The Narrative of Normalcy of Conjoined Twins in the Novel "God's Fool" by Mark Slouka

เรื่องเล่าของความปกติของแฝดติดกันในนวนิยายเรื่อง
"ก๊อดส์ ฟูลล์" ของ มาร์ก สโลคา

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze the attempt to normalize conjoined twins through the narrative of Chang Banker in the novel "God's Fool" (2003) by Mark Slouka, and to criticize the medical discourse that created the negative stereotypes of conjoined twins regarding their way of life and sexual relations. The author created a sense of normalcy for Chang by presenting the relationship between siblings and opposite-sex relationships differently from what appeared in various literary works. That is, the author did not write about the sibling relationship in terms of confinement or limited freedom resulting from their conjoined physical condition, which led one of the twins to be preoccupied with the desire to separate their bodies. Instead, the author presented a close and intimate sibling relationship, as well as positive aspects of being conjoined. Regarding the issue of sexuality, through the analysis of the relationships of Chang and Eng with their wives, the author did not narrate with a focus on sexuality that was often imagined to be immoral. Additionally, the author portrayed the relationship between husband and wife and family members as not different from ordinary people, showing that the conjoined twins' physical condition was not an obstacle or a cause preventing them from living

like ordinary people. Therefore, the portrayal of conjoined twins in this novel illustrated the attempt to create a “normalcy” for conjoined twins and to criticize medical discourse on the issue of surgical separation, the undermining of perceptions, beliefs, and the collective understanding of conjoined twins.

Key words: Conjoined Twins, Normalcy, Medical Discourse, Sexual Relations

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ความพยายามที่จะสร้างความปกติของแฝดติดกันผ่านเรื่องเล่าของจัน บังเคอร์ ในนวนิยายเรื่อง “ก๊อดส์ ฟูลล์” (2003) ของมาร์ก สโลคา และเพื่อวิพากษ์วาทกรรมทางการแพทย์ที่สร้างภาพเหมารวมเชิงลบของแฝดติดกันในประเด็นเรื่องของการดำรงชีวิตและความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศ โดยกลวิธีที่ผู้ประพันธ์ใช้สร้างความปกติให้กับจันคือการนำเสนอภาพความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพี่น้องฝาแฝดและความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศกับเพศตรงข้ามให้มีลักษณะที่แตกต่างไปจากที่ปรากฏในงานวรรณกรรมต่างๆ กล่าวคือ มิได้เขียนอธิบายความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพี่น้องในเชิงของการถูกกักขัง ถูกจำกัดอิสระภาพอันเนื่องมาจากสภาพร่างกายที่ติดกัน ทำให้แฝดคนใดคนหนึ่งหมกมุ่นอยู่กับความปรารถนาที่จะแยกร่างออกจากกัน แต่นำเสนอในเชิงความสัมพันธ์ฉันพี่น้องที่สนิทสนมกัน รวมทั้งแสดงให้เห็นอัตลักษณ์เชิงบวกของแฝดติดกัน ในประเด็นเรื่องทางเพศ เมื่อวิเคราะห์ผ่านทางความสัมพันธ์ของอินและจันและภรรยาของพวกเขา ผู้ประพันธ์มิได้เล่าเรื่องโดยมุ่งประเด็นไปที่ความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศที่มักจะจินตนาการว่าต้องเป็นเรื่องที่ผิดทำนองคลองธรรม รวมทั้งการนำเสนอให้เห็นถึงความสัมพันธ์ของสามีภรรยา และคนในครอบครัวซึ่งมิได้แตกต่างไปจากคนทั่วไป ทำให้เห็นว่าสภาพร่างกายของแฝดติดกันมิได้เป็นอุปสรรคหรือเป็นสาเหตุที่ทำให้พวกเขาไม่สามารถใช้ชีวิตอย่างคนทั่วไปได้ ดังนั้น การนำเสนอภาพของแฝดติดกันในนวนิยายเรื่องดังกล่าวแสดงให้เห็นถึงความพยายามที่จะสร้าง “ความเป็นปกติ” ของแฝดติดกัน รวมทั้งวิพากษ์วาทกรรมทางการแพทย์เกี่ยวกับประเด็นเรื่องการผ่าตัดแยกร่างกาย การล้มล้างทัศนคติ ความเชื่อและความเข้าใจแบบเหมารวมเกี่ยวกับแฝดติดกัน

คำสำคัญ: แฝดติดกัน, ความปกติ, วาทกรรมทางการแพทย์, ความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศ

Introduction

Conjoined Twins or Siamese Twins are a form of twins that develop from the same fertilized egg. While growing in the womb, the embryos do not separate completely, resulting in a distinctive feature of having certain body parts conjoined from birth and sharing some internal or external organs. Medical professionals categorize conjoined twins based on the areas or parts of the body that are joined together. The most common type of conjoined twins is thoraco-omphalopagus, meaning twins with their chests joined together

(DeRuiter, 2011). Due to the relatively low occurrence of conjoined twins worldwide, as well as the significant risk of mortality both during pregnancy and childbirth, conjoined twins have been subjects of societal interest since ancient times. The oldest evidence of the existence of conjoined twins is found in clay figurines and sculptures in small villages in Mexico dating back approximately 3,000 years (Kennedy, 2011).

The societal perspective towards conjoined twins has evolved according to the contexts of each era. During the medieval period to the Enlightenment era, conjoined twins were often viewed as freaks of nature. There was a belief that conjoined twins were a result of impure acts or a consequence of women witnessing something sinful or shocking during pregnancy (From 'Monsters' To Modern Medical Miracles, 2014). These beliefs led to abnormal perceptions of fetuses during pregnancy. Such beliefs formed the basis of societal fear towards conjoined twins.

Another important belief about conjoined twins is that they share a unified body and mind. This means they have similar thoughts, preferences, and shared emotions. In the pamphlet sold at the exhibition of Chang and Eng, titled "An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers from Actual Observations" in 1834, the author repeatedly stated that both Chang and Eng shared a unified body and mind. They had similar preferences, shared emotions, ate and slept together, never conversed with each other, and never had conflicting opinions. It was as if they had only one mind, as described by the author: "[...] that to those who have them constantly under their observation, it almost appears as if one mind only, directed the two bodies." (1834, p. 7)

Such beliefs persisted in society until the 20th century. When the number of surviving and grown-up conjoined twins increased, they began to recount their own experiences or feelings through interviews or autobiographies. Daisy and Violet Hilton, conjoined twins from England who gained fame as sideshow performers, musicians, and dancers in the 1920s to 1940s, stated in their autobiography, " [...] we are believed to share identical thrills, pains and even diseases. The truth is that we are as different in our reactions as day and night. I, Violet, often weep over something which makes my sister chuckle. I had a whooping cough a year and a half before Daisy. We did not even catch the measles from each other!" (Hilton, 1950, p. 2). Violet's statement refutes society's belief that conjoined twins are a single entity (Singleton) and highlights their individuality in terms of personality traits and differing preferences.

As scientific and medical advancements flourished, conjoined twins' bodies became of interest in the medical field. This can be seen through efforts to examine or acquire the bodies of conjoined twins. For example, in the case of Chang and Eng, when they arrived in the United States, numerous doctors examined their bodies. When they passed away, several physicians contacted Chang and Eng's wives to request the twins' bodies for anatomical study, reasoning that their bodies would contribute to medical knowledge (Wallace, 2011).

Interest from the medical community regarding the bodies of conjoined twins has been manifested in the form of attempts to separate their bodies surgically. This can be attributed to the influence of the notion of the average human being[1], which has led to the interpretation of conjoined twins' bodies as abnormal. The method to correct this perceived abnormality is through surgical separation. Attempts to separate conjoined twins date back to ancient times, with historical records mentioning the surgical separation of twins in 945 AD in Constantinople. One of the twins passed away three days after the surgery (Dreger, 2004, p. 51; The Case of Conjoined Twins in 10th Century Byzantium, 2014). Subsequent attempts at surgical separation continued but often ended unsuccessfully until the early 20th century. During this time, there was an increasing number of attempts at surgical separation, with a higher success rate compared to earlier times. Stories of successful surgical separations have been brought to public attention through interviews or newspaper articles, often highlighting the physicians as benevolent figures who transformed pitiable conjoined twins into "normal" individuals. These narratives also depict the heroic struggles of the surgical process, the endurance, and skill of the physicians, which captivate readers' attention without discussing the long-term effects on both the physical and mental aspects of the conjoined twins. Therefore, it can be said that these interviews contribute to creating a favorable perception of physicians' actions (Angier, 1997).

However, in recent interviews with conjoined twins and in various literary works such as novels or films, different perspectives on surgical separation have been presented, diverging from the mainstream societal concept. For instance, the novel "God's Fool" (2003) by Mark Slouka, reveals the possibility of interpreting and attributing positive meanings to the conjoined twins' physical condition. Therefore, this research focuses on the process of normalizing conjoined twins through the narrative of Chang Bunker in the novel "God's Fool" by Mark Slouka. The author's method of creating normalcy for Eng and Chang involved presenting the relationship between the twin siblings and their heterosexual relationships in a manner different from what is typically portrayed in various literary works, both past and contemporary. That is, the narrative did not depict them as adversaries or describe their relationship in terms of confinement or restricted freedom resulting from their conjoined bodies. Instead, the author presented a close sibling relationship, while also demonstrating the individuality of Eng and Chang, including their personalities, preferences, and differing desires. These differences led to conflicts between the twins, but ultimately, their bond and familial relationships allow for mutual understanding.

[1] The concept of the "average human being" (l'homme moyen) originated in the 19th century from the burgeoning field of statistics, which collected data on human attributes such as weight and height to determine the median average, considered the standard to which everyone in society should conform. This concept became a benchmark for controlling and evaluating physical attributes, leading to the transformation of disabled individuals into something else or into marginalized members of society (Davis, 1995, pp. 3-7).

Regarding the issue of the twins' sexuality presented in "God's Fool", when analyzed through the relationships of Eng and Chang with their wives, the author did not narrate with a focus on sexual relationships as in other novels featuring conjoined characters. Instead, the presentation emphasized the relationships between spouses and family members, which did not differ significantly from those of ordinary individuals. This demonstrated that the conjoined twins' physical condition is not necessarily an obstacle or a cause preventing them from living ordinary lives. Therefore, it can be argued that the portrayal of conjoined twins in "God's Fool" illustrated an attempt to create "normalcy" for conjoined twins, challenging the medical discourse on the issue of surgical separation, and undermining the stereotypes, beliefs, and misconceptions about conjoined twins.

Objectives of the Study

This research paper aimed to analyze the attempt to normalize conjoined twins through the narrative of Chang Bunker in Mark Slouka's "God's Fool" (2003), as well as to criticize the medical discourse that created the negative stereotypes of conjoined twins regarding their way of life and sexual relations.

Method of the Study

This research paper starts with a critical survey and review of key information and related theories which are the historical background of conjoined twins and the representation of conjoined twins in literary texts and theories on the medical discourse regarding the body of conjoined twins. Then the researcher conducts a close textual analysis of research materials related to the key research questions. Finally, after concluding all the data, the researcher starts writing the result of the findings and conclusion of the research paper.

Literature Review

Sex and Conjoined Twins

Sexual activities of people with disabilities are often overlooked or even denied by society, with the general assumption being narrow-minded that physical limitations prevent people with disabilities from having sexual desires like other individuals or having limited sexual desires. Tobin Siebers (2012) discusses the correlation between sexual activities and a strong physical condition in his article titled "A Sexual Culture for Disabled People," stating, "At the most superficial level, a sex life is described almost always in the context of health. A sex life must be, first and foremost, a healthy sex life, and the healthier a person is, the better the sex life is supposed to be" (2012, p. 42). Siebers's explanation demonstrates the societal bias that views sexual activities as suitable only for individuals with strong bodies, leading to the general exclusion and denial of access to sexual activities for people with disabilities.

Furthermore, Siebers also mentions that the pattern of sexual activities of people with disabilities may not conform to the norms or standards that society considers normal (2012, p. 39). For example, in the case of conjoined twins, due to their physical condition, the sexual activities of conjoined twins have been of interest to society from the past to the present. In the postmortem report of Eng and Chang Bunker in 1874, Dr. William Pancoast, a renowned surgeon from Philadelphia who was the head physician in charge of the autopsy, commented on the sexual relationship between Eng and Chang and their wives after the autopsy and thorough examination of their bodies. He stated, "Though it seems most immoral and shocking that the two should occupy the same marital couch with the wife of one, yet so thorough was this understanding of alternate mastery, that, as I was told by one of the widows, there had never been any improper relations between the wives and the brothers" (as cited in Davies, 2015, pp. 156-157). Pancoast's statement reflects the general public's attitude towards the sexual activities of conjoined twins as both alarming and morally wrong. This negative perception arises from the physical condition of conjoined twins, which is seen as a hindrance to sexual activities according to the societal norms that accept only monogamous relationships as desirable. The physical condition of conjoined twins is therefore perceived as an obstacle to the accepted form of relationships or deemed impractical. For example, in the case of Daisy and Violet Hilton, both sisters traveled to several states in the United States because state officials refused to register marriage for Violet and her lover, citing immorality as the reason for their marriage being sinful (Hilton, 1950, p. 2).

In the collection of biographies of Eng and Chang, there is only one book that discusses the issue of the sexual activities of Eng and Chang, which is the book titled "The Two" by Irving and Amy Wallace (2011). They speculate on the lovemaking methods of Eng and Chang with their wives. They explain in detail:

> "Physically, the twin could not maneuver very far apart. They were bound tightly when lying down, too close for either to achieve any real degree of independent performance or privacy. In sexual intercourse, only the obvious missionary position – with the man on top – could have worked well. Yet it could not have worked too well. The anatomical restriction was always there. If Eng mounted Sallie, then Chang could not be far behind—indeed, he would be dangling seven or eight inches to one side. Moreover, it meant Chang had to be curled against Sallie, partially covering her body throughout. The same condition would have occurred when Chang made love to Adelaide. Eng would have been drawn against or partially across Adelaide. Another likely position of copulation that may have been employed was that of the woman mounting the man." (Wallace, 2011)

The above description is merely speculative and does not come from Eng and Chang themselves or their wives. The author's actions could be interpreted as responding to the curiosity of the general public regarding the sexual activities of conjoined twins. From one perspective, such actions may be seen as a violation of the privacy of Eng and Chang, and the description places them in a state of objects responding to the pleasure of being observed.

In literature, both in the form of novels and films, it reflects the general public's curiosity about the sexual activities of conjoined twins. For example, in the dialogue of characters who are conjoined twins, Electra and Ephigenia, in the novel "Geek Love" (2002) by Katherine Dunn. Electra and Ephigenia are sideshow performers in their family's carnival. Later, they engage in a sex work profession. They tell their sister about the reason people are interested in them: "What they want to know, all of them, but never do unless they're drunk or simple is How do we fuck?" (2002, p. 207). Similarly, the tagline on the poster for the movie "Freaks" (1932) raises the issue of the sexual capabilities of conjoined twins: "Do Siamese Twins make love?" These examples reflect both the general curiosity and bias towards conjoined twins that they cannot have a "normal" sexual relationship like others. Therefore, it can be said that literature like this has contributed to the stigma regarding the issue of sexual intercourse with conjoined twins, suggesting that having sex with conjoined twins means engaging in group sex or is a taboo subject, distorting the reality of sexual intercourse with conjoined twins. The repetition of such themes in these literary works serves to perpetuate these ideas in society.

In the article titled "Disabled Sexuality: Toward Rights and Recognition" by Tom Shakespeare (2000), he interestingly discusses the issue of sexuality with disabled individuals. He suggests that there should be a reconsideration of thoughts, understandings, values regarding sexual activity, as well as exploring new sexual orientations. This aims to stimulate questioning or challenging of the traditional framework regarding sexual activities, which often stem from ideas about bodily perfection and strength, narrow concepts such as male dominance in bed, or the notion that sexual activity must involve only two individuals. By dismantling these frameworks, opportunities for disabled individuals to access sexual activities could increase. Additionally, Shakespeare (2000, pp. 159 – 166) argues that the diverse bodies of disabled individuals should not be seen as barriers to sexual activity. Even though the bodies of disabled individuals may not conform to society's norms for "normal" sexual activity, their physical limitations should prompt the exploration of new, suitable alternatives for sexual expression.

Medical Discourse and Body Separation

Medical discourse plays a major role in how the bodies of conjoined twins are viewed and managed. Medical discourse refers to the use of medical knowledge and principles to define and classify what is considered an abnormal body. This approach

emerged alongside the development of modern Western medicine during the Victorian era, from the mid-18th century, with the aim of categorizing, defining, or controlling bodies that deviated from typical physical norms. This perspective labeled such deviations as abnormalities, reflecting a view of disability based on the values of non-disabled people or those with fully functioning bodies. Additionally, this viewpoint regarded disability as a personal "problem" or "tragedy," implying that it could be repaired or fixed using medical technology (Johnson, 2001, pp. 17-18). Therefore, the medical discourse negatively influences society's perception of conjoined twins. Their physical differences have come to be seen as personal misfortune, leading to the idea that they need medical assistance in the form of surgical procedures to separate their bodies.

The evidence of successful separation surgeries of conjoined twins dates back to the year 1689 when conjoined twins named Elizabeth and Catherina underwent separation surgery using a method involving tightening ropes around the connecting skin and gradually tightening them every day until the joined part shrunk enough to be cut apart with a knife (Kompanje, 2004, p. 537). Attempts at separating conjoined twins have been documented throughout history, mostly involving twins joined by skin and lacking vital shared organs while having complete external organs. The number of successful separation surgeries of conjoined twins increased significantly during the 20th century, correlating with advancements in modern scientific and medical progress, including the discovery of antibiotics and modern surgical tools, which enhanced the chances of success in separation surgeries. Physicians often cited humanitarian reasons to justify their involvement in managing or owning the bodies of conjoined twins. Daisy and Violet Hilton stated in their autobiography that scientists often attempted to persuade them to consent to separation surgery experiments (Hilton, 1950, pp. 2-3). In the case of Eng and Chang Bunker, when they passed away, several physicians from different institutions approached their wives to request the delivery of the twins' bodies to their respective institutions for autopsy purposes. Some institutions were willing to pay to "acquire" the bodies of Eng and Chang (Wallace, 2011).

In Alice Domurat Dreger's work titled "One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of the Normal" (2004), the author analyzes the issue of conjoined twins and separation surgeries. Dreger critiques the medical discourse that places physicians in a position of authority over the bodies of conjoined twins, as evident in decisions to separate them under the pretext of enabling them to lead normal lives (2004, pp. 5-7). The medical view of conjoined twins demonstrates a negative interpretation of their bodies, as seen in the labeling of conjoined twins as "Aberrant Twins". This interpretation portrays their conjoined bodies as obstacles to living in society. Therefore, the perceived solution to aid conjoined twins often involves surgical "correction" to make their bodies "normal", even at the risk of their lives.

Dreger (2004, p. 70) further argues that the decisions made by parents or physicians sometimes fail to consider the physical and intellectual consequences on the twins or even the risk to their lives. The desired outcome of separate bodies may not always be desirable as the surgical separation may cause physical or intellectual disability. She provides examples of many conjoined twins who experienced adverse effects on both their physical and mental well-being after undergoing surgery, such as being unable to walk or use limbs normally, having incomplete brains, or in cases where conjoined twins share male genitalia, leading to the decision to assign one twin as male while the other undergoes surgery to create female genitalia. Furthermore, Dreger (2004, pp. 60-61) points out the contradiction in medical discourse, which often cites heterosexual relationships as a reason for separating conjoined twins surgically. However, such surgeries often carry the risk of loss of sexual sensation, which is a concern that physicians often overlook or consider unimportant.

Therefore, it can be said that individuals in the medical profession have a role in shaping the discourse surrounding the bodies of conjoined twins for their own benefit or professional advancement by stamping the label of bodily abnormality on conjoined twins. This discourse empowers and legitimizes physicians in the surgical separation of conjoined twins, positioning them as benevolent caregivers who transform the bodies of anomalies into normal individuals, thereby improving their quality of life. This is evident in narratives found in newspapers or interviews with physicians, which often praise the efforts, courage, or dedication of physicians in treating the bodies of conjoined twins. Even though the outcomes of surgeries may result in some conjoined twins experiencing brain abnormalities, physical impairments, post-surgical pain, or even the loss of one or both twins' lives, these actions reinforce bias against the bodies of conjoined twins. They portray conjoined twins who have not undergone separation surgery as leading difficult, pitiable lives or often resenting their own bodies, blocking positive views of the bodies of conjoined twins.

Dreger (2004, pp. 60-61) states that the issue of sexual relationships and reproduction is often one of the main reasons why parents of conjoined twins and physicians decide to opt for surgical separation of conjoined twins (in cases where they are infants). In various literary works, the influence of this idea is reflected in the decisions of characters who are conjoined twins regarding the reasons for wanting to undergo separation surgery. For example, in the television series "American Horror Stories: Freak Show", the main characters, conjoined twins named Bette and Dot Tattler, are involved in the desire to undergo separation surgery. When Bette and Dot become sideshow performers and Dot falls in love with a fellow performer named Jimmy, Dot develops a desire to undergo separation surgery. Although such surgery may lead to the death of one or both twins, Dot attempts to raise money to hire a doctor to perform the surgery on them. However, Dot abandons

this idea due to her love and attachment to their conjoined sister and ultimately marries Jimmy. The final scene of the series shows Dot pregnant, embracing Jimmy, while Bette holds up a magazine to give them privacy.

Conjoined twins are often surgically separated while still infants, a decision typically made by their parents or caregivers. It is intriguing that many conjoined twins, when they grow up, often do not desire separation. For instance, Mary and Margaret Gibb, sideshow performers, exemplify this when Mary refused surgery despite Margaret's cancer diagnosis. Ultimately, they both passed away in 1967, one minute apart (Fiedler, 1978, p. 199; Quigley, 2003, p. 75). Similarly, in interviews, conjoined twins like Lori and Reba Schappell expressed contentment with their shared existence, stating, "We don't hate it. We live it every day. I don't sit around questioning it, or asking myself what I could do differently if I were separated." (Angier, 1997)

In the comedy film "Stuck on You" (2003), although portrayed humorously, the struggles of conjoined twins post-surgery are depicted. Despite their initial eagerness for separation, the characters find it difficult to adjust to life alone and struggle with tasks they once did together, like making burgers within three minutes, a selling point of their burger joint. They ultimately choose to remain together and simulate their former conjoinment with Velcro clothing that attaches them.

Reflecting on these interviews and film examples, surgery may not always be the correct path. The physicality of conjoined twins may not be the root of their issues but rather societal perceptions of their bodies, which prompt questions about the necessity of conforming to medical discourse that dictates separation. It showcases how non-separated conjoined twins can live fulfilling lives in society. These questions are further explored in the subsequent analysis of "God's Fool"

Results and Discussions

The novel "God's Fool" by Mark Slouka is written from the perspective of Chang as the narrator. It features a first-person narrative style, narrating events from important occurrences that happen in the middle of the story or called En Medias Res, and alternates between past and present events. This allows readers to understand the life stories of Eng and Chang from the day they were born, their childhood, being summoned to the palace, traveling to America as peculiar actors, establishing themselves, pursuing farming professions, marrying a white woman, and having a total of 22 children together. Slouka's novel presents the relationship between Eng and Chang through various experiences, including childhood, journeying to the United States, meeting their love interest, and building a family. Despite occasional conflicts, the novel depicts the intimate relationship between siblings. Chang's storytelling reveals the strong bond between him and Eng, which evolves from the experiences they face together.

Chang describes his childhood as a period of happiness, with a warm family where there were always lively conversations in the evenings and plenty of laughter. This contrasts with novels featuring characters with disabilities that often narrate the difficulties of having a different body, facing societal rejection, and being bullied. In contrast, Chang's narrative in Slouka's novel illustrates the closeness between siblings growing up together, as evident from scenes describing their childhood home and experiences with Eng, which were as joyful as those of ordinary children. For instance, when Chang's first child is about to be born, while Chang is nervous and anxious about the event, Eng comforts him. Chang recounts, "When Addy's cries began to grow harsh and raw, exploding from her like stream under pressure, my brother tried to reassure me, assuming, naturally enough, that I was suffering as he was, I thanked him, touched by his concern, reassured him in return" (Slouka, 2003, p. 227)

Another significant event that demonstrates the strong relationship between Eng and Chang is when Christopher, Chang's eldest son, runs away from home to join the city's war. During this time, Eng and Chang quarreled to the extent of physically harming each other, leading Eng to blame Chang for driving Christopher away. However, despite the family's problems, Eng did not hesitate to end the conflict, volunteering to help and support Chang, and even agreeing to accompany him on the dangerous journey to find Christopher. Even though such a journey poses a life-threatening risk to them both. Chang reassured Addy, " 'What are we going to do?' she [Addy] said. 'We're going to get him,' I said. 'Tell me what you want me to do,' said my brother [Eng]" (Slouka, 2003, p. 254). Another noteworthy point that illustrates the relationship between Eng and Chang is the pronouns Chang uses to refer to himself and Eng while narrating the story. In Slouka's novel, Chang often uses the pronoun "we" to represent both himself and Eng. By using these pronouns, Chang demonstrates the closeness between himself and Eng, as well as his acceptance of Eng's existence as part of his life experiences.

In the issue of conjoined twins contemplating surgery to separate their bodies, Slouka's novel offers a perspective on the separation surgery different from other novels featuring conjoined twin characters. Specifically, Chang in Slouka's novel reflects acceptance of his own unique body condition, as seen in his acceptance of the condition of his birth, akin to weather conditions beyond control. This reflects a willingness to embrace differences and make the most of them. For example, when Eng and Chang begin trading, they use their own bodies as a selling point to attract customers. "People would be curious about us, my brother claimed, and give us their business. I agreed. And so, by slow degrees, we began to learn the delicate art of selling ourselves." (Slouka, 2003, p. 68)

Furthermore, Slouka's novel also demonstrates society's acceptance of the physical condition of conjoined twins, reflected through the relationship between Eng and Chang and the character named Gideon, who is the family's physician and close friend

of both. Gideon does not attempt to overlook the physical differences of Eng and Chang, unlike what ordinary people often do. Instead, he accepts their physical differences and considers them part of their identities. For instance, he fondly refers to Eng and Chang as "my hyphenated friends," allowing Chang to become his own person. Chang describes his feelings toward Gideon that "In Gideon's company, I could be wholly myself, a thing made possible, somehow, by the fact that he never attempted to overlook our peculiar condition, as Barnum used to call it." (Slouka, 2003, p. 20)

Moreover, Gideon does not attempt to correct or treat their physical differences. In contrast, in the scene where they discuss the possibility of surgery to separate Eng and Chang, Gideon remarks that anyone could perform the separation surgery, but he is accustomed to their company and sees no benefit in separating them. Chang describes the event, saying,

> "Gideon had answered, as he always did, that separating us was hardly the problem. The divorce could be realized in a matter of minutes, he said. Any idiot possessed of a sharp saw and a strong stomach could do it. The problem, he said, was that he'd grown accustomed to our company, which is why he was willing to defer the fame that a scientific description of our condition would bring." (Slouka, 2003, p. 22)

Gideon's actions contrast with the typical image of physicians who often seek recognition by surgically altering the bodies of conjoined twins. This is evidenced by his refusal to perform surgery on Eng and Chang, as he believes that what they have discovered through their shared experiences is a key aspect of their lives. Gideon's words also challenge the conventional idea that surgery to separate conjoined twins is often justified as enhancing their quality of life, indicating that their bodies are not limitations preventing them from living like other people. For example, he questions Eng and Chang about the benefit of the separation to their daily life, "And besides," he'd asked us, "what could you possibly do apart that you haven't already done together?" (Slouka, 2003, p. 22)

Furthermore, the portrayal of the relationship between Eng and Chang and their wives in Slouka's novel contrasts with the image of conjoined depicting in various literary works. For instance, Slouka's novel presents a warm family dynamic between Eng, Chang, and their wives, demonstrating the strong bond between husbands, wives, and their children. It also portrays a sense of connection among them, such as in the scene where Chang describes the family gathering around after supper to hear tales from their past:

> "In the evening after supper the younger children would gather around [...], and Eng and I would spin tales of Siam: [...] At some point, often toward the end of a story, Addy and I would look at each other across the heads of our children and our look would hold for a moment, [...] and the four of us would carry them off, one by one, to bed." (Slouka, 2003, p. 36)

Therefore, Chang's narrative style in Slouka's novel bears resemblance to the storytelling of conjoined twins in contemporary interviews or television programs. That is, it is a narrative of individuals who do not view their physically different bodies as weaknesses or limitations but rather demonstrate that they can build warm families. Additionally, it highlights the close relationship between siblings. It could be argued that Chang's narrative contributes to breaking down the general public's prejudice against conjoined twins and demonstrates the possibility for conjoined twins to build families and live normal lives even without undergoing separation surgery.

In Slouka's novel, the author does not emphasize or sensationalize the sexual aspect of the conjoined twins, which is often the selling point of stories involving conjoined twins because their conjoined bodies naturally pique curiosity about their intimate lives, often leading to imaginative, scandalous scenarios. Conversely, Slouka's narrative focuses on the relationship between Chang and his family. Slouka briefly describes two instances of intimacy between Chang and his wife, Addy, without going into explicit details. The first scene is described briefly: "Addy came to our bed that week, but though we please each other, sweating in the darkness, neither took much comfort in the thing." (Slouka, 2003, p. 24) And the second scene, where Slouka mentions, "I was relieved to learn that, [...] I had not grown enfeebled in the act of love, and though Eng's face, where I could make it out in the moonlight, invariably carried the expression of a man waiting for a carriage, Addy's look of surprise at my youthful vigor [...] more than made up for it." (Slouka, 2003, p. 35) These portrayals of the sexual relationship between Chang and Addy reflect attempts to challenge the traditional beliefs about sexual relations with conjoined twins as something strange and immoral. Instead, they depict the sexual relationship of the couple as ordinary, not significantly different from that of ordinary people. Slouka does not describe feelings of embarrassment, awkwardness, or excitement about the events that unfold. Furthermore, Slouka's novel demonstrates the possibility of maintaining privacy of the conjoined twins without needing shared experiences.

The way these scenes are portrayed in Slouka's novel demonstrates that the sexual relationship of conjoined twins can be an affair between two individuals, namely one of the twins and their romantic partner, without necessarily involving the other twin. Daisy and Violet Hilton have spoken in interviews about learning to compartmentalize

awareness[2] of the existence of the other twin to allow the conjoined couple to have private space in their interactions with their romantic partners. This approach is echoed in Slouka's novel, as seen in Chang's description of Eng's facial expression while having sex with his wife, indicating that Eng's face did not show excitement or mood along with him. Therefore, it could be argued that Slouka's novel shows that the physical limitations of Eng and Chang are not obstacles to having a sexual relationship. The physical differences allow for the creation or adaptation of appropriate ways for their bodies. Although having a sexual relationship with conjoined twins like Eng and Chang cannot be an activity between two individuals without the involvement of the third person, they have found ways to cope with their physical limitations that prevent them from having privacy like ordinary people. They find ways to create privacy between each other while engaging in sexual intercourse by blocking their own feelings and the existence of the other twins.

The result of this research shows that the negative images of conjoined twins can be deconstructed through the novel. The relationship between Chang and his wife in Slouka's novel demonstrates that the sexual relationship of conjoined twins does not necessarily have to be in a morally questionable format. Furthermore, the presentation of a warm family environment during the childhood of Eng and Chang, their intimate relationship, as well as the relationships between Eng and Chang with their wives and children, contribute to dispelling the stigma surrounding the lives of conjoined twins as predicted by medical discourse or societal views. Additionally, it serves to normalize the lives of conjoined twins, showing that despite physical differences or challenges arising from physical limitations, they can still live socially, pursue careers, build families, and lead fulfilling lives. Finally, Slouka's novel presents Chang and Eng as individuals with their own way of life, thoughts, and feelings that do not differ significantly from those of the normal people, helping to diminish prejudice against individuals with different body types, and broadening readers' perspectives on conjoined twins.

[2] In several books and articles, it is mentioned that Daisy and Violet learned how to block themselves from Houdini, the famous magician, by using a method referred to as "Mental Liberty" (Jensen, 2006, p.117).

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