Enlightenment Sympathy and the Ethics of Representation

Gergely Péterfy's *Stuffed Barbarian* in a European Context[1]

> In terms of its etymology, the ancient Greek word *barbarian* [βάρβαρος] is supposed to imitate the incomprehensible mumblings of the language of foreign peoples, sounding 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."[2]

Gergely Péterfy's *Kitömött barbár* [*Stuffed Barbarian*] was published in 2014 and is the outgrowth of Péterfy's doctoral thesis on the Hungarian poet, translator, and linguist Ferenc Kazinczy, and his friendship with Angelo Soliman, who 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 was translated into German and is summarized in English on Péterfy's page 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 dam-

1 The present paper grew out of Andrea Timár and Gyula Laczházi's "Ember" entry in *Kultúratudományi Kézikönyv*, eds. Beatrix Kircsfalusi, et al. (*c.* 22 pages, forthcoming).

2 Maria Boletski, "Barbarian Encounters," *Comparative Literature Studies* 44.1–2 (2007): 67–96, 68.

> aged 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.

Although this summary claims that the friendship is narrated by Kazinczy's wife, 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 who 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 entrusted Soliman's story to his wife on his deathbed. Readers of the book either praise Péterfy's originality in using a female, third person narrator,[3] or note that Péterfy shifts to omniscient narration in those parts of the book that tell about Soliman's life,[4] or remark, I think correctly, that the implied author of the book pretends, but, in fact, fails to use character narration, i.e. Sophie's voice all along.[5] Indeed, the real author, Péterfy, explicitly says in an interview that he realised after having written the first two hundred pages, that he would continue to use Sophie as a narrator until the very end,[6] and the very last words of the book allegedly written by Sophie herself equally indicate that the story is supposed to have been narrated by her. She reminisces that standing in front of the stuffed corps of Angelo Soliman, she thought: "I knew that I was standing in front of myself" (448). While these last words of the book

3 Péter Pogrányi, "Idegen Testek," *Revizor* 2014/10, http://www.revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/5243/peterfy-gergely-kitomott-barbar/

4 Emese Ujvárosi, "Idegen Testek (Péterfy Gergely: *Kitömött Barbár*)," *Holmi* (August 2014) https://bit.ly/2TdOG3W.

5 Miklós Győrfy, "Pályám képzelt emlékezete (*Péterfy Gergely: Kitömött barbár*)," *Jelenkor*, 2015/05 https://bit.ly/2DuEb6w; Tamás Koncz, "Péterfy Gergely: Kitömött Barbár," https://bit.ly/2MsUHam: "Péterfy Gergely az omnipotens írók gyakori hibájába esik, azt is láttatja, amit nem lehetne: Angelo Soliman élettörténetét Török Zsófia visszaemlékezésein keresztül mutatja be, de olyan intim részleteket is közöl, amit a Solimant csak Kazinczy Ferenc leírásából megismerő feleség biztosan nem tudhatott."

6 See http://konyves.blog.hu/2014/08/04/peterfy_gergely_773: "Végül úgy döntöttél, Kazinczy feleségének, Török Sophie-nak hangján szólaltatod meg a történetet. Ő hogyan került a képbe? / A szövegnek volt olyan verziója, ahol Báróczi Sándor az elbeszélő, meg olyan is, ahol több elbeszélőt alkalmaztam. Sophie nagyon sokadjára jött, de aztán annyira összebarátkoztunk, hogy remekül tudtunk együtt dolgozni. Annyira jól álltam neki, és ő is annyira jól állt nekem, hogy a hangja végül meg tudott szólalni egy olyan tónusban, amire azt tudtam mondani körülbelül kétszáz oldal után, hogy na Sophie, akkor te viszed a bulit."

are meant to evoke the shared marginality of women and Africans in "Enlightened" 18th and 19th-century Europe, which made it easier for Sophie to sympathise, and eventually identify with Angelo[7] (see: the critique of this equation in the previous chapter on *Foe*), from the ethico-political perspective this chapter wishes to advance, it is the narrative technique (rather than the amply reviewed content) of the novel that seems to be somewhat flawed, or, at least, it seems to be at odds with the ethico-political stakes implied by its content.

From an epistemological standpoint, Péterfy's use of an improbably omniscient character narrator stems from an all too improbable disregard for the obvious difference between characters and real people. As Suzanne Keen succinctly points it out in an introductory work to narratology:

> While your friend can tell you what he is thinking, or you may guess what your mother feels from her expression, or you may read in a diary entry another's private thoughts, no living being experiences the sort of access to consciousness – including thoughts, emotions, memories, motives, and subverbal states – that modern and contemporary fictional narrators routinely render up to the reader about fictional characters. (Keen, *Narrative Form*, 59)

Obviously, therefore, a probable character narrator *cannot* have access to another character's consciousness to such an extent as a fictional, omniscient narrator can. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to focus on this narrative inconsistency,[8] but rather to investigate the ethico-political implications and the consequences of Péterfy's past tense, omniscient, third person narration. In what follows, I shall first elaborate on the 18th century cultural-political context in which both contemporary novels inscribe itself, focusing, this time, on the second half of the 18th century.

According to Lynn Hunt, it was the 18th century sentimental novel, and its ability to generate sympathy that had paved the way for the invention of "human rights." Para-

7 See Helena Woodard, *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (London Greenwood Press, 1991): "The unique subject of British women's role in colonial slavery is explored in Moira Ferguson's study, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834*, which critiques anti-slavery writings by Hannah More, Sarah Scott, and others. I am not altogether convinced, though, by Ferguson's argument that Anglican women's participation in the anti-slavery effort 'displaced anxieties about their own assumed powerlessness and inferiority onto their representations of slaves.' I believe that British women's abolitionism more likely resulted from a dual, paradoxical identification with enslaved blacks because of shared forms of oppression. But because of racial acculturation, Anglican women also identified, in part, with a white, male patriarchy" (68).

8 This was amply commented upon by Csaba Károlyi, István Margócsy, and Beatrix Visy in *ÉS Kvartett*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHUtEs3LcKk.

doxically, however, while female subjectivities were often depicted in sentimental novels, such as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) – which was one of the most influential novels of the time as far as gender politics was concerned – and readers indeed learnt to sympathise with protagonists who were emphatically different from them (because of the gender divide), "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."[9] These latter, as Lynn Hunt points out in a different article, 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.[10] Therefore, reading the work of the historian, Lynn Hunt, one has to accept that that even though 18th century sentimental fiction only centred upon the representation of female consciousness, and even if the "woman question" itself, i.e. women's right to participate in the *political* sphere became an object of discussion only in the second half of the 19th century, 18th century sentimental fiction still contributed to a widespread discourse on human rights in *general*, and that Enlightenment discourse (contrary to Horkheimer's and Adorno's more pessimistic views) did indeed pave the way for our contemporary ideal of "universal" human rights.[11] Meanwhile, 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. In fact, a distinction was made between

9 Hunt sums up the implications of our contemporary concept of human rights as follows: "(1) all human beings have certain inherent rights simply by virtue of being human, and not by virtue of their status in society; (2) these rights are consequently imagined as 'natural,' as stemming from human nature itself, and they have in the past often been called 'natural rights'; (3) rights belong therefore to individuals and not to any social group, whether a sex, a race, an ethnicity, a group of families, a social class, an occupational group, a nation, or the like; (4) these rights must be made equally available by law to all individuals and cannot be denied as long as an individual lives under the law; (5) the legitimacy of any government rests on its ability to guarantee the rights of all its members" (2).

10 "Although many thinkers, both male and female, had raised the question of women's status through the centuries, most of them had insisted primarily on women's right to an education (rather than on the right to vote, for instance, which few men enjoyed) The status of women did not excite the same interest – as measured in terms of publications – as that of slaves, Calvinists, or even Jews in France; the issue of women's rights did not lead to essay contests, official commissions, or Enlightenment-inspired clubs under the monarchy. In part this lack of interest followed from the fact that women were not considered a persecuted group in the same way as slaves, Calvinists, or Jews. Although women's property rights and financial independence often met restrictions under French law and custom, most men and women agreed with Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers that women belonged in the private sphere of the home and therefore had no role to play in public affairs [...]. 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" (Lynn Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights* [New York, St Martin's Press, 2016], pp. 11–12).

11 Ann Thompson, "Why Does the Enlightenment Still Matter?" *Diciottesimo Secolo* I (2016): 147–168.

those who were entitled 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 (Hunt, 19.) Of course, it was, precisely, the question who (slaves? servants? Jews? Protestants? Catholics? actors? executioners? women?) were entitled to civil, and, then, to 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. And the answer to the question who counts as human (i.e. "who is in and who is out"[12]) has never been purely descriptive, but rather performative: "scientific" descriptions always had serious political consequences.

Discussing the "humanity" of Africans in his PhD dissertation, Péterfy draws attention to the outrageous racism of figures like Hume, Kant, and Blumenbach.[13] Meanwhile, the dissertation does not seem to emphasise enough that epistemological questions of race were always deeply intertwined with the political discourse of slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries. More precisely, slavery was mostly justified and made legitimate by the "scientific" claims of Enlightenment anthropology. Carl von Linné in the 10th, 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* (1748–1804), already drew a sharper dividing line between humans and animals, maintaining that humans, as opposed to animals, have soul, and while 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 colour.[14] Indeed, as Silvia Sebastiani argues, Enlightenment science ended up fixing in biological terms the historically determined distances between races (12).

Sebastiani also outlines the causes – such as colonisation, and geographical discoveries – and the complex intellectual and political consequences of theories of both monogenesis (like Buffon's), and the less widespread idea of polygenesis.[15] According to polygenetic theories, the savage was no longer understood to have a Biblical descent,

12 Maria Kronfeldner et al., "Recent Work on Human Nature: Beyond Traditional Essences," *Philosophy Compass* 9/9 (2014): 642–652.

13 Gergely Péterfy, *Orpheus és Massinissa: Kazinczy Ferenc és Angelo Soliman* (Miskolc, 2007). https://bit.ly/2AYH8KZ, 39–41.

14 Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment, an Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 1991), 15. On the question of the "Human" and the sciences behind it, see: Timár and Laczházi, "Ember," forthcoming.

15 "[T]he polygenetic explanation was a response to the discovery of savages, to encountering peoples whose existence had not been envisaged or who did not fit into the traditional schemes with which European man had conceived himself until the sixteenth century" (Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* [New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013], 9).

and these were the "scientific" classification, based on "objective" observation (skin colour, skull size, facial angle) of the polygenesists that contributed the most to the development of theories of racial inferiority, which then served as justifications for slavery (12).[16] Other critics, however, argue that it was, in fact, slavery that produced "race" as a side effect of, and a justification for, the violence on which it depended. As George Boulukos puts it, the "dehumanisation of slavery, in this account, leads to the conceptualisation of blacks as less than fully human."[17]

Meanwhile, Boulukos also suggests that in the second half of the Eighteenth century, metropolitan discourse in Britain already expressed a distaste for slavery and rejected "race" in both theory and practice, and that abolitionists maintained that planters on the colonies must have believed that their slaves are inferior only in order to be willing to treat them so cruelly (97–98). Indeed, the Enlightenment discourse of the metropolis (as opposed to the openly racist discourse of the colonies) in the second half of the century was generally abolitionist, and the Enlightened minority (such as Kazinczy, or Joseph II in Austria and Hungary) held that since slaves shared the humanity of Europeans, and their difference (esp. their skin colour) was the result of the different climate (see: famously Montaigne and Montesquieu's influence on European thought), they were just as "perfectible" as a white child (see: Rousseau's *Origins of Inequality* on human perfectibility). This, of course, did not amount to complete equality, since without proper *Bildung* and the entire, and, therefore, impossible, erasure of their past (i.e. biology, culture and climate), ex-slaves were still considered as less than human, less human than a white child. But while an ex-slave who freed himself in Europe (e.g. Angelo Soliman, or, as we will see, Ignatious Sancho) could be given certain rights, even the "active" right to vote based on their property, there is no depiction in 18th century literature of the actual liberation of a slave on the colonies themselves (see: Boulukos).

Indeed, the sympathetic portrayal of the "negro" as fully human, and, therefore, as possessing either passive, or, later, active political rights, required from the writer the previous erasure of his or her slave origins/past in the colonies, i.e. the demolishment, and subsequent rebuilding, reshaping of his character and personality in Europe, presented (by novelists) as benevolent Enlightenment *Bildung.* Indeed, it was only this preconfiguration of his (!) "humanity" that could guarantee the awakening of readerly sympathy too. In other words, while the question of the shared humanity of the "barbarians"

16 Meanwhile, since monogenetic theories, in fact prevailed, and even in polygenetic theories, the different races were still considered as part of the same human species, while this latter was defined as the capacity to produce prolific offspring, white paranoia concerning potential contagion and impure mixture became also widespread. 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 Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). (See also Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* for a 20th-century treatment of the problem.)

17 George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth Century British and American Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95.

was the subject of both scientific and political (especially) abolitionist discourses, which claimed that it was possible to "civilise" Africans (i.e. make them – almost – fully human), for an 18th century reader, sympathy with a "non-Enlightened," i.e. "non-civilised" ("barbarian") African slave would have been unimaginable.

Péterfy seems, therefore, to follow in the footsteps of Enlightenment humanism in that it is, precisely, the "*non*-barbarian" character of Angelo Soliman (the fact that he is cultivated, speaks many languages, is knowledgeable in the arts and sciences, all in all, that he already underwent a process of *Bildung*) that makes him worthy to be considered as a fully-fledged human, and, therefore, capable of awakening "our" readerly sympathy. Indeed, at first sight, the way in which Angelo's fate is represented even looks similar to Friday's in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: Friday's native language is not evoked and Robinson Crusoe does not make any attempt at getting to know it. Likewise, while we do get to know that Angelo underwent terrible sufferings on the merchant ship that transported him to Europe, he is said to have entirely forgotten both his childhood memories and his native tongue. We 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 German, and all the other languages he is made to learn in Europe. However, as opposed to Defoe's Friday, Angelo does become one of the main focalisers of *Stuffed Barbarian*: even though we cannot hear his own voice, he is emphatically given a point of view, i.e. eyes that can see, and a vision of the (European) world and his own place in that world, which *is* represented by the narrator. Therefore, as opposed to Defoe's Friday, with whom we are not "supposed to" sympathise as readers (i.e., we sympathise with Crusoe, *because* he is the focaliser-narrator of the story), Angelo is given eyes, and his point of view is represented, by the narrator. At the same time, when Péterfy invites us to sympathise with his "otherness," our readerly sympathy cannot result but from an imaginative self-projection: Soliman is (almost) like us, and his consciousness is also perfectly accessible to us.

Interestingly, the historical Kazinczy, Angelo's friend, was the first Hungarian translator of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). Sterne, as is well known, both contributed to and ironically subverted the 18th century sentimental tradition. Yorick, the first person singular narrator of *Sentimental Journey,* stages both the recto and the verso of sympathy: while offering a bathetic ode to Sensibility,[18] he eagerly looks forward to the pleasurable prospect of wiping down the tears of a suffering Lady:

18 "– Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw – and 't is thou who lift'st him up to HEAVEN – eternal fountain of our feelings! – 't is here I trace thee – and this is thy divinity which stirs within me – not that in some sad and sickening moments, '*my soul shrinks back upon herself, and startles at destruction*' – mere pomp of words! – but that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself – all comes from thee, great – great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in

> with what a moral delight will it crown my journey, in sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer? To see her weep! and, though I cannot dry up the fountain of her tears, what an exquisite sensation is there still left, in wiping them away from off the cheeks of the first and fairest of women, as I'm sitting with my handkerchief in my hand in silence the whole night beside her?[19]

Yorick famously finds the most (erotic) pleasure in being moved by the sufferings and plights of beautiful women. Meanwhile, although Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is a masterpiece of irony too, it is, at the same time, the only canonised piece of 18th century sentimental fiction, which contains an allusion to the imperative to sympathise with "barbarian" "negros," only because they have "souls" and are able to exercise mercy (and are, therefore, distinct, from animals – see: Buffon). In volume 9 of *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne writes:

> When Tom, an' please your honour, got to the shop, there was nobody in it, but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies – not killing them. – 'Tis a pretty picture! said my uncle Toby – she had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy –
>
> – She was good, an' please your honour, from nature, as well as from hardships; and there are circumstances in the story of that poor friendless slut, that would melt a heart of stone, said Trim; and some dismal winter's evening, when your honour is in the humour, they shall be told you with the rest of Tom's story, for it makes a part of it –
>
> Then do not forget, Trim, said my uncle Toby.
>
> 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 –
>
> – It would be putting one sadly over the head of another, quoth the corporal.
>
> It would so; said my uncle Toby. Why then, an' please your honour, is a black wench to be used worse than a white one?
>
> I can give no reason, said my uncle Toby –
>
> – Only, cried the corporal, shaking his head, because she has no one to stand up for her –

the remotest desert of thy creation. –" (Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, http://www.bartleby.com/303/1/67.html).

19 Sterne.

> – 'Tis that very thing, Trim, quoth my uncle Toby, – which recommends her to protection – and her brethren with her; ,tis the fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands now – where it may be hereafter, heaven knows! – but be it where it will, the brave, Trim! will not use it unkindly.
>
> – God forbid, said the corporal.
>
> Amen, responded my uncle Toby, laying his hand upon his heart.[20]

Here, uncle Toby argues that black people are used worse than whites only because there is no one to stand up for them (i.e. "represent" them in a modern sense), and are, therefore, in need of protection. This is a very advanced claim in the period, even though, as has been mentioned, people/readers did not necessarily act upon their sympathetic feelings with characters. As for Sterne himself, however, he did act upon a sympathetic impulse to protect black people: literary historians have shown that he included this specific passage into *Tristram Shandy* upon the request of an ex-slave, Ignatius Sancho, whose life of *Bildung* was surprisingly similar to that of Angelo Soliman – with the important exception that *his* life (i.e. Sancho's) did have a happy ending. Indeed, Péterfy mistakenly claims in his dissertation that we know of only two ex-slaves, besides Angelo Soliman, who achieved a higher social status, the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Amo, and Pushkin's great grandfather Abram Petrovich Hanibal. For there is, in fact, at least one clear British parallel to the life of Angelo, Ignatius Sancho's, Sterne's friend's. He was a cultivated ex-slave, who had many influential (Whig) friends, bought his freedom, and even acquired the right to vote (based on his wealth), becoming the first black man to get an obituary in the periodical press when he died. Meanwhile, as opposed to Angelo, he also played a significant role in abolitionist debates, and managed to persuade the great "sentimental novelist" Sterne himself to stand up against slavery. In his often anthologised letter to Sterne, he awakens Sterne's sympathetic feelings through a first-person singular autobiographical narration of his fortune to acquire European learning (i.e. *Bildung*), and the way in which he himself was touched by Sterne's work:

> [Sancho to Sterne]
>
> REVEREND SIR,
>
> It would be an insult on your humanity (or perhaps look like it) to apologize for the liberty I am taking. – I am one of those people whom the vulgar and illiberal call "*Negurs.*" – The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience. – A little reading and writing I got by unwearied application. – The latter part of my life has been – thro' God's blessing, truly fortunate, having spent it in the service of one of the best families in the kingdom. – My chief pleasure has been books. – Philanthropy I adore. – How very much, good Sir, am I (amongst millions) indebted to you for the character of your

20 See http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1079/1079-h/1079-h.htm.

amiable uncle Toby! – I declare, I would walk ten miles in the dog days, to shake hands with the honest corporal. – Your Sermons have touch'd me to the heart, and I hope have amended it, which brings me to the point. – In your tenth discourse, page seventy – eight, in the second volume – is this very affecting passage – "Consider how great a part of our species – in all ages down to this – have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their distresses. – Consider slavery – what it is – how bitter a draught – and how many millions are made to drink it!" – Of all my favorite authors, not one has drawn a tear in favour of my miserable black brethren – excepting yourself, and the humane author of Sir George Ellison. – I think you will forgive me; – I am sure you will applaud me for beseeching you to give one half hour's attention to slavery, as it is at this day practised in our West Indies. – That subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many – but if only of one – Gracious God! – what a feast to a benevolent heart! – and, sure I am, you are an epicurean in acts of charity. – You, who are universally read, and as universally admired – you could not fail – Dear Sir, think in me you behold the uplifted hands of thousands of my brother Moors. – Grief (you pathetically observe) is eloquent; – figure to yourself their attitudes; hear their supplicating addresses! – alas! – you cannot refuse. – Humanity must comply – in which hope I beg permission to subscribe myself,

Reverend, Sir, &c.

I. SANCHO

[Sterne to Sancho]

Coxwould near York July 27. 1766

There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro – girl, and my eyes had scarse done smarting with it, when your Letter of recommendation in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me – but why *her brethren*? – or yours, Sancho! any more than mine? It is by the finest tints, and most insensible gradations, that nature descends from the fairest face at St James's, to the sootiest complexion in Africa: at which tint of these, is it, that the ties of blood are to cease? and how many shades must we descend lower still in the scale, ,ere Mercy is to vanish with them? – but ,tis no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for one half of the world to use the other half of it like brutes, & then endeavour to make 'em so. For my own part, I never look *Westward* (when I am in a pensive mood at least) but I think of the burdens which our Brothers & Sisters are *there* carrying – & could I ease their shoulders from one once of 'em, I declare I would set out this hour upon a pilgrimage to Mecca for their sakes – [which] by the by, Sancho, exceeds your Walk of ten miles, in about the same proportion,

> that a Visit of Humanity, should one, of mere form – however if you meant my Uncle Toby, more – he is [your] Debter.
>
> If I can weave the Tale I have wrote into the Work I'm [about] – tis at the service of the afflicted – and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a sad Shade upon the World, That so great a part of it, are and have been so long bound in chains of darkness & in Chains of Misery; & I cannot but both respect and felicitate You, that by so much laudable diligence you have broke the one – & that by falling into the hands of so good and merciful a family, Providence has rescued You from the other.
>
> And so, good hearted Sancho! adieu! & believe me, I will not forget [your] Letter. [Yours]
>
> L. STERNE[21]

Sterne, of course, is still talking about "most insensible gradations, that nature *descends* from the fairest face at St James's, to the sootiest complexion in Africa" (italics added), implying the existence of a great chain of being with Europeans at the top, and blacks serving as intermediaries between white men and animals. However, he does hear the plea of the oppressed and acknowledges the injustice of oppression. For him, one does not have to *earn* or *deserve* to be treated as fully fledged human, he does not say that the oppression of blacks can ever be justified by their lack of European *Bildung* or cultivation. On the contrary: he speaks up, both in his letter (privately) and in *Tristram Shandy* (publicly) against "one half of the world to use[ing] the other half of it like brutes, & then endeavour[ing] to make 'em so."

Angelo Soliman, as opposed to Ignatius Sancho, does not mention the global problem of slavery in the novel and, unlike Sancho, he does not want to speak for his "brethren," to "represent" them or "speak for them" in any sense. Partly because the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy has, in fact, no colonies to speak up for, and partly as a (psychological and social) strategy, he chooses to assimilate into European (high) culture as much as he can, while, importantly, also playing the role of the "barbarian" assigned to him be the majority, forgetting, and, indeed, obliterating, the predicament he used to share with slaves.

Indeed, on a thematic level, Péterfy seems to exhibit an awareness of a few post-colonial theories, such as Edward Said's *Orientalism,* or Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry: Angelo makes fun of those who "exoticise" him (or else "Orientalise" him), and is shown to have learnt to ward off all kinds of psychic and physic injuries provoked by his visible difference from the majority. He also plays the "barbarian" game, like Shakespeare's Othello, he dresses up *as if* he exemplified the prototype of the African *parvenu*, wearing colourful cloths and a turban. His subjective feelings and thoughts concerning the gentle *and* cruel ways in which Viennese society treats him are also wonderfully rendered by Péterfy, who conscientiously shows how Soliman both defies and is compelled

21 See http://www.brycchancarey.com/sancho/letter1.htm.

to conform to stereotypes, while also suffering from them (e.g. his first permanent lover is a Jewish woman, and his eventual wife is a French déclassée, implying that he cannot get access to and understood by but to women in marginal positions). How he is forced to be constantly conscious of his body, which others find either attractive, or disgusting or both, and how this repressed body-centeredness of the Viennese society will culminate in his stuffing after his death. In this sense, the Enlightenment of Vienna turns out to be a mock Enlightenment, their acceptance of the possibility of his *Bildung,* a process that, in Enlightenment Europe, mostly implied the transcendence of the "animal" body,[22] turns out to be, in fact, fake. Indeed, in Péterfy's novel, Angelo's, the ex-barbarian's *Bildung,* his civilised character stands in contrast with the true barbarism of provincial Hungarians, and the fake Enlightenment of Austrians. The main, Enlightenment argument of the novel, which is proven to be fake by Viennese society but which Péterfy still does endorse, is that you are not what you were born, but what you make of yourself. That is, even though Angelo was born African, he could become the epitome of the cultivated white European man, as opposed to provincial Hungarians (the "true barbarians"), who have, in principle, much better opportunities, but destroy everything culturally valuable or progressive. In many sense, the novel is "right": it offers a perfect mirror to Hungarian society. What are then the ethical and political stances the emerge from the narrative technique Péterfy uses?

As was suggested above, apart from endorsing a specifically European, Enlightenment concept of what it means to be human, Péterfy fails to engage with the problems of narrative representation. In *Fiction across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth Century Borders*, Shameem Black speaks about the need to confront "the spectre of invasive imagination"[23] and warns against the use of "representational violence" and "discursive domination."[24] 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 pe,* I venture to estimate. As much as you learned listening to the *Jack Benny* program back in Shillingtom, Pennsylvania. Ask Cynthia Ozick. Ask Leon Wieseltier. Ask Orlando Cohen.[25]

Updike's irony is that Orlando Cohen is also his own creation, but Beach's argument most obviously raises the question whether it is possible to have complete imaginative access to another person's being. To put it differently, is Elizabeth Costello, J. M. Coetzee's fictional character right in claiming that "[t]here is no limit to the extent to which

22 See Andrea Timár, *A Modern Coleridge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Introduction and Chapter 1.

23 Shameem Black, *Fiction across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth Century Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 12.

24 Black, 23.

25 Black, 22.

we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are *no bounds* to the *sympathetic imagination*"?[26] Or else, *can* we access the mind of another, isn't there a limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves to the being of another? And even if there was no such limit (there is!), should *we* not *put* a limit to the extent to which we endeavour to access, and/or represent another person's mind? These are the basic questions Shameem Black asks throughout her work, focusing, largely speaking, on the ethics of narrative representation.

In fact, as she argues, since novels always speak about (and implicitly speak for) others, the representation of "other minds" is always present as a problem, and not only in cases when the other mind is very different as far as his or her social, geographical, historical or biological (i.e. gender) givens are concerned. However, the problem becomes an ethical problem only when the author speaks from a position of dominance (i.e. he belongs to the powerful majority of "white" / "healthy" / "rich or middle class" / "cultivated" / "heterosexual" / "men"). Péterfy himself exemplifies of all of these categories, and even though his endeavour to represent the "other" is "ethical," the realisation is less so, since his omniscience also implies omnipotence, a God-like knowledge of a person's innermost thoughts and feelings. This technique *could* be used to reflect, precisely, on the ethical stakes involved omniscient narration, but Péterfy's omniscience is *non*-reflective, non-revelative of its own stakes. Similarly, past tense, retrospective narration also implies a privileged position, the description of known, established facts, and a great, retrospective, omniscient insight into the importance of each event. Indeed, omniscient, retrospective narration is the most prone to what critics call a "totalising closure." Of course, there is nothing inherently "wrong" with omniscient retrospection, this is the technique the most widely used in 19th century fiction. The problem is that a novel *about* otherness, which, didactically, advances the moral imperative to respect this otherness, calls for a narrative technique that equally respects the wholly otherness of the other (Spivak), without trying to imaginatively invade or appropriate it. This appropriative technique can only awaken narcissistic self-projections in the reader, masquerading as sympathetic benevolence.

Hence, one may conclude that the political agenda of Péterfy's book does not lie or does not stem from its figuration of Soliman's "otherness," nor does it want to "speak for" or "bear witness to" the sufferings of the dispossessed, let alone the poor. Rather, Soliman's fate serves as an allegory for the "barbarian" way in which the Hungarian majority treats minorities, as well as speak up for those who, like Kazinczy himself, thrive for living a life of *Bildung.* And while Soliman and Kazinczy stand as allegories "for *us* all," it shows a mirror to 21st century Hungarian society, which disavows more and more the heritage of European Enlightenment.

26 Elizabeth Costello's argument is supposed to be, in fact, a refutation of Thomas Nagel's claim that it is impossible to feel what it feels like to be a bat.