# *"THEY'RE ABOMINATIONS"* – INSTANCES OF OTHERING IN A CONTEMPORARY FANTASY NOVEL *THE HOUSE IN THE CERULEAN SEA*

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Toiseus ja toiseuttaminen ovat poikkitieteellisiä ilmiöitä, jotka elävät sekä muovautuvat yhdessä yhteiskunnan kanssa (Dervin 2016). Yhteiskuntaa ja sosiaalista todellisuutta puolestaan muokkaavat ja ylläpitävät erilaiset diskurssit. Yksilöt osallistuvat näiden rakenteiden ylläpitämiseen tai muuttamiseen monin eri tavoin, mutta etenkin kielellisessä kanssakäymisessä eli diskursseissa toistensa kanssa. Valtarakenteet vaikuttavat siihen, mitkä diskurssit ovat hallitsevia. Koska yksilöiden käyttämä kieli heijastaa näitä valtarakenteita sekä hallitsevia diskursseja, on tärkeää tarkastella, miten diskursiiviset ilmiöt ilmenevät taiteen sekä fiktion parissa.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisin keinoin toiseutta ilmennetään sekä institutionaalista valtaa käytetään modernissa fantasiakirjallisuudessa. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu vuonna T. J. Klunen 2020 julkaistusta fantasiaromaanista *The House in the Cerulean Sea* (julkaistu suomeksi nimellä *Talo taivaansinisellä merellä*, Otava 2021). Aineiston analyysi pohjautuu kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen teoriaan, josta tähän tutkimukseen on valittu metodiksi yhdistelmä Faircloughin (2015) tekstin analysoinnin työkaluja sekä Pandeyn (2004) koostamia kirjoitetussa tekstissä esiintyviä toiseuttamisen strategioita.

Tutkimuksen tulosten mukaan romaanissa maagiset olennot toiseutetaan kielellisesti pronominivalintojen, nimittelyn, stereotypioiden sekä kielellisesti rakennettujen kontrastien kautta. Institutionaalista valtaa käytetään muun muassa kylttien ja sloganien kautta sekä pakottamisen ja suostuttelun kautta. Sanavalintojen kantamat muodolliset merkitykset tuovat esille hahmojen ja romaanin sosiaalisen todellisuuden diskurssit, suhteet sekä identiteetit. Institutionaalinen valta on keskeinen tekijä maagisen yhteisön toiseuttamisen mahdollistavien diskurssien ylläpitämisessä ja osaltaan vaikuttaa siihen, miten romaanin maailman ihmiset suhtautuvat maagisiin olentoihin heitä uhkaavana ja vaarallisena toisena.



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## TABLES

TABLE 1 The values of formal features as presented in Fairclough (2015: 131) … 18

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


1 INTRODUCTION ..... 4

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ..... 6
2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis ..... 6
2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and literature ..... 8
2.2 The concept of othering ..... 9
2.3 Fantasy as a genre in literature ..... 11

3 INTRODUCTION TO *THE HOUSE IN THE CERULEAN SEA* ..... 14

4 PRESENT STUDY ..... 16
4.1 Aim and research questions ..... 16
4.2 Selection and collection of data ..... 17
4.3 Methods of analysis ..... 17

5 ANALYSIS ..... 19
5.1 Othering ..... 19
5.1.1 Chapter 14: visit to the village ..... 22
5.1.2 Lucy or Lucifer the Antichrist ..... 25
5.2 Institutional power ..... 26
5.2.1 Extremely Upper Management ..... 27
5.2.2 Use of posters and slogans ..... 29

6 DISCUSSION ..... 31

7 CONCLUSION ..... 35

REFERENCES ..... 37

# 1 INTRODUCTION

It is often said that life imitates art, but just as often art acts as an extension of our lived lives. For instance, literature can be a multicultural tool that young individuals use to explore diverse experiences and one's own identity, making it important for authors to provide authentic and inclusive stories for readers to consume (Jiménez 2015: 408). Therefore, it is relevant to question the position and impact of popular culture in the construction of discourses. Moreover, linguistic phenomena are governed by social habits and have an impact on social reality, no matter how aware individuals might be of their social bias (Fairclough 2015: 56). In turn, social phenomena are linguistic not only as reflections of society but as embedded parts of its practices (ibid.). Because of this, it is important to also pay attention to the types of stories literature currently tells – who are the stories about, what is the world they operate in or who is telling these stories?

Topics of otherworldliness and magical creatures are common in fantasy literature. Where fantasy as a genre is a multifaceted entity with rich and far reaching canon under its belt, it often evades attempts of definition (James & Mendlesohn 2012). In turn this offers a chance for diverse works within the genre and an opportunity for readers and authors alike to discover topics of great importance. If in a real world setting groups of people are positioned against each other based on, for example, religious, political or identity questions, in a fantasy world similar effect could be achieved through the juxtaposition of humans and magical creatures. Such a situation can be seen in a contemporary fantasy novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea,* written by T. J. Klune (2021).

In the present study, instances of power and othering are pondered in the context of fictional text. The abovementioned novel, *The House in the Cerulean,* is examined through the frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis and othering, in order to investigate how institutional power and othering operate in the novel's fictional fantasy world. Language cannot evade being political or the fact that it is an integral part of

how the world we live in, its cultures, and institutions are maintained (Gee 2011: 10). In this sense, authors are bound to incorporate fragments of how they experience the world in their works across genre boundaries and themes. Because of this, the impact fictional texts can have on discourse and building lived reality should not be disregarded. Typical data in CDA often consists of real world interaction but works nonetheless in analysing fiction as well, as will be discussed later in Chapter 2. The purpose of the present study is thus to contribute to research of fictional text through CDA.

As established, language encompasses meaning through social practices and it is those practices that in turn can be used as tools for harm or injustice (Gee 2011: 12). It might not always be explicit since power often hides in small details, and it might be harder to notice for those who are not the targets of the injustice. Discourses that build our social reality are permeated in institutional structures, daily interactions and behaviour. Social struggles are battlegrounds on which power is lost or won, and more specifically they are contests for who controls orders of discourse (Fairclough 2015: 98). By taking charge of discourse, i.e. defining which discourse an interaction is a part of, one can determine which suppositions are at play.

Powell and Menendian (2016: 17) argue that the concept of othering can offer a frameset through which processes and conditions used to create inequality and marginality can be made visible. Othering offers the chance to examine discrimination based on multiple different factors, on individual or group level. In turn, discourse analysis tries to unveil the mechanisms of world building through language (Gee 2011: 10). In order to do this, Critical Discourse Analysis specifically focuses on the relationship between power and discourse.

The present study has been structured in a following way. First, the theoretical framework and key concepts of CDA, othering and fantasy as a literary genre are introduced. Secondly, an overview of the novel's success after publication is given and its relevant plotlines are introduced. This is followed by explanations of the present study's methodology and aims, after which the analysis of data is conducted. In the following section, the findings of the analysis are discussed and reflected upon, and lastly the present study closes with final conclusions.

# 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical concepts and previous research that are essential for the present study. It opens with a discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), after which the key concept of othering is introduced. Finally, the chapter closes with a look at fantasy as a literary genre.

## 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis has emerged from a background of varied combinations of different disciplines. As a result, it can be argued that CDA does not offer any single comprehensive theory or methodology but is rather divided into many different schools (Wodak 2011: 50). CDA is interested in how power manifests through knowledge and language and is then discussed through discourse, meaning how one speaks about the world also helps to build it. Some of CDA's contributions to the field of linguistics include documenting how knowledge is established through discourse and how social representations of such aspects as class, gender or social events can be connected to status quo (Martín Rojo 2015: 3). Since CDA is such a vast body of work, the present study will be largely focusing on the version established by Fairclough's *Language and Power* (2015). Nonetheless, for the benefit of a more comprehensive discussion, other approaches will be considered as well.

According to Fairclough (2015: 6, emphasis in original),

> CDA combines **critique** of discourse and **explanation** of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for **action** to change that existing reality in particular respects.

This perspective offers a three-fold perspective on Critical Discourse Analysis and its purpose. In other words, CDA sees critical examination of discourse and its operation

in a society as a necessary starting point to make any change to societal structures possible. In order to enact change, one needs to be informed of how current structures and the discourses within them work and what their relation to each other is (Fairclough 2015: 6).

One of the central concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis is discourse. Fairclough (2015: 53) generally defines the term discourse as language as a form of social practice. This definition implies that language is not separate from society but rather a social process that is conditioned by all other aspects of it (Fairclough 2015: 55–56). However, definitions of discourse – or discourses – are abundant as are its varying written forms. For example, Gee (2011: 34) uses discourse to mean everyday language-in-use instances and Discourses capitalised as reference to the combination of language and ways of thinking the social reality. Evidently, these two definitions by two different researchers both have the same general idea incorporated, just in two different ways.

What is characteristic for critical approaches is that they aim to highlight and change imperfections in societies instead of only focusing on theoretical understanding of language use (Gee 2011: 9). As previously mentioned, CDA attempts to accomplish this by focusing on how power is distributed in a society. Wodak (2011: 52) notes how texts, be it written or oral, are usually produced in collaboration with multiple individuals and thus they become sites of negotiation that are ruled by competing discourses and ideologies. Wodak continues to mention how discourses are not equal in weight as neither are individuals, this incorporates power balances to these negotiations. In other words, while discourse might not be the foreground subject of negotiation, it is at play behind the scenes as something that has shaped the views and ideologies of the participants.

Oftentimes power in discourse is about how in interaction individuals with power aim to control the contributions of those with less power (Fairclough 2015: 75–76). Fairclough (2015: 76) identifies three different strategies for this: controlling the contents, relations or subjects of interaction. In other words, this means that the ones with power can dictate what can be said or done in a given situation (contents), the social relationships individuals have affect what discourses are applied (relations) and individuals can enact varying subject positions in interaction (subjects). Interestingly, even though the one with power can dictate which discourse the interaction is drawing from, the conventions of that discourse apply to them as well (Fairclough 2015: 76). Of course, the nature of power is that the more power one has the more one can bend the rules.

When discussing power in the context of discourse, different distinctions can be made. Power is not necessarily explicit but rather hidden inside different discourse conventions. Fairclough (2015) discusses power in discourse and behind discourse.

Where power in discourse encompasses interactions between unequal participants (for example a job interview), power behind discourse contextualises how orders of discourse can affect who can access resources (for example language standardisation) (Fairclough 2015: 27). That is to say, power behind discourse affects larger societal structures and is thus even more hidden than power in discourse. While it influences individuals, it moreover structures institutions and how individuals in those institutions, such as a university, can access resources, relationships and power.

Discourses are produced in daily action, but they do not go unchallenged. Martín Rojo (2015: 3) argues that CDA as an approach fails to explain the way people can reuse, adopt or overcome discourses through interaction because the main focus of study has often been elite discourses circulating in media or politics. While CDA might offer a multifaceted look on how discourse is produced in society, it also leaves questions unanswered. CDA rarely explains how power is emitted through discourses and makes its way to the daily actions and mentalities of individuals (Martín Rojo 2015: 3). On the contrary, Fairclough (2015: 7) argues that the word "critical" in Critical Discourse Analysis specifically directs towards asking "*why* is the discourse like this", i.e., to search for an explanation. Fairclough (2015: 3) claims that *Language and Power* offers a more radical view of CDA in the sense that it aims to also look into the power apparent behind discourse in addition to in discourse.

While it is important to critically examine CDA's approaches, the multifaceted nature of it makes it complex. Because of this, Wodak (2015: 50) suggests that when criticising CDA, it should be mentioned towards which school or researcher of CDA the criticism is directed to. Otherwise, it might lead to a situation where the criticism becomes redundant. However, it is important to critically view even those theories that brand themselves as critical, because it helps to keep them current and fix possible shortcomings.

### 2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and literature

Another point of interest for the present study is whether it is appropriate to apply CDA to fictional texts in addition to real world text and interaction. However, authors do not operate as outside social subjects but rather are conditioned and bound by the social reality created in discourse (Talbot 1995: 32). What is more, works of fiction move from one context to another, thus transferring discourse between contexts (Talbot 1995: 34). Also, Fairclough (2015: 78) notes that in a contemporary society discourse is not tied to interaction happening in the same space and time – in fact mass media and writing creates clear groups of producers and interpreters.

In the past, the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis has been applied to analysing children's literature and fairytales (for example Curwood 2013; Smith 2015). Given that when texts are written, they are influenced by contemporary societal

beliefs, texts for children are often battlegrounds for the most powerful attempting to cement mainstream discourses (Smith 2015: 426). Moreover, teaching critical literacy skills to adolescents shapes the ability to evaluate social context and lived experiences (Curwood 2013: 16).

Curwood (2013: 20) examined through Critical Discourse Analysis how discourses of normalcy and disability were represented in young adult literature. The analysis encompassed three novels with disabled protagonists and focused on discovering how characters challenged narrative of normalcy, how disability shaped their identity and other characters, and how power and agency developed throughout the plot (Curwood 2013: 21). The analysis suggests that the three novels offer well crafted representation of disabled individuals, and the narratives offer chances for self-reflection and empowerment for readers of young adult literature (Curwood 2013: 25).

On the other hand, Smith (2015: 425) used CDA to set several retellings of the fairytale Rapunzel to their social context and examine the effects of feminism and gender politics of that time in those retellings. Through CDA it was possible to critically examine both gender roles and word choices of those selected retellings and discuss their impact on how the retellings read now, decades after their publishing (Smith 2015).

As has been illustrated by these two studies, Critical Discourse Analysis is a versatile theory and method that can be applied to analysing literary texts in addition to text produced in interaction. What is more, CDA appears to work well in combination with other theories to offer an even wider scope for scientific research.

## 2.2 The concept of othering

The concept of other or the notion of othering is not exclusive to one specific field of study. Rather, it has been discussed in studies ranging from psychology and sociology to archeology and gender studies (Dervin 2016: 45). While all these fields offer valuable insight to this concept, in the present study the concept of other will be mainly discussed from the perspective of linguistics. According to Pandey (2004: 155) if one is to comprehend language as the main tool to understand the world, then the category of the other is constructed through the small nuances and dichotomies that are inherent in language that is used to categorise the world and convey meaning. Alternatively, psychology offers a definition that examines othering more through the lens of identity. By othering is meant the process in which something is alienated from the self and made into other (Rana 2009: 15). Otherness in itself is difficult to define without something to compare it to, meaning one needs to establish the norm before the other can be discovered. Dervin (2016: 45) regards that "the other and the notion that

derives from it, otherness, is an interdisciplinary concept *par excellence.*" Considering othering as such an interdisciplinary concept, an argument can be made that it is therefore important to consider definitions across the board. Especially given that language is one of the main tools for building one's identity.

Othering as a concept is linked to how people can be alienated from one another based on different kinds of criteria (Powell & Menendian 2016: 17). Othering can be based on, for example, religion, gender and sexuality, race or class status, but the underlying reasons for othering are often contextual and can therefore vary greatly from one situation to another (Powell & Menendian 2016: 17). Othering can occur on an individual level or be group-based, and its severity can range from mild, harmless discomfort in a new setting to systemic expressions of marginality (Powell & Menendian 2016: 17–18). Other or othering is a versatile concept that can encompass a multitude of meanings, and it can be studied from different angles to reveal interesting underlying phenomena. However, the other is not a singular concept that acts always similarly, in fact there can be a hierarchy within the other, where othered individuals face different kinds of treatment and talk (Dervin 2016: 44).

In real world setting, othering can be used, for example, as a political strategy. In American politics, the category of other has been used to invoke fear or resentment as a way to appeal to those voters who are more inclined towards nativism and xenophobia (Powell & Menendian 2019: 19). This creates polarisation and strives to create artificial divisions to the lived reality. More often than not, social reality is viewed through the contrast of us versus them (Pandey 2004: 155), where the "them group" is viewed as the other, something different from the created "us group". This is hardly a new phenomenon as fear based rhetoric has been used for political gain since ancient Greece (Powell & Menendian 2019: 21).

Moreover, there seems to be scientific proof from the past fifty years that humans might have a tendency to form group identities with the people they are grouped with regardless of how concrete the group boundaries actually are, while still judging their own group as superior to others (Powell & Menendian 2019: 23). However, even though grouping and categorising might be inborn, the meanings applied to those created categories are a result of social construction (Powell & Menendian 2019: 24). That is to say, even if forming group identities might be inherent, they should be examined critically to counteract any ill meant biases rooted in social structures.

From a more philosophical standpoint, othering can be seen as one projecting one's unaware fears of self onto other and thus as refusal of seeing oneself as other (Kearney 2002: 5). Kearney (2005: 4) theorises that monsters, among other things, are a way for individuals to differentiate between same and other while simultaneously presenting an option to learn and adapt to strangeness or to refuse it by projecting it onto others. Stories and mythologies are riddled with monsters and supernatural

others. This understanding of other of course requires a different kind of careful examination, as what is possible or even acceptable in the realm of arts can be quite different from its reality counterpart.

Authors, whether knowingly or subconsciously, are bound to incorporate the existing structures of lived reality. It would require an author – or anyone for that matter - conscious effort to bypass internalised prejudices (Rana 2009: 102–103). In a recent study about black women's reading habits in science fiction, it was illustrated how black women try to consciously read science fiction written by or featuring characters of minorities (for example racial, sexuality or gender) as the predominantly white and male narrative fails to capture a universal lived experience (Toliver 2020: 327–328). Science fiction and fantasy as genres have prime opportunities to examine othering with stories filled with fantastic beings. However, if it goes unchallenged by the narrative and only reproduces pre-existing prejudices, it does nothing to subvert harmful discourses.

In literature it is possible for readers to experience sameness and difference. Through sameness one can gather an understanding of lived experiences, whereas difference helps to discover social structures and critically examine what is viewed as normal (Curwood 2013: 19). Curwood (2013: 19) argues that young adult literature has the ability to counteract othering of disabled people through teaching about disability and social justice, if critical literacy skills are applied. On the other hand, Thomas (2018) asks the question if it even is possible to write fantastic narratives without the Dark Other – the concept of evil darkness that is constantly battled against in science fiction and fantasy, which too often is placed in characters of racial minorities.

As can be seen, othering and placing one as other is a versatile concept across disciplines and modes. It pertains intriguingly to social structures and their reproduction is popular culture such as literature. It has the power to emancipate but also to restrict, and should therefore be examined more closely if one wants to investigate how dominant discourses are reproduced in art.

## 2.3 Fantasy as a genre in literature

The definition for genre differs based on whether it is used in, for example, linguistic sense or literary sense. While the specifics might be different, usually what they have in common is the meaning to draw borders between classifications. For the purposes of the present study, the definition of genre in literature is the more relevant one and will be focused on.

However, the literary definition of genre is not a simple one. It can mean classification by medium, imprint or author, or the division into poetry, drama and novels

as is often done in literary studies (Talbot 1995: 36). In other words, the context in which literature is discussed largely affects its classification as the definitions have different purposes. This is why there seems to be more genres if one visits a bookshop than on a literary course in a university. For publishers, genres are often a marketing tactic meant to make novels appealing to different audiences or demographics (Talbot 1995: 36). Coincidentally, from here one arrives to the notion of genre fiction.

Genre fiction is an umbrella term for those works of fiction that are not considered mainstream in publishing, for example science fiction, romance, westerns and fantasy (Talbot 1995: 38). Talbot (1995: 38–39) argues that genre fiction limits the possibilities of authors by pushing conventional structural models and through limiting audience shifting across genre borders. What is more, literary criticism has had the tendency to disregard genre fiction in favour of non-genre conforming literature (Talbot 1995: 39). Whether this is still the most prominent view is debatable as arguably many changes have occurred in the past decades affecting the field of arts among other demographics of life as well. Especially fantasy has seemed to gather some movement during the 21st century with some notably popular publications in literature and other media.

Fantasy as a genre is transmedial, encompassing anything from literature and film to live action roleplay (Laetz & Johnston 2008: 161). It can be argued that in fantasy the author and the reader are in dialogue to create a sense of wonder (Mendlesohn 2008: xiii). While suspension of disbelief is not unique to fantasy, its frequent themes of magic and supernatural require it for reader's enjoyment. On the other hand, Talbot (1995: 38) adds that the relationship of an author and a reader is generic as it is rather the genre itself that builds the connection.

Attempts to give an exhausting definition of fantasy literature have been made in the past (see for example Hume 2014; Jackson 1981; Todorov 1975), but no definitive consensus has been reached. Many of the field's leading theorists agree that fantasy is about the impossible (unlike in the realm of the genres cousin, science fiction, which is usually about the improbable within the possibilities of scientifically true) but deviate in their definitions quickly after (James & Mendlesohn 2012: 1). Laetz & Johnston (2008: 167) define the fantasy genre to mean narratives that are fictional action stories with supernatural elements – they can be drawn from myth or folklore, but they do not need to be believed true by the audience nor be purely absurd and metaphorical in nature. However, a definition cannot be solely based on the occurrence of general tropes as texts can subvert or use them sparingly (James & Mendlesohn 2012: 1). It often is not easy to give an exhaustive definition of a genre, especially considering how genres tend to evolve and develop new classificatory practises through time (Laetz & Johnston 2008: 167). Considering that fantasy is a rather old genre with decades of works in its canon, it is only natural that the genre has evolved.

Since fantasy is such a vast genre with endless possibilities, it would also be possible to draw definitions within the genre itself. Mendlesohn (2008) attempts to do this not by defining the genre as is but rather through closer examination of the genre's construction. By examining the language and rhetorics of fantasy, four categories are constructed: the Portal-Quest Fantasy, the Immersive Fantasy, the Intrusion Fantasy and the Liminal Fantasy, with the inclusion of fifth category Irregulars to account for works that defy categorization (Mendlesohn 2008: xiii–xiv). This categorisation is largely based on how the fantastic is introduced to the reader and the characters of the story, but again proves the point that no definite borders can be drawn since texts can have features from several different categories. Clearly, the task of categorising fantasy is an intractable job.

While in the past a trendy topic in fantasy media has been sending characters on a daunting task, things might have been on the change in the past decades. Research on modern children's fantasy suggests that there has been a growing trend of quests focusing on journeys to oneself and emotional growth (Butler 2012: 225). Additionally, topics have been drawing from current world events like global warming in dystopian fantasy or political climate, bringing the fantastical world evermore closer to the lived reality (Butler 2012: 226). It is no surprise, since as previously mentioned social structures and discourses are reproduced in text, that narratives in fantasy have started to reflect current world topics. Ongoing discussions against racism or sexism among others have had their part in broadening the representation in fantasy narratives and in questioning the necessity of traditional tropes. Thomas (2018: 8) mentions the success of Marvel Studios' *Black Panther* and the Hugo awarded afrofuturistic narratives of N. K. Jemesin and Nnedi Okorafor as examples of this progress. This has meaning in the sense that even if readers wish to read for escapism, they still crave to be seen in a positive light in the stories they read. In turn the stories they read continue to be reproduced in other texts and interactions readers engage in.

# 3 INTRODUCTION TO *THE HOUSE IN THE CERULEAN SEA*

The aim of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the novel that is in the focus of the present study. First, context on the novel's publication, target audience and popularity are provided. Second, a brief overview of the main plot is given as well as descriptions of the novel's world and the characters that are most relevant for the present study.

*The House in the Cerulean Sea* by T. J. Klune was first published in 2020 by Macmillan Publishers. It is a contemporary fantasy fiction novel that is primarily marketed towards adults and young adults. After its publication in 2020, the novel has gathered popularity through several USA bestseller lists and book awards (Macmillan Publishers: n.d.), including the Alex Award 2021 (YALSA: n.d.), which is awarded by the American Library Association annually to ten adult novels that are also suitable for younger audiences (YALSA Alex Awards: n.d.). The novel also gained moderate popularity on social media book communities. On Goodreads, one of the biggest online sites where users can rate novels, *The House in the Cerulean Sea* has a rating of 4.44 stars out of five with over 414,000 ratings given and over 70,000 written reviews (Goodreads: n.d.). Since its publication, the novel has been translated to several languages.

In the world of the novel, magical beings exist in the same world as humans. To regulate and supervise this coexistence, a bureau with designated departments was created, with a governing body named Extremely Upper Management. Linus Baker, the novel's main character, is employed as a caseworker for the Department in Charge of Magical Youth (referred to as DICOMY). He investigates the orphanages for magical children his department upkeeps to determine whether they are suitably managed. Linus is described to be good at what he does while also being unhappy with his personal life. The reader follows the story through Linus' point of view and learns that Linus is a middle-aged gay human man, who lives alone with his cat Calliope, with only one dream: to one day see the ocean.

One day, Linus is summoned to a meeting with Extremely Upper Management. There he is given the task of investigating a very particular orphanage and its caretaker. The Management is concerned that the inhabitants of the orphanage might bring on the end of the world if left unsupervised. With only a final warning to be careful, Linus journeys the next day to his onsite location.

The Marsyas Orphanage is located on a remote island and the residents rarely leave the island to visit the nearest village that is inhabited by humans. During Linus' first trip through the village, it is made clear to the reader that the villagers are not welcoming towards the magical residents of the orphanage. The relationship is tense and even hostile, and later it is revealed the townsfolk are being paid to silence about the existence of the orphanage by DICOMY.

However, on the island Linus is greeted by six magical children: Lucifer (nicknamed Lucy) the Antichrist, Talia the garden gnome, a wyvern named Theodore, Phee the sprite, Sal who transforms from a boy to a Pomeranian when frightened and Chauncey, a jellyfish like being whose species no one really knows. Their guardian is a mysterious man, Arthur Parnassus, who is later revealed to be a phoenix, and he is helped by the island's sprite caretaker, Ms. Zoe Chapelwhite. While Linus received files containing information of each resident from Extremely Upper Management, he is still not properly prepared for his task and expresses his overwhelmedness in various ways throughout the story.

While in the beginning Linus is determined not to form personal relationships with the children or their guardian, the longer he stays on the island, the more difficult he finds it to uphold that decision. The children and Arthur treat Linus with respect as they are aware of his position as some with power to permanently close the place they call home, but the longer Linus stays on the island, the more he starts to question the things DICOMY teaches. A similar journey can be seen with the inhabitants of the orphanage and the villagers – after the children visit the village on a daytrip and are later spoken in favour by a well-liked human resident, the relationship between the magical individuals and the humans begins to slowly change for the better.

In the end, Linus still returns home and to his job, but feels even more unhappy with his life than before. Thus, after turning in his final report to Extremely Upper Management in which he strongly states that Marsyas orphanage should stay open as there are no indications of danger or malpractice, Linus quits his job and moves back to Marsyas island. After confessing his love to Arthur, they decide to take care of the children together and build a future as a family.

# 4 PRESENT STUDY

In this section, the main methodology of the thesis will be introduced. This will include introducing the aim and research questions of the present study, outlining data selection and collection, as well as presenting methods of analysis.

## 4.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to discover in which ways othering of non-human characters is portrayed in the novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by T. J. Klune and what role institutional power plays in this portrayal. The research questions are as follows:

1. How are magical beings othered in the world of the novel?

2. How is institutional power expressed in the novel?

While the main focus will be the phenomenon of othering through linguistic and discursive practices, institutional power is an important factor in configuring structures that can result in othering. Furthermore, there is a prominent operating institution in the novel, of which two departments are mentioned: Department in Charge of Magical Youth (DICOMY) and Department in Charge of Registration. These departments have joint management board, Extremely Upper Management, and this combination is in charge of supervising and legislating any laws concerning the co-existence of humans and magical beings. The second research question is aimed to reveal its possible involvement in any othering that might happen in the data.

## 4.2 Selection and collection of data

The primary source for data is a novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by T. J. Klune. It is a contemporary fantasy book of 400 pages. The edition used in present study is the UK paperback published by Tor Books in 2021. The book was chosen as it is a relevantly new novel which gained moderate popularity after its publication. As previously mentioned, in addition to charting on US bestseller lists and receiving several awards, the novel also circulated social media book communities.

The collection of data was done through close reading of the source material. The book is 400 pages in length, but as the present study is interested in examining othering and institutional power within the novel's world, the acknowledgements of the author will be excluded from the analysis, leaving the dataset with 398 pages. While the whole dataset was considered, the main focus of analysis was on instances of othering involving the magical children and moments illustrating DICOMY and Extreme Upper Management's power. This focus arises naturally from the novel, as the main plot follows the magical children of the Marsyas orphanage, and DICOMY, as the name suggests, is focused on matters involving magical youth.

The collection of data will be guided by the focus points of the chosen method, which are introduced in chapter 4.3. Relevant excerpts from the collected data will be given in Chapter 5 to support the analysis.

## 4.3 Methods of analysis

The collected data is analysed through the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. The method is a combination of textual analysis tools offered by Fairclough (2015) and strategies of othering identified by Pandey (2004). A combination of these two was chosen, as Pandey's strategies are suitable for more closer examination of specific othering strategies utilised in writing, whereas Fairclough offers tools for more interconnected examination of discourses and power.

The strategies of othering in writing, adapted from Pandey (2004: 161):

1. Overt denigration (lexical strategies)
2. Stereotypes (declaratives: constructing semantic overgeneralizations in and through syntax)
3. Distance markers, e.g. pronoun use, voice, pacing
4. Positive self-representation vs. negative other-presentation (Linguistic contrasts and qualifications)

It is important to note that Pandey has based the list on numerous previous studies made in the field of sociolinguistics and discourse studies. As the data in present study is fictional literature and thus differs from the data used by Pandey (2004), strategies not fitting fictional text have been excluded.

Fairclough (2015) offers a list of ten questions as a guide to Critical Discourse Analysis. Moreover, he also considers three different values that formal features (e.g. vocabulary, grammar) can have.

Table 1. The values of formal features as presented in Fairclough (2015: 131).

| Dimensions of meaning | Values of features | Structural effects |
|---|---|---|
| Contents<br>Relations<br>Subjects | Experiential<br>Relational<br>Expressive | Knowledge/beliefs<br>Social relations<br>Social identities |

*Experiential* value refers to how the lived experience of a text's producer becomes visible through used formal features (Fairclough 2015: 130). *Relational* value, as the name suggests, has to do with how social relationships are produced in text (ibid.). Lastly, *expressive* value reveals how text's producers appraise other subjects and social identities (ibid.). Even if these three values can be found individually, they can and often emerge in combination thus linking parts of text to each other (ibid.).

Through this combination of strategies of othering in writing and values of formal features, it is possible to distinguish instances of othering and institutional power in the dataset, respectfully. More specifically, while closely reading the data, instances of othering and institutional power were highlighted and then examined through above mentioned strategies and values. Through considering the values it is also possible to investigate the connection of the two phenomena.

Finally, it is of importance to note that while the above mentioned tools are for analysing texts, the usual texts used in CDA research are based on real world interaction. This does not mean that they cannot be applied for fictional texts as well, which is the case in present study. This does, however, mean that some adaptation is necessary in order to achieve successful analysis as has been illustrated in this chapter.

# 5 ANALYSIS

For the purpose of clarity, the analysis is divided into two sections pertaining to the two research questions, and further into subsections within those sections when necessary. The first section, 5.1 Othering, is focused on analysing data relevant to the first research question: How are magical beings othered in the world of the novel. While the section in question offers a general understanding of how othering is portrayed in the data set, it also takes a closer look to two specific cases of othering in subsections 5.1.1 chapter 14: visit to the village and 5.1.2 Lucy or Lucifer the Antichrist

The second half of the analysis, 5.2 Institutional power, deals with data relevant to the second research question: How is institutional power expressed in the novel. Its subsection 5.2.1 takes a closer look to the highest position of power, Extremely Upper Management and subsection 5.2.2 explorers how institutional power is extended through slogans and posters.

## 5.1 Othering

The terms *magical creature* and *magical being* are both used to refer to those with magic in the novel, and while the terms are used interchangeably by all characters, there seems to be a slight favouring for the term *magical creature* by humans whereas *magical beings* is favoured by magical beings themselves. This small difference relates to experiential value and ultimately reveals how the terms' users see the world and its social subjects. However, there are noted instances in the novel, where magical beings are referred to as *monsters* or other words carrying negative connotations and stereotypes. This type of name-calling has resulted in one of the children, Chansey, starting to hide underneath people's beds and scaring them just like in the stories about monsters that he has been told.

In the world of the novel, humans seem to have been considering magical beings as something other for a long time through history. There are also suggestions that the more like a human a magical being physically looks like, the more they have been ostracised, as illustrated here:

> (1) --Many considered them to be nuisances, and for a long time, they were hunted down, their heads used as trophies, their skin made into fashionable shoes. It wasn't until laws were enacted protecting all magical creatures that the barbaric acts ceased, but by then, it'd almost been too late, especially in the face of empirical evidence that wyverns were capable of emotionally complex reasoning that rivaled even humans. (Klune 2021: 79)

Overall, there root of the othering in the novel seems to circle back to the idea of what is normal. It is a question of what is encoded in the discourse of normalcy and how it relates to how individuals perceive the world. Even Linus, who quite vocally proclaims to be objective when inspecting an orphanage, cannot escape this:

> (2) "--Just because **these orphans** must be kept separate from **normal children** doesn't mean they should be treated any differently. All children, no matter their . . . disposition or what they're capable of, must be protected regardless of the cost." (Klune 2021: 44, bold added for emphasis)

As seen in this example, magical children are referred to with a demonstrative determiner *these orphans* and as having a *disposition*. Although Linus is saying that all children should be treated equally, he is still excluding a specific group from normalcy when syntax is inspected according to Pandey's (2004) strategies. Moreover, there is experiential and expressive value to be found, because by juxtapositioning *these orphans* and *normal children* Linus is inadvertently expressing how he sees non-magical beings as normal and magical beings as something else.

Linus is introduced to the orphanage and its inhabitants first through the briefing Extremely Upper Management gives him. How he perceives the inhabitants thus begins even before he has personally met any of them. He receives both verbal descriptions and later governmental files including detailed information like age and species of magical youth, although he does not read all the files beforehand.

> (3) "We haven't received word of any wrongdoing, but the orphanage you'll be going to is . . . It's special, Mr. Baker. The orphanage is nontraditional, and the six children who live there are different than anything else you've seen before, some more than others. They're . . . problematic." (Klune 2021: 45).

The orphanage is branded as being *special* and *nontraditional*, linguistically constructing negative other-presentation, because the words carry a meaning of diverging from normalcy. Similar effect is repeated with the children by describing them as *different than anything else* and *problematic*. Both expressions are negatively describing the existence of the children instead of, for example, their actions, especially noting how there has been no wrongdoing, and thus results in othering.

In this light, Linus's arrival to the Marsyas orphanage and the resulting first meeting with the inhabitants is interesting. Linus is fearful and overall imagining "all manner of things, from terrible monsters with wickedly sharp teeth to fire and brimstone" (Klune 2021: 70). The first child Linus meets is Talia, whom he initially mistakes for an inanimate statue of a garden gnome instead of a living gnome. Talia retorts Linus' "Strange statue, aren't you?" by saying "You can't just say something like that about a person. It's rude. Don't you know anything?" (Klune 2021: 76–77), taking offence in being called a statue when she is in fact a person. Interestingly, instead of apologising for mistaking her, Linus goes to say "You're a gnome" after recovering from being startled. Whereas Talia sees herself as a person first, Linus sees first her species and then a person. Similar instance occurs with Theodore, a wyvern, and Linus must consciously correct himself from using the pronoun *it* instead of *he* (Klune 2021: 79). This is an interesting occurrence when contrasted with how Linus corrects the children to use *her* when they refer to his cat by using *it* within the same chapter.

It seems that during this initial meeting and day with the children, Linus struggles to see the magical beings as individual, living people, but he is also starting to realise the error in his perception. Consider the next instance:

> (4) He said the first thing that came to his mind. "I… I learned that there are things in this world that defy the imagination."
>
> "Things?" Talia said, eyes narrowing. "And what would these things be?"
>
> "The ocean," Linus said quickly. "Yes, the ocean. I've never seen it before. And I've always wanted to. It's… it's vaster than I even realized."
>
> "Oh," Talia said. "That's… so boring. Can we eat now? I'm starving." (Klune 2021: 108, italics in original)

In this situation Talia questions whether Linus is using the word *things* in reference to them. Linus is quick to correct that he means the ocean although it is left for interpretation if he initially in fact did mean to refer to the children he has just met. The way Talia questions Linus' word choices indicates that she is aware of how language can be used to build discourse. Her questioning and on the other hand Linus' word choices have relational value, as in building the relationships between these individuals. Nevertheless, Linus' use of language is dehumanising and a clue to how he perceives magical beings.

As the story progresses and all parties get to know each other better, there is also a change in how Linus perceives them. Where in the beginning he seems to see them through the lens of otherness, by the end he predominantly views them as children, and the othering is performed by villagers. Near the end, Linus together with other adults of the orphanage and the mayor meet with the villagers:

(5) -- But we won't allow our lives to be threatened when—"

Linus laughed bitterly. "Threatened? By whom? Who in the world has threatened you aside from me?"

"They have!" a woman cried in the back of the crowed [sic]. "By simply existing, they're a threat!"

"I don't believe you," Linus said. "I have been by their side for a month, and I have heard nary a whisper of a threat. In fact, the only time I've ever thought there was danger, aside from Marty's ill-advised attempt against a child, was from you lot here. Say you crossed to the island. What would you do? Would you lay your hands upon them? Would you strike them? Hurt them? Kill them?"

Norman paled. "That's not what we—"

"Then what are you doing?- - (Klune 2021: 323, italics in original)

Notable in this interaction is the use of the personal pronouns *we* when a villager is claiming on behalf of all villagers that they feel threatened and Linus' *you* when he in turn accuses the villagers of vilifying the children. Furthermore, when Linus asks them to specify who they are threatened by, the woman answers with a *they* pronoun, instead of explicitly naming the children, and thus assuming Linus knows who she is referring to. The woman is outright saying that *by simply existing* the children are a threat to them. This is amplified further by the villagers admitting that they do not know what they are doing, and they have not stopped to think about the consequences of their actions. By admitting to being threatened by simple existence, the villagers are othering magical beings.

### 5.1.1 Chapter 14: visit to the village

Chapter 14 is of significance in illustrating the relationship between the town and the orphanage, as in that chapter the children together with the adults visit the town for the first time. From the beginning it is made clear in the narration that "-- those who were on the street didn't do much to hide the fact that they were gawking." (Klune 2021: 255). Note how the word *gawk* is used to refer to the act of watching, which according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) means to "stare stupidly". So, although the narration notes how the townspeople's behaviour is not proper, it also establishes how the visitors from the orphanage are viewed as something other to be stared at.

Throughout the visit, there are several incidents where the visitors have direct interactions with humans, with various outcomes. Often, the interactions feature othering done by human adults towards the children, as illustrated by excerpt 6:

(6) He [Linus] saw her standing at the front of the store, looking out the window. There was a little girl outside on the sidewalk, no more than five or six years old. She was smiling, her dark hair in twin braids on her shoulders. She put her hand against the window.

> Talia did the same. Their hands were the same size and matched perfectly. Talia laughed, and the girl smiled.
>
> She smiled, that is, until a woman came running up the sidewalk, snatching her away, a horrified look on her face. She held the girl against her, turning the girl's head against her shoulder. She glared at Talia through the glass. "How *dare* you?" she snapped. "You leave my daughter alone, **you freak**!" (Klune 2021: 269, bold added for emphasis, italics in original)

There are several interesting aspects in this interaction. Firstly, Talia as a gnome is physically different from humans and it is thus easier for the townspeople to recognise her as non-human. Secondly, Talia and the girl are separated by a glass window. And thirdly, it is the girl's mother that performs an act of othering, whereas the girl and Talia were experiencing sameness through the narrative noting their hands being a perfect match. The mother results in denigration by calling Talia a freak and takes the aggression even further by spitting on the window while dragging her daughter away.

The next three excerpts are all from the same situation, when at the end of the visit the group visits the local ice cream shop in order to buy ice cream. In essence, this situation is when the most overt act of othering happens.

> (7) "You're—you—" the man behind the counter sputtered.
>
> "Yes," Linus said. "I am me. Thank you for noticing. Children, please form a line. One at a time, so the gentleman isn't overwhelmed—"
>
> "No," the man said, shaking his head furiously. "Absolutely not. You need to leave."
>
> The children fell quiet.
>
> Before Linus could speak, dread beginning to flood through him, Arthur beat him to it. "Come again?"
>
> The man was turning red. A vein throbbed in his forehead. "I don't serve your kind here."
>
> Zoe blinked. "Excuse me?"
>
> The man pointed at a wall. There, ever present, was a familiar poster. SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!
>
> "I reserve the right to refuse service," the man said. "To *anyone* I choose. I see something, I say something. And I'm saying there is no way you're getting anything from me." He glared at Theodore, sitting on Sal's shoulder. "You aren't welcome in my shop. You aren't welcome in this *village*. I don't care how much we're paid to keep quiet. Go back to your damn island." (Klune 2021: 272–273, italics in original)

Note how Norman (the man selling ice cream) is going from using the first person pronoun *I* and saying that he is doing something, to assuming a more general *we* by saying "I don't care how much we're paid to keep quiet". In a way he is exceeding his authority from his shop over to the whole village. While Norman uses the personal

pronoun *you* to refer to his customers as a whole, he also lumps them together with *your kind*. While this is already othering language use, it quickly escalates the further the interaction continues:

> (8) "How dare you?" Arthur said quietly, and Linus thought of a tiger hunting. "How dare you speak to them that way? They're *children*."
>
> "I don't care," the man said, taking a step back. "They're *abominations*. I know what their kind is capable of—" (Klune 2021: 274, italics in original)

Now, Norman's language has changed to use the pronoun *they* with the added negatively charged noun *abomination*. While saying this, the narrative also tells how Norman is physically distancing himself from his customers in addition to the linguistic distancing. The use of *abominations* is juxtaposed with *children* that Arthur uses in his previous utterance, making it clear Norman does not see them as merely children but as something other to be afraid of. What is interesting, however, is how Arthur is excluding himself and Zoe, who both are magical beings, by questioning how Norman dares to speak to the children in such a way, even though there seems to be no indication in the beginning of the interaction that Norman's hostility is directed only towards the children instead of the whole group. By explicitly mentioning the children, Arthur is trying to make Norman acknowledge that his behaviour is not generally considered appropriate when children are present and to acknowledge his othering.

> (9) "Helen!" the man behind the counter cried. "These—these *things* won't leave!" (Klune 2021: 275, italics in original)

Finally, Norman results in substituting usual pronouns for a deictic pronoun *these* and pairing it with a noun *things* that is usually used to refer to inanimate objects. In a way, this escalation from *you* to *them* to *these things* reveals in a sequence the underlying beliefs Norman has. In this, he is expressing his social relationships through relational value. What is more, he is expressing it to a new participant, who has just arrived and questioned what is going on. Judging by the familiar use of first name, Norman is familiar with Helen beforehand, but he is not the only one, as Linus, Lucy, and Thalia met Helen moments before while visiting a hardware store. Norman is trying to communicate his personal experience and view to Helen, but since Helen already has pre-established relationships with them, he is unsuccessful. The formal features Norman uses thus become more expressive in value, revealing how he regards the subjects and social identities of the interaction.

After Helen's arrival, the interaction is diffused. Helen, as the mayor of Marsyas, uses the power that comes with her position to threaten to inform the village council of Norman refusing to serve customers and not renew his lease. While Norman still

refuses to serve the waiting customers, it is enough to make him retreat to another room and let Helen serve ice cream to the inhabitants of Marsyas' orphanage.

### 5.1.2 Lucy or Lucifer the Antichrist

Among the children in the novel, Lucy is singled out more than others as something dangerous. When Linus first reads Lucy's file he faints, and similar allusions are made several times more.

> (10) It was about this time that Linus felt his vision grey yet again at the thought of—of this *child.* This *Lucy.* He couldn't believe that such a creature existed without his knowledge. Without the *world's* knowledge. Oh, he understood why there was secrecy and could even comprehend the need for it. But the fact that there was a weapon of mass destruction in the body of a six-year-old and the world wasn't prepared was simply shocking. (Klune 2021: 85, italics in original)

The words Linus uses to refer to Lucy in this excerpt are interesting. He uses a demonstrative pronoun *this* to distance Lucy as a person to what he represents. Linus also refers to Lucy as *such a creature*, an ideologically charged expression that strengthens the otherworldliness of Lucy. Ultimately Lucy is seen as an inanimate object, a *weapon of mass destruction* over a living individual. Interestingly Linus thinks this is something that the world should be aware of and prepared for. Linus is afraid of Lucy even before he has done anything to suggest that he is dangerous, which is very similar to how the villagers justified their fear in excerpt 5. By that point, however, Linus has surpassed his own fear and prejudice.

Although Linus' perception of Lucy ultimately changes, it was quite othering in the beginning. Consider an excerpt from a report Linus send to DICOMY in the novel:

> (11) If you take away what is known about the boy—who he is supposed to be—you are left with an inquisitive youth who tends to say things for shock value rather than with any sincerity. He is intelligent, almost frighteningly so, and well-spoken. If DICOMY weren't sure he was the Antichrist—a word that's not to be uttered at the Marsyas Orphanage—I would think he was nothing more than a boy capable of conjuring images meant to scare. However, I expect this is what he wants me to think. I would do well to keep my guard up. Just because he appears as a child doesn't mean he isn't capable of great calamity. (Klune 2021: 202)

Several things are noteworthy in this. Linus notes how Lucy is an intelligent and well-mannered youth with no real intention to harm anyone, but this is all underneath of *who he is supposed to be*. Linus is also relying on DICOMY's authority and not questioning their claim of Lucy being the Antichrist, a word that is considered offensive in the orphanage. It seems that DICOMY's authority is overriding Linus' actual observations of Lucy and he is thus more inclined to think that Lucy is trying to trick him. Within the same report, Linus is also pondering if Lucy is capable of becoming *a productive member of society* or if he can be *rehabilitated* and *assimilated* as long as Lucy does not *give in to his true nature*. These expressions are ideologically charged, implying that

Lucy's magic is something that needs to be suppressed before he can be a part of society.

The increased othering Lucy experiences might be connected to a wider discourse. His father is the Devil, suggesting the world of the novel has religious structures where the Devil is seen as a representation of evil and damnation. This discourse framework affects how Lucy is perceived as the Devil's child despite being his own person. An example of this is how during a visit to the village's music store, one employee tries to exorcise Lucy and calls him an abomination. This is in contrast to the other employee of the same store, who offers to help Lucy find new records and refers to him as *little dude*.

## 5.2 Institutional power

The most prominent in-world institute is the Department in Charge of Magical Youth. As evident in the name, it is a department of a larger organisation, but the organisation is never named more specifically as it is not relevant to the main story of the novel. Only one other department is mentioned, the Department in Charge of Registration, which oversees that all magical beings have been registered and have proper identification. During Linus' first meeting with Zoe Chapelwhite, the guardian sprite of Marsyas island, when he arrives to the orphanage, he inquires weather she is registered:

> (12) "Are you registered?" he demanded. "Does DICOMY know that you're—"
>
> She bared her teeth. "I was never in the system, Mr. Baker. My line is far older than the rules of men. Just because you have decided that all magical beings need to be tagged in the wild for tracking doesn't give you the right to question me or my legal status." (Klune 2021: 67)

Zoe uses the pronoun *you* in this instance which can be understood both in its singular and plural form. She can be referring to the larger institution behind the registration, but also to Linus who is the one questioning her in this situation. She also describes registering as *tagged in the wild for tracking*, akin to something that is usually done to wild animals. By doing so, she is implying that registering is dehumanising magical beings and lessening her independence.

Another tool of extending institutional power is the handbook "Rules and regulations" which is given to all DICOMY workers. According to Linus "it provides the order needed to create happy and healthy children" (Klune 2021: 179). Within this phrase is the idea that happy and healthy children need to be created, as in somehow made. The ideological implications behind this are further illustrated when Arthur

remarks that "not a single magical person had any say in the creation of that tome. Every word came from the hand and mind of a human" (Klune 2021: 179). The handbook meant to guide those working with magical youth to create wellbeing children has been written from the perspective of humans, obstructing involvement from magical beings. Furthermore, this is probably not general knowledge among those whose use the handbook, as the narrative notes Linus was unaware of this. However, there are also other moments in the novel that indicate how Linus is unaware of his own status and power as a caseworker for DICOMY:

> (13) "Me? I don't know that I've scared anyone in my life."
>
> "I highly doubt that's true. You work for DICOMY, after all."
>
> "What does that have to do with—"
>
> "And it's not necessarily *you,* as in you specifically. It's what you represent. You're a caseworker, Mr. Baker.--" (Klune 2021: 118, italics in original)

As this example illustrates, while working for DICOMY, Linus also represents their values and ideas of the world. He is not solely his own person but also an extension of institutional power. The fact that Linus does not recognise this before it is spelled out to him is a sign of him having been blind to his status as a member of a majority group.

### 5.2.1 Extremely Upper Management

Extremely Upper Management of DICOMY is a mysterious entity that even employees cannot contact without prior appointment. It consists of four members that Linus notes having seen once a year during office Christmas parties, but otherwise the management keeps separate from caseworkers: "There were three men and one woman, and though Linus had learned their names early on in his career at DICOMY, for the life of him, he couldn't remember them presently." (Klune 2021: 42). As noted in this example, Linus does not remember the names of the members of Extremely Upper Management. As a result of this, the members are referred to by nicknames based on their descriptions. The three men are named Jowls ("One of the men was balding, his jowls hanging off his face." (ibid.)), The bespectacled man ("He wore spectacles far too large for his face, the lenses shaped like half-moons." (ibid.)) and Handsome ("His hair was wavy, and he was intimidatingly handsome." (ibid.)). However, the fourth member of the Management is simply referred to as the woman despite having similar description in the narrative: "The woman's hair was cut into a petite bob, and she wore a large brooch in the shape of a beetle, the carapace iridescent." (ibid.). Linus, and thus the reader, learns one of their names slightly later when the woman utters it and after that handsome is referred to as Mr. Werner.

The members of Extremely Upper Management speak of themselves as *we* and they are often noted to do things as a single entity.

> (14) "Your reports will be directed **to Extremely Upper Management**," the woman said. "They will be overseen by Mr. Werner, though **we** will all be involved." She nodded toward Handsome. "And **we** expect them to be as thorough as the ones you've done in the past. In fact, **we** insist upon it. More so, if you deem necessary." (Klune 2021: 46, **bold** added)

> (15) "Extremely Upper Management stood as one, bowed down at him, and then all the lights went out." (Klune 2021: 47)

This is further illustrated in the correspondence Linus has with Extremely Upper Management during his stay at the Marsyas orphanage. The letters Linus receives use the first person plural pronoun *we* even though they are written by only one member, Mr. Werner. This is an example of exclusive *we* that is used to include other parties in addition to the actual writer (Fairclough 2015: 143). The plot of the novel explains why Mr. Werner would be more invested in this investigation than other members of the board, as he was assigned to investigate the orphanage in the past when he was still a caseworker and has therefore personal connections with the place and especially its guardian, Arthur Parnassus.

In the correspondence Extremely Upper Management sends to Linus during his stay at the Marsyas orphanage, they are referring to it as an *investigation*. This wording indicates that Linus is supposed to find something to report instead of simply observing. Moreover, he is reminded several times to leave nothing out from his reports. When Linus begins to question Extremely Upper Management's intentions in his second report, the following section is included in the reply:

> (16) To that end, we want to remind you that DICOMY and Extremely Upper Management are here for you. We care about you. Upon your return from the island, we'll require you to attend a psychological evaluation. For your own peace of mind, of course. The well-being of our caseworkers is of the utmost importance. You are the lifeblood of DICOMY, and without you, there would be no us. There would be no hope for the children. You matter, Mr. Baker. (Klune 2021: 285)

As before, there is the use of *we*, but Extremely Upper Management is also attempting to include Linus in this by saying *without you, there would be no us*. They are *requiring*, not suggesting, Linus to have a psychological evaluation, but in the next sentence assuring that it is something that he wants to do for his *own peace of mind*. Interestingly, the management is not directly saying Linus' well-being is important, but rather opting for a vague *our caseworkers*. It is all suggesting that the time Linus has spent in the orphanage has somehow deteriorated his well-being and that he is not mentally stable, which is the reason why he is questioning them in the first place. Lastly, they are appealing to a sense of community and importance. The overall tone is quite persuasive as words expressing modality are more on the side of certainty

than uncertainty (for example *want*, *will*, *utmost*). Forms expressing modality reveal ideological interest through indicating authenticity or knowledge (Fairclough 2015: 144). If Linus is not a part of DICOMY, he cannot help the children. In DICOMY, he is cared for, and his life has a meaning.

### 5.2.2 Use of posters and slogans

DICOMY has issued posters and signs with slogans and distributed them around cities and orphanages. The impact these signs have on interaction between humans and magical beings has been seen, for example, in example 7, where Norman used the sign as a support for his right to refuse service. There are several different types of slogans. DICOMY-sanctioned orphanages have posters that are more focused on children.

> (17) He passed by posters nailed to the walls, the same messages that hung in all the DICOMY-sanctioned orphanages he'd been to. They showed smiling children below such legends as WE'RE HAPPIEST WHEN WE LISTEN TO THOSE IN CHARGE and A QUIET CHILD IS A HEALTHY CHILD and WHO NEEDS MAGIC WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR IMAGINATION? (Klune 2021: 17)

The slogans in these posters use several different linguistic strategies of othering and power. There is the use of inclusive group pronoun *we* and direct addressing with the pronoun *you*, contrasted with more statement like second slogan. Inclusive we includes both the writer and the addressee, thus speaking for all involved parties and assuming authority (Fairclough 2015: 143). In the first two slogans, desired behaviour is encouraged through appealing to positive things such as happiness and health. Quite interestingly, the last slogan which addresses magic, is the most direct in tone and agency, as it is grammatically formed as a question. It is asking for the addressee to question the importance of magic and equating it with an abstract concept, imagination, that is something that generally happens inside one's mind and would therefore be silent doing. In this context it is also important to remember that these posters with the slogans exist in the DICOMY orphanages where all children are magical and, what is more, these posters are seen together. With these posters, DICOMY is asking for action and information, which is an act of power (Fairclough 2015: 142). They are first asking for addressees to listen to those in power, then telling children to be quiet and finally making them question the necessity of magic.

The most common type of poster that is seen in various different settings across the world of the novel is the one with the text *SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING*:

> (18) SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING, the sign on the bus had read. And everywhere, really, wasn't it? More and more lately. On buses. In newspapers. Billboards. Radio ads. Why, he'd even seen the words printed on a grocery bag of all places. (Klune 2021: 140)

As noted in the excerpt, the appearance of the slogan has increased and made its way to even mundane objects such as grocery bags. Being a relatively short sentence but nevertheless powerful, it would make sense for DICOMY to try and reach as many individuals as possible. It encourages action with imperative mode and thus lacks direct subject. However, it can be accompanied by additional sentences that add value, as illustrated by example 19:

> (19) A sign next to the train station caught his eye.
>
> On it, a family was at a picnic in the park. The sun was shining. They sat on a checkered blanket, and the wicker basket sitting between them was open and overflowing with cheeses and grapes and sandwiches with the crusts cut off. The mother was laughing. The father was smiling. The boy and the girl were staring adoringly up at their parents.
>
> Above them, the sign read: KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFE! SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING! (Klune 2021: 344)

The additional sentence *KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFE* with the imagery of the poster, adds experiential value to the sentence. It becomes a part of family discourse – what is seen as a traditional family – and again demands direct action to protect *your* family, which the ingrained assumption that the addressee's family matches the one presented in the poster.

It is noteworthy that towards the end of the novel, when Marsyas town is going through the changes of becoming more welcoming to magical beings, the DICOMY issued signs are first to go: "First came down the SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING posters around town." (Klune 2021: 389). The impact that these signs have in othering magical beings and extending DICOMY's power is thus recognised by the novel's characters.

# 6 DISCUSSION

The present study examined othering and institutional power in the novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea* through two research questions: 1) How are magical beings othered in the world of the novel and 2) How is institutional power expressed in the novel. The emphasis was in linguistic and discursive means as the chosen method was Critical Discourse Analysis.

To answer the first research question, magical beings were othered through following different linguistic strategies: pronoun usage, name calling, stereotyping and linguistic comparisons constructed through syntax. Pronoun usage was usually highlighting group based thinking, where humans were striving to create an "us group" and a "them group". Pandey (2004: 162–163) noted how in freshmen writing, using pronouns like *them*, *us* and *me*, is an overt linguistic strategy attempting to distance the writer from another group (like the homeless in Pandey's study) and, on the other hand, to create contrast and perspective between two groups. In the present study this type of pronoun usage was seen, for example, whenever the humans of the Marsyas village were talking about magical beings. In the novel's world, humans strived to distance themselves linguistically from magical beings that they view as a "them group", something separate from their "us group". Through making conscious decisions on which distance markers or pronouns to use (for example deictic pronouns versus distal pronouns), one can adopt a critical perspective on how social groups are presented in discourses (Pandey 2004: 163). That is to say, linguistic strategies such as pronoun usage are capable of both creating and correcting othering, depending on the writer's intentions.

Stereotypes and name calling were another othering strategy used in novel's world. In the analysis it was noted how humans used terms such as *magical creature* over *magical being* or *magical person* and referred to the magical children as *monsters* or *abominations*, to name a few. Pandey (2004: 166) made similar discoveries as student writers utilised nouns with strong semantic meaning to represent othered groups,

which reveals how large societal attitudes are reflected in language use. Through stereotyping and using grouping names like *monster*, groups are homogenised and any variety as well as individuality in a community is erased.

The linguistic strategy of comparisons was used to juxtapose magical beings with humans. In these instances, magic users were often referred to as something *special* or *extraordinary* while simultaneously mentioning *normal* children, for example. These linguistic juxtapositions reveal how the speaker's view normalcy and that magical beings do not belong to that category.

Moreover, the prevailing discourses of the novel's world contribute to the othering the magical youth experience. The dominant ideology seems to be that magical beings are inferior to humans as they are incapable of feeling and thinking in an equal way. While this has been proven wrong and inaccurate in the novel's world, it would take time for harmful beliefs and discourses to change. This is evident with how the novel's main character, Linus Baker, acted when he met the wyvern Theodore, as he was initially afraid although he knew the history of wyverns and that they are as intelligent as humans. Rana (2009) observed similar kind of subhuman othering in the *Harry Potter* series, where human witches and wizards view different magical races such as garden gnomes and house-elves as inferior and less intelligent, resulting in violent treatment of those individuals. Whereas in *Harry Potter,* grammatically incorrect speech was one way of depicting this otherness (Rana 2009: 42—43), in *the House in the Cerulean Sea* this is not the case. All magical beings speak grammatically correctly and, in some cases, even multiple languages (like gnomish or wyvern) that are presented as full, comprehensible languages on their own. In fact, Linus even begins to learn these languages during his stay in the orphanage by being exposed to them daily.

Although Linus claims to be objective whenever he is investigating an orphanage, the data suggests that this is not entirely the case. As Linus is a human and employed by DICOMY, his vocabulary especially in the beginning of the novel reveals how dominant discourses are also rooted in him. Despite of how aware one might be of social influence, one's language use is still controlled by social conventions, and it is often the language one uses in the most intimate of settings that reveals the state of social relationships while simultaneously having the power to either maintain or change those relationships (Fairclough 2015: 56). While Linus seems to be careful with his language during face-to-face interactions with magical beings, his correspondence with DICOMY reveals the underlying bias and fear he has. Nonetheless, it is in those letters where the change in Linus' perception becomes visible to the reader, and it is strengthened through action, when Linus uses the power benefiting him to protect those it is hurting.

The second research question revealed ways of how those in power extended that power in the lived reality of the novel. The most visible way was the usage of

posters and signs with slogans in them, but also through specific language use, like how Extremely Upper Management talked about magical beings and to its employees. Linguistically they deliberately used inclusive pronouns as well as directly addressing readers like in the slogans and using imperative voice. The instances of institutional power communicated experiential and expressive meaning with their word choices, thus communicating how the ones in power perceive magical beings as something to be feared.

According to Fairclough (2015: 64—65), the ones in power can sustain it either through coercion or consent, in other words either via threats of violence and ultimate sanction or through winning people's consent for their dominant position. In the analysed data similar actions were seen, for example when Extremely Upper Management told Linus he would attend a psychological evaluation upon returning home. Similarly, DICOMY paying the villagers for silence of the existence of the orphanage can be seen as an act of acquiring consent.

The dominant discourse DICOMY was enforcing wanted magical beings to assimilate to the human society. Assimilation strives to remove the differences causing othering by encouraging marginalised groups to adopt the identities and practices of the dominant group (Powell & Menendian 2016: 32). In other words, by including such slogans as "who needs magic when you have your imagination", DICOMY was invoking magical beings to erase their identity and directing it towards easily influenceable children. DICOMY is starting to spread its ideology from the grassroots level and directing it at both the magical community as well as humans, although the slogans are different in both cases – for humans they are projecting messages of danger and civil responsibility whereas for magical beings the message is that suppressing magic will equal happiness. Similarly, Extremely Upper Management is promoting registration for magical beings as something normal to do. Fairclough (2015: 64) notes that when discourses or practices that have originally stemmed from those in power and have become naturalised, they are functioning ideologically to nourish unequal power relations.

In the novel, the oppressing treatment of the magical community is being recognised as wrong by the end of the plot and measures are taken to change things for better. Linus acts as a starting point for this change, as through his time at the Marsyas orphanage he has started to see the harm DICOMY is doing, and ultimately ends up sending an anonymous report describing the wrongdoings of Extremely Upper Management, resulting in internal examination and the management's resignment. This is Linus using the power he has – access to DICOMY reports, first hand experience and connections – to change dominant discourse of how magical beings are viewed. Because of systemic othering and power imbalance, a member from the othered

community would probably not have access to similar resources and thus cause similar change.

For readers that themselves have faced othering or marginalisation in their lived reality, reading a story with such an ending might be an empowering experience. There is a need for stories that break the experienced marginalisation, as was illustrated by Toliver (2020) in whose study black women expressed the need for more race, gender and queer inclusive science fiction stories. Reading a story where real life prejudices like homophobia or racism are rejected can be a life saving act for individuals who suffer in real life because of those worldviews (Jiménez 2015: 409). Thus fiction, the stories that are told, who is telling them and how they are telling them should not be taken lightly. In the best case, the stories can act as starting points for social change, but at the same time, they also have the power to reinforce and circulate harmful discourses. Resolutions in fictional narrative can carry meanings in and outside of fiction and those resolutions are in actuality solved real world phenomena, linking reality and fiction quite closely together (Talbot 1995: 8).

# 7 CONCLUSION

The present study has attempted to illustrate how othering and institutional power can be represented in works of fiction. It has done so through analysing a contemporary fantasy novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea* (Klune 2021), a fairly successful novel marketed to both younger and older demographics. With the help of Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis of the novel suggests that othering of magical beings is done linguistically through pronoun choices, name calling, stereotyping and comparisons. Word choices carrying experiential, relational and expressive values reveal underlying discourses and social structures of how those in power perceive the magical community. Institutional power has its role as an enforcer of those dominant discourses and is extended through slogans, consent and coercion.

The data proved to be robust and quite extensive considering the limitations of a master's thesis. Because of this, the present study offers only an understanding of othering practices targeted at magical youth and the general involvement of institutional power enabling such behaviour within the novel's world, with much room left for more targeted analysis. For example, a character study on the main character Linus and the changes in his personal perception of the magical community could be a possible topic for future research, or closer inspection of the correspondence between Linus and Extremely Upper Management could yield interesting analysis in terms of rhetorical devices, for instance. It should also be noted that due to the data being fictional text instead of text produced in real world interaction, the analysis would have benefited from the inclusion of a method suited for literary analysis in addition to CDA. Still, the present study does add to research where Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to literary works.

Large discourses that shape the lived reality also shape one's individual perspective. These boundaries and social meanings that have been absorbed either intentionally or subconsciously do not stay within one's mind but rather continue on to manifest outside oneself through actions and communication (Powell & Menendian 2016:

25). Because of this it is important to pay attention also to the smaller picture and individual acts in addition to bigger discourses of society. Where a single act of discrimination might seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, it is the repetition of those single acts through time that has a cumulative effect (Powell & Menendian 2016: 25). Similarly, culture and art produced by individuals is a way of transferring discourses across communities. It is thus important to examine how such structures like othering or institutional power are represented in fictional works as well.

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