

## Gergely Péterfy's Stuffed Barbarian ['Kitömött Barbár'], the Ethics of Narration and the Politics of the Human: A British Context\*

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**Abstract:** This paper presents Gergely Péterfy's *Stuffed Barbarian* [*Kitömött Barbár*, 2014] in the context of eighteenth-century, pre-Revolutionary debates on slavery and the related question of the "human." It investigates the ethical and political stakes of Péterfy's narrative technique and argues that the improbably omniscient, third person character narration used throughout the novel performs the universalist *and* exclusive ideology *Bildung* of the European Enlightenment, which Péterfy mourns.

**Keywords:** Gergely Péterfy, *Stuffed Barbarian*, *Kitömött Barbár*, dehumanization, slavery, *Bildung*, humanism

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In terms of its etymology, the ancient Greek word *barbarian* [βάρβαρος] is supposed to imitate the incomprehensible mumblings of the language of foreign peoples, which to Greek ears sound like "bar-bar" (or, as we would say today, "bla bla"). As such, it has a double implication: on a first level, it signifies a lack of understanding on the part of the other, since the language of the other is perceived as meaningless sounds. At the same time, it suggests an unwillingness to understand the other's language and thus to make the encounter with the other a communicative occasion. Consequently, the term *barbarian* entails a collective construction of the other in a way that helps define the civilized subject itself—by specifying its negative limits. In this construction, the other is supposedly invalidated because it can never speak back and question its construction (its language would not be understood). The barbarian thus appears as an abjected outside, which, according to Judith Butler, is always inside the subject 'as its own founding repudiation' (Boletski 2007: 68).

Published in 2014, Gergely Péterfy's novel, *Kitömött barbár* ['*Stuffed Barbarian*'], is the outgrowth of his doctoral thesis on the Hungarian poet, translator and linguist Ferenc Kazinczy, and his friendship with Angelo Soliman. Soliman was transported to Europe as a slave and lived in Vienna as a free man at the time of his meeting with Kazinczy. The novel is summarized in English on Péterfy's homepage as follows:

The book focuses on the most enigmatic and outlandish aspect of the poet's life: his close friendship with Angelo Soliman, a renowned scholar and high-society figure in 18th century Vienna, who was brought to Europe as a slave and managed, through his learning, to become the Grand Master of the Masonic lodge, and also a personal friend to Mozart and Emperor Joseph II. The story of this friendship and of those hectic, transformative years is narrated by Sophie Török, Kazinczy's wife in a truly memorably and iconic location: the attic of the Viennese Imperial Natural History Collection, among the damaged and discarded exhibition items, facing the stuffed figure of the late Angelo Soliman. After a lifetime of scholarly achievements and of being considered a model of integration, the 'enlightened' gentlemen of Vienna had used his actual skin to exemplify and realize the racist stereotype of the 'savage African.' The terrifying and outrageous fate of his friend haunted Kazinczy all his life, not only because of the traumatic experience of losing a kindred spirit, but also because of the disheartening insight such a symbolic treatment brought to the internal contradictions of the 'civilized' world of *Aufklärung* and *Bildung*. The Hungarian poet struggled with the meaning and the articulation of Angelo's peculiar demise, and managed to pass on this unsettling and significant story only on his own deathbed.

In this summary, Péterfy claims that the friendship is narrated by Kazinczy's wife, but almost two thirds of the novel, including the story of Soliman's life in Vienna, is narrated in the past tense by an omniscient narrator. S/he has unlimited access to Soliman's life events, thoughts, feelings and memories, even to those that could not have been but unknown to his friend Ferenc, who had entrusted Soliman's story to his wife, Sophie Török, on his deathbed.

Readers of the book either praise Péterfy's engagement with "gender," for his use of a female, third-person narrator (Pogrányi 2014; Pieldner n.d.), or critically note the inconsistency of the narrative technique given that Péterfy shifts to omniscient narration when telling about Soliman's life (Újvárosi 2014; Györfy 2015; Koncz 2015). In other words, the implied author of the book pretends, but, in fact, all along fails to use character narration and Sophie has access to and reports on information that she cannot possibly have access to as a character. Péterfy explicitly says in an interview that he realized after having written the first two hundred pages that he would continue to use Sophie as a narrator until the very end. (Péterfy 2014b)

Allegedly written by Sophie herself, the very last words of the book equally indicate that the story is supposed to have been narrated by her. She reminisces that when she was standing in front of the stuffed corpse of Angelo Soliman she thought, "I knew that I was standing in front of myself." (Péterfy 2014a: 448; my translation). Despite the problems, well established in historical and literary scholarship, involved in the conflation between race and gender, this closure is meant to evoke the shared marginality of women and Africans in "Enlightened" eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, which, according to the novel's implicit claims, makes it easier for Sophie to place herself imaginatively in Angelo's situation and report on his feelings and thoughts. Indeed, one of the novel's most sympathetic interpreters, Judit Pieldner claims that,

Sophie Török's narrative perspective seems to be the most suitable to represent this intimate viewpoint [i.e. Angelo's], having access to everything that an (almost) all-knowing first-person narrator needs to know. At the same time, the female perception can 'get under the skin' of the patriarchal society, revealing fine nuances within. In the story Sophie Török is the one for whom the opportunity rises to enter the 'walled-in room' of Kazinczy's trauma (Péterfy 2014: 54), to be initiated into the story of the stuffing, partaking of the scandal and being 'stuffed' herself by this inexpressible story (Pieldner: 2-3).

The difference between the marginality of Black men and white women has been widely debated in the scholarship of the past decades; perhaps the most famous literary rendering of this difference is J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* in which the narrative situation is somewhat similar to the one we find in Péterfy's novel: a female narrator, Susan Barton, tries (although in vain) to get access to the mind of the ex-slave Friday and the story of the loss of his tongue. As opposed to *Stuffed Barbarian*, which does not seem to place the implications of omniscient narration on critical display, Coetzee's novel famously lays bare the violence involved in the desire for the story of the other (Timár 2011 and Timár, forthcoming). Péterfy depoliticizes and dehistoricizes this difference and places the stakes of the novel elsewhere in order to promote a universalist ideal of the human. As Róbert Smid writes in complicity with this ideal: "Reader and narrator get connected in the realization that strangeness is not specifically a question of race. Soliman was not the only stranger in the court, and we can also experience strangeness with regard to our own life. The climax of Sophie's insight is that she encounters her own strangeness through the

strangeness of the other—Kazinczy or Soliman—which makes it possible for her to become an autonomous (female) narrator [sic]"(Smid).<sup>1</sup>

My essay aims to foreground not so much the "failure" of the novel to re-visit the structural differences between a white female narrator and a Black, male narratee, but much rather point to the tensions between the narrative technique of the novel (omniscience) which is supposed to advance the Western, humanist ideal of *Bildung* on the one hand, and the ethico-political implications of this story about "otherness" on the other, in order to reveal the limitations of the liberal optimism of Péterfy's perspective. Indeed, as Smid's phrasing already indicates: while reading the novel, "we" are invited to identify with the white female narrator (Sophie Török), a white man (the first narratee, Ferenc Kazinczy) and a Black ex-slave (the second narratee, Angelo Soliman) *alike*, because they all make us face "the stranger in ourselves." This stranger, however, is paradoxically always the *same*: since they all exemplify a life of *Bildung*, the structural differences between race, gender, class, as well as the singular differences between individual lives seem to dissolve in the universally human aspiration for an ideal of *Bildung*, which is itself the product of a specifically Western, eighteenth-century context. In what follows, I shall first elaborate upon this specific, cultural-political context of the "human" in which this novel inscribes itself.

According to Lynn Hunt, it was the eighteenth-century sentimental novel, and its ability to generate sympathy that had paved the way for the invention of "human rights:"

Novels made the point that all people are fundamentally similar because of their inner feelings, and many novels showcased in particular the desire for autonomy. In this way, reading novels created a sense of equality and empathy through passionate involvement in the narrative. Can it be coincidental that the three greatest novels of psychological identification of the eighteenth century—Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48) and Rousseau's *Julie* (1761)—were all published in the period that immediately preceded the appearance of the 'rights of man?' (Hunt 2008: 39)

Paradoxically, however, while female subjectivities were often depicted in sentimental novels and readers indeed learnt to sympathize with protagonists who were emphatically different from them, "women's rights," such as, most importantly, women's right to vote, were hardly ever discussed in (French and English) pre-Revolutionary debates about "human rights." As Lynn Hunt points out in a different article, the latter tended to focus on questions concerning the "humanity" of Africans, and the abolition of slavery, the rights of Jews, Protestants (in France) and Catholics (in England), or the rights of the poor and the dispossessed: "Women could ask for better education and protection of their property rights, but even the most politically vociferous among them did not yet demand full civil and political rights" (Hunt 2016: 12).

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<sup>1</sup> My translation; I left the confusing turns of phrase as they are in the original. See <https://www.mmalexikon.hu/kategoria/irodalom/kitomott-barbar>.

At the same time, as Markman Ellis suggests, although sentimental fiction equally engage with the problem of slavery and did play a role in the abolitionist movements, partly due to the supposedly levelling effect of the "sympathetic imagination" (see particularly, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759), these novels' appeal to sentiments was largely escapist. As Ellis claims, "sentimental writing displaced what it could not face: whenever these limits were approached, benevolent emotions were channelled into safer images of suffering and exploitation—such as the caged bird [in *Sentimental Journey*]—which offered secure and unproblematic ground for testing and developing new attitudes" (Ellis 1996: 86).

In fact, what the eighteenth century witnessed was the emergence, in fiction, of the trope of "the grateful slave," that is, the trope of the slave grateful for the (relative) benevolence of his master (Boulukos 2008). (On the gender difference between slaves and their relationship with their masters and the difference between the mainland and the colonies concerning the treatment of sexual relationship with slaves; see Nussbaum, Felicity 2003.) Rather than advancing the cause of black people as "fully human," these novels presented the "good" African who was, first and foremost, faithful to his white masters. Writing the fictional autobiography of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe offers a perfect illustration: when Friday is rescued by Crusoe from the hands of cannibals, his attitude is reported by Crusoe as follows: he "lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head, as he had done before; and after this made all the signs to me of subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable, to let me know how he would serve me so long as he lived. I understood him in many things" (Defoe).

Although Defoe's Robinson (1719) precedes by almost half a decade those sentimental novels that, according to Hunt, advanced the cause of human rights, as Boulukos shows us, the trope of the grateful slave prevailed. Boulukos's careful analyses in fact suggest that despite Hunt's optimistic contentions about the morally and politically beneficial effects and advanced claims made by eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, a black *Bildungsroman*—such as a novel featuring a Friday liberated, receiving a proper name, identity and place in British society—would have been unimaginable. Fictional narratives presented people of colour as either objects of white pity, white benevolence or white cruelty, but never as autonomous subjects acquiring agency.

Meanwhile, two non-fictional pieces stand out of this trend. Olaudah Equiano's 1798 autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, was written in the voice of and from the perspective of an ex-slave and contributed to the passage of the British Slave Trade Act in 1809, which had indeed been preceded by public discussions of the "humanity" of Africans (see Hunt 2016). Earlier, the *Life of Ignatius Sancho* (1782) by Joseph Jekyll appeared as the preface to the letters of Ignatius Sancho. Sancho himself was, as Wikipedia helpfully summarizes, "the only Briton of African heritage known to have been eligible and voted in an eighteenth-century general election through property qualifications. He gained fame in his time as "the extraordinary Negro," and to eighteenth-century British abolitionists he became a symbol of the humanity of Africans and immorality of the slave trade. *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, edited and published two years after his death, is one of the earliest accounts of African slavery written in English by a former slave." Although Jekyll's text is too short and not fictional enough for qualifying as a *Bildungsroman* proper (both the preface and Sancho's letters are presented by the scholar Brycchan Carey at <http://www.brycchancarey.com/>), its structure does contribute to the shaping of the genre.

Together with Equiano's autobiography, it significantly advances the idea of universal humanity by featuring a non-European leading a life of European *Bildung*.

Lynn Hunt also calls our attention to the important bifurcation at the heart of the Enlightenment discourse on human rights, which cut through gender, racial and religious divides and introduced the active vs. passive citizen binary. Specifically, a distinction was made between those who were entitled to active (political) rights, such as the right to elect representative and be elected as a representative, and those who possessed only passive (civil) rights, such as the right to marry, to acquire property, or religion. It was, precisely, the question who (slaves? servants? Jews? Protestants? Catholics? actors? executioners? women?) was entitled to civil, and, then, political rights that was the main object of Enlightenment discourses of human rights, which were obviously conditioned by questions concerning the boundaries of the human. Importantly, the answer to the question of who counts as human (i.e. "who is in and who is out," Kronfeldner, 2014) has never been purely descriptive, but rather performative: "scientific" descriptions always had serious political consequences and motives.

When Péterfy's Kazinczy reflects on the question of the human, introducing the idea of the "emember" (sur-human, more than human), he uses precisely those normative—and necessarily exclusive—criteria of Western Enlightened humanism that emerged in the eighteenth century, but still prevail among twenty-first-century Hungarian liberal intellectuals. As Pieldner supportively puts it,

the notion of the (Western, spiritual) emember [manman, or *surhomme*] is set against the (Eastern, physical) barbarian; this is Kazinczy's word invention for the ideal of the superior man that he has also set himself as a goal: '[t]he emember is the cultured man, the erudite man, the Western man, the emember is Ulysses and Faust and Don Giovanni. The emember is the reduplicated man who doubled himself, who did everything to become better, to become more—the emember is the freemason, the adept; the emember is the artist, the emember is the philosopher, scientist, the poet' (Péterfy 2014: 135. qtd by Pieldner: 7). Further, as Péterfy continues, 'The emember is the free man,' and the status of the emember is independent from his heritage or his family: he is a self-made man. (Péterfy 2014: 135, quoted by Pieldner)

This passage reveals that Kazinczy is very much like Péterfy, and Péterfy is very much like Pieldner. In other words, Pieldner, like Péterfy, is an advocate of Kazinczy's universalist and seemingly egalitarian description of the ideal of the human. However, as is well established, if the *properly* human is the "cultured man," "Ulysses and Faust and Don Giovanni," the "free man," then it is not difficult to see who remains outside of this category: not only those who, like the provincial Hungarians of the novel, did not have the desire, will, perseverance, or openness to cultivate themselves or be free and autonomous in the Kantian sense, but also those who did not have the ability to do so, precisely because they are *structurally* un-free, i.e., the women (or the "non-men"), the poor (or the "non-middle or upper class"), and the non-Europeans. In other words, as is equally well established, the humanist ideal of the human based on the idea that "all men are equal" does not necessarily take into account the structural *inequality* between rights and opportunities.



Interestingly and somewhat unusually, Péterfy's novel emerged from his PhD dissertation in Hungarian literature on the relationship between Kazinczy and Angelo Soliman. Discussing the "humanity" of Africans, he draws attention to the outrageous racism of figures like Hume, Kant, and Blumenbach (Péterfy 2007: 39-41). While endorsing Kant's idea of autonomy, Péterfy rejects his racism, and the discourse of slavery with which it is intertwined (42). Still, Péterfy's dissertation does not make it a central problem that the epistemological questions of race were deeply intertwined in the politics and the economy of the time; in other words, the "scientific" claims of Enlightenment anthropology served to justify and legitimize slavery. Carl von Linné in the tenth, authoritative edition of his *System of Nature* (1758) was the first to classify man as a species (*homo sapiens*) separate from the apes but still part of the animal kingdom (which he saw as an uninterrupted chain), and divided humans into four races, with the European at the peak. Later, Buffon, in *Natural History, General and Particular* (1749-1788), drew a sharper dividing line between humans and animals, maintaining that humans, as opposed to animals, have a soul. Meanwhile, supporting the idea of monogenesis (i.e. that all humans share a single origin), he established a clear hierarchy between races, ascribing both climatic and biological causes to the alleged differences in the intellectual abilities, habits and customs of people of different skin colours. (Chukwudi, 1991. 15) As Silvia Sebastiani argues, Enlightenment science ended up fixing in biological terms the historically determined distances between races (Sebastiani 2013: 12).

Sebastiani also outlines the causes—such as colonization and geographical discoveries—and complex intellectual and political consequences of theories of both monogenesis (like Buffon's), and the less widespread idea of polygenesis. According to polygenetic theories, the "savage" was no longer understood to have a Biblical descent; hence, these were the "scientific" classifications, based on the "objective" observations (skin colour, skull size, facial angle) advanced by polygenesists that contributed the most to the development of theories of racial inferiority, which then served as justifications for slavery (12). Other critics, however, argue that it was, in fact, slavery that produced "race" as both a side effect and justification of the violence on which it depended. As George Boulukos puts it, the "'dehumanization' of slavery, in this account, leads to the conceptualization of Blacks as less than fully human" (95).

Boulukos suggests that in the second half of the eighteenth century, metropolitan discourse already expressed a distaste for slavery and rejected "race" in both theory and practice. Abolitionists maintained that planters in the colonies held that their slaves were inferior only in order to be willing to treat them so cruelly (97-98). Since slaves shared the humanity of Europeans and their difference (especially their skin colour) was the result of the different climate (see: famously Montaigne and Montesquieu's influence on European thought), they also partook in human "perfectibility" (see: Rousseau's *Origins of Inequality* on human perfectibility). This, of course, did not amount to complete equality: without the entire, and, therefore, impossible, forgetting of their past (i.e. culture and climate), ex-slaves could not undergo a proper process of *Bildung* and remained "less than human." Meanwhile, although a liberated slave (e.g. Equiano, Sancho or Soliman himself) could eventually acquire the right to have rights (based on their property), Blacks always remained the object of the racist stare.

Péterfy is very much aware of the extent to which Angelo was the object of the racist gaze (I shall discuss this later); however, he still follows the spirit of the Enlightenment in

suggesting that the sympathetic portrayal of the "negro" as *fully* human requires the preliminary erasure of the slave's origins/past in the colonies and the reshaping of his character and personality in Europe. When Angelo undergoes the full process of cultivation and becomes Kazinczy's "emember," it is only the complete erasure of his past and his entirely "*non-barbarian*" character (the fact that he is cultivated, speaks many European languages, is knowledgeable in the arts and sciences) that makes him eligible for the category of the human.

At first sight, the way in which Péterfy renders Angelo's fate may even look similar to how Defoe represents Friday's: Friday's *Bildung* (he is forced to learn English and to become a Protestant) which aims at his becoming almost, but never quite the same as the white Crusoe is predicated on the complete erasure of his past and what "we" in the West would call his previous "self" or "identity." Likewise, while we do get to know that Angelo had undergone terrible suffering on the merchant ship that transported him to Europe, he is said to have entirely forgotten both his childhood memories and his native tongue (the farthest he can see in his past is the dark and dirty bottom of a ship, Péterfy: 121). In Angelo's case, one could well speak of a traumatic erasure, but this "traumatic" past has been somewhat all too unproblematically (i.e. improbably) replaced and overwritten by his "new culture" and by his "new languages," particularly by German and by all the other languages he is made to learn in Europe.

Angelo thus leaves behind the status of the grateful slave, acquires an agency, and, as if consequently, becomes one of the main focalizers of *Stuffed Barbarian*. Angelo is given a point of view, i.e. eyes, that can see and interpret the world around and his own situation in it. Meanwhile, the representation of his (transparent) interiority, his thoughts and feelings, is not only a (political) means to suggest that he is endowed with a universally human subjectivity, but also inscribes the novel into the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition, in which "others" started to possess a "soul," and sometimes even a "voice." In fact, even though we only hear his voice as it is echoed by Kazinczy (which is reported, in turn, by Sophie), Sophie's improbable omniscience erases this triple, intersubjective, interpretative distance, and his voice does not sound like an echo at all. Hence, Péterfy's novel turns into a twenty-first-century example of Lynn Hunt's ideal of eighteenth-century sentimental fiction: we almost hear the narrative of Angelo, the ex-slave, offering a plea for the universally human. When Péterfy invites us to sympathize with his "otherness," our readerly sympathy cannot but result from an imaginative self-projection: Soliman is (almost, but not quite) like us, while his consciousness is also perfectly (and, therefore, improbably) accessible to us. Thus, Péterfy's humanistic belief in a universal humanity not only results in the erasure of the necessary difference of the "other" from "us," but, more importantly, in the erasure of his *secrecy*, too. Indeed, the total transparency of Angelo's mind (to Kazinczy, to Sophie, and to the reader) may even be evocative of Bentham's Panopticon.

In his dissertation, Péterfy claims that we know of only two ex-slaves, besides Angelo Soliman, who achieved a higher social status: the philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Amo, and Puskin's great-grandfather, Abram Petrovich Hanibal. There is, in fact, at least one British parallel to the life of Angelo: Ignatius Sancho. Ignatius Sancho's life of *Bildung*, as was mentioned above, is surprisingly similar to that of Angelo Soliman, with the important exception that *his* life (i.e. Sancho's) did have a happy ending; he even became the first black man to get an obituary in the periodical press when he died. Meanwhile, as opposed to the Angelo depicted by Péterfy, Sancho also played a significant role in abolitionist debates and managed to persuade in



a private letter the great "sentimental novelist," Laurence Sterne, to stand up against slavery. "Consider slavery—what it is—how bitter a draught—and how many millions are made to drink it!" (qtd at Carey) According to Brychan Carey's influential research, it was the consequence of their correspondence that Sterne, in volume nine of *Tristram Shandy*, inserted the following passage: "A negro has a soul? an' please your honour, said the corporal (doubtingly). / I am not much versed, corporal, quoth my uncle Toby, in things of that kind; but I suppose, God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me."<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, the real-life Ferenc Kazinczy was the first translator of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. The novel is not only an ironic take on sentimental literature *per se* and the moral sentiment of sympathy portrayed as an indulgence in other people's (especially women's) sorrow, but, as Ellis notes, it equally exemplifies the escapist solutions to the problem of slavery generally offered by eighteenth-century sentimental fiction. Sympathizing with the sad predicament of the "bird in a cage," Yorick addresses "Liberty" and establishes a *bathetic* parallel between his own situation (i.e. he does not have a passport to continue his journey in France), that of the starling singing, "I can't get out," and that of slaves. Sterne thus not only makes fun of the narcissistic self-projections involved in sympathy, but also of the self-congratulatory indulgence in pity fuelling abolitionists—despite his own conviction concerning the unity of the human race. Given that the *Stuffed Barbarian* deals with an ex-slave, as well as the epistemological, narrative and political problem of "other minds"—also known as the problem of sympathy (and aspires to our readerly sympathy too)—and one of its main characters is, precisely, Kazinczy, it is surprising that Péterfy does not evoke Kazinczy's engagement with Sterne in his doctoral dissertation, nor Sterne's engagement with Sancho and the abolitionist movement.

As opposed to the real Sancho, the Angelo Soliman of Péterfy's novel does not make the global problem of slavery central to his life; he does not want to "speak for his brethren" the way Sancho does. His ambitions are individual: he wishes to prove that, despite his skin colour, he has the right to assimilate into European (high) culture. In this sense he is the perfect pupil of his first master, Prince Lobkowitz, who used him as a case study to prove that it was possible "to educate a perfect white man from a specimen of the black race" (Péterfy 2014: 117, my translation). The words of the prince, however, suggest that Enlightened Humanism is predicated upon the practice of animalistic dehumanization and the treatment of non-Europeans as if they were less than human ("specimen of the black race"), and that the *singular example* of "one Negro" who is "humanized" (so much so that he became Kazinczy's exemplary "emember") cannot but disavow and project this dark side of the Enlightenment onto the Viennese society that eventually stuffs Angelo, precisely as if he had been an animal (a "specimen").

Meanwhile, Péterfy's Angelo also plays the role of the "barbarian" assigned to him by the majority: on the thematic level of the novel, it does seem that Péterfy is aware of post-colonial theories. Angelo laughs at those who "exoticize" him and, like Shakespeare's Othello, he is shown to have learnt to ward off all kinds of psychic and physical injuries provoked by his visible difference from the majority. He also plays the "barbarian" game by dressing up *as if* he

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Sterne and Sancho is extremely well documented. See <http://www.brychancarey.com/>

exemplified the prototype of the African, wearing colourful clothes and a turban. His subjective feelings and thoughts concerning the gentle *and* cruel ways in which Viennese society treats him are wonderfully rendered by Péterfy, who conscientiously shows how Soliman both defies and is compelled to conform to stereotypes while simultaneously suffering from them. For example, his first permanent lover is a Jewish woman while his eventual wife is a French *déclassée*, elements which suggest that he can only gain access to and be understood by women in marginal positions. Péterfy also shows how he is forced to be constantly conscious of his body, which others find either attractive, or disgusting or both, and how the Viennese obsession with bodies and the bodily will culminate in his stuffing after his death. In this sense, the Viennese Enlightenment is shown to be a mockery of the Enlightenment: their acceptance of the possibility of Angelo's *Bildung* (a process that, in Enlightenment Europe, mostly implied the transcendence of the "animal" body) turns out to be fake.

Shameem Black asks whether it might be possible to imagine any "other" without doing violence to one's object of description. Contemplating what it means to "imagine across borders without imperial eyes" (Black 2010: 250), she argues for the need to confront "the spectre of invasive imagination" and warns against the use of "representational violence" and "discursive domination" in novels (12, 23). She evokes John Updike's comic mock interview with one of his fictional creations: "Q (Beach): And this Jewishness you give me. What do you know about being Jewish? *Très peu*, I venture to estimate. As much as you learned listening to the *Jack Benny* program back in Shillington, Pennsylvania. Ask Cynthia Ozick. Ask Leon Wieseltier. Ask Orlando Cohen" (22). Updike's irony is that Orlando Cohen is also his own creation; Beach's argument raises the question whether it is possible to have complete, imaginative access to another person's mind. Can we access the mind of another, is there not a limit, as J. M. Coetzee often asks in and through many of his novels, to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another? Even if there were no such limit, should *we* not *put* a limit to the extent to which we endeavour to access, and/or represent another person's interiority? These are the basic questions Shameem Black asks throughout her work, which largely focuses on the ethics of narrative representation. In fact, as she argues, novels always speak about (and implicitly speak for) others; therefore, the representation of "other minds" is always present as a problem. This is especially so when authors speak from a position of dominance (i.e. they belong to the powerful majority of "white"/"healthy"/"rich or middle class"/"cultivated"/"heterosexual"/"men").

Péterfy himself exemplifies all of these categories, even though his omniscient narrator, endowed with a God-like knowledge of a people's innermost thoughts and feelings, Sophie Török, is a woman. The use of the past tense, retrospective narration equally gives the illusion of her knowing "well-established facts" and the relative importance of each and every event. While omniscient retrospection is the technique most widely used in nineteenth-century fiction, generally driven towards narrative closure, this novel *about* otherness, which didactically advances the moral imperative to respect this otherness, may call for narrative techniques that do not imaginatively invade or appropriate this other. One may therefore raise the question whether the novel puts imaginative invasion on *critical display*, or, rather, is this a novel that is not aware of the ethical and political stakes involved in the narrative technique it uses? If one opts for the first solution, Sophie's last words recalling her encounter with the stuffed Angelo in the National History Museum in Vienna (suggesting that Angelo appeared to her as her mirror image) have to

be taken ironically. That is, this closing encounter with the dead Soliman constitutes the supreme irony of an author different from the narrator, an author who puts his own narrator's appropriative violence and delusional self-projections on an ironic display. This solution, however, is highly improbable since nothing suggests that Péterfy is critical of Sophie, that there is a moral distance between author and narrator. However, besides the image of an author falling in the trap that he warns us against (i.e. the second solution), a third solution equally presents itself: Sophie's omniscience is so improbable as she knows so much more than she could ever possibly know, that Péterfy's aim might be precisely to turn the tradition of *male* omniscience, often associated with "imperialist" occupation, mockingly upside down. For example, when Sophie narrates how Angelo's othering and abjection happens in Vienna (i.e. at the sight of Angelo, pedestrians became scared, were afraid that he would attack them, spit at them, etc.), she also tells us that people who saw him had bad dreams for days and did not dare stay alone (169). Since, realistically speaking, Sophie could not have known what dreams strangers had in Vienna after having encountered Angelo, one may assume, in good faith, that Péterfy is very much aware of his transgression of the rules of realism, i.e., that a character cannot know everything. According to this reading, by making Sophie omniscient, Péterfy simply mocks the tradition of male omniscience.

The political agenda of Péterfy's book thus does not lie in its figuration of Soliman's "otherness." In fact, its proper historical and political stakes lie in twenty-first-century Hungary: Kazinczy is supposed to stand as an allegory "for *us* all," for the "cultivated liberal intellectuals" of twenty-first-century Hungary who are considered to be outsiders, even "non-Hungarians," by those who are in power. At the same time, asking crucial questions about acculturation, assimilation, othering and, most emphatically, about what it means to be human, through the figures of the black-skinned Angelo, the novel also puts into sharp relief the "true barbarism" of provincial Hungarians who oppose Kazinczy's progressive ideas, as well as the false Enlightenment of Viennese society that eventually deprives him of his human status. However, the book cannot escape, and in fact, perpetuates an exclusive ideology of *Bildung*: its dubious narrative ethics of improbable character transparency is driven by an Enlightenment ideal that escapes the encounter with "differance" and manipulates readerly empathy in such a way as to make us forget about the oblivion thus maintained.

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