

This work is focussed on the question of problematic identity of literary characters. The characters are chosen from the modern Italian novels to show the theme of crisis of a human identity as a constitutive element for the literature of the twentieth century. The first novel which is being interpreted and compared is „Un re umorista“ by modernist Alberto Cantoni. The main character of this novel is the king of a nameless country who feels his „king's“ identity as a role, only a mask. He considered himself as two different persons, but one of them, the king, is not authentic, real.

The second novel, called *Il fu Mattia Pascal* by Luigi Pirandello, is the story of the identity as a social sign and its loss. The identity of human being in Pirandello's conception is closely linked with a society and its rules and law. To have an identity means to be a part of society, community, family and the only meaning of identity is the social meaning. Mattia Pascal loses his identity when he is said to be dead. At first he finds his situation as a challenge and a new chance to be free, to start a new life and create it from scratch on his own. He made a new identity for himself with a fictitious past and name. Then he tried to make this identity real and valid but eventually he realised that it is not possible and he could not live with an imaginary identity.

The third novel *Il visconte dimezzato* is a part of the trilogy *I nostri antenati* by Italo Calvino. This text is from 1952 and it is written as an allegory variation. It belongs to the period of avant-garde of the sixties, time of the literary experiments, discovering new narrative principles and innovating traditional genres and topics.

The main character of *Il visconte dimezzato* is the „dimidiated viscount“ who was divided in two parts by a cannonball. One part of him is the „bad one“, it represents the personification of evil. On the contrary, the second part is the „good one“.