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The apotheosis of intellectual disability in fictional literature

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Abstract

Purpose: Intellectual disability is an extremely complex phenomenon and can therefore be considered on the basis of either intellectual malfunction patterns and adaptability disorders, or in the optics of the socio-cultural construct. The ephemeral truth about the essence of the phenomenon of intellectual disability is formulated in a fluid and dynamic way at the border of culture and biology which justify the fact of analyzing it on the field of medical humanities. The broad perspective of the view of the phenomenon outlined in the first part of the paper provides the basis for understanding the image of a character with intellectual disabilities in fictional literature. The primary objective of the research was to get to know and understand the apotheosis of intellectual disability in selected works of fine literature.

Views: Basis assumptions of the hermeneutic method were applied in this research. Hermeneutics is a specific methodology on literary grounds, as it does not provide the user with ready-made techniques or tools for text analysis, emphasizing the lack of universal means of deciphering the meanings of literature. The meaning of the text becomes a reference developed by interpretation, which is a question of the hypotheses generated by the recipient. The area of analysis consists primarily of the categories of wisdom and good outlined in the silhouettes of the presented literary heroes.

Conclusions: As a result, characteristic ways of understanding wisdom and good in relation to characters with intellectual disabilities were identified, and thus the image of apotheosis was outlined.

Key words: intellectual disability, image apotheosis, hermeneutics, medical humanities.

PURPOSE

Medicine and fine literature, the disciplines seemingly distant from each other but still at the interface between literary fiction and real life, can mutually draw on each other's resources [1]. The ephemeral truth about the essence of the phenomenon of illness is formulated in a fluid and dynamic way at the border of culture and biology [2].

Disease as an existential experience is one of the most important motifs in the history of literature. Yet more intriguing is the reverse relation, namely, the presence of fictional literature in medicine. Pursuant to the growing interest in the interdisciplinary trend of medical humanities, a professor of literature was hired for the first time at a medical college in the United States in the 1970s. That caused a certain stir in the academic community [3]. What should medical professionals use fictional literature for?

The answer to the above question should be considered both in an aesthetic and ethical context [4]. Reading literary texts prepares the physician to establish a contact of special quality with the patients. The fundamental competence here is to go beyond literality and to search between and beyond the words for what has actually been said. The true meaning can be ambiguous, hidden from the inattentive and superficial recipient i.e., among metaphors, symbols and even in silence. The literary text is also a pretext for reflection that inspires moral sensitivity and empathy. Reading fine literature allows a doctor to move between the abstract issue and the actual existential situation of the sick person [5].

The marriage of medicine and fine literature takes on a special meaning in the field of psychiatry. The intellectual tools acquired in the process of critical reading of a literary text allow to go beyond the simple nosological framework in the understanding of mental disorders.

In particular, intellectual disability is a phenomenon that escapes the narrow and simple formulas of thinking. It can be approached closer through an interdisciplinary and multidimensional cognitive process. Limitation of the approach to empirical recording of intellectual and adaptive deficiencies, genetic and neurological abnormalities, is merely a context for understanding the microcosm of the existence of a person with an intellectual disability. A literary work, filtering the matter through the cultural and intellectual sensitivity of the author, allows the reader to bring out the meanings and ideas hidden beneath the surface of reality.

From such perspective, the analysis of the literary picture of intellectual disability seems particularly relevant in the area of psychiatry. Broadening the horizon of understanding of this phenomenon and going beyond the strictly medical area not only enables epistemological and ontological reflection impacting directly on medical practice, but also makes it possible to refer to universal values.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY – BETWEEN A BIOLOGICAL PHENOMENON AND A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The concept of intellectual disability seems to be widely understood owing to its linguistic intuitiveness. However, simple semantic paths may prove confusing in the face of the issues taken up in this research. Intellectual disability is a phenomenon that is not only multidimensional, but also in its own way elusive in its complexity. A perfect illustration of this cognitive difficulty may be the conceptualization of the essence of this phenomenon, which has evolved over the centuries. What is intellectual disability?

The current definitional consensus is based on the recognition criteria contained in the international diagnostic systems. According to them, intellectual disability can be defined as a significantly reduced intellectual potential implying irregularities in social adaptation beginning in the developmental period [6, 7]. From the clinical point of view, intellectual disability is considered to be a kind of “umbrella” term involving a group of disorders induced by developmental abnormalities of the central nervous system [8]. It should be understood as a primary, concomitant or leading symptom of numerous diseases with different etiologies [9].

Although the medical approach to intellectual disability has the highest empirical value and is most prevalent in public discourse, it is not the only possible perspective that might be employed. Therefore, another level of reasoning in this area should also be considered, which is a key basis for the literary texts analyzed in the following part of the paper. By shifting its emphasis to the sociological perspective based on the assumptions of symbolic interaction, intellectual disability appears as a kind of so-

cial construct, negotiated through human interactions and constantly interpreted in an axiological environment. The aspect of nervous system disorders has not been overlooked, but it does not constitute the phenomenon in itself [10]. In optics of this type, it is true to say that a person with an intellectual disability is one who has been socially given the status of a person with an intellectual disability and therefore plays his or her part in the social system [11]. Thus, it is the society and cultural conditions that determine, in a sense, at what point the reduced level of intellectual functioning and adaptability is so significant that it is labelled as a type of disability. Thus, the diagnosis of intellectual disability is not based on objective studies, but on the observation of behavior and measurement of the intelligence quotient [12], which also arouses a lot of controversy in some environments. Critics argue with a hint of irony that if intelligence is treated as an objectively measurable capability, it should be described as the ability to achieve high scores in intelligence tests [13].

The serious divergence in the meaning of the essence of intellectual disability, apparent in the above considerations, stems from a completely different approaches to the description of a particular fragment of reality. Undeniably, the universe of the levels of cognitive functioning, the repertoires of adaptive behaviors and etiopathological mechanisms, exists objectively. However, it should be acknowledged that the concept of intellectual disability, however understood, is merely a cognitive representation of reality and not one of its elements. Thus, the differing notions of intellectual disability do not, conceptually, call into question the existence of its undisputed designation in any way.

The feeling of otherness, basic in relation to the assumptions of the diagnostic and conceptual apparatus, is certainly an indisputable issue here. It is possible to discuss the ways in which we might identify the precise limits of that difference and to recognize its essence, while remaining consistent with respect to its existence. It is precisely the phenomenon of this non-normality that becomes the most interesting issue from the perspective of this research and is the key to understanding the way literary characters with intellectual disabilities are portrayed in fictional literature.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN HETEROLOGICAL TERMS¹ – A NOSOLOGICAL ENTITY IN THE SERVICE OF FINE LITERATURE

An analysis of the historical outline of intellectual disability indicates that the foundation for understand-

¹ The concept of heterology is a philosophical neologism coined in the first half of the 20th century by Georges Bataille, defining the science of what is not subject to reasoned appropriation, and whose primary interest is broadly understood “otherness” [16].

ing this phenomenon is the concept of norm and normality [14]. Antinomy, personified by the juxtaposition of health and illness, sanity and madness, or wisdom and “foolishness”, is perceived by the general public almost instinctively, and the feeling of the “otherness” and “difference” of certain groups has always accompanied humanity. However, until there was an interest in constructing rules to distinguish different notions, which are the categories of abnormality, such an assessment had a purely subjective dimension. Reality is ordered in a special way by means of norms, because their existence has created, in a sense, the existence of the outlands of humanity.

Michel Foucault ([15], p. 83) argues that “there cannot be a society without a margin, for society is always cut off from nature in such a way that the rest, the sediment, something that gets out of control, remains. It is on these margins, indispensable and inextricably linked to the society, that a madman will appear”. The madness in terms of Foucault’s reasoning far exceeds the colloquial understanding of the term, taking away from it some of the burden of pejorative meaning. The wide panorama of madness includes all manifestations of social inadequacy. Madness, therefore, is what the society wants to exclude beyond its own horizon, it is the antithesis of normality.

Intellectual disability is understood here as a special kind of madness resulting from the reason – stupidity antinomy. Being a reasonable man sanctions having at one’s disposal the symbolic capital to represent all mankind and create one’s own sociodicy, which confirms the existing social and cultural order.

The marginality of persons with intellectual disabilities is manifested in this context with all its force. Since reason in modern society is an indisputable and necessary value, it follows that a significantly reduced level of intellectual functioning takes away the importance of the discourse and symbols generated by the group of people so defined. Intellectual disability appears here as a community “not listened to”, an ignored subjectivity without any influence on the surrounding reality.

There are people whose words are valuable, respected, and have the power to influence the shape of culture and community. The words of the madmen are empty, meaningless and worthless; no one will believe them, and they have no influence on reality. The speech of a person with intellectual disabilities thus becomes an ephemerality freely drifting amid a reality built on “Enlightenment blackmail” [15].

A person diagnosed with intellectual disability seems to be, from this perspective, an outlaw from the realm of normality, condemned to an existence situated almost on the outskirts of humanity. However, for the purpose of research conducted on literary texts, it seems more interesting to adopt the opposite perspective, which at the expense of an even deeper departure from empiri-

cism constructs an extremely capable space of the symbol. Intellectual disability as a symbolic notion can be understood as an escape, or liberation, from reason. The horizon of being human thus opens up in a special way by liberating from the chains of rationality. However, the transgression of reason is not simply synonymous with “being a fool”. It is a complete overstepping of the wise – stupid antinomy, formed after all in the narrative of the primacy of reason.

In the history of literature, the 19th century was famous as the time of a marriage between art and madness [15]. The fascination with this escape from normality is a kind of “window vent”, through which one can look at what has hitherto remained inaccessible and go beyond the pattern of the current reality. A literary hero with an intellectual disability is not so much a figure burdened with a nosological diagnosis, but the epitome of a frameless peregrination across and transgression of the horizon of thought available to humanity.

SEARCHING FOR A PICTURE OF THE APOTHEOSIS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN FICTIONAL LITERATURE IN LIGHT OF THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE HERMENEUTIC METHOD

The picture of the phenomenon of intellectual disability, as it is outlined throughout the research presented in this paper, differs in its specificity from the presentations most common within the interdisciplinary approaches that explore this state of functioning. The contemporary research in medicine, psychology and pedagogy focuses on the empirical aspect in quantitative and qualitative terms, while ignoring the hermeneutic orientation [17, 18]. Considering the ambiguity and interpretative openness of the phenomenon of intellectual disability, the best way to explore its literary image seems to be to embed this research in hermeneutics, which consists of interpretation, explanation and understanding.

Seventeenth-century scientific terminology moved away from the former term *ars interpretandi* in favor of the concept of hermeneutics, translated from the Greek *hermeneuein*, meaning elucidation, announcement, interpretation and explanation [19]). In the basic sense, this type of “art” is a method of studying literary texts, including the critical examination, explanation and internal interpretation of meaning [20]. According to the concept of Wilhelm Dilthey, who polarized the methodologies of the natural sciences and humanities in the 19th century; while we can learn about and explain natural phenomena, the processes of spiritual life can only be read through certain signs and thereby brought closer to their understanding [17]. Breaking the code of hidden mean-

ings can take place at any level of existential experience, one of which is the literary text.

Hermeneutics is a specific methodology on literary grounds, as it does not provide the user with ready-made techniques or tools for textual analysis, emphasizing the lack of a universal means of deciphering the meanings of literature [19]. The meaning of the text becomes a reference developed by interpretation, which is a question of the hypotheses generated by the recipient, and not of the original message given directly by the author of the work [21].

The main research area within which the planned objectives will be pursued is the authors' selection of the most outstanding works of world fine literature which contain a character with intellectual disabilities. The criterion of identifying characters with the same type of disability turned out to be a key difficulty. It should be understood that fictional literature is often devoid of a specific kind of literality, and therefore the way in which a literary hero functions is not always clarified by giving him a specific label of "intellectual disability", or according to the obsolete terminology of "mental retardation", "mental handicap" "underdevelopment", etc. Most often, the author leaves clues scattered in the structure of the text, which may indicate such a way of functioning. It is also not insignificant that the character can be used primarily for the embodiment of certain ideas, which casts doubt on the appropriateness of realist readings.

The subject of the research is the phenomenon of intellectual disability in the selected positions of fine literature. The primary purpose of the exploration was to get acquainted with, and to understand, the apotheosis of intellectual disability presented in the selected works via the hermeneutic interpretation of the characteristics of the following protagonists of fine literature:

- Ross O'Grodnick – the main hero of "Being There" by Jerzy Kosiński;
- Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin – the main hero of "The Idiot" by Fyodor Dostoevsky;
- Gimpel the Fool – the main hero of "Gimpel the Fool" by Isaac Bashevis Singer.

APOTHEOSIS IN LITERARY IMAGES OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Free through "foolishness" – Ross O'Grodnick

Published in 1971, the novel "Being There" by Jerzy Kosiński tells the story of a mysterious gardener who accidentally finds himself in the environment of the American political and financial elite, gaining fame, recognition and authority among men and a reputation as an incredible lover among women. This is a man who had spent his whole life taking care of plants in the complete isolation of a garden surrounded by a high wall, knowing reality

only from the TV screen. Everything he says applies only to plants and horticulture. However, people in the environment, distrusting the situational inadequacy of his botany-focused speech, focused on botany, try to find a deeper sense and meaning in it.

A valuable literary trail, scattered across the structure of the novel, is left through mentions of Ross's reduced level of intellectual functioning. He is illiterate in two ways: he cannot read a text consisting of letters, nor the world in which he has come to live. On the early pages of the novel we learn that "the soft soil of the boy's brain, from which all thoughts grow, has been permanently destroyed. Therefore, he, Ross, should not seek a place in the world of people who live outside the house and outside the garden gate" ([22], p. 9).

While in his garden, Ross is fully fit intellectually. He uses his reason efficiently at the level of specific operations, as is characteristic of intellectual disability. His limited efficiency is signaled only in relation to the criteria of the world beyond the gate in the garden wall, built on the basis of abstract constructs beyond the area of understanding available to persons with intellectual disabilities. Interestingly, Ross is considered an extremely intelligent person among the American elite. This perfectly indicates the fact that the phenomenon of intellectual disability is socially constructed, as illustrated by the concepts of symbolic interactionism described earlier. O'Grodnick's cognitive performance is sufficient in itself, and its inadequacy can be seen in only specific contexts.

The statements generated by him, which also include answers to extremely difficult questions (related to politics and economics), consist of simple platitudes based on horticultural knowledge. After momentary consternation, however, they are perceived by his interlocutors as metaphors that illustrate the issue accurately and brilliantly. O'Grodnick becomes a sage like the Delphi Pythia.

This therefore raises a controversial question about the nature of wisdom. Note that Ross's partners in dialogue, on hearing his words, have every opportunity to classify them as either "wise" or "stupid". The hero's constations are in a way intellectually neutral. They contain statements related to horticulture, which are not false, but the political and economic context in which they are articulated leaves doubts. At this stage, a grotesque gameplay takes place at the interface of literality and interpretation. Paradoxically, by engaging in the search for the metaphorical meaning of Ross's speech, his interlocutor confronts his own desires, so there is no chance of him receiving a response that could be considered by him as unwise. Seeking the meaning of a non-existent metaphor, the interlocutor involves only his own cognitive resources, extracting the solution from them. So, the fool becomes a sage, because he is regarded as such by his interlocutors.

Ross O'Grodnick is attributed with positive qualities, but in reality, the template of the hero's behavior is a mixture of what he has observed on television and his helpless passivity. It is difficult to determine from the text the traits of the hero's character, and agree with the characters glorifying his virtues. It is truly fascinating that it seems impossible to define Ross's moral orientation. From an ethical perspective he does the right things, but as a consequence of his imitating of television personalities, passivity and sheer coincidence, rather than of the hero's intentions.

Thus, the question of whether Ross O'Grodnick is a good or a bad person remains unresolved. Kosiniński seems to be playing a trick on his readers, provoking a naturally arising question. The solution seems to be outside the obvious categories of answers. O'Grodnick is neither good nor bad. He is a man without properties, and thus transcends the Manichaeic dichotomy.

Ross is like a plant in his beloved garden. He was foretold that "he will be like them [flowers]: quiet, serene in the sun, sluggish in the rain" ([22], p. 8). This is perfectly illustrated by the scene ending the novel. O'Grodnick runs out of a party at which the social and intellectual elite is playing. He feels dazed, and in his imagination, he sees a picture of his own character, which has been created by all of the overinterpretations of his words and gestures. The image appears to him as withered, which clearly refers to the world of flora. The hero is like a plant that withers, having lost his vital force in an environment that is to him artificial, and which has imposed a mask on him. After walking through the lobby, O'Grodnick finds himself in a garden engulfed in sleepy silence. He sees fresh shoots growing and small leaves thriving on the branches. "No thought was knocking in Ross's head. Peace came to his heart" ([22], p. 114).

The hero is a pure emanation of life in a free state. In heterological terms, his unspeakable otherness is symbolized by the figure of the garden as a world not subject to classical understanding, a world of primordial literality. O'Grodnick rises above wisdom and stupidity, above good and evil, but that does not mean that in this way he goes beyond their determinants. Ross' otherness is radically different and the categories known to us are simply not applicable to it, so it is hard to use them to value and assess him. The position that the hero occupies beyond the margins of the reality given to us is a fascinatingly libertarian construct.

The title of the novel can be read as an cry for the liberation of the soul in the truth about man as he is. For it is enough to be, it is enough to remain in one's literal, primordial existence like Ross, and "peace will be in the heart". The intellectual disability personified by O'Grodnick appears as a form of pure existence, the freedom of not understanding, and a pass to "not being" in the cobweb of contexts and social constructs.

A saintly "idiot" – Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin

Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, the main character of the famous novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky entitled "The Idiot", is a character emerging as if from the fog. He comes to 19th-century Russia from an alternative axiological space, which the writer designed for an eccentric thought experiment. In the pages of his novel, he called to life a perfectly good man – an idiot, who is the reincarnation of Jesus.

Myshkin suffers from severe epilepsy, the seizures of which have resulted in "dumbfounding, spiritual gloom, idiocy" ([23], p. 251). As he admits, "(...) he remembers everything, he can explain very little satisfactorily, because he did not realize many things" ([23], p. 34). There is indeed a close link between epilepsy and a reduction of neurocognitive capacity, with effects reaching intellectual disability in 18% of cases [24]. The idiocy affecting the Prince, already indicated in the title of the novel, can be described precisely according to modern terminology as an intellectual disability. At the same time, however, Myshkin cuts himself off from the label attributed to him by the surrounding people, saying: "(...) I was actually so sick once that I gave the impression of an idiot, but now what an idiot of me when I realize that people think of me like that? I go in and I think: <I'm an idiot in their eyes, and yet I have reason, and they don't even guess it...>" ([23], p. 85).

The Prince's intellectual state is presented in an ambiguous way, which serves the author to shape the two tracks of the hero's existence in the novel. The first is a realistic representation and, in fact, bears the signs of what is most likely a slight degree of intellectual disability. The second, in turn, is supernatural in character and embodies a key ethical idea for the novel. It does not care about the likelihood of the clinical picture of intellectual disability, ignoring it to give Myshkin a wide, although specific, cognitive and axiological space. In this dimension, intellectual disability is only a pretext embedded in the world of reality for outlining the abnormality, which is crucial from the author's point of view. Therefore, the "idiot" stating "and yet I have reason" raises in this dimension the question of the essence of the phenomenon of wisdom. The madness here is, as in Foucault's view, a foolishness understood as reason in a completely different sense. Intellectual disability, a superficial characteristic of Myshkin, is only a figure through which the author shows his project of an infinitely good man.

The name of the main character through animal allegories reflects the specific construction of the personality of this character. Prince Myshkin behaves like a weak mouse. Childish naivety, boundless trust, sincerity, compassion and kindness make him completely helpless in the social world. He responds to all the evil he experienc-

es from other people with deep understanding, forgiveness, and goodness. The lion's power is hidden, however, in Myshkin's apparent weakness. This particular power of Lev is foolishness, which gives him a mission tailored to Don Quixote: he wants to love people and free them from conflicts and disastrous passions, showing them the true good. The main character is a lion, because he managed to remain a mouse – that is his wisdom.

The culturally rooted understanding of what “wisdom” and “stupidity” are must be temporarily abandoned, because Dostoyevsky semantically breaks down the meanings of both notions. “Foolishness” does not mean being stupid, but merely moving away from reason as the cultural labyrinth into which we enter when we come to the world. This labyrinth sets the horizon of cognition and understanding, providing well-worn clichés for interpreting reality, and its high walls simultaneously obscure the view of the world beyond it. Prince Myshkin's intellectual disability does not show him the exit, but rather raises him above the walls of that labyrinth. Myshkin is deprived of the interpretation key, which is almost automatically used by the society, which is why the Prince's perception is extra-schematic.

In the character of Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, “idiotcy” becomes wisdom. One of the protagonists of the novel, Yevgeny Pavlovich Radomsky, declares: “I disagree and even I am outraged when someone calls you an idiot; you are too wise to define you in this way (...)” ([23], p. 644). The main character “(...) will always be able to see what others will never notice” ([23], p. 135). He embodies the unique transgression of what we have become used to as wisdom, for Myshkin's reason is inextricably linked to the feeling of moral beauty. Wisdom is the heart that sees goodness and desires to do good.

In a letter to Sophia Ivanovna, Dostoyevsky wrote that the essence of “The Idiot” is to show a perfect man, and that “there is only one perfectly beautiful figure in the world – it is Christ” ([25], p. 96). In the person of Prince Myshkin, a kind of divine humanity is realized. The main character bestows boundless love and trust upon every person. He would like to help, to devote himself fully to everyone. He does not condemn, does not burst with anger and does not resent, forgiving immediately. In the face of humiliation and hatred, he responds with love.

Myshkin's adoption of such a crystalline attitude, which is the antithesis of that of the surrounding world, is possible only owing to his foolishness. Let us try a simple thought experiment – imagine an infinitely good man walking through the streets of the modern world. Considering the various features of character which constitute that kindness, a simple conclusion is reached as to the complete inadequacy of that person's resources to the conditions of social life. An inability to adapt – is this not one of the criteria for identifying intellectual disabilities [6, 7]? So, are goodness and foolishness inextricably

linked? Perhaps Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin personifies the reason of a completely different quality, and the concept of wisdom requires a new definition.

“A good man lives by his faith” ([26], p. 21) – Gimpel the Fool

The world depicted by Isaac Bashevis Singer on the pages of his short story “Gimpel The Fool” is a fairy tale, like Marc Chagall's phantasmagoric paintings. Here, every lie can turn into truth, and truth can take the form of falsehood, for “without a doubt, the world is only a collection of our imaginations” ([26], p. 24). Singer, however, does not seem to seek epistemological boundaries. A question far more important for his deliberations than “can we be sure of anything?” is that of what such cognitive certainty can bring to a man. The character of Gimpel the Fool is a creation praise of a pure lack of understanding. Above truth and falsehood, he discovers a much more important value – immeasurable trust. Is it possible to live without truth? We would really make Gimpel laugh with this question, because it is not the truth that defines the meaning of his world.

The main character of the tale is a good-natured Jewish baker at the end of his days, who tells the story of his life among the community of a small town in pre-war Poland. He introduces himself to the readers with the following words: “I am Gimpel the Fool. But I don't consider myself a fool. Just the contrary. But that's what people call me (...) In general, I've had seven nicknames: dum dum, donkey, redhead, blockhead, retard, buffoon and fool” ([26], p. 5).

Gimpel's character is presented as having an inner being and an outer mask. He cannot, seemingly, determine and understand the situational context in which he finds himself. He seems completely lost and naïve like a child, because he believes in everything he hears from people. He takes part in the game of contempt and humiliation, because the surrounding community accepts it as “a point of honor to double-cross him at least once” ([26], p. 6). The highlight of the fun at his expense is to match him with the false and malicious Elka. Although she is far from innocent, he is convinced that she is an immaculate virgin, and that the illegitimate son she raised was her younger brother. Taking advantage of Gimpel's foolishness and naivety to play a cruel joke on him proved so important to the community that the dwellers of the little town were even willing to make a dowry donation for his future wife. Why do they go to so much effort to do all this? Only to make the life of the main character founded forever on falsehood and thus to provide themselves with a constant source of entertainment. However, the main character endures his fate with dignity and love.

This is how Gimpel the Fool was treated by the world of rational people, considering him a person with an intellectual disability. However, the interpretation

of the main character's expressions of boundless naivety as a direct consequence of intellectual difficulties is based on false grounds. It turns out that Gimpel took on the role of a buffoon imposed on him in a fully conscious manner:

"However, I decided that I would always believe what they were telling me. What's good about not believing? Today it's just your wife, but tomorrow you start disbelief the God himself" ([26], p. 17).

Gimpel understands every situation he finds himself in, and his thinking is independent of the persuasion of those trying to make fun of him. He does not lack the cognitive resources to judge the world in a normal way, congruent with the beliefs of the general public. For the right reasons, however, he makes a quiet revolt against epistemological certainty. This rebellion, however, has nothing to do with demonstrating his own power. It is a conscious consent to go beyond normality and take on the stigma of Foucault's madness [15]. He agrees to remain powerless against the vision of reality that the playful community is trying to impose on him at all costs – he accepts life as it is given to him through the crooked mirror of jokes. Gimpel accepts living in a space on the borderline of truth and hypocrisy. As he admits: "Different things happened, but I didn't see anything, I didn't hear anything. I believed and that's it" ([26], p. 21).

The main character adopts an attitude of humility towards the understanding of the world, bestowing it with boundless confidence. Faith without doubt rises to the rank of the most precious moral value, above the truth. For does any truth exist in a world that is a set of imaginings?

Gimpel does not argue with the world, but flows calmly with the current of events. He trusts reality by accepting it as it is, as it is presented to him. He is not tormented by doubts or questions, and does not feel anger and humiliation. He can accept and love everything that comes to him: both truth and falsehood. He endures ridicule and humiliation throughout his life, but is unable to respond to them with hatred. He does not expect respect, kindness, love, or material well-being and, consequently, does not experience the bitterness of disappointment. Faith, and at the same time consent to the reality as it appears to him, allow him to feel love for the world. *Amor fati*, a kind of love of human fate in happiness and misery makes him a good man, for "(...) it is better to be a fool for the rest of one's days than a villain even for an hour" ([26], p. 7).

Through unwavering faith and trust, Gimpel adopts an attitude of epistemological humility, approaching the Socratic thought of "I know that I know nothing". However, while the ancient philosopher assumed that intellectual humility was the key to true knowledge, Gimpel seems to reject the possibility of the existence of truth. In his opinion, anything is possible and likely, because reality does not exist objectively, but is merely a set of imaginings.

Gimpel's inner wisdom seeks meaning where only delusion can seemingly be found. And strangely he finds it! Why should we know the truth? The world is always the same, no matter how we see it and describe it. Life is enchanted by words that create many realities. For Gimpel, they are all real, all worthy of experience and love. The hero's intellectual disability becomes a conscious escape into foolishness. Gimpel is a deserter from a world racing for a trophy that does not exist.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AS A CURSE OR BLESSING – AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE APOTHEOSIS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Foucault [15] states that since the 19th century there has been an unbroken fascination with madness in European literature². Art discovers for itself a marginal discourse, existing "across" the established world order. It retreats, in a sense, "into the deep", from the pressure of what has long been established in the social reality, exploring the immeasurable area of what does not fit the limits of normalcy.

The silhouettes of literary protagonists are often difficult to refer to the currently applicable diagnostic criteria of intellectual disability, and attributing such a diagnosis to them takes place by searching for various clues scattered in the text. The apparently carefree portrayal of a character with intellectual disabilities, however, is not a matter of chance. The aim of the authors is not only to outline the silhouette of a man with low intellectual potential, but to construct a kind of "vessel", which will be the only one capable of conveying specific ideas. From this perspective, intellectual disability appears not as an actual state of functioning, but as a literary figure in which a man, through his foolishness, becomes a phantasmic deserter from the world of universally accepted meanings. He escapes to show the reader an axiological transgression.

The characters of the novels analyzed novels, despite their apparent foolishness, are the embodiment of a particular kind of wisdom, carrying a certain philosophy of life. Ross O'Grodnick's wisdom is a hymn to primordial literality, an escape from the cobwebs of interpretation and social constructs. Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin understands internal human microcosms and is able to respond to them. His wisdom lies in emotional intelligence. Gimpel the Fool stands out for his epistemological humility, which implies boundless trust in the world.

Ethically, the figure with an intellectual disability is shaped in two ways: as a person absolutely good (Prince

² It should be remembered that, according to Foucault, the concept of "madness" covers, broadly, all forms of going beyond socially constructed norms, and includes intellectual disability.

Nikolayevich Myshkin, Gimpel the Fool), or transcending the dichotomy of good and evil (Ross O'Grodnick). We call an innocent both a person "(...) living in the dark, who has no knowledge, a simpleton", and someone who does nothing wrong ([27], p. 167).

The existence of man is spread between meaning and absurdity. Existential tremors and a sense of deformity of purpose and order clash with the rational social order, built with effort. What can be done if the concepts aiming to seek and define meaning bring disappointment by giving in to the unfathomable essence of being? If rationality of thinking fails to provide an answer, perhaps an escape from reason can bring relief. There are original healing

rites, during which participants take on the role of madmen. The logic of the ceremony is as follows: when what is systematically rooted in reality and within the limits of normality becomes unbearable, only what is unconscious and abnormal, and therefore madness, can bring salvation [28].

The escape into foolishness may appear as a longed-for lightness of being and a kind of blessing. After all, the literary heroes with intellectual disabilities, despite turbulent or tragic fates, achieve, if not a sense of happiness, at least inner peace and harmony. They are not troubled, except perhaps for Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, by metaphysical anxieties and doubts.

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