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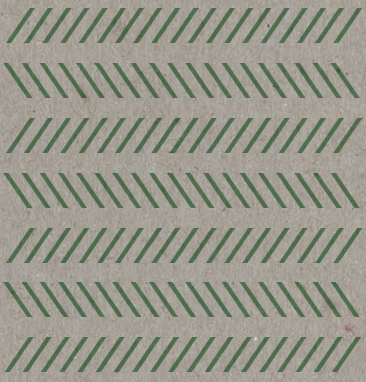

SCARY REALITY:
FEAR IN NARRATIVE CULTURES

Founded by the Polish Ethnological Society in 1957
vol. 66 (2022) no. 3

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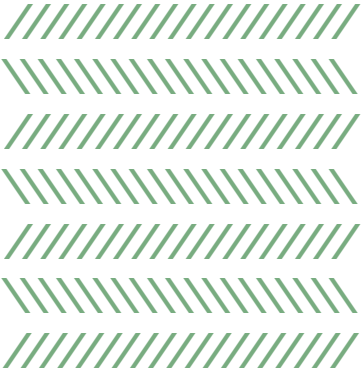

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ARTICLES

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Therianthropes in a Cartesian and an Animistic Cosmology: Beyond-the-Pale Monsters versus Being-in-the World Others

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ABSTRACT: The nature of human-animal hybrid beings (or therianthropes) is examined in an Animistic (traditional San Bushman) and a Cartesian (Early Modern Western) cosmology. In each ontological ambiguity is imagined and conceptualized in different terms. One of them is through monstrosity, which, in the Western schema, is equated with human-animal hybridity. This equivalence threatens the boundaries and categories that buttress western cosmology, through a being – the human-animal hybrid – deemed a conceptual and epistemological abomination. It elicits a category crisis that is as much cerebral as it is visceral as the were-beings it conceives are feared and demonized. No such valences attach to therianthropes in the cosmology described in this paper. It is an "entangled" cosmology shot through with ambiguity and fluidity in which human-animal hybridity is neither abominable nor feared. Instead, as a pervasive and salient theme of San world view and lifeways, especially its expressive and ritual spheres, along with hunting, ontological mutability becomes an integral component of people's thoughts and lives and thereby normalized and naturalized. Beings partaking of this state are deemed another species of being with whom humans engage as other-than-humans, on shared social terms. Monsters are beings who negate or transgress the moral foundation of the social order. San monstrosity, conceptually and phenomenologically, becomes thereby a matter of deviation from social (moral) pre/proscriptions rather than from classificatory (ontological) ones. This basic conceptual difference notwithstanding, we also find a fundamental commonality: the inversion, through monsters and monstrosity, of each cosmology's underlying epistemic matrices, of structure and ambiguity, respectively.

KEYWORDS: monster studies, San cosmology, comparative mythology, relational ontology, modes of thought, new animism

> In summary, monstrousness is marked through monstrous bodies, which do not fit into the classificatory schema of the respective people they haunt [...]. Monsters are ontological puzzles that demand solutions. They are things that should not be, but nevertheless are – and their existence therefore raises vexing questions about humanity's understanding of and place in the universe (Weinstock 2014: 1; cited in Musharbash, Presterudstuen 2014: 11).

> I am not a mere Hare, but am a Bushman Hare, and am /Xue [!Kung trickster-divinity]; for thou alone art not /Xue, for we two are /Xue, and are Bushmen (Tamme, !Kung story teller; Bleek 1934/35: 263).

The two epigraphs above convey human-animal hybridity in epistemological, ontological and phenomenological terms that are conceptually distinct. One is beset with cerebral concern over classification and separation elicited by this instance of ontological ambiguity. The "vexing questions" over the fuzziness of the human-animal boundary and the factuality of the human-animal divide culminate in the demonization of beings that confound these divides as monsters. The questions in the Southern model, more visceral in tone, are about identity and conjoining, and such concern over ontological ambiguity as may be felt is balanced by awareness and acceptance of the fictiveness of the human-animal divide and the porousness of its boundary.

The difference between the two paradigms on the human-animal divide/nexus derives from the two cosmologies in which they are embedded, which are both conceptually distinct and, as recently argued by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015), geographically removed and separated, by a hegemonic intellectual "Abyssal Line". To reflect their conceptual remove, he dubs these two epistemologies "Northern" and "Southern" (somewhat misleadingly as epistemologies of such northern people as the Siberian Yukaghir, the Arctic Iglulik and Subarctic Ojibwa have "Southern" contours; see Brightman et al. 2012; Guenther 2020: 114–32). The "Northern epistemology" is dualistic, positing an ontological dichotomy between culture and nature, which Philippe Descola, in *Beyond Nature and Culture* – a global comparative "grammar" of four global ontological "schemas" and the cosmologies in which they are embedded – refers to as Western intellectual history's "the Great Divide" (Descola 2013: 57–88). Its roots are in ancient Greece and subsequent intellectual, religious and scientific developments led to its anthropocentric crystallization in the Enlightenment, especially through some of the writings of René Descartes, one of the founders of the Age of Reason and arguably that age's most influential *spiritus rector*. While not unopposed by contrarian "theriophilic" (Preece 2005: 233–70) views from philosophical, literary and theo-

logical quarters[1] – and without impact on the popular imagination throughout the ages in different regions of Europe that retained animistic and shamanistic elements from the hoary pagan past (Ginzburg, Lincoln 2020; Mencej 2019) – "Cartesianism" fueled Western scholarly thought during the four subsequent centuries. Throughout these centuries of burgeoning Modernism, this ontological and epistemological worldview, notes Descola (2013: 87), "played a directive role in the organization of the sciences", implanting itself, with deep roots and pervasive rhizomes, within Western cosmology.

The second – "Southern" – cosmology is "connective", positing an overlap between, and a partial merger of, these two ontological domains, especially humans and animals (as well as plants and certain features of the landscape), which/who are deemed parts/members of the same moral community and assigned thereby social and mental personhood (and, by extension, also "soul"). Revisiting and "restoring" an old and somewhat discredited term from the anthropology of religion that resonates with this schema, Descola labels it "Animistic" (2013: 129–39). His label for the Western schema is "Naturalistic".

Descola's rationale for designating the Western schema as he did is both conceptual and critical. In line with the "New Animism" generally, as well as with the post-colonial critique of Western intellectual hegemony regarding southern modes of thought (and of sociality)[2], Descola points to the term's implicit assumption of universalism. "Naturalism's supreme cunning ploy", he writes, "and the purpose of the term I use for it is to make it seem to be natural" (2013: 199). Convinced by the "certainties" of the ontological schema the term refers to and culturally conditioned by its underlying mechanist-materialist premises, the subscribers to the Naturalist paradigm deem self-evident both the "physical heterogeneity" of the entities of nature and nature's innate givenness and law-based universality (2013: 199–200). In this it trumps – indeed "disqualifies" – the other, more culturally contingent and geographically confined "rival ontologies". Especially so the "animistic formula", of which naturalism, *pace* Descola, "turns out to be a total inversion" (2013: 199).

This essay concerns one of those "rival" cosmologies, namely that of the San, a people inhabiting southern Africa, focusing specifically on its respective notions of monstrosity that are part and parcel of a people's wider ideas on humans and animals, on ontology and cosmology, the here-and-now and the beyond. These notions, along with the epistemic matrix they are embedded in, are juxtaposed with their Cartesian counterparts, in an exercise of intercultural exposition, translation and comparison that seeks to elucidate, relativize and valorize the less familiar, minoritarian and marginalized Animistic cosmology.

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1 In a *tour de force* of critical scholarship the late Rodney Preece (2002, 2005; see also Ritvo 2007), a Canadian political scientist and historian of ideas, reviews in detail these counter-currents to Cartesianism throughout Western history.

2 One of them by the above-mentioned de Sousa Santos (2015), whose "Abyssal Line" hegemonically defines, inscribes and safeguards the two epistemologies' respective positions of privilege (northern) and marginalization (southern).

While concerned primarily with difference of substantive and conceptual aspects of the two cosmologies, this exercise reveals also a basic similarity, at the deeper level of epistemology: inversion, and through it oblique assertion, of the fundamental epistemic premise of each of the cosmologies. Notwithstanding their profound oppositeness and the deep "abyssal line" that separates them, the two notions of monstrosity and the cosmologies and epistemologies within which each is embedded, are thus seen also to be apposite. The two modes of thinking and imagining converge on epistemological ground common to both cosmologies, rendering the abyss between them less bottomless and more fathomable, as well as fordable.

Demon, Devil, Dog-head: The Trilogy of Western Therianthropes

> It is verily a horrid thing to be spoke that man, the Prince of all Creatures, and which is more, created in the Image of God, should flagitiously mingle with a Brutish Copulation. So that a Biformed breed, halfe men and halfe beasts are ingendered by the confusion of seed of diverse species, of which there have come abominable and promiscuous creatures, to the horrible abasement and confusion of the human form (Bulwer 1653: 445).

> The tumultuous admixture of what was supposed to be held separate is frequently the work of the medieval monster, a defiantly intermixed figure that is in the end simply the most startling incarnation of hybridity made flesh (Cohen 2006: 2).

While there are many ways in which monstrosity is perceived in the Western imagination – conveyed through folklore and literature, popular culture and Hollywood and Hammer Production Films in the US and UK, respectively, through figures that range from demons and witches, through giants and dragons, freaks and mutants, torturers, terrorists and psychopaths to robots and post-human cyborgs[3] – the prototypal Western monster is a being who confounds ontological categories.

Such hybrid creatures are "ontological puzzles that demand solutions" from humans who encounter them, who find them "vexing" mentally and unsettling emotionally. Using Freud's terminology, from a classic essay on "the uncanny", they are that – "*unheimlich*" – because they are beings that combine within them what is alien and other with what is *heimlisch*[4] – "known of old and long familiar" (Freud 1955: 219). As such, they are wont to elicit a double-barrelled "crisis", notes English literary critic Nicholas Royle in his Freud-informed criti-

3 This rogues' gallery of Western monsters is from Stephen Asma's comprehensive scholarly "unnatural history" on monsters in the Western imaginary (2009; see also Weinstock 2014 for an encyclopedic and even more comprehensive scholarly treatment of the same topic).

4 Freud uses the adjectives *heimich* and *heimlich* seemingly – if questionably – as synonyms of one another.

cal study *The Uncanny* (2003), the "crisis of the proper" and "crisis of the natural", the latter "touching upon everything that one might have thought of was 'part of nature'" (2003: 2), the former pertaining to social norms and symbolic categories. Each is a "critical disturbance", eliciting "an experience of strangeness or alienation", through a "peculiar commingling of the familiar with the unfamiliar" (2003: 2). Engaging with Royle (and Freud) on this phenomenological aspect of the uncanny, Danish anthropologist Nils Bubandt refers to this experience as "a certain *frisson* – an emotional shiver that is at once existential and epistemological" (2018: 4).

Human-animal hybridity is a case *par excellence* of such critically disturbing commingling in Western cosmology. As discrete entities, each with its own, distinctive human and animalian form and being, each is indeed both proper and natural (as well as, in the case of the human, divinely cast). Animals, notes French cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber – in terms of the culinary metaphor so popular with Gallic symbolic anthropologists – "make good food for symbolic thought", as opposed to anomalous humanimals, who, *au contraire*, "make bad food for taxonomic thought" (1996: 150). Sperber's analytical framework here is Mary Douglas's classic essay on the abominations of Leviticus (1966) that draws hybrid/monster beings into the symbolic and ontological sphere of the abominable (one of whom, from Christian hagiography, we will meet below). Undermining species identity and integrity, such were-beings as Wolf- and Dog-Men threateningly manifest both "monstrous humanity" and "hominid monstrosity" (White 1991: 15). This species of monster places animals outside our Cartesian comfort zone, from the "comforting guise of absolute difference", as noted by feminist scholar of embodiment Margit Shildrick in her study of the physically disabled or deformed – "monstrous" – human body, "into an ambivalent relationship to our humanity" (2002: 20).

As to humans' relationship to God – a concern of scholars of an earlier age such as John Bulwer, cited in the epigraph opening this section – this relationship, too, became clouded with ambiguity, ambivalence and confusion when imagining or encountering a human-animal monster. "Flagitiously mingled with a Brutish Copulation [...] to the horrible abasement and confusion of the human form", such beings challenge the divinely decreed and created exceptionalism of "man, the Prince of all Creatures". Marshalling scriptures, Bulwer expands:

> For there is one flesh (saith Paul) of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, another of birds, and therefore is absolutely against the ordinance of God (who hath made me a man) that I should become an Asse in shape: insomuch as if God would give me leave I cannot do it; for it were contrary to his own order and decree, and to the constitution of any body which he hath made (Bulwer 1653: 525).

Concordant with the distinctive flesh-ness of men and each species of beast, God also "hath endured every man and everything with its proper nature, substance, forme, qualities and gifts, and directeth their waies", notes Bulwer (1653: 525). With one exception, the "humane soule [...] which cannot receive any other than a human body, nor yet can light into a body that wanteth reason of mind" (1653: 525).

"Neither wholly self nor wholly other" (Shildrick 2002: 3), "halfe men and halfe beasts" (Bulwer 1653: 445), monstrous human-animal hybrids thus evoke, *sui generis*, mental and existential unease over a sensed yet "unthinkable" "category crisis" of which monsters are the "harbingers" (Cohen 1996:6). And they may also trigger a spiritual crisis in some individuals, when that unease escalates to a crisis of faith over doubts about their own kind's unique kindredness with God.

But, in addition, and topping all this intellectual and spiritual disquiet, this breed of monsters evoke in Westerners also visceral fear, nightmarish, unreasoning, which may climax into terror when demonical – and, by extension, diabolical – aspects become part of such "halfe beasts" ontological makeup.

Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562), Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. Source: Wikimedia Commons

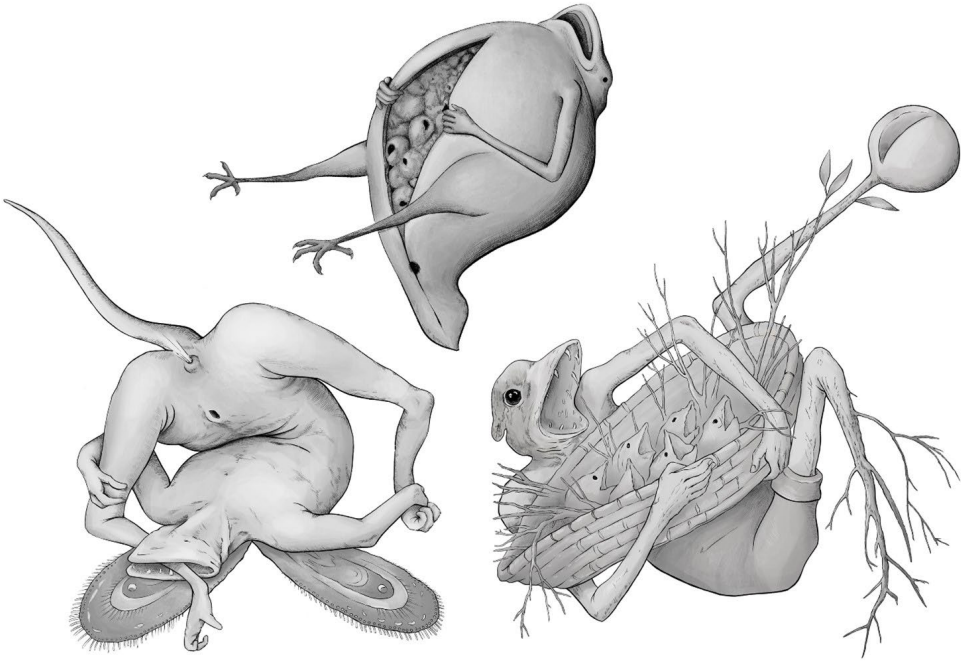

Figure 2. Demon chimeras: human-toad-bird, human-serpent-moth (?), human-animal-plant. Source: details from Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, drawing by Sophia Moffat (with permission)

This was the case in medieval Europe, an age whose collective imagination spawned zoomorphic demons by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions (Russell 1984: 72). Fallen angels, whose incorporeal bodies became, during their free-fall from their celestial sphere, grossly embodied "condensations out of the air or from some grosser matter" (Davidson 2012: 40, quoting the 16th-century French demonologist and theologian Nicolas Remy), were believed to "swarm in the air like flies" (Russell 1984: 7) (figs. 1–3)[5] as well as populate hell and torment its resident sinners (fig. 3). This can be seen in the painting by the Northern Renaissance artist Hieronymus Bosch, depicting one of the dozens of human-animalian demons inflicting torture and retribution in ways that are as heinous as they are obscene (*viz.* the so-called "Prince of Hell" seated on his commode-throne while devouring one of the sinners and defecating two others into a pit of offal below his seat).

They were also active in the world, for instance, wasteland hermitages to taunt, tempt and torment saintly anchorites. Especially so Saint Anthony – "of the Desert" – off in his hermitage in eastern Egypt. Figure four depicts this most sorely tried of saintly hermits in the clutches of a posse of demon chimeras of exceptional anatomical and ontological heterogeneity.

5 I acknowledge with thanks Sophia Moffat's drawings of the details from Bruegel's painting (fig. 2).

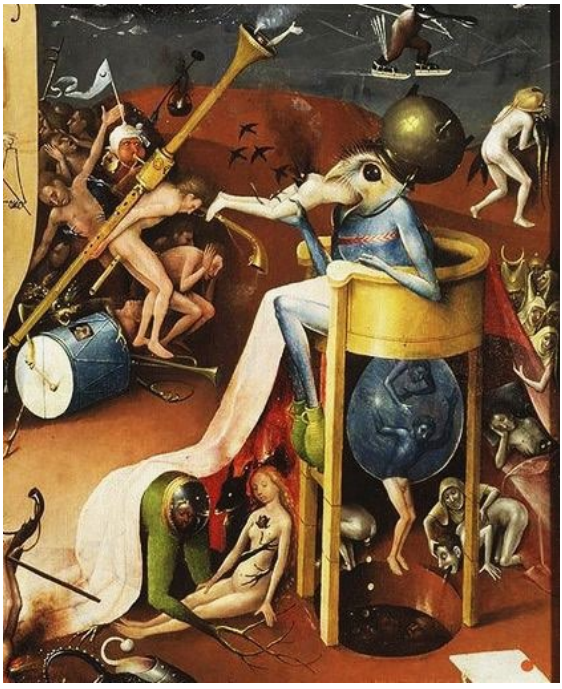

Figure 3. The Prince of Hell and other demons. Details from Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (right panel, c. 1490–1510), Museo del Prado in Madrid. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 4. Martin Schongauer, *The Temptations of St. Anthony* (engraving, c. 1470–1475). Source: Wikimedia Commons

Both motifs, those of sinful and of saintly humans being tormented by hybrid demons in hell and on earth, were especially prominent in the Bosch-inspired Flemish Renaissance (Russell 1984: 67, 130–32, 209–12; see also Davidson 2012: 190).

Another worldly venue for demons was sleepers' bedrooms at night, which succubi or incubi would visit to seduce and copulate with their sleeping human male or female counterparts. They were a species of Western therianthrope – human-animal hybrid – that was deemed especially gross and heinous because, while demonical to the core of its being, in appearance each was human[6].

Adding yet further to the abominable nature of these two demon species was that they were capable, through their nocturnal copulations with humans, of producing over the generations ever more anatomically, ontologically and spiritually aberrant offspring, "altered and deformed in its Humane Fabrick" (Bulwer 1653: 513). John Bulwer, a seventeenth-century English medical doctor-scholar and Baconian natural philosopher with far-ranging interests that ranged from theology to ethnography, describes the "nefarious Issue" that can be spawned by these "demoniacall Succubusses" (Bulwer 1653: 513). The topic receives extensive treatment in Bulwer's magisterial *Anthropometamorphosis*, an early popular encyclopaedic treatise on the origin and nature of monstrosity and transformation that bridges Middle Age and Early Modern modes of thought and discourse and that drew extensively on more or less recent or contemporaneous travel accounts. One is from Brazil, where reportedly

> from the copulation of a barbarous woman with an Incubus, there was a horrid monster procreated, which grew in height to sixteen Palmes, his back covered with the skin of a Lizzard, with swolne Breasts, Lions Armes, staring and rigid Eyes, and sparkling like fire, with the other members very deformed and of an ugly aspect (Bulwer 1653: 512).

The demonic nature, *sui generis*, of these and all the other demons was underscored by their close association with the devil, who, *qua* "Enemy and Deformer", with a "will of disturbing mankind and the order of this world [...] [with] utter confusion of all things and speciesses [*sic*]" (Bulwer 1653: 515), was the demons' centre-fold exemplar. Horned, bird- or bat-winged, tailed and cloven-hooved, the devil was that Age's most prominent, terror-inducing therianthrope. Along with Baltic werewolves and Balkan vampires[7], the devil can be seen as the main instrument for the demonization of beings of their

6 More or less so: female succubi sometimes had animal appendages such as avian claws "or perhaps a serpent's tail hanging out from under her skirt" (Davidson 2012: 40; see also Milne 2008: 179–80, 2017: 93–4).

7 These two were-beings were conflated in some folkloric traditions (adding thereby another ontological component to their entangled being-state, that of "the restless dead"). Such was the case with werewolf lore in some Balkan countries (Mencej 2019: 106; see also Ginzburg, Lincoln 2020: 77–80, 133–35, 262; Hertz 1862: 88–89). And still is: "werewolf beliefs", notes the Slovenian folklorist Mirjam Mencej (2019: 106) in a recent ethnographic study, "are by no means a matter of the past among Croats"!

kind in the Western collective imagination, therianthropically depicted and reaffirmed in countless images throughout the Middle Ages[8]. These were frequently exorbitantly entangled in their ontological-anatomical details, such as the being seen in figure five, from a fifteenth-century painting by the Austrian artist Michael Pacher, which conjoins in the subject's humanoid body such diverse animal features as goat's horns, bat's wings, deer's ears, boar's tusks. And a stubby dog's tail which, in also doubling as the nose on his human buttock-face, constitutes an obscene anatomical inversion that further confounds the depicted therianthrope's ontological hybridity.

Figure 5. Michael Pacher, *Saint Wolfgang and the Devil* (detail, c. 1471–1475), Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Source: Wikimedia Commons

8 Unbounded in their imaginative force and scope, the devil becomes an ontological chimera in these depictions, blending in his being traits not only from the three animal species he was most frequently associated with in medieval folk-religion and lore, bird (or bat), goat and dog (or wolf), but with a multiplicity of other species. Fifty-seven of them are listed – alphabetically, from "adder" to "worm" – by Jeffrey Burton Russell (1984: 67) in his scholarly study of the devil in medieval folklore, religion, art and literature!

Another Middle Age species of therianthrope – cousins to the above-noted Wolf-man – were the Cynocephali (i.e. dog-heads). They were less variegated ontologically and more linked to the world and human affairs than the ontologically *über*-monstrous devil and his retinue of demons who were tied to, or were themselves, residents of hell and thus entirely beyond the human moral and spiritual pale. Notwithstanding this reduced degree of flashy Otherness, the Dog-Men were medieval "Christianity's favorite fairyland monster" (White 1991: 30) who shared center-stage with the devil/demon in the collective imagination of the medieval folk[9]. While their ghastly appearance and "bestial nature" (Friedman 2000: 70) – dog-headed, barking, snarling, ferocious, cannibalistic – raised the fear quotient of this breed of monsters, there was also discussion in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles on whether these were-beings, their monstrousness notwithstanding, were not at some basic physical – "protoplastic" – as well as psycho-spiritual level of their being redeemable and deserving of admission to the human fold (fig. 6)[10].

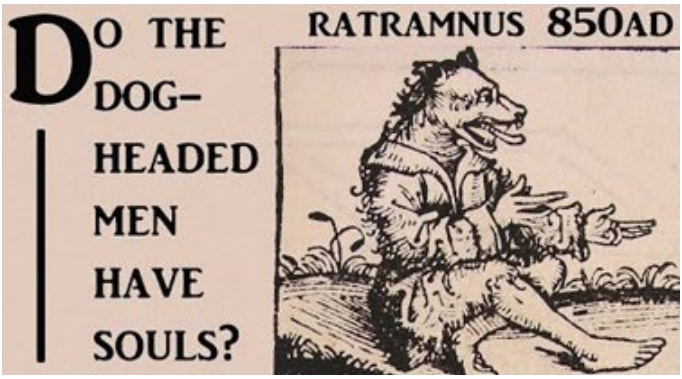

Figure 6. Cynocephalus, illustration from the *Nuremberg Chronicles* (1493).
Source: Wikimedia Commons

9 As documented by the religious scholar David Gordon White in his comprehensive study of cynocephali, this mythic being, whose geographic center in Indo-European mythology was central Asia, is "a truly cosmopolitan myth motif" that is traceable "back to the dawn of human culture" (1991: 26). Moreover, the folklore surrounding this being is richer and more varied than that around "their lycanthropic cousins" (1991: 15) whose mythic profile in myth, legend and cult practices is more regionally confined (as well as overblown in Euro-America, in recent times, by Hollywood and video games).

10 This sort of notion resonates with the ancient pagan European folkloric idea – the roots of which Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg traces back to Eurasian shamanism – that persisted in parts of Europe as an element of the period's "peasant counterculture" until the Enlightenment, namely that werewolves were not a bane to their fellow humans but a boon: banded together in packs – as "hounds of God" – they mounted periodic raids on hell to retrieve from the devil's clutches seed and stock animals for next year's harvest and herds (Ginzburg, Lincoln 2020: 10). Subsequently, as Christianity spread and became more and more entrenched and hegemonic, werewolves became progressively demonized, morphing from "God's friends and hunting dogs, whom he used against the devil and the sorcerers" and whose souls, after their death, "come to heaven" (2020: 27, 18) into "accursed men who are turned into wolves […] with Satan's help [and] out of pure bloodthirstiness […] to inflict harm" (2020: 3, 35).

That notion was based on a determination, a thousand years earlier, by the scholar-saint Augustine in his *De civitate Dei*, a section of which (in Book XVI, chapter 8) deals with "human and quasi-human races" (Augustine 1957: 315). Drawing on Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, Augustine briefly lists the Ancient's classic account of "monstrous races" – hirsute or tail-endowed, one-eyed, one-legged, or double-sexed, without either mouths or heads and the like. Some were therianthropic, tailed or horned, horse-footed or dog-headed people such as the Gorgades, Hippopodes and Cynocephalia, respectively (Friedman 2000: 15–17).

Augustine rounds up his review of "Pliny's people" with the last specimen:

> What shall I say of Cynocephali, whose dog-like head and bark proclaim the beasts rather than men? But we are not bound to believe all we hear of these monstrosities. But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from one protoplast. We can distinguish the common human nature from that which is peculiar, and therefore wonderful (Augustine 1958: 315).

Augustine then turns to "monstrous birth", the chapter's main topic, stating that "the same account" can be given to birth-deformed Christian individuals as was given to monstrous races. All are included within "God's great design" as it is only "God, the Creator of all, [who] knows where and when each thing ought to be, or to have been created, because he sees similarities and diversities which contribute to the beauty of the whole" (Augustine 1958: 315; see also White 1991: 30).

As for the "monstrous races", outside the Christian fold and world, Augustine placed them in the "inheritor's of Cain's curse" category of *humans*, who, as descendants of Ham and his sons, were included "within the economy of salvation, albeit a fallen and exiled part" (White 1991: 30).

Included as well within these salvageable "barbarous races" were the Cynocephali, by virtue of their human traits, with respect to both their physical – "protoplastic" – makeup and their possession of soul, rationality and morality, respectively, albeit all of it on a sliding scale of humanness (White 1991: 16). The ensuing debate in theological, philosophical and, later on, scientific quarters on this point, whether the animalian component of hybrid beings warrants inclusion within or exclusion from the human fold, has remained one of the key issues of contention in Western thought since Augustine's ruminations and pronouncements on the matter. It has remained such to this day, ever since 1859 when Charles Darwin implied – and twelve years later made explicit – a phylogenetic affinity between humans and animals, specifically apes.

From the fifth century onward the redemption of barbarous races – "widely allegorized and moralized as a quarrelsome, morally dumb, or even demonic race" (White 1991: 16) – became an active enterprise for missionaries whose

travels and travails amongst them make up some of the more legendized accounts of early Christian hagiography.

Two of these were fifth-century Bartholomew and Andrew, of the Nestorian and Coptic creed, respectively. The two apostles were afoot for years spreading the Gospel in the far reaches of Asia, including in the land of the Cynocephali in Parthia on the north shore of the Black Sea. Their main convert was a local Cynocephalus named Hasûm ("i.e. the Abominable"), whose bestiality so terrorized the missionaries and their disciples at their first encounters that one of the latter fell into a dead faint and another hid under a rock, while the two missionaries – "who trembled at his appearance" – fled in terror (Budge 1901: 206–207).

This is what made them tremble and flee:

> Now his appearance was exceedingly terrible. He was four cubits[11] in height and his face was like unto that of a great dog, and his eyes were like unto lamps of fire which burned brightly, and his teeth were like unto the tusks of a wild boar, or the teeth of a lion, and the nails of his hands were like unto curved reaping hooks, and the nails of his toes were like unto the claws of a lion, and the hair had come down over his arms to look like the mane of a lion, and his whole appearance was awful and terrifying [...] (Budge 1901: 206).

As it turned out, the missionaries and their disciples had nothing to fear from the approaching dog-headed monster-giant who, as he related to them reassuringly, had just been visited by an Angel from God and blessed with the sign of the cross, with the invocation to "restrain in thee the nature of the beasts". While for a time being Hasûm was rendered "gentle as a lamb" through this blessing, and helping the missionaries in their endeavours, this restraint on his moral being did not hold, however. A ferocious relapse to bestiality was triggered at the end of the story, which was checked and reversed by Bartholomew: invoking, in the name Jesus the Christ, to "let the nature of wild beasts leave thee, and return to the nature of man"; this is what came about forthwith (Smith Lewis 1904: 24). Moreover, underscoring this ontological transformation spiritually, Andrew changed his convert's name from Hasûm/Abominable to "Christianus" (Friedman 2000: 71). In terms of both his spirituality and ontology, through conversion and transformation, respectively, this were-creature was now securely ensconced within the human fold.

While less heinous as well as less real and immanent in people's lives and affairs than in medieval times, were-beings are still astir in our imagination today, with varying degrees of dread. As numerous, diverse and ontologically variegated than ever – thanks in part to the magnifying effect of Hollywood and video games – they have remained a hard-worked motif in literature, both

11 Depending on which of the half-dozen or so standards for cubit that is applied by the hagiographist, our human-dog protagonist may be as tall as eight feet!

for children and grown-ups. A case in point are the "Beast Folk" that inhabit vivisectionist Dr. Moreau's island, in H. G. Wells's novel with the same title. A dozen-odd in number, they include not only such run-of-the-mill were-fare as Dog-Man and Ape-Man, but also such multi-species and gender-ambiguous ontological assemblages as "Hyena-Swine", "Mare-Rhinoceros-Man" and "Half-Finished Puma-Woman". Topping the list, as the doctor's "most elaborately made of all creatures" and "complex trophy of Moreau's skills" is his chimerical servant M'ling concocted from bear, dog and ox components. As they did for Wells's narrator-protagonist, such beings may evoke stark horror and terror in other Western grown-ups, their reactions' intensity commensurate with the acuteness of a reader's negative capability. For their children, they stand as the bogey-men through whose dreams and bedrooms such monsters may parade (or lurk, under the bed) – and which their parents may either use to scare and bring in line unruly youngsters.

The Onto-epistemological Status of Monsters in a Connective Cosmos

The story of Hasûm would likely have played itself out differently in the cosmological context of the non-Western people I have worked amongst, the San or Bushman, erstwhile hunter-gatherers of southern Africa. As I will show, people there are quite familiar – and more or less at ease – with creatures such as cynocephalous Hasûm/Abominable/Christianus of the Eastern Christian legend. In San myth, lore and cosmology this figure would not have to undergo this sort of anatomical, mental and spiritual remake, from partial to fully human, as a prerequisite for gaining human acceptance and appreciation. There would be no issues as to Hasûm's spiritual affinity and integrity since humans and animals are not seen as different with respect to this component of their interiority: soul, spirituality, connectedness to spirits and divinities and to the mythic are the same qualitatively for both. Hasûm would not, in the San view of things, have to eschew the animal component of his being phenomenologically and move, conceptually, from ontological ambiguity and liminality to clarity and discreteness, to find "human understanding" and acceptance and a "place in the universe".

The San take on "human understanding" is different from ours as they see the universe in ways that do not conform to the Western "standard – speak Cartesian – model", of dichotomies and hierarchies, anthropocentric subject-object distinction, vitalism-mechanism differentiation and the like. Theirs is a "connective cosmos", using the South African Sven Ouzman's (2008) term, creating a "world view of inter-connectedness", which the South African poet-novelist Antje Krog considers the defining trait of San symbolic culture (2009: 184; quoted in Wessels 2012: 187). Tracing the complex, mutually interactive and "not always predictable" strands of connectivity of all its domains in the context of a /Xam transformation myth, David Lewis-Williams (2020: 41) has recently substituted "connective" for "entangled" as the defining adjective for the San cosmos. Entanglement captures – even more than inter-connectedness – what

I have elsewhere referred to as "tolerance for ambiguity" and what I see as the defining quality of San society, ethos and cosmology, at a social-structural and conceptual level (Guenther 1999: 226–37), and phenomenologically, in the way being – especially being-in-the-world – is experienced, *vis à vis* the non-human animate and inanimate features of the dwelled-in land (Guenther 2020b).

Connectedness – more or less entangled – is something that applies especially to humans and animals, beings to whom, in this pre-industrial and pre-agricultural hunter-gatherer society, humans are especially close. Human-animal hybridity is thus much less disjunctive in the San cosmology and less likely to raise "vexing questions" – "about humanity's understanding of and place in the universe", along with crises of identity and faith. Animals provide food for both the stomach and the mind, to be processed not only by the alimentary canal to sustain the body but also by the imagination, in the context of cosmology, myth and ritual (Guenther 1988, 1999: 70–80, 2017: 12–13, 2019b: 160). Another such context is hunting: when a hunter tracks, stalks and kills a large antelope, slow to die of his poison arrow, he may engage with his prey in an inter-subjective manner. A bond of sympathy may become established between hunter and prey throughout the often protracted hunt that may last days. The bond's intensity peaks at the animal's dying moments at the end of the hunt, and may be so acutely felt – at times palpably – by the hunter as to amount to some sort of an ontological transformation. This is evident from the eloquent statement by !Xõ hunter Karoha's to anthropologist Louis Liebenberg, after a successful endurance hunt of a kudu in the central Kalahari:

> What you will see is that you are now controlling its mind. You are getting its mind. The eyes are no longer wild. You have taken the kudu into your mind (Liebenberg 2006: 1024).

A similar process is undergone by the San shaman, who, as part of the trance state that he experiences when he carries out his healing ritual, may also transform into a lion (Guenther 2018). This experience may be "utterly real" to the shaman undergoing it, as well as to spectators who witness it, and, to a degree, experience it vicariously, as explained by the Ju/'hoan trance dancer to ethnographers Richard Katz and Megan Biesele:

> When I turn into a lion, I can feel my lion hair growing and my lion-teeth forming. I'm inside that lion, no longer a person. Others to whom I appear see me just as another lion (Katz et al. 1997: 24).

Animal transformation is a strongly felt visionary experience also in the case of initiands at puberty rites of passage, especially girls – "maidens", in /Xam parlance – at their menarcheal rite. During her transition from girl- to womanhood there may be moments when she feels herself to be an eland antelope, so much so that real antelope may approach the initiation site, to be hunted

by nearby hunters (or, in spirit, hunted by herself, compounding the maiden's transformation from human to antelope and hunter's prey, to human to man, and hunter of prey). So potent is her eland'ness that people around the menstrual hut – of her parents' and grand-parents' generation – may themselves "catch the feeling" of eland and perform a vigorous eland courtship dance, through which some dancers may come close to merging identities with the animal (Guenther 2015: 291–92). Most of the variety of ludic dances performed by the San, not only children but also adults, mimic animals, and animal hunts and encounters, at times with such intensity and absorption on the part of some adult dancers, as to result in instances of "the mimetic faculty taking us bodily into alterity", using Michael Taussig's words (1993: 40).

The center-stage presence at male initiation, among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi, is, once again, the eland, the premier antelope to San hunters, story tellers and painters (Vinnicombe 1976). A series of ritual practices bring about a palpable bond to the eland, such as, painting the initiand's forehead with the eland's distinctive forehead mark, rubbing "eland medicine" into cuts administered to his body or anointing him with eland fat (Lewis-Williams, Biesele 1978; Lewis-Williams 2020: 52). Such practices may be seen as a mystical, "contagious" process of "transfer of essences" from animal to human (Low 2009: 80) and as instrumental in effecting a degree of *Wesenswandel* ("being-change") (Straube 1955: 197), that is, ontological transformation. All these actions occur at an impressionable age and turning point in the young hunter's life; they prepare him psychologically for the bond of sympathy that he might sense at times toward a prey animal at some future point in his life's career as a hunter.

These experiences, by shamans and initiands, dancers and hunters, of animal transformation are all psycho-somatic manifestations of ontological mutability which I see pervading San cosmology (Guenther 2015, 2017, 2020). San mythology and rock art[12] express this theme especially elaborately, through Ovid's stories of metamorphosis – of Myth Time maidens into frogs, a *goura* (musical bow) player and hunter into trees, an agama lizard into a hill, a lion into a human or antelope, a young mother into a boulder and her child into a guinea fowl and so on. The most transformation-prone Early Race figure is the trickster, who can shape-shift at will, into any kind of animal species, as well as into trees and plants, bodies of water and winds. Tricksters are themselves of hybrid ontological make-up, such as the /Xam /Kaggen "Mantis's Man" and the !Kung /Xue featured in the epigraph at the opening of this paper, in the process of engaging in a conversation with his "inner Hare", sorting out his entangled and conflicted human-animal identity and identities.

Therianthropes like these trickster figures are San Myth-Time's most prominent denizens. They are the myth tellers' primary characters and the rock art creators' principal motif. Here the prototypal therianthrope is a human-headed antelope (fig. 7).

12 For a cross-cultural examination of this prominent theme in hunter-gatherer rock art see Davidson (2017).

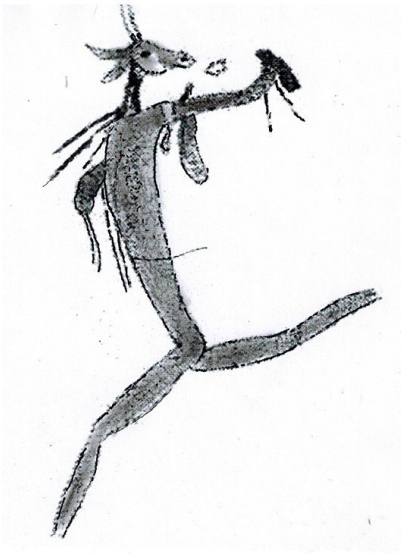

Figure 7. Prototypal San therianthrope.
Source: redrawn from (Jolly 2002:86)

The figure's feet are frequently seen to be cloven and its head is either that of a generic "buck" or of an identifiable antelope species, most frequently of an eland. Figure eight depicts gemsbok-horned human figures, likely trance-dancing shamans undergoing antelope transformation, an incarnation of sorts, of therianthropes of the world of myth in the actual world.

Figure 8. Joseph Millerd Orpen's Drakensberg Bushman rock art copies.
Source: The Digital Bleek and Lloyd, image file STOW_015

Like the *ur*-dog's myriad breeds and infinite mongrel mixes, the therianthrope's basic antelope-human prototype appears in equally countless chimerical variations in San myths and on rock surfaces (Jolly 2002), as paintings or engravings, with traits drawn from such other animal species as baboon, elephant, lion, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, snakes, ostrich and wildebeest or, in San myth which features a more variegated cast of therianthropes, such unlikely human-animal beings as ticks, wasps and beetles.

While these were-beings of San myth and art are every bit as varied and extravagant in their hybridity as the monsters – "tumultuous admixtures", *pace* Cohen – that inhabit the Western collective imagination, the emotions they evoke are quite different. While dread might have been elicited by one or another of these therianthropic images – those perhaps informed by spirits of the dead or by elements of altered state of consciousness and lion transformation that are part of the powerful trance curing dance of San shamans – it is dread fueled less by ominous terror *á la* Hieronymus Bosch and more by numinous portent *á la* Rudolf Otto. Other therianthropes, from San stories rather than paintings and engravings, are a vast array of protagonists and antagonists in widely and engagingly told myths and other tales performed by story tellers with consummate skill that includes enlivening impersonations of specific animal or human-animal characters, through special voices and special clicks (Guenther 2006).

They are, for the most part, stories about metamorphoses that "recall the lasting kinship between humans and animals", derived from a "primal intimacy between humans and animals" that existed back in Myth Time, a time French poet, essayist and literary critic – and San rock art researcher – Renaud Ego refers to as "the era of 'humanimality' (*humanimalité*)" (2019: 28). The most salient "humanimal" of that era, which the San refer to as the "First Order of Creation" (Guenther 2020a: 42–44), was the ontologically fluid and morally ambivalent trickster (Guenther 2002). As noted above, this member of "the First Race" is the favorite protagonist for traditional San story tellers whose listeners' appetite for antic-frantic stories about transformations and transgressions is insatiable.

What makes trickster tales all the more arresting is the shared cultural understanding of story tellers and listeners that the Trickster's sphere of operation is not only the myth time's First Order of Creation but also the Second Order, of the present world.

This brings us to another strand of ontological connectedness – and entanglement – that phenomenologically heightens the mytho-mystical salience of the "Early Race" of were-beings. It is the absence, in San cosmology, of any clear distinction between Myth-Time and historical Now-Time (Guenther 2020a: 37–44). A cosmologically consequential link between myth and actual time is the pan-San notion of "double creation", whereby the beings of Myth-Time were ontologically reversed, so that today's humans and animals contain within their being elements of the other, including, in some animals like the hare, quagga and elephant, in their flesh (Schmidt 1995: 149–52, Guenther 1999:

668–70). There are also mythic therianthropes who never became reversed and found their way, as were-beings, into the real world wherein they have a shadowy existence, such as the mystical Gemsbok People of the remote Kalahari (Marshall 1999: 245). Another member of the Early Race who makes an appearance in today's veld or the hunting ground is, once again, the trickster. This is in his animal guise *qua* Animal Spirit Protector, out to misdirect hunters, transformed, perhaps, into a louse, to bite and torment the hunter, thereby distracting him from his quarry.

Linkages of this sort between these two worlds have the effect of reducing the extraordinariness of these mythological beings as human-animal hybrid creatures, when they are encountered in the real world, by shamans, initiands or dancers. Or hunters (as well as gatherers): myth and spirit beings are, or may be, actual or potential beings of the people's hunting ground and gathering range. Given their presence, as another species – along with animals – of other-than-human in the San people's dwelled-in world (Guenther 2020c), such unearthly, *unheimlich* eeriness as may surround such an encounter is held in check by *heimliche* familiarity (of the kind that breeds not contempt but regard). People's composure here derives in part from their culture's cosmological premise concerning the connectedness of the First and Second Orders of Creation and, thus, a lower negative capability threshold in such a mythic face-to-face situation. Its salience and remarkableness is further reduced through a certain quality that scholars of Western fairy tales see in the domain of Faerie. It is a quality of taken-for-grantedness that attaches to fantastical beings and happenings in the World of Myth and Story[13]. Miracles, magic, giants, speaking animals and the like are, writes Swiss *Märchen* scholar Max Lüthi, "accepted [by story protagonists and story listeners] as if they were matter of course [rather than] [...] a cause of wonderment" (1970: 46, 76). Much the same point about the myth-world and the were-creatures that inhabit it is made by Noël Carroll: that the latter are not unnatural, fearsome monsters, but that they form "part of the everyday furniture of the universe [...] that can be accommodated in the metaphysics of the cosmology that produced them" (1992: 16). Given the San cosmological premise concerning the connectedness of the First and Second Orders of Creation, it is conceivable that some of the same of matter-of-course givenness about preternatural matters might have surrounded some hunter's or gatherer's veld encounter with a being from the First Order – especially one especially "musical" mytho-mystically, with a raised predilection for suspension of disbelief.

Myth and experience, especially that of lion-transforming shamans, eland-transforming maidens, kudu-transforming hunters, state and restate, and there-

13 As I have discussed elsewhere (Guenther 2014), the same quality can be found also in the mythology of the southern /Xam San. It is especially marked in stories in which /Kaggen-Mantis, the /Xam trickster, is placed within one of many dreams, in which the narrative weaves in and out of dream and reality. This oneiric element intensifies the "magic realism" quality of Myth Time, as well as valorizes the same experientially for the dreamer.

by reinforce and to some extent validate, the theme of ontological hybridity and mutability, in different modalities and with different effects on mind and body. These expressive and experiential iterations of being-animal are epistemologically linked to a cosmology of interconnectedness that renders the human-animal species divide porous, while the human and animal identity and alterity – ontologically indistinct.

A were-creature, or therianthrope, like Abominable or M'ling would thus, to the San, be not nearly as abominable as he was to our three Westerner spokesmen, the apostles Andrew and Bartholomew and H. G. Wells's narrator, when they first laid eyes on the creature in legendary Parthia and on Dr. Moreau's apocryphal island, respectively. Nor would this creature be seen as anomalous and unthinkable, awful and terrifying but, rather, as merely another variant – cyno-anthropic the one, cyno-ursi-bovine the other – of the many and varied therianthrope were-creatures and chimeras that populate the San's World of Myth and Story. And that one may encounter, not only in the imagination and dreams, story-mediated, but also experience, out in the veld on a hunting or gathering excursion. Or sense astir inside one's own body, either directly, through metamorphosis or, more incipiently, mimesis, or vicariously, by witnessing a shaman's lion transformation or a dancer's animal imitation. Or "dance out", on an experiential mimesis-metamorphosis spectrum (fig. 8).

Animalness in the animistic schema of San cosmology is a component of humanness – and *vice versa* as seen above in the mythological theme of double/reverse creation. Expanded into a basic postulate of the San world view, it is a concept through which personhood and sociality, agency and intentionality come to inform animals, in other-than-human terms. This further underscores the link between the two ontological orders and opens up space, conceptually and metaphysically, for human-animal hybrid beings. These are not deemed monstrous, horrendous abominations nor is the transformation, the process that brings them into being, deemed a hallucination or delusion. Nor are either of these manifestations of ontological mutability held to be epistemologically and phenomenologically aberrant and considered threats to rationality, saneness and the structural and moral order of the universe.

When experienced by a hunter or shaman, or witnessed by attendees at the latter's lion trance-formation ritual performance, they can be handled (just as /Xue can sort out the existential and ontological anxiety-inducing human-hare disjuncture in his being)[14]. The animal part does not require exorcism, through baptism and the assumption of a Christian name, as it did for Hâsum Abominable, when he ceased to be a were-monster.

So, do the San have any monsters? And if so, what are they?

14 This is the theme of a drawn-out tale in the /Xam archive that expands volubly on this article's opening epigraph and that is beyond the scope of this paper (see Bleek 1934/1935: 263–65; Guenther 2019b: 45–46).

San Monstrosity[15]

> The Porcupine said: 'People do not live with that Man, he is alone; because people cannot hand him food, for his tongue is like fire. He burns people's hands with it. You need not think that we can hand food to him, for we shall have to dodge away to the sheep opposite. The pots will be swallowed with the soup in them. Those sheep will be swallowed up in the same way, for yonder Man always does so. He does not often travel, because he feels the weight of his stomach which is heavy. See, I the Porcupine live with you, although he is my real father; because I think he might devour me [...] (//Kabbo, /Xam story teller; Bleek 1923: 35).

Monsters do indeed appear in San myth and lore (McGranaghan 2014); however, they are of an altogether different cast from their Northern counterparts. What makes them monstrous is not ontological ambiguity and fluidity, but moral and social transgressions. These are flagrant and vile, and unequivocally damnable in their crassness.

The two transgressions San moral culture deems most monstrous in such beings are excessive, unchecked food greed and lack of sharing, followed closely by social aggressiveness, directed especially at children, whom such a monster is inclined to eat (along with the parents), combining thereby the two transgressions, gluttony and rage, and maximizing the monster's monstrosity.

Food greed, so unchecked that not only the contents of the demanded pot of food are devoured, but also the pot itself, and raging anger are monstrous failings that are exemplified most egregiously by //Kkhwai-hem ("He who is a Devourer of Things" – "sheep, people, everything") of the /Xam First Order[16] (McGranaghan 2014). Huge in stature – "his shadow resembles a cloud" – and massively paunched – his other name is "Fat-Stomach" – he is so uncontrollable in his appetite that, when visiting his in-laws, he is wont, in a fit of rage, not only to eat the food they provide him – pot and all – but even some of the people themselves (such as /Kaggen, who has adopted the monster's daughter Porcupine due to the worries that she herself might be "devoured" by her father). His irascibility – "he has blackness and darkness inside him"[17] – makes him unfit for human company. "People do not live with that man, he lives alone ... he does not often travel" living, instead, a hermit's life, in remote mountainous terrain, days' travel distance from any family group.

15 I have dealt with this issue at some length elsewhere (Guenther 2020b: 20–28) and the following is a précis of my previous discussion.

16 Folklorist Sigrid Schmidt (2001: 277) has traced this monster figure, which she labels "ogre" ("the concept […] of the sinister opposition to life") – through Khoisan folklore, as well as through that of many Bantu-speakers (Schmidt 2001: 98–105, 277–80; see also Schmidt 2013: 171–76).

17 The cited passages are from /Han=kasso's account of //Kkhwai-hem' visit to his daughter's people, as retold by Dorothea Bleek (Bleek et al 1923: 34–40) and derived from Lucy Lloyd's translation of /Han=kasso's text (Bleek and Lloyd Archive VIII – 20: 7812-16; 22: 7906-56; in The Digital Bleek and Lloyd this entry is listed as BC151_A2_1_095 and as BC151_A2_1_097, respectively).

As shown elsewhere (Guenther 2020b: 18–28), there were other such monsters in San myth and lore. One of them, named !nu !numma- !kuiten ("White Mouth"), was a meat-devouring ogre, much like //Kkhwai-hem. And, like the latter's, it was unchecked gluttony that comprised this bogey man's monstrosity, rather than any hideous body features, ontologically mixed and mismatched. In his bodily frame he was a man – "a man who eats great pieces of meat, he cuts them off, he puts them into his mouth, holds them in his mouth", all the while salivating and dripping fat from his mouth (the trait that earned him his name) (Guenther 2020b: 22). This greedy meat eating is what defines his name: his white mouth was caused by excessive salivating for meat. Apart from defining this human bogey-man's monstrosity, this trait also renders "White Mouth" "a beast of prey", a generic category of animals San assign monstrosity to, because of their food greed – potentially and actually anthrophagous – and their volatile anger (McGranaghan 2014: 10–12). Two other monstrously voracious Early Race beings are !Ko and !Khau, the former a mongoose, the latter an agama lizard person, both of whose food greed is so extreme and unchecked that they will eat their own flesh, in obsessive feats – feasts – of self-immolation (Guenther 1989: 101–104, James 2001: 85–86).

A monster like "All-Devourer" and beings of that ilk can be conceptually linked to the First Order, as the social equivalent and counterpart to that Myth World's state of ontological inchoateness. This state is manifested morally in monsters and ontologically in therianthropes, the former as grossly immoral rule-breakers beyond the pale of their as yet precarious social order, the latter as ontologically unstable human-animal hybrid beings in an as yet not fully formed world (Guenther 2017: 7). And it is this sort of being, the moral transgressor and social inverter, not the latter, the transformation-prone therianthrope and ontological hybrid that constitute monstrosity in the San – and arguably other hunter-gatherer (McGranaghan 2014: 5–6) scheme of things. In sum, what breeds monsters here is not so much ontological ambiguity and its threat to people's sense of who and what they are and are not, and to their conceptual categories. Instead, it is moral deviation and social otherness, both threats to the social order, in both the mythical First Order and the actual Second Order of Existence.

The reason such moral deviations are deeply threatening to the Second Order are found in the inherent disorderliness that pervades its social makeup. This consists of loosely organized bilateral bands, structurally labile, lacking in authority figures, open and fluid in composition and membership made up of strongly "individuated" members (Gardner 1991) without "long-term binding commitments and dependencies" (Woodburn 1988). What holds people together is not any segmentary lineages or state institutions but precariously safeguarded prosocial values, such as sharing and reciprocity, sociability and affability, self-deprecation and humility. While in full force in the daily interaction of people, the looseness of San social organization also renders these moral values precarious. They are issues of contention and much of people's interaction

consists in monitoring one-another's actions and imposing more or less subtle, face-saving sanctions on potential or actual transgressors (Marshall 1961; Lee 1982; Silberbauer 1982; Kent 1993; Guenther 1999: 39–57, 2006), some of them through routinized litanies of complaint by an aggrieved party sitting amidst her or his band members and addressed to some or all of them collectively (Rosenberg 1990). Their transgressions – irascibility, envy, self-advancement, avarice, food greed and its concomitant, failure to share – the last, sharing, San sociality's core value that defines its ethos (Guenther 1999: 46–47; see also Barnard 2019: 16, 50, 74, 143) – are a direct threat to the survival of San society (and of small-scale band societies generally). As among humans anywhere, among San, too, these anti-social traits are inherent components of personality and deportment of which people are very much aware, creating moral conundrums and contradictions. If not always actually, San social life – especially their interpersonal and exchange relations – is potentially marred by "a constant tug-of-war [...] between sharing, generosity and reciprocity on the one hand, and hoarding, stinginess and self-interest on the other" (Guenther 1999: 48; see also Gulbrandson 1991; Kent 1993). These matters preoccupy people day in and day out and make up much of the contents of their conversations.

San monstrosity stews in the cauldron of these moral conundrums and contradictions, inherent in every-day social life and embedded within an inherently unstable organizational and institutional framework.

Conclusion: Northern and Southern Monstrosity – Fording an Abyssal Line

> Some people may see what we take to be disturbingly contradictory as meaningfully ambivalent (Lewis-Williams 2020: 41).
>
> The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed (Cohen 1996: 13).

Transgressors of moral rules the one, confounder of ontological categories the other, these two monster templates are starkly opposite in terms of cosmological content and makeup. Yet, at a deeper epistemological level the Northern and the Southern brand of monstrosity – and, I would argue, monstrosity anywhere else in the human world – do actually converge. What makes them similar is that the monstrosity configured in each template inverts the basic epistemic premise of the cosmology, myths and beliefs within which it is embedded.

In the Northern case, the cosmos, nature and the world are structured and orderly, ever since having been created by a Grand Architect creator, in terms of binary categories the latter imposed on a hitherto chaotic universe from on up high, by divine decree (perhaps even by wielding a divine golden compass, as did Blake's iconic Urizon, "The Ancient of Days"). This cosmology of order was sustained in its basic outline and through multiple versions through the

ages – Pre-classical, Classical, Medieval, Modern – by its gate-keepers, the priests and princes, scholars and scientists, preachers and teachers, writers and painters.

Though not unanimously: one dissenting voice was, in fact, Blake, who deemed his above-noted fictional deity Urizon, the divine spirit of reason and law, a repressive force on the imagination. Moreover, elements of a pre-Cartesian and pre-Christian world view remained part of the "indigenous imaginary" of the peasantry in parts of Europe, including, as noted above, were-wolves which seventeenth-century Livonian folk belief dubbed "hounds of God" – "God's friends and hunting dogs whom he used against the devil and witches [...]. The devil can't stand them" (Ginzburg, Lincoln 2020: 27, 16). It is part of a suite of attributes of the werewolf that radically distance these beings from the diabolized portrayal they received from the Inquisition in the late Middle Ages. Historian Carlo Ginzburg traces these back to "an ancient Eurasian style of shamanic religiosity" (2020: 7).

Yet, notwithstanding such arguably "shamanistic" residues in western "Little Traditions", monster and monstrosity in the cosmology of the "Great – speak Cartesian – Tradition" are the beings and state that invert this order and orderliness, through their thoroughly disorderly, form- and norm-defying makeup. This classificatory defiance is manifested through ontological hybridity, in bodies and souls that conflate human with animal, either constitutionally or through transformation.

The Southern cosmos is pervaded with ambiguity and fluidity, especially during the San First Order of Creation, which retained its primal state of chaos throughout myth time, manifested in a world of generative flux and inchoateness and inhabited by hybrid beings. Their exemplar, the trickster, was the prime creative agent in that world of flux (Guenther 1999: 108–109); his creations ranged from trivial, such as anatomical and behavioral traits of certain animals, through significant – river beds and waterholes in the Kalahari – to portentous, such as bringing fire, medicines and death to humankind and reversing ontological states. And more often than not they were carried out on a whim or haphazardly without clear intent, as opposed to the deliberate, orderly fashion whereby his Western creator counterpart, the Grand Architect, went about creating the cosmos from chaos[18].

In the present, Second Order of Creation, beings and states, while less fluid and more set in their form and ways, are nevertheless still ontologically precarious. In part, this is because that primal state, of inchoateness, as seen above, has never quite left them (as evidenced by proneness for animal transformation of shamans, initiands, dancers and hunters). In part it is also because humans and animals continue to be connected to Myth Time, which they may on oc-

18 Writing about the trickster in the context of Amerindian mythology, in a paper that also juxtaposes to Judaeo-Christian "Abrahamic Tradition", the American folklorist Tok Thompson aptly summarizes this myth being's creative *modus operandi*: "One is left with the distinct impression that this world, rather than being some clock-like heavenly plan, might instead be a bit of a mistake, a bit of a joke" (2019: 165).

casions visit, or from which they may receive visitors. A frequent one, as seen above, is the trickster who, as "spirit of disorder" and "enemy of boundaries" (Kerényi 1972:185), brings ontological and conceptual havoc – "topsey-turvey-dom" (Koepping 1985: 193) – to people and their world.

For all this ontological and temporal fluidity, reiterated on a social register through loose social institutions and social organization negotiated by autonomous individuals, there is something in that world that is fixed and set: its moral rules, the "sharing ethos" and its edicts, around egalitarianism – "fiercely", even "staunchly" asserted by the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi (Lee 1979: 24) and Kutse San (Kent 1993: 480) – along with reciprocity, self-effacement and non-competitiveness, communalism and commensality (Guenther 1999: 39–57). What constitutes monstrosity is transgression of this ethos, the edicts of which are stark and unequivocal in their expectations and demands on individuals regarding their deportment and interaction with their fellows. The monster is a being who negates this moral code and does so unequivocally, in black-and-white terms – unlike the trickster, whose moral lapses, for all their frequency and outrageousness, are offset by the many positive traits that also attach to this ambiguous being, evoking ambivalence in people who come across him in stories, dreams or in ritual-liminal settings. Such terms – "unequivocal", "black-and-white" – are profoundly incongruent with a cosmology and epistemology that rests on and is pervaded by ambiguity and flux, contravened and confounded by the monster-transgressor's violation of prescriptions and proscriptions that are unambiguous and unequivocal.

As embodiments of negated moral edicts or of conflated ontological categories, Southern and Northern monsters invert *sui generis* the epistemic underpinnings of their respective cosmologies of ambiguity and clarity, anti-structure and structure. As a shared epistemological feature, or convergence, this inversion can be seen to bridge what is evidently an "abyssal" gap separating the Southern cosmology from its Northern counterpart. Even though expressed through different phenomenological registers – moral and affective the one, ontological and conceptual the other – and in relation to cosmologies with different epistemic foundations – dualistic and connective – each of these two diverse cosmologies is affected epistemologically in the same way by its respective monsters, through inversion.

The generalization by Jeffrey Cohen's – who can be considered the dean of Western Monster Studies – about the "Northern" monster a being that "refuses to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" (Cohen 1996: 6) can thus be seen to apply as well to this being's "Southern" counterpart (albeit in reverse, as it were, as its refusal to participate epistemologically is in their – "things" – dis-order). As such, to continue with Cohen's elegant phrasing, the monster, in both instances, becomes "a vehicle of prohibition" who is "continually linked to forbidden practices" (1996: 15, 17). As well as to norms, which, in the one instance are social and moral, in the other – conceptual and corporeal. In exemplifying these proscriptions in its being and actions, the monster, on the one

hand, undermines and, per Cohen, "defiantly intermixes" (2006: 2) – indeed, "threatens to smash" (1996: 6) – fundamental cosmological, conceptual and social categories, distinctions and norms. Yet, on the other hand, the monster – *qua* "monster of prohibition" – in each case and each in his or her own way and idiom, also undergirds the same, by calling, each in its own voice "horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed" (Cohen 1996: 13). This expresses one of Cohen's "seven theses" about "monster culture", discussed in a foundational essay with that title. While deserving of its acclaim and stature as a much cited "classic" in the field of Monster Studies, the essay, written by a scholar of English literature, is overly Eurocentric (as are the contributions to the anthology to which Cohen's essay is the introduction). I present this comparative, inter-cultural essay as a complement to Cohen's article and volume, to expand its insightful theses substantively and problematize them conceptually.

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U Thlen and the *Nongshohnoh*: Folklore, Experience, and Reality

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ABSTRACT: The need to better understand the supernatural is an ever-engaging aspect of any enquiry into the matter due to the changing paradigms of time and space and the existence of numerous misconceptions and observations concerning the same. Such is a case of the legend of *U Thlen* and the *nongshohnoh* phenomenon of Meghalaya, a north-eastern state in the sovereign country of India. *U Thlen*, an evil mystical being, is described in Khasi legends and recounted in Khasi folklore as an entity thirsty for human blood and never satiated. He was, however, tricked and captured by the Khasi people but never ultimately destroyed. As an act of deception – of reward and mainly revenge, *U Thlen* promised people riches in exchange for human sacrifice. An existing belief is that *U Thlen* was adopted by a Khasi household which saw the beginning of the *nongshohnoh* or the "cut throat" phenomenon. The surrounding belief about the keeping of *U Thlen* functions on the basis of prevailing social notions that human sacrifice offered to *U Thlen* equates to riches. While the legend of *U Thlen* has witnessed transcendence from narratives to lived realities over an incredible part of the history of the Khasi people, the *nongshohnoh* phenomenon has seen its fair share of criticism with time as well. It is in this regard that this study aims to (re)look into this very phenomenon as a living reality of the Khasi society. This paper also aims to look at existing beliefs and disbeliefs in *U Thlen* and the *nongshohnoh* phenomenon in order to arrive at an understanding, proper to the contemporary setting of the Khasi society, in the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS: folk beliefs, Khasi folklore, Khasi legend, *nongshohnoh*, *U Thlen*

Introduction

U Thlen[1], a serpentine entity in Khasi[2] folk belief and legend, also exists as a living and oftentimes scary reality among the Khasi tribe in north-eastern India to this day. There exists a bounty of folklore on *U Thlen* that has been circulated and documented within the tribe and such folklore, whenever produced, brings about polarising effects and opinions. In the domain of Khasi folk narratives, *U Thlen* commands a very special place as one of the most iconic malevolent figures from which a subsequent *nongshohnoh*[3] or *menshohnoh*[4] phenomenon emerged. According to Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, *U Thlen* is "an evil creature of supernatural powers" (Nongkynrih 2001: 147).

As a cultural phenomenon, any mention of instances or cases regarding *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* receives special attention from the Khasi tribe and it is treated with deep concern: mainly in the form of public opinion and print, as well as local media coverage. In the recent past, the legal system of India has also been urged to act upon the problem that has emerged out of either the *U Thlen* or *nongshohnoh* narrative. The police department and the law court have been asked to intervene, which has often times produced no conclusive outcome. To the legal system, *U Thlen* is often described as an intangible superstition over which no legal process and treatment can be granted; conversely, the Khasi tribe, to a considerable extent, still perceives *U Thlen* and the *nongshohnoh* as real socio-cultural phenomena.

Instances of contact and experiences with the *nongshohnoh* assert that the folklore concerning *U Thlen* potentially offers an expression of a reality that could suggest the existence of a problem that is yet to be properly scrutinised and understood. In relation to this, an informant whose name has been purposely changed to Bah Hon (male, 56 years old) was interviewed on May 21, 2022 due to his family's previous association with *U Thlen* as the *nong-ri thlen*[5]. His identity has to be kept secret due to the sensitivity of this issue within the Khasi society and it was also requested by him[6]. Furthermore, memorates from the author's own childhood, pertaining to the *U Thlen* narrative, are included for further speculation into the *nongshohnoh* narrative as well.

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1 The letter "u" is connotative of the male gender.

2 The Khasi tribe is the only Mon-Khmer speaking tribe in India. They are a collective of seven sub-tribes: Khynriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Lyngngam, Maram and no longer existing Diko. The Khasi believed in the existence of sixteen tribes making the collective. However, only seven chose to dwell on earth while the remaining nine stayed back in the heavenly abode. They are an oral culture and do not have their own script, but eventually adopted the Roman script for writing after it was introduced by Thomas Jones, a Welsh missionary in the 1840s.

3 *Nongshohnoh* implies a cut-throat who is responsible for catching a human and extracting blood or other items which are then used as commodity of exchange between the keeper family of *U Thlen* and *U Thlen* itself.

4 The terms *menshohnoh* and *nongshohnoh* are used interchangeably.

5 *Nong-ri thlen* is the indigenous term for *U Thlen* keeper.

6 He did not talk very much and chose to not answer many questions. He hardly wore a smile, and was deeply reflective throughout the interview.

The folklore regarding *U Thlen* and, by extension, *nongshohnoh* has also taken new definitions over the years in Khasi society and has also affected, oftentimes negatively, the social outlook of the Khasi cultural group. At a primary level, the narrative on *U Thlen's* origin in folk belief and narration becomes of vital importance. Throughout the Khasi-Jaintia Hills inhabited by the Khasi people, there is a variety of lore associated with *U Thlen* that has coloured the imagination and belief on the entity. Similarly, the alleged cases and incidences linking *U Thlen* to the *nongshohnoh* become significant when it comes to formalising an understanding of the socio-cultural phenomenon that has continued to remain an enigmatic and problematic aspect of Khasi folklore and society.

U Thlen in Folklore and Written Records

In order to understand the contextual association between *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* in the Khasi community, it is necessary to first understand the folklore of *U Thlen* and its association with its first keeper, which I reproduce from sources such as Gurdon (1907); Gatphoh (1937); BarehNgapKynta (1967); Mawrie (1981); Nongkynrih (2001) to reconstruct the *Thlen* narrative.

According to the widely accepted lore, *U Thlen* was said to be ostracised and shunned by his grandfather, a Khasi deity – *U Mawlong Syiem* (the chief patron deity[7] of Mawsmai[8]), from birth for being an aberration and a deformed creature. *U Thlen* was subsequently abandoned by his mother – *Ka Kma Kharai* (the Goddess of Caves and hollow cavities on the Earth) as well. A cave at Pomdoloi Falls, Sohra became the haunt and nestling ground of this entity, who grew in disdain of the humans who worshipped the deities and attained their favour while *U Thlen*, the grandson of a deity, was abandoned to his own isolation. According to the lore, *U Thlen* would grow in size and strength by feeding on humans who moved about the market route between Rangjyrteh[9] and Sohra. He would earn people's fear and hatred by catching and feeding on stragglers who travel in the odd numbers[10]. As a supernatural entity, he could shape-shift to the form and size of other animals, however, the shape of a constrictor was considered his favourite to hunt and devour a human whole.

This folklore also holds another dimension in which *U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*[11] (God the Creator and Keeper), the Khasi's highest God, requested the

7 Chief patron deity – refers to village deities that reside and overlook the well-being of a certain village.

8 Mawsmai is a village located at a short distance towards the south of Sohra (erstwhile Cherrapunjee), in Meghalaya, India.

9 This village no longer exists. However, its ruins can still be found close to Sohra.

10 The *U Thlen* is known to hunt people especially when they travel in odd numbers. Stragglers who are either left out from a conversation or lagging behind will become him prime victim.

11 *U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw* refers to the highest of God in Khasi faith.

aid of another patron deity of the Khasi, who was known as *U Suidnoh*[12] (God of Health and Restoration), to intervene and rid the land of *U Thlen* as the latter had been terrorising the humans with an aim to destroy every single one. *U Suidnoh* devised a plan to rid the lands of *U Thlen* by having him swallow massive iron balls heated to bear a resemblance to fatty white pork. Following the defeat of *U Thlen*, people from the Khasi hills and the plains of now Bangladesh were called to feast on the cooked remains of the serpent. However, an important condition was made to the gathered humans – they were to consume all of the remains of *U Thlen* and not supposed to take any with them to their homes or leave anything for the following day (Gatphoh 1937; Nongkynrih 2001).

Unknown to gathered mass of people, an old woman kept a piece of the serpent flesh to offer her son, who was absent at the feast. She stored the meat in a basket and had every intention of handing it to her son, but, strangely, failed to recall that she was to offer it to him. It was narrated that a number of days had passed; the old woman was sitting in the kitchen when that piece of *U Thlen's* flesh spoke from within the basket. She opened the basket to find a small snake (*U Thlen* resurrected) who asked her to keep him and, in turn, promised her riches and wealth, which eventually seduced the old woman. This was the turning point in the *U Thlen* narrative; the old woman was made wealthy by *U Thlen*. He could see how she could no longer detach herself from her wealth, and so asked her for a sacrifice in return for keeping his word. She offered him goat's blood, which infuriated him. He made a stern demand for human blood, failing which, her family would become victims instead. Driven by the attachment to material wealth and fear for her family's well-being, the old woman agreed to *U Thlen's* demand, initiating the *nongshohnoh* phenomenon.

This narrative does not outwardly conclude with *U Thlen* being revived; instead, it took on another dimension highlighted by the formation of an association or a pact between *U Thlen* and its first keeper, who would be known as the *nong-ri thlen*. *U Thlen's* engagement with the old woman in human speech reveals that Khasi folklore asserts that an association between humans and supernatural beings, such as *U Thlen*, is possible and forms the basis of a belief that is still considered real today. This cultural lore also points out how such an association between a Khasi individual or a family with *U Thlen* can be sustained by a pact of mutual benefit.

In written records, narratives concerning *U Thlen* are seldom omitted and often included in discourse relating to the Khasi religion and worldview. One of the earliest records on ethnography, *The Khasis,* first published in 1907 by Philip Richard Thornhagh Gurdon, provides, in great detail, the laws and customs of the Khasi tribe under section III – Human Sacrifices. Gurdon alludes to the Assam Gazette, August 1882, to talk about what he first considers "an

12 *U Suidnoh* is a patron deity who resides in the northern part of Sohra. His abode is said to be located in the sacred grove of Laitryngew. He was considered to be a powerful deity, who was also worshipped by people who dwell in the plains of Bangladesh – previously known to the Khasi as Shilot.

interesting superstition: The tradition is that there was once in a cave near Cherrapunji, a gigantic snake, or *thlen*, who committed great havoc among men and animals" (Gurdon 1907: 98). He also mentions the association between *U Thlen* and the *nong-ri thlen*:

> When a *thlen* takes up its abode in a family there is no means of getting rid of it, though it occasionally leaves on its own accord, and often follows family property that is given away or sold. The *thlen* attaches itself to property, and brings prosperity and wealth to the owners, but on the condition that it is supplied with blood (Gurdon 1907: 99).

However, getting rid of *U Thlen* is simply mentioned as an act of throwing away "all the money, ornaments, and property of that house or family" (Gurdon 1907: 101). This is not necessarily the case, according to a reported account by Bah Hon, a person previously associated with *U Thlen*. The following was noted:

> Families associated with a *Thlen* cannot [get] rid [of] the entity by simply discarding the material gains that the entity has provided and the *Thlen* will never leave on its own accord. The family must leave behind everything! There is no knowing how the *Thlen* will follow you. [...] We left our house in the nude (to rid of the *Thlen*), and it was late in the evening. We were acknowledged, given blankets to cover and allowed to walk freely. It was the only way to rid ourselves of it.

Another record concerning *U Thlen* can be observed in a *Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India*, first published in 1979 under Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. In it, the narrative of *U Thlen* appears in a section on religion. While the *Gazetteer* failed to adequately record the Khasi faith, it did not fail to mention *U Thlen* as a "curious superstition" written about in great detail. However, the text observed that the *U Thlen* narrative had also enabled the *nong-ri thlen* and *nongshohnoh* phenomenon to exist; and it was seen as a social problem negatively affecting Khasi society as follows: "Many families are known or suspected to be *nong-ri thlen*, or keepers of the *thlen*, and murders are not unfrequently committed in consequence of this awful superstition" (Allen 1979: 488). This continues to be a pervasive problem that is still tackled by society at a certain magnitude today. More recent writings relating to *U Thlen* continue to emerge in historical and sociological records as well. Hamlet Bareh (1967) places the *Thlen* narrative within the chapter on Religion. In it, the belief and exercise associated with this entity is identified as:

> occult household practice [...] spread through marriage, kinship and trade transactions [...]. Contact with the days of modern science, spread of electricity, power, heavy road traffic, increasing volumes of trade – probably

> these and other factors have decreased the number of *Thlen* worshippers as well as the *menshohnoh* and *dakus* to catch any victim possible in a secret place and feeding the monstrous spirit (Bareh 1967: 355–357).

Based on this writing, it is apparent that the *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* continue to exist as an engaging discourse that constantly challenges the Khasi society. H. O. Mawrie also observes a similar aspect in *The Khasi Milieu* (1981). Mawrie engages with the notion of *U Thlen* and its keepers, among other entities, in the context of the contemporary in the following manner:

> In contemporary Khasi society, there are people who have no fear of sins of incest and sacrilege and keep the devils as their household deities and worship them. These deities bring the keepers wealth material prosperity and splendour. These deities are of different types having different qualities. Amongst these the less evil are *Ka Lei Khuri*, *Ka Raliang*, *Ka Taro*, *Ka Lasam*, *Ka Sabuit* and others and the ferocious ones are *Ka Shwar*, *Ka Bih* and *U Thlen*[13]. Families who keep these devils as their household deities (*U Phan U Kyrpad*)[14] have their own way of worshipping these deities and offering sacrifices to keep them content, failing which the deities will bring ruin and even death to the members of the family or the household which keeps them (Mawrie 1981: 42).

Margaret Lyngdoh's (2015) essay *On Wealth and Jealousy among the Khasis*: *Thlen, Demonization and the Other* observed the prevailing problems posed by this very condition in Khasi society by mentioning that this very aspect of lore is still experienced within the social fabric of society as a real phenomenon which has produced numerous undesirable instances, problematic narratives as well as "noxious" legal cases. Because *U Thlen* can be attributed to a family's wealth and fortune, as Gurdon also pointed, it can sometimes be mistaken that a family's wealth is due to such familial association with *U Thlen*, resulting in grave consequences for the alleged family. Lyngdoh also mentioned the following:

> The negative effects that this narrative has upon Khasi consciousness may be seen in the numerous incidents of violence and mob fury attributable to *Thlen*. In addition, the *Thlen* narrative forces the Khasi populace of today to take a second look at Khasi myth and tradition and the role that they play in constructing the identity of the community (Lyngdoh 2015: 183–184).

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13 *Ka Lei Khuri*, *Ka Raliang*, *Ka Taro*, *Ka Lasam*, *Ka Sabuit*, *Ka Shwar* and Ka *Bih* are other supernatural entities known to the Khasi apart from *U Thlen*. It is believed that these entities are also worshipped for the purpose of attaining wealth and fortune. These entities too are propitiated by some form of sacrifice after which they reward the keeper household. *Ka Shwar*, *Ka Bih* and *U Thlen* are considered to be the more malicious ones.

14 Household deities are known as *U Phan U Kyrpad* in the indigenous tongue.

Nongshohnoh: Experiences and Reality

The *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* phenomenon, deeply ingrained in the social existence of the Khasi society has not only been tried and examined from varied academic perspectives; regional news portals have also reported on the instances relating to the same. The online archive of *The Shillong Times*, English news daily in Meghalaya, India was analyzed and the following information was collected. Terminologies like "witchcraft" and "superstition" are collectively used by newspaper agencies to refer to most things supernatural – often associated with *U Thlen*.

According to *The Shillong Times* report dated April 24, 2013, a large number of related cases and incidences have been cited over a period of eight years. Here, I quote the brief report:

> March 15, 2006: Five friends – Julie Lyngdoh, Norma Lakiang, Susana Kharumnuid, M Syiemiong and John Mawlot – were branded as sorcerers by villagers of Laitkyrhong under Mawkynrew C&RD Block of East Khasi Hills district. June 17, 2007: An angry mob torched five houses and two vehicles of Dhon Nongkynrih at Mawbseiñ village in Ri-Bhoi district after being alleged for practicing witchcraft. October 7, 2011: Three persons died in two localities in Sohra, East Khasi Hills district after they were lynched by villagers who accused them of being *menshohnoh* (cut-throats) or those who worship *U Thlen* (a mythical serpent) in the hope of acquiring further wealth. April 27, 2011: The family of Phil Mawlieh and Joseph Tongwah, who reside in Pdeng Shnong locality at Mawlai Phudmuri, Shillong, was attacked by a mob following allegations that they were practicing witchcraft on Cynthia Massar. April 28, 2012: Johnson Marak, 64, a resident of Joiram village near Balat under Mawsynram constituency was asked to leave the village following saga of superstition that included a tale as incredulous as five women dreaming about him giving 'something' to people where they 'died'. February 23, 2013: Jein Khongwet and her family were attacked by villagers of Wahlyngkhat village in Pynursla C&RD Block of East Khasi Hills district on the allegation that she is practicing witchcraft. March 16, 2013: Three persons – Rikitlang Kharnaior, Stanly Jyrwa and Shaining Star Kharnaior – assaulted one Spendri Kharmyndai at Lempluh village, under Mawphlang C&RD Block alleging him of practicing witchcraft. April 23, 2013: Hundreds of villagers set a blaze the house of a businessman Tremlin Nongsiej of Mawrynkang village near Mawsynram on the allegation that he was practicing witchcraft (Endless Cases of Superstition).

The eight cases highlighted above occurred over a brief period of eight years (2006–2013), showcasing the transcendence of lore that can become a scary reality to individuals who have suffered if not worse – while the worst has also happened to the unfortunate. The incident involving the destruction of

the property of Tremlin Nongsiej of Mawrynkang village on April 23, 2013 also involved the local authorities, who expressed the following:

> Enough is enough and we will not accept the argument that it was the decision of the Dorbar to attack the house of anyone who is allegedly practicing witchcraft (Call for Awareness against Illogical Beliefs 2013).

The incidences that occurred in 2013 were so grave that the state machinery through the Department of Arts & Culture, Meghalaya organised a two-day regional seminar in Shillong on the May 3–4, 2013 on "Superstition in the Tribal Cultures of the Northeast: a Study of Myth and Reality". H. H. Mohrmen, one of the contributors in the seminar, wrote to *The Shillong Times* and expressed his findings as follows:

> *U Thlen*, the *Taro, ka Bih* etc. are part of the Khasi Pnar belief system which has been inculcated in the minds of the people from one generation to another. We grew up believing that the *nongshohnoh* exists and is lurking around the locality to catch us and to feed our blood to *U Thlen* a kind of serpent [...]. I am not defending superstition, neither will I out rightly dismiss myths, legends and traditions as superstition, which is a complex issue because it is in the realm of the spirit. I am not condoning the violence and madness that has happened. Any act of vandalism need to be condemned in the strongest terms and such acts of violence find no mention in our culture and tradition. But I would rather like the educated Khasi Pnar to look at the wisdom behind these legends and beliefs and interpret them in the new light (Mohrmen 2013).

The *Nongshohnoh* Phenomenon

If the *U Thlen* narrative exists in the realm of discourse and ideas, the *nongshohnoh* is no doubt a cultural phenomenon. Folk narratives assert the existence of contact between the supernatural entity *U Thlen* with the *nong-ri thlen* and *nongshohnoh*, which, as a unique Khasi cultural creation, serves to realise the lore. But how does one attempt to explain such a phenomenon? Is the phenomenon even real? Here, I present a number of experiences collected from my respondent (Bah Hon) as well as three personal experiences or memorates. This folklore has been related in the author's family from the point of view of the author's maternal uncle known as Fam[15], who was a resident of Sohbar village, a border village of Meghalaya, situated at a distance of 12 kilometres south

15 Fam's name has been altered for the purpose of this text as it deals with the personal narratives articulated in the author's family; the individual concerned is now deceased. The incident narrated occurred during the afternoon hours on an extremely hot day in 1970s. This story is still related in the author's family to highlight the dangers and problems the *nongshohnoh* gives to the inhabitants of a village called Sohbar.

of Sohra. In the 1970s, Fam had an experience that made him flee from his *bri*[16] until he reached the safety of his village. It was said that Fam was resting his back on a beetle nut tree and was sleeping during the hottest hours of the day (post-noon) since it was difficult to work then. It was during such a time that a rock thrown at the beetle nut tree woke him up. Soon, another rock hit the tree. He got to his feet and ran. He would go on to claim that he dared not wait for the third strike. The two stones hitting a tree were warnings (a feature of the *nongshohnoh* at Sohbar). He would mention that he was being stalked by a *nongshohnoh* and was lucky to have heard the two strikes.

The narrative above was circulated after I experienced something similar along with my sibling and our young uncle and aunt in the same aforementioned village. It happened during the early 2003 and I was still a pre-teen – too young to be familiar with the *U Thlen* folklore. It was a late evening; all of us have already gone to bed. The elder people, including my mother and grandmother, slept in our great-grandmother's hut while we slept in an adjoining hut belonging to our great-grand aunt. We were awakened by a sudden and forceful shaking of our hut's door. We understood that there was someone trying to pry the door open which led to our sudden and shrill scream "U At! U At! U At..."[17]; as swift and sudden as it was, it ended. Our scream woke up all the elders in my great grandmother's hut. But they observed no one.

Another such incident occurred while I was a student at a reputed private school in Shillong[18]. I was a student of class three or the third standard and not more than nine years old. There, I shared a close friendship with Dolph (a boy around my own age), one of the few friends I had as a child. He would tell me many stories about his family and of his half-fish-like sister whom his grandmother used to bathe. To me, then, all of his stories were either fascinating or strange, but they were nonetheless interesting. He would share many stories like these – many of which I did not pay proper attention to or have forgotten and I would recount them all to my mother. This is where things would change. I lost my school sweater after I had left it in a mountain of sweaters and joined my friends for a game of football. Our parents came to pick us up and so one by one, we stopped playing and collected our belongings. Unfortunately for me, I could not find mine. My mother scolded me for it, but I did all I could to find my sweater. I asked the school guards, had a look at the lost and found. I never found mine! My mother and I accepted that it must have been picked up and claimed by someone else. After a few weeks, Dolph said that he saw my sweater in his house. I did not even ask him anything. As always, I informed my mother, once I got back home, and she was alarmed by such news. The following day, I was told to ask and find out if Dolph mentioned seeing my name

16 *Bri* is a War-Khasi term that is used to denote a family/clan farmland.

17 The word *At* is used in the context of War-Khasi communities to refer to a *nongshohnoh.*

18 The name of the school has been purposely removed due to the controversial nature of the narrative. Names of anyone concerned are altered in this narrative as well, apart from the incident, to protect the identity of all involved. It all happened to the author.

badge on the sweater. I was the only one who wore a name badge in my class. The following day, my mother requested an audience with my friend's mother from the school authorities and demanded my sweater be returned intact with the badge. My friend's mother denied ever seeing my sweater and uttered these words in everyone's presence, including mine, "It is not ours". All arguments stopped. Back at home, my mother would tell me "it's all right, you will be fine. You will not be harmed now"[19]. I never got back my sweater, but Dolph returned my badge after a few days. The following year, Dolph and his siblings changed school. I never saw him again.

Similar situation was described in account of Bah Hon: "I do not like to talk about my family's past but it is known by many. I need not go to the details. Our family did not only abandon the family house, we also abandoned our village because we wanted to be clean from all of that".

In more recent times, *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* have also been treated with scepticism and doubt. Not everyone experiences such strange phenomena and some have even opined of either *U Thlen* or *nongshohnoh* as nothing more than a metaphorical exercise that is used for the advantage or disadvantage of people and families. *U Thlen* is sometimes seen as an effective tool to exact personal grudges and sway public opinion. The mob lynching is perhaps the scariest of realities to come out of this social condition in Khasi society. *The Shillong Times* reported on a case as recent as December 2016, which had occurred in Sohiong, Meghalaya, where the city police rescued a person from a crowd, who were contemplating to lynch him for allegedly practicing witchcraft (*U Thlen* keeping). Even with the man rescued, the police who investigated the matter could not bring about a swift resolution to the issue on the basis of a general lack of evidence.

19 This is another aspect of the *Thlen*, *nong-ri thlen* and *nongshohnoh* relationship – the human sacrifice ceremony. Not all victims of the *Thlen* must be murdered for the sacrifice to take place. According to Bars (1973) *Thlen* is defined as "devil in the shape of a snake supposed to be kept and reared by some clans in Khasi Hills. (It is propitiated with human blood and the nail-tops from fingers and toes or, failing these, human hair and pieces of the garment of the victim clipped with silver scissor. It is believed to bring wealth to his keeper. The people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills are in constant dread of being murdered by the keepers of this monster)" (Bars 1973: 933). P. R. T. Gurdon in *The Khasis* also mentioned that the ritual generally occurs "at the dead of night, costly cloths are spread on the floor of the house of the *thlen* keeper, all the doors are opened, and a bras plate is laid on the ground in which is deposited the blood, or the hair, or a piece of cloth of the victim. All the family then gathers round, and an elderly member commences to beat a small drum, and invokes the *thlen* [...] the spirit of the victim (called *Ka Rngiew* in Khasi) appears, and stands on the plate, laughing. The *thlen* begin to swallow the figure, commencing at its feet [...]. By degrees the whole figure is disposed of by the boa constrictor [...] the person expires" (Gurdon 1907: 100–101). Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (2001: 147) also elucidated on the effects of the human sacrifice ceremony as follows: "a kind of deadly illness where a person loses his natural colour, grows thin and weak, with a strange bloatedness about his face and belly". One of the ways to inhibit the ceremony is by causing the keepers of the *U Thlen* to deny, refuse or reject their *Thlen's* role, thereby rendering the entity incapable of completing the ceremony. The other mechanism is the *Kynthah narsaw* rite performed by the queens of select Khasi chiefdoms, especially those who trace their lineage to divine entities.

Discourse, in matters pertaining to the *nongshohnoh*, especially in the twenty first century, is highly sought by people from within the society to address a problem as old as the lore of *U Thlen* itself. According to James Lyngdoh, the *U Thlen* and *nongshohnoh* phenomenon is

> [...] very disturbing and dastardly trend taking place in our social fabric in this 21st century. It is yet to voice its protest and condemnation against these so-called self-styled vigilantees who are all out to rid out society of *Thlen* and *menshohnohs*. Even the Church is a mute spectator to this tragedy. The fact of the matter is that in our Khasi society, when you are affluent you are branded a *menshohnoh*; and if you are living from hand to mouth, you are a *nongtuh* (thief). It all comes down to envy (Lyngdoh 2011).

Phrang Roy, in his letter to the editor of *The Shillong Times*, expressed the shared concerns of many:

> I think we need a more proactive social research work by our educational institutions into these real social problems of our communities so that the public can have a deeper and more informed dialogue on this real and simmering problem of today (Roy 2013).

Similarly, Stefferson Malngiang, in the same edition of the online daily paper raised the following:

> I am really amazed at how strong this word *Menshohnoh* is and how it has impacted our society. Apparently, it's a sort of label used to frame a person so as to cover up personal issues and grudges [...]. Disorder and maladjustment can happen in a society. Should we live by a set of archaic beliefs and turn a blind eye to the enlightened laws? Or are we ready to set up standard protocols to eliminate the pain that creeps into our bloodstream? After this incident we live in fear lest anyone labels us a *menshohnoh* and kills us because we have no defence against a mob. Should the government and elected representatives play politics at the cost of the people's safety and welfare? (Malngiang 2013).

An October 21, 2020 issue of *The Shillong Times* also raised the idea of introducing legal measures following a number of newly surfaced incidences concerning the same. The daily reported the Home Minister's statement as follows, "Lahkmen Rymbui confirmed on Tuesday that there was no move to bring any law in this regard »as of now«, although there are some within the MDA Government who favour the idea" (No move for law to deter menshohnoh 2020). The macabre incidents and deaths on the basis of suspicions or witchcraft pose serious concerns to the people of Meghalaya.

Conclusion

Margaret Lyngdoh rightfully noted an important concluding remark in her observation of the issue, "Folklore that has such devastating results persists over time only if it is supported by the social mechanisms that create it and through the transitions that every society experiences. If expressing social conditions is one of the functions of folklore, then *U Thlen*-related violence is illustrative of the need in Khasi society to carefully re-evaluate and re-examine its cultural values and norms that allow for and tolerate violence against fellow human beings" (Lyngdoh 2015: 184). The social mechanisms that exist in Khasi society today clearly consider *U Thlen* not only as folklore of a group of people; *U Thlen* represents belief that is tangible and real, oftentimes, with terrible consequences through the *nongshohnoh* and the mob lynching. One of the few mechanisms to tackle this social malignant issue depends upon relying solely on the powers endowed on the queens of select Khasi chiefdoms, which are believed to be able to cast away *U Thlen's* powers of oppression. However, this belief further enforces the *Thlen* narrative. The calls for resolutions and legal mechanisms are at their most earnest. Perhaps no other period in Khasi history has observed such urgency to re-evaluate and re-examine this folk tradition. Until our folklore and social mechanisms address the cultural implication of *U Thlen* and the *nongshohnoh*, the relationship between folklore and experience will inevitably remain the living scary reality of the Khasi.

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Cannibalizing the Wiindigo: The Wiindigog in Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree Boreal Landscapes and Its Re-presentations in Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT: This paper will discuss the Wiindigo, a cannibalistic character among some Indigenous peoples of North America. Illustrated through the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree, two Algonquin-speaking Indigenous groups, the Wiindigo serves as a personification of fear and hunger, and alludes to the cultural heritage elements of the boreal forest food system as well as the differing legal systems in Canada. In examining the Wiindigo from the Indigenous cultural and historical perspectives related to the author by several knowledge-holders, as well as from Euro-Canadian popular culture representations, the paper illustrates the importance of the Wiindigo to Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree world views, customary governance, and contemporary lived experience.

KEYWORDS: Wiindigo, customary governance, food systems, Canada, Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree

Introduction[1]

Wiindigo: the name sparks fear and mystery for horror film-lovers in North America. The familiar popular horror plot often includes a group of visitors from the city surviving the horrors of an Evil Spirit awakened by a long-

1 Acknowledgement and Appreciation: I would like to recognize and honour the collective and individual stories shared with me by members of the communities on Nigigoonsiminikaaning, Asatiwisipe akiing, Gojijing akiing. Gichi-miigwetch memindage dibaajimowag Walter Nanawinba miinawaa Richard Morrisonba, niin a'da miigwechiwendam a'do gikendamowinan. Any errors in the article are solely mine.

forgotten ritual of Indigenous people. In this story, a lone settler (or a group of attractive teenagers), finds himself/themselves in a dense wilderness that is representative of the Canadian "north". A howl, a growl, and a high-pitched shriek are heard but the sounds echo across the landscape and it is difficult to tell where they are coming from. Trees, too, creak in the stillness of the night – or was that branches cracking under the weight of the creature's heavy footsteps? And more importantly, is "the thing" moving towards its victim? The sounds seem to come from all directions and, unfortunately, running incites an attack of the frightening creature. Then, a semi-human figure with shiny red eyes and big deer antlers emerges.

Figure 1. A popular version of the appearance of the Wiindigo; the figure is covered in fur and carrying human head skulls. Source: Shutterstock, image 1511144420

The moonlight enables one to distinguish the horrifying creature, and, by its mere appearance, one can tell that the encounter will lead to a terrible fate. There are screams, there is blood; torn flesh is dispersed at the scene. If found, human remains are hard to identify. The audience later learns from an Indigenous Elder that this was the Wiindigo.

Such popular culture versions of the Wiindigo allude to an ancient "Indian" burial ground or an "Indian curse", both of which add a layer of exoticism, the unknown, and authenticity to "Indian myths". Due to that cultural affiliation, the "Scary Monster" that is the Wiindigo kills out of revenge for being awakened, or simply because it is his nature to do so. In North American and particularly in Euro-Canadian popular culture, the Wiindigo represents an enigmatic "Indian monster", sometimes reimagined through Christianity as a demon, but always terrifying the forest visitors with its haunting ubiquity.

Because the Wiindigo is associated with the eerie unknown of "the Canadian wilderness", it is a pervasive figure tied to a colonial understanding of Indigenous presence. However, the Wiindigo is immensely meaningful to the Algonquin-speaking people in the central boreal forest of Canada. For the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree[2] in these regions, the Wiindigo has always been – and continues to be – an important component of culture and worldview, arising out of oral stories and transported through time and re-imagined along with the peoples' historical circumstances. Although significantly "cannibalized" by Euro-Canadian understandings, the Wiindigo and the Indigenous narratives to which he belongs remain vital to the living heritage of the *akiwenziyag*, "men of the land"[3] and other community members.

This paper will discuss the cultural and historical heritage of the Wiindigo and the subsequent "cannibalization" of these Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree narratives by Euro-Canadian popular culture. By illustrating how Indigenous social values were "devoured" by (re)settler discourse, the paper highlights new Wiindigo narratives tied to colonialism, justice, and "Indian" presence. Written from the perspective of a non-Indigenous woman who has spent more than fifteen years examining intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and linguistic transmission with Indigenous communities in Canada, this paper elaborates on the narratives of Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree *akiwenziyag* about livelihoods and customary governance within the *Wiindigowi dibaajimowinan*, "stories of the Wiindigo from anecdotal experience". Despite the wealth of anthropological literature written about the Wiindigo (including the detailed work of Basil Johnston), this paper centers around the stories and perspectives gathered from community members and *akiwenziyag* at Asatiwisipe Aki/Poplar River, Nigigoonsiminikaaning, and Couchiching First Nations territories in central Canada. The paper concludes by articulating on the re-presentation of the "modern" Wiindigo through contemporary State apparatus and socio-cultural challenges historically and presently experienced by Indigenous communities.

The Wiindigog

Indigenous people in North America recorded their histories largely through oral stories. There are many different Indigenous cultures and Nations across the large country now called Canada. Even among the Anishinaabeg and Oji-

2 The Anishinaabeg are Algonquin-speaking peoples residing around the Great Lakes in North America; the Oji-Cree are located east and to the north of Lake Winnipeg, in Manitoba. The members with whom I spoke come from the boreal forest areas around the eastern side of Manitoba and north-western Ontario in central northern Canada. The *akiwenziyag* are members of the communities of Asatiwisipe Anishinaabeg Poplar River First Nation in Manitoba as well as Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation and Couchiching/Gojijing in Ontario, Canada, but their territories and traplines extend beyond and far away from these communities.

3 The term *akiwenzi* literally means "man of the land/man who walks the land" but is often used in the context of the Elder or a "man who knows his land and cultural way of life". I use this Anishinaabemowin term to refer to both the Anishinaabeg and the Oji-Cree because the term was used by both.

Cree, there are distinct features such as landscape, relationship with the state, and treaty promises that further deepen this cultural diversity. Many of the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree stories are divided into *dibaajimowinan* (stories, personal narratives, anecdotes from lived experience) and *aadizookanag* (sacred or historical stories). Many of these contained *gikinoo'amaagoowinan,* "teachings", that relied on Other-Than-Human Beings to shape cultural values and establish social norms (Johnston 1995; Pawłowska-Mainville, forthcoming). Shapeshifters, Weesakejak, Sasquatches and Memegwesiwag (Little People Who Live in the Rocks), and Buhnaabeg (Water Beings) are just some of the personas who exist in Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree narratives. Likewise, Mishu Bizhew, Animikiiwag, and the Wiindigog are beings which teach humans about respect, responsibility, and their role in the world (Johnston 1982, 1995; Benton-Banai 2010; Bouchard, Martin 2010). The Wiindigo, in particular, has generated interest in Euro-Canadian popular culture, and the creature, as we will see shortly, has permeated the horror film genre.

Figure 2. Norval Morriseau, *The Wiindigo* (tempera on brown paper, ca. 1963).
The Anishinaabe artist portrays the Wiindigo eating humans-turned-beaver.
Source: Courtesy of The Estate of Norval Morriseau

For the Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree, the Wiindigo is a combination of spirit, animal, and human nature, all of which evoke narratives of mankind's power, cleverness, strength, and resilience as well as Anishinaabe principles and values (Johnston 1995). Depending on the cultural dialect, the Algonquian name for the Wiindigo is also spelled Wendigo, Windigoo, Weendigo, and Wiitiko. The term "Wiindigo" will be employed here, with originals kept in citations so as to respect the linguistic and dialectical variability. The Wiindigo is understood to be of human form, often clad in hides and furs; sometimes he is half naked. He is understood to have shiny red eyes that permit him to see well in the dark. Newer and pop-cultural interpretations have added deer antlers to the Wiindigo (even among some young community members), but the Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau rarely painted the being with any horned components.

The Anishinaabe writer Basil Johnston describes the Wiindigo as a giant cannibal, who, as a manitou, a "spirit",

> towered five to eight times above the height of a tall man [...] Because it was afflicted with never-ending hunger and could never get enough to eat, it was always on the verge of starvation. The Weendigo was gaunt to the point of emaciation, its desiccated skin pulled tautly over its bones. As the Weendigo ate, it grew, and as it grew so did its hunger, so that no matter how much it ate, its hunger always remained in proportion to their size (Johnston 1995: 221–222).

There are multiple descriptions of Wiindigog[4] that add a hypnotic appeal to this frightening persona. In some versions, the Wiindigo is described as a giant cannibalistic skeleton of ice (Landes 1968), in others, he is a "monster" with "hate in his eyes, hate in his presence, and death in his breath" (Johnston 1982: 22). In his conversations with the Anishinaabeg of Berens River, the anthropologist, Irving Hallowell (2010: 142), noted that Wiindigo accounts rendered him as tall as or "taller than the trees". Some Oji-Cree narratives mention his sickly and disheveled appearance and strong, pungent smell of rot and old, bloody meat.

Emphasizing his bright eyes and easily angered demeanor, different cultural details add to the fantastic surrounding the Wiindigo figure. The Wiindigo could be a man or a woman, or even a young person. He is said to have a heart of ice, or be made up of ice altogether (Richard Morrison, personal communication, August 2, 2015; Johnston 1995) Other narratives from Anishinaabeg *akiwenziyag* speak to Wiindigo's attempts to kidnap babies and mention his angry prowess across the landscape to avenge his dead relatives. The anthro-

4 Wendigo is singular and Wendigog is plural. Some also anglicize the name in plural form to Wendigos or Wendigoes, however, Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibwe language, tends to pluralize with -ig, -wag, -ag, -wuk, etc.

pologist Hallowell, who spent over fifty years in an Anishinaabeg community in this region, was told by his friend, William Berens, that the Wiindigog are human beings who are "transformed into cannibals by sorcery, that cannibal monsters can be 'created out of a dream' by a sorcerer and sent into the world to perform malevolent acts" (Hallowell 2010: 237). These cannibal giants roam the woods, particularly in the spring, and people must always know how to get rid of them.

Figure 3. A version of the Wiindigo as described by many Anishinaabeg oral narratives, but with the antlers attached. Source: Shutterstock, image 2071031273

While the "Old People" (Elders of previous generations) were scared of the Wiindigog – who are generally described as powerful – the *akiwenziyag* also share stories where people would fight back. Some even challenged the beings in a fight of strength and cleverness. Basil Johnston (1982), for example, argues that the Wiindigo is loathsome in its habits, conduct, and manners, and enjoys challenging humans in a match. The Poplar River Oji-Cree Elder Walter Nanawin also shares that in the past, when the Wiindigog taunted

humans, humans would play hide and seek and eventually swim away from the location on a boat which the Wiindigo could not catch. According to this Elder, "the Wiindigoog could not swim or something... they were scared of the water" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 14, 2015). Walter explains that during his trapping days, he has seen many strange things and many Other-Than-Human Beings. He also claims to have heard the Wiindigo himself, chronicling that the creature makes his presence known through shrill screams in the forest, "it's to scare you, you know. To instill fear, is what I say" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 14, 2015). The Elder likewise tells me that the Wiindigo enjoys running through the trees, sometimes even bringing the trees down as he runs: all "those broken trees there, you see, that's the Wiindigo taking them down, you know" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 14, 2015). The Wiindigo also enjoys playing "taunting" games with humans, and he does this by stalking a solitary trapper or throwing things at him until the trapper leaves the territory.

While the Wiindigo is said to have a malignant character and to enjoy menacing humans, people are aware of his sinister personality and work together to resist him. Walter reveals that one time, around the 1930s, a very strong windstorm went through Poplar River. The people believed that a Wiindigo was heading their way from the South-East and members of the community all assembled in one dwelling so that "some shamans" could work to "alter his path" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 14, 2015)[5]. As is the case still, Poplar River is an isolated community in the boreal forest and without road access. As such, local people place high value on *widookodaadiwin*, "helping each other/mutual help", to ensure the well-being of the collective. To ensure the safety of community members and to prevent any disruption to *mino-bimaadiziwin*, "the good/balanced life", in this incident, the members used their collective powers to resist the aggressive attack of the Wiindigo. The fact that this particular moment of a group of men "working together" to alter the Wiindigo's path was unique and lived, illustrates that the community was responding to a real, rather than perceived, danger.

Because the Wiindigo is said to be made of ice, it is possible defeat the Wiindigo by clubbing it to death or by waiting until the creature thaws out or melts in the spring (Johnston 1995; Maude Kegg quoted in LeGarde Glover 2009). The flesh-eating Wiindigo can also be defeated by an individual "forcing boiling lard down its throat, thereby releasing the human at the core of ice" (Erdrich 1984). In other interpretations, it is only his heart that melts, and in others, the entire creature melts the moment the "ice on the river opens up. When the Crane Creek opens, [the creature] melts, you know" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 13, 2007). For Walter, knowing the type of Wiindigo (they are not all the same) as well as the circumstances surround-

5 It is interesting to note that this story is also shared with Hallowell by William Berens (Hallowell 2010).

ing the Wiindigo (how he came into being) is important; it is knowledge of these details that helps to effectively eliminate the creature. "Some have tried, you know", Walter shares one *dibaajimowin*, "but they don't do it right. They [didn't] know how to do it right, that time, you know. They [didn't] do it right" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 13, 2007). For those Wiindigog who do not melt with the spring, human interference is essential, otherwise the creatures will prevail and cause chaos for local families. The performative element of "dealing with" the Wiindigo illustrates not only the power and expertise of the *akiwenziyag*, but also the urgency of the situation. If undefeated, the Wiindigo continues its wrath; if conquered in the Spring, it returns the following year. Whether it shows up at another time or becomes embodied in another person or circumstance, the terrifying characteristic of the Wiindigo is that it is an ever-present and recurring threat in the boreal forest.

The Wiindigo as *Gikinoo'amaagoowin, "a Teaching"*

The Wiindigo intertwines Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree worldviews which include an overarching discourse on human nature merged with jurisprudence and cultural values around collective responsibility. This is particularly relevant to the Wiindigo's cannibalistic nature. Stories around this figure refer to his insatiable hunger for beaver, which causes him to turn humans into giant versions of the animals: the more beaver he eats, the more he craves the meat (Hallowell 2010: 143). In some narratives, his desire for meat is proportional to his size, so the more meat he eats, the more he grows and craves meat. In the boreal forest, when summer supplies diminish in late winter, meat and fish caught at moment's need are the only sources of food. But they are infrequent and not guaranteed. During this stage of winter, *wawashkeshiwag*, *atikak*, and *moozag*, deer, caribou, and moose, respectively, were prized, and men would often travel out of camp to seek them. Success in a hunt, however, requires a man to have a good relationship with the animals; only if the hunter is respectful and if he follows *Anishinaabediziwin*, the cultural "way of life", will the animals agree to give up their life to the hunter (Pawłowska-Mainville, forthcoming; Tanner 1979). The animals who do give themselves up to humans are not abundant, however. This feast-and-famine period of food shortage caused previous generations to go hungry for days or even weeks at a time. This reality expanded *dibaajomowinan*, stories about the existence of a "ravenous and frightening Wiindigo spirit" (LeGarde Grover 2009).

In the boreal forest of central Canada, the exposed rocks of the Canadian Shield descend into the numerous cold black lakes. The thick lushness of the tall spruce trees intermingled with *azatiwag*, the poplar trees, contours the shorelines and exemplifies the beauty of the "Canadian north." Yet the beauty of these trapline territories, the homeland of the local Indigenous people, can be deceiving. While the landscape is breathtaking, it is also dangerous.

Here, when the land-based mode of production fails, there is nothing to eat. Frances Valiquette, one of the local Elders in Poplar River, recounts that

Figure 4. The typical Canadian shield landscape around Asatiwisipe Aki with boulders descending into the iron-rich waters. Photo. A. Pawłowska-Mainville (2008)

"people fished in the summer and mostly trapped in the winter. [...] There was not much welfare, just the ones who were sick and under a doctor's care. It was a hard life [...] In the winter there wasn't too much to eat. [...] But it was a good life" (Frances Valiquette, notebooks)[6]. Frances acknowledges that livelihood and self-determination on the land brings a good life, but it is a demanding life, one that often includes *noondeskade*, the state of being short of energy that comes from food. Walter Nanawin concurs, illustrating his trapping days when he would travel across the land: "I'm talking about the land from here to Black River, where we used to travel to the trap lines. 'Cause the winter road there, from time immemorial that people have travelled to Manoomin River and Black River and Bear Head River. And that road, I have travelled that road, I've waded that up to my knees in cold freezing water in spring, going back and forth on native block, on the trap lines [to hunt and trap]. Even before the

6 In addition to the *dibaajimowinan,* in 2013 I received a set of notebooks compiled by one of the local Elders, Frances Valiquette. The notebooks, written between 1974–1981, summarized some of the changes in the community from 1950s onwards. Willie Bruce, Abel's Bruce's nephew from Polar River, dropped off these notebooks for me so I could "do something with them", thus some of the information from those years is present in (Pawłowska-Mainville, forthcoming) as well as in this article.

trap lines were made". Walter concludes by adding that "sometimes, we went hungry for weeks. That was the life, you know" (Walter Nanawin, personal communication, July 14, 2008).

In a community three hundred kilometers away from Poplar River, Richard Morrison, the Nigigoonsiminikaaning *mashkikinini*, medicine man, speaks to a similar reality. He shares that there were times when people had nothing to eat, and people went hungry for a long time; sometimes, people would die of starvation (Richard Morrison, personal communication, July 12, 2015). What these narratives tell us is that when the land no longer provides, the lifestyle gives rise to cannibalistic Wiindigog. In such extreme instances, when an individual is said to "grow fond of human meat" and poses a threat to others in his or her group, the people say that the Wiindigo has taken them over, or that they have "become" Wiindigo (Richard Morrison, personal communication, 2015). In this particular environment and with these specific circumstances, to ensure the well-being of the collective, the individual who has "gone Wiindigo" needs to be removed. And here is the key difference between the Wiindigo-Monster in popular culture films and the Indigenous version of the Wiindigo: in the latter version, the creature does not need elaborate features or embellishment of its appearance to make it scary. For the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree, by its very existence the Wiindigo is the scariest element of life imaginable: the cannibalistic spirit-human that comes into being in a bout of famine and decrepitude to devour members of its society.

When a person becomes Wiindigo, they become a threat to the safety of others and hence, must be dealt with. One such Oji-Cree Wiindigo story from this region became one of the most unique cases in Canadian jurisprudence. The story centers on Jack Fiddler, an *ogimaa*, "chief" or "leader," of his people at Sucker Lake in northern Manitoba, and a very powerful shaman (Fiddler, Stevens 1984). His father, Porcupine Standing Sideways, was said to appear into the community as a man who "lived before in this world" (quoted in Fiddler, Stevens 1984: 3). Both father and son were influential *mashkikiininiwag*, medicine men. By virtue of his ability to conjure animals, to cure, and to "relate to the animals of the forest," Jack Fiddler became a leader of his clan in the late 1800s (Fiddler, Stevens 1984: 4). The shaman was also known for his ability to defeat the Wiindigog. As was the common practice at the time, one day, a family member asked Jack Fiddler to kill a Wiindigo. Because of the foreseen violent ending, being asked to kill a Wiindigo was an important task, and not taken lightly. Jack Fiddler killed the family member who had become a Wiindigo. The shaman was subsequently accused of murder by the Canadian Mounted Police in 1906. From the standpoint of Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree customary law, the strangling of a woman who turned cannibal, that is to say, the Wiindigo, was not illegal; in fact, it was a "communally sanctioned defensive act", rationally justified in the circumstances (Hallowell 2010: 238). The murder and the trial were held in a Canadian court and, even though Jack Fiddler had no knowledge of Canadian law and did not speak a word of English, he was

found guilty of murder and put in prison. The case illustrates the imposition of Canadian law on the local people, who, up to that point, have been living under their own jurisprudence and customs. The case also symbolizes the lived fear and vulnerability of the people who, with Canada's removal of the peoples' ability to kill the Wiindigo, were left defenseless against it.

The court case exemplifies how local people's "scary stories" and practices of dealing with the Wiindigo were embodied in customary law and served as a form of social control used to ensure the well-being of community life. Those who have encountered a Wiindigo, and those who have "gone half-Windigo" (Erdrich 1988), meaning the individuals who started to crave (human) meat, as well as those who understand the gravity of the situation and the need for a legal system that deals with the Wiindigog. In *akiwenziyag* narratives, the Wiindigo is a combination of things weaved into one malevolent spirit. It devours the human mind, spirit, and body of its victim, while, simultaneously, obliging collective responsibility and action. It represents both the endurance and erosion of Anishinaabe principles and values around human self-interest (Johnston 1995). Through the principle of *ganawenindiwag*, "caring for each other", the Wiindigo also reinforces protocols around the sharing and distribution of food, reciprocity, and esteem for the land (Pawłowska-Mainville 2020, forthcoming). Since the northern boreal forest climate provides people with abundant but not assured resources and food, customary laws arising out of the land reflect unique social values and behaviours. In a time of food scarcity, when a person starts to crave meat – including human meat – it was common, as well as wise and responsible towards the collective, to kill the Wiindigo (or to sacrifice oneself by euthanasia or suicide, which frequently occurred as well). Life-and-death customs of the boreal forest societies mirror the landscape, and in times when the local food system falls short, the Wiindigo is given life though story and lived experience.

The Wiindigo must exist for people to exist. In its cannibalistic phase, a Wiindigo transforms fellow humans into food, thereby evoking local jurisprudence to deal with the threat to society. The Wiindigo is more than just the "scary monster" of the wilderness as conceptualized in Euro-Canadian popular culture. The creature is an important reminder about the reality of living in the boreal forest, and many *akiwenziyag* believe the Wiindigo still roams in the vast bush, forever hungry, never satisfied. Other community members, who consider the creature to be only a pagan myth that Christianity eliminated from social consciousness, equally respect the important significance it embodies. In these landscapes, the Wiindigo is a fact of existence that can happen to anyone. To survive here, it is critical to understand the protocols of respect and *akiiwi miijim*[7] food distribution, and it is equally urgent to have knowledge of *inaakonigewinan*, the necessary "laws" that ensure the survival of the collective.

7 The term literally means "land/dirt/earth food" but which is an identifiable Anishinaabe foodsystem or traditional boreal forest diet.

Although the feast-and-famine lifestyle is not as prevalent today, the Wiindigo continues to serve an important role in Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree worldviews. For example, the Wiindigo is used as a warning to children if they stray too far or stay out too late; pronouncing his name is likewise considered a bad omen. My petition to have an image of him drawn for this article was met with apprehension by some; it is for the fear of "summoning it", they said (John Mainville, personal communication, September 20, 2022).

Figure 5. John Mainville, *Humanity Fluctuates in Hunger Till It's Gone* (2022, used with permission). An original Anishinaabe rendition: the Wiindigo includes a human with deer rams but the "hunger" for human flesh is meant to represent drug additions that eat away a user

But there was interest in the request and excitement in the discussion, particularly when the conversations brought forth many dreams afterwards. Walter Nanawin, the Oji-Cree *akiwenzi,* especially enjoyed talking about the Wiindigo and other Other-Than-Human Beings. He confidently recounted the narratives around this figure, and, sharing one Wiindigo *dibaajimowin* with me over his kitchen table at *asatiwisipe aki* in 2010, he smiled at me in a mischie-

vous way. His confident voice and bold grin during the story of the Wiindigo breaking trees in the forest tells me that this fiery eighty-year-old man would still be able to take on a Wiindigo – and win.

Finally, it is important to point out that, while early anthropologists and scientists have relegated the Wiindigo to a psychosis – the state of insanity that ensues during famine – this position is perceived as limiting and even silly for some *akiwenziyag*. It is not simply "hunger" that creates psychosis; it is the Wiindigo that influences an individual's cannibalistic behavior. To Richard Morrison from Nigigoonsiminikaaning, the argument that the Wiindigo is simply a psychosis only explains how an individual became a Wiindigo (i.e., because of the starvation), but the assertion fails to explain why a particular individual at that specific time assumed the form of the Wiindigo. Given that the creature is both literal and figurative, Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree community members very rarely consider the Wiindigo as a psychosis; it is a *manidoo* that tempts and possesses under aggregate circumstances (i.e., a series of qualifiers in an individual's life) or it can be evoked to possess by fellow humans. For many community members, therefore, talking about the Wiindigo, even today, is a taboo. Many members are hesitant to say the creature's name and refuse to depict him in drawings; this fear is to avoid inviting the creature into one's mind and body – and to not bring it into existence. This is because they know from their Elders' stories that to vocalize its name is to tempt fate: becoming a Wiindigo or being devoured by one is an on-going fear in any society. Consequently, differing among families, regions, and cultures, many *akiwenziyag* still maintain that the Wiindigo can be "brought to life" anytime that the people are starving – for food, for self-determination, or for a return to *mino-bimaadiziwin*, "the good/balanced life".

Devouring Indigenous Presence

Because of its "exotic" nature and source, the Wiindigo has permeated into popular culture. In these representations, the Wiindigo is often understood and portrayed as the malevolent beast that comes out of the shadows to stalk, possess, and murder. They frequently feature innocent souls who happen to enter Wiindigo territory or overstep a supernatural boundary (such as breaking a specific taboo), to "invoke" the evil being into existence. Having awakened the malevolent Spirit, these individuals are then punished by it with dire consequences, as illustrated in the introduction. And while an Indigenous voice is occasionally added to provide a level of authenticity or indigeneity to an "Indian myth", these popular media Wiindigog stories and films are generally presented from the non-Indigenous, Euro-Canadian perspective.

The re-imagined Wiindigo illustrates the continuity of colonial practices of taking other entities and making them "monsters". In this case, the Wiindigo has been removed from its original culture-specific association and devoured by colonial discourse, became a Devil-like "Indigenous Evil Spirit" that hounds the (re)settlers. This characteristic is important as the notions of "evil" and "Devil"

do not exist in the Anishinaabe language or epistemology (Richard Morrison, personal communication, 2007). Even though the notion of *maji-*, "bad" or "negative consequence" is a part of Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree linguistic cosmos, the term "evil" as attached to the Wiindigo stems from Christianity. Due to the appended perspective, the Wiindigo is often re-imagined with Christian Devil-like features such as goat rams, hooves, and a half-human, half-goat bottom. This means that an outside value system contributes another layer of interpretation to the Wiindigo – and to its origins.

Since first contact, perceptions of Indigenous people in settler-imagination guided the European treatment of Indigenous communities and the subsequent relationship therewith. The initial amazement with the Indigenous way of life and customs quickly transitioned to a strategically negative view of the population so that "civilization" and "occupation" of the land would become more justifiable. Beginning with the notion that non-Christians cannot own the land, Indigenous people in the "New World" (which was very old to local populations) were classified as "wildermen" or "wild people", "savages" (noble or ignoble), and "pagans" (Dickason 1984; LaRocque 2010; Doxtator 1988). The physical appearance of North American Indigenous people led the way in shaping the way the 16th and 17th century English and French settlers behaved towards the locals and their way of life. Seeing the ostensibly naked people with little body hair and a skin colour "pulling towards red" (Amerigo Vespucci quoted in Dickason 1984: 10), the Europeans believed that the indigenous residents were "uncivilized" and strange – and depicted them to be almost monster-like in some drawings (LaRocque 2010; Dickason 1984).

The fascination with Indigenous livelihoods, particularly with the "free for all" hunting, trapping, and fishing economy led the early explorers to (wrongfully) assume that Indigenous people had no religion, markets, nor governments, and that they were living "according to nature" (Amerigo Vespucci quoted in Dickason 1984: 11). The subsistence economy of the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree, for example, contradicted the political economies of Europe: food "freely" harvested and redistributed according to local protocols represented a unique vision of subsistence. The culture-as-nature epistemology that argued for respecting Nature and being in a reciprocal relationship with it, challenged the European-imported Christian belief that humans dominate over Nature (Barton et al. 2022). Not able to identify or understand land-use and its accompanying resource management practices (such as *Anishinaabediziwin* and the practice of *asemaa*, putting down tobacco), ecological planning (such as burning, crop cycling, and aquiculture), and local food systems (such as *aki miijim*), early Europeans' myopic view interpreted Indigenous customary laws and spiritual/religious practices as evil, pagan, and monstrous, thus destined to be replaced by Christianity (Pawłowska-Mainville, forthcoming; Linklater et al. 2014). Consequently, Eurocentric thinking led to the enforcement of aggressive policies of disenfranchisement, land dispossession, and cultural genocide of Indigenous people in the boreal forest.

Figure 6. *Columbus Landing on Hispaniola* (engraving, 1594?). Spanish explorers represent the people they encountered in the "New" World as "primitive" and "savage".
Source: Wikimedia Commons

The land, too, mesmerized, and yet simultaneously terrified the Europeans. The "pristine" landscapes were interpreted in colonial ways that divided humans from Nature. Terms like "wilderness", "untouched" and "virgin land" re-positioned Nature as an entity to be dominated, justifying its exploitation, resource-extraction, and development by early colonists and Euro-Canadians. For the 16th and 17th century Christians in the Americas, "wilderness" was a potent symbol applied to the "moral chaos of the unregenerate and to the godly man's conception of life on earth" (Nash 1971: 1). Prior to (re)settlement, largely unmodified natural spaces of the North American continent served as an example of "wilderness" because the Europeans arriving to the New World considered it as such. Consequently, it was necessary to take control of and reorder the "frightful and obscene" Indigenous practices around Nature (Nash 1971: 7). To this day, North American "wilderness" continues to shape the imaginative and most mundane attitudes about Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations. Landscapes of the "frontier" articulate themselves systematically in terms of the absence and displacement of local peoples, only to replace their presence with "Indian lore".

As settlement of the Americas advanced and Indigenous populations were pushed to the margins, the combination of convenient imageries around Indigenous beliefs and "the wilderness" provided justification of colonialism. Subsequent contemporary popular culture productions amplified the "Indian" and "wilderness" horror tropes with themes of "Indian burial grounds", "Indian curses", and "evil shamans". Like the inherent characteristic of the Wiindigo, cannibalism "almost immediately became the appellation by which Amerindians were known in Europe", which re-presented Indigenous populations and their rituals as rooted in flesh-eating (Dickason 1984: 21). The merger of imagery and ideas helped popularize films like *The Shining* (1980), *Poltergeist* (1986), *The Lost Empire* (1984), and *Pet Sematary* (1983, 2019) and more recent films such as *Frostbiter* (1996), *Wendigo* (2001), *The Last Winter* (2006), *The Retreat* (2020), and *Antlers* (2020). In almost every film, the "scary" object is tied to an Indigenous presence or oral story, illustrating that since the beginning of colonialization, the scary monster in the wilderness who frightens the young (White) settler is not so much the Wiindigo, but rather "the Indian" and his existence.

The Wiindigo, like most similar motifs in films with "the Indian" trope, is conveniently represented as a horrifying figure: it occupies the landscape and devours "civilized society." What the Euro-Canadian Wiindigo represents is perhaps a personification of the "hellish" space – the space that nature and indigeneity represent and occupy. It is a Christian-infused understanding that "evil" exists in natural, unoccupied spaces and "demons" lurk in the shadows to devour the "innocent" frontiersmen. In that sense, the Wiindigo reflects a discourse of colonialism where the "civ[ilized]/sav[age]" dichotomy positions Indigenous populations as pagan nature-dwellers in opposition to the civilized settlers who arrive and control Nature (LaRocque 2010). Relying on the Wiindigo as a violent monster located in a forest emphasizes Eurocentric nuances that justify colonialism and civilization of "savage" Indigenous populations and their practices that both fascinate and repel (Taussig 1986).

The on-going existence of Indigenous people fighting for rights and land has been replaced with narratives of empty lands and Indian lore; these do not pose a threat to claims of Canadian sovereignty and legitimacy (Bordo 1992). By cannibalizing Indigenous presence and re-introducing it as "Indian lore", the viewer has a focal point from which to position disenfranchisement and displacement of Indigenous populations. Introducing the "missing" variable – "the myth of the Indian" – into the landscape enables popular culture films about the Wiindigo to place "Indians" as existing only through legends, cursed graveyards, and "myths of the savage" but not as self-determining and co-present populations fighting for territorial and resource management rights. The notion of wilderness filled with "wild" cannibals is central to the colonization process and exposes a deep-rooted European anxiety over enduring Indians who refuse to submit to their rule (Hämäläinen 2022). Euro-Canadian popular culture, therefore, reduced the culturally-important figure of the Wiindigo to a Scary

Monster, highlighting that, like Indigenous landscapes, popular culture representations of the Wiindigo are deeply political and nuanced in colonial legacy.

Today, Indigenous people are reclaiming their own stories through popular media, films, and books. Among others, Wiindigo stories are re-told and even reconceptualised to their original, albeit continually terrifying, importance. By reviving frightening *dibaajimowinan* about the Wiindigo, the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree offer popular culture the opportunity to learn about cultural values related to the boreal forest food systems as well as their very existence. The re-presentations of these stories by the Anishinnabeg and Oji-Cree offer new forms of self-determination and lived realities in a (post)colonial world.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to illustrate the Wiindigo and its significance to the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree in central Canada. While Wiindigo narratives differ across cultures, regions, and communities, the figure continues to be central to cultural and historical heritage of the Indigenous populations. With much of the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree cultural values "cannibalized", the Wiindigo has been absorbed into Euro-Canadian and North American popular culture and films. In conjunction with early representations of "the Indian" as "savages", popular culture representations of the Wiindigo limit the figure to a mere Scary Monster and inherent horror-film tropes, thereby decontextualizing Indigenous presence in North America. Even though the Wiindigo is indeed a dreadful figure that enjoys eating human flesh, his existence is paramount to the boreal forest Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree world views, values, and lived experiences.

As the Anishinaabeg shifted to a more settled way of life in the 20th century, Wiindigog narratives became reconstructed to expound upon the lived realities of colonization. The same fear used to describe the Wiindigo: of being chased, devoured, possessed (and fighting the possession) is now used to depict the "modern" Wiindigog, the colonial monster that today "kills" Indigenous people in different ways. While the "original" Wiindigo runs through the forest and takes over individuals to be devoured, the "modern" Wiindigo likewise cannibalizes the Indigenous world: it tears children from their families through the foster care system and it is embodied by the police who "get" young people like Neil Stonechild and take them on "starlight tours"[8]. This Wiindigo is causing environmental degradation in traditional territories, destruction of cultural knowledge transmission and language loss (Johnston 1995; Pawłowska-Mainville, forthcoming). Somewhere in between, there is also the terrifying Wiindigo-as-inter-generational trauma which arose from land dispossession,

8 "Starlight tours" refers to the practice of police officers taking young Indigenous men from the streets of the cities like Saskatoon and Regina, in the Canadian prairies, and driving them to the peripheries of the cities to walk home without their shoes. This was done usually in the middle winter when the temperatures often reached below –40°C.

unfulfilled treaty promises[9], and forced relocations[10]. This Wiindigo exhibits itself today though depression, anger, suicide, and challenges with parenting skills and addictions (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Wagamese 1997; Chrisjohn, Young, Maraun 2006; Morris 1991.) Policies like the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement of 1930, the Indian Act, and welfare programs which caused disproportionate experiences of ill-health, a shorter life expectancy, poverty, and food insecurity (Desmarais, Whitman 2013; Waldram, Herring, Young 1995; Shewell 2004) are also "creatures" that devour Indigenous youth. Because Indigenous people suffer from higher rates of diabetes, suicide, drug additions, and incarceration as well as foster care when compared to other Canadians, many *akiwenziyag* argue that the Wiindigo has been replaced by "modern" Wiindigog embodied by government officials, priests and nuns of the residential school systems, and contemporary social determinants of health. With this interpretation, the Wiindigo narratives remind us not only that all humans are capable of "devouring" fellow humans, but that they are also continually capable of justifying cannibalistic behavior. *Akiwenziyag dibaajimowinan* illustrate that the Wiindigo is a perpetual threat for their existence, but ultimately, in order to circumvent and subdue it, Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree living traditions must be (re)employed.

In conclusion, there are many faces to the Wiindigog. This cultural figure is an important character in many Indigenous oral stories because it teaches important values and ensures collective well-being. Although the Wiindigo has been re-imagined through the discourse of settler as well as popular cultural imagination and horror films as a terrifying "Indian" monster, the creature also serves as a fascinating personification of socio-political processes and human relations. Equally terrifying and educative, tied to colonization and self-determination, laws and murders, the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree figure of the Wiindigo, rather than be "evil", reminds people to respect the land, food, and each other.

For the Anishinaabeg and Oji-Cree *akiwenziyag,* the cannibalistic Wiindigo-spirit will always exist. The foundational element the Wiindigo, the idea that each one of us can figuratively and literally "devour" others if the conditions are right, still captures many imaginations and livelihoods. This is because the Wiindigo speaks to human nature and illustrates that in a time of intense conditions the worst thing that can happen to a society is precisely the Wiindigo.

9 Alexander Morris, the Treaty Commissioner working in this area, writes in his book outlining the process that a lot of Indigenous people complained about unfulfilled treaty promises as early as during the treaty signing.

10 A few scholars show the tragic consequences of relocations including Kulchyski, Tester 1994; Bussidor, Bilgen-Reinart 1997; Wikler 2019.

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From Stories to Behaviour, the Ebb and Flow of Fears and Panics: Discussion of the Needle-Spiking Epidemic Scares of 2021–2022*

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ABSTRACT: The needle-spiking scares in the UK and France are discussed and contextualized through comparison with former outbreaks linked to social fears. The contradictions of our attitudes towards psychoactive drugs, both coveted and feared, are outlined and lead to an analysis of the scares in a folkloric perspective that centers on the notion of ostensive action.

KEYWORDS: needle attacks, psychoactive drugs, scare stories, urban maniacs, violence towards women

Introduction

This paper presents and interprets recent panics that have surged in Autumn 2021 in the UK and from there spread to Belgium, France, and other countries of Europe in the early 2022. These panics are put in context, through comparisons with former outbreaks linked to societal fears, and analyzed. The focus will be on vernacular narratives, which are often expressed through digital media, but which also inspire specific ostensive behaviour. Ostension, as the term is often used by urban legends analysts, designates "imitation in real life of the script of a legend" (Campion-Vincent, Renard 2002: 12)[1].

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1 Translated by the author as are all further non-English quotations.

Needle-Spiking Epidemic Scares 2021–2022

In its modern form of concern about "the date rape drugs", drink spiking has been reported since the 1990s. However, while it is a danger everyone, especially young students accessing universities, knows about, it is a rare – and largely underreported – offence, seldom prosecuted. From 2015 until 2019 the UK police forces indicated 2840 victims of drink spiking, over 72% of them women[2].

After the lockdowns enforced in the UK because of the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020, night clubs reopened during the summer of 2021. Complaints were soon discussed in the media and presented to the police. They referred to disturbing new events that mixed drink spiking and needle attacks. Student unions, and feminist personalities – often former victims who had set-up self help groups – talked to the media, organized petitions and demonstrations, linked with calls for a boycott of nightclubs, which met with great success, mainly in the Northern cities of the UK such as Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham, starting on 23rd October 2021.

The demonstrations were major events, and entailed numerous press article and TV news, from their preparation to their occurrences:

> Nottinghamshire Police are investigating multiple reports of young women being spiked physically by needle injection. Yesterday the home secretary, Priti Patel, requested an urgent update from police chiefs on spiking by needle injection, and the National Crime Agency has become involved. A petition calling for compulsory searches on entry to nightclubs has been signed by 100 000 people. Universities are holding boycotts of nightclubs next week on Wednesday [27th] in Bristol, Brighton, Nottingham, Bournemouth, Belfast and Southampton, and on Thursday in Edinburgh, Swansea, Stirling, Aberdeen and Newcastle under the banner Girls Night In (Thomson 2021).

> Huge crowds of people across the UK took to the streets on Wednesday night, boycotting nightclubs in protests against a sharp rise in spiking cases. There were demonstrations in more than 40 university towns and cities, from St Andrews in Scotland to Brighton on the south coast of England, united by a common fury (Pidd 2021).

Minor events made headlines because they were linked to the subject. "Police in Sheffield are investigating three reports of young women being spiked with needles last weekend, warning those responsible that they are endangering the lives of innocent people and face long jail terms" (Brown 2021). Official police figures of needle-spiking in 2022 as quoted by the BBC reporter Datshiane

2 BBC Radio 5 (2021, November 27). *I collapsed in the street after drink spiking*. BBC News: England & Wales 2650 incidents, women 71,6%; Scotland 137 incidents, women 81,8%; Northern Ireland 53 incidents, women 67,9% (the figures quote UK Police forces).

Navanayagam are, however, impressive: "The National Police Chiefs Council told us that from September to January, 1382 suspected cases of needle-spiking were reported to police in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland" (BBC Radio 4 2022).

The subject was larger than the specific offenses and expanded to all attacks on women, fueled by the conflictual climate that had risen following the Sarah Everard murder. The 3rd March 2021 murder of this 28-years-old professional had raised strong emotions when it was announced that her killer was a serving Metropolitan police officer who kidnapped her through a fake arrest. The widely publicized trial took place in September 2021 and the murderer received the exceptionally severe term of prison for life sentence. This dramatic case reinforced the campaign of feminist organizations for the inclusion of misogyny as a category of hate crimes; however, the campaign received a stern refusal from the conservative government. The advice to women "do not go out alone" or "stay home" given by the police stirred some indignation that was expressed in articles "Staying home lets the sleazy spikers win" (Turner 2021) and "But why should young women be forced to stay tucked up at home, their freedoms curtailed?" (Thomson 2021).

The authorities reacted through setting-up a Parliamentary Enquiry Committee in early December 2021. It set its actions "[a]s part of the Committee's overreaching work into violence against women and girls" and stated its objectives "the Committee wishes to explore the incidence of spiking at nightclubs and pubs, festivals and private house parties" (Home Affairs Committee 2022a). The Committee launched a call to evidence and published 46 answers received, held three oral evidence sessions whose transcripts are available on-line and published its final report 26th April 2022 (Home Affairs Committee 2022a). The report contained many recommendations to the authorities who were to be more watchful, but it insisted on the problem's elusiveness:

> No-one knows how prevalent spiking is, whether by drink, drug or needle, and no-one knows what causes perpetrators to do it; anecdotal evidence suggests the practice is widespread and dangerous, and that many people, particularly young, particularly women, are affected by it and are afraid they will be spiked on evenings out. An absence of accurate data makes it impossible, however, to judge accurately just how widespread, how dangerous spiking is. Policy initiatives to reduce both spiking and the fear of it cannot be well-founded or well-targeted without reliable evidence (Home Affairs Committee 2022b: 39).

No guilty parties were arrested and the series remained unexplained. The government's response was due 26th June 2022.

In the numerous documents published by the Committee, as well as in the opinion of experts given to the press, it appears that several doubted, not the occurrence of the needle offenses but their potential motivations and purposes.

We'll come back to this important subject later; here is an example drawn from a fact-checking website:

> Experts seem to agree that while it is plausible that spiking by injection could be carried out by an individual or very small group, it's very unlikely that it's being easily replicated on a wider scale. Mr. Slaughter [a senior forensic toxicologist at Analytical Services International, which provides toxicological services], said: "If someone is jabbed with a syringe then their reflex action is going to be to move away within a second or two. The opportunity for someone to actually inject enough drug from that syringe to have the effect, I would think, is fairly low. I'm not saying it's absolutely impossible, I'm just saying, in my opinion, it's unlikely" (Turnidge 2021).

Within this article's limited space we have not tried to list all cases entailing demonstrations and protests through Europe, but have chosen to focus on the cases in the UK, Belgium and France.

In French-speaking Belgium, an Instagram page #Expose your bar #BalancetonBar – the name was chosen in reference to an initiative linked to the #MeToo movement #Expose your pig #BalancetonPorc – was launched in early October 2021. The denouncers were anonymized, but the bars – mainly around Brussels and catering to a student clientele – named:

> Tongues are wagging in the nightlife world. Since 10 October, testimonies reporting sexual assaults and rapes in bars and nightclubs have multiplied on social networks under the hashtag #ExposeYourBar, in reference to the free speech movement #ExposeYourPig. The taking of drugs without the victims' knowledge is regularly incriminated (Fillon 2021).

As in the UK the militants speaking to the press denounced the caution advised to, and even imposed on, women:

> Many of them point to a paradox: it is always the girls who are asked to be careful when they go out, and not the boys to behave. [...] And that, as Laura says, is not normal. "Since we are little, we are told that we are the problem, that we are a source of desire and that it is up to us to adapt ourselves to fight against it. When in fact the problem has to be taken in the other direction and it's high time to question men about why you rape us, why you assault us and why you consider us to be objects", she points out (Heinderyckx 2021).

A demonstration that boasted 1 300 participants was organized in Brussels on the 14th October. Later, calls to boycott of night-clubs were launched in the middle of November and demonstrations were noted in other Belgian French-

speaking cities, such as Liège. Several French feminists followed closely the Belgian initiative that influenced the neighboring country.

In France the night-clubs, reopened briefly in the summer of 2021, had been closed from early December and reopened on 7th February 2022. Complaints of "spiking by injection" were reported soon and a judicial inquiry was opened in the region of Nantes (West, Population 318 808) with a press conference from the *procureur,* state attorney (Bazylak 2022; Pagneux 2022). The cases concerned 23 victims, under 20 years of age, and the state attorney stressed their numerous uncertainties:

> The place of the injection differs according to the victims – twenty women and three men aged between 18 and 20 years: arm, forearm, thigh, buttock, shoulder, hip. "But it is impossible to know what the victims were pricked with, a syringe or any other object" the state attorney said. Neither the medical examinations, nor the testimonies or the study of the video surveillance have made it possible to know. The only certainty is that the tool is strong enough to penetrate clothing sometimes (Pagneux 2022).

Complaints soon appeared in other regions. When, by the end of April, the state attorney of Grenoble (South East, Alps, Population 533 773) gave a press conference, there were more inquiries and the cases in Nantes were more numerous:

> There are fifteen investigations in Rennes, others in Hérault, Isère, Haute-Garonne, Dordogne or Loire-Atlantique. The Paris state attorney's office said that six investigations have opened since last week following complaints. In Nantes, 45 facts have been brought to the police since mid-February (La Croix 2022).

The state attorney of Béziers (South West, Population 82 000) also spoke to the press, explaining that most toxicological analyses were negative (Dorison, Pavan, Soullier 2022). By mid-May, 130 judicial inquiries had been opened, and 250 complaints were processed by police forces:

> The case of the notorious nightclub injections has only just begun. In France, 130 investigations are now underway after men and women believe they were injected without their knowledge in nightclubs. Victims have suffered dizziness and nausea afterwards (Moreno 2022).

> In total, 250 people reported to the police saying they had been bitten and "only one tested positive for GHB", according to a national report obtained by AFP from a police source in Paris (Le Point 2022).

While no perpetrators were found, the evidence of the reality of the pricks (*piqures*) was everywhere, declared the judicial authorities:

> The investigators are confronted with a major difficulty because GHB disappears in the body in just a few hours. Nevertheless, the state attorney maintains that it is not a question of a "collective psychosis" because the victims do show traces of injections (Moreno 2022).

The figure of 250 complaints is small compared to the British complaints of more than 1300. Still, it met with an important echo, especially in the regional French press. Thus on 25th May 2022, the Google query "night-club pricking" (*piqûres boite de nuit*) in actu.fr a network of the regional press, gives some 103 000 results.

We will now turn towards the analyses of components of these narratives of fear – often well-attested in former tradition. We will examine in succession the notion of "urban maniacs" and scare stories of random needle attacks, followed by a discussion of contradictory attitudes towards psychoactive drugs and alcohol in society.

Urban Maniacs, and Scare Stories of Random Needle Attacks

The term "urban maniacs" was coined by Michael Goss in 1990 when he developed his 1987 study *The Halifax Slasher* into an article (Goss 1990). That short-lived panic in a Yorkshire town around a mystery assailant, or assailants, said to slash female victims, 16th November-2nd December 1938, had been ended by Scotland Yard's conclusion of "mass hysteria" and self-inflicted wounds (the fake victims were prosecuted). Goss's studies showed that there was more than this dismissive statement to be made of the panic. First he developed the notion of a "flap", very close to that of moral panic introduced in 1972 by Stanley Cohen (Cohen 1972):

> A flap is an unusual, dramatic burst of excitement centered upon some anomalous and possibly threatening report that generates others of the same variety. It is characterized by intense public and media excitement during which a number of separate incidents become collated into a series or cycle, the whole being more impressive (convincing, credible) than any of the parts. [...] A flap is dominated, and in some senses fueled, by an escalation characteristic. [...] Gradually, there is a tendency for later reports to become more violent and more disturbing than the ones that preceded them. [...] The emergence of vigilante groups is a key phase in any flap. [...] Then, just as the flap seems to have reached a point where anarchy, and irreversible lawlessness appear inescapable, the whole thing subsides (Goss 1990: 99–100).

Goss also discussed how the slasher – a collective creation – benefited its creators:

> Why should we want to terrify ourselves through these distorted, part-imagined, larger-than-life apparitions? Because the Maniac is a stimulant, suddenly, thanks to him, life becomes unpredictable, more urgent [...]. The Halifax slasher was a mass-promotion. He was a cure for unacknowledged boredom and could be used in a number of ways. For once everyone might become a detective [...] an important, active personality making a vital contribution to the community (Goss 1987: 38–39).

Allowing indirect protest against the neglected state of the town was an important factor that made the collective creation gratifying:

> The mystery assailant's multi-purposes included an outlet for protest and unrest. Urban problems regarded as inevitable or completely disregarded – the lack of adequate street lighting, the sprawl and decay of some parts of town – abruptly became critical issues because the Slasher relied on them for his success (Goss 1987: 39–40).

In the 1970s–1990s the Fortean researchers, often amateurs not linked to the academia, played a pioneer role in the growth of relativism through their attacks of the era's academic and institutional certainties.

The adjective Fortean designates people and perceptions of occurrences which claim a link to Charles Fort (1874–1932), an eccentric intellectual who spent his life in the great public libraries of New York and London, collecting in newspapers and memoirs oddities that did not fit in with the approved consensus of these years, i.e. domination of scientific rationality.

Urban maniacs, who act violently and unpredictably without precise reasons are by no means a recent phenomenon. London and Paris have had their "slashers" or rather "prickers" (*piqueurs*) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Both series raised emotions and were concluded by naming and punishing the guilty parties, whose scapegoating ended the flap.

In London, we will follow the retelling of the flap by Michael Goss:

> From May 1788 to April 1790 the Monster outraged the city with a series of minor yet insulting attacks upon women which usually took the form of his waylaying them on their doorsteps and stabbing their thighs and buttocks. [...] A reward of £50 (later £70) was offered and the residents of St Pancras formed an association "to nightly patrol the streets from half hour before sunset till seven at night for public safety" [...] In retrospect it seems doubtful that Williams Renwick was the Monster or only one of a large number of men who habitually pestered women on the London streets – for here again the Monster was not so much

> a person as a symbol for a particular form of contemporary violence. The case against him was not strong. [...] However he appeared to fit all the requirements of the man the authorities were looking for and after a well-attended trial. [...] Williams was sent to Newgate for six years (Goss 1987: 42).

In Paris, the historian Emmanuel Fureix recently analyzed a well-known occurrence that took place in the early years of the restoration of the monarchy in France:

> Between August and December 1819 in Paris, almost four hundred women – and a few men – reported having been subjected to a new form of violence: being pricked while in the public space by a stylus, needle, hole punch, or cane fitted with a spike. Both at night and during the day, men were attacking innocent people – especially girls – to the point of drawing blood by pricking their buttocks and thighs, and sometimes their breasts, hands, or arms (Fureix 2013: 31).

A panic developed by the end of 1819:

> From November and over the course of December 1819 such stories proliferated, became public, and turned into rumours that sometimes exaggerated the intensity and sophistication of the violence suffered, to the point that it came to include death and poisoning. The acts themselves became more widespread in the weeks and months that followed, as though by mimetic contagion, reaching various provincial cities (Lyon, Bordeaux, Marseille, Calais, Bayonne, Soissons, Lille, Arras, Amiens, and so forth), and even abroad (Brussels and then Augsburg). A new – nonjudicial – criminal category was penned by contemporaries: *piqueurs* (prickers). This pathology became indissolubly real and imaginary, and was given coverage by a press that was rapidly expanding. [...]. This hybrid phenomenon, consisting of human-interest stories that had sexual overtones, rumours, and political discourses that overlaid one another, gradually faded away (Fureix 2013: 31–32).

The Paris epidemic was widely commented upon by the press and these palatable morsels are still available in the 21st century through entries in human interest stories, books and websites that relay popular anthologies of funny, strange or weird happenings of the past (La France pittoresque 2018). Thus, the 2018 entry of the website *La France Pittoresque* on the "Parisian Prickers" indicates its source as the 1897 "Museum of conversation" (*Le Musée de la conversation*).

Emmanuel Fureix remarks that in 1819–1820, it was the press – and the conversations and rumours that the press conveyed – that discussed the sexual

aspects of the act of pricking. It would be much later that von Krafft-Ebing and Paul Garnier developed the notion of sadofetishist practices as a distinct category of the psychopathology of sexuality (von Krafft-Ebing 1892; Garnier 1900). As fear swept Paris in December 1819 and an article of "La Gazette de France" published on 11 December 1819 was titled *Invisible Vampires,* the memory of the Marquis de Sade – his 1814 death in the Charenton asylum was only a few years away – evocated the pre-revolutionary character of the lecherous, wealthy and evil noble:

> A man of quality who ended his days at Bicêtre[3] revealed by his conduct and his writings the level of atrocity and depravity to which the human heart was susceptible of sinking. Therefore, during the earliest news of the bloody attacks that had victimized some young women, there was no absence of attributing the cause to the excessive immorality of some new Marquis de Sade (Fureix 2013: 40).

Through articles, cartoons and street songs, a construction and commodification of the event rapidly took place. The cartoons, in bawdy modes, played on sexual innuendoes:, thus a cartoon entitled *Result of a prick*, showed a very pregnant girl, with her former slim profile targeted by a lurking syringe and needle in the background. The press also made fun of the remedies suggested by pharmacists or metallurgists, whose drawing showed hat-wearing young women trying metal protections.

New episodes of mystery assailants occurred. In his 1987 study Michael Goss lists several perpetrators who had never been caught: "Jack the Cutter", who stabbed pedestrians with a sharp knife in Chicago around 1906; the "Connecticut Jabber" between 1925 and 1927, 26 attacks that occurred every three months; the "Mad Gasser" of Botetourt County (Virginia, US) from 22nd December 1933 till February 1934; and finally in 1944, the "Mad Gasser" of Mattoon, Illinois (Goss 1987: 42–43). The Mattoon case is the best-known as the dismissive 1945 article of Donald M Johnson (Johnson 1945)[4] has been often challenged by anomalists and Forteans, from Jerome Clark to Robert Bartholomew (Clark 1993). This author, whom we will encounter in his dismissal of the needle-spiking attacks in nightclubs, our main subject, wrote at length about the incident (Ladendorf, Bartholomew 2002; Bartholomew, Victor 2004; Evans, Bartholomew 2009).

Other Urban phantoms should also be quoted. In his study of the complex history of one of these characters, Spring Man (Janeček 2022) – first noted in 19th century England as the loosely defined phantom Spring Heeled Jack, before he was turned into a Czech hero fighting Nazi invaders by popular culture and

3 The journalist's indication is erroneous. While Sade had stayed for a limited period in this general asylum, he entered the Charenton asylum for mental cases and died there.

4 The article became a classic text reprinted in *readers*, that is, text books offered to students of social psychology in the 1950s.

propaganda. Petr Janeček mentions several occurrences of attacks with razors, sometimes razor gloves, by the creature. The creation of scary phantoms is still going on: Slenderman, the latest scary collective creation, was born on the internet:

> There are of course all sorts of other strange creatures, jinns and boggarts, or at least the latter's Massachusetts cousins the Pukwudgies, along with their colleagues the Shadow People, the grinning men with their impossibly wide grins, Mad Gassers, our old friend Springheel Jack and the new kid on the block, Slenderman (Rogerson 2016).

Ascribed to deranged characters, accusations of needle-tampering, often linked to HIV have been with us for more than twenty years. Jan Brunvand's *Encyclopedias of Urban Legends* duly quotes them (Brunvand 2012).

For brevity's sake we will follow the offhand retelling of these "needle attacks" on the fact-checking and legend-spotting Snopes website. Snopes' remark in discussing the closely related "AIDS Mary" legend is worth quoting as it touches on an important factor in the surge and proliferation of such stories: "The legend speaks to our fears; as such, it's larger than life, complete with shocking messages of impending death callously delivered" (Mikkelson 2000). In these accusations of random needle attacks, ostensive behaviour is often noted. Thus, in discussing the false claim that "Madmen are injecting HIV-infected blood into unsuspecting moviegoers and random young people dancing in bars or at raves" (Mikkelson et al. 1998), revived in 2018 but also attested long ago, Snopes lists several occurrences of online warnings, often complete with fake authority sources, for example:

> A few weeks ago in a movie theater in Melbourne a person sat on something that was poking out of one of the seats. When she got up to see what it was she found a needle sticking out of the seat with a note attached saying... "You have just been infected by HIV". The Disease Control Centre in Melbourne reports many similar incidents have occurred in many other Australian cities recently. All tested needles ARE HIV Positive (Mikkelson et al. 1998).

These stories are firmly dismissed:

> In all the time since this rumor's initial appearance time we've turned up no confirmed AIDS-laden needle attacks on moviegoers have been reported in Bombay, Hawaii, Dallas, Paris, or anywhere else in the world (Mikkelson et al. 1998).

Snopes also refers to a 1989 New York City series of incidents, which was designated as ostension by Bill Ellis in its day:

> Keep in mind that although there have at various times been random attacks with needles, none have resulted in infection being passed to victims. That part is myth. Now for the truth of it: For a few weeks in the fall of 1989, a group of Black teenagers (mostly girls) scared the pants off the denizens of New York City by running about jabbing pins into the necks of 41 random white females. Media coverage escalated the general public's fears as it was repeatedly stated the pins were tainted with AIDS. Within a week the kids responsible were found and arrested, and it was at that time police discovered there was no basis to the reports of the AIDS virus being part of these attacks. The hooligans responsible admitted it was just a fun game to them, run up to a white woman, stick her with a pin, see her reaction, then run off. Possibly inspired by the 1989 panic in New York City, for three weeks in 1990 a Black man terrorized white and hispanic [sic] women in that city by hitting them in the legs and buttocks with dart-like missiles fired from a homemade blowgun. More than 50 women were hit in this fashion before the man responsible was caught (Mikkelson et al. 1998).

Snopes also notes a variant involving an activity that targeted service stations customers, which was said to come from a local police officer:

> My name is Captain Abraham Sands of the Jacksonville, Florida Police Department. I have been asked by state and local authorities to write this email in order to get the word out to car drivers of a very dangerous prank that is occurring in numerous states. Some person or persons have been affixing hypodermic needles to the underside of gas pump handles. These needles appear to be infected with HIV positive blood. In the Jacksonville area alone there have been 17 cases of people being stuck by these needles over the past five months. We have verified reports of at least 12 others in various states around the country (Snopes Staff 2000).

Having inspected the claims published in the press, and that had reappeared 17 years later, Snopes firmly dismisses the hoax:

> Although there have been a few isolated reports of copycat pranksters leaving needles in public places (including gas pumps, such as an incident in May 2017) in the wake of this hoax, none of those incidents has involved a needle bearing any traces of HIV. No matter how it is reworded, the "Captain Abraham Sands" message is naught but another hoax dreamed up by someone intent upon enjoying the sight of people thrown into a panic over nothing (Snopes Staff 2000).

From urban maniacs and flaps to vivid examples of (false) needle attacks, we have thus reviewed a major component of the stories and panics of 2021–2022.

Contradictory Attitudes towards Psychoactive Drugs and Alcohol

From the 19th century, the progress of chemistry led to the creation of new powerful synthetic drugs. In her 2016 book on the subject, the sociologist and historian Pamela Donovan focuses on the early uses of chloral hydrate, a sedative discovered in 1832, widely used since 1869 – in asylums and as private medicine, mainly for anxious upper-class women (Donovan 2016: 3). The substance's misuse was denounced and it was nicknamed the knockout drop, a weapon for thieves and seducers (Donovan 2016: 18). Donovan also discusses the uses of anesthetics such as ether and chloroform, focusing on the fear of chloroform that surged in the popular press and among the general public with the explosion of the White Slavery legends in the late 19th century (Campion-Vincent 2005), mainly the supposed abductions of young virgins into enforced prostitution through chloroform that could be effective if only breathed (while chloral hydrate had to be ingested).

> This fear of predatory chloroform seemed to be wholly limited to the popular press and its readers—medical men were in fact extremely defensive about even the possibility that this prized breakthrough in medicine could be misused this way. [...] Press and popular fiction saw chloroform as easily administered and effective in producing instant unconsciousness (Donovan 2016: 29).

Unfortunately, it is impossible to fully present Donovan's fine and perceptive book within this article. One of its important points concerns the similarities she underlines in the evolving reputation of the new synthetic psychoactive drugs from the 19th to the 21st centuries, "where techno-wonder is supplanted by fear of misuse" and in consequence tales of "drugging, drink spiking and forced intoxication" surge (Donovan 2016: 18). With the development of individualism in the 1960s and the "newly minted expectation that we should also be ourselves [...] a task considerably more angst-ridden than simply being able or being good", the era of "general-audience psychopharmacology" was born and the new miracle-pills, starting in the 1970s with Methaqualone (Miltown, Equanil) became widely used (Donovan 2016: 91–92). However, after the initial celebration of Miltown, the new miracle drugs were used but not openly discussed:

> There is widespread adoption but little open celebration. Simply put, we do not talk about it. Once the medical model of anxiety and acute stress became hegemonic, in the 1980s, it privatized worry about Worry (Donovan 2016: 95).

In the 1990s a new narrative emerged in the United States concerning the dangers of date-rape drugs; it focused on "The Big Three: Flunitrazepam (Rohypnol, »Roofies«), GHB, and Ketamine" (Donovan 2016: 144). This coincided with widespread denunciation of "the seemingly reckless, narcissistic, and

out-of-control behavior of America's youth" (Weiss, Colyer 2010: 358), and the development of *raves,* festive all-night events where the consumption of drugs "known for provoking a rapid and dramatic high" was widespread (Weiss, Colyer 2010: 359).

Sociologists Weiss and Colyer first reviewed the literature in 2010 and pointed out that:

> Most forensic researchers agree that a collective (lack of) empirical evidence suggests that the problem of surreptitious drugging is not nearly as common as most people think. [...] In fact, forensic studies tend to conclude that victims' voluntary drinking and drug use is much more likely a factor in facilitating sexual assault than surreptitious drugging (Weiss, Colyer 2010: 352).

They defined the phenomenon as a "protected narrative" that "persists in part because it has been institutionalized as a key component of many anti-rape and safety campaigns" (Weiss, Colyer 2010: 365).

Later, in 2018, judging that "drink-spiking is broadly perceived in the contemporary culture to be a problem even as it is much less commonly experienced", Colyer and Weiss (2018: 11) reviewed important academic literature on the subject. The opposing sides consist in the risk mitigation school which accepts that "predatory drugging is a concrete threat to public safety and warrants particular empirical attention" and the social constructivists who "argue that outsize concern or fear of drug-facilitated sexual assault at college is little more than an institutionalized or protected narrative embedded in popular culture" (Colyer, Weiss 2018: 13–14). They propose that the narrative's persistence should be understood by considering its context: the ambiguities and uncertainties of the university students' party scene where alcohol and drugs are common. The drink spiking narrative offers an unambiguous frame that shifts the blame from the victim and "is kept alive in drinking contexts as a shared and interpretive frame for making sense" (Colyer, Weiss 2018: 18).

These academic studies are sharp and analytical. However, they appear to the outside observer (i.e. the author), as discussing almost exclusively the situation in three English-speaking countries: the US, the UK and Australia. Three countries and one subgroup: university students who have access to independence and often live their first experience away from home. This parochialism leads to ignoring the drink spiking variations in different social settings, as the date-rape drugs narrative has spread to more European countries, as we shall see when we resume the analysis of the ongoing French scare.

Official agencies unanimously warn about the dangers of psychoactive drugs and fight for more severe legislation against these. However, psychoactive drugs are very present in society. "Prescribed to the anxious and restless middle class" new psychoactive drugs that appear are widely available and "quite easy to get to divert for one's own recreational or self-medicating use, but

also potentially to dose someone else with" (Donovan 2016: 119). They are also widely used for recreational purposes, especially in youth culture. In 2022 the wild raves of the early 1990s have been institutionalized into festivals favorably presented in the media. Authorities are warned and remain watchful: however. it is well-known that being high is a coveted state during these events, and all sorts of means are used to attain this goal. These simultaneous attitudes of rejection and of acceptance, craving, even fascination, towards psychoactive drugs are in contradiction with each other. As Claude Lévi-Strauss famously remarked "The purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" through mediating symbol chains (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 443). Myths do surge around the subject of psychoactive drugs and their misuse.

Analysis of the Needle-Spiking Epidemic Scares in the UK and in France

In the UK the Press has stopped mentioning the incidents after the Spiking Committee's report from late April 2022, as described earlier. It seems the British Government has not yet responded to the report.

In France, where the incidents started 4 months later, in February 2022, the situation is so evolutive in late June (the time of this writing) that a full description or prediction as to its outcome is impossible. Figures concerning the night club needle-spiking evolve at a dazzling rhythm.

The first widely publicised arrest of a supposed perpetrator occurred on 3rd June 2022. The arrest was during a festive event on the Mediterranean beach Le Mourillon in the city of Toulon: the recording of a song for a TV show that had drawn an audience of 15 000 people. Aged 20, this undocumented Tunisian dismissed the accusations and no syringe was found on him. Two accusing female witnesses said they had seen him with a syringe trying to attack people and the third witness, a female security agent claimed he had pricked her. The charges were fairly weak; however, this 20-years-old had been sentenced in 2020 for violent acts on his partner and was charged and provisionally jailed (Gonzalès 2022). A few days later, some 30 complaints were registered around this beach concert (Bonnin 2022).

The scare had been growing since May and the 250 police complaints noted then swelled. On 9th June the police indicated that 360 additional complaints had been filed, while the victims were said to be 400. On 12th June the Sunday newspaper "Journal du Dimanche" on a whole page titled a dramatic: *Piqûres: la peur de l'été* (Pricks: the fear of the summer). The article's tone was fairly quiet and factual; it quoted the judicial, health and police authorities who unanimously declared that no "connected facts" had been discovered and that it seemed all this was a "sick fad". The 3rd June arrest was mentioned. As to figures, "on 9th June, 461 victims had officially been counted by police and *gendarmerie* who have registered 381 complaints".

Then on 17th June the title *1098 victimes de piqûres 'sauvages': ce que révèle le document interne de la police* (1098 victims of "wild" pricks: what an internal police document reveals) appeared on a half-page in the conservative *Figaro*.

This article mentioned "an exponential growth with 808 police complaints". As to perpetrators, the police declared to have arrested, and released as they were cleared, five suspects, but the arrest of 3rd June was not mentioned. The regional press kept track of these new developments. On 19th June 2022 the same query as on 25th May gave 474 000 results, which is 371 000 more in 25 days, less than a month. We will come back to this disproportionality (103 000 mentions for 250 complaints, 474 000 for 808 complaints), a clear indication of panic, in the analysis of this collective scare.

This summer of 2022, after the long pause due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the media welcome even the most extreme festivals. Thus, in France, the return of Hellfest, a festival specializing in hard rock and dark metal since 2006 in Clisson (a western town close to Nantes), is hailed in very favorable articles. This Hellfest is planned to be huge, 350 bands, 420 000 paying participants, two week-ends plus a whole week. It was the festival's organizers who reminded the journalists, almost with a chuckle, it seems, of the past controversy of 2010, when right-wing politicians accused the dark metal musicians of authentic satanism – there is no denying that these musicians do use satanic emblems and symbols; however, they generally do not preach satanic beliefs. The contradictions we have outlined earlier in the attitudes towards psychoactive drugs, gateway both to desired high spirits and feared bad trips, are very present in France this summer of 2022.

A comparison of the scares in the UK and France indicates several specific French features. In both countries the authorities are strongly involved. However, there are practically no politicians that give statements or comment in France when they were very present in the UK (but, as has been discussed, in the UK a Parliamentary Committee was put in charge by the Interior Minister). French comments are voiced by the three types of authorities involved in the cases: a) judicial: French state attorneys give press conferences when their English counterparts remained silent; b) police, c) health authorities who speak to the media about equally in the two countries. While female victims are dominant in both countries, the student population seems less concerned in France. Some interviews concern women over 40 frequenting night clubs (Thierry 2022). The fact that universities are less residential in France than in the UK, probably combined with the media's attitudes and reports, centered on the nightclubs and remaining unspecific about the victims' social status perhaps accounts for this difference. Indignant statements linking the incidents to the plight of women targeted by masculine lust and violence, very present in the UK, hardly exist in France.

Another example of nation-wide panic, a scare concerning horses' mutilations swept France all year 2020. A supposed random epidemic, generally concerning animals in open-air dwellings, had started in early 2020, quickly stirred public indignation and perplexed the public. The most extreme hypotheses: evil cults, Satanists, stupid challenges, pure sadism were presented to explain a phenomenon that swelled to almost 500 cases (Campion 2020).

The authorities' response was important: setting up a centralised task-force and analysis of the cases by teams of specialists. The report of the task-force was an adamant dismissal. Only 84 cases out of 500 corresponded to a human intervention, while the others were overinterpretations of "normal" wounds of horses in outside accommodations, and of ignorance of the wounds inflicted by animal predators feeding on dead carcasses (Peychieras 2020). This ended the flap. The author's experience with the dismissive treatment of beasts or mystery cats episodes has shown her that this is a strong tendency of authorities (Campion-Vincent 1990, 1992). When it comes to episodes of said random attacks or of said mysterious sightings, once they have explained the majority of cases as human error the authorities extend the explanation to all cases. It is worth recalling that similar episodes – ended by the same conclusions – had swept the US in the 1970s (Ellis 1991; Goleman 2011).

Fears of the date-rape drugs, i.e. instrumental drink spiking leading to rape through the use of Rohypnol, GHB or Ketamine have been present in society and media for over thirty years, a period of time much longer than that generally characterizing a flap or a moral panic. These widespread fears persist in spite of the discrepancy between the narratives – widely spread and transmitted by concerned speakers who enrich and embroider the tales – and the officially constated facts, which remain rare occurrences. Indeed, Weiss and Colyer's designation as "protected narratives" describes well these tales, strongly validated by the well-meaning and benevolent authorities.

The needle-spiking epidemic scares of 2021–2022 are variants on the drink-spiking theme in which the aggressive component is more salient. Their closeness to a moral panic is shown by their disproportionality, "the gap or disjunction between the threat or harm of a given behavior and the fervor or concern that that behavior generates in the public, the media, and among legislators and social movement activists and members of interest groups" (Goode 2018: 535). The other traits of moral panics – "stereotyping, exaggeration, distortion, and sensitization" (Cohen 1972: 59–65) – are also present.

Robert Bartholomew has analyzed the needle-spiking allegations in the UK as a "social panic that reflects current fears" (Bartholomew 2022). For Bartholomew, a specialist of "social panics" – his preferred expression for collective outbreaks of emotion – whose text about The Halifax Slasher has been presented earlier, the claim of injections is "a red flag" of implausibility as the operation is so impractical that it is improbable: "compared to slipping something into a drink, injecting a victim carries a much higher risk of being caught". Bartholomew quotes the experts who pointed out the implausibility of pricks and concludes that "the needle-spiking bubble may be about to burst". He does not hypothesize the existence of pure, i.e. aimless, aggressive behaviour – which is the hypothesis of the author of the present article. This is logical and derives from Bartholomew's interesting 2004 article, co-authored with sociologist Jeffrey Victor, which dismisses the notion of "emotional contagion" as linked to "the psychiatric frame" to which the article opposes "the

social psychological frame" to discuss such episodes as "a rumor panic or mass anxiety attack"[5] (Bartholomew, Victor 2004). Bartholomew and Victor have overlooked ostension, precisely ostensive action, wherein behaviour is a reaction or response to the scenario of a legend, or of a shared belief.

Folklorists' reference point for the notion of ostensive action is the seminal 1983 article co-authored by Linda Degh and Andrew Vazsonyi which concludes with the words "we have to accept that fact can become narrative and narrative can become fact" (Dégh, Vázsonyi 1983: 29, see also 5, 12). This article has not been forgotten: Bill Ellis has quoted and analysed it in several publications (for references see Ellis 2019).

Rumor Mills, which the author of the present text co-edited, stressed in its subtitle *The social impact of rumor and legend* (Fine, Campion-Vincent, Heath 2005). The social anthropologist Julien Bonhomme's recent study of accusations of genital theft in Western Africa states in its introduction: "Rumor is thus a speech act that should always be considered as both an utterance and an action at the same time" (Bonhomme 2016: 15); and Theo Meder reminds us that:

> For ethnologists, the *perception* of truth should be more vital than truth itself. The question is why certain legends are believed to be true. [...] We tell, hear, see and read legends, but we believe, experience, re-enact and live legends too. The notion of *ostension* is used to comprehend the mechanism of legends we live (Meder 2004).

To Conclude

Predicting is a dangerous game. However, what is happening around needle-spiking seems closer to a flap combining fear-inducing exaggerated perception (and forgetting insects, as some of the complaints can be linked to misperceived insect bites) with a series of imitative gestures of aggression than to a wave of "DFSA drug facilitated sexual assault" (if we adopt the US law enforcement designation of this serious crime). In the UK, the flap has more or less subsided, or at least it is no longer newsworthy, following the Spiking Committee's report. In France, while the complaints of malicious pricks have swirled to 2100 by early September (Ouest-France 2022), the authorities keep to their perplexed attitude, and no perpetrators have been caught. So it appears reasonable to predict that the needle-spiking epidemic scare will disappear, or no longer be reported by the end of 2022[6].

However, it will have shown how close we are to a reawakening of fears, how the historic characters of urban maniacs can easily come back to haunt us. The series is also a reminder that aggressive imitative behaviour can be triggered easily.

5 The quotes are from an unpaged version kindly sent to the author by Jeffrey Victor.

6 The manuscript of this article was completed in October 2022. In early 2023 the subject is dead.

Fear has always been present in expressive folklore and traditional tales abound with shock elements, from cannibal witches to evil spirits from the invisible surrounding us. However, the commodification of fear in popular culture has developed to become supreme. Fear, disguised as fun, is everywhere around us, as horror stories for kids, scary (or spooky) urban legends (or stories) abound on YouTube as well as on mobile phones, which offer by the dozen such apps as Evil Nun, Scary Clown, Troll Face Quest, Creepy Scream Scary Horror, etc.

Drink spiking for criminal purposes has existed and exists, but we should remember the opening remark of Pamela Donovan who explains that law enforcement authorities feel justified by their mission to look for the "malicious" types of drink spiking that are a means to the realisation of violence or crime and to overlook the fact that it is often an expressive rather than instrumental act. As she states, "[a] large part of the time, drink spiking is actually an end in itself" (Donovan 2016: 1), and "Some spiking – like other forms of tampering and poisoning – is often an end in itself" (Donovan 2016: 5).

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Race and Horror in HBO's *Lovecraft Country*

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ABSTRACT: This article is an analysis of the HBO series *Lovecraft Country* in terms of the elements of racism and traditional horror elements present in it, including elements typical of the prose of one of the genre's creators, H. P. Lovecraft. The purpose of the article is to explore typical horror elements that appear in the series and show how the authors of the series combine traditional horror with the horror of everyday life in the oppressed Black community in 1950s America. At the beginning of the article, the series and its main idea are described. The article then takes up the subject of the portrayal of racism in the series, specific examples of which are presented and discussed in terms of their compatibility with the realities of America at the time. The article also discusses elements related to the antiracism movement – situations presented in the series that exemplify the character' struggle against racism are shown. Then the otherness depicted in the series is discussed – not only racial otherness, but also gender and sexual otherness; in this part of the article, otherness is given as a reason for oppression by society. The article also explores the use of traditional elements of horror genre in the series – it indicates which scenes in the series use the traditional concepts of the horror genre, and attempts to show which characters in the series function as monsters in the story. At the end of the article, it is explained how the series draws inspiration in the works of Lovecraft, whose name appears in the very title of the series.

KEYWORDS: horror, Lovecraft, racism, white supremacy, antiracism, otherness, monster, America in 1950s

About the Series

Lovecraft Country is a television series produced by HBO that premiered in 2020. What is initially just a story of a search for his missing father by a Black veteran of the Korean War turns into a tour of the 1950s America, where the

threat is not only a racist society but also monsters taken straight from the pages of H. P. Lovecraft's books.

Tic, the main character of the story, returns from the war and starts searching for his father Montrose, who disappeared some time ago, having sent his son a letter. He is initially aided in his search by his uncle George and Letitia, a childhood friend. The search for his father quickly turns into a battle with forces that the characters previously had no idea existed. The first episode makes the viewer realize that the racism of America at that time is one of the main themes of the show – the characters from the first minutes face racist treatment not only by the society as such but mainly by the police officers. However, it is not only the racism of society that is a threat here – the protagonists discover a world of magic, monsters, and supernatural powers. They meet a cult whose head is the father of Christina, the series' main antagonist. Throughout the story, the protagonists race with Christina in search of a lost book that grants immortality and can provide them with answers to their questions. During their adventures they meet ghosts, ancient creatures taken straight from the pages of Lovecraft's novels, as well as face the society and the police that continue to oppress them. The show is a mix of many elements typical of horror fiction, but it also uses elements from other film genres, such as science fiction. It is a multi-layered story with multiple storylines, but its entire backbone seems to be based on combining the horror genre with the horror of everyday life for the Black community in racist America.

The series is based on Matt Ruff's book of the same name and was directed and adapted for television by Misha Green. It premiered in 2020 – an important year not only for the Black community, but also for all people concerned with the issue of racism, due to the death of George Floyd and the increased activity of the Black Lives Matter movement, under whose banner protests against violence against Black people were held around the world. The series thus fits in with its anti-racist overtones at a time when the anti-racist movement was leading protests around the world.

The purpose of this article is to show how the series portrays the theme of racism and the real-life struggles of not only Black people, but also other minorities in 1950s America, and to connect them with elements typical of the horror genre. This article is also an exploration of how traditional genre assumptions are used by contemporary genre creators who combine these assumptions with current messages. Finally, it is also an attempt to analyze how conservative pop culture lore can be updated in more emancipated times.

Racism in the Series

Since the series is set in 1950s America and its main characters are Black, it is not surprising that the issue of racism is addressed from the very beginning of the series. The racism portrayed in the series is one of the main sources of horror and is not related to any supernatural forces; it is people, specifically the white part of society, who are responsible for creating terror and act as

"monsters" here, and the scenes of racism shown in the series seem to be taken out of the real life of Black people in the 1950s.

At the very beginning of the series, Atticus Freeman – the protagonist – returns to his hometown after years of serving in the military and faces segregation on a bus in a specially designated area for people of color; that is how the series begins a journey through a world of monstrosities, not only supernatural, but also social. Besides segregation on public transportation, the series shows many other examples of racial segregation in the United States of the time: Black people enter public places through different entrances than white people; they use libraries specifically reserved for them; in stores they are served only by Black employees; and their presence on the street arouses distaste and indignation among other passers-by, giving the impression that Black people do not belong there, that they have no right to walk the same streets as white people. There is a tension among the white passers-by, hatred in their gaze, and embarrassment in the eyes of the Black people. It is only in their own neighborhoods, inhabited by the Black community exclusively, that they can feel comfortable and at ease, and going out into the streets does not involve hateful stares and the need to avoid eye contact with white people. The only obstacle standing in the way of well-being in the Black community is the police officers who are always there somewhere – watching, marking their presence and readiness, as if waiting for something to happen so they can step in and intervene.

Institutional racism is very marked in the series and we can see it in many of the situations the characters find themselves in. It is especially related to the activities of the police, which is one of the main sources of oppression in the series. Black people are observed by police officers not only in their neighborhoods, but especially in other parts of the city, inhabited by the white population. The police are always ready to react when a Black person does something they think is suspicious or when a conflict actually arises. The police's approach to Black people, similar to the approach in America today, is brilliantly illustrated in episode five when a Black woman, as a result of drinking a magic potion, transforms into a white woman and goes out into the city, exploring the world from a white woman's perspective. When she collides with a Black teenager who then wants to help her, the situation is immediately of interest to police officers, who drive up to the woman. Both the teenager and the woman automatically put their hands up – the teenager does it because he knows that in a collision with a white woman he will be charged with causing the incident; the woman does the same because her habits and experiences as a Black woman are stronger than a temporary change in appearance. Inevitably, it is the Black teenager who becomes the target of the police aggression – he is thrown to the ground and forced to admit to attacking or even molesting the woman. It is only the woman's defense that allows the boy to be released and the incident to end – although her attempts to defend the boy are met with disbelief from the police who try to force her to file a complaint because

"[t]here is no need to protect this animal" (Green, Sackheim 2020). The police's hostility toward Black people is also evident as the protagonists travel to a place that its sheriff refers to as "sundown city" – after sunset, Black people are not allowed on the street there.

During their journey, the characters do not experience hostility only from police officers – another suspenseful scene plays out at the restaurant where they attempt to eat. When they enter the restaurant, the waiter and a client freeze in astonishment at the fact that Black people dare to cross the threshold of the establishment. The waiter is confused and frightened, the white customer ostentatiously leaves. Eventually, the waiter goes into the back room to notify the fire department, whose members arrive at the restaurant with guns and immediately open fire on the fleeing characters.

The scale of the problem of racism in America in the 1950s is also illustrated by the activities of the main character's uncle, George Freeman, who is the author of a guidebook for Black people, aiming to describe safe places for Black people to visit and to warn them of places that they should avoid because of the dangers there. He travels across America and checks out various locations, assessing their safety for the Black community. During these trips, he often encounters hostile and aggressive behavior from white people, which he also includes in his guidebook as places to stay away from. All these examples show how successfully the series portrays the problems of the Black community in America at that time, and the dangerous situations in which the characters find themselves are a source of horror and cause tension in the audience.

Antiracism

The series problematizes the subject of racism both by including its rather drastic and vivid depictions and by featuring many elements related to the anti-racism movement, comments on the harm of racism, and suggestions for fighting racism.

During the scenes of the first episode, in which the three Black characters make their journey across America experiencing various types of discrimination from white society, one can hear a real-life speech by James Baldwin, an African-American writer and activist, who said these words during a debate about fulfilling the American Dream at the expense of Black people:

> I find myself, not for the first time, in the position of a kind of Jeremiah. For example, I don't disagree with Mr. Burford that the inequality suffered by the American Negro population of the United States has hindered the American dream. Indeed, it has. I quarrel with some other things he has to say. The other, deeper, element of a certain awkwardness I feel has to do with one's point of view. I have to put it that way – one's sense, one's system of reality. It would seem to me the proposition before the House, and I would put it that way, is the American Dream at the expense of the American Negro, or the American Dream is at the ex-

> pense of the American Negro. Is the question hideously loaded, and then one's response to that question – one's reaction to that question – has to depend on effect and, in effect, where you find yourself in the world, what your sense of reality is, what your system of reality is. That is, it depends on assumptions which we hold so deeply so as to be scarcely aware of them (Baldwin 1965).

Baldwin's words (which we can hear spoken by Baldwin himself in the series) address the problem of the American Dream and the fact that there are two Americas – one seen through the eyes of the white man who can find opportunity, fulfillment, and take advantage of all the opportunities this country offers; the other is seen through the eyes of the Black man whose identity is not part of the identity of the country as a whole, and the opportunities of living in America are not available to him. These two realities are illustrated in the series by the scenes we see during Baldwin's speech – we see three Black people using a separate line, a woman working with a baby in her arms, fights, and other images that show that not everyone is treated in the same way in America. These words show that the American Dream is not for everyone, and that the perception of America as the Promised Land is nothing like how Black people feel about the country.

Another subtle commentary on white supremacy and what the world ruled by white people looks like in the eyes of Black people can be heard in the second episode of the series, in which the protagonists become guests at the residence of a member of a cult founded centuries ago in an attempt to discover the secret of immortality. During the ceremony in which the main character, recognized as a descendant of the cult's founder, is used to open the gate to Eden, a spoken word poem by Gill Scott-Heron can be heard:

> A rat done bit my sister Nell. (with Whitey on the moon) Her face and arms began to swell. (and Whitey's on the moon) I can't pay no doctor bill. (but Whitey's on the moon) Ten years from now I'll be payin' still. (while Whitey's on the moon) The man jus' upped my rent las' night. ('cause Whitey's on the moon) No hot water, no toilets, no lights. (but Whitey's on the moon) I wonder why he's uppi'me? ('cause Whitey's on the moon?) I was already payin' 'im fifty a week. (with Whitey on the moon) Taxes takin' my whole damn check, Junkies makin' me a nervous wreck, The price of food is goin' up, An' as if all that shit wasn't enough. A rat done bit my sister Nell. (with Whitey on the moon) Her face an' arm began to swell. (but Whitey's on the moon) Was all that money I made las' year (for Whitey on the moon?) How come there ain't no money here? (Hm! Whitey's on the moon) Y'know I jus' 'bout had my fill (of Whitey on the moon) I think I'll sen' these doctor bills, Airmail special (to Whitey on the moon) (Scott-Heron 1970).

Although it appears in the series at a rather supernatural moment, the poem is a perfect commentary on both the scene and the reality and priorities of America at that time. The poem depicts in a rather brutal and moving manner the situation of not only the Black people, but the poor part of the American society in general, as they have to deal with their financial problems, the continuously rising prices of food products, the lack of access to basic household items or to a doctor, while American national funds are spent on space travel and boosting the humanity's ego by conquering the cosmos. The poem shows frustration with the situation the society finds itself in and the fact that the lives of individuals seem unimportant compared to the grand plans and dreams of humanity. This poem perfectly fits the scene in the series where the white people, with the help of a Black man, try to open the gateway to Eden, the new dream land, the role of which is played by the moon in the poem. In both the poem and the series, Black people are relegated to the role of a tool, an insignificant element that is used to achieve white people's goal; a goal that is perhaps beyond human ability and should not be a priority, but becomes one due to human hubris and the desire to prove their greatness. In both the poem and the series, white society ignores the small individual, deeming them worth sacrificing for achieving their goals.

The comments about white supremacy or the plight of Black people, however, are not limited to the songs and speeches that occur during scenes; they come just as often from the mouths of characters who are completely aware of their situation and of how society treats them. The characters, despite the supernatural situations they find themselves in, are still real people with real problems; they are often smiling and cheerful, but just as often frustrated and powerless to go on facing the world and the evil that befalls them, not only from fantastic monsters, but mainly from other people. It seems even more challenging to be a Black woman in a white society, which is often emphasized by the characters in the series. When Ruby drinks the potion that turns her into a white woman and spends her entire day carelessly wandering around the town and enjoying simple everyday activities, she later admits that she "enjoyed my entire day using the only currency that I needed: whiteness" (Green, Kidd, Winton, Dunye 2020). The theme of the woman's changing body provides an interesting and highly contrasting portrayal of the differences between the lives of white and Black people; while Black people encounter only hateful stares and contempt from passers-by and constant surveillance on the streets, and many public places are simply closed to them, Ruby, as a white woman, experiences something surreal for her – on the street she is met with smiles, kindness, and treatment worthy of a lady. Being white, she is treated not only as a woman, but simply as a human being, as the following dialogue confirms:

> – It scared the shit out of me to wake up white. Then... When I was stumbling down the street, crazed and disheveled and screaming at

> everybody around me, they weren't scared of me. They were scared for me. They all treated me like...
> – A human being (Green, Kidd, Winton, Dunye 2020).

As Ruby continues to discover the world in her new white skin, she is hired at an exclusive department store where she has long dreamed of working. Although the woman was denied employment before, she comes in with the same qualifications but a different body and skin color and is then easily hired as manager of the entire store. When she notices that the Black woman who was hired before her and who is the only employee with skin color other than white is not doing well with the tasks given to her, she emotionally teaches her a lesson about how much harder she has to try as a Black woman:

> Your best isn't good enough. You want to be a credit to your race? You have to be better than mediocre, and do you want to know why? Because white folks are more fucked up than you think (Green, Kidd, Winton, Dunye 2020).

This statement shows another huge contrast between the realities of the Black world and the white world: a Black person cannot simply be good at something, they have to rise above the average level and be better than everyone else to at least be noticed. Moreover, it also shows how Black people are deprived of the right to individuality: while every white person is considered unique and responsible for themselves, Black people must not only prove their worth, but the worth of their entire "race".

As this discussion shows, *Lovecraft Country* is a very anti-racist series – due to its portrayal of racism coming from the perspective of Black people, who are still oppressed by the white society. Watching the scenes showing the treatment of Black people, it is impossible not to reflect on the extremely poor condition of the society where the color of the skin determines the attitude towards another human being. *Lovecraft Country*, by combining racism with horror, proves how great a threat to the world and humanity such behavior is and how terrible the reality of an oppressed group is.

Otherness

The theme of being different, misunderstood and not fitting in with the rest of society is an important part of the series. The obvious candidates for being the Other in this case are the Black people who are resented and misunderstood by the white part of the society, but the series does not limit itself to the representation of the otherness of the Black people; the show presents the otherness of race, gender, sexuality, and the otherness related to supernatural powers that people do not understand.

It is clear that Black people are treated as the Other by the rest of society; they are considered outsiders who have no right to be there. Black people face

hostility and hatred, and they are assigned a host of stereotypical, negative traits that they have nothing in common with as individuals. This is undoubtedly related to the realities in America at the time and the real history of Black people in the New Continent – as well as the still vivid memory in the white community of Black people as slaves whose lives may be sacrificed for their profits since they are not treated as humans. With this conviction, the white community separates itself from Black people – the former avoid the latter on the streets, designate for them separate entrances to public places, and design special neighborhoods in which they can live. When Letitia, one of the main characters in the series, manages to buy an old house in a white neighborhood, it results in strong opposition from her neighbors. A sign at the entrance to the neighborhood announces: "We are a white community – undesirables must go", and cars are parked in front of the house inhabited by Black people, honking their horns to frighten the residents and force them to leave the neighborhood. The conflict turns into a confrontation, violence is exchanged, and eventually a couple of white men enter the house, which ends in their violent deaths due to the evil powers inhabiting this old building. Throughout the series, one can see how Black people are treated as outsiders; even leaving out the racism, which is an obvious aspect and problem addressed by the series, Black people are simply pushed to the side of society because they are misunderstood in their otherness, and the fact that the rest of the people are used to the reality they have lived in for years and do not want to change it.

Another example of otherness portrayed in the series is gender otherness, often represented in conjunction with racial otherness. It is not only Black people who face different treatment in 1950s America – the problem also affects women in general and Black women in particular. Discussing her transformation into a white woman, being aware of the inferior treatment she has experienced throughout her life both for being a woman and for being Black, Ruby states: "I don't know what is more difficult, being colored or being a woman. Most days, I'm happy to be both, but... the world keeps interrupting, and I am sick of being interrupted" (Green, Kidd, Winton, Dunye 2020). This statement clearly shows the frustration with how women and Black people are treated by society and how it is a hindrance to everyday life; Black women are simply not treated in the same way as white women.

This established world order, which places the white male at the top of the hierarchy and all others as subordinate to him, seems to be the main reason why those others are oppressed and not allowed to speak. In the scene when Christina introduces Tic to her father, Samuel Braithwhite, the head of the organization, he refers to Tic with apparent reserve and superiority. Braithwhite does not treat Tic as an equal, but, rather, as an object that he does not pay much attention to – as "something" he may need to achieve his goal, yet he does not seem entirely convinced of "its" usefulness. When Tic and Christina appear in the room, Braithwhite asks them about a passage in the Bible in which Adam is given by God the task of naming things:

> And out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam, to see what he would call them. And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof (King James Bible 1769/2017, Genesis 2: 19).

With this passage, the leader of the Sons of Adam immediately establishes a hierarchy among the people in the room, placing himself in the position of Adam, who takes an active part in creating the order of the world and assigns to each creature its rightful, subordinate place, which is confirmed by what he says later:

> – This act of naming is more than a simple picking of labels. Adam is sharing in creation, assigning each creature its final form and its station in the hierarchy of nature.
> – He put everything in its place (Green, Sackheim 2020).

Adam, who may be the symbol of the white man, not only names things – he creates reality, establishes the hierarchy of the world, but also defines the final forms of each creature, which allows him to decide what they are. Thus, he becomes the silent standard by which the world should be organized – he can decide on how the world is perceived, who occupies what place in it, and how creatures should behave. According to this logic, Adam was appointed by God as the leader of the world, and all creatures should obey him. This can be seen both in the attitude of the white community in the reality of the series and in our reality and history, in the fact that slaves were used for centuries to achieve the white man's goals and that slavery is still echoed in society's treatment of Black people.

This established world order with a white male at its top is something that is considered ideal and the way things should be, but it was destroyed by a woman, which is emphasized quite explicitly in the subsequent conversation:

> – At the dawn of time, just for a moment, everything was where and as it should be. From God, to man, to woman, down to the lowliest wriggling creature. It was Nirvana. – Then that stupid, meddlesome, troublemaking bitch Eve brought entropy and death. What was an elegant hierarchy became a mess of tribes and nations (Green, Sackheim 2020).

In this passage, Eve may act as a symbol of all those who are supposed to be subordinate to Adam in this hierarchy, the white male, and who threaten his supremacy by demanding equal rights and equal treatment. This group may include all representatives of various kinds of Otherness who no longer wish to be on the margins of society and hide in the shadows, masking their needs and their true identity. Rebellion against the established world order is equated here with chaos, proving that those at the top fear for their position – the

world in its current form is Nirvana for them, and any disobedience threatens their well-being. Rebellion is equated with death, but this death does not concern everyone – what for "Adam" is death, the end of Nirvana and the beginning of chaos, for "Eve" can be liberation and rescue.

The last kind of otherness worth mentioning here is sexual Otherness, which is also present in the HBO series. The most prominent example is Montrose Freeman, Tic's father, who does not have the best relationship with his son. This may be due to the fact that his own father was not a perfect example of a parent – he beat both Montrose and his brother, George. The father's violence toward Montrose, however, may have stemmed from something slightly different than the man's aggressive nature – Montrose was "different" because he was gay, and his father sensed this and could neither understand nor endure it. Montrose's marriage to Tic's mother seems to be just a facade created for a society in which being gay is a crime – Montrose admits to his son that his now-deceased wife knew her husband was gay. Montrose seems to be uncomfortable in his own skin, which is undoubtedly a result of society's attitude toward people like him. In the series, we also meet his love interest, Sammy, who is the complete opposite of Montrose when it comes to representing the gay part of society. Indeed, Sammy is a drag queen and performs at a club in front of dozens of people like him, and seems to enjoy every second of the life he leads. Sammy is comfortable in his own skin and has no problem with his otherness, while Tic's father seems ashamed of who he is, even in front of himself. What is interesting, Montrose's attitude towards his otherness changes depending on the environment he finds himself in. On a day-to-day basis, he is ashamed, repressed, and afraid of his feelings toward another man. When the two of them go to a gay club and Sammy performs in his drag queen costume, new life seems to be breathed into Montrose – he goes out on the dance floor with his lover, which eventually leads to their first kiss in public. Montrose is an example of how other people's treatment of otherness is capable of affecting the very representative of that otherness – it is not easy to accept oneself when one is not accepted by everyone else. This moment in the club between two men in love seems to be a point of awakening and release of emotions that were long hidden and repressed for the sake of society and the struggle with oneself.

Horror Elements in the Series

Lovecraft Country works not only as a successful representation of the realities of America in the 1950s, when racism and racial segregation were the order of the day to an even greater extent than today, and as a representation of the treatment of various forms of otherness, whether racial, gender or sexual; at the same time, the series combines all these aspects and real world problems with the classic themes of the horror genre. The series contains a number of well-known, classic motifs from various stages in the history of the horror genre; it incorporates different types of horror in its structure, starting with classic gothic, moving through psychological horror, and ending with exploi-

tation horror, which focuses on the depiction of drastic torture or behaviour. The series seems to tick off all the most popular horror elements, such as ghosts, hauntings and zombies, without forgetting the seriousness of real human problems.

The first episode of the series, in which the protagonists begin a journey to find Tic's father, seems to be an example of classic psychological horror, where it is not the monsters or drastic scenes that are the main source of terror – it is rather the elusive threat of danger hanging over the protagonists and the inevitable pursuit of the climactic moment when the protagonists collide with the threat. The role of danger in this case is played by policemen, whose presence at every turn signals a potential threat to the protagonists. Indeed, throughout the characters' journey across racist America, the viewer senses the threat hanging over Black people both from the policemen and the rest of society. However, this is not the only moment when the series becomes a psychological horror – throughout the episodes we also follow the protagonists' journey, not only physical, but also the one into themselves. As the story continues, the viewer sees what fears, anxieties and painful memories accompany the protagonists, as well as the side characters; for instance, in the second episode, three protagonists find themselves in the cult's mansion. With the help of mysterious magic, they are trapped in their rooms and experience visions related to their desires and fears – Tic is attacked by a woman resembling a member of the military, thus not letting him forget the war he participated in and the specter of which still hangs over him; Uncle George is visited by the love of his youth, but after some time he realizes that it is only an illusion; Letitia, on the other hand, is haunted by a creature that looks like Tic, with whom, after an honest conversation about her family and its problems, she begins to exchange confessions of feelings that end in violence. Family problems, frustration with one's status, and inability to change are also evident in Ruby's plotline – in this case, delving into the character's emotional states is all the more related to horror, as the situations and emotions Ruby experiences lead to horrific actions, such as the brutal, bloody mutilation of her employer; at this point, the viewer watches as this seemingly nice, harmless woman turns into a "monster" capable of cruelty and violence. Ruby's transformation into a white woman, who is still her but does not look like her at all, unleashes desires and lusts that as a Black woman she had to suppress and repress; however, when she changes her body and the woman in the mirror no longer resembles the old Ruby, she does things she would never normally do.

The third episode of the series, in which Letitia rents an old mansion that turns out to be haunted, is a classic ghost story. There is a popular theme utilized here, whereby the young protagonist decides to start their life in a new place, but it does not turn out to be what it should be – the inhabitants are haunted by nightmares, strange things happen to the apartment and there are strange noises from everywhere. In this case, the same thing happens – Letitia is haunted by strange dreams, strange sounds come from the basement, and

creepy figures of massacred Black people seem to hide in the shadows. As it turns out later in the episode, the building previously belonged to a scientist who experimented on and killed Black people kidnapped by a police officer, and the terrifying figures appearing in the house are the very ghosts of those dead people.

Ghosts are not the only beings typical of horror fiction to appear in the series. Other creatures known from horror fiction appear in various, sometimes unobvious forms. Letitia, for example, can be considered a zombie – she is killed in the second episode during the protagonists' unsuccessful escape from the cult's mansion, and then brought back to life so that Tic would agree to take part in the opening ceremony of the Gate to Eden. Although the woman does not behave like a classic zombie, the death and return from the afterlife seems to affect her emotions and feelings, as well as her attitude towards reality. Furthermore, the series incorporates many monsters familiar from Lovecraft's prose, such as the shoggoths – amoeba-like creatures that appear in Lovecraft's prose and also in the first episode of the series, as the main monsters that the characters escape from. Lovecraft's prose and the characters he created may not be the main antagonists of the series, but they are mentioned at many points in the show; for example, in the first few minutes of the series we see Cthulhu – and although this is only part of Tic's dream, it is an example of how Lovecraft's "spirit" is present in the series, and his legacy is an inspiration for the entire story; in this way Lovecraft's racism is confronted and his stories are rewritten.

What seems to be the most explicit feature of *Lovecraft Country* as a horror story, however, are the feelings and reactions that accompany viewers as they watch the series. Horror films in general are characterized by inducing feelings of fear, revulsion, and horror in the audience, and the HBO series definitely does all of these things. After all, the story has no shortage of terrifying creatures, bloody crimes, and massacred human bodies, the sight of which can cause revulsion in viewers. During Ruby's transformation into a white woman and back into her real body, the series shows in detail the process by which this happens – her body bends, her bones seem to move inside her, her skin flakes off revealing flesh and blood. The series seems to intentionally show these scenes in such detail, making viewers not only horrified by the sight, but also able to imagine the pain involved, and understand the frustration and fierceness of a character who knowingly brings such pain upon herself in order to try another life, at least for a while. The creators of the series often show scenes and elements that cause feelings of the uncanny and the abject in their viewers by showing numerous dead, mangled bodies, monsters that sometimes resemble people but are not people, or by surprising their viewers with transformations of people who turn out not to be who we thought they were. Furthermore, the series focuses on psychological fear, portraying the hardships of the Black community in America and depicting in a horrific way how they are treated by the white part of society. *Lovecraft Country* is thus an ideal rep-

resentative of horror fiction, in which the classic elements accompanying this genre are intertwined with the horror of real life, making its viewers terrified not only by macabre sights or monsters jumping out from around corners, but also by human drama and the terrifying nature of human beings.

Who Is a Monster?

In a story where traditional horror is intertwined with real-life horror, and where both monsters and monstrous human behavior are the source of fear, the important question seems to be who is really the monster in this series. Jeffrey Cohen's theses presented in his article *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, in which he explores how we can define a monster in fiction, are useful in answering the question.

According to the first thesis, each monster represents something more than it is, and this is true in the context of the series – monsters are not simply an element that inspires temporary fear with their appearance or behavior, and they often represent the fears and anxieties of both the characters in the series and their viewers. The ghosts in the episode about Letitia's haunted house may represent Black people who die because of oppression and inhumane treatment from society, and the specters that haunt the characters locked in their rooms in the cult mansion represent the desires and fears of the characters. Moreover, in these contexts, the "human" characters may also function here as monsters representing certain fears and anxieties – for example, the individual police officers who appear in the series may symbolize the officers in general and the threat they pose to Black people, and the residents of the neighborhood where Letitia buys the house, by their aggressive behavior, represent a segment of society that exhibits extreme racist behavior that is often a source of danger and fear for Black people. The second thesis that speaks of a kind of immortality of monsters and their ability to escape also works in the series, as Lovecraftian shoggoths appear many times throughout the show, regardless of how much they are hurt by the characters. In this case, we also have the situation of monsters returning from the pages of another story, as they come from Lovecraft's prose – however, here they are presented in a slightly different context and reality, as they are used in a story that is a kind of re-writing of Lovecraft's racism. Although the shoggoths are a threat to all humans who find themselves in the woods at the wrong time, the protagonists avoid death by the hand of police officers thanks to these monsters, and the monsters themselves only kill the police officers. Also, human monstrosity in the form of a racist society runs throughout the series and seems to be a constant threat to the protagonists, no matter how hard they fight for their equality and acceptance. The series also features monsters that harbor a category crisis, that is, monsters that represent something that is not easy to fit into existing frameworks. In one episode, there is a young woman possessed by a spirit called kumiho, which her mother summoned in order to kill her husband who was committing rape on his daughter. The girl became a stranger to her mother – although she resembled the girl in

body, her mind was taken over by a ghost who was lost and did not know what to do with her new life. The mother is unable to accept her daughter's new form, which she herself helped to create, and the daughter herself, possessed by the spirit, is unable to fully accept who she is and the fact that she has to kill men to restore her previous incarnation. In this way, the girl is a monster who escapes the reality of the familiar mother and considers her a monster, despite the fact that she is still in some way her daughter. Similarly, Black people are also treated as monsters by white society in the series – white people do not understand Black people and their culture. Black people escape the framework of the reality white people have lived in so far, so white people are unable to treat Black people like human beings. In this sense, white people's treatment of Black people is also related to Cohen's next thesis: that monsters are the embodiment of otherness. Differences between one group and another are constantly emphasized, allowing white people to treat Black people differently and strip them of their humanity, but also questioning the difference between white and Black people. Another thesis about monsters guarding the boundary of what is possible is also reflected in the series – especially in the form of shoggoths, which in the episode stand between white and Black people and prevent them from confronting each other, and an encounter with them can result in turning into one of them. The series also features certain kinds of desires that the monsters represent – they are a source of jealousy and freedom, as in the case of the white people for Ruby, who temporarily tries to live their lives in their skin and uses their freedom to do the things she desires that she cannot do in her own skin. Ultimately, the monsters in the series also act as reflections of our reality and bring knowledge about our world. In particular, the monstrosity of white people makes the viewer want to "reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression" (Cohen 1996: 3–21).

Monsters in the series take many forms and are represented both by supernatural creatures that are a threat to the protagonists and side characters of the series, and humans whose monstrous behavior brings about horror and danger. The treatment of the other creature as a monster here is also dependent on perspective – for white people, Black people are monsters because of their behavior and the danger they pose, while Black people treat white people as a threat by being unable to understand them and representing a kind of otherness that has no place in their reality. Somewhere in between the monstrous human behavior there are also supernatural monsters, but it is the human ones that seem to be the main threat in the series to both the characters and themselves.

Lovecraft's Legacy in the Series

Lovecraft Country in its very title references one of horror's most famous writers, so it is no surprise that his legacy is evident throughout the series, and the monsters he created appear from time to time in the path of the characters.

The obvious connection between Lovecraft's work and the series is the very fact that Lovecraft exists in the series' reality as the author of the stories he wrote in real life. The characters in the show know all those monsters they meet on their journey from the pages of Lovecraft's novels, and his work itself is among the favorites of Tic and his uncle. However, Lovecraft's presence is not limited to the use of the legends and monsters he created, or to the feeling of cosmic horror that accompanies the characters as they discover new mysteries of the world. It seems that the series is a sort of factual representation of "Lovecraft's country" – a place where Black people are not treated equally with the rest of society, as Lovecraft's racist views are well-known. Despite the fact that the series is a kind of tribute to Lovecraft and his works, it does not forget about what is controversial and problematic; it does not pass over the racism occurring in his works, that is, it does what Kathleen Hudson suggests – it rewrites Lovecraft's racism and translates it into a new story.

The ghost of Lovecraft is evoked in the first episode, when the characters quote one of his poems:

> When, long ago, the gods created Earth / In Jove's fair image Man was shap'd at birth. / The beasts for lesser parts were next design'd; / Yet were they too remote from humankind. / To fill the gap, and join the rest to man, / Th'Olympian host conceiv'd a clever plan. / A beast they wrought, in semi-human figure, / Fill'd it with vice, and call'd the thing a NIGGER (Lovecraft 1912).

The poem, then, perfectly illustrates Lovecraft's views, which may be abhorrent for the contemporary reader. The series, however, does not attempt to cover up the reality of Lovecraft's racism or avoid the issue; instead, it uses the author's legacy, both glorious and shameful, and creates a story that is both a great horror and an anti-racist tale that shows the terrors of racism and allows us to look at Black people as people.

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ROZMOWY I ESEJE
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Na tropach legend miejskich. Z Dionizjuszem Czubalą rozmawia Piotr Grochowski

Tracking Urban Legends: A Conversation between Dionizjusz Czubala and Piotr Grochowski

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DIONIZJUSZ CZUBALA is one of the most important contemporary Polish folklorists; his research pertains to the occupational folklore of potters and various forms of oral narratives. Among his works of particular value are his field studies concerning urban legends conducted in Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Mongolia, reports from which were published in the "FOAFtale News" bulletin, and research on memoirs connected with the Holocaust, published in the book *O tym nie wolno mówić... Zagłada Żydów w opowieściach wspomnieniowych ze zbiorów Dionizjusza Czubali*, 2019 (*We Are Not Allowed to Speak about It... The Extermination of the Jews in Memoirs from the Collection of Dionizjusz Czubala*). He is the author of numerous monographs and collections of folklorist texts, including: *Folklor garncarzy polskich*, 1978 (*The Folklore of Polish Potters*); *Podania i opowieści z Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego. Sto lat temu i dzisiaj*, 1984 (*Legends and Stories from the Dąbrowa Basin. A Hundred Years Ago and Today*); *Opowieści z życia. Z badań nad folklorem współczesnym*, 1985 (*Stories from Life. From Research on Contemporary Folklore*); *Nasze mity współczesne*, 1996 (*Our Contemporary Myths*); *Polskie legendy miejskie. Studium i materiały*, 2014 (*Polish Urban Legends. Study and Materials*).

KEYWORDS: contemporary folklore, urban legends, field work

P. G. Jak zaczęła się Pana przygoda z badaniem legend miejskich?

D. C. W latach 80. XX w. zbierałem wspomnienia wojenne i w trakcie tego zbierania zdarzały się takie teksty, które nie pasowały do modelu klasycznej opowieści wspomnieniowej. Dostrzegłem, że są to teksty, które pojawiają się,

Dionizjusz Czubala. Fot. Marta Ankiersztejn © Narodowy Instytut Muzyki i Tańca

żyją krótko, mają zdolność szybkiego rozpowszechniania się. Ja wtedy nie wiedziałem, jak je nazwać i pisząc książkę, określiłem je jako sensacje[1]. W tym czasie ukazała się też publikacja Jana Harolda Brunvanda *Znikający autostopowicz*[2]. Kiedy ją przeczytałem, nagle uzmysłowiłem sobie, że Brunvand pisze o tych moich sensacjach, tylko nazywa je legendami miejskimi. Napisałem do niego liścik, że ja też się tym zajmuję i że chciałbym opublikować artykuł na ten temat. A Brunvand przesłał ten mój prywatny list do Billa Ellisa, redaktora czasopisma „FOAFtale News", poświęconego legendom miejskim. Ellis opublikował w całości mój list i dodał jeszcze, że polski badacz poszukuje kontaktów. Nagle zacząłem otrzymywać z całego świata różne zapytania o legendy miejskie, zacząłem ich szukać i tak ruszyło zbieractwo. A były to lata 80. XX w., okres szczególnego kryzysu politycznego i gospodarczego w Polsce, a więc to był idealny moment, bo kryzysy zawsze sprzyjają rodzeniu się mitologii dnia codziennego. I tych tekstów zaczęło mi gwałtownie przybywać.

Wtedy już dobrze wiedziałem, co zbieram, i uświadomiłem sobie, że jest to nowe zjawisko, które dostrzegły również Janina Hajduk-Nijakowska i Dorota Simonides. One także w tym czasie opublikowały artykuł, w którym nazwa-

1 Chodzi o publikację: Czubala, D. (1985). *Opowieści z życia. Z badań nad folklorem współczesnym*. Uniwersytet Śląski.

2 Brunvand, J. H. (1981). *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. Norton.

ły te teksty podobnie jak ja, czyli opowieściami sensacyjnymi[3]. Moje polskie doświadczenia zostały błyskawicznie skonfrontowane z dorobkiem światowym. Dość szybko zacząłem przesyłać Billowi Ellisowi raporty z badań terenowych, zresztą nie tylko z Polski, bo zaczęły do mnie docierać również wątki ze Wschodu – z Rosji, z Ukrainy, z Białorusi. Myśmy wtedy mieli ułatwione kontakty, bo uczelnie polskie miały porozumienia z uczelniami rosyjskimi, ukraińskimi, białoruskimi i ja tam wyjeżdżałem, i dość szybko zacząłem włączać do moich zbiorów materiały wschodniosłowiańskie. To bardzo interesowało Ellisa i badaczy zachodnich, bo był to teren dla nich nieznany i nawet zastanawiali się, czy tam w ogóle istnieją legendy miejskie. No i moje penetracje odpowiadały na ich pytania. I wszystkie te moje raporty, a było ich chyba siedem, ukazały się drukiem w „FOAFtale News"[4], dzięki czemu docierali do nich różni badacze. Stąd też miałem wiele próśb, żeby udostępnić legendy, które były tym uczonym potrzebne. Oni z kolei zaczęli mi przysyłać własne teksty. Dlatego w tamtym czasie byłem w Polsce chyba jedynym badaczem, który miał tak szeroki przegląd tego, co się na świecie pisze w tej materii. Z kolei Brunvand w *Encyklopedii legend miejskich* opisał polski dorobek w oparciu o moje teksty[5].

P. G. Jakie metody stosował Pan podczas zbierania legend miejskich?

D. C. Dość szybko zacząłem porządkować moje materiały, dzieląc je na wątki tematyczne i układając w teczkach opisanych takimi hasłami, jak: „lekarze i cudowne lekarstwa", „erotyczne i seksualne", „rynkowe", „związane z religią" itd. Na tej podstawie układałem kwestionariusz. Na początku miał on około 30 pytań, ale po przeczytaniu książki Brunvanda i pierwszych polskich penetracjach tych pytań było już 250. Rzadko kto podda się takiemu wywiadowi.

Jak zbierałem? Jedna metoda to była próba szukania kogoś, kto z tobą usiądzie i pozwoli się usidlić. Wtedy zaczynałem ten normalny wywiad według kwestionariusza. To jest bardzo skuteczne, ale tylko w przypadku tych rozmówców, którzy są w stanie z tobą współpracować. Ludzie się przy tym szybko nudzą, ale legendy miejskie mają taką siłę uruchamiania emocji, że jeśli są aktualne, to jednak ludzie łatwo wygrzebują je ze swojej pamięci, bo je jakoś

3 Hajduk-Nijakowska, J., Simonides, D. (1989). Opowiadania ludowe. W: D. Simonides (red.), *Folklor Górnego Śląska*. Wydawnictwo Śląsk.

4 Są to następujące teksty: Earliest Accounts of Contemporary Legends in Russia. *FOAFtale News*, 18 (June 1990), 6–7; The 'Black Volga': Child Abduction Urban Legends in Poland and Russia. *FOAFtale News*, 21 (March 1991), 1–3; AIDS and Aggression: Polish Legends about HIV-infected People. *FOAFtale News*, 23 (September 1991), 1–5; The Death Car: Polish and Russian Examples. *FOAFtale News*, 25 (March 1992), 2–4; Mongolian Contemporary Legends [3 części]. *FOAFtale News*, 28 (December 1992), 1–5; 29 (March 1993), 1–7; 31 (November 1993), 1–4. Czasopismo jest dostępne na stronie FOAFTALE NEWS On-Line: https://www.folklore.ee/FOAFtale/.

5 Brunvand, J. H. (2012). *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends: Updated and Expanded Edition*. ABC-CLIO. Materiały Dionizjusza Czubali stały się podstawą do opracowania haseł *Poland*, *Russia* i *Mongolia*, ale zostały też przywołane w kilku innych hasłach dotyczących poszczególnych wątków legend miejskich.

przeżyli, przemyśleli i pamiętają. To dawało wyniki. A druga metoda polegała na tym, żeby zbierać to, co akurat słyszałeś od ludzi. I bardzo często mi się to zdarzało, kiedy o legendach z pasją odkrywcy mówiłem na swoich wykładach. To się udzielało i studenci natychmiast opowiadali mi swoje warianty, a ja nosiłem ze sobą magnetofon i nagrywałem. Legendy miejskie dobrze jest nagrywać, ale robiłem też mnóstwo zapisów ręcznych, bo to są krótkie teksty i często nie zdążyłem włączyć magnetofonu.

A więc te dwie metody mi się sprawdzały. Ale idealna była praca ze studentami. Kiedy mi się z nimi pracowało wyjątkowo dobrze? Na egzaminach. Prowadzisz egzamin i student odpowiada dobrze albo bardzo dobrze. Dostaje do indeksu stopień i widać, że jest radosny. I jeżeli takiemu radosnemu człowiekowi zadajesz pytanie, to on cię nie opuszcza i możesz go „wyeksploatować" badawczo. Więc ta metoda była bardzo dobra i zbierałem przy jej pomocy dwa rodzaje tekstów. Gdy ktoś zdawał słabo, wtedy pytałem, jakie zabiegi magiczne czynił, aby ten egzamin się udał. No i studenci bardzo rzetelnie odpowiadali; zwykle stosowali jeden czy dwa takie zabiegi, i to był ten pierwszy rodzaj tekstów. A drugi to właśnie legendy miejskie, które studenci bardzo chętnie mi opowiadali.

P. G. Ale studenci byli nie tylko Pana „informatorami". Często uczestniczyli w badaniach, pomagając Panu w zbieraniu materiałów. Jak sobie radzili w terenie?

D. C. Byłem opiekunem Koła Naukowego Folkloroznawców na Uniwersytecie Śląskim i kiedy ogłaszałem, że mamy pieniądze na dwutygodniowy obóz naukowy w jakimś rejonie, zwykle zgłaszało się do mnie 20–30 osób. Najczęściej zbieraliśmy wtedy materiały w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim. Studenci byli dobrze przygotowani, wiedzieli, co mają zbierać, mieli magnetofony i kwestionariusze. Przyjeżdżamy na obóz, ruszamy w teren i po pierwszych wyprawach ludzie wracają z niczym. Co się okazuje? Za trudny jest dla nich ten pierwszy etap przełamania obcości, przełamania nieufności rozmówców, którzy przyjmują ich, wysłuchają, ale nie mają nic do powiedzenia lub zbywają ich byle czym. Studenci z lęku często łączyli się w większe grupy, co jeszcze bardziej utrudniało im prowadzenie rozmów. I na 20 osób zdarzały się może dwie, które świetnie sobie radziły i dzień po dniu przynosiły taśmy z nagraniami.

Ale zdarzały się też komplikacje, które wynikały z moich błędów. Na przykład kiedyś byliśmy na Ukrainie i całkowicie oddałem studentom inicjatywę w prowadzeniu wywiadów. Wymyślili, że przeprowadzą grupowy wywiad ze studentami ukraińskimi. Zaprosili ich. Przyszli tacy ładni chłopcy, przynieśli wódkę. Nasze dziewczyny też bardzo piękne. A ja siedzę z boku, nie chcę przeszkadzać, chcę, żeby młodzież się sprawdziła. Wywiad ma prowadzić przewodnicząca koła. Ma kwestionariusz. I co ona wybiera z tego kwestionariusza? Wybiera pytanie o wątki seksualne. Jak ona zadała to pierwsze pytanie, jak się ci chłopcy zaczęli śmiać, to pospadali z krzeseł i tego już się nie dało w ogóle zahamować. Każde kolejne pytanie było dla nich równie śmieszne. W końcu

dziewczyny też zaczęły się śmiać i ja też i żadnego wątku nie udało się zapisać. A potem, wiadomo, chłopcy wyjęli wódkę, była zabawa, śpiewy...

P. G. Jak to się dzieje, że legendy miejskie czasem wywołują śmiech, czasem zaś są traktowane niezwykle poważnie, a niekiedy wzbudzają nawet panikę?

D. C. W 1989 r. była u nas panika na tle AIDS i codziennie rodziły się opowieści na ten temat. Takiej panice ulegali zresztą nie tylko zwykli „zjadacze chleba", ale i dziennikarze. Na przykład popularne były opowieści, że znane prostytutki hotelowe, które przyjmują wyszukanych gości zagranicznych, są roznosicielkami AIDS. I w jednej z gazet znalazłem artykuł, w którym dziennikarz z pełną wiarą obliczał, ile taka prostytutka dziennie przyjmuje klientów i ile osób może dzięki temu zarazić, a były to astronomiczne liczny. A więc widać, że ten dziennikarz był klasyczną ofiarą legendy miejskiej. Po roku ta panika z powodu AIDS umarła. W legendach miejskich zawsze występuje identyczny mechanizm. W momencie narodzin mamy dramatyczną i emocjonalną wiadomość, która powoduje, że legenda błyskawicznie się rozprzestrzenia, później osiąga taki punkt krytyczny, szczytowy i potem nagle jej wiarygodność załamuje się. Dzieje się tak dlatego, że kiedy już dziesiąty człowiek opowiada tę samą historię inaczej, to u odbiorców następuje krytyczna refleksja i wtedy bardzo często dany wątek zmienia się w opowiadanie komiczne, przechodzi w dowcip, co też niejednokrotnie dokumentowałem. Tak było choćby ze znanym wątkiem „Czarna wołga". Kiedy ta legenda była aktywna, pojawiały się różne dementi ze strony policji, dziennikarzy, oficjeli, którzy mówili, że nigdzie nie odnotowano takiego przypadku, że to jest absolutny wymysł i żadne dziecko nie zostało w taki sposób porwane. Nic to nie pomagało, bo panika obejmowała zarówno dzieci, które bały się czarnej wołgi, jak i rodziców oraz nauczycieli, którzy najbardziej przyczyniali się do rozpowszechniania tej legendy. Początkowo miała więc ona niebywałą wiarygodność i jak pytałem studentów o czarną wołgę, to w tym pierwszym okresie ich opowieści były tak dramatyczne, że włos się jeżył na głowie. A potem, mniej więcej po roku, jak zapytałem o wołgę, to cała sala studentów buchnęła śmiechem, bo wątek już został zdegradowany. Później może się on odrodzić w nowej formie, z innymi bohaterami lub szczegółami wydarzeń. Wielokrotnie zapisywałem np. wątek „Czarna wołga", która porywa ludzi, by wyciąć im nerkę, a w Rosji istniała odmiana mówiąca o wycinaniu źrenic dla wybitnego rosyjskiego okulisty.

P. G. Czy jako ekspert w tym zakresie był Pan proszony o konsultacje i dementowanie takich podejrzanych sensacji?

D. C. O konsultacje i dementowanie nie. Ale udzieliłem bardzo wielu wywiadów i dziennikarzy zwykle zaskakiwało to, że naukowiec zajmuje czymś takim, co dla nich jest chlebem powszednim, bo legenda miejska jest pożywką dla tzw. prasy brukowej i innych mass mediów. Najczęściej pytali mnie, co i jak zbieram,

i oczywiście zwykle wywiad kończył się przytoczeniem kilku ostatnich przykładów. Zawsze miałem na podorędziu takie najświeższe wątki, no i to bardzo chętnie dziennikarze publikowali. Natomiast chyba unikali dociekania, czy oni sami nie padają często ofiarą legend miejskich. A z moich obserwacji wynika, że niejednokrotnie tak było. Przykładem może być wątek mówiący o tym, że mafie lub sekty religijne prowadzą specjalne farmy lub sierocińce, w których hoduje się lub gromadzi dzieci, aby dostarczyć organów do leczenia bogatych ludzi w Stanach Zjednoczonych. To był niezwykle popularny wątek w Ameryce Południowej, ale w Polsce wiele razy spotkałem w telewizji, w radio i w prasie wypowiedzi, w których dziennikarze z pełną wiarą twierdzili, że takie miejsca na świecie istnieją, i nie wspominali nawet, że mogą to być plotki czy pogłoski, a więc byli klasycznymi ofiarami legendy miejskiej.

P. G. Chciałbym porozmawiać nieco więcej o Pana podróżach na Wschód, czyli do krajów wschodniosłowiańskich oraz do Mongolii. W odróżnieniu od Zachodu legendy miejskie nie są tam bowiem chyba przedmiotem intensywnych badań naukowych?

D. C. W Mongolii byłem trzykrotnie, za każdym razem przez prawie całe wakacje; to był 1991 r., potem 1999 i 2000. Ale te badania rozpocząłem już w 1990 r. Zaprzyjaźniłem się wtedy z Mongołem, który miał na imię Moncho. Przyjechał do nas na Uniwersytet Śląski na staż naukowy. On był zapalonym myśliwym i ja zabierałem go na polowania. Mieszkał w akademiku dla asystentów, miał dwa pokoje, a więc mógł przyjmować innych Mongołów i ja do niego jeździłem przez cały rok, i pytałem o legendy miejskie jego żonę, braci i wszystkich, którzy do niego przyjeżdżali. Krótko mówiąc, właściwie trochę ich wszystkich terroryzowałem, bo nie mogli się wywinąć i to dawało mi bardzo dużo materiału. Ale w Mongolii sytuacja okazała się zupełnie inna, niż to sobie wyobrażałem. Jechałem tam głównie po to, żeby zbierać opowieści o yeti, bo to mnie wtedy fascynowało (oni tam mają własną nazwę na tego zwierzą – *almas*). Moncho był moim tłumaczem i przewodnikiem. On wiedział, co ja zbieram, po co przyjechałem, i zapewniał mi kontakty, które nie było łatwo nawiązać, tym bardziej że ja robiłem wywiady po rosyjsku i trzeba było szukać ludzi mówiących w tym języku. Ale pierwsze moje doświadczenia były wręcz szokujące. W krajach zachodnich człowiek jest przyzwyczajony do tego, że jak zadajesz pytanie, to otrzymujesz odpowiedź – jakąkolwiek, może być negatywna, może być kiwnięcie głowy, jakiś gest – ale jest jakiś kontakt. W Mongolii spotkały mnie natomiast sytuacje takie jak ta. Pewnego dnia teść mojego przyjaciela przyszedł, żeby zobaczyć „tego Europejczyka", bo był ciekawy. To był wykształcony człowiek, ciekawy świata. Byłem przekonany, że błyskawicznie nawiążemy kontakt i rozmowa się uda. Moncho posadził nas przy stole, zrobił herbatkę czy kawę i czymś się zajął. I ja rozmawiam z tym jego teściem. Teść się pyta: „Pan przyjechał na badania naukowe, co pana interesuje?". Myślę sobie tak: „Trzeba mu dokładnie wytłumaczyć, o co mi chodzi w tych badaniach". Więc mówię, że

interesuje mnie taka współczesna mitologia, takie przypadki szczególne, często dramatyczne i podaję polskie przykłady. I wydaje mi się, że on zrozumiał, co mówiłem. Za chwilę do tego stolika dosiada się jego córka, czyli żona Moncho, i jeszcze jakaś osoba, a ja już jestem przekonany, że za chwilę będziemy zbierać legendy. Zadaję mu więc pierwsze pytanie – najłatwiejsze, na które każdy rozmówca na świecie ma dziś jakąś odpowiedź, czyli pytam o UFO. Ale on nic nie odpowiada. Myślę sobie: „Może to pytanie jest jakieś drażliwe i z jakiegoś powodu mu nie odpowiada". No to szukam innego wątku. Drugi taki, który – jak myślę – pozwoli „rozgadać" narratora, to *almas*, czyli yeti. Więc zadaję mu pytanie o yeti, ale on w ogólne nie reaguje, jakby pytanie odbiło się od niego, tylko zwraca się do córki po mongolsku. I takie sytuacje zdarzyły mi się jeszcze kilka razy. Zdarzyło się też tak, że Moncho specjalnie zaprosił na spotkanie ze mną swojego przyjaciela. Ja cały wieczór tłumaczyłem mu, co mnie interesuje, on słuchał, ale na żadne pytanie mi nie odpowiedział. I myślałem, że skończy się to tak, jak z tym teściem, a on przychodzi na drugi dzień i mi opowiada mnóstwo swoich wątków.

W Mongolii trudność z prowadzeniem takich badań polega także na tym, że często zaciera się tu granica między legendami miejskimi a tradycyjnymi wątkami. Opowiadano mi tu dużo takich historii, co do których nie byłem pewien, czy są to legendy miejskie. Na przykład w jednym mieście zachorowało dziecko, któremu żaden lekarz nie mógł pomóc. Rodzice poszli wiec z tym dzieckiem do lamy i opowiadają mu, jak to dziecko choruje. A on mówi tak: „Macie w domu czerwony przedmiot przyniesiony z zewnątrz. Trzeba ten przedmiot oddać". Oni wracają i szukają. Cały dom przeszukali, nigdzie nie ma żadnego cudzego czerwonego przedmiotu. I wreszcie w piórniku tego dziecka znajduje się czerwony ołówek czy długopis; dziecko przyniosło ze szkoły nie swój przedmiot. Rodzina pozbyła się tego przedmiotu i dziecko wyzdrowiało. Czy to jest legenda miejska? Zdarzenie jest współczesne, ale sam schemat i sens przedstawionego zachowania bardzo tradycyjne.

P. G. Czy ze swoich badań na Wschodzie pamięta Pan jakieś niebezpieczne sytuacje, kiedy ludzie reagowali agresywnie lub czuł się Pan zagrożony?

D. C. Nie miałem takich sytuacji. Rosjanie są bardzo serdeczni. Najczęściej prowadziłem z nimi wywiady, jadąc wiele dni pociągiem przez Syberię. Siedzisz w tych przedziałach, nudzisz się i jak się znajdzie jakiś ciekawy rozmówca, to ludzie się otwierają bardzo szybko. Zresztą zaprzyjaźniałem się w ten sposób, że na tych wielkich stacjach syberyjskich, kiedy trzeba było po chleb do kiosku skoczyć, to oni dbali, żebym nie został na stacji, żeby mi ktoś czegoś nie ukradł. Więc jeśli chodzi o Rosjan, doświadczyłem bardzo wielkiej serdeczności, a także wyrozumiałości nawet w stosunku do naprawdę głupich pytań z mojego kwestionariusza, ale z agresją się nie spotkałem. To, że mnóstwo ludzi nie odpowiadało, jest normalne. Znaleźć rozmówcę to jest pewna sztuka.

P. G. A pamięta Pan swoich najlepszych rozmówców?

D. C. Tak. Tacy ludzie na całe życie zostają w pamięci, bo to jest wielka radość, tyle satysfakcji i przeżyć emocjonalnych. Mój wywiad życia odbył się we Lwowie. Jeździłem tam ze studentami w ramach wymiany między Uniwersytetem Lwowskim a Uniwersytetem Śląskim. Byliśmy zakwaterowani w akademiku i zauważyłem, że jest tam na portierni taka urocza, uśmiechnięta babcia, która mówi po polsku. I zacząłem z nią rozmawiać, ale ona była tak zajęta tym wydawaniem kluczy i kontrolą, czy ktoś obcy nie wchodzi, że nie miała czasu. Umówiłem się więc z nią, że przyjdę o godzinie dziesiątej, kiedy zamykała portiernię. I to był mój wywiad życia. Spałem w tym akademiku trzy noce, a dwie noce nagrywaliśmy wywiad. Nagrałem kilka taśm. Radość zbieracza polega na tym, że masz kwestionariusz, zadajesz pytania, a rozmówca od razu, jak wulkan, odpowiada na każde z nich. I ona w ogóle nie była tym zmęczona. Ja już padałem na twarz, a ona opowiadała dalej. Miałem wtedy jakiś aparat i zrobiłem jej zdjęcie, które było niesłychanie udane. Postanowiłem jej się zrewanżować chociaż tym zdjęciem, bo wyszła idealnie. Ale długo nie jeździłem do Lwowa i dopiero kiedy moja koleżanka jechała tam na wycieczkę, powiedziałem: „Weź to zdjęcie. Tam jest taka babcia, ma takie nazwisko, oddaj jej". Po powrocie koleżanka mówi: „Słuchaj, nigdy nie przeżyłam czegoś takiego. Jak powiedziałam, że tu był taki Polak, rozmawiał z panią i przesyła to zdjęcie, to ona zaczęła płakać i objęła mnie, i tak płakała nad tym zdjęciem, że ja byłam zszokowana". W ten sposób sprawiłem tej babci radość i jakoś się zrewanżowałem za ten cudowny wywiad.

A drugi wywiad życia był w zupełnie innej sytuacji. Jechałem po raz pierwszy do Mongolii w 1991 r. i na Syberii, już w Omsku, wsiadły do sąsiedniego przedziału trzy studentki, które jechały nad Bajkał na wypoczynek do jakiegoś ośrodka. No to dwie albo trzy doby podróży mieliśmy do tego Bajkału, bo one wysiadały w Irkucku. Wtedy pierwszy raz pomogli mi moi studenci, którzy ze mną jechali, bo oni bardzo szybko nawiązali kontakt z tymi rosyjskimi studentkami. Przyszli do mnie i powiedzieli: „Panie profesorze, te dziewczyny znają legendy miejskie". Ja zaraz wziąłem magnetofon i poszedłem. I to była Nastia, Natasza i Irina. Dokładnie pamiętam – przeurocze dziewczyny. Coś takiego nigdy mi się już potem nie zdarzyło, żeby w zbiorowym wywiadzie na każde pytanie były trzy odpowiedzi. Pierwszą opowieść mówi Nastia, potem Natasza, a potem Irena. Trzy warianty na jedno pytanie. I co ja zadam pytanie, każda z nich opowiada. W Polsce zdarzały mi się wywiady grupowe ze studentami, ale nawet jeśli oni znali inne warianty danej legendy, to dorzucali tylko różnice i wtedy nie wychodziły trzy różne wątki, tylko jeden wątek z dodatkami. Natomiast tu miałem trzy niezależne opowieści. No to był wywiad! Nagrałem kilka taśm po półtorej godziny. Oczywiście przerywałem, częstowaliśmy się czymś, bo w tych rosyjskich pociągach było tak, że jak wyjmujesz coś do jedzenia, to cię od razu Rosjanie częstują. To myśmy też te dziewczyny częstowali. Taka się przyjaźń nawiązała, że jedna z nich napisała do mnie później i przysłała mi kilka stron

materiałów związanych z legendą cara Aleksandra I. To popularna w Rosji historia, która mówi, że car Aleksander I nie zmarł śmiercią naturalną, tylko wsiadł do łódki w Taganrogu i zaginął. A potem pojawił się na Syberii jako święty mędrzec i zmarł tam otoczony wielkim szacunkiem. Przez cały XIX w. były wycieczki do grobu tego starca, którego traktowano jako cara Aleksandra.

P. G. Czy na wschodzie Europy i w Azji opowiada się inne historie, które mają swoją specyfikę, czy też spotyka się te same wątki co na Zachodzie?

D. C. Jeśli chodzi o legendy miejskie, to mamy obecnie duże zbiory amerykańskie, angielskie, niemieckie, belgijskie, włoskie, polskie, czeskie, a nie mamy wielkich zbiorów z krajów wschodniosłowiańskich czy krajów Dalekiego Wschodu, więc nie jest łatwo powiedzieć, jaki procent z nich to wątki międzynarodowe. Jak patrzę na moje zbiory wschodniego repertuaru, to wydaje mi się, że wątki zachodnie są w nich obecne, często mają jednak swoiste, lokalne oblicze. Dobrym przykładem jest Mongolia. Tam udało mi się zarejestrować ogólnoświatowe wątki, które miały silne własne akcenty. Mongolia to mały kraj – około trzy miliony mieszkańców – który jest cały czas zagrożony tym miliardem Chińczyków i każdy Mongoł boi się, że wcześniej czy później może dojść do utraty wolności. Stąd Chiny i Chińczycy są przedstawiani jako wielkie niebezpieczeństwo także w legendach miejskich. I to jest chyba taki uniwersalny proces czy schemat. Próbował go kiedyś opisać Julian Krzyżanowski, który stwierdził, że typowe sytuacje egzystencjalne – np. określone zagrożenia – wpływają na to, iż podobne opowieści powstają niezależnie od siebie w różnych miejscach[6]. W związku z tym również podobieństwo legend miejskich na świecie można tłumaczyć tymi klasycznymi sytuacjami egzystencjalnymi, występującymi w Mongolii, w Rosji, w Polsce czy w innych krajach.

P. G. A na czym polega mongolska specyfika międzynarodowych wątków legendy miejskiej?

D. C. Podam taki przykład. W Ameryce i w Europie jedna z najsłynniejszych legend miejskich to „Znikający autostopowicz". Mówi ona o tym, że oto jedzie drogą kierowca i zatrzymuje go ktoś bardzo charakterystycznie ubrany. To może być dziadek, jakaś kobieta w czerni, jakaś dziewczyna. Zatrzymuje, prosi o podwiezienie i podaje adres. Kierowca zna ten adres, wie gdzie jechać. W trakcie jazdy pasażer w ogóle nie rozmawia, milczy, siedząc na tylnym siedzeniu. Kiedy kierowca podjeżdża pod wskazany adres, okazuje się, że tej osoby już w samochodzie nie ma, a przecież on nigdzie się nie zatrzymywał. Nie rozumie tej sytuacji, idzie do tego domu i opowiada, co się wydarzyło. Wtedy kobieta, która otworzyła mu drzwi, mówi: „To była moja córka; ona zmarła rok

6 Krzyżanowski, J. (1977). Typowe sytuacje życiowe w literaturze i folklorze. W: J. Krzyżanowski, *Paralele. Studia porównawcze z pogranicza literatury i folkloru*. PWN.

temu". I pokazuje mu zdjęcie, a on widzi, że rzeczywiście wiózł osobę, która jest na zdjęciu.

„Znikający autostopowicz" występuje także w Mongolii, ale pojawiają się tu różne lokalne odmiany tego wątku. Trzeba przy tym pamiętać, że w Mongolii w zasadzie nie ma asfaltowych dróg. Oczywiście poza Ułan Bator, bo to miasto – jak wszystkie inne miasta na świecie – ma asfaltowane drogi, ale te drogi kończą się w każdym kierunku po kilku kilometrach i zaczyna się trakt na stepie. Te trakty są jednak używane przez kierowców ciężarówek, którzy jeżdżą po całej Mongolii i przywożą barany, kumys, sery, żeby wyżywić to wielkie miasto. I to właśnie jest specyficzna sceneria, w której rozgrywa się akcja tych lokalnych odmian „Znikającego autostopowicza". Jedna z nich to tzw. szybkobiegacz: kierowca mongolskiej ciężarówki zauważa, że obok jego wozu pędzi bardzo szybko, tak szybko jak samochód, jakaś postać. Druga odmiana: ni stąd, ni zowąd w oknie, na zewnątrz jadącej ciężarówki pojawia się dziewczyna, która trzyma się jakiegoś uchwytu i patrzy na kierowcę. On jest tak przerażony tym zdarzeniem, że podjeżdża do najbliższego hudona, czyli wsi, i zaczyna tańczyć, czyli zwariował. W jeszcze innym wariancie kierowcy mongolskiemu psuje się samochód. Ponieważ na stepie trudno znaleźć warsztat, to on zaczyna rozbierać i remontować swoją ciężarówkę, a w tym czasie podchodzi do niego taki mały chłopczyk i prosi o podwiezienie. Kierowca mówi, że jak skończy naprawę, to go podwiezie, ale później postać znika. Ten mały chłopczyk to prawdopodobnie jest jakaś transformacja motywu karła, który występuje w rożnych wcześniejszych tradycyjnych, mongolskich opowieściach.

P. G. Czy da się jakoś podsumować Pana badania legend miejskich w krajach wschodniosłowiańskich i w Mongolii? Czy wyłaniają się z tych badań jakieś ogólne wnioski?

D. C. Moje badania na Wschodzie pokazały jedną ciekawą rzecz. Wątki, które pojawiały się na Zachodzie, za parę lat przenosiły się do Polski, a później dalej na Wschód. Na przykład wątek trucizny lub niebezpiecznych pająków w bananach. Najpierw przeczytałem o nim w artykule jednego z folklorystów ze Szwecji, z którym miałem kontakt. Później zacząłem trafiać na jego warianty w Polsce. Jeździłem wtedy również do Rosji, ale tam w ogóle ludzie nie reagowali na hasło „trucizna w bananach". Dopiero po jakimś czasie, ni stąd, ni zowąd, moja żona przywozi mi opowieść z Białorusi: jej siostra opowiadała, że szwagier opowiadał, że w Mińsku dojrzewalnia bananów znajduje się w szpitalu, w pomieszczeniu tuż obok „trupiarni" i z tej „trupiarni" przechodzi trupi jad do tych bananów, których nie wolno dawać dzieciom, bo umrą. Podobną sytuację mamy w przypadku wspomnianych wcześniej opowieści o AIDS. Panika na tym tle wybuchła w Stanach Zjednoczonych dużo wcześniej niż w Polsce. Natomiast w Mongolii pojawiła się właśnie wtedy, kiedy ja tam przyjechałem, czyli jeszcze parę lat później. Wszyscy wtedy mówili, jak bardzo niebezpieczny jest AIDS, i ostrzegali mnie, żebym nie szedł do dzielnicy lekkich obyczajów, bo

przyjechało tam kilku murzynów i zaraziło wszystkie mongolskie prostytutki, które wcześniej nie były roznosicielkami wirusa HIV.

Być może teraz, kiedy mamy internet, sytuacja się zmieniła i wątki błyskawicznie przeskakują z miejsca na miejsce. Ja w tamtych latach badałem jednak przekazy ustne i stwierdziłem, że bez wątpienia legendy miejskie wędrowały przez świat z Zachodu na Wschód.

Transkrypcja wywiadu Mateusz Napiórkowski

RECENZJE I OMÓWIENIA
REVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

LITERATURA LUDOWA. Journal of Folklore and Popular Culture vol. 66 (2022), no. 3
Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze Polish Ethnological Society

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Masław, Wałęsa, Wojtyła, czyli chłopska historia Polski

Miecław, Wałęsa, Wojtyła or the Peasant History of Poland

Jan Wasiewicz, *Pamięć – chłopi – bunt. Transdyscyplinarne badania nad chłopskim dziedzictwem. Historia pamięci pierwszego powstania ludowego na ziemiach polskich*, Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2021.

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„Ludowa historia Polski" stała się w ostatniej dekadzie zarówno nazwą dla coraz szerszej fali badań historycznych, etnologicznych, socjologicznych, filologicznych, folklorystycznych i pokrewnych, jak i etykietą dla przedsięwzięć o charakterze artystycznym, obecnych w muzyce, teatrze i literaturze. Odczytywana na nowo przeszłość rodzi spory o pamięć, dziedzictwo, sprawstwo i władzę; kreuje nowe panteony bohaterów i bohaterek; po raz kolejny roznieca debaty nad desygnatem terminu „lud"; profiluje ponadto widzenie teraźniejszości poprzez pryzmat długiego trwania folwarcznych struktur odczuwania i zarządzania.

Książka Jana Wasiewicza, *Pamięć – chłopi – bunt. Transdyscyplinarne badania nad chłopskim dziedzictwem. Historia pamięci pierwszego powstania ludowego na ziemiach polskich*, otwarcie wpisuje się w przywołaną falę. Jej autor,

filozof i wykładowca poznańskiego Uniwersytetu Artystycznego, świadomie to przyznaje, a czytelnik od razu zauważa, choćby uważnie taksując tytuł. Reinterpretowanie przeszłości, oddanie głosu grupom upodrzędnionym oraz pełne troski zaangażowanie po stronie klas ludowych – wszystkie te cechy w pracy Wasiewicza są obecne.

Narracja zawarta w pokaźnych rozmiarów (ponad 700 stron) książce rozpoczyna się od – wydawałoby się – drobiazgu. Jest nim fotografia przedstawiająca „ziemiańskie zabawy", a konkretnie polowanie. Brali w nim udział arystokraci, np. książę Karol Hieronim Radziwiłł, i członkowie międzywojennej polskiej elity. Mimo że za grupą podpisanych imieniem i nazwiskiem mężczyzn stoi jeszcze jedna osoba – dyskretnie wycofana, zdecydowanie na drugim planie, spoglądająca jednak w kierunku obiektywu – nie zaprzątała ona ani uwagi fotografa, ani późniejszych archiwistów, skrupulatnie identyfikujących pozostałych bohaterów zdjęcia. Wasiewicz postępuje inaczej. Dopomina się właśnie o dostrzeżenie jej obecności, o włączenie do opisu fotografii. A szerzej, kontekstualizując swoje rozważania ideami zaczerpniętymi z prac Rolanda Barthes'a, Thomasa Bergera, Waltera Benjamina, domaga się uznania istnienia jeszcze jednego podmiotu tego wydarzenia, tamtego państwa, a także wspólnych dziejów.

Wychodząc od tej pojedynczej, symbolicznej fotografii, autor deklaruje, że interesują go ludzie „stojący na marginesach historii oficjalnej, monumentalnej, historii grup dominujących" (s. 23), a także „miejsce chłopów i chłopek w dziejach narodu i państwa [...] w polskiej przeszłej i obecnej pamięci zbiorowej" (s. 27). Jego nadrzędnym celem jest „pisanie historii pamięci i zapomnienia [...] chłopskiej krzywdy i oporu wobec niej" (s. 230). Autor od razu dopowiada, że owemu celowi przyświeca postawa „rewizjonistycznego patriotyzmu krytycznego" (s. 33), rozumiana przezeń w Heglowskim duchu „negacji zachowującej". Nie idzie tutaj zatem o radykalną negację dominującej narracji historycznej, o rozbicie w pył „wielkiej opowieści", ale raczej o dopełnianie historii, naświetlanie jej zaciemnionych miejsc, krytyczne spojrzenie na interpretacyjne liczmany. Ostatecznie także, jak podkreśla Wasiewicz, jego praca może być traktowana jako remedium na szowinizm, tak często idący ręka w rękę z określoną polityką historyczną.

Jak do swoich zamiarów podchodzi Wasiewicz? Pierwsza część książki poświęcona została kwestiom teoretycznym i metodologicznym. Autor z rozmachem szkicuje w niej pole transdyscyplinarnego pamięcioznawstwa. Zastanawiając się nad „gorączką archiwów" i fiksacyjnym niemal zainteresowaniem przeszłością, przywołuje pojęcia, takie jak *memory boom* czy „kultura upamiętniania". Trafnie dostrzega, że ich konsekwencją jest transformacja przeszłości zarówno w medium pamięci, jak i w pole walki; jemu zaś bliski jest model traktowania jej w charakterze wspólnej, obywatelskiej agory, na której współistnieją rozmaite tradycje i wspólnoty, także interpretacyjne.

Rozważając rozmaite konsekwencje „zarządzania przeszłością" (Pierre Nora), zaznacza, że jego samego najbardziej interesuje jedna kategoria, a mianowicie pamięć kulturowa (w ujęciu Jana i Aleidy Assmannów), czyli ta jej formuła,

która jest „zobiektywizowana w szeroko pojętych tekstach kultury" (s. 69). Owe „teksty kultury" z kolei pamięć magazynują, cyrkulują i wywołują afekty. Wasiewicz zajmuje się także zapominaniem/wypieraniem/nieprzyswajaniem oraz ich rewersem, jakim jest „odpominanie", zwykle polegające na przepracowywaniu „trudnej", niechcianej, niewygodnej pamięci. Rozważa też arcytrudny problem zapominania i przebaczenia, upominając się o taką postawę, która z jednej strony zapewnia pamiętanie, z drugiej natomiast umożliwia akt przebaczenia.

W ciekawym, polemicznym fragmencie autor analizuje domniemany „kres kultury chłopskiej", przypomina spory o chłopskość polskiego (i nie tylko) społeczeństwa, naświetla proces „sarmatyzacji klasy chłopskiej". Celnie wskazuje przy okazji chłopski rodowód dwóch najbardziej bodaj emblematycznych Polaków XX w.: Lecha Wałęsy i Karola Wojtyły. Zestawia również ze sobą – na mocy mechanizmu ambiwalencji – chłopofilię i chłopofobię.

Dalej Wasiewicz przedstawia ciekawy i różnorodny wybór tekstów kultury dotyczących tematyki chłopskiej, powstałych w ciągu ostatniej dekady w ramach wspomnianej już fali: monografii i artykułów naukowych, publicystyki, prozy, dramatów, przykładów sztuki wizualnej i wystaw muzealnych. Przedkłada i broni tutaj także określenia „metachłopska postpamięć", odnosząc je do osób, które uznają wagę dziedzictwa kultury chłopskiej, pamiętając je wszelako z drugiej ręki, niebezpośrednio, tworząc jednak w konsekwencji kontrpamięć. W zakończeniu tej części autor optymistycznie wnioskuje, że tak samo jak możliwy jest inny świat, tak samo możliwa jest inna pamięć: bardziej wielowymiarowa, inkluzywna, lepsza. Zadaje ponadto trafne pytanie o dziedzictwo chłopskie: czy są nim tylko posłuszeństwo, poddaństwo i strach? Czy może odwrotnie: swoboda, opór i dążenie do samostanowienia?

Część druga pracy ogniskuje się na pierwszym ludowo-pogańskim powstaniu w dziejach piastowskiej Polski. Idzie o znanego pod wariantowo różniącymi się imionami Masława/Miecława/Miesława/Mojsława, cześnika Mieszka I, a następnie także władcę Mazowsza, który w czwartej dekadzie XI w. kierował ludową rebelią. Wydarzenie to jest chronologicznie bardzo odległe, faktograficznie niejasne, a nawet kontrowersyjne („reakcja pogańska"). Mimo upływu wielu stuleci pozostaje jednak ważne, jak przekonuje autor, dla wspólnej, polskiej pamięci kulturowej. Wasiewicz najpierw porównuje poświęcone temu wydarzeniu zapisy kronikarskie, potem dawne interpretacje historyków, jak też relacje dziejopisów i „bajhistoryków" nieprofesjonalnych (Krzysztof Opaliński), cykle obrazów, dzieła popularne, wizje romantyków, kreacje literackie (od Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego poczynając), także widowisko plenerowe, artykuły prasowe, a nawet prace satyryków. Dodaje przy tym mnóstwo szczegółów historycznych i obyczajowych, przypomina biografie, zdarzenia, losy redakcji, naświetla atmosferę polityczną, tropi kolejne wydania omawianych dzieł. Ten przeglądowy fresk obejmuje wiele stuleci, a w ostatnim rozdziale uzupełniony zostaje, znacznie już krótszymi, rozważaniami o pamięci drugiego ludowego powstania, tym razem z nieco późniejszych czasów Bolesława Śmiałego.

Od razu zaznaczam, że nie mam wątpliwości ani co do oryginalności recenzowanej książki, ani co do jej ciężaru merytorycznego. Wasiewicz dokonuje ważnego gestu, przekonuje bowiem, że pamięć kulturowa wydarzeń sprzed niemal 1000 lat jest tematem godnym podjęcia, dającym się sensownie aktualizować i wpisywać w ramy bieżących dyskusji. Nierzadko imponuje erudycją, trafnie dobiera odniesienia, dokonuje bardzo skrupulatnego przeglądu dostępnych źródeł, nie fetyszyzując przy tym tych zapisów, które historycy bałwochwalczo nazywają „tekstami źródłowymi".

Nie znaczy to, że książka *Pamięć – chłopi – bunt* nie budzi pewnych zastrzeżeń. Najpoważniejsze z nich dotyczy braku podsumowania. Wasiewicz rozpisuje powstanie Masława na tak wiele odsłon, że niemal naturalna wydaje się konieczność ich skomentowania, wskazania na kluczowe mechanizmy transformowania pamięci, kreowanej przez tak długi okres i tak wielu aktorów. Mamy jednak tylko zdawkowe – w porównaniu z całością wręcz mikroskopijne – „Zamiast zakończenia". Autor sygnalizuje tam dobrze znane początki kształtowania się systemu folwarczno-pańszczyźnianego: wydany przez Leszka Białego zakaz osiedlania się polskich kmieci na prawie niemieckim, statuty wiślickie (dla Małopolski) oraz piotrkowskie (dla Wielkopolski), ograniczające wolność zmiany miejsca życia. Szkoda, że zabrakło Wasiewiczowi sił i energii na spuentowanie swojego historycznego fresku.

Trudno za zakończenie uznać również wykonany na końcu książki gest. Autor ponownie nawiązuje do przywołanej wcześniej fotografii z „ziemiańskiej zabawy". Na jej pierwszym planie, przed grupą uśmiechniętych mężczyzn, stoi stolik z kieliszkami i butelką alkoholu. „Moje przedsięwzięcie – objaśnia Wasiewicz – miałoby być postawieniem jeszcze jednego kieliszka na tym stoliku, a właściwie dwóch. Pierwszego dla bezimiennego chłopa, drugiego także dla nieznanego z imienia fotografa" (s. 575). Zaproszenie do wspólnego, biesiadnego stołu w kontekście wcześniejszych drobiazgowych rozważań o polskiej pamięci odczytuję jako raczej anegdotyczne.

Nie mam wszelako wątpliwości, że mamy do czynienia z dojrzałą, pogłębioną i merytorycznie wysokiej klasy refleksją. Autor – swobodnie poruszający się na przecięciu kilku dyscyplin – pokazuje wędrującą pamięć kulturową w ruchu, w sensotwórczym działaniu. Jakkolwiek skupia się na pierwszym powstaniu chłopskim na ziemiach polskich, to wiele cennych uwag Wasiewicz sformułował także na temat „wyciszania" chłopskich korzeni oraz chocholego tańca chłopomanii i chłopofobii. Na koniec chciałbym zachęcić do lektury: niech Czytelnik nie obawia się ani odległego adresu historycznego, ani objętości tomu.

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Długie życie klasyki literatury dziecięcej

The Long Life of the Classics of Children's Literature

Maciej Skowera,
***Carroll, Baum, Barrie. (Mito)biografie i (mikro)historie*,**
Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2022.

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W najnowszej książce Maciej Skowera powraca do klasyki literatury dziecięcej, a w centrum jego uwagi znajduje się trójka powieściopisarzy, których bohaterowie – Alicja, Piotruś Pan i Dorotka – na stałe funkcjonują w masowej wyobraźni. Nieprzypadkowo też już we wstępie autor, odwołując się do powieści graficznej *Zagubione dziewczęta*, omawia niezwykle popularne zjawisko, jakim jest „przerabianie" XIX w. w najnowszej popkulturze (Paczoska, Szleszyński 2011). Okazuje się, że wiek pary i elektryczności ciągle jest atrakcyjny dla współczesnego czytelnika czy widza, a powracające motywy, wątki lub bohaterowie stają się nie tylko czytelnymi markerami danego dzieła, ale także często stanowią komentarz do współczesnej sytuacji społeczno-politycznej. Liczne prequele, sequele świadczą o nieustannej żywotności pewnych tekstów. *Zagubione dziewczęta* stają się początkiem niezwykle wciągającej podróży, w którą Skowera zabiera czytelników do przełomu XIX i XX w., kiedy to właśnie powstały kultowe powieści dla dzieci, jak *Alicja w Krainie Czarów* Lewisa

Carrolla czy *Piotruś Pan* Jamesa Matthew Barriego. We *Wstępie* autor zaznacza, że kluczem metodologicznym w pracy stanie się mitobiografia oraz mitohistoria. Co warto podkreślić, wybór narzędzi badawczych w odniesieniu do literatury adresowanej do dzieci nie tylko jest innowacyjny, jeśli chodzi o badania krajowe, ale także wzbogaca analizy oraz interpretacje o konteksty kulturowe (czasy wiktoriańskie, edwardiańskie). Definiując mitobiografię, Skowera odwołuje się do Jarosława Ławskiego (2010), który stwierdza, że jest to zespół wyobrażeń o biografii mający charakter klisz, układających się w całość. Klisze te są szczególnie widoczne w powtarzanych, utartych stereotypach na temat pisarzy, jak choćby zarzuty pedofilii wobec Carrolla czy Barriego. Co ciekawe, każdy z bohaterów tej książki ma intrygującą biografię, niekiedy pełną licznych niedomówień po części wpisujących się w klimat epoki przełomu wieków. Wspomnimy choćby o Carrollu, który z jednej strony był genialnym matematykiem o nudnej z pozoru osobowości. Z drugiej zaś jego zachowania odbiegały od powszechnie obowiązujących wzorców normatywnych. To podwójne życie koresponduje z podwójnymi standardami moralności wiktorian. Drugim narzędziem wykorzystywanym przez Skowerę w pracy są mikrohistorie, które definiuje za Ewą Domańską. Badaczka ta zwróciła uwagę, że w nowej historii kulturowej, inspirowanej literaturoznawstwem czy antropologią, w centrum zainteresowania znajduje się historia ludzkich doświadczeń, prywatnych mikroświatów (Domańska 2005: 62). Mikrohistorie, o których wspomina badaczka, obejmują szczegółowy opis przedmiotu badań, uwzględniającego rozmaite aspekty, często pomijane w „wielkich" historiach (niewątpliwie w przypadku bohaterów książki Skowery jest nią m.in. sfera seksualności). Zmiana tej optyki pozwala także uchwycić transformacje zachodzące w sferze obyczajowości oraz mentalności zwykłych ludzi, żyjących poza mainstreamem. Tym tropem podąża autor omawianej monografii, śledząc choćby przeobrażenia towarzyszące wizerunkom dzieci w literaturze angielskiej (w przypadku epoki wiktoriańskiej faworyzowano dziewczynki, w edwardiańskiej zaś chłopców). Dla Skowery kluczowy wydaje się właśnie ten kontekst kulturowy, co potwierdzają liczne odwołania do opracowań o charakterze biograficznym, artykułów prasowych, współczesnych filmów dokumentalnych i fabularnych inspirowanych twórczością omawianych autorów. We *Wstępie* autor podkreśla, że podejście mikrohistoryczne zakłada daleko posuniętą subiektywizację, obecną w monografii, co moim zdaniem stanowi wielki atut książki.

W pierwszym rozdziale, mającym charakter teoretyczny (*Literatura dziecięca – wersja „dla dorosłych" z dzieciństwem w tle*), Skowera zwraca uwagę na płynność granicy między dzieciństwem a nastoletniością, przywołując liczne opracowania zarówno badaczy krajowych, jak i zagranicznych. Badacz podkreśla, że na przestrzeni wieków w obrębie literatury dziecięcej nastąpiła ewolucja, którą odzwierciedla przejście od dydaktyzmu do artyzmu, a na którą – dodajmy – ogromny wpływ miał kontekst społeczny. Dzieciństwo, jak pisze Skowera, „ulega metamorfozom w ramach danej kultury dziejów (zmiany te są w dużej mierze warunkowane kontekstami filozoficznymi, społecznymi)" (s. 59). Literaturę

dziecięcą badacz definiuje jako „wieloaspektową narrację o dziecku i dzieciństwie, o tym, jak dorośli mogą i chcą je postrzegać" (s. 68). Autorowi bliska jest także perspektywa *childhood studies*. W rozdziale tym poruszona zostaje także kwestia kanonu i klasyki rozumianej jako obszar wzorcowy, modelowy. Skowera słusznie zwraca uwagę, że teksty kanoniczne, zarówno te z obszaru literatury dla dorosłych, jak i te przeznaczone dla dzieci, często poddawane są różnomedialnym transformacjom oraz ciągłej profesjonalnej i nieprofesjonalnej relekturze. Spostrzeżenie to koresponduje ze zjawiskiem intertekstualności, obecnym w najnowszej popkulturze, chętnie powracającej do klasyki i w wersji tekstualnej, i w wersji wizualnej. Wspomnijmy choćby o serialu *Dawno, dawno temu* stanowiącym nowe odczytanie klasycznych baśni. Renarracje, prenarracje, postnarracje dokonujące się w obrębie popkultury świadczą o nieustannej żywotności pewnych utworów, bohaterów literackich, motywów etc. Zabiegi te, jak słusznie podkreśla Skowera, występują w dwóch wariantach. W pierwszym zachęcają do ponownego aktu czytania dzieła, które uległo transformacji. W drugim zaś, naukowym, klasyczne opowieści poddawane są kolejnym interpretacjom prowadzonym z punktu widzenia zmieniających się metodologii badawczych (np. *animal studies*, ekokrytyka, *queer studies*).

W rozdziale drugim (*Kroniki Krainy Czarów. O tym, co się przydarzyło Lewisowi Carrollowi i „Alicji"*) Skowera śledzi fenomen popularności historii o Alicji, przywołując nie tylko jej przekłady, ale również ekranizacje filmowe, serialowe adaptacje, literackie opowieści odwołujące się do bohaterów z powieści Carrolla, jak np. rewizjonistyczne opowiadanie *Złote popołudnie* (1997) Andrzeja Sapkowskiego, w którym głównym bohaterem jest kot z Cheshire. Autor recenzowanej książki rozbudowuje również kontekst społeczno-obyczajowy i zwraca uwagę, że tak jak wiktorianie Carroll prowadził podwójne życie (wybitnego uczonego z Oxfordu, pioniera fotografii w Anglii), oddzielając twórczość literacką od naukowej. We współczesnych tekstach kultury nawiązujących do powieści Carrolla często powracają psychoanalityczne interpretacje, w których kluczową rolę odgrywają motywy oniryczne. Interesujący wydaje się fakt, że utwór Carrolla zmienił oblicze literatury dziecięcej; wcześniej dominował w niej dydaktyzm. Świat w *Alicji* stał się groteskowy i ironiczny, daleki od moralizatorstwa. Na marginesie warto wspomnieć, że pisarz budował za życia imperium Alicji (sprzedaż pudełek na znaczki, puszki na ciastka); książka pojawiła się pod koniec listopada w okresie przedświątecznym, co wpłynęło także na sukces wydawniczy. Liczne współczesne odwołania do Alicji świadczą, że utwór Carrolla stał się podatny na rozmaite – społeczne, psychologiczne i estetyczne – odczytania. Często mają one charakter parodii, satyry politycznej i społecznej (jak np. *Alice in Brexitland* Luciena Younga).

W rozdziale trzecim (*Opowieści ze Szmaragdowego Grodu. Życie i czasy L. Franka Bauma i cyklu o krainie Oz*) Skowera analizuje fenomen popularności *Czarnoksiężnika ze Szmaragdowego Grodu* (1900), będącej jedną z najczęściej przekładanych powieści amerykańskich dla dzieci. W przeciwieństwie do Carrolla Frank Baum wiódł szczęśliwe życie, w którym trudno wskazać niemoralne

czyny. Biografia autora uosabia sen o karierze „od zera do milionera". Ciekawa wydaje się recepcja powieści, którą początkowo krytycy chwalili za poruszane wątki filozoficzne. Z kolei lata 70. XX w. to zły okres dla utworów Bauma, na co niewątpliwie miała także wpływ tocząca się wcześniej dyskusja na temat „książek zakazanych". Utwór Bauma przypomina nowoczesną baśń, w której zdziwienie i radość górują nad strapieniem i strachem. Co ciekawe, we współczesnych interpretacjach powieść ta odchodzi od pierwotnego kontekstu (adresowanego do dzieci) i wchodzi w obręb popkultury dla dorosłych z pozytywnym waloryzowaniem odmienności. Liczne adaptacje filmowe, serialowe opowieści o Czarnoksiężniku z Oz sprawiają, że utwór Bauma przypomina opowieść transmedialną funkcjonującą w kulturowym uniwersum czy nawet podświadomości wielu osób. Mam tu na myśli utwór *Over the Rainbow* pochodzący z adaptacji filmowej, który doczekał się licznych coverów.

W rozdziale czwartym (*Z annałów Nibylandii. J. M. Barrie i „Piotruś Pan" – zawsze pomiędzy*) Skowera koncentruje się na fenomenie Piotrusia Pana, wiecznego dziecka, żyjącego na pograniczu świata ludzkiego i fantastycznego, cywilizacji i natury. Postać ta stała się inspiracją dla psychologów. Dzisiaj syndromem Piotrusia Pana określa się niedojrzałych mężczyzn, którzy „odraczają" dorosłość, żyją w świecie fantazji. Szczególnie interesujący wydaje się trop, w którym Skowera zwraca uwagę, że wieczny chłopiec jest archetypicznym bohaterem *fin de siècle*'u, marzącym o niekończącym się dzieciństwie i zafascynowanym beztroskim okresem młodości, kiedy kluczową rolę odgrywa zabawa. Podobnie jak w przypadku *Alicji* czy *Czarnoksiężnika z krainy Oz* Barrie kreuje wizję alternatywnego świata, ukrytego przed wzrokiem dorosłego człowieka. Dodatkowo w świecie tym autor odwołuje się do folkloru Wysp Brytyjskich. Skowera podkreśla, że „zarówno Ogrody po godzinie zamknięcia, jak i Nibylandia podobne są do Krainy Czarów z powieści Carrolla, da się je interpretować jako zaświaty, wykluczone z czasu historycznego mityczne przestrzenie snu i śmierci" (s. 393). Trop ten jest niezwykle trafny, uwzględnia bowiem wątki biografii Barriego, która obfituje w liczne traumatyczne wydarzenia, jak śmierć brata (utożsamianego z tytułowym bohaterem powieści) czy oskarżenia o pedofilską fascynację dziećmi, które twórca adoptował. Autor zmagał się z depresją, lękiem przed śmiercią oraz przemijaniem. Podobnie jak w przypadku *Alicji w Krainie Czarów* powieść Barriego stała się czytelnym komentarzem do współczesnej sytuacji społeczno-politycznej. Badacz wspomina chociażby o Michaelu Jacksonie, oskarżanym o pedofilię, i jego posiadłości Neverland. Analizowana z perspektywy najnowszych badań biografia Piotrusia Pana posługuje się kategorią dziwności, w świetle której dziecko to ponowoczesny Obcy, przypominający przedstawicieli i przedstawicielki innych grup marginalizowanych społecznie i kulturowo (s. 381).

Bez wątpienia monografia Skowery to fascynująca opowieść o klasyce literatury dziecięcej, jej długim trwaniu w najnowszej popkulturze. Autor z pasją śledzi recepcję poszczególnych powieści, uwzględnia kontekst biograficzny autorów. Zaproponowana kategoria mitobiografii nie tylko wzbogaca dyskurs, ale

też stanowi trafną egzemplifikację tezy badacza, mówiącej, że „Carroll, Baum i Barrie, a raczej ich mitobiografie – to konstrukcje schizofreniczne, podwójne, w pewnym sensie sobowtórze" (s. 356). Kategoria ta decyduje o sposobach funkcjonowania pisarzy w kulturowym imaginarium. Skowera śledzi zmieniające się koncepcje na temat „natury" dziecka i dzieciństwa. Szczególnie ciekawe i inspirujące wydają się fragmenty, gdzie badacz zwraca uwagę na najnowsze adaptacje oraz renarracje, w których klasyka dziecięca adresowana jest do dorosłych i często stanowi komentarz do współczesnych zagadnień dotyczących polityki, historii, tożsamości. Niewątpliwie książka Skowery zainspiruje badaczy nie tylko literatury dziecięcej, ale także nurtów wiktoriańskich oraz (neo)wiktoriańskich w najnowszej popkulturze. To przede wszystkim wspaniała opowieść, która wywołuje w czytelniku nostalgię za beztroskim okresem dzieciństwa...

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