

Also, the descriptions of Prague, which appear in the novel, render this city as exotic, stimulating and unusual. The language used by the author to depict Prague is filled with magic and wonders: "Prague had a rich tradition of illusionists and sleight-of-hand artists [...]" (Chabon, 2010:25).

Thus, the setting of the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is representative of an escape novel, taking into account that overall normal and every-day

places are by the use of language and the events taking place in them, transformed into rather exciting and completely unusual locations, where everything could become possible.

Several of the conflicts presented in the novel require superior ability. Throughout the entire story Joe pulls off a number of impressive feats. For instance, the time, when Joe together with Shannhouse flies the plane across Antarctica to kill the German scientist, is described in the novel in a very casual manner: "It was as if they had forgotten that flying unsupported and alone across one thousand miles of storm-tossed pack and glacier to shoot a lonely German scientist had been their own idea." (Chabon, 2010:451). This is only one of the examples, where a character of the novel displays the superior ability, and there are many more instances, when Joe performs some rather astounding feat.

Furthermore, the conflicts presented in the embedded stories, namely in superhero stories, most definitely require a superior ability in order to be solved. It is, essentially, the main component of the superhero stories that a superior ability is necessary in order to solve the conflict between the good and the evil and to keep the evil forces at bay.

Also, in this novel the plot dominates and exciting plot twists occur several times. The plot in this novel is exceptionally masterfully crafted. Joe goes through many amazing and life-changing events. Already within the first pages of the novel Joe has, through a complete miracle and a lucky and favourable coincidence of events, escaped the clutches on Nazi regime and travelled to New York via Lithuania, Japan and California:

““Can you tell me what you were doing in California?” said Sammy. "Or is that confidential information too?"

"I was crossing over from Japan."

"Japan!" Sammy was sick with envy. He had never gone farther on his soda-straw legs than Buffalo, never undertaken any crossing more treacherous than that of the flatulent poison-green ribbon that separated Brooklyn from Manhattan Island.” (Ibid., 6).

Thus, even within the universe of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* it is perceived as something unusual and adventurous to travel across the world in order to come to the United States of America.

The novel continues in the same manner as it starts, and the plot twists can be found in abundance in this novel. One of the main plot twists, which changes the course of the novel and forces Joe to enlist in the army, is the sudden death of his beloved brother Tommy, whom he spent months trying to save from the Nazi regime and bring to America safely.

These listed features all seem to pinpoint *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* as a true work of escape literature. Nevertheless, there are many features at work in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, which point to the contrary, as described below.

2.2. Realism and interpretative Literature

Despite the observation that the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* does indeed contain several elements, which are characteristic to escape literature, there are also several features, which belong to the realm of interpretative literature.

To begin with, the novel is set in the real world and in a historic period of time – the action takes place slightly before the Second World War and up until the 1960ies. The novel depicts such historical events as the occupation of Prague by the Nazi soldiers, the Second World War, Holocaust, Pearl Harbour, which were all of tremendous significance in the human history and which shaped the modern world. Although these events are mostly kept in the background of the novel and the characters do not experience these tragic occurrences directly first-hand, their lives, especially Joe's course of life is significantly influenced and shaped by these events.

Another significant aspect, which seems to authenticate the events of the novel, is the frequented appearance of historical figures. One of the historical figures, making an appearance in the novel is Orson Welles:

Among the magicians who haunted Louis Tannen's Magic Shop was a group of amateurs known as the Warlocks, men with more or less literary careers who met twice a month at the bar of the Edison Hotel to baffle one another with drink, tall stories, and novel deceptions. The definition of "literary" had been stretched, in Joe's case, to include work in the comic book line, and it was through his membership in the Warlocks, another of whom was the great Walter B. Gibson, biographer of Houdini and inventor of the Shadow, that Joe had come to know Orson Welles, a semiregular attendee of the Edison confabulations. Welles was also, as it turned out, a friend of Tracy Bacon, whose first work in New York had been with the Mercury Theatre, playing the role of Algernon in Welles's radio production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Between Joe and Bacon, they had managed to get four tickets to the premiere of Welles's first film. (Ibid., 354)

The cited paragraph of the novel is an excellent example of how Michael Chabon weaves together fact and fiction. Louis Tannen's Magic Shop is a real store, and it is actually the oldest magic shop in New York, which has been around since 1925, located on the 34th Street in Manhattan (Enemark, 2014). It is still open to this day and features several historical artefacts, including great Houdini's handcuffs, as well as keys used by this world-famous escape artist (Enemark, 2014). Likewise, Mercury Theatre is also a real independent company founded by Orson Welles and producer John Houseman (Rippy, 2009:25). Whereas the actor Tracy Bacon is a made-up character, whose charm and charisma make another fictional character - Sammy - fall in love with him.

To continue, the novel also contains one scene, where the world-famous eccentric surrealist painter Salvador Dali makes an extraordinary appearance – he is one of the guests in a party thrown by Rosa’s father, where Joe and Sammy get to meet this legendary artist:

The doorman had pointed Dali out to them when they came in, standing in the ballroom, just off the front hall. He was wearing a deep-sea diving costume, complete with rubberized canvas coverall and globular brass helmet. A striking woman whom Deasey identified as Gala Dali stood loyally by her husband's side in the middle of the empty room, along with two or three other people too stubborn, too sycophantic, or perhaps simply too deaf to mind the intolerable coughing hum of the large gasoline-powered air pump, to which the Master was connected by a length of rubber hose. They were all yelling at the top of their lungs. "No one at the party," as Kahn wrote in *The New Yorker*, was ill-mannered enough to ask Dali what he intended by this get-up. Most took it to be either an allusion to the tenebrous benthos of the human unconscious or else to "The Dream of Venus," which as everyone knows featured a school of live girls dressed up as mermaids swimming around half-naked in a tank. In any case Dali would not, in all likelihood, have been able to hear the question through the diving helmet. (Ibid, 232-233).

Here, in this brief paragraph, the author once again masterfully merges fact and fiction. Dali, who is a historic person, attends a fictional party thrown by a fictional character Longman Harkoon. However, some elements in this excerpt do resonate with the real life. Firstly, this paragraph features Ely Jacques Kahn, who was a writer for the *New Yorker*, starting from 1937 (Bliven, 1994).

Secondly, the allusion to the “Dream of Venus” is of some significance here, since it refers to such spectacular event as the World Fair, which took place in New York in 1939 and which, among other things, comprised Dali’s surrealist fantasy dream world. Taking into account that Dali actually designed two swimming pools, where topless sirens and mermaids were swimming about, it was rather fittingly entitled the “Dream of Venus” (Ross, 2003:98).

Thirdly, in 1936 Salvador Dali participated in the in the International Exhibition of Surrealism in London, England, where he gave a lecture dressed in the deep-sea diving suit. During the course of lecture it became clear that Dali was suffocating inside the helmet of his deep-sea diving suit, and he was saved by someone, who prised open the helmet with a billiard cue (Moorhead, 2016). An episode, which is reminiscent of this historical fact, makes an appearance in the novel:

After ascertaining that Salvador Dali was indeed beginning to turn blue, Joe opened the screwdriver blade of the knife. He jammed it into the slot on the bolt head to hold the bolt steady. Then he worked the nut. Through the wire grid of the face plate, his eyes met Dali's, abulge with terror and asphyxia. A stream of muffled Spanish rattled against the far side of the inch-thick glass. As near as Joe could tell—his Spanish was poor—Dali was calling abjectly for the intercession of the Holy Mother of God. The bolt held. Joe bit down hard on his lip and twisted until his fingers felt that they would split at the tips. There was a snap, and the nut began to protest and grow warm. Then, slowly, it

gave. Fourteen seconds later, with a loud Dom Perignon pop, Joe yanked the helmet off. (Chabon, 2010:242).

It appears that this historical episode was actually taken by Michael Chabon and transformed in such a way, as to fit the novel – London was changed to New York, year 1936 was changed to 1940, and just like that Dali's life was saved by brave and helpful protagonist of the novel Josef Kavalier. In this episode Chabon modified one other historical fact regarding this incident – instead of using a billiard cue to save Salvador Dali, Joe rescues Dali by the help of Victorinox knife given to Joe on his seventeenth birthday by his beloved brother Thomas (Ibid.).

In the context of the main events in the novel, possibly the most noteworthy is the entrance of Eleanor Roosevelt into the novel's plot. The first lady of the United States of America in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is an active participant and patroness of the movement to allow Jewish refugee children to emigrate to the United States. In the novel, it is her influence and pressure, thanks to which the Ark of Miriam is granted a permission to transport the Jewish children to America:

Longman Harkoo called the White House that afternoon and was told that the First Lady was in New York City. With some help from Joe Lash, whom he knew through his Red connections, Rosa's father managed to track down Mrs. Roosevelt, and received a brief appointment to visit her at her apartment on East Eleventh Street, not far from the Harkoo house. For fifteen minutes, over tea, Harkoo explained the predicament of the Ark of Miriam and its passengers. Mrs. Roosevelt, Rosa's father later reported, had seemed to become extremely angry, though all she said was that she would see what she could do. (Chabon, 2010: 384)

Once again, the paragraph of the novel reflects the combination of fact and fiction – a fictional character Longman Harkoo enlists the help of America's first lady Mrs. Roosevelt to bring Joe's brother Tommy to New York. Several history books, including the Pulitzer Prize winning bestseller of Doris Kearns Goodwin, indeed remark upon the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt partook in the efforts to grant the passage to America to the European refugees and she did so by pulling the strings behind the scenes (Goodwin, 2013:101). She became the honorary chair at U.S Committee for the Care of European Children, and the first goal of this organization was to make the U.S State Department to loosen the constraints for granting visas (Goodwin, 2013:99).

Unfortunately, similarly, as it was depicted in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, the efforts to bring refugee children of Jewish origin were severely impeded by the fact that for security reasons they were not granted a permit to enter the United States. According to the estimates of historians, approximately 105 000 refugees from Nazism escaped to the

United States, but sadly it is a pitifully small number compared to those, who were trying to flee and those, who were barred to enter the United States. (Goodwin, 2013:102). Eleanor Roosevelt was among those, who were sympathetic to the Jewish predicament despite the anti-Semitism reigning in the United States at that time (Goodwin, 2013:102).

Joe Lash, who is also mentioned in the cited paragraph above, is a real-life person and, according to the history books, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt (Goodwin, 2013:102). Moreover, in her history book Goodwin confirms the fact that it was indeed Joe Lash, who, during a small private dinner, brought to Mrs Roosevelt's attention the desolate and miserable situation of the European refugees (Goodwin, 2013:102). It is clear, that once again Chabon based the plot of his novel on a historically accurate fact, when he wrote how a real life person Joe Lash organised a meeting with Eleanor Roosevelt for a fictional character Longman Harkoo in order to help Jewish refugee children, including Thomas Kavalier, enter the United States of America.

Besides, the further development of events regarding the Ark of Miriam also somewhat reflects the real history of the World War II. As the story goes on in the novel, the joy granted by Eleanor Roosevelt's intervention soon turns to ashes, when the Ark of Miriam, on its way to the United States, is torpedoed by a German U-boat:

This account, it later developed, was not quite true. When, after the war, he was put on trial for this and other crimes, the commander of U-328, an intelligent and cultivated career officer named Gottfried Halse, was able to produce ample evidence and testimony to prove that, in full accordance with Admiral Donitz's "Prize Regulations," he had attacked the ship within ten miles of land—the island of Corvo in the Azores—and given ample warning to the captain of the Ark of Miriam. The evacuation had proceeded in an orderly fashion, and the transfer of all passengers to the lifeboats might have been effected safely and without incident if, immediately after the firing of the torpedoes, a storm had not appeared out of the northeast, overwhelming the boats so quickly that the crew of U-328 had no time to help. (Chabon, 2010:401).

During the World War II there were actually several tragic events, similar to the one described in the novel, where refugee ships were targeted and sunken by the submarines. One of the most tragic incidents occurred in 1942, when a Soviet submarine torpedoed and sunk the ship Struma carrying almost 800 Jewish refugees from Romania to British mandate in Palestine across the Black Sea. Out of them only one man managed to survive the ordeal. Several decades later it was discovered that the Soviet dictator Stalin had given a command to sink all neutral ships located in the Black Sea (Pitzke, 2013). This is only one example of a situation, where civilian ship was sunken in World War II, and there are other tragic stories as well. It is obvious that the disaster of Struma, as well as other ships, which were torpedoed and sunken during World War II served to Michael Chabon as the ground, on which to build the events of his novel.

Another significant instance, where the real life persons make an appearance in the novel, is when the creators of one of the most world-famous superhero – Superman – are mentioned. While the mention of Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel occurs indirectly, and they are not directly placed in the novel, like Orson Welles and Salvador Dali, nevertheless, it is an extremely respectful, as well as informative homage to the inventors of the Superman:

“Then, in June 1938, Superman appeared. He had been mailed to the offices of National Periodical Publications from Cleveland, by a couple of Jewish boys who had imbued him with the power of a hundred men, of a distant world, and of the full measure of their bespectacled adolescent hopefulness and desperation. The artist, Joe Shuster, while technically just barely apt, seemed to understand from the first that the big rectangular page of the comic book offered possibilities for pacing and composition that were mostly unavailable in the newspapers; he joined three panels vertically into one to display the full parabolic zest of one of Superman's patented skyscraper-hops (the Man of Steel could not, at this point in his career, properly fly), and he chose his angles and arranged his figures with a certain cinematic flair. The writer, Jerome Siegel, had forged, through the smelting intensity of his fanatical love and compendious knowledge of the pulps and their antecedents, a magical alloy of several previous characters and archetypes from Samson to Doc Savage, one with its own unique properties of tensility, hardness, and luster. Though he had been conceived originally as a newspaper hero, Superman was born in the pages of a comic book, where he thrived, and after this miraculous parturition, the form finally began to emerge from its transitional funk, and to articulate a purpose for itself in the marketplace of ten-cent dreams: to express the lust for power and the gaudy sartorial taste of a race of powerless people with no leave to dress themselves.” (Chabon, 2010:77).

The mention of the Superman in the context of the novel is especially significant, and the partnership of Joe and Sammy is strongly reminiscent of the partnership between the Superman creators Shuster and Siegel, who are also of Jewish origin (Lund, 2012:81). Another significant detail, which potentially served as an inspiration to Michael Chabon, is the fact that the Superman is often considered as being reminiscent of Golem – a mystic creature made of clay, who protects the Jews (Lund, 2012:81). This is known as a “Golem theory of Superman” (Lund, 2012:81).

The fact that the author Michael Chabon did indeed conduct an immense research on history and geography for this novel and that it in many instances shaped and influenced the story told by the novel, is verified in the Acknowledgments section, where Chabon included the following information:

The research for this novel was undertaken primarily at the Doheny Memorial Library at U.S.C., the U.C.L.A. College Library, the Bancroft Library at U.C. Berkeley, the McHenry Library at U.C. Santa Cruz, and the New-York Historical Society. I have tried to respect history and geography wherever doing so served my purposes as a novelist, but wherever it did not I have, cheerfully or with regret, ignored them. (Chabon, 2010:637).

Furthermore, in a very recently conducted podcast interview for *The Guardian* (2017) Michael Chabon states that in his opinion it is not very unusual that the authors turn to libraries in order to research the topic they are writing about. He continues by saying that he himself went to the New York Historical Society Library in order to get to see usual, everyday photos of New Yorkers around the 1940s, in order to get the sense of how a normal life looked like around in those times (Michael Chabon on *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* – books podcast, 2017:2'57''). Another strategy employed by Chabon is to read the works of the writers, who lived thorough a specific time in history and to note down small details, which can be found in their works. For instance, this way Chabon can get the sense of what smells and aromas floated around the New York City during that time (Michael Chabon on *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* – books podcast, 2017:6'00''). Chabon's statements during the interview indicate how important it is to him to conjure up a sense of real life in his novels.

Michael Chabon's continuous strategy of mixing "well known referential anchor points" inseparably with "fictional elements" has also been noted by Irmtraud Huber, who considers that the ontological seams between fictional projections and actual facts are made rather obvious and conspicuous in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (Huber, 2014:156).

Also, the novel itself at times is written in such a style, which may even lead the readers to believe that the events depicted in it actually occurred in reality.

The novel begins with a following statement:

In later years, holding forth to an interviewer or to an audience of aging fans at a comic book convention, Sam Clay liked to declare, apropos of his and Joe Kavalier's greatest creation, that back when he was a boy, sealed and hog-tied inside the airtight vessel known as Brooklyn, New York, he had been haunted by dreams of Harry Houdini. "To me, Clark Kent in a phone booth and Houdini in a packing crate, they were one and the same thing," he would learnedly expound at WonderCon or Angouleme or to the editor of *The Comics Journal*. (Chabon, 2010:3)

Thus, at the outset of the novel Michael Chabon already creates the atmosphere as if the events depicted in the novel are somewhat biographical and are of historical significance. Already, even before reading the rest of the novel, a reader learns that Joe and Sammy created an important work in the comic book universe and it was so significant and legendary, that even years later one of the creator's, namely, Sammy, is still being interviewed at comic book conventions. This strategy of the author sets the overall tone of the novel, which is continued in the style of semi biographical / historical realism novel, told by an omnipresent narrator, who constantly switches between the past and the present.

Overall, despite Huber's statement that the ontological seams between the fact and the fiction are rather obvious in this novel (Huber, 2014:156), it must nevertheless be pointed out that this is not always the case. As the examples of instances, where Chabon introduces historically real persons in the plot of the novel, show, the line between fact and fiction is extremely thin (e.g. the plot-line about Eleanor Roosevelt, where she indeed had a meeting with Joe Lash). Thus, this novel requires either a reader, who is well equipped with the knowledge of historical facts, or a reader, who is prepared to devote some time to an in-depth research in order to determine the point, where the historical facts slowly transform into fictional stories. However, Huber also agrees that Chabon actually tempts the readers of the novel to verify some of the historical references (Huber, 2014:157).

The overall tendency of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is to create a sense of realism, by employing and referencing various actual historical events and historical personages, at the same time slightly or at times obviously changing the events in order to fit the plot of the novel.

2.3 Fantastic literature, magic realism and the Holocaust literature

What is so notable about *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, is that this novel creates a unique universe, where both the Superman and the Holocaust exist simultaneously. To put it mildly, this is an exceptionally unusual approach to tackling such complex and horrific historical event as Holocaust, and, in this regard severely controversial views have been expressed by the critics. Also, the fantastic literature, as well as magic realism as a genre are often charged with the offense of promoting escapism and belonging to the realm of the escape literature. For these reasons it is firstly necessary to conduct an investigation, in order to verify, whether the fantastic literature and the magic realism can indeed be categorized as escape literature. Secondly, it is of paramount importance to discover, how such seemingly opposed concepts as the fantastic literature or magic realism and holocaust literature interrelate. Thirdly, it is crucial to consider *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* in light of the theoretical conclusions.

The fantastic mode in literature to an average reader suggests myths, fairy tales and science fiction, which are all improbable, and thus, not very serious. Whereas the Holocaust literature, autobiographies and historical texts are all perceived as "serious literature" (Kerman and Browning, 2014:3). This is an extremely fascinating dichotomy, and, at a first glance, it would seem impossible, that these two modes of literature could even be combined in a single novel. In this regard, Kerman asks a rhetorical question about the Holocaust and its

representation in literature: “When the real is so fantastic, what literary effects will succeed in making it credible and in helping the reader to comprehend its human meaning?” (Kerman and Browning, 2014:3).

Fantastic literature still is often perceived as whimsical, however, Rosemary Jackson’s work is aimed at redeeming the perception of the fantastic literature. Rosemary Jackson has conducted an immense research regarding the fantastic literature, and her works especially highlight the function of the fantasy genre (Kim, 2008:92). Her main argument, in the work *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* is that fantasy as a genre is essentially subversive. Fantasy is often meant as a form of protest, in order to rebel against the “real” society and also against the existing concepts and rules within such society, which are considered normal and normative (Jackson, 1981:3). It thus pushes the boundaries of the existing establishment or culture (Jackson, 1981:3). For these reasons, fantasy as a genre is of paramount standing to challenge the dominant views and to promote alternate possibilities.

As regards the magic realism, unlike the fantastic literature, which makes a reader and the characters hesitate and respond in a certain way to the fantastic elements, the magic realism does not present the magical event as “ontologically disruptive” (Adams, 2011:8). Thus, magic realism fuses the elements of the real and the fantastic in such a manner, that the magic seems to be rooted in the “laws of the universe as we know them” and is accepted by the characters within the novel’s universe (Adams, 2011:5). David Danow suggests that the magic realism and the Holocaust literature are at the opposite end of spectrum, because the magic realism portrays ultimately positive, whereas the Holocaust literature features only horrific and grotesque elements of the fantastic (Danow, 2015:9-10). According to Danow the main difference between the magic realism and the Holocaust literature lies in the fact that the former represents life, whereas the latter represents death (Danow, 2015:10). However, taking into account that the reality of the Holocaust is “incredible and inconceivable”, some scholars now tend to suggest that the extremity of the Holocaust allows the context of magic realism to be considered as appropriate mode of writing the Holocaust literature (Adams, 2011:10).

There are authors, who consider that some themes and events in human history do not warrant escape literature. For instance, the author, who refers to escape literature as to cesspools, in which writers often tend to fall, is actually making a reference to authors who employ this technique in regard to the history of slave trade and oppression of African Americans (Osofisan, 1975:140). Similar opinion has been directed toward the use of the fantastic elements in literary fiction about such sacred event in the human history as Holocaust.

Holocaust is an extremely difficult narrative to depict in any literary work. It is also one of the most canonized topics and each literary work, that does not pay the due respect to this event or treats it superficially, is met with harsh criticism. It presents a challenge for many writers and it is not always easy to find a right balance, because Holocaust raises serious questions in respect to narrative, which not many other historical events do (Langer, 1996:78). As a result, it limits the flexibility of the artistic expression (Langer, 1996:75).

There are strict rules in place, how the Holocaust must be treated in a literary fiction, as the Holocaust scholar Terrence De Pres has established. Firstly, it must be represented in its “totality, as a unique event”. Secondly, the representation of the Holocaust must be accurate reflection of the facts of this event, without any manipulations for artistic reasons. Thirdly, Holocaust must be approached as a solemn and even as a sacred event in human history, warranting no possibility to dishonour the dead (De Pres, 1988:217).

The distinguished professor James E. Young in his immense work *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* observes that many critics still view a metaphor as inefficient and even dangerous method of transmitting the facts about the Holocaust. According to those critics, Holocaust metaphors only falsify the real facts and consequently misinform the readers. However, despite all this, Young urges to recognise metaphor as a vehicle, how a reader can access the facts, instead of viewing metaphors as hostile towards the facts (Young, 1990:91).

Another important issue to consider is that if the representation of Holocaust insists on restricting imagination, it would achieve a rather paradoxical effect, where this event would be mythologized even further (Kerman and Browning, 2014:3).

All these progressive statements tentatively suggest that authors should be granted some form of freedom in how to describe Holocaust, and that the use of imagination, and even fantastic may in some instances be an appropriate vehicle of describing the indescribable reality.

Still, the above-mentioned rules foster strong restrictions on how Holocaust should be depicted in a literary work and only a few scholars support the idea of breaking away from the established mould and experimenting with metaphors and using the imagination in literary works related to the Holocaust. Despite the set boundaries on writing about Holocaust, there have naturally been authors who have tried successfully or unsuccessfully break away from the pre-determined conventions and show the world that slightly different modes of writing do not automatically render those authors as impious. It might seem that the abovementioned rules preclude depicting the Holocaust alongside such allegedly whimsical medium as comic

books, or forbids including such elements, as the fantastic and magic realism, which are traditionally perceived as promoting escapism.

When Chabon himself was asked the question, whether he hesitated about the incongruity of bringing together comic books and the Holocaust, his response was that he did not even hesitate for a moment, especially taking into account that Art Spiegelman did it first (Michael Chabon on The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay – books podcast, 2017:18’22’’).

What Chabon is referring to, is Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. The novel is based on Art Spiegelman’s interviews with his own father Vladek Spiegelman, who, together with Art’s mother Anja Spiegelman, during the World War II desperately tried to escape the clutches of Nazi regime in Poland, however, they still ended up in the Auschwitz concentration camp (Spiegelman, n.d.:11-156). What’s unusual about Art’s Spiegelman’s work, is the form in which he chose to transmit his father’s story – instead of simply writing a novel, he created a graphic novel, based on his earlier comic strips, which he created in 1971 for an Underground comic book (Witek, 2007:86).

The peculiarities do not stop at the form of Spiegelman’s work. The contents of this graphic novel are also worthy of surprise reaction and have sparked serious academic research. Namely, in Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* the Jews are depicted as mice, Germans are portrayed as cats and Poles are drawn as pigs (Spiegelman, n.d.:11-156). Even the author himself remarked in an interview: “Its the kind of project (that) when people first hear about it, they roll up their eyes and say, “This guy’s sick.”” (Johnson, 1986).

This revolutionary form of transmitting a Holocaust history, of course, did not go unnoticed and, while most reviews were full of praise, it caused a controversy, whether a graphic novel featuring animals, or as some critics put it “comic book”, is actually an appropriate medium to transmit the history of Holocaust. Also, to this day it is still unclear how to even begin to define *Maus* – is it a biographical or fictional work, is it literary work or a comic book (Pullman, 2003)?

The negative reviews centred on the use of animal characters and the use of cartoon genre and considered it a diminished and inappropriate vehicle, to carry the full weight of the Holocaust testimony (Shatzky and Taub, 1997:406). On the other hand, the positive reviews defended the use of the comic-strip format and speculated that it is an essential contribution to the Holocaust memory and that the genre of Spiegelman’s work played a significant role in the novel’s success (Shatzky and Taub, 1997:406). Overall, the use of illustrations has helped

to illustrate the ambiguities of the memory and serves as a means of transmitting an untellable story (Shatzky and Taub, 1997:406).

Generally, the publication of *Maus* is still to this day considered as innovative and ground-breaking success in transmitting the Holocaust testimony and, based on Michael Chabon's comments during an interview with the Guardian, it is one of the sources, where he drew an inspiration for his own novel. When he was writing *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, more than a decade had already passed since the publication and critical acclaim of *Maus*, therefore, the themes of Holocaust and the comic books had already been connected.

However, while *Maus* does feature anthropomorphic animals, who represent Jews, Germans, Poles and other nationalities, it is less an element of the fantastic and serves more as a metaphor. Even despite the fact that *Maus* is a graphic novel, the stories within the novel aim at depicting the historical events as close to reality as possible. Art Spiegelman does not glorify his father and, to remain honest, he portrays his father as a very difficult person to communicate with (Spiegelman, n.d.:11-156). Consequently, while *Maus* is written and drawn in the form of a comic book novel, it does not really feature the elements of the fantastic realm.

For this reason, it is essential to look further and to explore, how Michael Chabon's use of the fantastic elements in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, featuring the Holocaust, was perceived by the critics.

Naturally, it comes as no surprise that some criticism has been directed towards Michael Chabon for including fantastic elements in the same work, which also deals with the Holocaust. For instance, Alan L. Berger devotes very critical words about the use of the magic and mysticism connected to the Golem of Prague in this work. According to him "the Shoah is transformed into a metaphor and there is no distinction between the mysticism of hope and the Nazi mysticism of death" (Berger, 2010:88). Berger also cites John Podhoretz, who said: "Chabon descends into false mysticism" (Berger, 2010:88).

Berger concludes his opinion by saying that the novel "*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* generalizes the Shoah (i.e. the Holocaust), so that the Europe's murdered Jews are a nameless and anonymous group, whose memory may, or may not be for a blessing" (Berger, 2010:88).

Despite the harsh statements of the critics, in the opinion of the author of the present Master Thesis, Chabon has not, transgressed the above-mentioned boundaries listed by Terrence De Pres.

In order to verify, whether the statements of the critics have a solid ground, it is important to consider how the Holocaust is represented in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

For the most part the novel is set in the United States of America. However, Joe travelled there from Prague, which was occupied by the Nazis. When Joe left for America, the situation in Prague was gradually worsening, however, it was not yet at its worst. It is described in the novel how Kavalier family had to sell their possessions, just to get the Joe the visa and the ticket to the United States:

This very seat had cost, with the addition of departure imposts and the recent "transfer excise," precisely what Josef's mother had been able to raise from the pawning of an emerald brooch, her husband's gift to her on their tenth anniversary. (Chabon, 2010:19)

When Joe is forced to return to Prague, due to one missing stamp on his visa, he also witnesses the fact that just after his departure his family was forced to move out of their beautiful and spacious apartment:

"They moved?" he said, in the softest whisper he could manage.
"To Dlouha eleven," Thomas said, in a normal tone. "This morning."
"They moved," Josef said, unable now to raise his voice, though there was no one to hear them, no one to alert or disturb.
"It's a vile place. The Katzes are vile people."
"The Katzes?" There were cousins of his mother, for whom she had never cared much, who went by this name. "Viktor and Renata?" (Chabon, 2010:56)

During his return to Prague, Joe has some sort of a premonition about the fate of Jews in Prague:

Josef felt a bloom of dread in his belly, and all at once he was certain that it was not going to matter one iota how his father and the others behaved. Orderly or chaotic, well inventoried and civil or jumbled and squabbling, the Jews of Prague were dust on the boots of the Germans, to be whisked off with an indiscriminate broom. Stoicism and an eye for detail would avail them nothing. (Chabon, 2010:58)

Apart from that, during the time that Joe spent in Prague, the novel does not contain any direct indication of the horror of the Nazi regime suffered by Jews in Czechoslovakia.

Once Joe finally manages after all the trials and tribulations to get safe and sound to the United States of America, the first thing he does, is getting all the major newspapers, in order to find out some information about the condition of Jews in Prague. However, to his dismay, there is almost complete silence on this topic, even though the war in Europe as such in covered in detail by the major newspapers:

"What was with all the newspapers?"
"They are your New York newspapers. I bought them at the Capitol Greyhound Terminal."

"How many?"

For the first time, he noticed, Josef Kavalier twitched. "Eleven." Sammy quickly calculated on his fingers: there were eight metropolitan dailies. Ten if you counted the Eagle and the Home News. "I'm missing one."

"Missing ... ?"

"Times, Herald-Tribune"—he touched two fingertips—"World-Telegram, Journal-American, Sun." He switched hands. "News, Post. Uh, Wall Street Journal. And the Brooklyn Eagle. And the Home News in the "Bronx." He dropped his hands to the mattress. "What's eleven?"

"The Woman's Daily Wearing."

"Women's Wear Daily?"

"I didn't know it was like that. For the garments." He laughed at himself, a series of brief, throat-clearing rasps. "I was looking for something about Prague."

"Did you find anything? They must have had something in the Times."

"Something. A little. Nothing about the Jews."

"The Jews," said Sammy, beginning to understand. It wasn't the latest diplomatic maneuverings in London and Berlin, or the most recent bit of brutal posturing by Adolf Hitler, that Josef was hoping to get news of. He was looking for an item detailing the condition of the Kavalier family. (Chabon, 2010:9-10)

Thus, from the very outset of the novel, a reader is informed that in the United States of America, during the 1940s there is not much information about the circumstances, in which European Jews are forced to live and suffer. This sets the tone for the remainder of the novel and throughout the entire time, when the World War II takes place, a reader is not even once directly informed about the Holocaust. All the references are very subtle and mostly are provided to a reader either as information about the fate of the members of the Kavalier family or as the adventures of Escapist, when he frees the oppressed people in a thinly fictionalized Europe:

In his first three appearances, the Escapist along with his eccentric company had toured a thinly fictionalized Europe, in which he wowed the Nazi elites of Zothenia, Gothsylvania, Draconia, and other pseudonymous dark bastions of the Iron Chain, while secretly going about his real business of arranging jailbreaks for resistance leaders and captured British airmen, helping great scientists and thinkers out of the clutches of the evil dictator, Attila Haxoff, and freeing captives, missionaries, and prisoners of war. (Chabon, 2010:170)

What is even more astonishing in this context, is that the corpus search of the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* revealed that the term "Holocaust" does not appear even once throughout the novel. Other terms describing the genocide of Jews in Europe, such as "Shoah", also do not make an appearance in this novel. On the one hand, this may be partly explained by the fact, that the term "Holocaust" became a common word to refer to the Nazi genocide of Jewish population only by the 1960s (Fleet, 2012). On the other hand, the novel is narrated by an omnipresent narrator, who seems to be very well aware of all the past and future facts, however, there is still no mention of the Holocaust.

One reason, which could explain the absence of any direct mention of the Holocaust in the novel, is that the author Michael Chabon on purpose wanted to somewhat distance the novel from this event and did not want to undertake the enormous and difficult task of writing about this event directly. Another plausible reason is that the author also in this way reflects the general ignorance about the events in Europe, especially those connected with the Jews, which was present in the United States during the World War II.

Indeed, historians have noted that during the World War II, the American general public knew very little and had a very vague notion of what was going on with the Jews in Europe. This lack of information was due to the fact that the major American newspapers, and, for that matter, even Jewish newspapers did not contain a lot of information on what was happening in Europe to the Jews. Also, during the World War II the press tended to compile all the atrocities of war in one pile, thus, Jews were presented as only a part of the population, which suffered during the wartime (Novick, 2000:37- 38).

Consequently, it is understandable, why the references to the Holocaust in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* are so obscure and subtle. The subtle references also require from a reader a prior advanced knowledge of history, in order to be able to understand all the nuances of this novel. And, although no historical facts about the Holocaust are given in this novel, the trauma and impact of this event is on the full display via the protagonist Joe Kavalier, who loses all his European relatives in this tragedy.

As Joost Krijnen observes in his work *Holocaust Impiety in Jewish American Literature: Memory, Identity, (Post-)Postmodernism*, where it is argued that the impious Holocaust fiction should not be viewed as insensitive, but rather as exploration on how to renew the form of transmitting the Holocaust narrative: “*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* does not employ the exceptionalist, tragic frameworks, in which the Holocaust tends to be recounted” (Krijnen, 2016:78). He also draws attention to the fact that *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is notably Americanized and it is a result of the temporal distance of more than fifty, as well as special distance between the event itself and the writer Michael Chabon (Krijnen, 2016:80). Also, Helene Meyer concludes that as the generation of the Holocaust survivors passes away, young Jewish writers are struggling how to depict the Holocaust in a historically conscientious manner, while at the same being creative and imaginative (Meyers, 2010:75). Thus, the seemingly distant approach in fact is the natural consequence of time and space. In addition, Irmtraud Huber points out that the distance between the events in Europe and the cultural life in New York is one of the defining tensions within this novel (Huber, 2014:152).

Based on the abovementioned, a significant aspect must be taken into account in respect to the Holocaust fiction, namely, the generation of the author and his connection to the Holocaust. The first generation Jewish authors, who were the Holocaust survivors and thus the ones who had a first hand experience with this horrific episode in human history, were able to recount their experiences in true historical detail. Eli Wiesel's work *Night* is an example of such work. Second generation Jewish writers are the children of the Holocaust survivors and their life was influenced by the traumatic event their parents went through. Third generation Jewish writers are the grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors and, thus, have the weakest link to this calamity (Reynolds, 2017:25). Of course, there are also those Jewish writers, whose ancestors were lucky enough not to experience Holocaust directly.

The internet resources do not contain a precise information, whether Michael Chabon's grandparents had any direct experience with the Holocaust themselves, however, it is obvious that the knowledge of this horrific historical event left a deep impression on Chabon, and Holocaust theme also appears in his other novels, such as *Yiddish Policemen's Union* and *The Final Solution*. Same as in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, in *The Final Solution* the theme of Holocaust is very subtle and hidden and the word "Holocaust" itself does not appear in *The Final Solution* (Chabon, 2013:1-160).

This confirms, that in a way, the avoidance of a very direct mention of the Holocaust, is the preferred style of writing of Michael Chabon. By the use of such technique, he actually demands a serious reader with substantial knowledge, who would be able to detect serious historical themes beneath the playful adventures of the characters and exciting plot-twists.

Now turning to the discussion of the fantastic elements present in the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, it is important to establish, whether any fantastic events are directly connected with the Holocaust.

As already mentioned above, the Holocaust is partly represented via the comic books created by Joe and the main character the Escapist performs astounding stunts and breakouts in order to save the oppressed people in Europe:

The Escapist and his gang fought on land, at sea, in the skies of Fortress Europa, and the punishment taken by the minions of the Iron Chain grew operatically intense. (Chabon, 2010:171)

However, this representation of the Holocaust is never direct, it is rather shown via a wish-fulfilment practiced by Joe Kavalier. The comic books in the novel represent the Holocaust only in a very general manner, by mentioning the oppressed masses of people under the evil force of a dictator, but they never go into historically accurate and descriptive detail. The comic books about the Escapist are the fruit of Joe's imagination and even though

on the one hand, the comic books indeed connect the Holocaust and the fantastic elements, on the other hand it is done so in a very generalized manner and it stems from the best intention of the desperate protagonist Joe. Thus, the reason behind this connection of the Holocaust and the fantastic is the necessity to portray Joe's struggle to maintain psychological strength during a horrible time in his life and to fight back the only way he can.

This precisely corresponds with Rosemary Jackson's ideas, namely, Joe's creation of comic book heroes, who ceaselessly and courageously fight for peace in Europe, is a form of protest and subversion against the culture and international politics existing during the time of the World War II. *The Escapist* is a protest against Hitler's aggression, it is an objection against the powerlessness of the Jewish population in Europe, and, finally it is disapproval of the passive position of the United States of America during the first years of the Second World War.

Lastly, the main point of the critique devoted to *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* revolves around the appearance of the Golem of Prague within this novel. As briefly mentioned above, Alan Berger finds the use of Golem as especially offensive and marks it by the following observation about Michael Chabon:

He utilizes magic and mysticism as they coalesce in the Golem figure. Consequently, the Shoah is transformed into a metaphor and there is no distinction between the mysticism of hope and the Nazi mysticism of death" (Berger, 2010:88).

Berger is not the only one, and, John Podhoretz essentially says the same:

There is nothing offensive in this conversion of the Shoah into metaphor; but there is something off about it. The Jews of Central Europe, both those who were murdered and those who escaped murder, were ordinary people. In attempting to memorialize them and pay tribute to their suffering, Chabon descends into a false mysticism. It is true that their tradition featured a certain mystical strain, but it is also horrifically true that mysticism was among the forces that led to their extermination—an evil mysticism that promised the world would be purified by their removal. (Podhoretz, 2001)

Taking into account the criticism of Berger and Podhoretz, it is imperative to scrutinise this novel in order to ascertain, whether Berger's and Podhoretz's conclusions are truly warranted.

In this regard it is first necessary to draw a distinction between the appearance of various superheroes in the novel and the appearance of the Golem of Prague. The former is an element of the fantastic literature, while the latter belongs to the realm of the magic realism. The Golem is an artificial anthropomorphic creature made out of clay, which first appeared in the Jewish mysticism during the medieval age (Gelbin, 2011:1). The Golem of Prague is incorporated in the novel in such inconspicuous way, that this magical creature seems to be a normal occurrence within the novel's universe.

A reader is first introduced to the Golem at the very outset of the novel, when Joe and his magic mentor Kornblum set about the task of locating the Golem and transporting it to Vilna:

“It's a giant,” Kornblum said, with a shake of his head, speaking in a tense whisper. With his miniature crowbar, he had pried loose the nails along one side of the coffin's top and lifted the lid on its creaking, galvanized-tin hinges. He stood peering at the pitiable slab of lifeless and innocent clay. “And it's naked.” (Chabon, 2010:51)

Then the Golem of Prague reappears only at the very end of the novel, when Joe has overcome his demons and has returned to his love Rosa and their son Tommy. The mysterious casket containing the Golem has somehow surprisingly found its way to their suburban house in the United States, however, unfortunately it has also deteriorated due to being away for so long from its place of birth:

“How had it known where to find him? What had it been waiting for? Who could be keeping tabs on his movements?

He went around to the side opposite the padlock and dug with the teeth of the crowbar into the seam of the lid, just under a nail head. The nail whined, there was a snap like a joint popping, and then the entire lid sprang open as if pushed from inside. At once the air was filled with a heady green smell of mud and river scum, with a stench of summer rich with remembered tenderness and regret.

“Dirt,” Tommy said, glancing anxiously at his mother.

“Joe,” Rosa said, “that isn't—those aren't ashes.”

The entire box was filled, to a depth of about seven inches, with a fine powder, pigeon-gray and opalescent, that Joe recognized at once from boyhood excursions as the silty bed of the Moldau. He had scraped it from his shoes a thousand times and brushed it from the seat of his trousers. The speculations of those who feared that the Golem, removed from the shores of the river that mothered it, might degrade had been proved correct. (Chabon, 2010:610-611)

Other than that, the Golem is mentioned in the context of Joe's professional activities as the comic book illustrator. Namely, at the outset of the novel, just when he arrived in the United States, Joe tried to pitch the idea of Golem as a superhero, however, this idea of his was not well received and consequently Golem was replaced by the Escapist. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel the figure of Golem as a superhero is revived again and it turns out, that for all these years, when Joe was living in the solitude and in hiding he was actually drawing Golem. Same as with the Escapist, Golem figure in Joe's comic book, when he first arrives to the United States, serves as a form of protest against the current situation of the Europe. Towards the end of the novel, however, the drawing of Golem helps Joe to find the inner peace and has a cathartic effect, helping him to come to terms with the tragic events, which occurred during his life.

Thus, Golem makes an appearance in the novel in a very circular way, first he is featured at the very start of the novel and then returns both physically and psychologically and creatively to Joe at the very end of the novel. Throughout its entire course the plot of the novel does not even once touch upon the Nazi mysticism of death and it does not connect the themes of Nazism and Golem in the way that Podhoretz and Berger suggest. Instead of the Golem in a way appears to reflect Joe's journey. Like Golem, Joe is uprooted from Prague, but at the very end of the novel he accepts his new home in America, together with Rosa and their son Tommy. However, as Golem has transformed to dust, Joe has also been transformed by the events that life threw at him and he is not the same person he used to be in Prague.

Overall, the main conclusion, based on the foregoing is that *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* is a novel about the Holocaust, where the Holocaust is not directly mentioned. However, this does not inevitably render the novel as disrespectful or impious, instead Michael Chabon, in a roundabout way pays a respectful tribute to the event of the Holocaust and acknowledges the pain and suffering it has caused, while maintaining an artistic distance from it.

To sum up the foregoing, while *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* indeed has some features, which are normally attributed to escape literature, on the other hand, this novel deals with many important human emotions, such as grief, anger, loneliness and love. This novel also deals with many heavy issues, such as the representation of the Holocaust and the Second World War (as well as issues concerning sexual identity, which will be described in the following chapter). The overall realistic stance of the novel is not interrupted by the elements of the fantastic and of the magic realism, on contrary, the use of these devices allows a reader to better understand the emotional condition of Joe Kavalier, who creates comic book characters as a form of subversion and protest.

Taking into account the important themes, which are featured in this novel, it may hardly be called escape literature, even though it does contain some elements of fantastic and of magical realism. The merging of comic books – an art form, which is traditionally perceived as low, with such serious topic as the Holocaust is a characteristic feature of postmodern literature.

3. ESCAPISM IN THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY

It has been contended by Arthur Christopher Benson that all the best stories in the world are in reality “the story of an escape” (Benson, 2015:21). Escapism is arguably the most prominent and central theme in Michael Chabon’s novel *The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier & Clay* and it is featured so heavily in the book that it would be hard to miss even for an inexperienced reader. After all, the comic book character created by Joe Kavalier is called the Escapist and the corpus search of the novel’s 639 pages reveals that the term “escap[.]” appears 261 times within the text. While the theme of escape and escapism at the first glance might seem as extremely transparent and easy to grasp in this novel, one must nevertheless look rather carefully, in order to discover all the different layers of escapism, which are presented in this novel. The analysis below will therefore consist of examination of the term “escapism”, its origins and meaning and, further, the different levels of escapism, which are present in Michael Chabon’s novel, will be discussed in close detail.

3.1. JOE’S ESCAPISM

The most obvious character, who throughout the entire novel has especially well pronounced flair for escapism is Joe Kavalier, one might even go as far as to call him the embodiment of escapism. The escapism practiced by Joe is extremely profound and it manifests both in physical escape, as well as psychological escapism, as described below.

3.1.1. Physical escape

Since the very beginning of the novel Joseph Kavalier is presented as an inquisitive and adventurous young boy, who is far from average. Joe is lucky to be born into a wealthy and highly educated Jewish family that indulges and spoils him in all the possible ways. Joe’s wits and curiousness at the age of fourteen result in studying the art of escapism with one of the best retired escape artists – Bernard Kornblum:

But then a patient had referred his father to Bernard Kornblum, and everything changed. Under Kornblum's tutelage, Josef began to learn the rigorous trade of the Ausbrecher from the lips of one of its masters. At the age of fourteen, he had decided to consecrate himself to a life of timely escape. (Chabon, 2010:24).

At this point in Joe’s life nothing has yet occurred to actually warrant the wish to escape either physically or emotionally. Thus, his wish to devote his life to learning all the hacks of the escape art seems to be the trait of his character, some innate wish and talent he was

actually born with. The fact that he was born into bourgeois family and thus understandably had a very pleasant childhood may not seem like the best motivation for leaning the trade of stage escapism, since unlike Harry Houdini, who experienced poverty, when his father's death coincided with the Panic of 1893, when the stock prices began to fall (Lalicki, 2014:4), Joe did not have to fend for himself during his life in Prague. However, on the other hand, his comfortable life combined with his character, might have been exactly the reason why since a very young age he felt the yen for breaking out. Nevertheless, the fact that his brother Thomas did not really share his enthusiasm for breaking out and who became bored of the meticulous training very soon, points towards the theory that it was Joe's character, which indeed played the main role in him wanting to pursue stage magic and the art of the escapism:

Josef had become interested in stage magic right around the time his hands had grown large enough to handle a deck of playing cards. Prague had a rich tradition of illusionists and sleight-of-hand artists, and it was not difficult for a boy with preoccupied and indulgent parents to find competent instruction. (Chabon, 2010:23)

In any case, Joe did not only have the wish to learn the magic of the escape, he also had the talent for it and already rather early in the learning process managed to pass the test of his tutor:

Josef took a deep breath, slid the pick that was tipped with a small squiggle into the plug of the lock, and again applied the wrench. Quickly, he stroked the tip of the pick back and forth across the pins, feeling each one give in its turn, gauging the resistance of the drivers and springs. Each lock had its own point of equilibrium between torque and friction; if you turned too hard, the plug would jam; too softly, and the pins wouldn't catch properly. With sixteen-pin columns, finding the point of equilibrium was entirely a matter of intuition and style. Josef closed his eyes. He heard the wire of the pick humming in his fingertips. With a satisfying metallic gurgle, the lock sprang open. Kornblum nodded, stood up, stretched." (Chabon, 2010:27)

Joe is an obsessive and diligent student and almost since the very beginning of his studies he becomes deadly determined upon impressing other magicians and becoming invited to the Hofzinsler Club, the most famous club in Prague, where magicians came together:

Josef Kavalier's determination to storm the exclusive Hofzinsler Club had reached its height one day back in 1935, over breakfast, when he choked on a mouthful of omelette with apricot preserves. (Chabon, 2010:22).

His obsession with impressing the experienced magicians by an astounding escape sequence naturally did not lead to a good end, and, although he did manage to escape from handcuffs and sack, in which he was rolled in Moldau, altogether, the escape performance was a tremendous failure, which almost ended tragically for the Kavalier brothers and resulted in discontinuation of studies with Kornblum:

At a certain point, Josef realized that his limbs felt warm now, even hot, and that he was drowning. His last conscious perception was of Bernard Kornblum cutting through the water toward them, his bushy beard tied up in a hair net. Josef came to an hour later in his bed at home. It took two more days for Thomas to revive; for most of that time, no one, least of all his doctor parents, expected that he would. He was never quite the same afterward. He could not bear cold weather, and he suffered from a lifelong snuffle. Also, perhaps because of damage to his ears, he lost his taste for music; the libretto for Houdini was abandoned. (Chabon, 2010:37).

It might seem that near-death would promptly and permanently obliterate the seed of physical escape in Joe, it did not quite happen this way. Although it is true that afterwards Joe did not actively and consciously pursue the art and science of the autoliberation, his aptitude for physical escape persisted throughout the entire novel. Namely, his gift for timely escape manifested, when several times during the novel Joe managed to escape a sure death and remain unscathed even in most dangerous circumstances.

Joe's first amazing feat of escape is when after the first unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to the United States of America he is forced to return to Prague due to one missing stamp on his visa. However, with the help of his old mentor Kornblum, an astounding escape is organized for Joe.

The way how Joe escapes from the Nazi clutches in Prague is nothing short of extraordinary and breath-taking – together with Kornblum and after a extremely creative, as well as meticulous search, he first locates the Golem of Prague, which must be sent to Vilna, same as Joe, to escape the Nazi regime.

An important aspect to note in this regard is that basically Joe's childhood interest in magic helped him to escape the Nazi Europe unscathed. If Joe hadn't shown interest in magic, if his parents hadn't indulged him, if his first magic teacher hadn't turned out to be a thief, he wouldn't have commenced studies of the escape art under the tutelage of Bernard Kornblum and this eventually wouldn't have led to his escape from Prague: "It was a caterpillar scheme—a dream of fabulous escape—that had ultimately carried Josef Kavalier across Asia and the Pacific to his cousin's narrow bed on Ocean Avenue." (Chabon, 2010:14). This passage from the novel confirms this theory and indicates that indeed it was young Joe's obsession with the escape art that transported him to safety of the United States of America.

And even though at the first glance his escape from Europe together with the Golem of Prague might seem glorious and legendary, it was hardly so. On contrary, it was difficult, extremely dangerous and immensely uncomfortable:

Inside the coffin, Josef lay insensible. He had fainted with an excruciating, at times almost pleasurable, slowness over a period of some eight or ten hours, as the rocking of the train, the lack of oxygen, the deficit of sleep and surfeit of nervous upset he had accumulated over the past week, the diminished circulation of his blood, and a strange,

soporific emanation from the Golem itself that seemed connected to its high-summer, rank-river smell, all conspired to overcome the severe pain in his hips and back, the cramping of his leg and arm muscles, the near-impossibility of urination, the tingling, at times almost jolting, numbness of his legs and feet, the growling of his stomach, and the dread, wonder, and uncertainty of the voyage on which he had embarked. (Chabon, 2010:65).

Joe's escape from Prague hidden in a coffin together with the disguised Golem has an intertextual connection to the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, written by Alexandre Dumas in the 19th century. Edmond Dantès, also known as The Count of Monte Cristo also escaped the imprisonment in a burial sack, pretending to be the dead Abbé Faria (Dumas, 1998). Thus, it transpires that Michael Chabon draws inspiration from a classical and epic work of Dumas, which features many themes that are also important in the context of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, such as hope, loyalty, vengeance and forgiveness.

The escape from the Nazi filled Prague is actually only one of Joe's escapes from a completely certain death.

The other time, when the fate intervenes on Joe's behalf is in Antarctica, when Joe, unlike his fellow army men, escapes poisoning with the carbon monoxide in the Army base of the United States of America in the Antarctica:

"Look here, the fellows are dead and the radio is out, but there is no connection between the two. One has nothing to do with the other, like everything else in life. It was not some Nazi superweapon. Jesus Christ. It was the fucking stove."

"The stove?"

"It was carbon monoxide from Wayne." The Antarctic Waldorf was heated by a gasoline stove, affectionately known as Wayne because of the legend ft. WAYNE iron works Indiana USA stamped on its side. The naming madness that came over men when they arrived here in the unmapped blankness seeped quickly into every corner of their lives. They named the radios, the latrine, they named their hangovers and cuts on their fingers. "I went up and checked the ventilators in the roof. Packed with snow. Same thing with Dog-town. I told Captain they were poorly made. Maybe I did not. The thought did occur to me at the time we were laying them in." (Chabon, 2010:434-435).

It an extremely ironic inversion that once Joe enlisted the United States army he was sent to the most remote place on the planet, as far away from any Nazi's a physically possible, and yet only by a lucky coincidence he did not die from the gas poisoning, like all the rest of his fellow soldiers, apart from Shannenhouse. Thus, in a way, Joe got to see after all something slightly similar, what was meanwhile happening in Europe, though but on a much smaller and incomparable scale. But, once again, it is important to note, how little Joe's capabilities and talents had to do with him escaping the death on this occasion as well.

In this particular case Joe escaped the death only because that evening, when the stove malfunctioned, leading to the death of 20 men, Joe was not sleeping in his bunk because he had lost a silly game Lupe Velez and thus ended up sleeping in the dog tunnel:

But the winners at Lupe Velez won only the right to sleep in their bunks, warm and dry inside the Antarctic Waldorf, for one more night. It was a stupid, cruel, but at the same time forgiving game, and easy to play. There were always twenty-one winners at Lupe Velez and only one loser, and he had to go lie down with the dogs. Though in theory, given the essentially random and unskilled nature of play, they were all at an equal disadvantage, usually the one bedded down in the chaos and smell of the tunnels at the end of the evening, after a brisk inning of Lupe Velez, was Joe Kavalier. He was in there, tucked right into a crate alongside the dog called Oyster, the night that something went wrong with the Waldorf's stove. (Chabon, 2010:426).

And, even then, Joe is once again saved not only by luck, but with the help of help of some other person, and, in this particular case, also by a dog named Oyster. To be more precise, he is saved simply because he managed to form a special link with Oyster:

It was only because he had lost so often at Lupe Velez and had, as a consequence, slept with the dog so many times, that Joe became aware, even deep in his own poisoned sleep, of an alteration in the usual pattern of Oyster's breathing. (Chabon, 2010:428).

To sum up, all the greatest feats of Joe's physical escape involved not only his athleticism, stoicism, and impressive abilities, but for a large part they involved sheer luck and immense help from the people around him.

Nevertheless, these feats of escape and heroism performed by Joe have not gone unnoticed by the critics, and, according to John Podhoretz, Joe's capabilities alienate him from the readers and somewhat diminish the real victims of the Holocaust:

Chabon, perhaps unconsciously echoing George Eliot's depiction of Jewry in *Daniel Deronda*, sets the Jews of Central Europe apart. Like Daniel Deronda himself, Josef is an impossibly grand character, omni-competent, capable of near-supernatural feats of skill, survival, and self-sacrifice. These qualities make it difficult for a reader to feel any sort of commonality with him, and in this way Chabon inadvertently denies some measure of the humanity of Hitler's victims. (Podhoretz, 2001)

This interpretation of Podhoretz may be opposed on two levels. First, while it is true that Joe is omni-competent, his competences generally include only two aspects – he is good at drawing, which in itself is nothing uncommon or unusual, and he has learned how to pick locks, which again, is not anything impossible. Plus, he is also athletic, which once again, is not anything either uncommon in the real world or supernatural. Secondly, Podhoretz seems miss the fact that without those capabilities Joe's story would be completely different and that this is exactly the premise of the novel and Joe's capabilities form part of the basis upon much of the development of events and plot-twists of the novel rest.

The fact that a writer creates a Jewish character, who has a combination of unusual qualities and capabilities, which help him escape to the United States of America, does not automatically entail any disrespect towards the Holocaust victims or diminish their humanity. Even though Joe has different talents, it is mostly luck and pure coincidence, which helps him to escape death. As many Holocaust survivors point out, they managed to escape death only by chance and not much else (Meyers, 2014:27). In *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, as explained above, it is exactly the chain of circumstances and events, as well as help of others, which allow Joe to escape from the war-torn Europe. Thus, Podhoretz's statement, which hints on the fact that Michael Chabon has created a character, who is better and more talented than an average Holocaust victim and that his capabilities are the reason why Joe escapes death, is unwarranted.

Overall, as mentioned in the first chapter, physical escape is perceived as a positive occurrence. In Joe's case physical enables him to survive and to go on living.

3.1.2. Psychological escapism

Joe's psychological escapism within this novel is both clearly evident and also rather complex, taking into account that it manifests on several levels.

To begin with, Joe has a strong pull towards the physical escapism, which is described in detail in the chapter 3.1.1. However, such tendencies for physical escapism definitely do not come out of nothing and, in Joe's case the reason, why escapism arrested his attention so thoroughly ever since his childhood, may be more complicated and sinister than a simple boredom of the affluent bourgeoisie youth.

As Kornblum quietly noted, when he refused to continue teaching Joe the art of escape after Joe's unfortunate escape incident in Moldau, where Joe and Thomas both almost died:

He had never had so naturally gifted a student, but his own discipline—which was really an escape artist's sole possession—had not been passed along. He didn't tell them what he now privately believed: that Josef was one of those unfortunate boys who become escape artists not to prove the superior machinery of their bodies against outlandish contrivances and the laws of physics, but for dangerously metaphorical reasons. Such men feel imprisoned by invisible chains—walled in, sewn up in layers of batting. For them, the final feat of autoliberation was all too foreseeable. (Chabon, 2010:37)

Thus, very early in the novel it is already revealed and foreshadowed that Joe may actually be a type of person, who plays with death and for whom only death grants the final grand act of escape and autoliberation.

Thus, Joe's psychological escapism tends to have a pull towards what Freud considers to be the most fundamental drive in man – the so-called “death wish” (Jackson, 2008:42). The

death wish, however, is more than the name seems to initially suggest and Freud considers it to be the most radical form of pleasure, a condition of entropy (Jackson, 2008:42). And this Freudian term appears to be exactly what Kornblum has in mind, when he ponders on his impression that for Joe the final form of escapism and the highest form of pleasure is death. Thus, Kornblum's trained eye has indeed somewhat correctly spotted the flair for the dramatic and unusual in Joe, which will play out especially strongly, when Joe will hit the lowest points in his life.

However, before turning to the discussion of Joe's lowest points in life and his escapist tendencies at those moments, first it is necessary to view Joe's escapist tendencies in a chronological order.

After Joe's unfortunate incident in the Moldau river, for a while it seems that Joe has reined in his escapist dreams. However, once he sets a foot in Sammy's bedroom and becomes acquainted with the concept of comic books and superheroes, his escapist fantasies take a different turn. Namely, now the main goal is not to escape but to organize an escape for his family. And this goal cannot be achieved without first acquiring a substantial amount of money. Luckily for Joe, Sammy has already wriggled into the comic book business and with his help Joe gets to do something he had not even ever heard about before – draw illustrations for comic books.

However, a catch of making illustrations for the comic books is that one also has to come up with a new and exciting superhero, that would be worshipped by the kids and who would at the same time be commercially profitable. One of the cornerstones of comic books is creating characters and setting which are exciting and superior and thus allow readers to escape from the struggles of the everyday life. However, as it happens in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, comic book characters and setting affect the artist who creates them, as much, or even more significantly, than it affects readers. In Joe's case it is clearly evident, that for him a drawing of a superhero is deeply symbolic and carries an important meaning. The first superhero, which he ever draws is a Golem and it showcases that to him the line between the real and the imagined is sometimes very thin and, after having travelled with Golem to Lithuania, he maybe still unconsciously hopes that the Golem would be able to somehow save the Jews of Europe. Unfortunately, his idea of the Golem as an American superhero is not well received by the owners of the comic books business and is almost ridiculed:

"Is that the Golem?" said Anapol. "My new Superman is the Golem?"

"I didn't—the conceit is new for me," Joe said, his English stiffening up on him. "I just drew the first thing I could think of that resembled ... To me, this Superman is ... maybe ... only an American Golem." He looked for support to Sammy. "Is that right?"

"Huh?" said Sammy, struggling to conceal his dismay. "Yeah, sure, but, Joe ... the Golem is ... well... Jewish." (Chabon, 2010:86)

The less than excited reception of the Golem as a superhero sets Joe on a new path of creative outlet and, drawing inspiration from his past connection with the art of escapistry, he, together with Sammy, creates a unique superhero named the Escapist. They come up with a backstory for Tom Mayflower, also known as the Escapist and the legend of the League of Golden Key, and, most importantly Joe and Sammy decide that Tom Mayflower is a superhero, who will devote his life to fighting the evil forces in Germany:

He calls Big Al, Omar, and Miss Blossom to gather around him, then raises the key high in the air and swears a sacred oath to devote himself to secretly fighting the evil forces of the Iron Chain, in Germany or wherever they raise their ugly heads, and to working for the liberation of all who toil in chains—as the Escapist. The sound of their raised voices carries up through the complicated antique ductwork of the grand old theater, rising and echoing through the pipes until it emerges through a grate in the sidewalk, where it can be heard clearly by a couple of young men who are walking past, their collars raised against the cold October night, dreaming their elaborate dream, wishing their wish, teasing their golem into life. (Chabon, 2010:134)

Accordingly, for Joe the Escapist represents a powerful, ingenious figure, who is able to do, what Joe himself cannot do – liberate the oppressed Jews in Europe. In a way, Joe identifies with the Escapist and wishes that it was him and that it would be possible to perform the incredible feats that the Escapist does on a daily basis. But at the same time Joe has very complicated relationship with the Escapist, because he does realise that this wishful thinking in reality does not really contribute towards saving the unfortunate people in a war torn Europe:

"What?" Sammy said. "What are you thinking?"

"I wish he was real," said Joe, suddenly ashamed of himself. Here he was, free in a way that his family could only dream of, and what was he doing with his freedom? Walking around talking and making up a lot of nonsense about someone who could liberate no one and nothing but smudgy black marks on a piece of cheap paper. What was the point of it? Of what use was walking and talking and smoking cigarettes?

"I bet," Sammy said. He put his hand on Joe's shoulder. "Joe, I bet you do." (Chabon, 2010:135)

This thought about the futility of the Escapist occurs to Joe at the very same day, when he and Sammy come up with the character and the story, however, despite this momentary thought, the Escapist becomes the symbol of Joe's psychological escapism. He pours all his heart and hard work in order to breathe life into this character and to use this character as a proxy, to do all the incredible things, which he himself cannot do:

The dark blue fabric of the Escapist's costume was creased with palpable pleats and wrinkles, and his hair—they had decided to do the kerchief as a mask that left the hair

exposed—glinted like gold and at the same time looked messy and windblown. His musculature was lean and understated, believable, and the veins in his arm rippled with the strain of the blow. As for Hitler, he came flying at you backward, right-crossed clean out of the painting, head thrown back, forelock a-splash, arms flailing, jaw trailing a long red streamer of teeth. The violence of the image was startling, beautiful, strange. It stirred mysterious feelings in the viewer, of hatred gratified, of cringing fear transmuted into smashing retribution, which few artists working in America, in the fall of 1939, could have tapped so easily and effectively as Josef Kavalier. (Chabon, 2010:150)

It is evident that Joe puts all his anger, his frustration, fear and hopes in his work and, in such way he partially gets a relief and escape from his psychological torment:

“Over the course of the last week, in the guise of the Escapist, Master of Elusion, Joe had flown to Europe (in a midnight-blue autogyro), stormed the towered Schloss of the nefarious Steel Gauntlet, freed Plum Blossom from its deep dungeon, defeated the Gauntlet in protracted two-fisted combat, been captured by the Gauntlet's henchmen and dragged off to Berlin, where he was strapped to a bizarre multiple guillotine that would have sliced him like a hard-boiled egg while the Fuhrer himself smugly looked on. Naturally, patiently, indomitably, he had worked his way loose of his riveted steel bonds and hurled himself at the throat of the dictator. At this point—with twenty pages to go until the Charles Atlas ad on the inside back cover—an entire Wehrmacht division had come between the Escapist's fingers and that gravely desired larynx. Over the course of the next eighteen pages, in panels that crowded, jostled, piled one on top of the other, and threatened to burst the margins of the page, the Wehrmacht, the Luftwaffe, and the Escapist had duked it out. With the Steel Gauntlet out of the picture, it was a fair fight. “On the very last page, in a transcendent moment in the history of wishful figments, the Escapist had captured Adolf Hitler and dragged him before a world tribunal. Head finally bowed in defeat and shame, Hitler was sentenced to die for his crimes against humanity. The war was over; a universal era of peace was declared, the imprisoned and persecuted peoples of Europe—among them, implicitly and passionately, the Kavalier family of Prague—were free.” (Chabon, 2010:165-166)

The cited paragraph showcases that for Joe the Escapist is a sort of proxy, the means of living life in Europe and helping his family reclaim their freedom.

On the one hand, such behaviour of Joe indeed is the epitome of wishful thinking and escapism. But at the same time, it does not become self-deceiving. Joe is painfully aware that there is really no superhero, who could save his family by the magic art of escapism. In Joe's case creating the Escapist is a form of protest against Hitler and the war in Europe. Accordingly, this goes hand in hand with Linda Hutcheon's theory about fantasy literature being a form of subversion against the existing cultural establishment and rules. Hence, Joe's escapism is not bare and futile as it might appear at a first glance, it carries a deep and important message, protesting the violence and hatred reigning in Europe during the World War II.

Also, another important point to note is that within the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* the creation and continuous obsessive work over the Escapist character

not only helps Joe at times to pour out his frustration and to escape from the reality, it also opens a lot of door for him and allows to earn a considerable amount of money, which is necessary in order to bring his brother Thomas to the United States of America. At this point it is relevant to recall Hume's theory regarding the mimetic escape and fantastic escape. Joe's success in the comic book industry represents a mimetic escape, whereas, the incredible feats performed by the Escapist within the pages of the comic books represent the fantastic escape. Thus, Joe's escapist fantasy is not only the instrument to escape the unpleasant truth of the World War II, it is also an instrument which effects actual change in the world, making Joe able to afford a ticket for Thomas and several other kids to be transported to the United States by the Ark of Miriam:

It was not that Joe felt at home in New York. That was something he never would have allowed himself to feel. But he was very grateful to his headquarters in exile. New York City had led him, after all, to his calling, to this great, mad new American art form. She had laid at his feet the printing presses and lithography cameras and delivery vans that allowed him to fight, if not a genuine war, then a tolerable substitute. And she paid him handsomely for doing so: he already had seven thousand dollars—his family's ransom—in the bank. (Chabon, 2010:167)

Unfortunately, each time, when the Escapist manages to successfully avert the crisis and say the enslaved people in Europe, Joe is left with a feeling of emptiness and powerlessness and thus, each episode of Joe's creative escapism is followed by a hard slap from reality:

Joe was deflated. The surge of triumph he felt when he finished a story was always fleeting, and seemed to grow briefer with every job. This time it had lasted about a minute and a half before turning to shame and frustration. The Escapist was an impossible champion, ludicrous and above all imaginary, fighting a war that could never be won. His cheeks burned with embarrassment. He was wasting his time. "Idiot," he said, wiping at his eyes with the back of an arm. (Chabon, 168)

Joe's entire existence and sole purpose seems to be focused on the success of the Escapist, both in the fantasy realm, as well as on making an impact in the real world:

He wanted Anapol to understand the importance of the fight, to succumb to the propaganda that he and Sammy were unabashedly churning out. If they could not move Americans to anger against Hitler, then Joe's existence, the mysterious freedom that had been granted to him and denied to so many others, had no meaning. (Chabon, 2010:172-173)

All of the abovementioned citations from the novel point towards two main conclusions – on the one hand the imagination and escapism via comic books is celebrated by the novel, especially when Joe gets to destroy his enemies on paper, but on the other hand it is also shown that comic books are charged with promoting wishful thinking, and imaginary ideas, which could never come to life. As Irmtraud Huber observes, in this novel escapism via the comic books is celebrated, but at the same time the novel also openly admits the problems of

escapism (Huber, 2014:172). Consequently, Joe's escapism via the comic books he himself creates, has both beneficial, as well as detrimental effect for him. Overall, Joe's escapism tendencies, when drawing comic books could not be classified as severe according to Longeway's scale, taking into account that Joe is most of the time painfully aware of the situation in Europe.

In fact, Joe's escapist tendencies most of the time actually go hand in hand with guilt and trauma. Even though he physically manages to escape the evil dictatorship in Europe, psychologically it leaves him extremely wounded and remorseful. Joe begins to suffer the first pangs of remorse, once he boards the train to begin his journey to America and the reason behind this feeling is Joe's failure to say goodbye to his family in a proper and loving manner. "He seemed at once to swell, to pulse and burn with shame, as if his entire body were in rebellion against his behavior, as if shame could induce the same catastrophic reaction in him as a bee's sting" (Chabon, 2010:30). Hence, ever since his very first attempt to escape Europe, Joe feels as if he is an undeserving person, who left his family in Europe in a most horrific manner possible.

His feeling of guilt only increases, once he sets foot on the American soil and he works day and night to earn money in order to bring his family to America. This feeling of guilt is closely intertwined with a feeling, as if he does not deserve his freedom and that only by some tiny bureaucratic detail he was able to escape from the clutches of the Nazi regime. This sensation even escalates to a point, where Joe believes that even the smallest form of enjoyment for him is unwarranted and he forgoes all social and recreational events.

One of the manifestations of his guilt is to subconsciously seek out the brawls with American Germans in order to feel less entitled and thus, closer to his family, who back in Prague suffer at the hands of Nazi supporters:

On the southbound platform, a few feet from the cousins, stood a dark, glowering gentleman—reading the cut of his topcoat, or some indefinable emission radiating from his chin or eyes or haircut, Joe felt certain that he was German. This man was giving them the fish-eye. Even Sammy had to agree afterward that the man had been giving them the fish-eye. He was a German right out of a panel by Joe Kavalier, massive, handsome in a prognathous, lupine way, wearing a beautiful suit. As the wait for the train dragged on, Joe decided that he did not like what he considered to be the superior manner in which the theoretically German man was looking at him. He considered a number of possible styles, in German and in English, of expressing his feelings about the man and his fish-eye. Finally opting for a more universal statement, he spat, as if casually, onto the platform between him and the man. (Chabon, 2010:191)

The spitting incident results in Joe being punched severely in the stomach and, such situation seems to solidify and unite Joe with his family.

Even when Joe manages to begin enjoying his life in America and falls in love, he is still revisited by guilt and he struggles to balance together his old and new world. “The burst of guilt that lit up the radiant nerves of his solar plexus when he handled or suddenly remembered the unopened letter was every bit as intense, he was sure, as whatever he would feel upon tearing its fragile seal and letting out the usual gray compound of bad dreams and pigeon feathers and soot.” (Chabon, 2010:324)

Even though Joe himself never experiences the horrific events of the Holocaust directly, he experiences it through the death of his family members. And thus, Joe is plagued by the so called “survivor’s guilt”, which influences his actions and affects his course of life in America.

The survivor’s guilt is on a full display at the moment, when Joe learns about the sinking of the Ark of Miriam and his brother’s death and this is the moment, when Kornblum’s earlier prediction about Joe’s wish to escape life comes to mind:

Two minutes and fifty-eight seconds from the time of his immersion in the cool blue water of the Trevi’s fountain, the two waiters, the house detective, and Mr. Konigsberg in his best suit went splashing in after Joe. They had been watching the crate for signs of movement, a telltale shuddering, a visible straining in the planks that made up the crate. But there was no motion at all. The crate lay inert, covered up to within an inch of its nailed-on lid, in water. When Mrs. Konigsberg began to scream, though there were still a few seconds to go until the deadline, the men went in. They rolled the crate up and out of the water, but in their haste they lost their grip on it, and it shattered against the floor. The laundry sack rolled out and flopped wildly on the floor like a gasping fish. Joe was thrashing around so much on the carpet that the house detective couldn’t get the sack opened alone, and had to call on the other men to lend a hand. It took three of them to hold Joe down. When they “peeled away the bag, his face was red as a fresh welt, but his lips were almost blue. His eyes rolled in their orbits, and he gagged and coughed as though fresh air were poison to him. They got him to his feet and the house detective removed the cuffs; when they were passed around afterward, it was plain they had not been tampered with. (Chabon, 2010:399)

As Kornblum had once rather precisely thought, Joe indeed tried to commit suicide in a rather metaphorical way by staying put and not escaping the crate and handcuffs during a bar mitzvah performance. Thomas’s death acted as a trigger for Joe to try to escape his own life. And he tried to do it in a very metaphorical way, presumably to feel closer to his brother. Since his brother drowned in the sea, Joe tried to accomplish something similar by drowning in a fountain, and the fact that Joe was handcuffed and in a sack is also reminiscent of that time in Moldou river, when both brothers almost died together.

After Thomas’s death Joe’s psychological escapism takes a completely different route. Naturally, the comic books and the Escapist will no longer suffice to Joe, after such horrible tragedy, when everything comes crashing down and all the comic book plots in the world will

never return Joe his brother and all the revenues earned from creating the comic books will not return Thomas back to life. For these reasons, Joe takes very drastic steps – he enlists in the US army hoping it will allow him to kill Germans and thus avenge his brother’s death. However, this is again one of Joe’s escapist fantasies. Another drastic measure, which he takes is cutting off entirely the contact with his closest friends and loved ones - cousin Sammy, girlfriend Rosa and the rest of his friends and relatives. He does so presumably in order to escape everyone, who knows him and his life story and may remind him of what happened to Tommy. Pursuant to Longeway’s classification of different levels of escapism, this can be viewed as a severe form of escapism - entrenched escapism (Longeway, 1990:6). Namely, Joe as much as possible tries to escape the belief that his brother has died, even though such escape is painful and irrational.

However, the fate plays a joke on Joe and instead of being sent to Europe to retaliate and kill German soldiers, Joe becomes stuck in a military base in Antarctica. And, even though at the end of his time in Antarctica, he does get to kill a German scientist, just as he fantasized, in the real life it is nothing like he imagined and definitely does not bring the emotional relief or closure that Joe was potentially hoping for.

In case of Joe’s escapism *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* also very appropriately reminds that escapism itself may not be so difficult, however, it is immensely challenging to return to the real life after so many years spent escaping it. When Joe returns from Antarctica, he does not reunite with Rosa, even though from her letters he has understood that they have a child together. It was an extremely difficult time for him, and even he himself does not know how to properly put into words the reasons, why he did not show up for more than a decade:

Joe shook his head, and the color returned to his cheeks. "I couldn't. So many times I wanted to. I would call you and hang up the phone. I would write letters but didn't send them. And the longer I waited, the harder it became to imagine. I just didn't know how to do it, you see? I didn't know what you would think of me. How you would feel about me. (Chabon, 2010:558)

Thus, at this point once again the words of Kornblum, spoken at the beginning of the novel: “Never worry about what you are escaping from,” he said. "Reserve your anxieties for what you are escaping to” (Chabon, 2010:37). These wise words spoken by Kornblum are extremely significant in respect to Joe’s escapism. Only at the end of the novel Joe escapes from his solitude and loneliness and sadness towards his love for Rosa and Tommy and friendship with Sammy, towards home and acceptance. Consequently, the escapist tendencies of Joe Kavalier go in full circle and when once he escaped from all human ties and emotions, at the end of the novel, he escapes towards these values. Joe’s escapism is extremely complex,

and it requires the length of the entire novel for Joe to make the full circle and understand the lesson that Kornblum taught him when he was only 15 years old. Also, it is important to note the overall transformative power of Joe's escapism. Creating the Escapist influences Joe in profound ways. Also, the escaping from his loved ones has taught Joe that Kornblum indeed was right, and the destination of the escape is more important than the escape itself.

3.2. SAMMY'S ESCAPISM

Joe's cousin Sammy Clay is the second most important character with the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. However, as opposed to Joe's escapism tendencies, which are on full display within the novel, Sammy's escapism is much more subtle and hidden between the lines. Nevertheless, the issues, which are at the heart of Sammy's escapism, are equally serious and worth examining.

3.2.1. Physical escape

Unlike Joe, Sammy was not born into a prosperous European Jewish family – instead, he is Brooklyn born and raised kid, who has not even set a foot outside New York. Naturally, he also never studied the art of the escapistry together with a retired magician, like his cousin Joe did. Another feature, which distinctively marks apart the European and the American cousins is the physical appearance. As already outlined above, Joe is a handsome young man with dreamy blue eyes and tall build, whereas his relative Sammy is somewhat of the opposite:

He was not, in any conventional way, handsome. His face was an inverted triangle, brow large, chin pointed, with pouting lips and a blunt, quarrelsome nose. He slouched, and wore clothes badly: he always looked as though he had just been jumped for his lunch money. He went forward each morning with the hairless cheek of innocence itself, but by noon a clean shave was no more than a memory, a hoboish penumbra on the jaw not quite sufficient to make him look tough. He thought of himself as ugly, but this was because he had never seen his face in repose. He had delivered the Eagle for most of 1931 in order to afford a set of dumbbells, which he had hefted every morning for the next eight years until his arms, chest, and shoulders were ropy and strong; polio had left him with the legs of a delicate boy. He stood, in his socks, five feet five inches tall. (Chabon, 2010:3-4)

For the most part of the novel Sammy remains in New York and up until the end of the novel he does not ever do anything that would remotely associate with physical escape. Even though at the very outset it is mentioned, how much he dreams of escape and transformation, he is too scared in his heart to take the big leap, to leave everything behind and escape out of New York into the unknown. The reasons why Sammy does not have the courage and the will

to break out of New York are psychological, however, for the sake of continuity they will be dealt within this subchapter, instead of the next subchapter on Sammy's psychological escapism.

One of the psychological reasons of Sammy's immobility is his father, or, put more precisely, the absence of his father, since Sammy's earliest childhood. The wandering lifestyle kept up by Sammy's father has left an extremely deep impression on Sammy, which in a way resulted in a strong sense of duty and unwillingness to ever cause anyone the pain that his father had caused him. For a brief period of time Sammy's father reappeared in his life:

Sammy was thirteen when his father, the Mighty Molecule, came home. [...] And yet Sammy understood, from the moment of his father's reappearance, that only dire necessity could ever have induced the Genius of Physical Culture to return to his wife and child. For the last dozen years he had wandered, "free as a goddamn bird in the bush," among the mysterious northern towns of the Wertz circuit, from Augusta, Maine, to Vancouver, British Columbia. An almost pathological antsiness, combined with the air of wistful longing that filled the Molecule's simian face, petite and intelligent, when he spoke of his time on the road, made it clear to his son that as soon as the opportunity presented itself, he would be on his way again. (Chabon, 2010:98)

Sammy's father is an unreliable, peculiar circus strongman and performer, who is never able to sit still for more than a couple of hours in one place and, as the novel already foreshadows in the paragraph above, despite Sammy's high hopes to escape Brooklyn and travel across the America together with his father, his dream is completely crushed by his father, the Mighty Molecule:

"All right," said his father. "I promise that I will take you when I go."

The next morning, when Sammy woke up, his father had gone. He had found an engagement on the old Carlos circuit, in the Southwest, said his note, where he spent the rest of his career playing hot, dusty theaters from Kingman as far south as Monterrey. Though Sammy continued to receive cards and clippings, the Mighty Molecule never again passed within a thousand miles of New York City. One night, about a year before Joe Kavalier's arrival, a telegram had come with word that, at a fairground outside Galveston, under the rear wheels of a Deere tractor he was attempting to upend, Alter Klayman had been crushed, and with him Sammy's fondest hope, in the act of escaping from his life, of working with a partner." (Chabon, 2010:108)

All of this has a cumulative effect on Sammy and profoundly influences his actions in his adult life.

The second reason, why it is so difficult for Sammy to escape life in New York and start over, is the fact that he is a homosexual man during a time, when homosexuality is not yet accepted even in the United States of America and when homosexual people are still violently persecuted by the police and the court-system. Despite all this Sammy does fall in love with one particular man – Tracy Bacon, who is a handsome, all-American actor, who voices the

role of Tom Mayflower, also known as the Escapist on a radio show. Unfortunately, their romance comes to a crashing halt, when the police descended upon the gathering of Sammy, Tracy and their friends and either brutalize or arrest the young men for homosexuality. For Sammy the experience was especially traumatizing, as he was raped by an FBI agent, in order to stay out of the jail:

The bitter taste of Agent Wyche's semen was in Sammy's mouth, along with the putrid sweet flavor of his own rectum, and he would always remember the feeling of doom in his heart, a sense that he had turned some irrevocable corner and would shortly come face-to-face with a dark and certain fate. (Chabon, 2010:413)

The fear to leave his old world behind and to settle in a completely new place was so dominant in Sammy after this unfortunate incident, that he did not want to ever risk experiencing any similar situation again and thus he gave up the dream of moving to Los Angeles together with Tracy Bacon. Sammy thus simultaneously sacrificed the love of his life and his dreams of escape from Brooklyn:

That morning, at Penn Station, Sammy had said goodbye to Tracy Bacon, in the compartment that had been reserved for them both aboard the Broadway Limited.

"I don't understand," Bacon said. They were awkward and clumsy with each other, in the closeness of the first-class compartment, a couple of men, one so intent on not touching the other, the second devoting each movement and gesture to not being touched, that their careful maintenance of a charged and shifting distance between them had itself been a kind of bleak contact. "You didn't even get arrested. Jimmy's lawyers are going to make the whole thing go away."

Sammy shook his head. They were sitting opposite each other on the twin upholstered banquettes, which they would have, somewhere around Fostoria that night, unfolded into a pair of beds.

"I just can't do it anymore, Bake," Sammy said. "It's just—I don't want to be like this."

"You don't have a choice."

"I think I do." (Chabon, 2010: 419-420)

In the day and age, when homosexuality was still not accepted in the United States of America, Sammy, in an interesting twist of events chooses a completely different type of physical escape, than the one he used to dream about when he was a kid – namely, Sammy marries Joe's pregnant girlfriend Rosa and raises their son Tommy as his own. In this bizarre situation it is clear, that Sammy traded the physical escape to sunny Los Angeles with his lover for a physical escape to a respectable suburbia in Long Island and fake, but from the outside very respectable looking marriage.

Accordingly, Sammy's first permanent act of physical escape is far from what he would have wanted deep down inside, but on some level it works very well for him and protects him from shame and persecutions associated with his homosexuality. Physical escape into a sham marriage is actually is beneficial to both parties, as not only Sammy is saved from the

embarrassment of someone finding out that he is gay, Rosa is also this way conveniently protected from being a single mother and raising Tommy on her own.

Although it may not be his dream to live in a pretend marriage, thanks to his and Rosa's good relationship and understanding of each other, Sammy finds comfort and safety in their routine and joy in his relationship with Joe's son Tommy:

He adopted the same policy with regard to it that he followed with his wife, his employment, and his love life. It was all habit. The rhythms of the commuter train, the school year, publishing schedules, summer vacations, and of his wife's steady calendar of moods had inured him to the charms and torments of his life. Only his relationship with Tommy, in spite of the recent light frost of irony and distance, remained unpredictable, alive. It was thick with regret and pleasure. When they did get an hour together, planning a universe on loose-leaf paper, or playing Ethan Allen's All-Star Baseball, it was invariably the happiest hour of Sammy's week. (Chabon, 2010:474)

It is only at the very end of the novel, when Joe finally returns home to Rosa, Sammy is finally completely freed from his duty to be present in Rosa's and Tommy's life and he ultimately takes the final step to escape physically from the constraints of the marital institute and suburban life into the big unknown:

When the household woke the next morning, quite early, the couch had been stripped, the sheets left folded on the coffee table with the pillow balanced on top, and Sammy and his suitcase were long gone. (Chabon, 2010:636)

Presumably, and hopefully Sammy's departure from the suburbia house into an undisclosed direction at the last page of the novel means that Sammy has finally, thanks to Joe's return, understood that he should be living his true and authentic life, instead of living a life, which for the most part is an empty shell, because part of his identity always remains tucked out of sight and hidden.

Throughout the entire novel, there is, however, one extremely brief moment of thrilling physical escape for Sammy – this is when he taken by his lover Tracy to the abandoned New York World Fair. As explained in the novel, World Fair holds a special place in Sammy's heart and this place has a strong connotation of being a dwelling, where the amazed New Yorkers could escape the reality:

Sammy had loved the Fair, visiting it three times in its first season of 1939, and until the end of his life, he kept one of the little buttons he had been given when he exited the General Motors pavilion, which said I have seen the future. He had grown up in an era of great hopelessness, and to him and millions of his fellow city boys, the Fair and the world it foretold had possessed the force of a covenant, a promise of a better world to come, that he would later attempt to redeem in the potato fields of Long Island. (Chabon, 2010:574-575)

Once Sammy and Tracy break in the abandoned site of the World fair, they end up climbing into a sphere, which contains the perfect city of the future, which is practically a billboard sign for escapism:

Finally they reached the major city, at the very center of the diorama, which had been known as Centerville or Centerton or something equally imaginative. A single skyscraper rose from a cluster of smaller buildings. All the buildings looked streamlined and moderne, like a city on Mongo, or the Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz*. Bacon got down on one knee and brought his eyes level with the top of the lone tower. (Chabon, 2010:579-580)

Thus, at least for a brief moment in time in the entire novel Sammy did manage to participate in a beautiful and romantic physical escape from reality together with his love in a place, which was designed by the escapists for the escapists.

To sum up the foregoing, although Sammy's physical escape takes a completely different and extremely unconventional path compared to Joe's astounding feats of physical escape, it still encompasses a deep meaning and has a special significance. While Joe manages to escape unfortunate circumstances several times throughout the novel, Sammy's situation is more static and he is tied up by the views and conventions of that particular era in regard to homosexuality. Sammy's hesitance to break away from Brooklyn and pursue his dreams is exceedingly poignant and it signifies how difficult it may be to physically run away from the norms of the surrounding society and live a truly free life.

3.2.2. Psychological escapism

In Sammy's case the psychological escapism is especially tied up and bundled together with the physical escape, or, put more precisely, the lack of physical escape in Sammy's life. In the very first pages of the novel, Sammy is introduced as a kind of person, who has vivid imagination and dreams of a bigger and more exciting life, which would lead him in a whirlwind of adventures and transfigure him into a kind of person that is widely admired and respected:

Presently, his breathing grew steady and slowed to a congested rattle, leaving Sammy to ponder alone, as he did every night, the usual caterpillar schemes. But in his imaginings, Sammy found that, for the first time in years, he was able to avail himself of the help of a confederate. (Chabon, 2010:13).

Once again the phrase "caterpillar schemes" appears within the novel and this time it is used in respect to Sammy. As explained in the sub-chapter 3.1.2. above, this phrase signifies the deep yearning of a character to escape the present life and conditions and in the process of escaping, transform *a la* caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. Hence, this phrasing, which is

used in the beginning of the novel to describe Sammy's imaginings, already alerts a reader to two particularly essential aspects: firstly, Sammy devotes a considerable amount of time to daydreaming and wishful thinking, and, secondly, that at the outset of the novel he has not yet reached his full potential as a person and that throughout the entire novel he will experience the process of growth and change.

Sammy has two sides to him, on the one hand he is a wild dreamer, who conjures up exciting daydreams featuring exhilarating adventures and fame, but on the other hand he is a realist, who understands very well the importance of money, and thus, in part, his dreams of escape are also focused on obtaining vast sums of money:

Sammy dreamed the usual Brooklyn dreams of flight and transformation and escape. He dreamed with fierce contrivance, transmuted himself into a major American novelist, or a famous smart person, like Clifton Fadiman, or perhaps into a heroic doctor; or developing, through practice and sheer force of will, the mental powers that would give him a preternatural control over the hearts and minds of men. In his desk drawer lay - and had lain for some time—the first eleven pages of a massive autobiographical novel to be entitled either (in the Perelmanian mode) *Through Abe Glass, Darkly* or (in the Dreiserian) *American Disillusionment* (a subject of which he was still by and large ignorant). He had devoted an embarrassing number of hours of mute concentration—brow furrowed, breath held—to the development of his brain's latent powers of telepathy and mind control. And he had thrilled to that Iliad of medical heroics, *The Microbe Hunters*, ten times at least. But like most natives of Brooklyn, Sammy considered himself a realist, and in general his escape plans centered around the attainment of fabulous sums of money. (Chabon, 2010:6-7)

Completely unlike Joe, who lived in Europe during his youth and adolescence and thus was completely unaware of such American cultural phenomenon as comic books, Sammy is already a huge fan of comic books at the very outset of the novel and part of his psychological escapism tendencies, such as, for instance, efforts to discover a telepathic powers in himself, can already be associated with the deep interest in comic books:

In more recent years, Sammy's commercial attention had been arrested by the field of professional illustration. The great commercial illustrators and cartoonists—Rockwell, Leyendecker, Raymond, Caniff—were at their zenith, and there was a general impression abroad that, at the drawing board, a man could not only make a good living but alter the very texture and tone of the national mood. In Sammy's closet were stacked dozens of pads of coarse newsprint, filled with horses, Indians, football heroes, sentient apes, Fokkers, nymphs, moon rockets, buckaroos, Saracens, tropic jungles, grizzlies, studies of the folds in women's clothing, the dents in men's hats, the lights in human irises, clouds in the western sky. His grasp of perspective was tenuous, his knowledge of human anatomy dubious, his line often sketchy—but he was an enterprising thief. (Chabon, 2010:7)

And, being the commercially minded young man that he is, Sammy has managed to turn the object of his escapist daydreams into the source of his income and to replicate the very

thing that has captured his imagination. Thus, for Sammy it can be deemed as rather healthy type of escapism, which keeps him captured, while also providing him with inspiration and a source of income, even despite the fact that Sammy is not even nearly the best artist in New York. Overall Sammy has a strong grasp on the whole comic book situation and this type of escapism even benefits him and works very well for him – Sammy is generally one of those few lucky people, whose hobby is simultaneously their work. Thus, Sammy manages to pull off the mimetic escape and his talents allow him to succeed and earn a considerable amount of money.

Although Sammy handles his comic-book related escapism exceptionally well, other sorts of psychological escapism are also present. As already outlined in the sub-chapter 3.2.1. above, Sammy is a gay man and this fact is very subtly hinted on, but never truly revealed until approximately the middle of the novel. The fact that such important characteristic of a character is revealed so late in the story, signals very strongly how well adapted Sammy is from escaping this truth. According to Longeway's classification of the types of escapism, Sammy actually exhibits the signs of entrenched escapism. He avoids from the belief that he is a gay man, so that the reflection on this fact does not even need to occur in Sammy's mind (Longeway, 1990:6). At some points in the novel, however, Sammy's entrenched escapism for a brief period of time even turns into self-deception.

Even though it was somewhat previously hinted in the novel, that Sammy found Tracy Bacon attractive, at that crucial moment, when Tracy Bacon visited Sammy at night on the 86th floor of the Empire State building, Sammy was completely taken aback by Tracy's daring kiss and it happened so fast, that Sammy simply did not have the time to turn on his denial mechanism and reject Tracy's advance:

Sammy was so taken by surprise that by the time his brain with its considerable store of Judeo-Christian prohibitions and attitudes could begin sending its harsh and condemnatory messages to the various relevant parts of his body, it was too late. He was already kissing Tracy Bacon back. They angled their bodies half toward each other. (Chabon, 2010:352)

It is obvious from the text that at that moment Sammy's escapism and denial in respect to his own sexual identity did kick in, and instead, his true identity took over at that instant. However, Sammy's denial of his own sexual orientation continues to persist even after his and Tracy's first kiss and all throughout the brief period of their secret relationship. In order to silence the guilt and shame, which persist in his mind, Sammy pretends to himself and even convinces himself, that their courtship is something both very innocent and very masculine at the same time:

Yes, all right, so maybe he was in love with Tracy Bacon; so what? What did that prove? So maybe there had been further kissing, and some careful exploitation of shadows and stairwells and empty hallways; even John Garfield would have had to agree that their behavior since that night in the lightning storm, on the eighty-sixth floor, had been playful and masculine and essentially chaste. Sometimes in the back of a taxicab, their hands might steal toward each other across the leather banquette, and Sammy would feel his small, damp palm and bitten fingers absorbed into the deep, sober Presbyterian fastness of Tracy Bacon's grip. (Chabon, 2010:373)

It is clear that such denying attitude cannot last for a very long time without any serious and damaging consequences, and indeed, it does not. After Sammy, Tracy and their other friends are busted by the police during their brief holiday and Sammy is brutally raped by an FBI agent, even Sammy can no longer pretend and escape the fact that he is a gay man in a world, where homosexuality is persecuted. However, Sammy is not a person to be underestimated, and when the time comes to either face that fact that life for a gay man is complicated and rather dangerous, but at the same time such life also includes being honest and being together with his lover Tracy Bacon, Sammy spitefully and understandably fearfully rejects such life, instead opting for a life, where he can never truly be himself, but which offers relative comfort and respectability. Such behaviour of Sammy is reminiscent of Tuan's statement that human is "congenitally indisposed to accept reality as it is" (Tuan, 2000:6).

Hence, Sammy starts a new chapter of escapism in his life in suburbia – a place, which itself is the product of escapism (Tuan, 2000:25). Nevertheless, even there Sammy cannot truly and genuinely escape his sexual identity. It is hinted that Sammy sometimes goes out and meets other man in New York. And the rumours regarding situations like that tend to slowly spread around and, as the time passes, surrounding people truly sense that there is something amiss in Sammy's and Rosa's marriage:

Uh-huh. I see." Everyone knew. That was what made their particular secret, their lie, so ironic; it went unspoken, unchallenged, and yet it did not manage to deceive. There was gossip in the neighborhood; Rosa had never heard it, but she could feel it sometimes, smell it lingering in the air of a living room that she and Sam had just entered. (Chabon, 2010:566-567)

The paragraph cited above is a clear illustration that even though Sammy tries his best to escape the reality and deceive both himself and the people around him, it does not genuinely work in achieving either of these goals. Thus, it transpires that escapism can be futile at times and it does not always work out in the end the way that a person wishes it would.

By the end of the novel Sammy finally appears to have understood this truth. The homecoming of Joe was the necessary catalyst, which in a way seemed to remind Sammy that it is possible to break the circle of lies and escapism, to emerge freed.

All in all Sammy has developed many escapist tendencies over the course of his life. Some of them lead to success, such as his interest in supernatural and in comic books works in his favour and leads him to his career path. Whereas the escapism from his own sexual identity and from the shame and stigma surrounding it leads him on even more unconventional path, where he fakes a marriage and raises his best friend's kid. But in the end this bizarre journey of escapism takes Sammy on emotional adventure and allows him to experience love and family relationship. Nevertheless, as important as those values are, at the end of the novel Sammy realizes that he must go his own way and carve his own path. All of this has a cumulative effect of transformation and development of Sammy's character.

Overall, to sum up Joe's and Sammy's escapism tendencies, power of the transformative power of the escape, which is highlighted in the novel, must be emphasized (Hess, 2014:31). At the very outset of the novel, it is contended that escape possesses a transformative capability: "It was never just a question of escape. It was also a question of transformation" (Chabon, 2010:3). The journey of the characters from the first page of the novel to the last page involves personal growth. The traumas in their life, as well as escapism as a coping mechanism with these traumas shape their lives and transform Joe and Sammy from young, slightly carefree men into grown ups, who deal with their personal problems.

CONCLUSIONS

The notion of escapism is an extremely complicated concept to depict and, simply put, escapism is a set of activities, which allow a person to get away from everyday life. In our society, escapism mostly tends to carry a negative connotation, and it is very often associated with counter-productive activities, which contribute to time wasting and wishful thinking and do not help a person in any way to tackle the real-life problems. However, despite the abundance of such opinion regarding escapism, recently, escapism has been redeemed to a certain degree. As established in the theoretical research, escapism can be either healthy or unhealthy, and, as John L. Longeway has found, there are varying degrees of escapism, raging from mild escapism, all the way to self-deception. Thus, there are nuances and variations between different types of escapism and it can have both positive, as well as negative effect upon a person.

The notion of escape literature was further investigated in order to determine, the connection between escapism and escape literature. As it turns out, the division of literature into the lowbrow escape literature and highbrow interpretative literature was first created by Laurence Perrine in the 1950s and is still often referred to in modern literature textbooks. However, this theory has certain flaws and it is often impossible to certainly determine, whether any said literary work belongs to escape literature or interpretative literature. This division is especially complicated by the fact that, as Linda Hutcheon has observed, the postmodern literature often deals with blending the high and low genres in order to create an unusual and complicated pattern in a literary work and blur the line between the high and the low.

In addition, the present work also deals with such notions as the fantastic mode in literature and magic realism, which traditionally would be definitely perceived as escapist and thus would render any given work as escape literature. Nevertheless, as it is showcased in the present work, the use of magic realism and fantastic mode within a literary work does not automatically render it as escape literature. Thus, fantastic literature and escape literature are two separate realms of literature, which may sometimes intersect. Moreover, according to Rosemary Jackson the fantastic mode in literature often may serve as a form of subversion and a protest against the existing and dominant cultural order, therefore, the fantastic mode in literature is able to add a deep and complex meaning to a literary text.

Also, as Soheli Begum has contended, escapist reading, and, thus escapism as such cannot always be categorized as a mindless pleasure, instead the transformative power of the escapism and escape literature must be recognized.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay is a literary work that unabashedly and joyfully celebrates escapism in its various forms and does not shy away from blending together such themes as the Holocaust, superheroes, World War II, escapism, friendship and love. Even though *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* indeed has some features, which are usually attributed to escape literature, the novel deals with many important human emotions, such as grief, anger, loneliness and love. This novel deals with many heavy issues, such as the representation of the Holocaust, the Second World War and sexual identity. The novel is a fusion of historical realism, fantastic elements and of the magic realism and the use of these devices allows a reader to better understand the emotional condition of the main characters Sammy and Joe. The elements of the fantastic and of the magic realism are not used thoughtlessly, instead they convey an important message. Namely, the creation of a comic book character the Escapist is a method of protest against Nazism and World War II in general, whereas the Golem is a symbol of Jewish resistance. Taking into account the important themes, which are featured in this novel, it may hardly be called escape literature, even though it does contain some elements of fantastic and of magical realism. Michael Chabon masterfully blends together whimsical and important themes, as well as fuses together high and low art in the true spirit of postmodernism and thus actually blurs the line between the escape literature and interpretative literature. Therefore, whether *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* is read either as an exciting escape and adventure story or as a deep work featuring trauma and escapism as a way of dealing with trauma, is left to a reader's discretion.

The escapist tendencies of the two main characters of the novel – Joe and Sammy – are accordingly analysed in detail in order to reveal the depth and reasoning behind their escapism. While Sammy's and Joe's reasoning behind their escapism is completely different, it stems from a trauma that each of them has suffered. The main vehicle for their escapism – creating comic books is presented in the novel as a worthwhile occupation, which also has symbolic meaning, namely, transmitting their protest against Nazism and World War II. Sammy and Joe experience a full spectre of escapism – starting from a milder degree of escapism, all the way to the entrenched escapism and self deception. Another commonality in their escapism is that by the end of the novel they have made a full circle and realised that the best decision to take is stop escaping their lives and who they are and embrace their true identity. Overall, the novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* celebrates escapism and showcases its transformative power, while at the same time acknowledging its shortcomings.

THESES

1. Escapism is generally defined as a diversion of mind to purely imaginative activity in order to escape the reality and is still perceived in our society as a negative occurrence, which hinders a development of a person and precludes an individual from dealing with the real life problems.
2. Despite the overall negative perception, escapism is not only a mindless and futile flight from the reality, instead escapism may also have a transformative effect upon a person and serve as a vehicle for coping with problematic issues and overcoming stress.
3. The traditional division of literature into the “low” escape literature and the “high” interpretative literature was established in the 1950s, however, it is problematic to definitely categorize any given work as either escape literature or interpretative literature, and, moreover, this distinction does not account for postmodern literature, which blends high and low forms of art.
4. The presence of fantastic elements does not automatically render any given novel as escape literature, and, while the escape literature and fantastic literature may intersect, these in fact are two separate modes of literature.
5. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* contains both the elements attributable to the escape literature, as well as the elements attributable to the interpretative literature; the novel blends these two modes of literature and thus it is a true example of postmodern fiction.
6. In *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* the fantastic elements, such as superheroes in comic books created by the protagonists, are not used merely as means for escapism, instead they are used as the vehicle to express the protest against the political situation in Europe during the World War II.
7. The novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* to a certain extent breaks the conventions of the Holocaust literature by including in the same literary work the elements of the fantastic and magic realism, however, this is not done disrespectfully and, moreover, these elements serve to convey a special meaning in the novel.
8. The novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* does not directly depict the Holocaust, however, this is not a result of the escapism, but rather a natural temporal and spatial distance between the event and the author, and, in addition, the partial absence of the Holocaust in a Holocaust novel helps to illustrate the actual historical ignorance of this event.

9. The protagonists of the novel Joe and Sammy both in their own way exhibit behaviour of the actual physical escape, as well as psychological escapism. The varying degrees of psychological escapism are presented in the novel, starting from mild escapism, all the way to the entrenched escapism and self-deception.
10. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* contains both elements of the mimetic escape, as well as fantastic escape.
11. The escapism in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is on the one hand redeemed and presented as a means of transforming the main characters, however, on the other hand, the negative effects of the escapism are also showcased.

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Dokumentārā lapa

Maģistra darbs „Escapism in Michael Chabon’s Novel *The Amazing Adventures Of Kavalier & Clay*” (Bēgšana no realitātes Maikla Šabona darbā “Kavaliera un Kleja brīnumainie piedzīvojumi”) izstrādāts LU Humanitāro zinātņu fakultātē.

Ar savu parakstu apliecinu, ka pētījums veikts patstāvīgi, izmantoti tikai tajā norādītie informācijas avoti un iesniegtā darba elektroniskā kopija atbilst izdrukai.

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