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Posthumanist Strategies of Forming Surrogate Cyborg Subjectivity in Contemporary Young Adult Autism Novels

Mahboubeh Farhangi [1]
Ph.D. Candidate of English Literature, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
Laleh Atashi (Corresponding Author) [2]
Assistant Professor of English Literature, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
Farideh Pourgiv [3]
Professor of English Literature, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

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Abstract
Posthumanist themes are usually worked in speculative genres such as biotechnological science fiction. This paper demonstrates the potentiality of realistic young adult autism fiction for exploring posthumanist ideas. By highlighting the parallels between autistic sense of self and the posthumanist conception of subjectivity, we argue that autism young adult novels have the potentiality to re-conceptualize adolescence and subjectification in ways that diverge from the dominant humanistic paradigm of traditional young adult novels. Unlike traditional young adult novels, these autism novels depict adolescence as the period in which the individual leaves the illusion of autonomy behind, and becomes aware of his status as relational and inextricably tied to other subjectivities. These novels demonstrate that subjectification is a collective process whereby the individual emerges as an agential subject only in relation to other subjectivities. In order to illustrate our point, we analyze Nothing is Right and Imaginary Friends, two novels by the autistic writer Michael Scott Monje, Jr. This paper proposes that this process relies on posthumanist premises of relationality, deconstruction of self/other binary and acknowledgment of difference as a constituent of selfhood.

Keywords
Posthumanism; Subjectification; Autobiography; *Nothing is Right*; *Imaginary Friends*.

1. Introduction

Almost eighty years after its identification by Kanner and Asperger in the 1940s, autism continues to be a fascinating topic not only in academic disciplines such as psychology, neurology and anthropology, but also in popular culture. A wide array of cultural productions of various genres have addressed this enigmatic condition, of which Barry

[1] amahboubeh.farhangi@gmail.com
[2] laleh.atashi@shirazu.ac.ir
[3] fpourgiv@rose.shirazu.ac.ir

Levinson's movie, *Rain Man* (1988), and Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) are probably the most well-known. Autism fiction in particular has flourished so remarkably in recent years that it has risen to the status of a genre of novel writing in its own right. (Hacking 2009). This rise in autism fiction, Hacking notes, far from a simple increase in quantity, is a phenomenon that reflects singular features of our time (2010).

One of the most conspicuous features of our time is the emergence of what Ihab Hassan denoted as the "posthumanist culture": The new trend that challenges hierarchal binaries set by humanism, in order to create "an 'orbic vision' in which the inner divisions of consciousness and the external divisions of humankind are healed and made whole – but not homogeneous, healed but not rendered uniform" (833). This monistic ethos renders the humanist conception of selfhood – as unitary, coherent, autonomous, self-determining and transcendent – untenable. It calls for an expanded self which "is not an atomized entity but a non-unitary relational subject, nomadic and outward" (Braidotti 17). Feminist poststructuralists such as Cixous, Irigaray, Butler, and most notably, Haraway paved the way for the emergence of posthuman subjectivity by critiquing the identitarian foundation of the humanist conception of selfhood, which assumes a stable un-changing human nature.

Donna Haraway, one of the earliest advocates of posthumanism proposes the figuration of the cyborg for the posthuman subject: a "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (163); a hybrid being which challenges the inevitability of humanist dualisms by transgressing naturalized hierarchical binaries. As a feminist, she employs the cyborg imagery to problematize the humanistic view of gender – as a natural and global identity – by calling attention to alternative forms of embodiment that refuse to be contained by humanism's dualistic identity categories. Similar arguments could be applied to other hierarchal aspects of humanism as well. Just as non-normative embodiment undermines dualistic view of gender, non-normative modes of enmindedness, challenge humanistic view of the self. (THE LOCK QUOTE DELETED)

In humanistic frame of reference, the neurotypical and non-disabled subject is the measure of normative enmindedness, and those who do not meet these particular standards are placed in a sort of liminal space between the human and the non-human" (172-73). This liminal ontological state is the starting point for Haraway's cyborgian critique of rigid humanistic boundaries that separate humans from animals and machines. We propose that a similar cyborgian critique could be brought against boundaries that divide the dominant humanistic normative enmindedness from the marginalized and pathologized non-normative mental configurations.

Posthumanist philosophy, especially the trajectory that is called critical posthumanism as opposed to the transhumanist branch which Nayar calls "popular posthumanism" exposes the constructedness of the boundaries that have traditionally defined the normative human(ist) subject, and allows for new conceptualizations of subjectivity to arise (18). Critical posthumanist theorists incorporate antihumanistic and deconstructive critiques of humanism and the humanist subject in order to "offer a long-awaited adjustment to the unfair attitudes towards the Other that humanism has promoted for so long" (Tarr and White xiv). They question the certainty and centrality of the liberal humanist subject as an autonomous, rational, unified self, and propose that we all have multiple subjectivities that are in a constant state of construction.

Such posthumanist re-conceptualizations are especially important when it comes to questions of disability. Within the dualistic structure of humanism, ability can only be defined against what it is not, that is disability. The normative subject of humanism cannot lay claim on his ability and normalcy unless he creates a disabled abnormal other to be excluded from the realm of full human subjectivity. Critical posthumanism unsettles this hierarchal dualism between ability and disability, neurotypicality and neuroatypicality and human beingness and non-human beingness, thus revealing the empty interiority of what humanism has called the human nature. From the posthumanist perspective the "other" cannot be left out, as it is actually a constituent of our sense of self.

Among various modes of non-normative enmindedness, autism exemplifies "possibly the most radical form of personal otherness" (Murray "Contemporary Sentimental" 26). Autistic enmindedness is so different from the normative humanistic enmindedness that it is viewed as "antithetical to" it (Davis). Nonetheless, autism defies humanistic binary categorization, and does not easily lend itself to be molded as an easy foil for normative human mental configuration. Although it is generally viewed as an abnormality, at times it is "recuperated back into the normative milieu as a souped-up, hyper version of that familiar trope of the modern human being" (Goodley). As an entity of liminal status, it flows in and out of the constructed boundaries of human being-ness, and embodies the alien within the human which cannot be walled out.

This liminal status of autism extricates it from the humanistic dialectic of negativity that defines the human in relation to what it is not. It can freely move in and out of our constructed dualistic identities (the autist versus the neurotypical), and challenge the impermeability of the boundary between them. As Murray puts it "the condition 'outhumans the humans' it gestures toward a beyond, or a 'post-,' that represents a space of cultural enactment, and possibly agency, separate from any configuration of a human norm" ("Autism and the Posthuman" 54-55); a separate space of non-normativity which extends itself beyond humanistic boundaries, and thus exposes the permeability and constructedness of those boundaries between what has traditionally been defined as human(ist) selfhood, and

its non-human others (including people whose non-normative enmindedness disqualifies them from the category of the fully-human). Therefore, autism's between and betwixt ontological status can serve a semi-cyborgian function in blurring naturalized boundaries by deflating the identitarian core of humanism and opening it up towards posthumanist flows.

This latent posthumanist potentiality of autism, we argue, can best be realized in YA stories, because adolescence, like autism is a liminal state. This potentiality, however, has not been fully captured in traditional YA fiction, which is predominantly humanist. This paper provide examples of how the trope of autism can be applied to introduce a rethinking of adolescence and subjectivity. We contend that these re-conceptualizations can be productively examined through the lens of posthumanism, as there seem to be strong parallels between autistic enmindedness and posthuman subjectivity.[1]

As noted above, posthumanist ideas presented in young adult novels mostly derive from the technological and transhumanist branches of the philosophy, and are worked out in speculative genres such as science fiction and fantasy. Realistic novels rarely lend themselves to posthumanistic analysis, but we hope to show that autism themed stories do have the potentiality of such an analysis, as unique attributes of autistic enmindedness provide the ground to explore aspects of posthumanism that focus mainly on questions of self-formation and subjectivity challenge the dominance of humanistic paradigm in YA novels and make room for a breath of posthumanist fresh air. [2]

In order to illustrate our point, we examine *Nothing is Right* and its sequel *Imaginary Friends* two novels by the autistic writer Michael Scott Monje, Jr. In these novels the process of self-formation of an autist on the verge of adolescence is portrayed. Monje skillfully delineates the process whereby a young autist with what is according to humanistic standards an impaired sense of self, disentangles himself from the mold of the identity imposed on him by the ableist society, and emerges as an ideal relational posthumanist subject.

These novels are selected for two interrelated reasons. First, they have a strong autobiographical dimension and compared to other fictional narratives of coming of age present a more accurate account of the process as experienced by an autist. Second, they connect themes of reading and writing with the process of self-formation by highlighting the primacy of difference in both phenomena. Monje's novels are unique in presenting primordial difference – a fundamental element of both posthumanist and deconstructive philosophies – in the cast of one of the most humanistic genres, namely autobiography.

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[1] Teunie van der Palen in *A cyborg Autography: Autism & the Posthuman* analyzes autobiographies written by autistic writers from the posthumanist lens, and gives a comprehensive account of the parallels between autistic autobiographers and the posthuman subject.

[2] Mark Osteen in *Autism and Representation* discusses similar strategies of self formation in the works of autist autobiographers such as Temple Grandin and Donna Williams.

2. The Posthuman Turn of YA Novels, and the Rise of Post-Identitarian Adolescence

Adolescence in Western YA novels is traditionally depicted in alignment with humanistic tenets, in the sense that it ultimately culminates in the emergence of a self "that is rational, autonomous, coherent, unified, and universal" (Hervey 135). This conception of adolescence is identitarian in that it assumes selfhood as an already existent positivity located in the individual, and clearly distinct from other human and nonhuman beings. However, Shannon Hervey identifies a shift in contemporary young adult novels away from this humanistic notion of adolescence and self to what can be called a post-identitarian adolescence and a posthumanist notion of self. This "revolutionary turn", she argues, is mainly caused by the fast-paced advances in digital and biotechnologies which constantly blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman life forms to such a degree that many long-held assumptions about what counts as human have been called into question (30).

This indeterminacy has found its way to YA literature in general, and science fiction in particular. Representations of scientific advances confront adolescent readers with the complexities and ambivalences of our time, and challenge liberal humanist ideals of autonomy, individuality and self-determination. Although, as Elaine Ostry notes, "writers generally assert the liberal humanist model of the human, in some instances [they] allow the posthuman challenge to this model to stand" (223). YA science fiction, she argues, conveys this posthuman challenge by using literary tropes such as

> the search for identity and sense of self, the discovery of the lie, the separation between parent and child, the formation of new peer groups, resistance to adult control, decision making, growth and adaptation, and the challenge of hierarchies. The texts, in short, use biotechnology as a metaphor for adolescence (ibid).

Implied in Ostry's remark is that these more recent stories revise the traditional conception of adolescence to make it more expressive of the posthumanist ambiguities and ambivalences provoked by scientific advances of our times. Similarly, Victoria Flanagan in *Technology and Identity in Young Adult Fiction: The Posthuman Subject* (2014) investigates the ways in which technologization invokes posthumanist changes in notions of selfhood and agency in contemporary young adult science fiction. Therefore, both Flanagan and Ostry concur with Hervey's proposition that a posthumanist trend is initiated in young adult novels which accounts for transformed conceptualization and portrayals of adolescence and selfhood. More recent young adult stories problematize the traditional identitarian adolescence in which the protagonist ultimately emerges as an agential autonomous unified subject by turning inward and unearthing some kind of subjective truth located in himself. Instead, they present a post-identitarian conception

of adolescence in which the individual internalizes the awareness of being inextricably tied to a wide network of dynamic relations:

> Beyond a simple status change, the disruption signaled by adolescence marks the opening up of the self to a powerful form of ambiguity. It suggests a puncturing of the subject's ontological core and the opening up of a bi-directional flow responsible for the evanescence of the same and a simultaneous intrusion of difference (Donner 6).

At the end of this process the subject emerges not as a unified autonomous and coherent entity endowed with solipsistic agency, but as a heterogeneous amalgam of relations whose self-will "cannot be clearly distinguished from the wills of others" (Hayles 3). Whereas the traditional adolescence successfully resolved ambiguities by achieving a sense of unified self in the end, this post-identitarian conception of adolescence indicates this closure to be unattainable and illusory.

This post-identitarian conception of adolescence, as evident in the examples provided by Ostry, Flanagan and Hervey, is mostly formulated in speculative genres such as science fiction, and fantasy, where the blurring of boundaries between human and nonhuman exposes the constructedness of human nature and embodiment, and allows the posthuman subject to emerge as a hybrid entity.

We need to understand, however, that humanistic boundaries exist not only between the human subject and non-human others, but also within the humanist subject himself. Just as human nature and embodiment are cultural constructs, normative enmindedness and the humanist conception of self as autonomous, unitary, transcendent is a label we have attached to a particular version of subjectivity which is becoming increasingly obsolete, and needs to be updated. As indicated above, Ostry views representations of biotechnology and non-normative forms of embodiment in young adult science fiction as metaphors for posthumanist adolescence, arguing that that the blurring of boundaries between human and nonhuman entities provokes young readers to question the humanist conception of man as an exceptional being clearly distinct from other organic and inorganic entities. We contend that besides non-normative hybrid embodiments, non-normative forms of enmindedness such as autism can also serve as a metaphor for posthumanist adolescence. Both embodiment and enmindedness are pathways to an individual's sense of self.

Compared to embodiment, enmindedness has received much less critical attention (ibid). In young adult fiction, for instance, posthumanist explorations of subjectivity are generally mediated through (non-normative) or hybrid forms of embodiment such as cyborgs or clones. But there is also a great potential of exploring posthumanist ideas in non-normative forms of enmindedness specially autism. In the next section we look at the areas of overlap between autistic enmindedness and the posthumanist conception of subjectivity.

3. Parallels between Autistic Enmindedness and Posthuman Subjectivity

In "Humans, Aliens and Autism" Ian Hacking calls attention to the persistence of "the metaphor of the alien" in descriptions that autists and neurotypicals offer of each other. He argues that the reason behind this alien trope is that the mental structures through which each group relates to the world are dissimilar, and consequently they experience the world differently. According to Vygosky these structures are not innate, but are rather the effects of internalizing the sociolinguistic rules of communal life. Autists, Hacking suggests, do not go through this Vygoskian process, and consequently do not share mental structures common to neurotypicals.

One of these mental structures is what Hacking calls "the first person authority over awareness of our own emotional states" which constitutes part of the bedrock of a shared humanity among neurotypicals (55). Autists, however, do not automatically share the authority of the autonomous unitary transcendent I that anchors neurotypical experience. Their ways of being and acting in the world is more inclusive and interconnected, "without consciousness of self and other" (Milton 2). From the decentered perspective of the autist the world is a plane of immanence where it is not possible to distinguish one's self from other subjects or objects. As the autist writer, Iris Johansson puts it "there is no subject, no I […] My existence was inhabited by all things between heaven and earth—chairs, tables, plants, animals and humans—and I had to relate to everything equally" (qtd. in Bergenmar et al.). In Autistic enmindedness selfhood is not a pre-existent attribute of the individual; rather it is a kind of performance whereby the subject emerges as he/she interacts with the surrounding milieu. This view of subjectivity aligns with posthumanist agendas in its non-anthropocentric, non-identitarian, non-unitary, relational, performative nature. Like the posthuman subject, the autist's sense of self is irreducible to any permanent identity as it is constantly in the process of becoming.

4. Narrative Representations of Autistic Enmindedness

Until recently autistic experience has been mediated mostly through neurotypical perspective. However, with the advent of neurodiversity movement and the rising popularity of own-voices narratives, autistic people are beginning to feel more confident in writing about their experience, deconstructing not only inaccurate stereotypes that have sedimented around them over time, but also neurotypical naturalized assumptions about human(ist) subjectivity. Thanks to Foucault the traditional conception of man is revealed to be no more than "wrinkles in our knowledge" that will be flattened in the course of time, and eventually disappear as "as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (xxv). Non-normative autistic enmindedness, and the challenges it poses to the traditional humanistic subjectivity seems to be one of these new forms which is becoming

increasingly more conspicuous, as autistic people are in Haraway's words, "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" as they begin to narrate their experiences in their own voices (175).

However, the relation between autism and narrative is complicated. Osteen for instance argues that the autistic experience is unsuitable novelistic or autobiographical material in that the demands of narrative such as chronological form and linear momentum seem to violate the chaotic nature of the condition. Discussing autobiographies by autistic people, he notes that crafting a homogeneous consistent authorial narrative voice is difficult for these writers, as their experience is decentered from the unitary and autonomous I. Therefore, instead of speaking from behind an authoritative authorial mask as humanist autobiographers often do, they create their narrative voice from ramshackle assemblages of spare parts" by resorting to strategies of bricolage echolalia, and imitation (Osteen 28).

This kind of piecemeal narrative voice allows autists to estrange neurotypical readers from conventional humanistic conceptions of authorship and subjectivity. They function as posthuman subjects narratively; they revoke the assumptions of the /author/narrator's unity, self-coherence and autonomy by puncturing the authority and autonomy of conventional narrator/author, thus exemplifying a more inclusive mode of being/becoming. Autistic narrative voice, flows through the spaces that mark the boundaries of a humanist unified self, and opens it up to the plane of immanence, difference and relationality.

In the following section we look into Monje's novel where the autistic narrative voice gives an account of an alternative posthumanist adolescence whereby the subject emerges not as a unified autonomous identity as is the case in humanistic coming of age stories, but as a relational non-unitary and ever becoming posthuman subject.

5. Imaginary Friends Turned into Surrogate Cyborg Subjectivities

Nothing is Right and its sequel *Imaginary Friends* are semi-autobiographical stories about the childhood and early adolescence of the autistic writer Athena Lynn Michaels-Dillon (Michael Scott Monje). They were originally published on Monje's personal blog, and were later printed by Autonomous Press in book forms in 2012 and 2016 respectively. The story is narrated in third person point of view focalized through Clay, a boy with undiagnosed autism. Compared to first person narration, third person focalized point of view imparts a stronger sense of distance, and Monje uses the effect to give the reader a taste of autistic selfhood, which is regarded to be decentered and disintegrated from the unifying authority of an autonomous I. This unanchoring of narration from an authoritative first person narrator perfectly resonates with the posthumanist mode of thought.

This non-normative enmindedness of the narrator, however, confronts Monje with a hard challenge in terms of characterization: on the one hand the focalized character should be identifiable to the reader in order to be able to hook him in the narrative. On the other hand, coherence and continuity of identity – qualities that are conventionally used to make a character identifiable – are incongruous with the character's autistic enmindedness. Monje finds a way to get around the paradox: he borrows a large number of fictional characters from a range of genres – children and YA realistic and science fiction, comics, and even adult novels – and brings them into an intense intertextual conversation.

The resultant friction leaves behind bits and pieces of identities which Monje reassembles to create the character of Clay: an incoherent assortment of recognizable identities which invokes in the reader a mixed feeling of familiarity and detachment; a menagerie of disconnected images that he has to constantly remind himself to see as a distinct character. This patchwork quality of Clay's character makes him an unreliable narrator, whose account should be taken with a pinch of salt by the implied reader.

The novels follow a simple storyline: clay is a young boy with undiagnosed autism who tries to find a way to survive in the world of neurotypicals whom he barely understands. Although he is desperate for making friends, he has no sense of social rules for interaction and communication and has a tendency to lose his words when he tries to speak. Like Christopher Boone, the prototype autistic adolescent character, Clay is an agglomeration of stereotypes. Besides being nearly nonverbal, he does not make eye contact, dislikes being touched, is hypersensitive to loud noises or bright colors, and also has a savant like talent for reading.

The central tension in both novels is between Clay and Kitty, his bigot Catholic mother who treats him "as less than a person"; a piece of clay to be shaped into her desirable image of a normal child and devout Catholic (*Nothing is Right*).[1] Monje pictures the struggle between Clay and his mother in the textual world of stories. Kitty assigns certain stories and reading assignments to Clay and tries to force him into the mold of the identities she approves. But Clay's autistic self is too varied and fragmented to be moldable in that mold or any other fixed identity. As he reads the stories, he discovers the deconstructive power of difference inherent to the written text, sees through the illusory mastery that authors seem to feign over their characters and uses this revelation to create a receptacle that can take in the multiplicity and diversity of his self, and also allow him to function as an individual subject. This focus on reading and subsequently reading is maintained throughout *Nothing is Right* and also its sequel Imaginary Friends, and constitutes an important part of Clay's self-formation process. As we will shortly see, each stage of the process is signposted by a reading experience.

[1] The quotes from both novels are taken from kindle editions. Thus, it was not possible to provide page numbers.

As an autist Clay cannot rely on an autonomous first person authority to navigate him through various situations, so he has to create a surrogate subjectivity out of the fragments or spare parts of the identities of others in order to be able to function as an individual. This strategy has been applied by other autistic writers as well. As Osteen notes autistic autobiographers such as Temple Grandin and Donna Williams create their (authorial) identity "by appropriating others' identities and voices" (27). Grandin for instance "has cobbled together her identity from the remnants of others' and the residue of her own alter egos, including Alfred Costello (36, 77), an imaginary self who mocked her but whose voice she assumed, and Bisban, a mischievous character she borrowed from the Little Rascals films (35)". Similarly, Clay tries to create a surrogate subjectivity that allows him to reclaim his voice in what Monje calls an "Autocyborgography".

This surrogate subjectivity is represented in the character of Van, the imaginary cyborg soldier created by Clay in his early attempts in Writing. Initially Clay sees Van solely as a child of his imagination, an image of himself. Gradually, however, he begins to notice in him traces of identities other than his own; in Van Clay discerns interwoven shreds of the identities of real people and fictional characters; an assemblage of different and at times contesting voices that was not always under his control, as "he made a good number of his own choices".

Significantly, this realization dawns on Clay when he begins to share his stories with his friends, Aaron and Patrick. Clay notes that the image of Van changes in the course of their story telling sessions, as each boy constantly reassembles the cyborg in a new way, adding to or subtracting from him. With each alteration, new identities were brought to Van's disposal and the network of his relations expanded. Van's initial solid suit (which stands for the fixed identity forced upon Clay by the ableist society) is thus replaced bit by bit with "a mosaic of small shields, capable of bending and flexing as Clay needed. He could feel how seriously it had been improved, and that feeling made him confident". The mosaic of small shields metaphor clearly suggests the kind of cyborgian surrogate subjectivity that Clay is beginning to create for himself by assembling various real or fictive identities.

This cyborgian subjectivity, like those of Grandin and Williams is a patchwork comprised of bits and pieces of other subjects. Far from being a monolithic, coherent and unified entity, it is a dynamic assemblage of relations that at any given moment define his sense of self. Monje skillfully guides Clay (and the reader) through this process of creating a surrogate subjectivity by making them aware of being parts of an ever-changing assemblage of relations. Monje illustrates this process whereby Clay creates his surrogate cyborg subjectivity through four stages, each signposted by a particular reading experience.

a) First stage: blurring the boundary between the real and the imaginary

When we meet Clay for the first time in *Nothing is Right*, he is already an avid reader of *Calvin and Hobbes* comics. In this first stage Monje shows how Clay's fragmented psyche blurs the boundary between the real world of Calvin and the imaginary world in which the talking stuffed Hobbes resides. We as neurotypical readers have no difficulty in trusting Calvin as a unified autonomous subject who imagines Hobbes. We trust Calvin and rely on his ability to distinguish the real from the imaginary. We assume that Hobbes is in fact the stuffed bear.

This assumption is corroborated by Bill Watterson arrangement of the panels. The panels in which adults appear are meant to be real, and the panels from which adults are absent are imaginary. The live version of Hobbes does not appear in any of these "adult" panels, which means that he belongs to Calvin's imagination. But "adult" panels also contain characters such as Susie Derkins, or Moe the school bully whose ontological status is murky. As nick walker notes: "How do we know that Susie and Moe are any more "real" than the live version of Hobbes, in terms of having an existence outside of Calvin's imagination?" Thus in Clay's first reading experience Monje demonstrates how a non-normative enmindedness like Clay's can challenge naturalized binaries like the one between the real and the imaginary.

b) Second stage: Blurring the boundary between self and other

The second stage is marked by Clay's introduction to the world of more sophisticated fiction, such as *Ender's Game*, *Childhood's End* and *The Joy Luck Club*. In the characters of these books Clay recognizes aspects of his own self; parts that had been chipped off him in the process of being shaped into Clay. They also delineated to him" the workings of human interaction and communication – the dynamics that had been always confusing to Clay's autistic mind – and provided him with strategies to resist manipulations and intimidations to which he often found himself exposed. Clay admires the authors of these books both for their deep insight into the ways of the world and for their apparent undisputed control over the narrative and its meaning. He looks up to them as authoritative gods ruling over their textual territory.

c) Third stage: the alien within

In the third stage, however Clay's image of the author as a transcendent autonomous authoritative god is shattered. The experience of reading Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* reveals to him that authors cannot rise above the worlds they create, as the two of them are constituted out of the same essence. While his mother tries to draw a line between Lewis the author and Screwtape, the character, and insists that the ideas attributed to Screwtape should not be viewed as part of the authorial identity of Lewis, Clay thinks those ideas would not have been there unless they had occurred to the writer:

> One thing that seemed obvious to Clay, but that his mother seemed uninterested in discussing, was the fact that even if the things Screwtape said were not meant to be believed by the reader as true, they still had to occur to the writer. This truism, while obvious, opened new ideas up to Clay. For example, the fact that C.S. Lewis talks about the temptations Wormwood inflicted on his "patient" …, might mean that C.S. Lewis himself had thoughts that talked to him when he wished they would not.

Clay wonders why Lewis should decide to disown part of his self and ascribe it to a demon instead. The idea of a pre-textual Lewis, transcendent to and independent from the characters he created is incomprehensible to Clay, who as an autist is "without consciousness of self and other" and therefore cannot draw the line between the author and his textual creation. This idea is curiously analogous to the famous poststructuralist (and posthumanist) concept of the primacy of language in general and writing as the precondition for the existence of the subject. just as the notion of a Lewis apart from and transcendent to his textual creation is inconceivable to Clay, the idea of an autonomous, homogeneous subjectivity devoid of difference is untenable by the standards of poststructuralism and posthumanism, because the building blocks of both subjectivity and writing are the same primordial difference. As Rosi Braidotti succinctly puts it: "By acknowledging the constitutive presence of otherness within and all around the self, writing enacts the destitution of unitary visions of the subject as an autonomous entity" (165). Thus Clay's reading of *The Screwtape Letters*, marks an epiphanic moment in which the specious authority autonomy and homogeneity of meta-textual gods falls apart and Clay recognizes the alien nested within.

To a neurotypical reader who in terms of humanistic ideals is expected to build a unified conception of selfhood in accordance with standard identity positions, this inherently alien-infested notion of (authorial) self is not helpful. To an autist like Clay, however, whose fragmented self has always been scorned by the humanistic standards of autonomy, individuality and agentiality, this non-identitarian notion of self-inhabited by multiplicity and difference is highly inspiring, as it shows the possibility of a subjectivity beyond conventional humanistic framework.

d) Fourth stage: surrogate cyborg subjectivity

By the fourth stage, Clay is equipped with necessary tools to take the final step. He is now aware of the primacy and primordiality of difference as the constitutive essence of his sense of self. This awareness is brought about through his engagement with the textual world. As an autist with a fragmented sense of self, Clay cannot anchor himself in the fixed identity positon of the implied reader imposed by the spurious authority of the logos. Instead, he reads nomadically constantly changing his perspective, occupying

different subject positions and appropriating various identities. This practice of nomadic reading in the textual world prepares him to rise to the authorial position in the real world. It enables him to create a surrogate cyborg subjectivity by opening up to the flows of difference and multiplicity, and emerge as a posthuman subject.

This stage culminates in the creation of Van, the cyborg, as an embodiment of Clay's new subjectivity. While in Clay's earlier writings Van was just an imaginary friend, a figment of his imagination, his quest in the world of words, teaches him that the boundaries between the imaginary world of stories and the real world can be blurred to let the power of difference inherent in realm of textuality flow through the real world. Clay is aware of the significance of this for marginalized people, like himself who can make use of this intense power to deconstruct identity positions constructed by the ableist society and imposed on non-normative bodies and minds.

In *Imaginary Friends*, Monje portrays Clay in authorial role as he voices his enmindedness through the character of Van, who is now more than a simple imaginary friend. He has metamorphosed into a surrogate cyborg subjectivity, a kind of armor that protects Clay from the manipulations of those who try to curb him in the mold of an impaired abnormal identity. Monje expresses this idea near the end of Imaginary Friends: "Van was something different from an imaginary friend to Clay, because he was a cyborg, and he made a good number of his own choices. Still, he might be an imaginary friend to Patrick or to Aaron. To Clay, though, Van would always be a suit to wear or a profession he could embody". A suit or an armor that protects him paradoxically by exposing him to the flows of multiplicity and difference, allowing him to become a nomadic subject: "a multiple, open-ended and interconnected identity that occupies a variety of possible subject positions, at different places (spatially) and at different times (temporally), across a multiplicity of constructions of self (relationality)" (Roets 168). Roets and Braidotti demonstrate how this notion of subjectivity "transforms and reconfigures the self in a politicised and anti-essentialist way", and thus highlight the significance of this nomadic posthuman mode of subjectivity for impaired bodies and minds who are labeled as "other" in exclusionary humanistic subjectivity politics (ibid).

6. Conclusion

Monje's account of the process whereby Clay as an autist on the verge of adolescence creates a surrogate subjectivity has remarkable parallels with the posthumanist conception of adolescence as "opening up of the self to a powerful form of ambiguity" whereby the ontological core of the (humanist) subject is punctured and boundaries between self and other are blurred. As noted in the introduction, posthumanist conception of adolescence is more often expressed in speculative genres such as science fiction. However, Monje's deep insight into autistic enmindedness has enabled him to

see in autism an appropriate ground to cultivate a posthumanist notion of adolescence and subjectivity. In the humanistic framework, Clay is an abnormal impaired child who possibly fails to realize the objectives of adolescence in terms of creating a unified homogeneous notion of self. Monje, however provides the reader with a new perspective from which Clay's autistic enmindedness is not an obstacle in the process of coming to age, but an asset as it facilitates the process of his emergence as a relational subject.

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