
**GETTING TO KNOW THE OTHER: IGOR KARKAROFF – A KEY BULGARIAN
FIGURE IN J. K. ROWLING’S *HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE***

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Abstract: The paper studies the way Bulgarians are being portrayed in one of the most read children (and not only) books of the twentieth century as well as today. In particular, the focus is on the image of Igor Karkaroff, the infamous teacher of the Durmstrang team, presented in the fourth book of the Harry Potter series, i.e. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The main idea developed in the paper is that the image of Karkaroff is more of a Russian spy than of a stereotypical Bulgarian.

Bulgarians in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, presented through the images of the two main protagonists: Viktor Krum, a Bulgarian star Quidditch player, and Igor Karkaroff, a teacher at Durmstrang, the Bulgarian School of Wizardry, and teacher to Viktor Krum, are chosen as the main opponent to the British centre. They are the cultural Other coming from the periphery. Notions and ideas about people coming from the Balkans and Eastern Europe – the whereabouts of the famous Count Dracula, and the more general stereotypical ideas about the periphery as the dwelling of evil creatures and the place where bad things come from, come into play in the work of J. K. Rowling. In various interviews the author herself has stated that in order to present her characters in a more plausible manner, she has resorted to encyclopaedias and maps. Analysing the text closely, however, one cannot but notice some discrepancies in the depicted images in terms of the names and surnames chosen as well as in some personal traits and the provided geographical description of Bulgaria’s location as “somewhere in the far north” and “somewhere very cold”.

Therefore, the paper argues that subjectivity and stereotypes work together in Rowling’s book to create the image of Bulgarians in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as backward, treacherous, evil, practicing the Dark Arts, outsiders trying to find out the secrets of the centre, people to be feared of and never trusted.

Although it is a matter of fiction that has to be taken with a grain of salt, the Harry Potter Series can easily influence people’s psyche into accepting stereotypical ideas about the unfamiliar cultural Other which can provoke attitudes of distrust and create divisions amongst people and even more so as free passage of people is one of the main characteristics of the times.

Analysing the text critically from the perspective of intercultural relationships one cannot but notice the dangerous trend in presenting Bulgarians as people who are treacherous, sly, backward, and most of all Other.

Keywords: The Other, Harry Potter, Bulgarians, centre, periphery

“He is Karkaroff’s student, isn’t he?”⁴⁰

1. INTRODUCTION

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, the fourth book of the Harry Potter stories, is the one with the most difficult plot and characters. Apart from the confrontation between good and evil and between wizards and normal people discussed in the previous three books, the fourth book adds a new dimension: it presents the relationships which develop between the wizards from Britain and the non-British wizards, and the way the British centre views the cultures outside its territory.

Bulgarians in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* are chosen as the main opponent to the British centre. They are the cultural Other coming from the periphery. Notions and ideas about people coming from the Balkans and Eastern Europe – the whereabouts of the famous Count Dracula, and the more general stereotypical ideas about the periphery as the dwelling of evil creatures and the place where bad things come from are easily discernible. Thus, subjectivity and stereotypes work together in Rowling’s book to create the image of Bulgarians in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as backward, treacherous, evil, practicing the Dark Arts, outsiders trying to find out the secrets of the centre, people to be feared of and never trusted.

The textual analysis of the book is carried through the prism of intercultural relations and cultural relativism⁴¹ with the objective of analysing the ways the image of the cultural Other is created and whether or not that image is accurate or exaggerated. Attention is also paid to the impressions left in the readers.

⁴⁰ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 427.

⁴¹ For more information on the essence of cultural relativism see Glazer, M. “Cultural relativism”. Texas: University of Texas-Pan American. (1996) <
https://web.archive.org/web/20070613222929/http://www.utpa.edu/faculty/mglazer/Theory/cultural_relativism.

2. ANALYSIS

The two main characters, used to convey the perception of Bulgarians as the Other, are Viktor Krum, a Bulgarian star Quidditch player, and Igor Karkaroff, a lecturer at Durmstrang, the Bulgarian School of Wizardry, and teacher to Viktor Krum. The stereotypical ideas mentioned above, are evident from the descriptions of the two characters: Viktor Krum is a younger image of Count Dracula with his thick eyebrows, aquiline nose, sharp profile and burning eyes. The Bulgarian teacher is attributed the features of a “bumbling East-European spy”⁴²: cold blue eyes, sleek hair, evil smile, goatee beard. Karkaroff is an instigator coming from the East, he is the traitor who has given into the Dark Power and has later seemingly repented and converted.

The fact that Rowling uses the label Bulgarian very loosely and more as a substitute for Other than as a representative of the real or “positive” geography⁴³, in this case, Bulgaria, becomes obvious when her main protagonists from the centre define Bulgaria as being “somewhere in the far north”⁴⁴ and “[s]omewhere very cold”⁴⁵. The same notion is confirmed when we look closely into the names of the Bulgarian representatives mentioned in the book. Bulgaria has the status of the “imaginary geography”⁴⁶, which covers the whole area outside the British borders.

The attitude of the British wizards to the Bulgarian school is governed, on the one hand, by their understanding of Bulgaria as the habitat of evil creatures, and on the other, by their perception of Karkaroff as a Voldemort’s follower and their knowledge of his past. The Bulgarian teacher with his past, behaviour and skills is the reason for the attitude Bulgarians encounter at Hogwarts. Viktor, the other prominent representative of the Bulgarian school, falls victim to the bad fame of his teacher. He is perceived as Karkaroff’s student and thereby as similar to him.

It is easy to notice the change of feelings towards Bulgarians when Karkaroff is not around. Krum is admired for his talent in sports at the Quidditch Championship. At this point nationality does not matter, there are other identity markers that come into play.

If we look at the surnames of the two characters: Karkaroff and Krum, we discover completely different qualities attributed to each of them. Krum being the name of one of the most famous and victorious Bulgarian rulers is suggestive of Viktor’s courage, while Karkaroff’s suggests the blackness coming with the Bulgarian teacher. Their first names, though, establish a relation which cannot be broken. It is similar to the bond connecting Viktor Frankenstein and Igor, Frankenstein’s hunch-back, ugly accomplice in the movie “Young Frankenstein”. It is the relation between a genius and a servant, which in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is presented in a bit distorted way, as it is Viktor who is a bit “hunched-up” and although defined as genius in sports, he is a construct of Karkaroff’s evil nature. Their places are also swapped. Viktor is more like the Creature from Marry Shelley’s *Frankenstein* rather than its Creator. The seeming concern and paternal attitude which Igor shows to Viktor is again a deviation from the generally accepted idea in Shelly’s book of the Creator leaving his Creature to manage and develop on his own. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* Igor, the Creator, educates his Creature.

In addition, it should be stated that Igor is not a typical Bulgarian name but a Russian one, a fact which further confirms the notion that the author uses the ethnonym Bulgarians for the team from Durmstrang quite loosely.

The first time we meet Karkaroff is prior to the Tri-wizard Tournament. The Bulgarian students led by Karkaroff come on a ship emerging from the middle of the lake by Hogwarts. True to the name of their school, and as if to strengthen the notion of the Balkans as place of chaos, Durmstrang’s arrival is marked by “disturbance [...] deep in the center; great bubbles [...], waves [...] washing over the muddy banks”⁴⁷, and “a whirlpool”⁴⁸ descriptions which bring associations of an apocalypse.

[htm](#)>, (Retrieved April 02, 2017) and Rosando, C, “Cultural Relativism”, *The Web of Culture*, (1998), <https://www.andrew.cmu.edu/course/80-241/guided_inquiries/articles/cultural_rel.html>. (Last accessed June 1, 2017).

⁴² Schafer, E, “*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*”, Beacham Publishing, (2000). p. 4.

⁴³ Kostova, L, *Tales of the Periphery*, V. Turnovo: UP Sv. Sv. Cyril and Methodius. (1997), p. 9.

⁴⁴ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 167.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Said, E, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, (1979).

⁴⁷ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 246.

⁴⁸ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 246.

The appearance of the Durmstrang ship, its “strangely skeletal look [...], as though it were a resurrected wreck”⁴⁹ and its portholes resembling “ghostly eyes”⁵⁰ is suggestive of the possible destruction and death which the Durmstrang students bring with them. It is death coming with them and its herald comes out first, clad in silver furs. The Bulgarians look like savages, remnants of a long forgotten past. While the students are wearing some kind of drab-looking furs, Karkaroff fashions strange exotic “sleek and silver [furs], like his hair”⁵¹ which single him out on the general background of his students. He stands out as different not only from his hosts at Hogwarts but he is different from his own countrymen. The silver colour of his furs is also suggestive of his elusive, changing, unstable and sly nature. Silver is the colour of the Moon and the appearance of full Moon marks the advent of chaos when all evil creatures creep out, threatening the peaceful existence of the whole world.

The arrival of the Bulgarian school at Hogwarts is actually a return for Karkaroff who, as we find out later, is a former student of that same school. We could discern the Biblical motive of the prodigal son. Only that it is quite difficult to qualify the genuine nature of his so-called repentance. Bringing Viktor with him to Hogwarts and seating him at the Slytherin’s table is in a way a symbolic bestowal from father to son. The students of the House of Slytherin are described as – “power hungry” and “of great ambition”⁵². Slytherins are also the House within Hogwarts that has produced most of the Death Eaters who have supported the evil wizard Voldemort during his reign. Now it is Krum sitting at that same table. This once again strengthens the bond between the teacher and the student and suggests even more the expectation of Viktor becoming one of the Death Eaters and being just as hypocritical, sly and evil as his teacher. The fact that “He’s [Krum’s] from Durmstrang!”⁵³ predetermines the attitude towards him. “Obvious, isn’t it? ... He’s Karkaroff’s student, isn’t he? [...] He’s just trying to get closer to Harry – get inside information on him – or get near enough to jinx him –”⁵⁴.

The notion of a spy lurking in the campgrounds of Hogwarts and possibly trying to kill his main enemy from the centre is further imposed by the connection between Karkaroff and the Dark Lord. Karkaroff is the one who is marked with the Dark Mark and he has been the one locked at Azkaban and released after betraying most of his collaborators, the supporters of Voldemort. Betrayal is one of the main features of Karkaroff’s character. He is trying to cheat at the Tournament before the first task. He is seen sneaking through the campgrounds in an attempt to find out the first task and thus to help his champion, Viktor, win. With this action he betrays the confidence the centre has entrusted him with by appointing him as one of the judges at the Tournament. Notions like fair-play and “Let the best one win” are something unfamiliar and strange and not the least valuable to him. He is trying with all his might to back up his student.

Betraying the confidence of the wizards who have appointed him as a judge is trivial compared to betraying Voldemort’s supporters and his former mates. He has made a deal with the wizards from the centre to be released from the prison of Azkaban at the cost of information on many other Death Eaters who subsequently took his place in Azkaban. He has inflicted the wrath of the Dark Lord upon himself and he is painfully aware of that.

Karkaroff, however, is afraid of the power of the center and that has been his primary reason to betray his collaborators and try to gain a place within the society that has accused him and sentenced him to death. His fear makes it difficult for him to live within the borders of the centre, he is under constant tension and always on the look-out. He understands his difficult position and is afraid. Even though master of the Dark Arts he is powerless because he is weaker than Voldemort or some of the representatives of the centre. His fear is obvious and brings feelings of contempt and repulsion “Filth”⁵⁵. His fear, however, and his ability to pretend, to be “a good actor”⁵⁶ provoke the suspicion he is viewed with. The centre is aware that, if the chance occurs and Karkaroff is sure of the protection of the Dark Lord, he might go back to him. Karkaroff is mostly interest-oriented. He is “power hungry”⁵⁷. It is obvious from the way he acts that it is his utmost desire to stand out and to be on the strong side. He uses the fame of his student to gain prominence himself. This is the explanation of his paternal attitude toward Viktor Krum

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 247.

⁵² Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 177.

⁵³ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 421.

⁵⁴ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 422.

⁵⁵ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 587.

⁵⁶ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 333.

⁵⁷ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 177.

on their arrival at Hogwarts. Desire to please and be on the side of the strong explains his sleek voice when talking to Dumbledore, and his siding with the Dark Lord.

The impression Karkaroff gives, apart from his spy-image, is that of a dandy over-conscious about his looks, who feels superior and tries to hide his evil face behind false smiles and friendly attitude. He has the appearance of the stereotypical spy – cold eyes, concealing the soul behind them, dandy goatee beard, cold smile. All his actions speak of immeasurable hatred piled up inside him, not only to his supposed enemies but to his students as well.

His eyes are void of any feelings just like his soul. His eyes are cold and inanimate. Karkaroff is unable to express any kind of other feelings but fear, which provokes hatred and anger. The personal description we encounter in the book focuses on his face, his eyes and the goatee he sports and of which he is so proud. At times he acts like a real coxcomb especially when faced with the camera. He is constantly twirling his goatee, which also brings associations with the Satan. This qualification is supported by his aptitude to dark powers and his being a Death Eater and once again stresses on his slyness, his hypocrisy and menace.

Another thing which strikes us throughout the whole book is that none of the so-called “outsiders” or Others are described as unclean – a feature considered inherent in the people coming from the periphery⁵⁸. It is only Karkaroff who has been described as having “yellowing teeth”⁵⁹ which he displays to their full extent. Karkaroff is the stereotypical representative of the periphery who is trying to invade the clean ordered center.

His hypocrisy leaves him out of the society of his students and out of the society of the Dark Force supporters. He is presented as a loner, not accepted by the others or by his own. Thus, he is even more of a marginal figure than the rest of the representatives from the periphery. His marginal status is the reason for his fear which reaches the extent of an obsession of people plotting against him and trying to lure him “Treachery! [...] It is a plot! You [...] have lured me here under false pretenses”⁶⁰. His fear is the reason behind his being overprotective about giving out the exact location of his school. What he is afraid of is that the centre might decide to invade his domain, the place where he has seemingly found solace and assumed protection after his betrayal of the Dark Lord. He is also afraid of giving out his secrets and his knowledge of the Dark Arts. As he himself puts it “Are we not right to be proud that we alone know our school’s secrets, and right to protect them?”⁶¹. As we find out later, Karkaroff is not so much concerned about the protection of his school’s secrets but of his own preservation. That is why just before the end of the Tournament Karkaroff flees haunted by his fear. He is the captain leaving the ship before the passengers. He leaves his students behind to manage by themselves. As it turns out, however, they have always managed by themselves. Even his students see the type of person he is and seemingly do not care whether he is with them or not.

At the end the students give up on their teacher, they break the bond connecting them with him and thus attempt to present their true selves, to walk out of his shadow, and disperse the stereotypes. It is Krum who is the leader of this new wave, of this new trend. This is quite natural as he is the one who has probably suffered the most from his teacher’s bad reputation. It only serves him good to have withstood it without complaints and to have been able to preserve his humanity and at the end to be able to show his real self and voice his difference from his teacher. This implies again a relation between the Frankenstein’s Creature and Viktor Krum – both the Creature and Krum strive to be accepted for what they are, what their souls are but both fall prey to their creators. The Creature falls victim of his creator’s whim and inability to take responsibility for his deeds. The Creature is not accepted because he is made ugly and ominous looking, while Krum suffers from the reputation of his teacher. The bad qualities of the teacher are so much emphasized that even though Rowling has attempted in a few places to differentiate the one from the other, the general feeling about the Bulgarians as treacherous, sly, backward, and most of all Other, stays.

3. CONCLUSION

In various interviews J. K. Rowling herself has stated that in order to present her characters in a more plausible manner, she has resorted to various encyclopaedias and maps. Analysing the text closely, however, one cannot but notice some discrepancies in the depicted images in terms of the names and surnames chosen as well as in some personal traits and the provided geographical description of Bulgaria’s location as “somewhere in the far

⁵⁸ For more characteristics of the cultural Other coming from the periphery see Kostova, L, *Tales of the Periphery*, V. Turnovo: UP Sv. Sv. Cyril and Methodius, (1997).

⁵⁹ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 417.

⁶⁰ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), pp. 561-562.

⁶¹ Rowling, J. K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, NY: Scholastic Press, (2000), p. 417.

north” and “somewhere very cold”. The associations that are activated are of Romania, based on the physical similarity between Viktor Krum and Count Dracula, and Russia, due to some of the names which are used for the other members of Durmstrang.

The analysis of the text has revealed that subjectivity, stereotypes, and intertextual references to other texts all work together in Rowling’s book to create the image of Bulgarians in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as backward, treacherous, evil, practicing the Dark Arts, outsiders trying to find out the secrets of the centre, people to be feared of and never trusted.

In conclusion it can be said that although Igor Karkaroff’s character is a fictitious one and has to be taken with a grain of salt, he is so vividly presented that the Harry Potter Series can easily influence people’s psyche into accepting stereotypical ideas about the unfamiliar cultural Other which can provoke attitudes of distrust and create divisions amongst people, even more so as free passage of people is one of the main characteristics of the times.

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