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IF ART IS WHAT MAKES US HUMAN, CAN IT RELIEVE THE PAIN OF BEING HUMAN?

A b s t r a c t. Two contemporary British novels, *Never Let Me Go* and *Saturday*, suggest that art (the ability to respond to art with deep affection and the ability to be creative) is indicative or even constitutive of humanity. The essay considers in detail some implications of this hypothesis with reference to the concepts of art and art therapy. In particular, it seems that the significance of art for humanity might be explained if art is interpreted as primarily a cognitive activity (whose main object is the self) and if self-awareness (interest in one's inner world) is perceived as essential for humanity. At the same time the hypothesis in question seems to undermine the idea of art therapy, since if art makes us human, it can hardly relieve the pain of being human, especially if, as argued by Dennett, awareness and self-awareness play the fundamental role in the experience of suffering. Art's therapeutic function may, however, be defended if therapy is defined as assistance in man's effort to accept suffering as inevitable part of human life.

Two recent British novels (both published in 2005) seem to exemplify the thesis that art is what distinguishes man from other forms of life. One book, *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, suggests that it is the ability to be creative, to produce artworks, that might help prove that the clones (beings to be used in the future as donors of supply organs for proper human beings) are in fact human beings in their own right; while another, *Saturday* by Ian McEwan, shows that it is the sensitive reaction to a work of art that reveals the humanity of an aggressive man suffering from a neurological condition. In the present essay I would like to consider some implications of the hypothesis that art is a distinctive human feature. In particular, I will try to argue that art might be not only indicative of but also essential for humanity if humanity consists in self-awareness and if this self-awareness is enhanced

by means of art. These two assumptions together with the hypothesis that awareness and self-awareness condition and intensify the experience of suffering seem to undermine the idea that art might bring relief to man. In other words, if art makes us human, it seems illogical to expect that it might also heal the pain that goes together with humanity.

Never Let Me Go is a story set at an unspecified point in the future. Kathy, the narrator and protagonist, is a human clone, educated in Hailsham, one of few centres in which clones were once encouraged to develop their intellectual and, especially, artistic abilities, in spite of public disapproval. The purpose of the project was kept secret. The clones, in particular, were not told why their works were selected and taken to a “gallery” by Madame, the headmistress in Hailsham. But Kathy and her friend come to hope that the works might serve to substantiate their claim to be in love, which, in turn, might be grounds for the deferral of their proper service: donating organs. It turns out, however, that the aim of the project was to prove the humanity of clones. Miss Emily, a teacher from Hailsham, explains, “Why did we take your artwork? Why did we do that? [...] You said it was because your art would reveal what you were like. What you were like inside. That’s what you said, wasn’t it? Well, you weren’t far wrong about that. We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to *prove you had souls at all*,” (255). “We selected the best of it and put on special exhibitions. ‘There, look!’ we could say. ‘Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?’” (256).¹ The world ignored the proof and the project was abandoned. Even so the novel’s argument is stated quite forcefully: human beings can be identified as such by their artwork.²

¹ It might be worth noting that at least one teacher recognizes the advantages that their art might give to the students: “Listen [...] your art, it *is* important. And not just because it’s evidence. But for your own sake. You’ll get a lot from it, just for yourself,” (ISHIGURO 106).

² It may seem that the clones are human in virtue of their engagement in art, as their intellectual potential and affectionate life appear of lesser importance (they are not used as indicators of humanity). This, however, might be a false impression: it may be difficult to present someone’s intellectual and emotional life in a way that might be convincing and attractive to the public, whereas a work of art, which in fact embodies the artist’s psychic life, may well be displayed in a gallery. The importance that their teachers attach to the artistic production of the clones might result from such practical considerations. That art in the book is shown as indicative, but not constitutive, of humanity might be further supported by the fact that Tommy, Kathy’s boy-friend, who has no artistic inclinations, is presented as if he were just as human as Kathy.

In *Saturday* the theme of art seems more tangential to the proper subject of the book (atonement for a morally questionable action performed in self-defence, yet abusing one's position of superiority and responsibility — the American war in Iraq being the main theme).³ Perowne, the protagonist of the book, is a neurosurgeon who early in the day is assaulted by a stranger, Baxter. He defends himself by identifying Baxter's neurological condition (Huntington's disease) and thus compromising him in front of his companions. At the end of the day Baxter comes to Perowne's house and terrorizes his family in revenge. Among other things he tells Perowne's daughter to undress and recite a poem for him. When remembering the scene later on, Perowne seems to feel tenderness and respect for Baxter who, though he has been so underprivileged in his life, can be moved by poetry and display much more sensitivity than Perowne himself: "Daisy recited a poem that cast a spell on one man. Perhaps any poem would have done the trick, and thrown the switch on a sudden mood change. Still, Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live. No one can forgive him the use of the knife. But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite all Daisy's attempts to educate him. Some nineteenth-century poet — Henry has yet to find out whether this Arnold is famous or obscure — touched off in Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. That hunger is his claim on life, on a mental existence [...]" (278-9). The scene, as interpreted by Perowne, might be taken to reveal the humanity of the man for the reason that he has been able to respond to a work of art.

³ This is not really true: the novel's treatment of the subject of art is in fact more extensive. Cf. the passage in which Perowne considers the wonder of music which alone in the world can conjure up the dream of Paradise: "This is when they give us a glimpse of what we might be, of our best selves, and of an impossible world in which you give everything you have to others, but lose nothing of yourself," (171-2). Perowne can appreciate music, but is dismissive about literature. He criticizes both realistic fiction — "And it interests him less to have the world reinvented; he wants it explained. The times are strange enough. Why make things up?" — and magic realism: "The reading list persuaded Perowne that the supernatural was the recourse of insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty, a childish evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real, of the demanding, re-enactment of the plausible," (66-8). He denies the ability of a medium that operates in the mode of fiction to explain the world, and thus questions both the cognitive potential and usefulness of this kind of art. Perowne's standpoint on the issue should not, however, be identified with the author's, whose novel, a work of fiction, seems very much engaged in explaining the world (especially as regards the issue of responsibility of the privileged and of man's aesthetic sensitivity).

That artistic activity is a phenomenon to be found exclusively among members of the human species (and therefore potentially useful in establishing the humanity of some borderline cases such as clones or people affected by serious mental illnesses, as in the two novels discussed) does not seem a very contentious idea. Denis Dutton presents it briefly in the introduction to his *Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*, an evolutionary theory of art. The philosopher admits that chimpanzees may draw, but explains that they have no intention of creating a work of art, no project of the work in their mind, no wish to contemplate the work once it has been created. He claims that bower birds come closest — and are unique in this closeness — to the human use of art. “What makes the bower bird case so extraordinary is that one sex creates an ornamented object open to imaginative invention that is then critically contemplated by the other sex.” Man is “[t]he only other animal species that does anything like it.” Once the mating is over, however, bowers lose their importance for the birds (7-8); hence Dutton concludes: “Animals [...] do not create art,” (9).

As noted above, the observation that artistic activity cannot be found anywhere beyond the human race does not seem to raise much controversy. It is less certain that the phenomenon is universal within our species: after all some people seem devoid of artistic inclinations. This may be true, but they might nonetheless be exposed to art’s influence, having various works of art in their environment, and even if as adults they have lost all interest in artistic creation, as children most of them probably made some drawings, whistled a tune of their own device, or composed a rhyme. In other words, it seems unlikely that any human being might avoid either passive or active contact with art (unless prevented by disease or untimely death). Even if this were the case, however, they still might owe much to art *via* the genetic material they have inherited from their ancestors.

Let us assume, then, for the purpose of this discussion that art is a distinctive human feature. The statement may be interpreted in various ways. The novels of Ishiguro and McEwan seem inconclusive in this respect, hesitating between art being indicative and art being constitutive of humanity (in the former art is merely a serviceable indicator of humanity, its manifestation, whereas in the latter art is nearly identified with humanity: man is a man because of the ability to create and contemplate art). In between these two extreme interpretations there is a third possibility of a close relation between art and humanity but one that does not involve identity. One way in which this close relationship might be understood is with reference to the human

faculty of self-awareness (awareness that is conscious of itself, able to view itself as an object different from the rest of reality, able to build hypotheses concerning both itself and external reality and recognize their hypothetical status). The relation might take the following form: art enhances self-awareness, self-awareness constitutes humanity.

That self-awareness is constitutive of humanity is a metaphysical proposition. As such it cannot be conclusively confirmed by any piece of evidence (by contrast with a similar but weaker claim that self-awareness is a distinctive human feature, which may be supported with reports from observations of non-human beings⁴). At the same time this view of the nature of humanity is not really very controversial, although there are competitive theories such as the theory that humanity consists in the ability to think in abstract terms or in being made in the likeness of God and equipped with spiritual life (the soul). Aware of competitive definitions, I will tentatively assume here that humanity may be defined in terms of self-awareness, and will now proceed to present three arguments (taken from analysis of art, David Lodge's description of the creative process and Daniel C. Dennett's hypothetical reconstruction of the evolution of the human mind) in favour of the view that the fundamental function of art consists in contributing to the development of self-awareness.

The first argument is taken from the nature of art and will be presented here in outline. Art is not exactly a homogenous phenomenon, but it might be argued that typical of art is the mode of fiction in which it most often operates, its mimetic character (which I understand here broadly as reference rather than representation),⁵ the aesthetic values it carries, and its ability to

⁴ Even if the beginnings of self-awareness can be found in some animals (monkeys, for example, or elephants), it seems possible to argue that their self-awareness cannot compare with ours because for them self-awareness is not yet the fundamental quality that determines their experience of being alive, as seems to be the case with humans.

⁵ The subject of this imitation might be either external reality (e.g. in a realistic still-life painting) or human experience of reality (e.g. in a stream-of-consciousness novel) or some categories of cognition of either external or internal reality (e.g. instrumental music or abstract painting). This approach is based on Piotr Gutowski's interpretation of so-called representational art as reflecting reality conceived of as independent of the mind, and his interpretation of formalist art as reflecting the mental forms of cognition; both kinds of art may thus be viewed as representational and involved in exploration of reality (197-200). When speaking of the mimetic character of art, I am referring to the broad understanding of mimesis both in terms of the range of objects that may be represented (material reality, psychological experience, forms of cognition), and in terms of the mode of representation, which need not be reduced to mechanical imitation. As argued by Ewa Borowiecka, already at the birth of the mimetic theory of art, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, one can find the argument that the purpose of imitation is not to produce

serve as a vehicle for communicating one's experiences.⁶ Accordingly, humanity might be said to consist in being imaginative (able to speculate about things which are not real), interested in reality (both material and psychic), sensitive to aesthetic qualities, and willing to communicate one's experience of life to others. A collective concept that might subsume the qualities which people evince when engaging in various activities related to art (the ones I have enumerated and possibly others I have failed to identify) seems that of self-awareness.⁷ In other words, I think that on the basis of even a cursory analysis of the phenomenon of art it is possible to argue that art testifies to the human faculty of self-awareness. It looks as if to create and appreciate art one needs to be self-aware. The cognitive theory of art in a way reverses the causal relation and suggests that art helps man examine his/her psychic world as well as develop awareness (the faculty of self-awareness) itself. This probably is not the only way to perceive art, but one that seems to gain more credibility from some descriptions of the creative process.

One such description comes from Lodge, another contemporary novelist much interested in art, who in his essay on "Literary Criticism and Literary Creation" argues that at the very heart of the creative process there is present a critical element: "Most of the time spent nominally writing a creative work is actually spent reading it — reading and rereading the words one has already written, trying to improve on them or using them as a kind of springboard

a copy of the represented object, but to evoke in the audience the experience of catharsis; if distortion of actual reality helps achieve this effect, then it is appropriate for the artist to introduce distortion; neither need poetry be confined to factual truth: it may well choose to present possible/probable, fictional or idealized reality. It is also worth noting that, even though Aristotle's theory of art was not cognitive, he related imitation — this, in his opinion, specific human inclination — to examination and comprehension of reality (BOROWIECKA 12-14).

⁶ This list of art's attributes may seem arbitrary: even though all the items listed here often reappear in discussions on art, they are all highly contentious, but the status of the list is merely provisional. (I have chosen to exclude two properties often ascribed to art: it being man-made — in the context of the present considerations this would come dangerously close to a vicious circle fallacy — and it being devoid of any practical life-sustaining function: in the light of evolutionary aesthetics this might be wrong, art being very much part of the natural and sexual selection processes, cf. DUTTON).

⁷ Intuitively one can accept, I think, that three features I have attributed to art — its use of fiction, its reference to reality (in particular to psychic reality) and communication (esp. of the inner experience) — presume the artist's and the receiver's self-consciousness. It is less obvious how the aesthetic character of works of art (categories such as harmony, tragedy, beauty or ugliness) might be related to self-awareness, unless one posits that aesthetic experience consists somehow in the satisfaction that self-awareness draws from these very categories. But this is a vague hypothesis and marginal to the present considerations.

from which to propel oneself into the as yet unwritten part of one's text," (107). It seems as if the essence of the creative process consists in a kind of critical interaction between the text that is being produced and the writer's mind: "it is impossible to, as it were, catch oneself in the act of creation. It is not as if one just comes up with an idea for a poem, say, and then puts it into words. [...] Writers discover what it is they want to say in the process of saying it," (109-110).⁸ This account of the creative process (if we tentatively assume that it is reliable) is relevant because it shows how in the process of creation of one particular work of art, the mind of the artist is challenged to pursue some vague idea moving back and forth between the recesses of the self and the artwork that is being created. In other words, it might be taken to show how the process of creation is essentially a process of self-exploration. The same phenomenon taking place on the massive scale of evolution might have given rise, or at least contributed, to the sophisticated consciousness of today.⁹

Admittedly, art might not have taken part in the very first stage of the development of the human mind. Dennett, in his study of the origin and nature of human consciousness, suggests that it is language, an advanced system of internal representation of both inner and outer reality (independent of the

⁸ Cf. Mark Schorer's 1948 essay, whose very title, "Technique As Discovery," expresses almost the same idea. In particular, in Schorer's opinion it is the attempt to express one's experience in artistic form that gives rise to insight: "technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring and developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it," (387). The purpose of his essay is to give due importance to the formal aspect of narrative works in prose, but his argument rests on the assumption that form is the means of discovery, and the concept of the exploration of the artist's inner world is thereby highlighted and given the status of the fundamental fact about artistic creation.

⁹ In another essay on consciousness and the novel, referring to Antonio Damasio and Ian Watt, Lodge claims that it is hardly a coincidence that the rise of the novel and human interest in consciousness are both three and a half centuries old. Both phenomena were triggered by Descartes, who first assigned the superior value to the human mind. As a result "[p]henomena such as memory, the association of ideas in the mind, the causes of emotions and the individual's sense of self, became of central importance to speculative thinkers and writers of narrative literature alike," (40). Lodge goes on to claim that the reason we read is that novels "give us a convincing sense of what the consciousness of people other than ourselves is like. We feel that we have 'learned' something from them; we have acquired new information," (30); the novel, he explains further, is "man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time," (10; cf. 14). I find this claim highly controversial, for it ignores such genres of art as lyrical poetry or film, and seems to reflect Lodge's personal preference, possibly related to his own novelistic profession. The claim he makes for literature — "literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have," (10) — I find much less controversial. Both claims exemplify the author's belief that art is, by and large, a cognitive enterprise.

actual presence of the thing represented), such that the representation can be externalized (it does not burden either one's perception or memory), that seems to have played the crucial role in the development of the mind. People learnt to use signs to cope with external reality; they also learnt to use signs to find their way inside their minds. They began to manipulate their representations (of inner and outer reality); the representations became objects to be manipulated (DENNETT 99-191).¹⁰ Nowhere in his book does Dennett mention art. However, what he says about language — representations of reality which can be easily manipulated and externalized — might well apply to art. Art might be the specific kind of representation of man's psychic experience by means of formal expression (which may but need not involve the use of language). Alternatively, the beginning and the early stage of the evolution of awareness could be accounted for without reference to art. Slightly later, however, there might have come the moment beginning with which the further development of the self was conducted above all by means of art. In other words, art might be the specific human way to continue the development.¹¹

Closing this discussion, it is worth mentioning that there is at least one theory of art in the European philosophical tradition which connects art with

¹⁰ It seems that scientists are at the moment still unable to reconstruct from the available evidence (endocranial casts which help estimate the size of the brain as well as the development of Broca's and Wernicke's areas responsible for speech and speech reception respectively, the position of the larynx, prehistoric artefacts and tools) the sequence and approximate dates of the birth of consciousness, language and art. Outlining the current state of research, Roger Lewin reports that rapid growth in brain size can be noticed with *Homo habilis/rudolfensis* (2.5-1.8 million years ago). Also Broca's area has been identified in *Homo rudolfensis*, but the remains of this species are not sufficient to state whether its larynx was lowered to enhance articulation. It appears that the modern shape of the skull and position of the larynx developed in *Homo sapiens* 300,000 years ago. Assuming that the use of tools and creation of artefacts required similar cognitive skills and testified to a complex social structure, archaeologists try to date the birth of speech with reference to these (the first artefacts appeared 2.5 million years ago, the proper beginning of artistic activity dates back 30,000 years). Iain Davidson and William Noble in particular argue that the rise of speech is closely related to mental processes involved in the creation of representations of reality and art (qtd. in Lewin 333-363). This shows that archaeology at the moment is not in a position to resolve conclusively the question of when language developed and whether art developed simultaneously or afterwards. Dennett's neglectful treatment of art might in the future be revised by some paleoanthropological evidence.

¹¹ This is not to say that art might not possibly also fulfil some other functions. Dutton, adopting the evolutionary perspective, explains at length the advantages that art might offer in terms of both natural and sexual selection, increasing human chances of survival and of finding an optimal mate (he also suggests that even if these were the primary functions of art, they might well have been in due course complemented by more sophisticated applications, art giving man a chance for transcendence of his/her nature).

the development of human consciousness¹² — the theory of Karl R. Popper.¹³ According to Popper, art, together with language, science and other products of the human mind constitute the third world,¹⁴ and are specific adaptations of man to the environment (Popper's framework is evolutionary). Life, for Popper, is a sequence of problem-solving events. The human mind developed consciousness so that it could test solutions to problems under conditions in which little risk is involved, by considering initial hypotheses in the imagination. Creating the third world, exteriorizing inner experience so that it can exist independently of human awareness (e.g. in the form of cave paintings, computer files or works of art), people have gained a vast advantage in terms of adaptation to the environment, being able to share knowledge in an, in principle, unrestricted way with each other. They need not, therefore, repeat the mistakes committed by others, but — familiar with these errors — may commit new mistakes of their own, which is the way science makes progress. The element of criticism (the moment when the mistake is identified as such) is crucial in science, but also in art one can speak of problems to be solved and critical judgment to be employed.¹⁵ Art, for Popper, must not be reduced to either communicative or expressive functions: they may be present, but art exceeds them both in its attempt to describe reality.¹⁶ From what has been said so far it follows that Popper's theory of art is cognitive. But Popper moves further to claim that the third world (language, above all, but also art) helps man develop full consciousness by letting

¹² Georg Hegel's theory might be another candidate except that for him it is the *Geist* rather than man that is evolving, among other things, *via* art.

¹³ What follows is a summary of my attempt at reconstructing Popper's theory of art. Popper was primarily concerned with science and its methodology, but in his youth he considered a career as a musician and in his writings left many valuable comments concerning art and its role in human life. I try to present them systematically in my essay "Filozofia nauki i sztuki z perspektywy metodologii Karla R. Poppera" ("Philosophy of science and art from the perspective of the methodology of Karl R. Popper").

¹⁴ The first world is the material reality; the second is constituted by awareness.

¹⁵ Popper recognized the element of criticism in art but confined it to aesthetic criticism present in the act of creation (in the process of interactions between the artist's mind and the work of art that is being created; his description of the creative process resembles Lodge's).

¹⁶ It seems that slightly extending Popper's theory, one might risk the hypothesis that it is the inner world that art attempts to describe, and that art not only depicts the world but also subjects this description to critical examination; art might then be interpreted as self-examination. Popper's theory might further be nicely complemented with the idea that a work of art might be, among other things, an instrument to be used in the experiment, i.e. an instrument by means of which the mind examines itself, observing its own reaction and searching for confirmation in the reaction of other people, an idea I owe to my father, Andrzej Teske.

him/her present the inner world as if it were external. The process of creating objects of the third world turns into a process of self-creation. The human mind (the second world) creates various objects, such as sculptures or mathematical concepts (the third world), and is in turn subject to their influence. There is positive feedback between art and human consciousness, though the outcome of this creative process is very difficult either to predict or control (even so, according to Popper, by means of objects of the third world, art included, man can transcend him/herself).

So far I have argued that art seems to be a distinctive human phenomenon and that this might be so because art both enhances and requires self-awareness. Art might indeed be a unique activity whose main (not necessarily the original or exclusive) function might be the exploration of man's inner world. Artistic activity might have contributed to the rise of self-awareness and ever since helped develop this faculty (both in the history of the species and the development of individual specimens). If humanity consists in self-awareness (this proposition, though plausible, has here the status of an assumption), then one might say that art, contributing to our self-awareness, makes us human. The question is whether this does not preclude art's therapeutic function.

If art helps make us human, then it seems to follow that art cannot exactly heal the pain of being human; that is, the pain of self-awareness.¹⁷ It may possibly help solve some specific problems of, for example, low self-esteem, blurred sense of identity or difficulties in communication. It might offer some distraction by virtue of its aesthetic qualities, as well as some relief, giving one a sense of community in suffering (provided that the knowledge that others suffer brings respite from pain), but otherwise it seems helpless. Indeed, if by means of art one becomes human (i.e. self-aware), then the use of art to treat the pain of humanity seems a grave mistake: art can only make matters worse, making one yet more conscious.¹⁸

If Dennett is right, then even physical pain is experienced as suffering (rather than sensation of some kind) only by virtue of consciousness. There

¹⁷ Pain is normally a signal for the organism of some disorder or disease. Therapy is the treatment of such afflictions. It is, however, not obvious that being human may be classified thus (as a disorder or disease). The main objective of therapy in that case might be not to cure the illness but, more simply, to remove or reduce pain.

¹⁸ Within this approach it seems obvious why art must not be confused with the entertainment industry (though they may have much in common): art sharpens the awareness of being alive, lonely (a separate centre of consciousness) and mortal, whereas the entertainment industry is meant to blunt it.

must be some subject of the sensation endowed with consciousness for whom the pain becomes a source of suffering. To make this point Dennett discusses the phenomenon of dissociation in small children who in this way attempt to survive when subjected to physical violence. They either split their personality and project the painful experience onto one of multiple selves or else project the pain outside, without attributing it to anybody in particular (which discloses their erroneous assumption that pain need not have a specific subject). The pain, Dennett argues, might remain, but the suffering is diminished (184-187). Another argument Dennett advances in favour of the close connection between consciousness and suffering is based on Marc Hauser's observation of primates. Hauser discusses a species of monkeys (the rhesus monkey) in which one male may, when competing for a female, bite off another male's testicle; the maimed specimen walks away without manifesting any special pain. A day later he may even copulate with a female as if nothing had happened. A terrible experience if it were to happen to a human being (aware of the loss), the monkey (a species in many respects very close to *Homo sapiens*, but not equipped with self-awareness) takes in its stride (113, cf. 112-118).

A fortiori this significance of consciousness for suffering applies to psychic pain. That consciousness is a great burden to man is not a new idea. It can be found in "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'" a late 19th-century novella by Joseph Conrad. This is how the author responds to a letter from R. Cunningham Graham, explaining why Singleton — the only man of integrity among the crew of the "Narcissus," the only one who does not fall for the deception of Wait, who is not moved to mutiny against the captain by Donkin, who finds the strength to withstand the storm, never once letting the helm go — is devoid of inner life: "Would you seriously, of malice prepense cultivate in that unconscious man the power to think. Then he would become conscious — and much smaller — and very unhappy. Now he is simple and great like an elemental force. Nothing can touch him but the curse of decay [...]. Nothing else can touch him — he does not think. / Would you seriously wish to tell such a man: Know thyself," (qtd. in LEVENSON 33). Michael H. Levenson explains that Singleton is impeccable in his conduct, but devoid of inner life; the rest of the crew, by contrast, become humanized (develop inner life), but are simultaneously weakened and demoralized (1-36).¹⁹ This

¹⁹ For Levenson, Conrad thus illustrates the moral ambivalence of consciousness, suggesting (*via* the characters and the choice of narrative techniques, but also explicitly in the Preface to the book) that consciousness, which may be the source of meaning in human life, may also give rise

is because, as Conrad shows, once the crew have developed consciousness, they become vulnerable to all kinds of mental anguish.²⁰ Apparently, for the novelist, the price of conscious and meaningful life is peace of mind (and, subsequently, man's moral integrity and social order).²¹ The more conscious and self-conscious one is, the harder one finds it to do one's duty and meet the desired moral standards, the more troubled becomes one's life. All this, of course, is not to imply that self-awareness can be reduced to mental affliction. Neither is this to say that psychic pain requires self-awareness as a *sine-qua-non* condition — the grief and anxiety of a cat whose kittens have disappeared proves this presumption to be wrong — but the potential for mental anguish seems enlarged beyond measure by the human ability to be conscious of oneself.

Now, I do believe that the hypothesis that human beings become (more) human (that is more self-aware both individually and as a species) in contact with art is reasonable. Further, I think that Dennett argues well in favour of the idea that physical pain is related to consciousness, and I can see that *a fortiori* this applies to psychic suffering. If art helps make us more human (i.e. self-aware), then it cannot alleviate the pain that goes together with

to social disorder and anarchy. The critic takes the novel to reflect the birth of the new modernist awareness and emphasizes the conflict that the novella shows between individualism and authority. To my argumentation more relevant is the novella's message that consciousness, the source of meaning of human experience, exposes man to destructive psychic torment.

²⁰ Cf. the following passages (the voice is that of the crew, who discuss the influence that Jimmy has had on them): "We were trying to be decent chaps, and found it jolly difficult; we oscillated between the desire of virtue and the fear of ridicule; we wished to save ourselves from the pain of remorse, but did not want to be made the contemptible dupes of our sentiment. Jimmy's hateful accomplice [Donkin] seemed to have blown with his impure breath undreamt-of subtleties into our hearts. We were disturbed and cowardly," (CONRAD 33); "All our certitudes were going; we were on doubtful terms with our officers; the cook had given us up for lost; we had overheard the boatswain's opinion that 'we were a crowd of softies.' We suspected Jimmy, one another, and even our very selves. We did not know what to do," (34); and "Through him [Jimmy] we were becoming highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathized with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions — as though we had been overcivilized, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life," (CONRAD 107-8).

²¹ This idea that consciousness makes life much harder, even if typical of the twentieth century, is much older than that: the very same argument may be found e.g. three centuries earlier in Shakespeare. The contrast between Hamlet, who reads books and is on friendly terms with actors, and Laertes, endowed with a less artful and introspective soul, both challenged with the task of taking revenge on the murderers of their fathers, is unequivocal. Also in his famous soliloquy Hamlet first depicts in detail the pain of human existence, then blames consciousness for preventing man from choosing the only available relief that death might offer.

being human (i.e. self-aware): this seems a logical conclusion. This logical conclusion, however, is falsified by the relatively common aesthetic experience of delight, elevation, an uplifted heart, pain becoming for a while easier to bear. To account for this inconsistency, it seems that we need to redefine the concept of therapy.

Perhaps therapy need not be taken to mean primarily removal or alleviation of pain. It may perhaps be taken to mean an intensified experience of being human, a clearer awareness of the suffering involved in being alive (some comprehension that the pain is inevitable, unless we choose to get rid of either consciousness or life; that we share this pain with others; that the pain might in various ways be precious, for instance, because it may be a measure of love). If we redefine therapy along these lines, then the answer may well be positive, i.e. art may be conceived of as therapeutic. It cannot take suffering away from human life (suffering to which it has contributed, developing man's self-awareness, sharpening man's sensibility, letting man understand better the transience of life and love and the evil of which man is capable and many other, though maybe not quite as painful, things about life), but it can for a moment at least make man feel that life in spite of all is worth living, that the pain does not really matter (or, to be precise, that it matters but does not cancel the meaning of it all).

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JEŚLI SZTUKA JEST TYM, CO CZYNI NAS LUDŹMI,
TO CZY SZTUKA JEST W STANIE ZŁAGODZIĆ BÓL BYCIA (CZŁOWIEKIEM)?

Streszczenie

Dwie współczesne powieści brytyjskie: *Nie opuszczaj mnie (Never Let Me Go)* i *Sobota (Saturday)* wydają się pokazywać, że sztuka (zdolność tworzenia i zdolność głębokiego przeżycia dzieła sztuki) jest tym, co wyróżnia człowieka, czy wręcz tym, co stanowi o jego człowieczeństwie. W eseju rozważam niektóre implikacje tej tezy dla rozumienia istoty sztuki i możliwości pełnienia przez nią terapeutycznej roli. W szczególności wydaje się, że można wyjaśnić szczególne miejsce sztuki w świecie człowieka, jeśli sztukę potraktować przede wszystkim jako aktywność poznawczą, w której przedmiotem poznania jest jaźń, oraz jeśli przyjąć, że samoświadomość (zainteresowanie własnym wewnętrznym światem) jest podstawową cechą człowieka. Jednocześnie rozważana hipoteza zdaje się podważać przekonanie, że sztuka może pełnić funkcję terapeutyczną, bo jeśli sztuka czyni nas ludźmi, trudno oczekiwać by mogła jednocześnie przynieść ulgę w cierpieniu, które jest związane z byciem człowiekiem, zwłaszcza jeśli, jak argumentuje Dennett, świadomość i samoświadomość odgrywają fundamentalną rolę w doświadczaniu cierpienia. Terapeutycznej funkcji sztuki można jednak bronić, jeśli terapię zdefiniować jako działania wspierające człowieka w jego wysiłku, by pogodzić się z obecnością cierpienia.

Streściła Joanna Klara Teske

Key words: fiction, art, cognition, self-consciousness, evolution, humanity, therapy.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura piękna, sztuka, poznanie, samoświadomość, ewolucja, człowieczeństwo, terapia.