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**History – story – lies: Patrick Ness’s
Chaos Walking Trilogy as a search for humanity,
independence and individuality**

One of the most ingenious creations of Patrick Ness’s awarded trilogy *Chaos Walking* sprang from a crucial characteristic of the contemporary world, namely the overflow of information. As the author himself admitted: “the world is a noisy place already, with mobiles and the internet and networking sites and on and on. You can’t really turn anywhere without someone telling you their opinion. So I thought the next logical step was, what if you couldn’t get away?”¹. As a consequence, the universe he has created is completely devoid of any privacy since New World is a planet permeated with information – every living creature has a voice that spills out freely, all thoughts, feelings and images swirl in an intricate maze that forms a constantly audible roar dubbed the Noise.

Noise itself is confusing for it contains everything, that is to say it is a mixture of fears, unvoiced intentions, dark desires or even fragments of songs. It consists of individual voices that are intertwined and interwoven, some louder than others, the more aggressive overshadowing the weaker ones, thus a tapestry of all the Noises overlapping one another is formed for the whole community to share. Nonetheless, the individual Noise is unique, depending on the current mood of the being; it may resemble a chaotic, though multilayered structure that brings to mind the stream of consciousness technique that is, however, manifested outwardly in the form of not only sounds but also pictures. What is

¹ <http://www.yareads.com/author-interview-with-patrick-ness/author-interviews/1673> (7.09.2011).

more, through Noise one may learn things, perceive ideas occupying the minds of those around. Regarded holistically the Noise of any group of men resembles the concept of shared memory, for it “is something almost animate: it is a dynamic shaping force, which is capable of transforming both the narrative of what is remembered, and the individual subjects who do the remembering, as the meaning and content of their own memories change”². This interaction of shaping and being shaped, of constant change is emphasized in the trilogy by the fact that Noise is dynamic and virtually uncontrollable, yet owing to its qualities it also becomes a preserver of the past, for “[t]hat’s another thing about Noise. Everything that’s ever happened to you just keeps right on talking, for ever and ever”³. Accordingly, forgetting on the planet of New World is simply impossible, an event may be denied or deliberately changed in the process of remembering (as will be discussed later) but it may not be completely erased. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the excess of information turns out to be the curse of the planet.

Even though the things glimpsed through Noise are often vulgar or abusive, Todd Hewitt, the last boy in Prentisstown, has had no reasons to doubt what he has been told and what he has seen in the Noises of his fellow townsfolk. It may seem that on the planet of information where all the thoughts and dreams are open for others to read (whether they want it or not) there is no possibility of a lie, but “how can you tell what’s true and what’s not when yer getting everything”⁴. In order to prevent exposure men have trained to hide the most shameful or even crucial data, which ability has become an arcane and well-guarded art. Nonetheless, the majority are not able to veil their thoughts constantly; this inevitable lack of privacy is the most fatal characteristic of New World given that it has inadvertently yet irreversibly shaped the lives of the settlers. It seems to be virtually impossible to differentiate between truth and falsehood on the basis of the information transmitted through the Noise itself for “it’s everything you think, not just the truth, and if you think hard enough that you did something, well, then, maybe you actually did”⁵. Therefore, Todd is well aware that men may blur their impressions, or intentionally think of trifles so as to conceal facts. Notwithstanding, the extent of the deception the protagonist accidentally uncovers goes beyond his wildest imaginings and permanently changes his life.

² K. Hodgkin, S. Radstone, *Transforming Memory. Introduction*, [in:] *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, eds. K. Hodgkin, S. Radstone, New Brunswick 2006, p. 23.

³ P. Ness, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Massachusetts 2009, p. 366.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁵ P. Ness, *The Ask and the Answer*, Massachusetts 2010, p. 52.

Todd has been made to believe that the whole planet is deserted save for his hometown, which illusion lasts till his raucous world is disrupted with something that has been so far inconceivable – silence. The absence of any Noise provides the first proof that there is a beyond, not only physical (as the swamps surrounding Prentisstown no longer form an impassable border) but also metaphysical proving that Prentisstown and its rules represent only one facet of life on New World. Thus, paradoxically, silence broadens Todd's understanding of the world, adds another dimension to it. At first, he as if subconsciously, equates Viola Eade's silence with emptiness, which directs one's attention to the state of being barely alive or, in fact, of being dead as this condition may be represented by nothingness – “[h]ow can they *be* a person if they ain't got no Noise”⁶. The experience is so alien to Todd, so inexplicable and sudden that he feels that the lack of any sound or image coming from the girl makes a gash in the fabric of his world. For the first time Todd is completely devoid of information, he has no idea whatsoever about what Viola thinks or feels, he cannot share her past (even though she can grasp his own confused emotions), which at first makes him completely bewildered.

His inability to get any sort of explanation from Viola (who refuses even to speak) is utterly frustrating and quickly leads to anger, the more so that with all its ability to preserve and transmit ideas, Noise cannot convey the concept of stillness. This is the reason why Todd sensing this particular absence in Viola is so shocked when he meets her. The initial lack of communication between the protagonists enables Todd to perceive that knowing a person goes beyond the surface of the Noise, and (if thus attained) is more profound. Gradually he begins to understand that behind Viola's apparent blankness there are hidden layers of thoughts and emotions. Moreover, he notices that her silence has an irresistible alluring power and, above all, is as expressible as his own Noise since it is “loud as a roar, getting at me like the greatest sadness ever, like I want to take it and press myself into it and just disappear forever down into nothing”⁷. In the beginning of their relationship Todd regards Viola as a mute creature, an almost mythical being, for she seems to step from a world that used to be inhabited by women, a world before the war.

The Spackle war (or as it later appears the first Spackle war) is a turning point in the history of New World, it is the event that has led to the establishment of Prentisstown as Todd knows it. The war serves as a demarcation line sharply dividing the world into two epochs, with the postwar epoch being the decaying one, as “[n]o one escapes from a war. No one. Not even the

⁶ P. Ness, *The Knife*..., p. 71.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

survivors. You accept things that would appal you at any other time because life has temporarily lost all meaning”⁸. As a result of repercussions for the committed atrocities Prentisstown is full of anger and resentment, the town is so loud that at times it becomes almost unbearable. Its vicious Noise stands in contrast to the original (though abandoned) ideals that led to the settlement of the planet. The settlers came to New World in order to start everything anew, for they claimed that the “Old World’s mucky, violent, and crowded [...] a-splitting right into bits with people a-hating each other and a-killing each other, no one happy till everyone’s miserable”⁹. However, as it quickly transpires the planet is transformed into an exact copy of the world the settlers were trying to escape from – what they have to face is a literal embodiment of a dystopia.

It ought to be emphasized that New World is a place that is virtually devoid of myths in the sense of stories regarded as true that establish social order and morality. A valid myth “forces us to change our minds and hearts, gives us new hope, and compels us to live more fully”¹⁰, yet the ones brought from the Old World turned out to be no longer applicable and thus useless in coping with the inherent characteristics of the planet. Therefore, the stories which tell of the first Spackle war and the subsequent events may be perceived as the basis on which particular communities have grounded their laws; these stories, in a way, sanction the rules followed in the settlements. The web of the interconnected stories is complex and their dissimilarity is due not only to subjectivity, but also to the deliberate distortion of the courses of events, their reasons and outcomes. The versions differ significantly up to the point of presenting completely different histories, hence, the laws stemming from them are not uniform, but reflect the settlements’ divergent ways of dealing with the past.

New World seems to be spiritually waning, the disillusionment and bitterness caused by the inability to cope with the tough and unexpected conditions have spread rapidly and religion has quickly lost its appeal. The majority of the churches have been abandoned and have fallen into ruin. What remained of religious practice in Prentisstown is abusive, twisted, far from being honest and voluntary – “[p]raying Noise it’s got a special feel to it, a special purple sick feel like men are bleeding it out”¹¹. Faith has been corrupted to the extent that the distinction between good and evil has been blurred, or one may venture the statement that it has been abolished altogether. The place of God has been taken

⁸ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 102.

⁹ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 163.

¹⁰ K. Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, Edinburgh 2005, p. 10.

¹¹ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 26.

over by Mayor Prentiss who usurps the power of shaping others, of turning boys into men the way he finds appropriate – “[o]ne man’s life was given over to a boy to end, all on his own. A man dies, a man is born”¹². Prentiss, therefore, sees himself as the dispenser of life and death, of experience and new order; he assumes the role of both the creator and the saviour of the settlers. Due to his schemes all the men of Prentisstown are connected by murder, violence and bitterness. They resent one another for what they have become, accordingly, there exist no bonds between them apart from fear and the willingness to dominate others. Hate is the only feeling that drives them onwards and even in the eyes of their preacher this is the only rightful way to remake the world since “[h]ate is the fire that purifies the soldier”¹³.

Todd, however, does not want to join the ranks of the Mayor’s army, he is unable to go through the rite of passage that is supposed to make him a man because he begins to understand that everything the Mayor stands for goes against his own nature. The gradual discovery of Viola’s character marks for the protagonist the beginning of a quest for his own identity. It ought to be emphasized that the basic facts pertaining to himself have not changed, yet the question arises as to their interpretation and significance. The perspective has been shifted, broadened to the extent that Todd is at a loss. He has to grapple with the change in the structure of the surrounding world, which at once undermines his sense of security as all his convictions turn out to be fallacies. The task of consolidating his beliefs is difficult for the role imposed on Todd by the Mayor is in direct conflict with the protagonist’s own opinions. Todd feels that the tasks he is made to carry out are wrong, yet being kept in thrall by Prentiss, unsure of Viola’s whereabouts he is impotent to change anything. Obsessed with power, the Mayor tries to break the protagonist because “[i]f they can snuff out that part of you [Todd] that’s good, the part of you that won’t kill, then they win [...] If they can do it to you, they can do it to anyone”¹⁴. Therefore, in order to confirm his identity and to answer the questions pertaining to his true nature, Todd is forced to reconstruct the past, that is to say he must try to establish the truth about the history of his hometown and its inhabitants.

For Todd truth means facts – getting to know what really happened to his mum, nevertheless “‘facts’ are very rare in the realm of human behaviour. They seldom come ‘pure’. Each culture deeply influences the way its members look at things. This is true of simple objects and is even more significant when it

¹² Ibidem, p. 449.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 450.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 266.

comes to ideas, values and beliefs”¹⁵. Hence as the protagonist gradually discovers, there are many not only subjective but also alternative versions of events, all of them equally probable. The way he perceives the world depends on the version of the past that he has lately discovered. And yet, paradoxically, his ignorance of history may be the only possible way of surviving, of being welcome in other settlements as a refugee and not a murderer. Having being shown a different version of the past of his hometown, Todd has to acknowledge the danger it brings. The issue of responsibility for the atrocities committed in Prentisstown is complex and still arouses hatred and the urge for revenge on New World. As it is generally believed “[a]in’t nobody innocent”¹⁶; accordingly, all men coming from Prentisstown are regarded as guilty or (as in the case of Todd) as being accomplices, marked by the very place they live or were born in. Regardless of his attempts, Todd is unable to get a straightforward answer concerning the past, for it “is not fixed, but is subject to change: both narratives of events and the meanings given to them are in a constant state of transformation”¹⁷ not only because this is how human mind works, but most of all because Mayor Prentiss has created and propagated his own version of the past events on which he has based his plans for New World.

Truth on the planet appears to be an elusive and variable concept, owing to the fact that the majority of settlers are caught between two people who actually make claims to be authorities on truth for New World – the Mayor and Mistress Coyle. It is worth mentioning that the monopoly on truth they try to seize points to the fact that “[e]ach society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true [...] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true”¹⁸. However, the problem becomes clear when one realises that the assertions of the above-mentioned characters are mutually exclusive since “as far as any objective observer can see, the President [Prentiss] is a mass murderer and Mistress Coyle is a terrorist. ‘I’m a general,’ the Mayor says. ‘And I’m fighting for freedom,’ says Mistress Coyle”¹⁹. The constantly misleading information both parties disseminate exacerbates the already difficult situation and eventually leads to utter mayhem.

¹⁵ D. Davies, *Christianity*, [in:] *Myth and History*, eds. J. Holm, J. Bowker, London 1994, p. 55.

¹⁶ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 177.

¹⁷ K. Hodgkin, S. Radstone, *Transforming Memory. Introduction*, [in:] *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, eds. K. Hodgkin, S. Radstone, New Brunswick 2006, p. 23.

¹⁸ M. Foucault, *Truth and Power*, [in:] *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. V. B. Leitch, New York 2001, p. 1668.

¹⁹ P. Ness, *Monsters of Men*, Massachusetts 2010, p. 264.

It is worth mentioning that Mayor Prentiss has discovered the key to master Noise and through it to control others. Consequently, he sees himself as the only man who has the right to dictate rules and establish social order. He is the sole individual who cannot be read or controlled, yet the silence he has achieved aptly reflects his nature, for it is “like nothing, like a dead thing, no more shape nor Noise nor life in the world than a stone or a wall, a fortress you ain’t never gonna conquer”²⁰. He is corrupt to the core, takes pleasure in inflicting pain and subduing any opposition since he sees it as a challenge, for which reason he appears to value Mistress Coyle and the rebellion she initiates. Mistress Coyle is as inscrutable and ruthless as the Mayor, not only because she is (as every woman) silent, but also because she is crafty; in fact, she is a perfect match for Prentiss. She would stop at nothing when her plans are concerned. She wants to prevent a tyrant from ruling the planet, but in the course of her actions she becomes one herself; the more so that she uses exactly the same methods as the Mayor – she cheats, lies and manipulates others because as she claims “[s]ometimes the people don’t know what’s best for them [...] Sometimes the people have to be convinced of things that are necessary. That’s what leadership is”²¹.

One quickly observes that the characters’ true intentions may be glimpsed not from what they say or pretend to reveal, but solely from their actions as “[w]e are the choices we make. And *have* to make. We aren’t anything else”²², particularly that all else on New World is mostly lies. Owing to the fact that trust may be used against the unwary and loyalties often change, Todd is never sure when (if ever) the Mayor is sincere and when he only pretends so as to achieve his goals. The uncertainty never truly leaves the central character, who wants to strongly believe that his own deeds have some effect on Prentiss. Todd tries to convince himself that he is really changing the Mayor, that he is able to uncover the good in him, yet all the time he is deceiving himself. The protagonist (himself struggling not to fall under the Mayor’s spell) attempts to confirm that everyone can be redeemed, that humans possess the capacity for both good and evil but are able to consciously choose rightly. His prolonged contact with Prentiss (in fact, both father and son) seems to prove it. It is not a fast-progressing process, still one is able to see some small changes in the Mayor’s character; as Todd tries to convince not only Viola but also himself – “[h]e’s different round me [...] Not as whacked-out crazy evil like he used to be”²³. Prentiss (who regards Todd as an equally strong opponent) begins to

²⁰ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 10.

²¹ P. Ness, *Monsters...*, p. 325.

²² P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 377.

admire the protagonist's moral standing, though he does not apply Hewitt's ethics to his own decisions. He sees Todd as his own conscience as if unable to independently assess his choices. Linking his own change with Todd's attention and closeness, Prentiss is unable to retain the values the young protagonist cherishes – "[y]ou let me glimpse a goodness I'd never be able to grasp on my own, and for that sin, Todd Hewitt, for that sin of self-knowledge [...] one of us is going to have to die"²⁴. Still obsessed with the desire to possess and control, the Mayor falls back on hatred. His final act of sparing Todd from becoming a killer is in equal measure an act of despair as well as giving in. It ought to be highlighted that Prentiss appears to be completely impervious to the natural law that constantly guides Todd, he openly admits to be corrupted to the core, which, nonetheless, does not contradict the existence of a force that directs men, for as Cicero noticed natural law's "commands and prohibitions always influence good men, but are without effect upon the bad"²⁵.

Forced to oscillate between the Mayor and Mistress Coyle, Todd is compelled to adjust his actions to the changing situation; he attempts to base his choices on the pieces of information he is able to gather, yet these are often half-truths complicating things further. Todd "who couldn't tell a lie if his life depended on it, who *didn't* tell a lie when his life *did* depend on it"²⁶ has to figure out the intricacies of the squabble between the Mayor and Mistress Coyle, which is not a simple task of distinguishing a blatant lie from truth. As has already been mentioned, in the trilogy truth appears to be something elusive and hard to pinpoint, because a small truth is often turned into a bigger lie in order to manipulate others²⁷. What is more, witnessing current events and their aftermath does not clarify much for history is more than simple knowledge of facts and dates, it is concerned with interpretation and significance²⁸. Since Todd is denied the information that would help him to attach a meaning to what is happening, he has to struggle with conjecture as well as speculation, and the uncertainty makes him easier to control by the Mayor. As a result, Todd is often doubtful and unsure of what to think and whom to trust, the more so as there exist no verified sources from which to draw knowledge or seek guidance.

²³ P. Ness, *Monsters...*, p. 265.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 547.

²⁵ Qtd. in J. Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century. The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1700-1789*, London and New York 1986, p. 70.

²⁶ P. Ness, *Monsters...*, p. 319.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

²⁸ D. Davies, *Christianity, [in:] Myth and History*, eds. J. Holm, J. Bowker, London 1994, p. 55.

Nevertheless, in spite of the circumstances Todd does not fall under the spell of evil, he does not succumb to the Mayor's propaganda simply because he has had the advantage of having been brought up by two people who have loved and cared about him. Their dedication has prevented Todd from being tainted by Prentiss's lies. The traumatic events that set the young protagonist on the way trigger the previously unrealized feelings and values that aid him in becoming more aware of the consequences of the decisions he is about to make. Todd perceives that "a knife [or for that matter any weapon] ain't just a thing [...] It's a choice, it's something you *do*. A knife says [...] die or don't. A knife takes a decision out of your hand and puts it in the world and it never goes back again"²⁹. He refuses to strike blindly, because being responsible for his actions, not agreeing to be shaped by the Mayor is what distinguishes him. Todd cannot kill not only in cold blood, but also in self-defence, though he sees it as his greatest weakness, not a virtue. Yet in the midst of all the painful occurrences, driven by the uncontrollable anger over everything that has happened to him and to those for whom he cares, he errs – because of all the lies, fear, and hopelessness he kills a Spackle. It needs to be emphasized that this act does not turn Todd into the very person the Mayor would like him to become – a ruthless killer. Todd is afterwards constantly haunted by his deed, the regret is at times overpowering so much that it seems almost to topple him – "the loss in his Noise is so great it feels like [...] standing on the edge of an abyss" where the blackness is "so empty and lonely there'd never be a way out"³⁰. The young protagonist not only does not try to excuse himself, but also does not blame others for what he has done, in point of fact, he does everything he deems right to recompense for the wrongdoing.

Observing the growing self-awareness and maturity of the character, one ought to emphasize that Todd is "[t]he boy who refused to lose his soul"³¹, that is to say his humanity. From the first wave of settlers only very few people have managed to retain a sharp distinction between good and evil, yet Todd seems to be the only one with an innate system of values. When it is confronted with the Mayor's regime (that implements acts which Todd himself believes to be despicable) it becomes a torment. Being separated from Viola, unsure of her safety and loyalties, unable to cope with the appalling deeds he is forced to witness as well as commit, Todd decides to shut off all the pain and suffering by curbing his Noise. This allows him to stop considering and recalling painful issues, though, as a consequence, he grows as quiet as Prentiss, which, in a way,

²⁹ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 84.

³⁰ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 395.

³¹ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 459.

makes him more prone to the Mayor's machinations since the useful emptiness likens him to his biggest enemy. The numbness makes the young protagonist more detached and colder, still it does not stop him from judging his actions – he is eventually able to admit that the tasks he and Davy Prentiss are made to fulfil question or actually deny their humanity. Notwithstanding, Todd does not become utterly indifferent, he is unique as “[w]ith [his] goodness, with everything about [him] that feels and hurts and regrets” he “refuses to fall no matter what [he’s] done”³². Even though he seems to be unprepared to oppose the Mayor, Todd realizes that as long as Viola is there for him, as long as she helps him to refocus on the most important things, he is able to make the hard yet right choices. Viola reminds him who he is, still the support goes both ways as they “just keep on having to save each other”³³ both in the literal and metaphorical way.

Viola acts as a counterbalance for Todd, she is the one who has been taught to differentiate between good and evil. She has been specially prepared to act so as to ensure peaceful existence for the settlers. What is more, she has been brought up in the surroundings where people have genuinely cared for one another. Bearing all this in mind one notices that Viola (though more educated and more knowledgeable than Todd) is also forced to readjust her convictions for the war questions everything she has taken for granted. She knows that good and bad are inseparable opposites, notwithstanding, living on New World makes her realize that there is a whole range of actions that cannot be precisely classified as the sheer absolutes. In point of fact both protagonists quickly comprehend that “[n]ot everything is black and white [...] In fact, almost nothing is”³⁴, which concerns also their own conduct. Furthermore, Viola discovers that in every person there are the aspects of both good and evil constantly shifting, depending on the choices one makes, which means that an individual's character is not fixed but has to be constantly confirmed. The harshness of the planet does not entail only the act of surviving, of striving to stay alive, as for Viola it means also a struggle to remain the same person who errs yet is not prone to corruption. She repeatedly has to remind both Todd and herself that all humans make mistakes, yet the biggest effort must be made not to succumb to one's weaknesses – “maybe everybody falls [...] the asking is whether we get back up again”³⁵.

In a world where God is only an empty slogan, a concept long-forgotten, Ness indicates through Todd that people have an inherent set of moral values,

³² P. Ness, *Monsters...*, p. 442.

³³ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 425.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³⁵ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 468.

which, nonetheless, is not deterministic by nature, as one decides whether to follow the rules it indicates or not. This inner voice usually directs one's actions, others may only enhance or suppress it. Todd is "a boy who can't kill"³⁶ – not because he has been told that killing is forbidden, but because it is a part of his nature which defines him as a person. Since New World is devoid of any uniform set of rules and values, Todd's ability to distinguish good from evil and then to choose rightly brings to mind natural law, that is to say the "recognition of what is good and right that lies in human nature and in the natural order to which we belong"³⁷. Nevertheless, the eponymous "Chaos Walking" is a term used in reference to human beings and their constant struggle not only with those around but, above all, with their own shortcomings. It ought to be mentioned that *Chaos Walking Trilogy* emphasizes the difficulties that stand behind the decision making process and its subsequent results, since "[d]oing what's right should be easy. It shouldn't be just another big mess like everything else"³⁸. The quotation aptly illustrates the discrepancy between intentions and their outcomes, and the fact that making the morally proper choices may lead to ravaging situations and resolutions that are far from being peaceful. Thus, the young protagonists do not actually believe that "[t]here's hope waiting for you at the end of the road"³⁹, yet giving in (even when faced with almost certain failure) is not an option.

HISTORIA – OPOWIEŚCI – KŁAMSTWA:
TRYLOGIA *CHAOS WALKING* PATRICKA NESSA
JAKO POSZUKIWANIE CZŁOWIECZEŃSTWA, NIEZALEŻNOŚCI
I INDYWIDUALNOŚCI

Streszczenie

Wojna zmieniła wszystko, ukształtowała świat. Todd Hewitt, ostatni chłopiec z Prentisstown, doskonale zdaje sobie z tego sprawę; właściwie widział urywki poprzedniej epoki w Hałasie innych mieszkańców (rzekomo) jedynej ocalałej osady. Jego świat to świat mężczyzn, który stopniowo ginie. Wydaje się, że nie ma ucieczki, nie ma żadnej alternatywy, ponieważ znany i bezpieczny obszar kończy się na granicy bagien, gdzie Todd przez przypadek odkryje, że rzeczywistość jest zupełnie inna od tej, jakiej nauczono go oczekiwać. Jedno przypadkowe spotkanie z Violą Eade zapoczątkowuje zdarzenia, które ogarniają całą planetę. Ucieczka przed Burmistrzem Prentissem i jego ludźmi zabiera Todda głęboko w przeszłość, którą musi rozwikłać, a następnie stawić jej czoła. Sam bez żadnych wskazówek i pomocy Todd zmuszony jest do konfrontacji ze światem,

³⁶ P. Ness, *The Ask...*, p. 423.

³⁷ D. Davies, *Introduction: Raising the Issues*, [in:] *Myth and History*, eds. J. Holm, J. Bowker, London 1994, p. 6.

³⁸ P. Ness, *The Knife...*, p. 396.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 376.

jaki (jak mu się zawsze wydawało) już nie istnieje. Trylogia Patricka Nessa *Chaos Walking* porusza kwestię samoświadomości w świecie, który – jak się zdaje – oszalał. Dwojgu młodych protagonistów historia jawi się jako plątanina półprawdy i jawnych kłamstw, które wydają się przysłaniać wszystko. Ponadto główni bohaterowie są świadkami tworzenia się historii, która jednak nie jest łatwiejsza do zrozumienia, ponieważ na nią składają się nie tylko ich własne odczucia, wiedza i zaobserwowane wydarzenia, lecz także (i należałoby dodać przede wszystkim) opowieści innych ludzi, historie, w które nie należy wierzyć. Dlatego też, oddzielając prawdę od kłamstwa, to, co prawdziwe, od wymyślonego, ważne od nieważnego, Todd musi zdecydować, kim jest, a także na nowo ustalić podstawowe wartości, starając się przy tym zachować swoje człowieczeństwo. Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie człowieczeństwa w obliczu nieuzasadnionej brutalności, okrucieństwa i przemocy; skupia się na wpływie, jaki historia, opowieści i kłamstwa (ponieważ wszystkie zdają się nierozdzielnie powiązane) wywierają na jednostkę i podejmowane przez nią decyzje. Dodatkowo szczególna uwaga poświęcona została sposobowi, w jaki ludzie manipulują historią (a przez nią innymi), aby osiągnąć swoje cele.