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FEMALE CHARACTERS BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Over time, the British novel has gone through many changes in both content and form. The postmodernist trend leads to the appearance of unique novels that explore different subjects in different and original ways. This is also the case of the British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie and his novel *Midnight's Children*, which I will be analyzing in the following pages. In this paper I will make a presentation of the main female characters of Rushdie's novel and how he combines fantasy and realism to create them.

The novel *Midnight's Children*, written by Salman Rushdie and published in 1981 in United Kingdom, is one of the most relevant examples of Magic Realism and historiographic metafiction. The novel tells the story of Saleem Sinai, who is both the protagonist and the narrator, born at the moment of India's independence. He is born exactly at midnight and he possesses telepathic powers along with an extremely sensitive nose.

The book is divided into three major parts, during which the narrator, Saleem, tells the reader his own story, starting from the past, with how his grandparents met and continuing with his childhood, adolescence until the present day. He affirms in the beginning of the novel that: "I must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as present, as my clock-ridden crime-stained birth" (Rushdie 1995: 10).

Midnight's Children is a complex piece of writing with a complicated story-line and with a large number of diverse characters. According to Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara in her book called *Salman Rushdie and Indian Historiography*, Rushdie is the author who "explicitly explores the idea of India and by doing so also creates his own version of the nation" (2009: 1). The novel is a postmodernist one and the term that Thiara uses to describe it is "Indian historiography", mostly because Rushdie succeeds in re-creating the history of his nation through Saleem Sinai, the one who writes the nation's biography while writing the story of his life (2009: 17). This is why he affirms that there are so many stories to be told and that there is "such an excess of intertwined lives

events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane" (Rushdie 1995: 9).

Some of the most important female characters in the novels are the following: Naseem Aziz, later called "Reverend Mother", Amina Sinai, known also as Mumtaz, Pia Aziz, Jamila Sinai, known as The Brass Monkey, Parvati-the-witch, the Widow and last but not least, Padma Mangroli. All these female characters (and many others) are created with the purpose of reflecting the status of women in the Indian patriarchal society, a role that represents a distinct image of the society, lying at the core of the Indian culture (Thiara 2009: 56). Therefore, the novel depicts the struggles and the joys that women had in the India of that time and how the society accepted and treated them.

Salman Rushdie uses Magic Realism while creating his characters, both male and female. Thus, not only Saleem has supernatural abilities and uncanny traits, but there are also women who possess magical powers and have bizarre physical traits. On the one hand, there are some characters who seem to be the perfect embodiment of magic, like Tai Bibi, who was "the whore of whores" and "claimed to be five hundred and twelve" (Rushdie 1995: 319). However, it is not the age that impresses the narrator, but her smell, a smell of "historic majesty" that made him affirm "I don't care about your age, the smell's the thing" (Rushdie 1995: 319). On the other hand, there are the apparently ordinary and normal female characters, which in the beginning do not strike the readers as extraordinary, but in the end they turn out to be exactly that.

The first female character who should be analyzed is Naseem Aziz. She is Saleem Sinai's grandmother, and the novel begins with the story of how Saleem's grandfather, Doctor Aadam Aziz, met his future wife Naseem Ghani, the daughter of the wealthy landlord. She was to be Aadam's first patient and then she became his wife. She is the mother of three daughters, Amina, Alia and Emerald Sinai and of two sons.

The reader first meets Naseem through a perforated sheet, while Aadam Aziz comes to her house weekly to treat her for all sorts of illnesses. The problem is that he only gets to see that part of her she claims to be hurting, not her entire body. This is why the reader does not get from the beginning the whole image of Naseem, but only body pieces, as Aadam is gradually discovering them. This is how their story begins: "gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams" (Rushdie 1995: 25). However, until she finally gets a headache, to the young doctor Naseem she was "headless, because he had never seen her face" (Rushdie 1995: 25).

After their marriage finally took place, Naseem starts to change and to become an entirely different woman from what Aadam Aziz initially thought.

One of the signs of that change is her attitude towards sex as she starts "weeping into a pillow" (Rushdie 1995: 33). She is horrified when her husband asks her to "move a little" during sex and she criticizes her husband for being a "Europe-returned m[a]n" (Rushdie 1995: 34), while strongly affirming that she will not become a "bad word woman" (Rushdie 1995: 34), like the women from Europe. This was an important event in their marriage and a testimony for her strength and power of will. Regarding their relationship, Saleem affirms that "This was a battle my grandfather never won; and it set the tone for their marriage" (Rushdie 1995: 34).

However, she is the one who transforms the most in the novel. This is how she gains the title of "Reverend Mother" and she begins to be presented as a strong woman. At her husband's request she came out of her purdah and accepted to live in "unveiled, barefaced shamelessness" (Rushdie 1995: 40). With reference to this, Thiara points out that Naseem's decision "directly refers to a central strand of the nationalist woman's question, namely the fashioning of the middle-class wife into a modern "companionate' partner" (2009: 60)

Another peculiarity concerning this character is the adoption of her leitmotif "whatitsname". The narrator refers to the usage of this term as "an unconscious cry for help" (Rushdie 1995:41) and that she tried to make them aware that "for all her presence and bulk she was adrift in the universe" (Rushdie 1995: 41). Thiara suggests that Naseem keeps repeating the term because she lives in a state of unhappiness where she feels her identity threaten due to the rapid changes in the modern society (2009: 63). She does not understand this modern world and starts asking obsessively "whatitsname". Moreover, even her husband asks her at the beginning of their marriage to "forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman" (Rushdie 1995: 34), facing her with the idea of progression and of leaving the traditions behind.

She is described to have "two enormous moles like witch nipples on her face" (Rushdie 1995: 40) and Thiara considers that those nipples become "her defining characteristic, foreshadowing her future awe-inspiring matriarchal status which is coupled with frightening potential" (2009: 63). The witch nipples are the physical signs that will remain on her face, as a testimony of the change that happened inside of her.

She refuses to be governed by this new modern society, and Saleem characterizes her as a fortress, which was impossible to move. She starts to dominate all those around her and engages in a war with her husband: "the domestic rules she established were a system of self-defense so impregnable that Aziz, after many fruitless attempts, had more or less given up trying to storm her many ravelins and bastions, leaving her, like a large smug spider, to rule her chosen domain" (Rushdie 1995: 40-41).

Her dominance culminates with two wars: the war of starvation and the war of silence. The war of starvation started as a consequence of the fact that Aadam threw out the religious tutor and, through this war, she almost made her husband do "a disappearing trick" (Rushdie 1995: 44) due to the lack of nurture, as she refused to feed him anymore. The second war, the great silence war, came as a consequence to Nadir Khan's hideout in their underground chambers. In this manner, "Reverend Mother's lips were sealed, and silence descended" (Rushdie 1995: 53), and this silence managed to transform the woman into a "deafening wall of soundlessness" (Rushdie 1995: 53).

The reader discovers in this part of the novel one of her supernatural traits: she could dream the dreams of others; for example, the dreams of her daughters or the dreams of her husband. The spittoon hitters affirmed about her that "she eavesdropped on her daughters' dreams, just to know what they were up to" (Rushdie 1995: 55). Thus, she could almost foresee the future. However, this bizarre capacity did not strike the society as out of the ordinary because they could just "pick up any newspaper and see the daily tidbits recounting miracles in the village" (Rushdie 1995: 55).

Another peculiar element is the relationship between her and her husband and the fact that as she became more dominant, he began to fade and to crack. She starts to get larger in size and stronger in personality and the narrator describes their marriage "as though [it] had been one of those mythical unions in which succubi appear to men as innocent damsels, and, after luring them into the matrimonial bed, regain their true, awful aspect and begin to swallow their souls" (Rushdie 1995: 270). Moreover, she acquires "a moustache almost as luxuriant as the dustily-sagging hair on the upper lip of her one surviving son" (Rushdie 1995: 270) a sign of masculinity and of strength that seem to lack so much in her husband.

Another important female character, who has a major role in the novel, but also in the analysis of the feminine personalities that exist in Rushdie's novel, is Amina Sinai, formerly known as Mumtaz Aziz. She is the daughter of Naseem and Aadam Sinai and she will be the mother of the narrator, Saleem Sinai. She is another character that is created by the combination of realistic and fantastical elements and traits.

She is described to be "black as midnight" (Rushdie 1995: 55), even blacker than most Indian women, and even her own mother refers to her as "the blackie whom she had never been able to love because of her skin of a South Indian fisherwoman" (Rushdie 1995: 56). Thus, her own mother was not able to love her and had prejudices against her black skin. Her father, however, is more open-minded and he is able to see Mumtaz deeper than the color of her body: "she spent more time with her father than any of her sisters, fortifying him against the bad temper of her mother" (Rushdie 1995: 56).

Her husband's cousin, Zohra, shares the same prejudicial beliefs as she goes on and on about pink babies and about the superiority of the white people: "How awful to be black, cousinji, to wake up every morning and see it staring at you, in the mirror to be shown proof of your inferiority! Of course they know; even blackies know white is nicer, don'tyouthinkso?" (Rushdie 1995: 70). After she realized that Amina might get offended by this, Zohra tries to explain that Amina was not included in that category: "Oh, Ahmed, cousinji, you are really too dreadful to think I meant our lovely Amina who really isn't so black but only like a white lady standing in the shade!" (Rushdie 1995: 70).

She is not as brilliant or as beautiful as her sisters, but she does have qualities. She is described as "good, and dutiful, and alone" (Rushdie 1995: 55). Moreover, "she took upon herself the duties of caring for the needs of Nadir Khan" (Rushdie 1995: 55) and this meant not only food and brooms, but also cleaning his thunderbox, so that not even a latrine cleaner would realize that he is there.

Her second husband, Ahmed Sinai, Saleem's father, is the one who changes her name into Amina Sinai, to give her a new identity, far away from what she was in the past. In opposition to her mother, Amina tries to be a good wife. This is why Thiara affirms that "Rushdie created with Mumtaz/Amina a woman who strives desperately hard to be the quintessentially dutiful wife" (2009: 66). Although she is haunted by the memory of Nadir Khan, she makes efforts to love her husband, considering that he deserved "unquestioning loyalty and unreserved, full-hearted love" (Rushdie 1995: 68). And her solution to her incapacity to truly do that is the usage of the perforated sheet and the decision to fall in love with him "bit by bit" (Rushdie 1995: 68).

She possesses some magical traits and capacities too. Whereas her mother was able to dream the dreams of others, Amina did not have any "witch nipples", but she had the power and will to change those around her. As she is a determined woman, she makes all efforts to love her husband, and this includes transforming their house and himself into the image of her former lover Nadir Khan. And she succeeds because Ahmed, without realizing "came to resemble – and to live in a place that resembled – a man he had never known and an underground chamber he had never seen" (Rushdie 1995: 68). Saleem called this mission "her Herculean task, the task of accepting, bit by bit, that she must love a new man" (Rushdie 1995: 69), suggesting that her efforts were probably in vain, and he describes her powers as "painstaking magic so obscure that Amina was probably unaware of" (Rushdie 1995: 69).

Padma Mangroli, another major female character, is Saleem's lover and caretaker, and his fiancée at the end of the novel. Moreover, she is Saleem's audience and the one who listens to his story. Thiara points out about her that she "is a crucial instrument in terms of providing Saleem with credibility and

investing his narrative with truth" (2009: 39). She also affirms that Padma signifies the "popular", the voice of the common people, and she is presented in contrast with the narrator, Saleem, who could not be considered objective and who could be accused of being biased. Therefore, Padma Mangroli, his listener and girlfriend, is the element that the novel needed in order to be credible and to have authenticity (2009: 39).

The narrator is the one who describes her, using straightforward words: "Padma – our plump Padma – is sulking magnificently. (She can't read and, like all fish-lovers, dislikes other people knowing anything she doesn't. Padma: strong, jolly, a consolation for my last days. But definitely a bitch-in-the-manger)" (Rushdie 1995: 24). Padma is the exact opposite of Saleem. She is illiterate, but she is practical, as she tries to rush Saleem in his narrative, to make him get to the point faster and continue with the account of his story. In what concerns illiteracy, Thiara affirms that "Saleem explicitly emphasizes Padma's illiteracy and lower class background as signs of the undiluted indigenous popular" (2009: 40), and she suggests again the importance of the character in the development of the story.

She is useful to the narrator. He talks about her and says that "Padma is leaking into me […] with her down-to-earthery, and her paradoxical superstition, her contradictory love of the fabulous" (Rushdie 1995: 38). As Thiara claims, Padma is the "popular audience" that helps the narrator to shape the narrative (2009: 40). Saleem uses even her musculature and says that "[t]he dance of her musculature helps to keep me on the rails; because in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happens is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe..." (Rushdie 1995: 270-271). Through Padma, Saleem manages to recreate the past while still remaining anchored in the present.

Pia Aziz, another relevant female character, is in fact Hanif's wife and Saleem's aunt, and she is the one in the novel who represents beauty and inspires sexuality. He describes his experience while living with his aunt and uncle:"[m]y mumani—my aunty—the divine Pia Aziz: to live with her was to exist in the hot sticky heart of a Bombay talkie" (Rushdie 1995: 241). She is beautiful and capable of creating melodrama; she is an actress without any roles and this is why she transforms the world around her into a film: "Deprived of film roles, Pia had turned her life into a feature picture" (Rushdie 1995: 241). She magically enchants almost every man that comes close to her and she mesmerizes even the adolescent Saleem Sinai who becomes attracted to her.

There are many more other female characters that are representative to the story and to the plot, like Jamila Singer, formerly known as the Brass Monkey, Saleem's sister, who came into the world without as much attention as Saleem received. She will eventually end up being a famous Pakistani female

singer. Another important character in the novel is "The Widow", known as Indira Gandhi, who, although she is briefly present in the narration, is the one responsible for the destruction of the midnight children. Last but not least is Parvati-the-witch, Saleem's wife, the one who was in love with the narrator but the one who Saleem never succeeded in truly loving.

All these female characters play roles in the novel; roles that are representative for the Indian society and reflect, in some way or another, the Indian culture and traditions. Most of these female characters "navigate the space nationalist discourse allocates them as modern women who nevertheless function as the guardians of Indian traditions and culture" (2009: 57), as Thiara affirms in her book.

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EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM: INFLUENCE ON THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS A THIRD LANGUAGE

Introduction

Until the second half of the 20th century, bilingualism was not seen as a norm either from an individual or from a societal point of view. Yet, if we look at the history of mankind, it is not precisely a modern phenomenon. Quite the opposite, it has existed for some time, even though it was treated as a deviation from the norm by the general public. Moreover, in the past it was considered as the cause for pupils' failure in schools, when compared to their monolingual peers' accomplishments.

Scholars mostly focused on the influence of a native language on the foreign one. Yet, not many research papers deal with the acquisition of a third language, nor with the influence of bilingualism on foreign language acquisition. Moreover, scholars use the term *second language acquisition* to refer to the process of learning all non-native languages in the area of cross linguistic influence. According to Gessica De Angelis (2007:21), CLI also mentions the *combined CLI* where two or more languages interact with one another in order to influence the acquisition of the foreign one.

According to Suzanne Romaine (1998: 1), multilingualism is inevitable due to political, economic and cultural interaction. Serbia is just one of the monolingual countries in Europe characterized by different types of bilingualism in different regions, usually regarding minorities. As any other monolingual country, the Republic of Serbia sees the use of Serbian language as a national treasure which needs to be protected. Yet, bearing in mind that Hungarians are the second largest ethnic group in the northern part of Serbia (Vojvodina), the Hungarian language is regarded as an official language in addition to Serbian, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian, and Rusyn. Nowadays, the Hungarian language is used as a means of education in various high schools. However, it is used only as an additional option, depending on the city and the type of vocational school.

Apart from Serbian and Hungarian languages that are used as a means of education, various foreign languages are taught in schools in Serbia, with the

English language as the most widespread one. Also, it has been introduced as a compulsory component in the majority of primary, secondary and high-schools, with the title of a *first foreign language*. Given these points, this particular research project is concerned with the effects of bilingualism on English as a third language, regarding 4th graders in the three grammar schools in Serbia who are bilingual in Serbian and Hungarian. This influence of early bilingualism will be seen in terms of pupils' accomplishment in language acquisition of English as a third language, and in relation to monolingual speakers' acquisition.

Bilingualism and Third Language Acquisition

From the very beginning, it was difficult to define what the term *bilingualism* implied. Scholars argued over the level of knowledge in two languages which was needed in order to define it as bilingualism. On one hand, Leonard Bloomfield (1933: 55-6) described it as a "native-like control of two languages". On the other hand, minimalists such as Einar Haugen (1953: 7) suggest that the absolute minimum proficiency required is when one is able to produce a complete meaningful utterance in the other language. However, in order to narrow down the topic and achieve the most precise results of the analysis, the present paper is limited only to *early bilingualism*.

Charlotte Hoffmann (1991: 33) explains that early bilingualism refers to the simultaneous acquisition of two languages from birth. It is also implied that the level of proficiency in two languages should be approximately similar, if not the same. In this particular research, it is suggested that bilingual pupils simultaneously acquired Hungarian and Serbian language. This can be explained due to the fact that there is the need of high proficiency in Serbian, considering that it is the official language in the country. Also, bearing in mind that the pupils are attending lectures in Hungarian language, it is presumed that they have learned it from early age.

The areas of *bilingualism* and *second language acquisition* are thoroughly examined in the last several decades. However, the studies which focus on the acquisition of more than one foreign language and which cover the topic of the influence of bilingualism on third language acquisition are rarely mentioned, nor analyzed. Moreover, scholars usually use the term *second language acquisition* as the synonym for any non-native language learning. Therefore, they tend to overgeneralize the meaning of *second*. Furthermore, the study of cross-linguistic influence also mentions the *combined CLI*, and according to Gessica De Angelis (2007: 21) it refers to the interaction of two languages in order to influence the process of the present foreign language acquisition. Therefore, the area of *third language acquisition* is a relatively unexplored one,

and one of the purposes of this paper is to provide guidance for further research.

Hungarians in Vojvodina

The author Lazo M. Kostić (1990) mentions the presence of Hungarian people in Serbia as a minority since the 18th century, when the northern part of Serbia was liberated from the Ottoman Empire, and then instantly conquered by the Habsburg Monarchy. However, the highest percentage of migration from Hungary to Serbia happened in the 19th century, particularly in the northern part called *the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina*. According to Guus Extra and Durk Gorter (2008: 218) the studies have shown that apart from Romanians, Croatians and Roma people, Hungarians made up 14% of the population in Vojvodina.

Even though Hungarian children have the option of attending schools in the Hungarian language, they have to know the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. Furthermore, giving classes in the minority language is an option for both elementary and secondary schools; however, only if a minimum of fifteen children require it in one community. Studies also show that the education in the Hungarian language lacks proper textbooks and trained teachers. The latter is due to the fact that Hungarian students attend higher education at lower rates than their Serbian peers. Therefore, what should be education in a minority language turns out to be a bilingual program where particular lectures are taught in Hungarian language, and the other lectures in Serbian.

Methodology

The following chapter is concerned with the research methods used in order to prove the positive influence on the acquisition of a third language in the case of bilinguals. More precisely, the topic deals with pupils bilingual in Hungarian and Serbian in their fourth year of grammar school who reside in Vojvodina. In the continuation of the methodology section the paper will cover important details of the analysis itself, which will serve as the means of discovering if bilingualism has any influence on the more successful acquisition of English as a third language.

For the purpose of more accurate results, three classes of each group are tested, with the total of 61 bilinguals and 61 monolinguals. Bearing in mind that this cultural phenomenon occurs mainly in Vojvodina, three cities from that particular area have been selected, which are populated by Hungarians as the dominant minority group. Furthermore, the tests were carried out in three grammar schools in the cities of Bečej, Zrenjanin, and Novi Sad.

As for the measurement of overall proficiency in the English language, the c-test is used, which consists of 5 paragraphs, and it lasts for 20 minutes. The paragraphs are on different topics which should be interesting and appropriate for the target groups. Furthermore, the texts do not require the need for specialized knowledge. Each paragraph has the first sentence intact, and starting from the second sentence, the second part of every second word is left out, leading to total of 20 blank spaces in each paragraph. As Günther Sigott (2004) suggests, the c-test is the most appropriate method for this purpose as it is one of the quickest and most efficient ways of collecting information. Also, it not only tests the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), but the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar as well. In addition to the c-test, the pupils are given questionnaire where they are asked for some personal data, together with their average grade in English as a foreign language. This gives the paper a general insight into the pupils' overall engagement in school.

On the other hand, the existence of endless independent variables makes the research procedure more complex and time-consuming. Given the time constraints, the scope had to be limited, taking into consideration only several carefully selected variables, such as age, years of learning English language, and native language/s. One can assume that the same research conducted in a different location, or with a slight change in variable selection, can lead to different results. Although this particular thesis bears certain restrictions, it also gives an opportunity for further research in the field of bilingualism.

The study

Considering the fact that this paper claims that bilingualism enhances the acquisition of English as a third language, the results of bilinguals and their monolingual peers are compared. The maximum points one can achieve on the c-test is 100, and according to the number of pupils, the maximum points of all bilinguals or monolinguals could reach 6100. Therefore, the first comparison was between the points of the two groups, where the results were in favour of monolinguals with 4167 points, as opposed to the bilinguals' 3824. When transferred into the average percentage of points per group, the Figure 1 shows a monolinguals' means of 68.31, while the bilinguals' is 62.69.

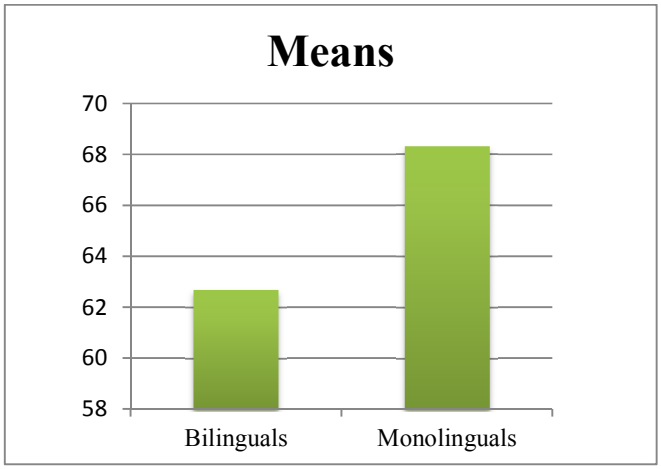

Figure 1. The average points of bilinguals and monolinguals

However, even if overall results testify in favour of monolinguals, the paper also compares the differences in the lowest and highest scores, as well as the average of lowest five and highest five points. The analysis showed that bilinguals still scored the lowest (5 points), when compared to monolinguals (8 points). Yet, the only pupil that succeeded in reaching maximum points is bilingual, even though the monolingual peers were not far behind, with just one point less. Figure 2 shows the average points of five lowest and highest results of both groups. Even though the monolinguals were two points under in the lowest section, they still outscored their bilingual peers in the highest average, with a means of 97.2.

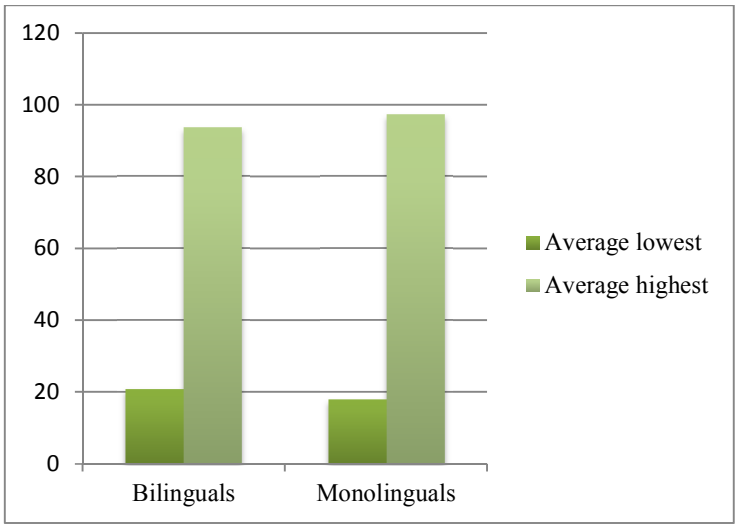

Figure 2. The average of highest and lowest five results of bilinguals and monolinguals

The study showed significant differences in the results regarding cities, which can be seen in Figure 3. The smallest town of the three, Bečej, had the lowest score in what concerns the average points of monolinguals and bilinguals taken together, that is 59.41 points. The slightly bigger city, Zrenjanin, was in second place, scoring an average of 64.89. The significantly highest means of 76.81 was recorded in the biggest city of Vojvodina, Novi Sad. This only proves the claim that the environment is one of the factors that should be taken into consideration when acquiring a native or non-native language.

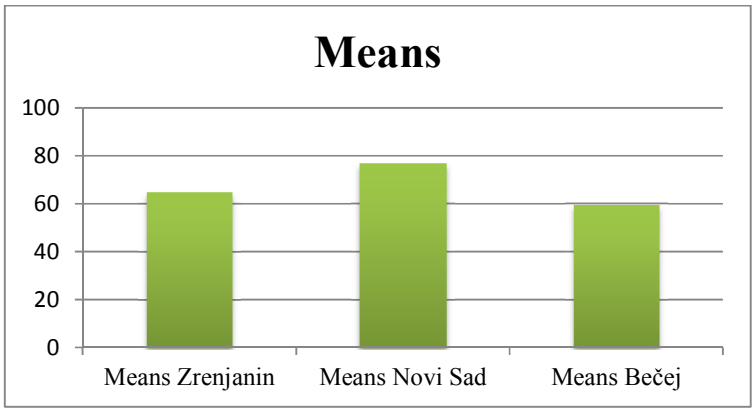

Figure 3. Average points in the three cities in Vojvodina

Another point to be considered is gender differences concerning both bilinguals and monolinguals. When comparing the average points, female and male bilinguals still ended up being in the bottom two, in relation to both genders of monolinguals. Also, both monolingual and bilingual females had a lower average when compared to their male peers. As Figure 4 suggests, the lowest average of 59.98 was scored by female bilinguals, while the highest average of 69.39 was achieved by male monolinguals. What is also interesting is that male bilinguals still scored lower than female monolinguals, even though it is suggested that female pupils are slightly less proficient in English that their male peers.

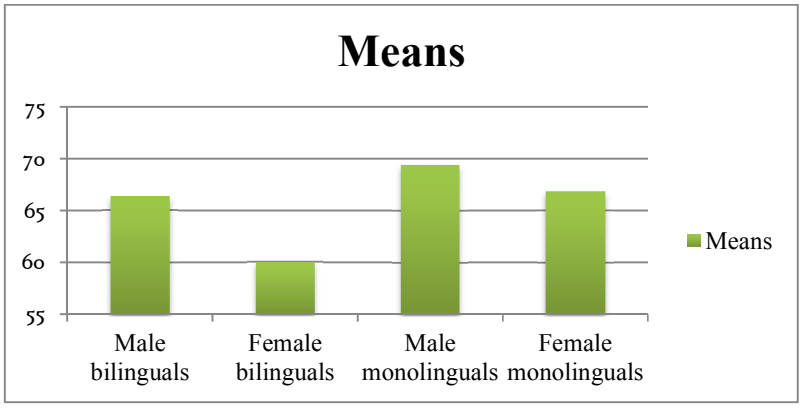

Figure 4. The average points of both genders of bilinguals and monolinguals

Discussion

As it could be seen, the analysis shows that in this particular case, monolinguals outperformed their bilingual peers in the proficiency of English language. Also, it is important to note that both genders of bilinguals scored lower in comparison to monolinguals. Another essential point to mention is that surroundings heavily influence the acquisition of a third language in this particular case. However, this also applies to the acquisition of any other language, for that matter. The environment can include the immediate one, such as family; the attitude of the community towards the minority language; specific conditions which affect their education (schools, teachers, textbooks), and many more.

However, an important factor which was discovered while testing the pupils is that even though bilinguals should be similarly proficient in both languages, it seemed that they have not completely mastered the Serbian. This clue directly influences the hypothesis that Hungarian-Serbian bilingualism is actually an equal one, having in mind that they are not proficient in both languages. Another hypothesis which could be derived is that it may be possible that bilinguals rely heavily on the Hungarian language. Having in mind that English and Hungarian are not from the same family of languages, the CLI suggests that the more distant languages are, the lesser the chance of acquisition enhancement. Therefore, one has to have a high command of both languages, and a similar proficiency in both of them. In other words, the paper suggests that one should have a minimum of bilingual proficiency in order to have a positive influence on third language acquisition.

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BEING BILINGUAL: AN ASSET OR A LIABILITY?

Until the 1960s in the United States, bilingualism had always been considered to be a disadvantage (Bialystok in Dreyfus 2011: D2). Throughout the years, many have formed their own opinions and theories about language and how being bilingual can have a positive or negative effect on one's life. Bilingualism simply means that one has the ability to use more than one language. The United States has always been a country filled with various languages and cultures. Throughout the history of the United States, it is clear that there were periods where bilingualism was not supported and often considered frivolous. This was due to the "Official English" movement which strongly promoted American ideas encouraging immigrants to speak English only. However, over the past few decades, American views have also shifted towards supporting bilingual education because, on many grounds, it is considered beneficial. Today, both opinions coexist. Being bilingual can have strong benefits, including cognitive ones, as well as the ones that are connected to communicative skills and the ability to connect around the world.

One of the most common benefits of being bilingual is the ability to make connections with many people. Language is unique because humans use language to unite each other and create bonds between societies. Dicker (2003: 12) states that "One of the ways we express our membership in these various groups and our relative status to others in the group is through language. Moving from one group to another, our language changes to express these multiple allegiances." Language is viewed as a shaper of personal as well as cultural identity, always changing as a result of how people interact with each other around the world. The 'mother tongue' is significant because it helps create a cultural identity. A sociologist would define the mother tongue as the language one learns first, a linguist would define the mother tongue as the language one knows best, and a sociolinguist would define it as the language one uses the most. Supporting data appear in a study by Kangas (1981, as citied in Dicker 2003: 4), which defines the mother tongue as

> ...the language through which in the process of socialization one has acquired the norms and value systems of one's own group. The

> language passes on the cultural tradition of the group and thereby gives the individual an identity which ties her to the in-group, and at the same time sets her apart from other possible groups of reference… since this socialization process to a large extent occurs with the aid of language, language itself comes to constitute a symbolic representation of the group.

This explanation of the mother tongue can be applied to a bilingual speaker because one's mother tongue could be different from the majority or a certain group's language. When the bilingual becomes part of society or part of a specific group, the first language becomes part of that person's individual identity. However, it is very important to realize that one's language also influences the group because it can very well become part of the group, which makes the language a connection between many people. This connection through the mother tongue shows how this concept can be applied to a bilingual not only individually, but socially as well. This social ability of connecting with many people through language is a positive factor of being bilingual because many are able to connect with people using more than one language. This shows that in a social setting a bilingual may have a stronger social position than a monolingual because they are able to interact with people from many cultures and integrate their own language and identity into a specific group, with multiple options of social allegiance available to them.

Being bilingual also provides a communicative skill of code switching. Code switching is being able to use two or more languages at the same time or in the same conversation. This technique can also be considered a social skill because many bilingual speakers choose to code switch and it helps them maintain their social standing within different communities. This is very common among bilinguals and it is a skill that is used daily. As Wei (2007: 17) states,

> Code-switching is an extremely common practice among bilinguals and it takes many forms. A long narrative may be divided into different parts and expressed in different languages; sentences may begin in one language and finish in another; words and phrases from different languages may succeed each other. Linguists have devoted much attention to the study of code-switching. It has been demonstrated that code switching involves skilled manipulation of overlapping sections of two (or more) grammars, and that there is virtually no instance of ungrammatical combination of two languages in code switching, regardless of the bilingual ability of the speaker.

Code-switching shows an advanced and sophisticated form of speaking which involves grammatical use of two or more languages. It is a

communicative skill that can be very useful in certain situations to people who speak the same languages. A bilingual often does this unconsciously when both languages are constantly being used in a person's speech daily, which shows that both languages are present and equally important to the speaker every day. Garcia (2009: 50) states that

> Code-switching often occurs spontaneously among bilingual speakers in communication with others who share their languages. Far from being a sign of inadequacy or sloppy language usage or lack of knowledge, it has been shown that code switching is a sophisticated linguistic skill and a characteristic of the speech of fluent bilinguals.

Many people may think that code-switching is an indication of sloppiness or lack of intelligence in speaking languages. However, it is a complicated skill that only a bilingual can master. Bilingual speakers choose to code switch as a way to identify themselves or because it is less effortless. Regardless of the reason a bilingual might choose to code-switch, it is considered a unique communicative skill because not everyone can do it and because it is specifically practiced by bilinguals. Code-switching suggests that bilinguals have a communicative skill that can be deployed for social benefits and as a way to maintain their bilingual practices. Code-switching is a positive concept in the case of bilinguals, since it contributes to society as well as forming a personal identity.

There is also a cognitive benefit of being bilingual through the executive control system located in the brain. The executive control system is a general manager that helps with planning, memory, multi-tasking, problem solving, task switching and other cognitive factors. The executive control system relates to language because it is constantly suppressing one language. If two languages are present and used regularly, both languages are present in the brain and the executive control system sorts out what is relevant in that moment and determines which language is to be used. Being a bilingual would mean that the executive control system is more in use and efficient. According to Bialystok (2009: 5), "If bilingual language production requires the constant involvement of the executive control system to manage attention to the target language, then it is possible that this experience enhances that system making it more robust for other functions." It is also proven that being bilingual will forestall symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. In an interview with Dreifus (2011: D2), Bialystok also states,

> "We did two kinds of studies. In the first, published in 2004, we found that normally aging bilinguals had better cognitive functioning than normally aging monolinguals. Bilingual older adults performed better

> than monolingual older adults on executive control tasks. That was very impressive because it didn't have to be that way. It could have turned out that everybody just lose function equally as they got older. That evidence made us look at people who didn't have normal cognitive function. In our next studies, we looked at the medical records of 400 Alzheimer's patients. On average, the bilinguals showed Alzheimer's symptoms five or six years later that those who spoke only one language."

The study proves that people who were bilingual were able to show delayed symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. This does not mean that bilinguals will never possess the disease; it means that a bilingual's brain is able to function at a higher level, thus delaying the processes of getting Alzheimer's disease due to a well exercised executive control. Not only are there social benefits to being bilingual but cognitive benefits as well by keeping the brain constantly functioning at the highest levels, and this will be beneficial in preventing certain illnesses later on in one's lifetime.

There are many benefits to being a bilingual. Being bilingual helps people connect with their heritage and it is beneficial to the brain. Many have reshaped their concept of bilingualism because language is what forms a society, culture and is a significant part of history. Language contributes a lot to society and it can be very valuable to the individual for both cognitive and social factors. Especially in the United States, many need to remember that theirs has and always will be an immigrant country filled with many different languages and cultures. Being bilingual contributes to society and to personal knowledge and thus helps people all around the world to share their ideas and life stories, a testimony to the unique concept of language and the power that it holds.

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HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

Motto: "A world where anything can happen is a world where nothing matters".
(Kazuo Ishiguro on "The Buried Giant", 18th March 2015)

As science reshapes the world under our very eyes, should one believe the voices claiming this to be a distortion? Before answering, one must be aware of the need to first define a point of reference against which to measure this distortion, be it the past or an idealized future from which it departs. As we have seen time and time again, utopia is u-topic, never and nowhere to materialize. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* goes as far as to suggest that in the future humanity as we know it shall be rendered obsolete. Approaching the posthuman age, does the possibility of dignity still exist or does the very cruelty of the system eliminate it? The present essay sets out to explore this matter as reflected in two novels on life after the current stage of man, namely *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro.

Following Heideggerian thought as expressed in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), it would seem that the true danger posed by technology has less to do with lethal machines and everything to do with altering man's essence by changing the very frame that contains it. Once we start tackling the issue of human cloning, we may link Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura" (Benjamin 1936) to humanity as well, since a new individual is seen less as a miracle of life or even a work of art in its own right and more as a sign that technology has not failed in reproducing an object with sufficient accuracy. A fresh look at this question needs to be taken, since in this day and age technology has caught up with earlier speculation. For this purpose, I shall take a more focused approach by discussing another piece of science-fiction literature bordering on dystopia where being useful to society is the ultimate goal of the individual and measure of his worth, namely *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. Quite interestingly, the setting of the novel is not a future from which we can comfortably distance ourselves, but an alternate version of the past that manages to bring these thorny questions home.

You can change, but…

The human subject has always been caught between the ever-fluctuating parameters of nature and nurture, although retaining the possibility of relative flexibility. How important is nature in defining human dignity? The past century has given two answers varying in the extreme, from the Nazi assuming humanity has everything to do with biology to the Communist regime, which favours a view where man is a *tabula rasa* that culture either makes or breaks. Nowadays, wary of these, we aim for a balance that is difficult to strike in practice. Discussing what could and should be done, be it stem cell research or artificial organs, we turn to what is mostly judged to be useful for more people in the long run. However, one may try to avoid this. Tampering with nature, just as selecting bits of culture, is ultimately an ethical choice, as Fukuyama warns us in *The End of History and the Last Man* that genetic engineering creates the possibility of creating people "with saddles on their back" and people "with boots" to oppress them (Fukuyama 1992:3). This naturalizes the violence and the power relations inherent in the system. Indeed, such naturalization is one way to rationalize violence, which makes it the worst kind of violence, as it makes the victim willingly accept it. With the "students" of Hailsham nurtured by and large for pleasure, the earlier wish for meaning ("Be someone important!") is implicitly changed into an urge to respond positively to what is experienced. The sensorial and the sensuous take precedence before what helps them ground their own individuality; it is now external agents that confirm the value of the subject rather than an inner process and a fleeting feeling is the focus, not a grounding thought. As such, they are, in a sense, raised to be distracted from their ontological difference. This succeeds to such a degree that they are genuinely surprised and confused once they realize they are unlike the Others. What does a human being not wish to be? That would be something which is neither pleasuring nor useful, the beast that cannot be absorbed by the system or the monster that remains alien and outlives its purpose. Indeed, the "students" who see beyond the veil fear their own projected monstrosity and accept being used as long as that offers them a sense of purpose and a place in the system. Their anxiety is the counterpoint to Henry's calm acceptance of the status quo in *Brave New World*: "Fine to think we can go on being socially useful even after we're dead. Making plants grow" (Huxley 1933:75). Zarathustra's doctrine might as well have been their lullaby, as they are urged to die no sooner or later that it is needed. The very idea of "completing" is a euphemism for dying once you are no longer of use to others, ignoring the fact that their using you has brought you into this state in the first place.

Stumbling upon their difference first because of Ruth's intuition that Madame finds them repulsive, the "students" find it difficult to understand that, for her, they are the monsters to be rejected. Switching between seeing the

Self as "human" to seeing it as "spider-like" is possible because, as Andrew Gibson puts it in *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative*, the monstrous as a category is not ontologically given, but an epistemological construct (Gibson in Borbély 2014:39). Had she not known they were clones, it is possible to speculate that Madame would have treated the children kindly and in a less reductionist manner. Like Bernard, having their existence reduced to one function only, they might say "I am what I am and I wish I wasn't". This perfect identity with one's role in society is contrary to human nature, which is changeable.

The heart wants what it wants

Turning back to Huxley, the suicide of the Savage can be read as a failure of this system to accommodate humanity. The main concern is not with comfort, but with God, freedom, and real danger. Without danger, there is no Dasein. To this, we may add the common sense assumption that, in order to prove the value of something, you must fear losing it. If it is recognized as just a part of a series, there is no real danger; the individual, a work of mass production, is now replaceable. This becomes immediately apparent in Ishiguro's version of the recent past as well, once we realize that, except for the cautionary tale about the girl who left Hailsham and now haunts the woods as a ghost, there is no talk of spirituality or an afterlife to lend them more meaning in a world where they are treated like spare-parts providers, which is curious for a book concerned with death and the senselessness of suffering.

The "students," however, receive comfort and they are repeatedly reminded of their privilege in the lecture hall speeches. The principal's discourse achieves the same effect as sleep hypnosis, convincing them of their luck through a mere repetition similar in tone to Huxley's "I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta" (Huxley 1933:27). As a group, they are united by an origin they are not told about, being "physico-chemically equal" (Huxley 1933:34), sterilized and kept in the best health possible not for their sake, but for the Others they will have to serve. What they feel that it gives them a group identity is not proximity, but shared form, a given common framework for their experience. Content may differ from individual to individual, but the rituals established by the guardians give the illusion of shared content. This is what draws them together later in adulthood and also what Ruth and Kathy reminisce about when they are reunited since nostalgia works towards giving them a sense of coherence of the self.

At the Cottages, they are genuinely surprised of their difference since they used to believe in this illusion of normality and representativeness. The reason why donors are not integrated in society is both fear and distrust. As Foucault had it, to each age its monsters (2003: 66). We see that the monster has

evolved from the fabulous to the collectable and now it is no longer a sign of divine anger or nature's immense fertility, but science-made. From prodigy to pathology, monsters have always been seen as threats to the patterns of order. Consequently, clones are feared as threats to the natural order, proving Goya right when he asserted that the excess of reason produces monsters just like "the sleep of reason" does. Control needs not be physical: ostracism suffices to keep the monsters at bay. Such a strategy is possible since, Alfred Schütz suggests in *The Problem of Social Reality* (Schütz 1962: 33), when what occurs is a moving from the concrete character of the face-to-face interaction with known individuals ("fellows") suggested by a "We" towards a "remote and anonymous" image of "Thou", respectively "They" ("contemporaries"). In its ultimate stage, the boundary of that world is symbolized by artefacts that "bear witness" to their meaning for some unknown Others, while failing to make those Others accessible for us. Beyond this, one's "contemporaries" are inaccessible, stripping away some of their shared humanity and even rendering empathy more difficult because of a sense of being "less than", of not being recognized as "full beings."

Beggars can't be choosers

Nurtured so as to be useful, the abuse is subtle. For one thing, their access to culture is limited. Why should they know all perspectives on humanity? This goes from the subtle censorship of smoking characters to promote health for later "harvesting" of organs to the peculiar use of art. Trying to make sense of their situation in retrospective is no easy feat. While they cannot ask "What really happened to us?" because that implies a reality contrasted with something that is to be its margin, be it the lie or the illusion. Consequently, they must re-frame the question as "What do we remember about what happened to us?" to make an answer possible in their circumstances. There is not just a need to experience things in their immediacy, but also to reflect upon them. However, memories are continuously edited and editable, which makes subjectivity a fickle thing, as identified by Gertrude Stein in the "You are never yourself" paradox[1] in the second chapter of *Everybody's Autobiography* (1973). This is even more dramatic when the centre is effaced and calling for reconstruction. The "students" are unaware of their biological origin, and therefore their personal narratives are affected: when you do not know where you come from and how, you are, as Jeanette Winterson puts it in *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2011), like a book with the first few pages ripped out and you must make a conscious effort to reinvent yourself. The

[1] "And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. [...] You are of course never yourself." (Stein 1973: 68)

centre of the circle which, in deconstructivist fashion, is at once *arché* (a stable position from which to reflect upon the events in one's life) and *thelos* (giving the possibility of guessing the potential of one's genetic material), needs to be projected anew, as Derrida would have it. How to move in this world then? Fukuyama, even while discussing the posthuman, is against cloning because of the strange relationship between the child and the "original" who is both parent and twin (Fukuyama 2002:207). The sense of disorientation remains although guardians were secretly used as surrogate parent figures, hence the search for one's "possible" and Ruth's utter disgust at the thought of having been "moulded on trash." Indeed, the Danish Twin Registry Study of the 1950s also suggested that the criminality of a biological parent is a better way of predicting a child's criminality than that of an adoptive parent (Fukuyama 2002: 32). Although crime is a socially constructed category, a "possible" is a better indicator of undesirable behaviour traits than a guardian as some of these may have a genetic origin.

How does this affect one's image of the self? Are they human or non-human, square or circle? Both, it would seem, so a living version of a cylinder. Paraphrasing Hegel's dictum that matter is nothing but spirit fallen into a state of self-otherness, from which follows that we are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin puts it (cited in Furey 1993: 138), we may say that these are clones having a human experience. In other words, these are posthumans simulating humanity. The main difference between the human and the non-human is that the former has no economic value placed on the bodies of the dead, thus defeating utilitarian reasoning. Clones are then no longer human as their bodies are worth more, but have entered the posthuman stage without being aware of it. Consciousness is no longer the marker of humanity now that animals may be considered self-aware, which is reason enough to shield them away from pain. A "student's" body *is* clockwork, the human in symbiosis with the technological.

The (im)possibility of guilt

The Savage wanted goodness, as well as sin. Bringing ethics in question, are the students mistreated or sinned against? The first is associated with discomfort and would imply that they are not subjects of the Kantian categorical imperative. As such, the comfort offered would excuse their fate, like when certain organizations demand better conditions for animals in slaughterhouses.

To be sinned against is to be recognized as an end-in-itself and as a subject. Even so, the suffering that happens largely off-screen in the novel echoes Zarathustra's question on the greater cruelty between killing and letting

it live a tortured existence. To be fair, Miss Emily's compassion is not innocent, either, since Adorno stresses the idea that pity only strengthens the system by treating it as an unalterable status quo and, "as in Schopenhauer, these circumstances are absorbed into the moral doctrine and interpreted as its main foundation," even "hypostatized and treated as if they were immutable" (Adorno 2003: 173-174), and thus containing an element of injustice towards the victims. Despite the ambiguity above, the "students" themselves are capable of feeling guilt, as we see in the case of Kathy with the "raunchy mags". The traps of comfort can be identified if, following Levinas, one notices how, while pleasure promises desubstantialisation, it is "just the deceit of evasion. Even if it is a continuous relaxation of the self, pleasure never keeps its promise, but unfolds as shame."(Critchley 2006: 195).

In this context, is art a saviour or another sinner, joining in on the delusion? Not reduced to a "feel good industry" like in *Brave New World*, it is used by the system nonetheless. As a deceiving mechanism, it offers the illusion of normality, so that they do not question the system. Paradoxically, Miss Emily defines artistic freedom as hiding the real lack of freedom since real freedom was never an option: "You wouldn't be who you are today if we'd not protected you. You wouldn't have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn't have lost yourselves in your art and your writing. Why should you have done, knowing what lay in store for each of you" (Ishiguro 2005:268). Not just this, but The Gallery also undertakes to test John Searle's critique of the Chinese room puzzle in "Minds, Brains, Programs" (1980), sharing the doubt on the validity of the Turing test when the subjects are posthuman (Searle in Fukuyama 2002:168). Do they truly take part in a human consciousness and understanding or are they simply proficient enough in formally mimicking it? Learning how to emit signals is no guarantee for an actual understanding, so art should indicate whether clones could replicate an emotional response and whether this was accompanied or not by actually having any feelings themselves. Political theorist Robert McShea suggested in *Human Nature Theory and Political Philosophy* (1978) that a human-looking lion is instinctually preferred in stories to a lion-behaving human, and this very instinct makes the test necessary (McShea in Fukuyama 2002: 169). Living in the "age of the refugee", these clones also live on the fringes of humanity, both inside (aware of the cultural relics of the country) and outside (living in their very own circle even in later life). Much to their disbelief, their collective identity as clones reared up for organs is assumed by society at large to take precedence over their identity as English youngsters, which they feel to be closer to their essence, supposing they have one.

Understanding may not explain and excuse suffering. Even when finally "out in the world" as young adults, their only right is not to suffer unduly,

much like animals. Hegel's epigram, that the Eastern man knew that one was free, the Greek and Roman only that some are free, while we know that man as man is absolutely free, excludes them (Hegel in Fukuyama 1992:88). If the posthuman "students" are closer to being human rather than non-human, then they are good and it is evil to make them suffer, but if they are abominations of science, they are evil and therefore it is evil to tolerate their presence. Not surprisingly, the community avoids answering the question of "students" and pushes them in the shadows. Following Plato's *The Republic*, where we are told that the soul is made up of three parts, we see that each is favoured by a governing system. It is utopic to believe all could be activated to their full potential. While the desiring part (*eros*) is thought to flourish in democracy, the rational part (*nous*) is privileged in aristocracy, so that the part that asks of others to admit one's worth (*thymos*), it seems, works on an intersubjective demand. Most societies manage to respect, at best, two thirds. In the democracy of the 1990s depicted in *Never Let Me Go*, they are all subjected to the "tyranny of the majority" (Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835). There is no better world for them to expect or where to have their worth recognized. Kant identifies that which operates the human/non-human distinction ("Factor X", as found in Fukuyama 2002: 149) as *nous*, the human capacity for moral choice which is also responsible for making them be recognized as ends, rather than means. Dignity, in the words of Mr Stevens from Kazuo Ishiguro's earlier work, *The Remains of the Day*, as "inhabiting one's role" becomes a sheer impossibility for Hailsham "students", who cannot feel at home when they feel akin to Bernard: "Even Epsilons are useful. As am I. And I damned well wish I weren't!" (Huxley 1933: 34). The system became even less forgiving of their existence since the Morningdale scandal due to the citizens' anxiety of being replaced by science. The brush with the question of human will and the importance of human fallibility echoes *Brave New World*'s concern with the freedom to be a square peg in a round hole. After all, the only constant of humanity as cultural beings is self-modification and this possibility, too, is limited. Horace stated that you can throw nature out with a pitchfork, but it will come running back (Book I, Epistle X, Line 24), while here it seems that the clones chase it aimlessly.

Conclusions

Ishiguro has maintained over the years that he always writes around a larger question first, only later deciding on a setting. In his 2005 interview with Nicholas Wroe for *The Guardian*, he pinpoints the main concern of *Never Let Me Go* to be the question of what really matters for us when we live as time starts to run out. The setting is, naturally, chosen for a greater effect, so that the ethical implications are brought home instead of pushed into a future pictured as

improbable, which can be written out of our conscience as fiction rather than possible fact. There is also a heightening of the sense of defamiliarization when everything happens to those seemingly "like us" in places that no longer resemble a home. Judging the characters is more problematic since this is no third person narration as with Huxley's novel, thus speaking also of memory and trauma. Kathy's voice is needed to speak for the posthuman precisely because it is sympathetic and because we are later informed that society silences it. Since she is a reliable narrator, it has the effect that our dilemma is greater, as is the empathetic imagination, while the warmth of her tone and the simplicity of her vocabulary make the revelation of the truth behind euphemisms such as "carers", "donors" and "completing" strike us suddenly. Like the characters of *Brave New World*, they live in an artificial Paradise similar to that of which Yevgeny Zamiatin wrote in *We*: happiness is possible on condition that their imagination has undergone surgery. Their deaths do not happen at random, but are ritualized as a social sacrifice. Ironically, this sacrifice (*facere* and *sacer*, literally "making sacred") makes them arrive at a higher ontological level, but only post-mortem and at the hands of their oppressors, who become the source of meaning and dignity.

Like the ominous image of the woods that were "always there" even though they were not visible from all the windows, the image of Hailsham is internalized and carried with them wherever they go. Because of this, they are never truly free from the system, and the tragic tones are deepened by the lack of a revolt and an attempt to escape the frame altogether. Kathy and Tommy only try to find loopholes in the system, so it is still a point of reference for them. This world is all the more dystopian due to the loyalty and hopelessness its system inspires. Their failure is more tragic and less dignified than that of the heroes in *1984* or *Brave New World,* so that *Never Let Me Go* may speak to the times to come with a voice less cynical and personal enough to unveil the wound.

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CATHOLICISM IN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION: *THE WAY OF CROSS AND DRAGON* BY G.R.R. MARTIN

Catholicism was (and arguably still is) a rather controversial topic in American media, and American science fiction literature is no exception. Perhaps due to the complex nature of the matter, the portrayal of Catholicism is rarely simplistic and usually gives way to philosophical conflicts between opposing modes of knowledge. Some of the finest pieces of science fiction media dealing with the topic are James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* (1958) and *Voices in the Dark*, an episode of the little-known anthology mini-series *The Lost Tales* (2007) written by J. Michael Straczynski. However, perhaps the most original portrayal of a future Catholic priest's struggles is G.R.R. Martin's Hugo Award-winning short story *The Way of Cross and Dragon*, first published in the June 1979 issue of the science fiction magazine *Omni* and later (1981) bundled in Martin's short story collection *Sandkings*. This latter book is notable for crystallizing themes not explored at length in Martin's other works, and most individual stories focus on the necessity of illusion in an uncaring or even openly hostile universe. In this particular story, Martin addresses the universal question of faith by rendering the Catholic Church and the journey of one of its agents through the lens of the medieval Western worldview, placing elements such as the holy book, Inquisitors, 'heroic' quests, heretics and dragons alongside holographic devices and spaceships.

The story is told as a first person narration made by Father Damien Har Veris, an Inquisitor of a futuristic Catholic Church. At the beginning of the story, he had just returned from a particularly demanding mission to an outlying colony where his (mostly successful) attempt to suppress a heretical movement led to riots and unnecessary bloodshed. Because of the brutal methods he is routinely forced to employ against heretics, he has slowly come to question the true motives of his Church and especially the legitimacy of using violence to ensure the orthodoxy of others' faith. In spite of his role as an enforcer of belief, he confesses that having spent far too much time among heretics and unbelievers has eroded his once-strong convictions and he now looks upon heresies not with theological horror, but intellectual interest. His next mission is assigned to him by his alien archbishop, Torgathon, who Father

Damien predicts will become a Cardinal, "should he squelch enough heresies" (Martin 2012). The Inquisitor is immediately intrigued by the teachings and imagery of the Order of Saint Judas, the unusual sect he is tasked to terminate on the distant colony of Arion.

While at first his fascination is mostly born out of curiosity, on his long space voyage aboard his ship, the Truth of Christ, Father Damien resolves to read the heretical bible, called *The Way of Cross and Dragon*. It narrates how Judas Iscariot, born of a prostitute in Babylon, becomes a sorcerer and tamer of dragons, and ultimately the emperor of the known world. Amused by Christ's 'claim' to his throne, he maims and humiliates Jesus but afterwards repents and renounces his earthly power to become the penitent 'legs of Christ'. Returning to Jerusalem from a long voyage spreading Christ's word overseas, he finds Jesus crucified by the empire he has founded. Infuriated by how Simon Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, he murders him and feeds him to the dragons. However, when Christ is resurrected, he is very disappointed in Judas and curses him to be forgotten by history and forever walk the earth as the Wandering Jew. Christ gives the Keys to the Kingdom to the first Pope, the resurrected Peter. Only after thousands of years of torture and persecution by Peter's Church is the wanderer finally redeemed by Christ, who promises to reveal Judas' memory to a select few. The text is generously decorated with pictures of the magnificent frescoes that can be admired in the heretics' Temple on Arion. Thus Father Damien's intellectual curiosity is transformed into an aesthetic admiration of the way the heretical text rearranges legitimate Christian mythological elements, apocrypha and medieval superstitions and combines them with a strong narrative voice that has "power and poetry" (Martin 2012).

Besides the intriguing book, there is yet another reason for Father Damien's rising interest in the heretical theology of the unusual sect, namely its profound departure from the more mundane heresies that he had previously come across. He cannot deny his impatience for meeting the leader of the sect, Lukyan Judasson. Arriving on Arion, the Inquisitor describes the world as a gentle, technologically advanced colony especially welcoming to artists of all kinds. Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and not even the local bishop seems very concerned with the Order of Saint Judas siphoning his flock away, despite already having lost three of the twelve Catholic churches under his jurisdiction.

The peculiarities of the present situation, as well as his curiosity, determine Father Damien to personally pay a visit to Lukyan Judasson, the First Scholar of the sect. He is surprised at the warm welcome Judasson, revealed to have been a former Catholic minister, has prepared for him. Deciding to continue exacting his duty, Father Damien attempts to intimidate the heretic

through his stature and frightening appearance; but the Inquisitor is tremendously shocked by the heresiarch's free admission of having made up the intricate history and theology of the sect. The almost unreasonable revelations that follow shatter Damien's composure and make him realise his own search for answers is far from over. Judasson tells Father Damien that he is part of an ancient secret society, the 'Liars', who believe that life has no intrinsic purpose, and construct elaborate lies to shield the common people from the truth of a cold uncaring universe. Judasson's superior, Jon Azure-Cross, a telepath residing in the basement, reveals to Damien that he is a potential candidate for joining the Liars, as he is defending a faith he no longer believes in. Father Damien finds that he is indeed empty of faith in Catholicism, but still possessed of a belief in the objective value of truth. Realising that the Inquisitor is a much more valuable asset to the Liars if he continues destroying heresies and protecting the "vast lie" (Martin 2012) that he serves, Jon Azure-Cross manipulates Judasson into letting Damien go.

The Inquisitor leaves and exploits the public's fear of telepaths to destroy the heretical sect, and returns to his superior, finally acknowledging that he has completely lost his faith. The archbishop cares only about results and is indifferent to this confession. Damien is confused and disappointed, fully understanding that he is now a pawn in the Liars' game. As reward for his actions in defending the Church, the Knight Inquisitor receives a new, faster ship, which he promptly renames 'Dragon'.

> The truth will set us free. But freedom is cold and empty and frightening, and lies can often be warm and beautiful. (Martin 2012)

The short story ends with these lines, clearly not spoken through Father Damien. Perhaps they are in place to help us better understand Martin's take on the eternal struggle of the human condition, of attempting to gain firmer footing by basing our experience on certainties. But when naked reality becomes too frightening, is taking refuge in hospitable lies truly such a sin? This is the dilemma presented to us through Damien's eyes. The Catholic Church's teachings are no longer adequate to fill in his void of doubt with genuine faith. It is because of this that *The Way of Cross and Dragon* is one of the most unique and eloquent treatments of the question of faith in American genre literature. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the short story is that Martin uses medieval imagery in his portrayal of the far-future Catholic Church as a metaphor for the universality and timelessness of the human struggle to discern faith from lies.

The first of these medieval allusions is the heretical Bible, *The Way of Cross and Dragon*, which also lends its name to the short story. Because of its hierarchical structure, presence of some kind of initiatory rituals and pretence

of esoteric revelation, the Order of Saint Judas resembles the ancient Hellenic mystery religions much more than orthodox Christianity. Therefore, *The Way of Cross and Dragon* is the archetypal 'Holy Book', a holder of arcane or mystical knowledge open only to initiates, very much like the widely-varying and incomplete collection of texts that was the 'Bible' of the early church (Riches 2000: 37). Moreover, before the core Christian orthodoxy was officially established at the First Council of Nicaea in 325, many independent teachers had fused Christian elements with Greek or Persian thought, producing revised, apocryphal rewritings of established texts that prevented a homogenous 'Christianity' to emerge in the first centuries CE (McGinn 2004: 7-8). The most important aspect of the heretical Bible in question is however the fact that it was purpose-written to serve as a basis for a new religious movement. It is then not only a subversion of Catholic doctrine, but a radical denial of the possibility of divine revelation. Father Damien, unsure of what to make of this baroque distortion of the Christian canon, lends the book to the captain of his ship, Arla, a woman of great navigational skill and intellectual ability but little interest in organized religion. This is however precisely the reason for which Father Damien values her critical but honest opinion over blind faith in the Church's teachings:

> "It makes a nice story. An easier read than your Bible, Damien, and more dramatic as well."
> "True," I admitted. "But it's absurd (...) Entertaining, yes, certainly. Imaginative, even daring. But ridiculous, don't you think? How can you credit dragons? A legless Christ? Peter being pieced together after being devoured by four monsters?"
> Arla's grin was taunting. "Is that any sillier than water changing into wine, or Christ walking on the waves, or a man living in the belly of a fish?" (Martin 2012)

Modern, secular society tends to accept religious pluralism and not view religious matters as absolutely true or false, but instead as a question of personal preference (Silk 2007: 64). This is precisely the perspective of Arla, who remarks on the artistic qualities of the prose and visual artwork, but is only casually interested in the profoundly heterodox theology proposed by the book. This serves to contrast the modern worldview (understood to be a product of Protestantism and the Enlightenment) with that of the Catholic Church, which even in the far future, when it has to face new, unprecedented challenges, echoes its historic propensity towards imposing its monopoly on faith.

This the Church achieves through forceful coercion by specialised agents, the Knights Inquisitor, who in the future have again been granted special powers to serve as protectors of orthodoxy. Father Damien is a skilled and

experienced Inquisitor, able to resolve doctrinal disputes efficiently by various methods, including legal action, subtle threats and even outright blackmail. However, despite his role as an enforcer of faith, Damien is struggling with his own faith. On his errand therefore he has to assume the impersonal mantle of the Inquisition to hide his own doubts and fears. Before going to meet his nemesis, Father Damien puts on high-contrast makeup and dresses in an almost-vampiric black vestment with burgundy lapels; his appearance owes much to the American Gothic image of the black-clad pale-skinned 'demonic' priest. His vivid description reflects the idea that the priest (and by extension, the Church) is supposed to frighten as well as impose respect. Father Damien's almost demonic appearance suggests his cold efficiency as well as the fact that he is not himself, but instead represents the Church. This association of Catholicism with transcendent, otherworldly forces has its root in the American Protestant view of this faith as a superstitious, orthopractical denomination focused more on 'mystic' ritual than belief. However, what ultimately elevates him is neither his stature as Inquisitor, nor the power of the Church he is serving, but his personal devotion to truth.

The heresiarch of the Order of Judas was originally a Catholic minister, Father Lukyan Mo. His apostasy came when, while suffering through a crisis of faith brought about by disillusionment with the Church and its teachings, he was contacted by the senior Liar Jon Azure-Cross and tasked with creating a new religion. He lies in stark contrast with true heretics in the sense that while his abandonment of orthodoxy is voluntary, the new creed he embraces is not just a variation of his original one, but a nihilistic philosophy which completely deconstructs the very essence of faith. As for his invented religion, he claims it is more suitable for the current time and place than mainstream Catholicism, an improved version which provides the basis for leading a happy and productive life by appealing to the specific tastes and sensibilities of the people of Arion. Like the medieval Cathars, he is concerned with the happiness of the people much more than the orthodoxy of their belief, and even goes as far as pragmatically remarking that his religion's presence has reduced the suicide rate on Arion.

Father Damien's voyage draws clear parallels to the heroic quest inspired by medieval fiction as defined by Grant and Clute (1997: 796) insofar as it represents a journey towards a specific goal and changes the protagonist in some way. But Martin undercuts the very point of a quest by systematically subverting all the allegorical meanings associated with specific stages of the story. For example, the plot begins with a 'sovereign' presenting the problem and assigning the objectives, but by this time the protagonist no longer believes in the cause he is sent to crusade for. The hero is therefore not fully invested in the process that is his Quest. Father Damien has to prepare for his encounter

with his nemesis, but instead of fortifying himself against spiritual corruption he becomes fascinated by the heretical text. He verbally spars with (and then physically defeats) his opponents, but his victory is superficial; in the end, he loses faith in his religion's truth and, for all intents and purposes, becomes a Liar. He then returns home to receive his reward not as a victorious crusader, but as an empty and tormented man unsure of what to believe in. So even as the medieval scholastics perceived literature as a means to know God's will (Strong, 1988: 2-3, 14), Martin borrows the form of their craft to let us see that the future can be expressed by calling on the beliefs of a bygone era, that only the veil changes and not the essence.

The Liars are a "grand star-spanning conspiracy as old as history" (Martin 2012), a nihilistic cabal of powerful individuals who engineer faiths to protect the masses from the revelation that life is without intrinsic meaning or purpose. They believe that this revelation is unbearable to most (Martin 2012), and they seek to help sentient beings by defining their existence for them through tailor-made faiths suited for different times and places. The idea of an ancient secret society subtly manipulating history while adhering to utterly alien beliefs can be found in the medieval European imagination in the form of the satanic witch cult rumoured, but never proven to exist. Despite having long lost academic credibility (Noble 2005: 6), Margaret Murray's witch cult hypothesis is a fascinating proof of the fact that sometimes, folk beliefs in the existence of the supernatural outsider push the community towards taking (sometimes drastic) action against the perceived threat, in return legitimizing belief in it. Therefore, while Murray's pre-Christian witch-religion has probably never existed, the fact is that the common people in the Medieval and Early Modern periods undoubtedly believed that the underground witch cult was very real and a direct threat to their existence and eternal souls. The Liars are, in a sense, the opposite then: to admit their existence is to actually give credence to their ideology.

Lastly, while Father Damien finds the inclusion of dragons in the New Testament narrative objectionable from a theological standpoint, the motif of the draconic serpent is in no way foreign to Christianity. While serpents or other reptilian creatures occasionally appear in the Bible (e.g. the famous Genesis 3), the Western dragon as a symbol of both ferocity and wisdom/cunning is best represented in the hagiography of Saint George. A roman soldier born into a noble Christian family, he opposes Emperor Diocletian's persecution of his religion's adepts and is subsequently martyred. A famous if somewhat apocryphal episode tells of his confrontation and defeat of a dragon in the land of Libya, a feat he accomplishes to save a princess from the monster's fangs (Ingersoll 1928: 101-102). According to the widely-disseminated, definitive Catholic collection of hagiographies, *The Lives of the*

Saints, this is to be understood as no more than a symbol of a stoic Christian defeating the Devil in his Dragon aspect as described in Revelation 12. However the numerous works of art inspired by this story, such as Paolo Ucello or Raffaello Santi's Renaissance masterpieces, are solid proof that the legend was syncretized in the West with the local literary tradition of the knightly romance and thus became very popular in its current, literal form. So even if the Church canon suggests an allegorical reading, the organic presence of mythical dragons in the medieval folk-Catholic legendarium is a certainty (Ingersoll: 97-98).

In Martin's story, the characters are constantly forced to re-evaluate their beliefs in the face of tragic revelations. In the end however, there is a limited extent to which they can change without losing their identity - and sanity. Ultimately the weight and alienness of the naked reality they experience crushes even the last remnants of idealism, leaving them with no certainties, but also granting them the freedom to pursue new paths towards their goal. However, Martin manages to make us see the twisted beauty in the cruelty of the revelations he faces his characters with. Martin's dark, cynical world takes on a silver lining if we take into account the underlying aesthetic philosophy that rationalistic knowledge of the universe forfeits us the beautiful abstractions we create about what we cannot comprehend, leaving us prey to nihilism and despair - or, as Martin himself puts it, "Beauty is infinitely preferable to truth" (2012). His short story therefore takes a great departure from the classical science fiction treatment of the science/ religion duality, taking a different, critical approach to both epistemological modes. It does not aim to educate, rather being like an open question, the answer remaining ours to formulate. Martin helps in this pursuit by providing all the pieces of the puzzle, indirectly painting the far-future world through retelling (and commenting on) the history of the Catholic Church by calling on elements of the medieval worldview.

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NATIVE AMERICAN STEREOTYPES IN POPULAR MEDIA

Native Americans have been stereotyped in various ways in the course of history, but the more prominent stereotypes emerged once Hollywood and the media took hold of the subject. Throughout my essay I will be discussing the Hollywood stereotypes of Native Americans in popular media, specifically in cartoons, movies, advertising and popular culture. Before starting my analysis, I would like to clarify the term "stereotype". Stuart Hall believes that:

> Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. […] [S]tereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference' (1997: 258).

When referring to Native Americans, we are inclined to imagine the Hollywood version of said people, rather than their true image. This is due to the vast commercialization of the stereotype as opposed to the reality of the matter, because Hollywood profits from such imagery. Stereotypical media influenced "Indians" far outnumber those whose image follows historical truth and the nature of the Native Americans as depicted in schools and history books.

In *Absurd Reality II: Hollywood goes to the Indians*, Ted Jojola refers to the Hollywood Indian as

> …a mythological being who exists nowhere but within the fertile imaginations of its movie actors, producers, and directors. The preponderance of such movie images has reduced native people to ignoble stereotypes (1998: 12).

This being said, the Native American imagery that has been presented to us by the media throughout time is in no way indicative of the true form and nature of the Native people. The exaggeration of some characteristics and the made-up factor have reduced Native Americans to undeveloped – and in some

cases even extinct – people, which is not truthful in any way. Popular media exploits Native stereotypes as a source of profit, without taking into consideration the potential damage that results from producing an image, a model that most grow up believing as truthful, due to the excessive reproduction of these stereotypes.

The first aspect that I will be analyzing is the portrayal of Native Americans in cartoons. As in the majority of Hollywood-influenced cases, cartoons have also presented Native Americans as savages or primitive people. Even though the imagery has changed throughout time, the main representation of the Native people has been racist and degrading.

One popular "Indian" stereotype found in cartoons is the Native as a savage, depicted as a threat to white society. Cartoons from around the 1950s commercialized such stereotypes, as it was a time when racism was common throughout America. The basic representation includes reddish (almost brown) skin, bows, arrows, primitive tools and scalpels, half naked, painted bodies. We can see these representations in cartoons such as Betty Boop or Looney Toons, in which the setting is almost always Western. The Natives are represented as unintelligent beings, as a culture waiting to be "saved" and educated by the white man, sometimes opposed to civilization and the white man, described and presented as the enemy.

A more modern representation of the Natives is the "Casino Indian" (Lacroix 2011). This stereotype emerged as a result of the rising number of casinos that utilize Native American stereotypes for commercial reasons. In this case, the "Indians" are perceived as casino owners and workers, trying to win back and rebuilt what was once taken from them by the "white man". The Native Americans are presented in typical "Indian" gear, while the Casinos are portrayed as modernized tents and Native grounds.

On the other hand, more modern and satirical cartoons such as South Park or Family Guy make use of this stereotype with the intention of trying to restore the true nature of the Natives. They utilize this type of representation in a satirical way, to underline the racism and stereotypes that have not yet been removed from the media and present day society. The fact that the main characters lose their properties to Indian Casinos shows the way in which such cartoons parody the loss of the Native lands, reversing the historical information and making the "white man" lose his property to the "Indians".

On the other hand, although they abolish the typical racism directed towards Native Americans by parodying them, they create a new form of racism in which they insinuate that Native casino owners use their heritage for profit. Lacroix believes that "the insinuation that many of the Natives who have benefited from tribal casinos are not authentically Native is reflective of a relatively new racist stereotyping" (2011: 16).

The second aspect that is up for analysis is the stereotypical Native American in movies. Compared to cartoons, movies have a larger variety of stereotypes when referring to Native Americans, due to the fact that movies which include Native characters are more numerous than cartoons. Although there is a large selection of movies that could be analyzed from this perspective, I shall only name a few when enumerating the most common stereotypes found in movies. It should be noted that film directors shift their notions of Native Americans according to what sells:

> Hollywood is presumably not filled with Indian-haters intent on using their power to put down the natives. One need only observe how quickly a director or a studio might switch from portraying a 'bloodthirsty' to a 'noble savage' if the market seems to call for it (O'Connor 1998: 30).

One common Native stereotype, also present in cartoons, is the "Indian" as undeveloped and uneducated, accepting the white man as a saviour. In movies such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990) or *A Man Called Horse* (1970) we see that the Native Americans are being presented as primitive beings that are in need of enlightenment, which can only be provided by the "obviously superior" white man. Also, the fact that in the beginning producers preferred to cast white actors for the roles of Indians – deeming them incapable of doing a satisfactory job – reinforces the stereotype that Natives are incapable beings.

Another stereotype reinforced by Hollywood movies is the Indian as a savage and hostile figure. This particular native stereotype became popular due to the Western movies, the predominant cinematic genre of the twentieth century. Movies such as *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *Chato's Land* (1972), or *Cheyenne Warrior* (1994) portray the Natives as the antagonist, bloodthirsty in nature, capable only of violence. War cries and weapons are common characteristic attributed to Native Americans in such movies. What should be taken into consideration here is the audience of this particular movie genre. John O'Connor believed that the popularity of Western movies stems from the usage of battles and action, specifying that "peace-loving Indians" do not provide an interest factor due to their lack of action and excitement (1998: 34).

The most common stereotype reflected in Hollywood movies revolves around the exterior image of the Native Americans. As in the case of cartoons, the Natives are presented as predominantly unclothed individuals, wearing feathers and skins, with their faces and bodies partially or fully painted. Almost all movies that utilize Native American characters apply this stereotype. If we take a look at *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) or any other movie that brings forward Native American imagery, it is clear to see that their representation

involves "native clothing," even though O'Connor (1998: 33) states that "the designers of Indian movie costumes have generally given little attention to the actual dress of the tribes." Also, the exaggeration of face and body paint is a predominant theme in such movies, bringing forward the idea of war paint and savagery.

Although these stereotypes have become less numerous over time, this exterior representation of Natives still remains present in some twenty-first century movies. One example is *The Lone Ranger* (2013), in which a non-Native actor plays the role of the Indian, wearing "traditional native clothing," a feathered head ensemble and a painted face. This proves that, even though Hollywood has gone a long way in reducing stereotyping in movies, it has not yet completely abolished it.

The last aspect that I will be analyzing is the representation of Native Americans in advertising and popular culture. In this particular case, mainstream media has reduced Native American stereotypes to iconic imagery associated with food, fashion or sports. From football mascots and Halloween costumes to liquor and honey, popular culture and advertising have taken advantage of cliché stereotypes and popularized them as memorable symbols:

> Companies that use these images of Indians do so to build an association with an idealized and romanticized notion of the past through the process of branding (Aaker & Biel, 1993). Because these representations are so commonplace, we often fail to notice them, yet they reinforce long-held stereotypical beliefs about Native Americans (Merkins 2001: 159).

The most offensive aspect of utilizing Native Americans in popular culture or advertising is racism. If we take a look at sports, it is clear that some football teams take advantage of stereotypes in an offensive way. For example, the *Washington Redskins* are offensive not only for their name, but also for their logo that depicts a dark-skinned, long-haired, feather-wearing, stereotypical Indian. Teams such as the *Cleveland Indians* and the *Atlanta Braves* utilize either a mascot that takes the form of a cartoonish Indian, or make use of the Tomahawk as their official logo. The fact that these – and many other – sports teams abuse Native stereotypes even nowadays proves that popular culture along with ignorance play a more dominant role in society than overcoming the stigmas that the Natives have to face.

Another domain that makes use of Native American stereotypical imagery are food brands. *Sue Bee Honey* utilizes the imagery of a small Native girl that is half human half bee, correlating the idea of purity (the young girl) with nature and the natural (the bee), and thus underlining the "child-of-nature imagery" (Merkins 2009: 140) associated with Native Americans. Another brand

that utilizes a female Native American is *Land O'Lakes Butter*. The product's logo depicts a Native woman holding butter, making an association between the product and the woman, "with youth, innocence, nature, and purity. The result is the generic 'Indian maiden'" (Merkins 2009: 140).

Uwanta Cigar and *Arrow Cranberries* display the image of Native American men as warriors, in native clothing, with weapons and their horses. The only visible correlation between the products and the logos are the product names, which make use either of a similarity with a tribe name (in the case of *Uwanta*), or of the stereotypical weapon used by Natives (in the case of *Arrow)*. The final product that I will be mentioning, *Crazy Horse Malt Liquor*, uses the image of an Indian chief as a logo. The Indian character's feathered headpiece reinforces not only the stereotypical imagery of the Native American chief, but also the offensive notion that Natives are associated with alcoholism (Merskin 2009: 142).

One last aspect to mention is the popularization of Native clothing in Halloween costumes and fashion. Fashion and costume designers try to include Native American apparel in their clothes, and in this way they contribute to reinforcing stereotypical and cartoonish versions Native clothing. By associating Native American clothing with large feathered headpieces, body paint, braided hair, colourful accessories and imitation leather clothing with tassels, they do not revive the Native style of dress, but rather play along with the stereotypical idea of what a Native Indian looks like, with imagery taken from old western movies, cartoons and advertising.

Throughout my paper I have specified and analyzed some Native American stereotypes that have become popular due to Hollywood and mainstream media. I have discussed the stereotypical imagery and characteristics of Native Americans in cartoons, movies, advertising and popular culture. Although most of the previously mentioned products and situations are not meant to be racist, they reinforce stereotypes that do not accurately represent the Native American people and their culture. It is worth mentioning that these are not the only cartoons, movies, products or aspects in which Native American stereotypes arise, which suggests that although we have reached a time when stereotypes have been brought to a minimum, they are still present.

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DECONSTRUCTING THE GOTHIC IN H. P. LOVECRAFT'S *THE PICTURE IN THE HOUSE*

H. P. Lovecraft, the famous horror writer whose work draws on Gothic elements, followed Edgar Allan Poe in creating a body of work meant to induce fear and unease to his readers, enveloping his characters in mystery and depth. The author utilizes various types of Gothic elements to construct his short stories, making them complex and full of direct imagery as well as subtle symbolism. One such story is *The Picture in the House*, in which H. P. Lovecraft combines multiple Gothic elements, ranging from horror to abjection, in order to create an intense sensation of uneasiness for the reader. Although some may argue that *The Picture in the House* plays with the Gothic only on the surface, i.e. mainly in what concerns the setting and the plot, the story offers a unique blend of Gothic elements in all aspects of its form.

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (2001: 244) state that role of the Gothic text is to induce fear, thus generating feelings of terror, horror or disgust. The Gothic text takes one's internal fears and exteriorizes them into threats, hence temporarily inflicting abjection. The plot of such a text revolves around death, the supernatural force of evil, as well as the fixation on darkness. Setting and atmosphere play an important role in a Gothic text due to their impact. Beville (2009: 42) gives examples of a few traditional atmospheres, such as mysterious lairs or hauntings being used in order to create terror.

The story follows a lost character that, being suddenly caught off guard by a storm, seeks refuge in what he believes to be an abandoned house. The fact that the setting is placed in an old crumbling house during a horrible storm sets the mood, and suggests to the reader that things will inevitably become sombre. By this point, we are already faced with two specific Gothic elements: the old, abandoned house, accompanied by the darkness that comes with the storm. The fact that these two elements are present from the beginning of the story makes it clear to the reader that the tale will be heavily encrypted with Gothic elements.

The old house surrounded by mystery, haunted or hiding secrets is probably the most symbolic aspect of the Gothic text. However, Anne Williams (1990: 39) explains in the chapter *The House of Bluebeard* that the house might sometimes be unnecessary. She brings into discussion what Dean R. Krootz

wrote in one of his works, that the house surrounded by evil should be considered as a character of the story like any other, that it should not be viewed as just a prop (cited in Williams 1990: 39). This is an important feature to be taken into consideration when referring to H.P. Lovecraft's short story *The Picture in the House*, where the house could be considered as a participant to the story's climax, in addition to being the main setting of the story.

Also, the presence of darkness and the storm from the very beginning of the story might be considered foreshadowing elements of what is yet to happen. The calm before the storm can be correlated with the first part of the story, beginning with the protagonist entering the house and up to his meeting with the antagonist. The storm, however, can be associated with the second part of the story, from the moment of contact between the two characters and ending with the final scene. The storm continuously foreshadows what is about to happen in the story, especially in the final scene, where the protagonist is faced with the intense sensation of dread and horror upon coming into contact with the murder, a moment cut short by a flashing bolt of lightning that leaves both the protagonist and the readers uneasy about what will happen next.

The atmosphere of the book also sets the tone of the story, indicating that the events that are about to take place will not be pleasant ones. In the story, the protagonist is caught off guard by the inhabitant of the house, who proceeds to make him uneasy by passionately speaking about a photograph in an old book. The photograph itself further sets the mood and creates a tense atmosphere, as it illustrates a butcher's shop of the Anzique cannibals, and a human being butchered. At a first glance, the picture in the book might seem unthreatening, but upon further inspection, it acts as a subliminal atmospheric trigger which provokes further sensations of uneasiness for both the main character and the reader.

As previously noted, H. P. Lovecraft often uses horror in his short stories when referring to the unknown – whether it refers to the story's characters, setting or atmosphere. The author paints a unique, horrific image of something that cannot be named or fully explained. The reader is frightened by the very sight of something that, when analysed, has no exact visual representation. If we take a look at the ending of *The Picture in the House*, we can see that Lovecraft creates horror by depicting a seemingly unthreatening situation which suddenly shifts to the other extreme.

The climax of the story, the ending, consists of a few simple aspects that are so finely put together that they provoke in the reader an ultimate sensation of horror while being set in the middle of the horrific atmosphere. A few drops of blood falling from the ceiling on the picture and the sudden silence that fills the room accompanied by a thunderbolt from the storm leave the reader, and the protagonist for that matter, with an uneasy sensation of what is yet to come:

> The open book lay flat between us, with the picture staring repulsively upward. As the old man whispered the words *"more the same"* a tiny spattering impact was heard, and something showed on the yellowed paper of the upturned volume. I thought of the rain and of a leaky roof, but rain is not red. […] I did not shriek or move, but merely shut my eyes. A moment later came the titanic thunderbolt of thunderbolts, blasting that accursed house of unutterable secrets and bringing the oblivion which alone saved my mind. (Lovecraft 2011: 89)

Blood and the idea of death are two specific Gothic elements that Lovecraft often uses in his works, due to the strong fear-inducing, unsettling effect they have on the reader. Thus, with the mere addition of a few elements that would be considered frightening at most if taken individually, Lovecraft creates an atmosphere of profound tension and distress. The visual representation of death – the blood –, accompanied by the violent representation of the nature outside, contributes to creating a typical Gothic scenery. We see how the protagonist's mood shifts from nervousness to horror as he locks eyes with the man and can only assume what is about to happen next. If we draw conclusions based on the clues from the text, one can only assume that the man is a cannibal and our protagonist is fully aware of that, which makes the atmosphere even tenser.

Lovecraft's depictions of Gothic elements are often directly represented within the text, and his most prominent elements are horror-induced fear. Horror is considered to be an intense sensation that one gets when in contact with an unnatural setting or object such as a corpse or a haunted house. It is the feeling one gets when coming in direct contact with the feared object, experiencing it rather than feeling the suspense of what might happen (Radcliffe 1826: 147).

At the same time, the author plays with more than just horror in his short story *The Picture in the House* – more specifically, with the grotesque. In the beginning of the story, the protagonist describes his interest for exploring old, desolate villages for genealogical findings. The conveying of the scenery puts an ordinary setting in a new light, a horror ridden perspective that converts the normal to the abnormal. The scenery is grotesque because it is given an unnatural appearance in which "the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness, and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous" (Lovecraft 2011: 85). Lovecraft plays with the idea of merging the Gothic elements of horror and the grotesque in this story, describing both scenery and atmosphere in a new light and showing the dark side that can be found underneath an apparently plain exterior.

In addition, the story also portrays the grotesque in the form of a character. The person that inhabits the house in which the protagonist is forced to seek refuge is a good example of a grotesque character. Although he is not physically deformed, the way in which he delivers himself in conversation gives us insight into the depths of his psychological state. The character is seemingly a normal country man who is nice to the protagonist, despite the latter's trespassing. But the further the story goes, the more we get a sense that the character has a hidden state of mind, and we see it coming to light when he speaks with perverted passion and even playfulness about the butchering picture in the book.

Even though the scene describes a horrific event, it is rendered in such a way as to make the reader feel uneasy, yet at the same time amused by the childish excitement that the character conveys as he speaks. The language he uses is effective: he chooses simple words and compares the butchering scene in the picture with the slaughtering of sheep. This type of grotesque, the comic grotesque, manages to blend horror and humour in order to make the reader feel uncomfortable and to a certain extent amused. All in all, Lovecraft plays with the idea of merging horror and the grotesque in this story, describing both scenery and characters in a new light and showing the dark side that can be found underneath an apparently normal exterior.

Another Gothic element that is present in H. P. Lovecraft's fiction is abjection. Death and corpses are the dominant abject elements that are found in H. P. Lovecraft's short stories, but other abject elements find their way into the majority of his works that are dominated by the supernatural. In *The Picture in the House*, we have two instances of decay and death, the first being the house itself. If we to look at the way in which Lovecraft creates his discourse, the words "the antique and repellent wooden building," "the rusty latch" and the "wall from which the plaster was falling" (Lovecraft 2011: 85) indicate that the house is in a physical state of decay. I refer to it as a state of decay, as opposed to a state of destruction, since 'decay' can also characterise humans and, as I previously stated, the house is considered to be a character in the story, which gives the house human characteristics.

Moreover, if we search the story for actual death and decay, we could find it in the form of the murder. Even though we cannot see the actual murder victim, we have remote access to its existence in the form of the crimson coloured ceiling above the main character and the blood that is dripping on the book. Therefore, Lovecraft uses both death and decay in this particular story, one when referencing a human and the other when referencing an object, which proves the creativity with which the author constructs his text with the help of various Gothic elements.

Bodily fluids, such as blood, are also abject elements which Lovecraft utilizes in *The Picture in the House*. In the final scene of the story Lovecraft resorts to blood as the abject element of the story, disguised in a poetic comparison: "I thought of the rain and of a leaky roof, but rain is not red" (Lovecraft 2011: 89). The expulsion of blood is an abject element because blood is a part of the body, and thus integrated into nature, but when the expulsion takes place as it does in the story, it becomes a separate element from the body, which goes against the natural environment in which it should be located.

What is more, another type of abjection found in the same story is the outcast, in this case the man who lives in the house. The character is an abject element because he is a murderer, and murder is considered to be an action that "disturbs identity, system, [and] order" (Kristeva 1984: 4), which means that the character disturbs the natural order with his actions. The reader is aware of his murderous traits because of the associations that are made throughout the story, specifically the commotion in the room the character comes from, the passion with which he speaks about killing sheep, and the blood that drips from the initial room.

Finally, the last Gothic element that is present in the story is the idea of cannibalism. Although cannibalism is considered to be a taboo topic, H. P. Lovecraft plays with the idea of including it in a subtle way in his story. The reason why the inclusion of cannibalism is not scandalous in *The Picture in the House* is the fact that it is not referenced directly by either the protagonist or the antagonist, it is merely hinted upon.

A more direct reference to cannibalism is given when the protagonist comes into contact with the picture in the book, in which a scene of butchering and cannibalistic rituals is described. At this point, the reader may feel inclined to dismiss the idea that cannibalism could have anything to do with the rest of the story, with the exception of setting a darker tone. What should be noted and what makes the reader think of a potential cannibalistic scene in the book is the passion with which the antagonist speaks about the picture.

Lovecraft indirectly hints that the owner of the house might have participated in such cannibalistic acts, based on the way in which he describes the picture and also refers back to his own encounters of butchering animals. By combining the fact that the books seem to have been opened specifically at that picture repeatedly, and the enthusiasm of the antagonist when speaking of such rituals, the author manages to hint at the idea that the antagonist has been practicing such rituals for quite some time.

All in all, H. P. Lovecraft successfully makes use of various Gothic elements throughout his works of fiction, specifically in the short story *The Picture in the House*, ranging from typical Gothic settings to specific elements such as horror-induced fear. While other writers of the genre make use of such

elements in a purely aesthetic way, H. P. Lovecraft focuses on making Gothic elements visual as well as subtle to his readers. It is this devotion to the Gothic that makes the author's works true tales of horror and suspense.

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