

# Criticism of the superficiality and banality of the modern world

By Darija Zilic

Cindy Lynn Brown is a well-known Danish-American poet and translator of the young generation. So far she has published six collections of poetry and one novel. Her poems have been translated into several languages and awarded. The collection "Real children don't grow up in passing" is exceptional and interesting, it is literary quality work.

This poetry speaks with sovereignty about the generations of the seventies. On the cover it says: *it has been said about the generation growing up in the seventies, that it is the most indolent and indifferent, yet to be seen. They are grown up now and so what kind of lives do they lead seeing they don't start revolutions or wars? They turn the steaks on the barbecue, live in beautiful surroundings, are well-informed and have a sense of morality.*

Indeed, in these narrative poems, the theme is mostly banal everyday life, a series of motives related to entertainment indoctrination, escapism of all kinds, corporations, team building, and often appearing images of oppression: on one side the exploitative factory in hills of Honduras and on the other side multi-million cities. But everywhere, however, is the same element - compilation. Hours and days are full of meaningless work and leisure stuff filled with content that has been added to suggest meaning. The author records all of these surface images, *captures* the matrix of capitalism, flow of money and energy. All done with mild cynicism, and in this way comments on the paradoxes of the society in which we live. The poems are series of lush phrases, written in a fast pace. Highly unusual, ironic, in our superficiality we do not perceive the problems of a contemporary society in which equal concern is given to the environment and a picnic or a midnight snack. There is also talk of the impossibility of communication, lack of "openings". Characters from her poems are submerged in their small private worlds, and there is the overall presence of fictionalization of private life. The theoretical concept of hermeneutics connected to ordinary everyday life, with slight wonder. And it seems as if it is impossible to escape from all of this distress, isolate yourself and be *offline*.

The lyrics from the poem "PC planet" are great:

*every click is biased no neutral place to sit with your feet up/ again and again the server pops up under new names feeding you with horrible anecdotes you could have done without*

The post-modern theoretician Gilles Lipovetsky in the book "The Era of Emptiness" argues that the modern ideal of subduing the individual to rational collective rules has crumbled to pieces, and the process of personalization has massively promoted the value of personal self-realization, and respect for subjective peculiarities. Society has elevated the free individual into cardinal value and this is the ultimate manifestation of individualistic ideology. To live freely without force, to choose in all your way of being: there are no social and cultural phenomena more symptomatic of our time, concludes Lipovetsky. Hedonistic and personalized individualism has become legitimate, the search for personal identity, and no longer

for universality. So compared to modern society that believed in the future, universality, revolution and reason, we now find a society where mass indifference rules. Not a single political ideology is able to ignite the masses, no ideals, nor taboos, no stories could possibly mobilize people. So ours, Lipovetsky determines, is a state of emptiness devoid of tragedy and apocalypse. The goal is quality of life, large systems of meaning are renounced, local rehabilitation is in action. Postmodern culture is decentralized, diverse, materialistic, psychological, pornographic and discrete, sophisticated and spontaneous, spectacular and creative. The consequence of this is narcissism, a symbol of transition from "limited" individualism to "total" individualism. While the modern age was obsessed with production and revolution, postmodern age is obsessed with information and expression. Humans express themselves through work, "contact", sport, leisure. It is a consumer society with an extravagant abundance of products, images and services, with the introduction of hedonism, with the euphoric atmosphere of temptations and intimacy; consumer society clearly reveals a large range of seduction strategies. The rigidity is reduced and the individual in this personalized world is expressed in the desire to feel more, to float, live vibrantly, feel immediacy, be engaged in integral movement, in some kind of sensual and instinctual journey. Lipovetsky speaks about this through theoretical discourse, and Cindy Lynn Brown through poetry. Maybe the best description is in the poem "Euroman and Eurowoman" through a poetic itinerary an imaginary journey across Europe is described in the form of stimulation, festivals, enjoyment, carnivals, full indulgence, without any deeper reflection on the world we live in. Focus on a world of perfecting the body, "desire for competition" linking lyrical and commercial phrases and catchphrases, worn out protest slogans, quotes from gossip and fashion magazines. Perhaps the spectrophobia, mentioned in the poem "Look" as fear of the mirror or fear of being with oneself is the fundamental metaphor of the anxiety of the contemporary human, standing before the mirror thinking:

*if that was her, then who was the body she was looking through/ the cheeks she couldn't see but feel with her fingertips/ what if the mirror sucked up her markers and her energy*

Irrationality, anxiety, superficiality, as images of the world in the *era of emptiness*, at the time of empty screens. The choice is roughly: "vote for the hottest Bond babe", or choose exclusive "organic fair-trade coffee" Every politicization has been pushed aside and voices of persuasion flood the mind and the world... Yet, the author in the poems seems to advocate a new possible look: "leave the body fallow for a brighter day, roll the dice in the meantime and please take a new category with a new letter" The author creates distinct poetic imagery which resists anything firm and conclusive and holds potential for questions and discussions.

Finally we should praise the fluent and precise translation from Danish carried out by Miso Grundler