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**THE REPRESENTATION OF LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN
PATRICIA HIGHSMITH'S *THE PRICE OF SALT***

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore different aspects of the representation of lesbians provided in Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt*.

The thesis consists of an introduction, a literature review, an empirical analysis part, and a conclusion. The introduction provides background information on both the novel and its author as well as on the historical context. The literature review consists of an overview of American lesbian literature of the same period, its traditions, and specific features unique to *The Price of Salt*. It also explores previous research on Highsmith's personality and her queer view of Cold-War society.

The empirical part explores the two main characters of the novel and their lesbian relationship from different aspects: mother-child connection, age and social inequality and contrast of traditionally feminine protagonists to the stereotypical view of masculine lesbians. This part also analyses the main characters' relationships with society and their unhappy heterosexual experiences, which is also common in Highsmith's writings.

The conclusion presents the summary of all findings of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The Price of Salt is a novel by Patricia Highsmith first published in 1952 under the pen-name Claire Morgan and republished under her own name in 1990 with the title changed to *Carol*. The novel tells the story of 19-year-old Therese, who works in the toy section of a department store and falls in love with an older woman named Carol in the USA at the beginning of the Cold War. The former is looking for her place in life while trying to get the position of a theatre stage designer and staying in a convenient and socially acceptable relationship with a man she does not love; the latter is going through a difficult divorce with her husband who is eager to get the custody of their daughter by any means, including ruining Carol's reputation.

The novel was unusual for its time: in her autobiography, Marijane Meaker, writer and Highsmith's former lover, stated that *The Price of Salt* was the first lesbian novel with a relatively happy ending in both American and world literature; for a while, it also stayed the only one of this sort (Meaker 2003: 1). Although lesbian novels were published earlier, traditionally, as Highsmith herself recalls, they ended with one or both women committing suicide, losing their minds or converting to heterosexuality, and falling in love with men (Highsmith 2015a: 311). Patricia Highsmith was the first author to give her lesbian characters a possible future together, even though it results in Carol giving up her daughter, and her ex-husband getting full custody.

The 1990 edition of the book and later ones include an afterword by Highsmith herself. She admits that the novel is semi-autobiographical: it was inspired by her own experience of working at a department store during Christmas time and meeting a blondish woman in a mink coat who later served as a prototype for Carol. Highsmith also recalls

writing the whole plot of the future novel in two hours or even less the same day (Highsmith 2015a: 309). After the success gained by her first published novel, *Strangers on a Train*, which was immediately adapted into a movie by Alfred Hitchcock, Highsmith was generally expected to write a similar suspense novel, but, she ended up writing *The Price of Salt* which was rejected by her publisher, Harper & Bros, and later published by another publisher under a pen-name to prevent ruining her reputation as a serious writer (Highsmith 2015a: 310). Based on Highsmith's diaries, her biographer, Andrew Wilson, suggests that, although the plot was inspired by a blonde woman personally unknown to Highsmith, the novel also contains biographical references to her previous romantic relationships with other women; he particularly names Virginia Kent Catherwood and Kathryn Hamill Cohen (Wilson 2003: 161). The story was adapted into a movie, *Carol*, in 2015, starring Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara, which once again caused public interest in the original novel by Highsmith.

Although the novel was first published almost seventy years ago and is widely read by both LGBT and heterosexual readers, it has not been extensively studied by scholars. The novel itself stands out from other novels dedicated to LGBT relationships as the first one with a happy ending for queer characters. Moreover, the semi-autobiographical novel written by a lesbian author in the middle of the 20th century provides a great opportunity for analysing the representation of past lesbian experience from today's point of view, not only how this kind of a relationship was perceived by heterosexual society, but also how it was represented by a homosexual person. In addition, although Patricia Highsmith passed away in 1995, 2021 was the year of her 100th birthday, which gives additional reason to look at her writings.

This thesis will focus on the representation of lesbian relationships in Highsmith's novel. The first part of the thesis will focus on the previous research on *The Price of Salt* and Highsmith's novels in general as well as on the research on American lesbian literature of the 1950-60s. The second part of the thesis will focus on analysing both of the main characters of the novel and the portrayal of their relationship. Main points of the research will be presented in the conclusion.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although *The Price of Salt* was first published in 1952 and has been widely read since then, it has been notably less often studied by scholars than other novels by Highsmith such as, for instance, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* or *Strangers on a Train*. It is usually analysed together with Highsmith's other writings (like in Victoria Hesford's articles discussed below), or among other novels dealing with the topic of lesbian relationships but seldom on its own. One possible reason for this unevenness may be the fact that, contrary to Highsmith's other novels, it was first written under a pen-name, and it was not until its republication in 1990 that Highsmith's authorship of the book became known to the public. In addition to this, as Ivonne Keller recalls, novels on same-sex relationships were for a considerable period of time seen only as pulp fiction and not studied properly (Keller 2005b: 177-178). *The Price of Salt*, as stated by Highsmith herself, was first published as hardcover book but only gained commercial success as a paperback book (Highsmith 2015a: 310).

This literature review will focus on the previous studies and the topics they have explored such as the queer view of the USA during the 1950-60s, lesbian novels in American literature of the same period as *The Price of Salt*, and its special place among them.

1.1. Lesbian novels of the period

The 1950s and early 1960s, according to Keller (2005a), were the period of the great popularity of lesbian pulp novels – cheap paperback books sold at newspaper stands. This type of novels normally had a plot, but their main topic were the relationships (sexual

or simply romantic) between two or more women; these were typically written by heterosexual males or homosexual females. Keller herself divides lesbian pulp novels into different categories: novels told from the point of view of heterosexual women who are involved in lesbian relationships for different reasons, for instance, lack of men in female-only places; novels directed to the male audience that were normally written by a male author and were rather pornographic and voyeuristic, objectifying the relationships between women in them; "pro-lesbian", as Keller herself names them, novels mostly written by homosexual female authors that are usually told from a female point of view and have more complex characters; pulp novels that could rather be called "pulp romances". Those are the closest to the modern understanding of a love novel, written by women and having female protagonists, dealing mostly with the characters' feelings, not their sexual intercourses, as well as having more complex plot. The last two types are the least homophobic of the categories (Keller 2005a: 390-391).

The Price of Salt falls under the last category, as it shows its characters' feelings, emotions, and thoughts instead of describing sexual scenes between women. Highsmith herself mentions that in those days it was common for the novels with homosexual love lines to end tragically for the same-sex lovers: they "had had to pay for their deviation by cutting their wrists, drowning themselves in a swimming pool, or by switching to heterosexuality (so it was stated), or by collapsing—alone and miserable and shunned – into a depression equal to hell" (Highsmith 2015a: 311). Keller (2005a) argues that the vast majority of lesbian novels of those times were aimed at the heterosexual male audience, and women were sexual objects seen through the eyes of a heterosexual male protagonist. Those novels typically ended with opposite-sex characters getting married, while

pro-lesbian novels did not follow this standard. Yet, it took a considerable period of time for lesbian pulp fiction to start ending happily for homosexual characters, even though the path was already discovered by Highsmith. The happy ending was "an image that may appear boringly mainstream to some today, but was surely radical at the time" (Keller 2005a: 400).

Sexuality, homosexuality especially, was not extensively studied by scholars at the beginning of the 1950s. It was in 1948 that Alfred Kinsey's report *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was released and only in 1953, a year after the first publication of *The Price of Salt*, that his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was presented to the public.

Previously homosexuality was typically seen as a sin, an unnatural phenomenon, and homosexuals themselves were presented as enemies (Keller 2005a: 401). Kinsey's interviews with about 6000 women and their analysis first revealed lesbianism to the public from a scientific point of view, not only showing its naturalness and versatility but also challenging the taboo of homosexuality (Kinsey Institute). However, Michael Bibler (2015) suggests that this wider public representation of homosexual people only worsened the homophobic attitudes, as homosexuals became more visible but were still seen in a negative light by most. Consequently, the negative picture of homosexuals and their unhappy lives was preferred in the literature of the period to highlight the importance of becoming part of the socially acceptable community to live happily (Bibler 2015: 126-127).

According to Keller, lesbian pulp novels were often not given enough attention by scholars, as they were often unrealistic and even homophobic, but they were still important as a rare (for some even only) source of lesbian representation available in the time of

overall silence or negative attitude (Keller 2005b: 178). In addition, pulp novels allowed some of the future pro-lesbian novelists to begin their careers to write novels able to challenge the negative literary representations of homosexual women (Keller 2005a: 392).

Keller (2005a) provides a number of about five hundred lesbian novels published between 1950 and 1965 when the popularity of these books was at its highest (Keller 2005a: 388). While *The Price of Salt* was only written at the beginning of this period, it avoids many clichés typical for the lesbian novels published before and after it. Among them Keller (2005a) names point of view of heterosexual male, sexual objectification of women, female-only location, and explicit sexuality none of which are to be found in *The Price of Salt*.

1.2. Highsmith's queer view of the 1950s period in the USA

Although *The Price of Salt* was first published in 1952, the idea of the future novel came to Highsmith already in 1948 – three years after the ending of the Second World War and two years after the beginning of the Cold War. According to Marc Miller, during the Second World War, the role of women in the United States changed rapidly to fit the needs of the country: workplaces had to be occupied when male workers left for war, and women were actively invited to leave their previous domestic roles and start working outside of the home (Miller 1980). However, the order of things was reversed as the war ended, and once again the role of the woman as wife and mother was praised and preferred in American society. While some women were happy to return to their domestic role, others were reluctant to give up their new more independent life once they had tried it. In her article Hesford argues:

Highsmith's vision of 1950s America turns the Cold War domestic ideology of the middle-class home as a source of national strength and normality inside out, revealing the undertow of violence and sexual unconventionality that both prop up the public function of the middle-class home and constantly threaten to tear it apart. (Hesford 2005: 217)

In Cold-War USA, the quiet suburban life of a married heterosexual couple with children was seen as an ideal, a symbol of stability and 'Americanness' during the constant nuclear threat from the Soviet Union. In public discourse, according to Hesford, homosexual people represented the inner enemy of the country, those who lived quietly and hid themselves and their 'perversions' from the rest of the citizens, but who were still able to ruin the desired stability and morality at any moment (Hesford 2005: 216).

Highsmith, however, uses her homosexual characters in the white American suburban setting as a literary tool to demonstrate how hypocritical this society is under its cover designed to look perfect on the outside. Hesford implies that homosexuals are seen as enemies for their lack of morality, but eventually, those who seem to live socially acceptable lives are the ones to suffer from their hidden desires and gain freedom only by escaping the suburban life. What Hesford calls "a heteronormative domesticity" in Highsmith's writings is a territory where people are robbed of their personalities and have to perform the fixed socially acceptable roles of heterosexual males and females that can be easily controlled and are not seen as a threat to other people and stability of their lives (Hesford 2005: 216-218). In her articles on *The Price of Salt*, Hesford mostly concentrates on the analysis of the gender roles and the complicated relationships between queer female characters and the society they live in, as at the time described freedom was limited for both women and homosexuals.

The Price of Salt, when compared to Highsmith's other novels, is heavily influenced by her personal life and even considered semi-autobiographical. While

Highsmith was lesbian, it is the first and only among her writings that openly explores the topic of female homosexuality. In her afterword to the 1990 edition of the book, Highsmith admits she did not have the aim to differ from other lesbian fiction writers of her time on purpose; she was also surprised by the number of thankful letters she received over years from both female and male homosexuals happy to finally read a story they could relate to and see proof people like them can live happily (Highsmith 2015a: 311).

Wilson argues that Highsmith was not a supporter of feminism and could even, perhaps, be viewed as a misogynist (Wilson 2003: 300). Highsmith not only did not show any interest in standing for her rights as a homosexual woman, but she also disapproved when others did so. For Highsmith, the story must have been more personal than others but still only a story, not a way to make a social statement on LGBT rights or change the perception of female homosexuals in the media.

After Highsmith's death, her former lover Marijane Meaker wrote memoirs that mostly covered the period of their relationship. Meaker (2003) also reports that Highsmith was extremely misogynistic: while physically she was only attracted to other women, she strongly disliked their company – none of her same-sex relationships lasted for more than a few years; at the same time, she enjoyed male company and had male lovers, unsuccessfully seeking satisfaction in heterosexual contacts (Meaker 2003). In addition to this, in her interview to *The Telegraph*, Marijane Meaker claims that in her later years Highsmith hated not only other women but also homosexual people (The Telegraph 2003). However, while Highsmith's misogynistic attitudes were reported by a number of people, Meaker is the only one to state that her former lover also began to openly express homophobic attitudes during her last years.

According to Wilson, Highsmith showed early drafts of *The Price of Salt* to a friend, who instantly remarked on its close personal connection to Highsmith herself which she admitted to be true: while Carol combines characteristics of different women Highsmith dated or simply met, Therese mirrors Highsmith's life and personality (Wilson 2003: 161). Highsmith even makes her say the very same words she once wrote in her diary: "The milk seemed to taste of bone and blood, of warm flesh, or hair, saltless as chalk, yet alive as a growing embryo" (Highsmith 2015b: 66). The character of Richard, Therese's boyfriend, appears to be based on Marc Brandel, who dated Highsmith and was willing to marry her before she left him because of being unable to maintain a heterosexual relationship (Wilson 2003). The story of Therese in the novel is a story Highsmith imagined for herself. It begins at a department store, very similar to the one Highsmith was working at, and develops as the young female protagonist meets the woman of her dreams with whom she instantly falls in love. The two women date and later start a relationship as they proclaim their love to each other – the thing that never actually happened to Highsmith and her blondish muse. While in real life Highsmith never had any relationship that lasted longer than a few years, the ending of the novel suggests that the two protagonists will have a future together. Highsmith created a perfect fictional female lover for herself that combined her favourite features of her former lovers and women in general. Carol was a woman with whom Highsmith, more probably, imagined herself living a life together, but who never actually existed.

Therese may have been the literary version of Highsmith she allowed to be happy; Therese is also used to portray a number of thoughts, uncertainties, and problems that she overcomes at the end of the novel. Hesford discusses how, while being at Carol's place,

Therese suddenly begins to study her own naked body to understand herself as a grown woman, a "sexual being"; she is interested to discover what she is and her place in this world, but she fails to do so in this particular scene (Hesford 2003: 131). Therese is more successful in understanding herself at the end of the novel: the relationships with Carol drives her to the point where she realises her real place, feels that she is no stranger to this world, and becomes braver, which leads her to understanding that Carol is the one she really loves and gives her courage to act and make her decisions, at the very end of the novel Therese concludes: "it was Carol she loved and would always love" (Highsmith 2015b: 307).

2. REPRESENTATION OF LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN *THE PRICE OF SALT*

In this part of the paper, the relationship of Therese and Carol will be explored more closely, with attention to the two central characters and their relationship. The discussion is built on the themes mentioned in the literature review above.

2.1. Carol as a mother figure to Therese

One of the most remarkable features of the main characters as a couple is their age difference: while Therese is clearly stated to be nineteen years old, Carol's age is never mentioned, but Therese thinks she must be between thirty and thirty-two (Highsmith 2015b: 48). Although Carol is not the same age as Therese's actual mother, there is a serious age gap.

During the novel readers obtain some knowledge about Therese's childhood and her relationships with her parents: her father died of an illness and her mother married another man with whom she had more children. Therese herself was sent to a church school and barely visited her mother's new family. She did not feel loved by her own mother, who moved Therese away from her and preferred to live with her new husband and children (Highsmith 2015b: 67). Therese found a new mother figure in one of the nuns at the church school, Sister Alicia, whom she remembers more eagerly and happily than her own mother, who is a painful memory of betrayal for her. However, her attitude starts to change already after her first meeting with Carol: "since yesterday morning, Sister Alicia had been thrust far away, far below [Carol]" (Highsmith 2015b: 47).

At the same time, during the whole novel, Carol struggles to keep her daughter, Rindy, to herself. Carol first appears in the novel when she comes to the department store to buy her daughter a Christmas present, and in the last chapter she admits to Therese that she lost custody to her ex-husband. While Carol's daughter never appears in the novel in person (she is only seen in the pictures and recalled in memories, sometimes Carol receives her calls and letters), she becomes the leitmotif associated with Carol from her first appearance until the last. Carol is no longer a wife (since the last thing still connecting her to her ex-husband is the custody of their child), but she is a mother.

Similarly to replacing her previous mother figure, Sister Alicia, with Carol, Therese feels that she has to compete with Rindy for Carol's attention – it appears that she sees herself not only in the position of Carol's lover, but as an elder child that can be betrayed and left by the mother figure (Carol), the way it was done by Therese's biological mother before. When Carol writes that she was given a choice between dating Therese and seeing her daughter, Therese immediately thinks: "Carol loved her child more than her" (Highsmith 2015b: 272). However, when later she meets Carol in person, Therese is relieved to hear Carol declined the offer to end their relationship. In Therese's understanding it means that "Carol had not betrayed her. Carol loved her more than she loved her child" (Highsmith 2015b: 298). Therese is not yet an adult in the scene, even though it is almost the end of the novel. She still feels that she has to fight another child for Carol's love, and she is happy to think she is loved more than her 'opponent'. Therese never actually admits it to Carol and even to herself directly, but there is an obvious parallel between Carol and her daughter and Therese and her mother. Therese feels she is not the main priority to Carol if there is another child – she wants Carol all for herself to

love her as a lover would, but also provide her with motherly love she was unable to get as a child.

It is more difficult to understand Carol's thoughts, as the novel is narrated by Therese, who is subjective in interpreting Carol's actions and words. However, there are instances of Carol taking the mother role with Therese, especially at the beginning of the story: "[Therese] knew [it] from tenderness and the concern in [Carol's] voice, as if she were a child sick with fever" (Highsmith 2015b: 65). However, it is still only Therese's interpretation, which may tell more of what she is willing to see and hear than of what Carol's actual intentions are. Therese clearly expects Carol to treat her as a child, even though her feelings towards Carol are undoubtedly romantic, and is thus trapped in a sort of Oedipal complex, which she, however, is able to overcome as she starts to identify herself as a grown-up woman.

2.2. Development to equals, Therese's coming of age

Nearly until the very end of the novel Therese, consciously or not, identifies herself as a child, especially when compared to Carol, who is older, was already married, and has a child of her own. A married woman with children in her early thirties must have had a position in society that was notably above that of Therese at the time they met. Carol is already someone, while Therese is still only looking for her path in this life. She has to make her living and save money by working as a temporary salesgirl during the Christmas rush, while Carol already has a house, car, and the amount of money that is enough to provide her with whatever she wants at any time. It costs Carol nothing to give Therese 200 dollars – the same amount of money Therese had managed to save over many months.

While Carol has no bad intentions, for Therese it is evidence of their inequality and she is reluctant to accept the money. At the same time, Therese has a painful memory of accepting the same 200 dollars from her biological mother, when the school requested it from her after graduation; Therese had to accept the money but was eager to return it one day. After finding this out, Carol says: "You were still a child. When you forget about paying her back, then you'll be an adult" (Highsmith 2015b: 68). Afterward and during the whole novel, however, Therese keeps refusing to take any money from Carol, in some way admitting she is not yet an adult, while Carol is one.

Later, Carol begins to lose her previous position: at first, she loses custody of her child, after that she gets a divorce and decides to sell her house in suburbia. During their last date, as Carol tells about all of this, Therese notices that her wedding ring is finally gone (Highsmith 2015b: 300). Instead of her previous life, Carol decides to start a new one: she gets a job and is going to move to the city apartment where she would be able to freely live with Therese. At the same time, Therese becomes more adult as well – at least, her looks begin to change. She changes her hairstyle and buys new clothes. When first seeing her after this change Carol notes "you're all grown up – with grown-up hair and grown-up clothes" (Highsmith 2015b: 294). However, at this point, Therese is not yet ready to overcome her immature nature and actually grow up. Although she finds out Carol decided to give up on her daughter, Therese is still too afraid to be betrayed and is not yet ready to forgive Carol for the painful moments when she thought Carol had left her. She declines Carol's offer to continue their relationship and live together and leaves for the cocktail party with her new coworkers.

It is at this party, however, that Therese finally transforms into an adult not only in her looks but also in her mindset. Therese understands Carol is not the only option for her as she may be attractive to other women and is able to create new relationships with them, when she meets Genevieve Cranell, an actress, who instantly begins to show Therese signs of her interest. Therese finally realises she is a woman attractive to other women, not an immature child. She even understands she may continue to see Genevieve and may even be loved herself, but Therese will never love her back (Highsmith 2015b: 305). Therese has to fully realise she is now an independent adult and an attractive woman, who is able to live without Carol, to conclude that Carol is actually the only one she loves.

Both Carol and Therese keep moving towards each other and to their independence: Carol frees herself from the bounds of heteronormative life and family, while Therese gains financial independence, overcomes her childhood traumas left by her biological mother, and finds her place in society. For the last time in the novel the two main characters meet as equals. The reader is unable to know what they say to each other, but the last thing Therese notices about Carol is "her arm lifted suddenly, her hand waved a quick, eager greeting that Therese had never seen before" (Highsmith 2015b: 307). Carol greets Therese in a completely new way, not as a child, but as a woman now equal to her. It may be assumed that they will create a relationship dissimilar to the unequal one they used to have, as both of them have changed themselves.

2.3. Opposition to the stereotypical picture of a lesbian couple

Even though Highsmith seems not to have intended to influence the public perception of lesbians, it may be said that she succeeded in presenting her readers with a

couple that was opposed to the stereotypical view of a lesbian couple. In her article Keller provides an overview of earlier lesbian pulp fiction that often tended to present the picture of 'real' lesbians that were opposed to traditional femininity of 'temporary' lesbians that were having love affairs with other women due to the lack of men. Keller gives an example of the famous novel *Women's Barracks* that roughly divides women into those two types (Keller 2005a: 388-389). Even Therese herself appears to be quite surprised by the fact she and Carol can be the women attracted to other women, as her own vision of lesbians is close to those stereotypes: "She had heard of girls falling in love, and she knew what kind of people they were and what they looked like. Neither she nor Carol looked like that" (Highsmith 2015b: 100). Both Therese and Carol are traditionally feminine women, who wear feminine clothes, use makeup and behave in a way socially acceptable for females, yet both of them are presented as lesbian women, not even bisexual.

The need to see both or, at least one in a lesbian couple as masculine may stem from the heteronormativity of the society criticised by Highsmith in her writings. Heteronormativity makes people expect for two lovers to be opposed to each other not only in their gender but in their behaviour and looks as well. Highsmith, however, decides to challenge this view and provide a more realistic picture where people of any looks and mindsets may be attracted to each other: "Therese noticed the long line from her shoulder to the wide leather belt, continued in her leg. It was beautiful, like a chord of music or a whole ballet. She was beautiful..." (Highsmith 2015b: 106).

2.4. Contrast between heteronormative suburbia and free city

The first ever meeting of Therese and Carol happens at Therese's workplace, a department store in New York, and it is also the moment Therese falls in love at first sight. They later continue to see and slowly get to know each other in different places in New York before Therese finally visits Carol's suburban house in New Jersey, where she once used to live with her husband and daughter as a seemingly perfect heterosexual family. In her article Hesford points out that the place is created not for the people living there, but as a picture for those who see it from the outside; it is a symbol of heteronormativity, a perfect advertisement-like house where everything, let it be people or things, must be perfect as well, and during Therese's visit Carol acts as if unsure where to locate her in this artificial picture and unable to find a suitable place for both of them – homosexual women so unfit for this setting (Hesford 2005: 226). While it is her own house where Carol lived for years before, she acts like a stranger here in the presence of Therese. The reader is unable to see how she acts there on her own, as the whole story is told from the point of view of Therese, but when they are together, Carol starts to see herself in a different way – she is no longer married heterosexual housewife who has the rights to live in such an environment, but a lesbian woman, an enemy of the quiet middle-class white suburbia who must hide herself and live under disguise to be safe. Therese understands there is something unusual in her behaviour: “[Carol] was preoccupied with something and regretted after all inviting her out to the house, Therese felt” (Highsmith 2015b: 62).

Contrary to the suburbia of New Jersey, there is a huge city of New York, where all sorts of people can find their place and easily hide in the crowd. Hesford states that for the

characters of the novel New York is a place where they have the freedom to establish relationships impossible in the suburbia. In the city, there are opportunities to make a career and live a life without getting into the trap of heterosexual marriage and becoming wife and mother. However, even there society keeps making its claims: it is only possible for Therese and Carol to meet in public by pretending there is nothing romantic between the two of them and still running into Richard or Carol's husband in public spaces (Hesford 2003:127). While New York is the place that liberates both women the most, they still have to face numerous limitations. Women can freely see each other and develop their sympathies, but cannot express them openly in public. It is not until the beginning of Therese and Carol's car trip that the two women find the courage to declare their feelings towards each other.

They return to New York, where Carol has to visit the court and fight for the custody of her daughter, divides women once again, as Carol's husband found evidence of them being lovers and, therefore, of Carol being unfit to bring up her child. She is given a choice between continuing her relationship with Therese and never seeing her daughter again, and leaving Therese forever and having the opportunity to meet her child once in a while. The choice stems from the suburbia, which is represented by Carol's husband's eagerness to bring her back to heteronormativity and his control, but it is the city that helps Carol liberate herself. She sees her only option in leaving the suburbia forever and buying a New York apartment for her and Therese to live together. Carol destroys her connections to her past suburban life, even to her own daughter, and decides to move to the city, the only place that provides her with freedom of choice.

2.5. Highsmith's portrayal of heterosexual relationships

Although the centre of attention in *The Price of Salt* is a lesbian couple, both women are at the same time involved in relationships with men: for a considerable part of the novel Therese is dating a young man named Richard, and Carol still has to contact her soon-to-be ex-husband during the process of their divorce. Both women are unhappy with their heterosexual partners. While Therese likes Richard, she does not love him and is not attracted to him physically – she recalls their sexual intercourse as unpleasant and even “painful enough to make her weep” (Highsmith 2015b: 57). She wants no future with him and becomes unemotional and apathetic whenever he starts making any plans of their future together.

Carol, in her turn, seldom sees her husband but recalls being seen as an item that looks good in his house and admits it was due to his inability to control her that their marriage collapsed: “... he picked me out like a rug for his living room, and he made a bad mistake” (Highsmith 2015b: 135). Carol is a beautiful and intelligent woman, but she is unfit to be the wife she was expected to be not only because of her relationships with other women, but also because she wanted to keep her own personality. However, even during the process of their divorce, Carol's husband seeks to control her life, which leads to her losing custody of their daughter because of her dating women.

Hesford suggests that in Highsmith's writing in general heterosexual couples and marriages are often demonised: they are the source of violence, abuse, and dehumanisation; this form of relationships exists because it was created and accepted by society, but it is more of a trap for the ones inside it (Hesford 2005: 217). Although

Richard is portrayed as a relatively good person in the novel, in his relationship with Therese he is blind towards her feelings. He rejects that love between two women can be equal to heterosexual love and cannot accept the fact that Therese left him for a woman that can be seen in him bitterly writing her: “I know I had stopped loving you then, and now the uppermost emotion I feel towards you is [...] disgust. It is your hanging on to this woman to the exclusion of everyone else, this relationship which I am sure has become sordid and pathological by now, that disgusts me” (Highsmith 2015b: 265). He ends up giving up but in his last letter he promises to tell everyone who happens to ask about Therese’s behaviour, which he considers inappropriate, as an act of his revenge and his way of dealing with pain: “People still ask me about you. [...] I intend to tell them the truth. Only that way can I get it out of myself...” (Highsmith 2015b: 265). However, it is never revealed in the novel whether he did so or not.

Carol's husband cannot give up on controlling her even while being separated: he hires a detective to follow her and Therese during their trip in search of evidence of them being lovers. It is his actions that lead Carol to the situation when she has to choose between seeing her daughter and continuing her relationships with Therese, a choice between being once again trapped by heteronormative society or living a life of a free person she wanted to be. While telling it all to Therese, Carol admits she would “prefer not to see Rindy at all any more” as it means she has to give up her pride and freedom (Highsmith 2015b: 297).

CONCLUSION

The Price of Salt is a semi-autobiographical novel by Patricia Highsmith that has a special place among both lesbian and LGBT American literature for its pro-lesbian perspective and happy ending, unusual for the Cold War period. The literature review gives an overview of the previous research on the novel itself – its autobiographical aspects that Highsmith decided to add to the fictional story, Highsmith's attitude towards and portrayal of Cold War society and heterosexual relationships; and a brief overview of the lesbian American literature of about the same period as *The Price of Salt*. The main features of this literature was the censorship that prohibited healthy and happy stories of same-sex lovers and expected such stories to end tragically or with a heterosexual marriage. Although lesbian pulp novels were popular, they were mostly homophobic, pornographic and often written particularly for the male audience. Thus they did not provide realistic representations of lesbians.

Although *The Price of Salt* was first published almost seventy years ago, it has not been analysed often. The few analyses observe that it was the first lesbian novel with a happy ending or view it as a part of Highsmith's works, although for a considerable period of time Highsmith did not publicly acknowledge her authorship, and the novel was published and republished under the pen-name, Clare Morgan. No analyses of the relationships between the two main characters, Carol and Therese, were discovered prior to the writing of this thesis. This thesis aimed to analyse how the lesbian relationship was described in this novel and how the novel represents lesbians.

The novel discusses the topic of mother-child relationships, as its protagonist, Therese, was abandoned by her mother as a child and still experiences major mother issues

as an adult. Her mental problems influence her relationships with her older lover, Carol, who is already a mother herself. Therese is afraid to be abandoned by an older woman, a mother figure, again and is jealous of Carol's daughter. Their relationship helps Therese to finally feel loved and needed, but her complexes are constantly threatening to ruin everything between the two women.

In addition, Therese keeps seeing herself as a child not equal to her older, wealthy, and married lover, who has a little child of her own. Therese keeps putting walls between them and cannot accept help from Carol, acting in an immature manner instead. However, Therese is able to grow up by the end of the novel, as she finally discovers she is an adult woman who may be loved if she wants to. She realises she may live on her own, equally fully with or without Carol, and is ready to accept the fact she actually loves Carol. In their last scene together, both women meet as equals ready to step into their new mature relationship.

Both of the main characters are represented as lesbians but at the same time also as conventionally feminine women. They are portrayed in the same manner as heterosexual women, wearing dresses and make-up, and are opposed to the stereotypes of lesbians as of masculine women, who do not fit the Cold War era American society, which even Therese herself used to have.

The analysis demonstrates that in addition to being the first lesbian novel with a happy ending, *The Price of Salt* also provides its readers with multifaceted characters with complex inner worlds. This thesis analysed the lesbian relationships between Therese and Carol, but possible future research can look into the characters of the novel and their personalities outside of romantic aspects.

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RESÜME

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Jana Narusberg

The Representation of Lesbian Relationships in Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*

Lesbiliste suhete kujutamine Patricia Highsmithi romaanis *Soola hind*

Bakalaureusetöö

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Lehekülgede arv: 27

Annotatsioon:

Selle lõputöö eesmärk on uurida Patricia Highsmithi romaanis *Soola hind* kujutatud lesbiliste suhete erinevaid aspekte.

Antud lõputöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kirjanduse ülevaatest, empiirilisest analüüsist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatus annab taustainfot nii romaani ja selle autori, kui ka ajaloolise konteksti kohta. Kirjanduse ülevaade tutvustab sama perioodi Ameerika lesbilist kirjandust, selle traditsioone ja *Soola hinna* eripära. See annab samuti ülevaate varasematest uuringutest Highsmithi isiksuse ja tema vaadete kohta külma sõja aegse ühiskonna kontekstis.

Empiiriline osa uurib romaani kahte peategelast ja nende suhteid erinevatest aspektidest: ema-lapse side, vanus ja sotsiaalne ebavõrdsus ning traditsiooniliselt naiselike peategelaste vastandamine stereotüüpsele arusaamale mehelikest lesbidest. See osa analüüsib ka peategelaste suhteid ühiskonnaga ja nende õnnetuid heteroseksuaalseid kogemusi, mis on tüüpiline Highsmithi loomingus.

Märksõnad: Patricia Highsmith, Ameerika kirjandus, homoseksuaalsus, lesbiline romaan

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