CREATIVE WRITING AND SCIENCE FICTION

Škomrlj, Jakov Andro

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2023

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split / Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:172:455291

Rights / Prava: In copyright/Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-02-09**

Repository / Repozitorij:

Repository of Faculty of humanities and social sciences

Sveučilište u Splitu

Filozofski fakultet

Odsjek za Engleski jezik i književnost

Jakov Škomrlj

Znanstvena fantastika i Kreativno pisanje

Diplomski rad

Split, 2023.

University of Split

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

Science Fiction and Creative Writing

MA Thesis

Student: Mentor:

Jakov Andro Škomrlj   Dr Simon John Ryle, Asst. Prof.

Split, 2023

Table of contents:

1. Thesis introduction

In this thesis, there are five short stories that fall within the domain of science fiction: *Wake the Poets, Robot Hand is the Future, Breaking Glass, Standing In*, and *Cut!*. All five stories contain some of the similar science fiction tropes or inversion of latter, but also stand on their own as self-contained, able to be read separately from each other. Throughout the introduction, there will be a discussion of genre, subgenre and topics that the stories are concerned with.

The first thing in discussing a piece of genre literature is establishing the genre and its aspects. As a genre, science fiction is a wide term, but it is generally acknowledged that there are two main categories: hard science fiction and soft science fiction. According to *Mammoth encyclopedia of science fiction*, hard science fiction is a "term used to define a particular subgenre of science fiction that has its basis in real scientific fact and extrapolation" (Mann, 1999; 488). It is the type of science fiction that:

"adopts the scientific spirit and looks for a natural, rather than supernatural, solution to a problem can be classified hard science fiction. This is not to say that devices such as teleportation and time travel will not feature in works of hard science fiction, it is simply that all scientific pathways will be explored to find an explanation, and that extrapolated concepts will be based in real theory" (Mann, 1999; 488).

Soft science fiction, on the other hand, is:

"a very ambiguous term, which is generally accepted to refer to science fiction that makes use of the 'softer' sciences such as psychology and sociology…it usually entails a more literary or character-driven approach; the scientific aspects of the story may not be fully worked out. Perhaps, this is part of the influence of the New Wave movement which took place during the 1960s, in which a cross-fertilization with the main stream led to the adoption in SF of many of the more mainstream concerns" (Mann, 1999; 509).

While the stories in the thesis do contain concepts that have basis in "scientific fact and extrapolation", such as cloning, cyber neurotics and artificial intelligence, those aspects are not elaborated nor explained – at no point, for example, is the titular hand from *Robot Hand is the Future* described in detail except that it functions like a human hand – the scientific elements of the stories are more concerned with psychological and sociological aspects: for example, how would the person who has an artificial hand live with the new hand, and the what would the impact of the titular hand be, or, in *Cut!*, how would the film industry operate if famous actors were replaced with their lookalike androids and how would an ambitious film director function, both business-wise and psychologically, in that world.

Another two terms are related to soft science fiction: literary science fiction and humanist science fiction. Humanist science fiction concentrates "on emotional, psychological and sociological implications and focus less on scientific aspects of a story and more on personal or interpersonal conflicts which arise" (Mann, 1999; 490). Literary science fiction, in addition to character, focuses on style; "it will usually follow the progress of one particular character or protagonist, developing their emotional involvement with the plot and examining the implications of their, or other people's, actions on a very personal level" (Mann, 1999; 491). Both of these terms, in relation to soft science fiction, can also be used to described the stories in the thesis.

As an example of literary science fiction, which is focused on style, there are numerous sentences, paragraphs and passages that do not only aim to present information to reader, but also aim to present the information in an unconventional or non-formal way.

An example of literary science fiction can be found in the works of Stanislaw Lem, and the story *Trurls' electrical bard* (from the short story collection *The Cyberiad*):

"Trurl never left his house…except for a few trips to the hospital and an unimportant excursion to some asteroid. Yet in a deeper and/or higher sense this was one of the farthest sallies ever undertaken by the famed constructor, for it very nearly took him beyond the realm of possibility." (Lem, 1965; 120)

Two more examples of literary science fiction can be found in *Wake the Poets*, first of the five stories:

"…only time when he would not clap was when a computopoet (his own name for those) took the stage. Then he would almost boo. As mentioned before, he was conservative and every computopoet was to him a contributor to cultural carnage. To be a computopoet, one had an easy condition to fulfill – all they had to do was to put a chip in their head…" and "...his ten pencils (eight of them broken) and three typewriters (two of them smashed into the same wall) gave birth to no poem in last five years…".

In both examples, an information about character or situation is presented in a manner that says more than an explicit, word-for-word information would. The example of Lem's story shows how the titular character lives and where he lives by providing information and usage of whimsical prose; an asteroid is mentioned, which informs the reader of character being somewhere in space and able to travel, and his psychological state and interests are presented: he does not like to travel and is more focused on introspection. The two examples from *Wake the Poets* serve to present situation and character in another way. In the first example, the reader is introduced to the existence of "computopoets" and the protagonists' opinion about them:

"contributors to cultural carnage". Alliteration is used to show protagonist's strong opinion about other people and to present his state of mind, for he is a writer himself. Another example describes the "tools" the protagonist uses, and by the additional explanations in parentheses, eight broken pencils and two typewriters smashed in the same wall, protagonist's state of frustration is presented. Another example of style can be noted in the term "gave birth to no poem" – a personification that is used due to the fact that the protagonist sees his art as a living entity.

An example of humanist science fiction can be found in works of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. his novels often explore the psychological side of its protagonists and their reaction to world around them and events in their lives – in *Slaughterhouse Five* the reader follows Billy Pilgrim, who survives Dresden bombing and tries to make sense of it afterwards, among other themes.

An example of humanist science fiction in the stories can be seen in numerous descriptions of the states the protagonists are in. One of these examples can be found in *Robot Hand is the Future:*

"Oliver felt strong inability to smile. To be fair though, he did not try very hard. Actually, he tried nothing - he simply continued to lie on his bed and when they released him from the hospital he just sat on his chair and read. What he read were the old reviews of his concerts. And the reading went for hours, every day."

The whole paragraph is focused on the state Oliver, the protagonist of the story, is in. His lack of happiness is expressed by not even feeling the need or wish to smile, and his lack of energy by not doing anything except laying down or sitting down. Also, his sadness for the past is shown by him reading old reviews for hours.

The genre of science fiction is more complicated than before, and it is recently described as speculative fiction. Once concerned with the ideas such as existence of aliens and advancements of technology, it is now more elaborate, exploring ideas more related to race, gender, cultural identity and other topics that were not common nor discussed in significant amount. The stories in the thesis can also be categorised as speculative fiction because, "it is more about today than tomorrow, imagines futures based on scientific and technological advances that are not extrapolations from the present" (Ghiglione, 2010; 140).

There are four overlapping and interwoven elements are necessary for pedagogical use of the speculative SF genre:

1. Deep description of the science content or technologies that were plausible or accurate to the time period.

2. The novum: A plausible innovation as a key element in the speculation.

3. Big Picture: Exploration of the impact on society and humanity.

4. Nature of Science: Science and technology as human endeavors. (Svec, Winiski, 2013; 38, cited in Dinis, 2021; 228)

These four aspects act as another reference point for the thesis, because they are related to science fiction in a sense that it provides it an additional, broader, perspective and understanding of science fiction as a genre.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration while reading science fiction stories is that they always take place in a universe within an alternative reality. Numerous terms and definitions are used to describe world building, and the world building terms mentioned here are most appropriate for the stories in the thesis. There are some variables within the realities and the way they are established. In "Building Science-Fiction Worlds" (Bertetti, 2017), numerous solutions and explanations are provided. He uses a basis from Umberto Eco, with several types of worlds:

1) metachronia or metatopia - "a possible world representing a future phase of the world as we have it here and now"
2) allotopia - where the world is really different from the Actual World, as is the case with fantasy worlds where wizards and fairies exist
3) the utopias - the possible world exists somewhere, parallel with our own but normally inaccessible to us; "usually—Eco goes on to say—it constitutes a model of the way our real world ought to be"
4) uchronias - the parallel world is based on a "what if" clause (Eco, 1984; 1257, cited in Bertetti, 2017; 51)

Every story contained in the thesis belongs to the category of metachronia or metatopia, since they are inspired by existing events (cloning, usage of artificial intelligence, bionic body parts, implants). According to Bertetti, a "possible world is a set of individuals (i.e. recognizable entities: characters as well as places and objects, etc.) singled out as bundles of properties (i.e. physical qualities, relations, actions performed, etc.)" (Bertetti, 2017; 48). However, the term of metachronia and metatopia is relatively broad, and there are more degrees to metachronia/metatopia and how do the worlds differ. In science fiction world building we can redefine the *novum* – a term by Darko Suvin which means novelty or innovation - as the whole

set of properties that distinguish the possible world of the story from the Actual World of reference (Bertetti, 2017; 53). There are three degrees of the worlds' structure presented in the stories:

1) Initially, the Fictional World is structurally similar (compatible) with the Actual World; then "something" happens that changes the world defining relation.

2) The Fictional World is structurally different from the beginning, but this difference is not immediately clear to the viewer or reader due to an information delay and a strategy of gradual revelation of novum. This creates a state of ambiguity that continues until an explicit science-fictional element awakens the reader or viewer and makes her reinterpret the information already received from this new perspective.

3) The Fictional World is structurally different from the beginning and the difference is immediately made explicit thanks to information unrelated to an Actual World encyclopedia (Volli, 1980; 121, cited in Bertetti, 2017; 55)

Out of the three categories mentioned above, the second category is most applicable to the stories; *Wake the Poets* makes a reference to an existing song, *Sound of Silence*, but the *novum* of "computopoets" is introduced. *Cut*! makes a reference to real-world business systems and people, such as Hollywood, Alfred Hitchcock and Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Robot Hand is the Future* and *Breaking Glass* do not present any hints that those worlds are different from the one we live in aside from unordinary events – having bodily modifications - that the protagonists experience and *Standing In* presents a world whose protagonist's name is Dustin Paniro, an amalgam of Dustin Hoffman, Robert de Niro and Al Pacino. To sum up, every world the stories are set in is a subtle variation of the real one. Except in *Wake the Poets*, there are no elaborate concepts or neologisms that are found in the science fiction genre, and the reader can easily understand what are the rules set in the stories' worlds since they are based on the world we live in, with small variations, and since the *novum* is introduced early in the stories. The state of the worlds presented in the stories serves as commentary on the very possible progress in science. The worlds the stories are set in try to present how would the lives of people engaged with art look like, how would the production of art look like, and how the body of an artist would be after the interference of technology and science.

The main themes that could be found throughout the stories is cybernetics, disability (studies) and posthumanism.

Regarding cybernetics, each of the stories contains a cybernetic element - modification of human body. There are different combinations of humans and non-human elements, categorized by Sidney Perkowitz as automations, robots, androids, cyborgs and bionic humans (Perkowitz,

2004; 5, cited in S. Haney II, 2006; 22). Four out of five stories – *Breaking Glass*, *Wake the Poets*, *Robot Hand is the Future* and *Standing In* - contain bionic humans. Bionic humans are described as mainly human with implants or replacements such as artificial limbs and organs or a pacemaker (Perkowitz, 2004; 5, cited in S. Haney II, 2006; 20). The last story, *Cut!*, contains androids. Android, on the other hand, is a machine that is entirely artificial but looks human (Perkowitz, 2004; 5, cited in S. Haney II, 2006; 21). The characters in the stories have various motifs to either modify themselves (*Robot Hand is the Future, Breaking Glass*) or counter the modification of other people or existence of modification (*Wake the Poets, Cut!*).

The term of disability in the stories is directly related to cybernetic elements. All of the protagonists can be described as people with disabilities, in numerous ways, and how cybernetics affect the disability as such. To define disability, one must know that

"key to a system of ableism are two elements: the concept of the normative (and the normal individual); and the enforcement of a divide between a "perfected" or developed humanity and the aberrant, unthinkable, underdeveloped, and therefore not really human." (Kumari, 2015; 50).

All the characters deviate from the norm – the protagonists of *Robot Hand is the Future, Breaking Glass, Standing in* and *Wake the Poets* have attributes that make them a minority, while the protagonist of *Cut!* has a disability of functioning in the world like he would want to. The protagonists of the stories are divided via anatomy. In *Robot Hand is the Future and Breaking Glass,* protagonists have bodies that are modified by prosthetics, while the main character of *Wake the Poets* opposes the idea of prosthetics. Prosthetics are defined as "broad category of assistive devices that people use to support what they want to do. Assistive devices, in general, enhance such capacities as mobility and agility, sensory apprehension, communication, and cognitive action." (Ott, 2015; 397). The prosthetics present in the stories mostly have a functional role – to make the disability less impactful to the lives of characters – and they are presented as integrated body parts, ranging from limbs and vocal cords to neurons. Every character is presented with a "new vocabulary of human motion" (Berressem, 2017; 33). The prosthetics that are introduced to the character's lives are source of confusion – *Robot Hand is the future, Breaking Glass* – since it presents a new manner in which parts of their bodies function. In *Wake the Poets*, a person without any implants, that is completely human biologically and psychologically-wise, is a minority and disabled, since his mind is supposed to have a less intense function than that of a computopoets'. It is also important that "in sociology, psychology, and anthropology, a prosthesis can function as a social symbol and a political allegory for one's self." (Ott, 2015; 401). The prosthetics in *Wake the Poets* serve as a

commentary of state of literature that is in the world, while *Breaking Glass* presents voice that is too hard to control – a malformation that occurs when an alien element (an implant) is introduced to a trained skill (singing and voice managing). As stated above, one aspect can be noticed that counters a used trope of "the romance of the cyborg in the popular imagination that is exemplified by a disabled or typically abled body that can become super abled when engineered with superpowers that enhance human potential" (Ott, 2015; 402). While prosthetics help the characters cope with their disabilities, they do not instantly overcome their adversities, nor they are presented as having an enhanced human potential that is romanticized, since every prosthetic comes with a disadvantage and requires time to become a regular part of the body. Important aspect about disability studies is that "they ask questions about the role of prosthetic technology not only in relation to design and function but also in relation to disability rights, political autonomy, and cultural citizenship" (Ott, 2015; 403). The last term, cultural citizenship, is explored in the stories. Since all protagonists are related to various fields of art, their role as an artist is brought into question – most noticeably by themselves – due to the modifications that happened to their bodies and psychological change they went through. A thing that is important to bear in mind while talking about disability is that "Ableism and disablism feed off each other; they are co-terminous. This is because disability cannot exist without ability" (Goodley, 2018; 7). We know the characters are disabled because they are contrasted to other people – the protagonist of *Wake the Poets* – or to version of their past selves (the violin player in *Robot Hand is the Future*).

Posthumanism is also related to cybernetics and bodily modification, and how that modification affects the character or society. In "Seeing Like a Cyborg?, The Innocence of Posthuman Knowledge", Paul Rekret states that:

 "posthumanist theorizing tends to forego a thorough accounting of the material conditions for the emergence of the symbolic dualisms (nature/culture, mental/material, mind/body, human/technological) of modernity in the first place" (Rekret, 2019; 84), and that it is "undeniable that technological developments, whether frozen embryos, the coding of DNA, or the manipulation of biological processes at the level of molecular fragments, erode or undermine boundaries between what is natural and what is artificial" (Rekret, 2019; 86).

However, humanity of the protagonists in the stories (and even of the clones in *Standing In*) seems to be intact. They are faced with the something that is either alien, new or unwanted to them, but they do not lose their individuality. The protagonists of *Wake the Poets* and *Cut!* Face the negative posthuman elements and overcome them, whereas the protagonists of *Robot Hand*

is the Future, *Breaking Glass,* and *Standing In* question their own physical and psychological abilities rather than unnatural aspect of their bodily modifications. According to Robert Cowley "Posthumanism as performing three inter-related roles:

1) it draws on and reverberates with an existing, dispiriting story relating to the end of modernity
2) it reframes this story in optimistic terms;
3) it thereby offers the prospect of a hopeful way forwards" (Cowley, 2019; 96)

Third point can be applied to the three latter stories. The protagonists do not see bodily modifications as unnatural because it is means to continue to pursuit their work and passion rather than changing their own personality. Even if it does change them, it affects the question of self-confidence more than the question of naturality. As stated by Eric Carl Link, "whatever else they may be interested in— war, politics, economics— science fiction authors have used their writing to explore what it means to be human", (Carl Link, 2013; 2) and the humanity of the characters is explored through their feelings. The third point, "prospect of a hopeful way forwards" is confirmed by the ending of all three stories: "In science fiction, the absence of disability is frequently used as a straightforward indicator of a more advanced society, one where the 'problem' of disability (conceived in biomedical terms) has been solved by techno-scientific progress" (Cheyne, 2019; 92). The protagonists in *Breaking Glass* and *Robot Hand is the Future* find solution to their disabilities early on, and learn to live with them without big obstructions and effect on the quality of their life. The disabilities are not one hundred percent solved, because no big life-defining trauma can be solved easily – such as losing an arm in *Robot Hand is the Future*, but the characters are still living the way they want to.

However, the other two stories, despite having relatively positive endings and set in not-so-different worlds, have more cynical setting and posthumanism can be seen through different lens. The protagonists of *Cut!* And *Wake the Poets* are "characters, in contrast, that have a stronger moral compass than others in the society" (Dinis, 2021; 223). Both the poet and the director live in society where theirs, in a sense old fashioned, model of creativity is either not supported or discouraged, but they try to fight it, and win in the end. Both settings can be seen as dystopian – although not to an extent as big as in, for example *1984*. Dystopias are described as "oppressive societies, either because of the tyranny of the 'perfect' system over the will of the individual, or because of the difficulty of stopping individuals or elites from imposing

authority over the majority, or, indeed, over minorities" (Edward, 2003; 220). While both artists are strong willed, the world in which the film director lives is more oppressive than the one in *Wake the Poets* – there is no way for him to creatively express himself except if he heavily subverts the rules he is working under and tries to go to the furthest extent, and even after his success he is still disrespected by film producers – a case of majority (artists) being disallowed by their producers (minority). This version of posthumanism provides a capitalist interpretation, inspired by Rodolfo Kusch: "Western culture that defines subject who has an impact on the world and modifies it. This is epitomized in two ways: in the invasion of this world and in the creation of a new one" (King and Page, 2019; 33). While the director wants to make an impact by creating works of art, he does not want financial profit. However, the system in which he works is intensely western and capital-oriented. He works in Hollywood and is constrained by contracts and money and is not allowed to use aspects of another culture: when he wants an android of a European actor, he is quickly denied his request. In order to succeed and come out as a "winner", he has to literally make an army of androids and use violence to "overthrow" (invade) the existing ruling class, and create new system later. However, the new system is de-westernized by making the big Hollywood studios inexistent and granting the artists creative freedom they want.

Wake the Poets is the story that presents society that is not as oppressive as in *Cut!*, but oppressive nevertheless. The protagonist lives in the world where rich people can implant their brains and have enhanced brain functioning, resulting in wider vocabulary. As said before, the protagonist actively opposes the poets who use their implants and comes victorious in the end. The theme of the story, aside from the protagonist's interests and conflicts, is neurological enhancement, and morality of it, in numerous aspects:

"A final risk for society arising from neuronal interfaces that may need further discussion is that they may actually increase inequality. Indeed, whilst such interfaces may bring certain benefits to individuals, they may also accentuate a competitive and individualistic success culture, which may be detrimental to the cohesion of a fair and descent society within which everyone can flourish. Moreover, at least initially, it is likely that the appliances may only be available to those who are willing and able to pay" (MacKellar, 2019; 104).

The *computopoets* in the story are competitive indeed, without regard for others or the real product of their creativity, they are instead focused on reception of their work and themselves, even if it is short term. The inequality is evident in that they are the majority in competitions, not only because of their own intention, but because of the other people's insecurity, as seen with the protagonist.

2. Comparison with other authors and analysis of motifs

The two authors chosen for the comparison with the thesis stories are Stanislaw Lem and Kurt Vonnegut Jr., since they were two main explicit influences on the creation of the stories, despite they are not the first authors that come to mind while discussing disability studies or posthumanism. The main subject of the comparison is the theme of human nature/how characters function, writing style, use of humor and science fiction elements in the stories. This section will analyze certain aspects story by story, and by mentioning similar points the other artists have in other stories.

There are numerous motifs that Stanislaw Lem used in his writings. The first motif that will be discussed and explored is that of existence cyborgs and technology. The motif is so prominent that one of his works is even named the _Cyberiad_ (1965). The stories in the collection, containing elements which could be categorised as fable-like in a certain sense (containing dragons, quests, kings, princesses etc.) are concerned with characters who are almost exclusively robots or machines. A story in the collection, titled _Trurl's electronic bard_, could be paralleled with _Wake the Poets_, despite the different setting – _Wake the Poets_ is set in a reality not quite different from our own while Lem's story is fantasy in addition to science fiction. Both are concerned with poetry and production of poetry that is made by non-human element. A passage from the beginning of the story explains the making of the machine:

"First Trurl collected eight hundred and twenty tons of books on cybernetics and twelve thousand tons of the finest poetry, then sat down to read it all. Whenever he felt he just couldn't take another chart or equation, he would switch over to verse, and vice versa." (Lem, 1965, 23)

The first aspect that is common to both stories is that poetry is stored – Lem's protagonist uses a machine while _Wake the Poets_ contains an implant and is more grounded, as characters can store more limited amount of poetry, and that amount is dictated by wealth the people who write the poems have. Another similarity could be seen in the last four words: a wordplay. 'Verse' and "vice versa' are used to make a comical effect by phonological similarity. In _Wake the Poets_, there is a big amount of wordplay on the word 'mind' – since the implants are placed in the mind, the phrases which contain it are used quite often in the sentences, for example:

"When people thought of the word conservative, someone like Ornie could and could not come to mind, at the same time. Worldview of his contained tolerance and open-mindedness…",

"…those lyrics crossed his mind while he went home…" and *"…but he didn't mind it and it didn't put a stopped to his process…"*

Another variation on the motif of cybernetics is that of the poet in *Trurl's electrical bard* is a machine, while the characters in *Wake the Poets* are human beings, but they are reduced to machines. Both stories present a battle: Trurl's machine produces poems to 'fight' the various poets who challenge it, categorized as true poets, classicists and third-rate poets. Some of the poets even use violence by hurting both the machine and Trurl, who ends up in a hospital. The 'battle' can even be seen in usage of phrases, such as:

"fatal urge to cross lyrical swords" and "true poets, on the other hand, were decimated by Trurl's electrical bard" (Lem, 1965; 29)

Ornie Phillips, is also in a battle, which is however led only by words, but there are still certain phrases to be found that express Ornie's feelings about the computopoets: he calls their activity a "cultural carnage".

While both stories do contain elements of literary science fiction, Lem's description offers a detailed functioning of the machine: "There was a fierce banging and clanging, the sputtering of shorted wires and the muttering of an even shorter temper", whereas *Wake the Poets* is not concerned in descriptions and details of implants, except the bare essential. Another similarity that the stories have are neologisms: there is an obvious similarity between the words "electropoet" and "computopoet".

Another important motif throughout *Cyberiad* is usage of fable-like elements that are already mentioned. An element found in the thesis stories are concerned references to mythological texts or texts from sacred books. *Wake the Poets* draws a parallel with the story of Orpheus, the first aspect is the obvious name of the protagonist, ORnie PHIlipS. Both are poets and both make a person who is more important – Hades and the book editor - cry when he presents his art to them. Another element of Orpheus story is looking back; Orpheus lost his love by looking back, and Ornie will not do the same thing, as the last sentence of the story reads "while moving forward, without looking back". The last element that is similar to the Orpheus myth is Cerberus - instead of a beast, there are three computopoets that are in front of the building which Ornie enters, and manages to make an effect on them by reciting his poetry. Another example of reference to mythology is the story *Breaking Glass*, where a character is like a siren, having a beautiful voice that seduces others (an opera singer). The surname of the character is Aetos, Greek for "eagle". In Greek mythology, the sirens were half-women, half-birds. Eagle is chosen

because it represents strength, and Meri Aetos shows her strength by not only having a overly strong voice, but also by ability to control it. In *Cut*!, the film director is in a David-versus-Goliath situation, as he continuously struggles against people who have more power than himself – film producers – but manages to 'defeat' them by usage of his intelligence and wit.

Another story that has a theme explored in the five stories is Kurt Vonnegut's *Harrison Bergeron* (1961) – to put it better, an inversion of the themes. Harrison Bergeron is set in the world where people are intentionally disabled, but disabled nevertheless. In the dystopian story, the individuals who are above-average are forcefully made under-average:

"…and George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains." (Vonnegut, 1998, 857)

The way the society functions is that disability is the norm rather than the deviation, and the stories in the thesis present an opposite setup: every character's body deviates from the norm because of their disability. The societies in the stories are not dystopian, even the most dystopian one in *Cut*!, as the one in *Harrison Bergeron*, where "…George was toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped" (Vonnegut, 1998, 857), and other people who showcase any form of talent or above-average trait are disabled, ranging from the titular character to television dancers.

Apart, from having disability in their everyday lives, the members of the society are used to it:

"George weighed the bag with his hands. "I don't mind it," he said. "I don't notice it any more. It's just a part of me."" (Vonnegut, 1998, 858)

That aspect is one that is similar to the one with the stories – by the end of the stories which contain disabilities, all characters are familiar with their new parts of, or, bodies (the characters in *Standing In*), and manage to live their lives without obstruction. To sum up, while the theme of disability is prominent in both stories, Vonnegut's story uses bodily modifications as means to degrade the members of society, and the people who have bodily modifications in *Robot Hand is the Future*, *Standing In,* and *Breaking Glass* have bodily modifications that serve as their return to normal existence.

A trait that can be found in Vonnegut's story, and throughout his opus, is a sense for dark or absurd humor. While the setup of the story is bleak and dark, he still manages to infuse a

sometimes hyperbolic of humor into his stories, such as the description of titular character's disability:

"…and to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random…" and "He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor, the god of thunder" (Vonnegut, 1998, 860)

The story ends with the death of titular characters and his parents' quickly forgetting his fate. The use of humor is of another correlation to the five stories – there are exaggerated events that are darkly humorous, such as the tinnitus that the Breaking Glass protagonists' voice causes, the overly theatrical behavior of one of the clones in *Standing In* or the destruction of film studios and killings of the producer by the androids who are modelled after famous action movie stars. However, a contrast between the stories are the endings. Numerous Vonnegut novels or stories ended on a pessimistic note – the main character's suicide in *Mother Night*, the despair of Kilgore Trout in *Breakfast of Champions* or (although not chronologically ending) the death of Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse Five*. The stories in the thesis are not pessimistic and rather hopeful, with every single one ending on a positive note – to varying degrees – and present a future that helps the individual rather than oppresses them.

A motif seen in both stories described in this part of analysis is art – art forms of poetry and dance are present in *Trurl's electrical bard* and in *Harrison Bergeron*. A motif of art is interesting in the concept of science fiction because art is often perceived as something opposite to science. However, both stories have different approach to usage art. The poetry machine knows how to write poetry because of the manner of its construction and detailed description of its creation, while the dancers are described as simply made unable to move as graciously as they usually could due to the weight added to their bodies. The art in the thesis stories is more similar, in terms of description, to Vonnegut story, where it serves to comment on the characters state or situation they are in, rather than explaining and detailing the function of scientific elements.

The last correlation to Vonnegut lies within the fact that both his story and the stories in the theses are concerned with humans. Even though there are implants and cybernetic modifications, all of the characters contain traits specific to humans. The characters express their emotions by crying and addressing their desires, show their opinions and insecurities.

Every story in the thesis ends with the human prevailing over the machine, showing that elements of humanity cannot ever be erased.

In addition to motifs described above, the stories build upon themes of the authors mentioned by using more grounded settings. Lem and Vonnegut set their stories in worlds that cannot be pictured as being our own, despite some similarities and mentioning familiar concepts and images, such as poetry and Thor. The stories of the thesis make references to existing music, people and are concerned with present problems. The sheep was already cloned in 1997, so cloning of a human being is not as unreal as it seems. People use implants in their brains and artificial intelligence is used to replace human beings, as seen in the case of Hollywood studios wanting to replace the screenwriters by usage of ChatGPT and/or other programs. To put it simply, the stories in the thesis differ from the analyzed one in the sense that thesis stories are more grounded in reality and conceive an easier imaginable world.

To conclude, the elements and motifs that analyzed form the stories by Lem and Vonnegut are cybernetics, dystopias and anti-utopias, science fiction elements and perception of humanity. In addition to those eminent themes, theme of disability is analyzed through Harrison Bergeron and its comparison to the stories in the thesis. Element of posthumanism is another addition, since neither Lem nor Vonnegut are initially related to their respective works. The main aspect of the five stories is that they can be related to some of the concepts and motifs in the two short stories, but the concepts are either varied, inverted, or built upon in some sense.

3. 1. Wake the Poets

Ornie Philips was a man who loved using his vocabulary and words, and he was quite admired for it. He was also unhappy. The world, he lived in, although he lived on the same planet as every other human being, had him hailed as a superstar - once. He never liked the glamour (in a literary world, glamour was quite broad term), but it did flatter him. In the age of what some scholars called New Poetry, Ornie was one of the last of his kind. And that was the exact reason why his editor was tight on the ropes.

When people thought of the word conservative, someone like Ornie could and could not come to mind, at the same time. Worldview of his contained tolerance and open-mindedness – it was his firm belief that being an artist also means being a good, tolerant human being – but his intellectual instruments were straight out of 1950s. Just one glance of a laptop, computer, or other digital enhancement made him cry and rage almost equally. However, despite his instruments he was unproductive. His ten pencils (eight of them broken) and three typewriters (two of them smashed into the same wall) gave birth to no poem in last five years. Luckily, he was a university professor (the youngest ever at University of Wordspound) so he had a steady income.

Even though his own words could not conceptualize or materialize for quite some time, his passion remained intact. He visited many literary poetry events whenever they were held, in the city that held him in high regard. No matter what the poem was, he would clap after its recital was finished. Only time when he would not clap was when a computopoet (his own name for those) took the stage. Then he would almost boo. As mentioned before, he was conservative and every computopoet was to him a contributor to cultural carnage. To be a computopoet, one had a small condition to fulfill – all they had to do was to put a chip in their head. That chip made people remember or even store a large number of poems in their memory - the average poem limit was 50 collections – and a rhyme base. You know, when you have a rhyme dictionary in your head, but without necessarily being well read. However, another condition was that to become a computopoet, you have to be moderately rich. There were some variations to how many poems one could store in his or her head – there were three degrees of storing the collections. Of course, for even the smallest degree one needed to have enough money to pay five college scholarships without taking a student loan Ornie, on the other hand, could recite approximately 20 collections by heart, and he would try to learn a new rhyme every they he

breathed. Another thing he held in contempt were the pills. Most computopoets would hand the pills to the audience during the recital. Some of the pills could induce tears, happiness, marvel etc. The computopoets would mostly combine tear pills with sad poems, and smile pills with happy poems. The experiment-oriented ones would combine tear pills with happy poems, and smile pills with sad poems. Those had an ounce of respect from Ornie, for a second, and then he would start despising the practice again. That night, Ornie clapped five times. The event lasted four hours.

"In restless dreams I walked alone, narrow streets of cobblestone….", those lyrics crossed his mind while he went home. a bit ironic, as streets of cobblestone were thing of the past. Since he missed those types of streets, a lot of free time he spent was dedicated to watching documentaries or old archive footage. He loved to watch them with the sound turned off, trying to think of how the images could be described, in a poetic way form. The screen he watched that footage on was the only novel piece of software he had in his apartment. A few decades before there was a square shaped television in his apartment, but it died and went extinct. The couch which he sat on belonged to his great-great-great-grandmother. Her taste was great, too. Related to taste, the only food Ornie liked was waffles. He collected old books and kept them in as good condition as he could

Ornie woke up – he fell asleep randomly after arriving home. It would often happen to him, since he often felt tired. Tired from everything. As he was switching from dream state to waking life he saw an archival recording on his screen which showed a man dressed like Tom Waits setting himself on fire. However, it was an accidental inflammation. While Tom's doppelganger was in unwanted, firm hug of flames, Ornie stared silently with a stone face. That recording urged him to move, finally.

"That's it. I'm gonna write anything that comes to mind. It can be a pie recipe, instruction manual or a doctor's order. Only thing it has to do is to rhyme", He said that out loud, and he did mean it.

First thing that he grabbed was the pencil. If rage takes control over him, he thought, it's better to break a pencil rather than a typewriter. He did not break the pencil, however. The second he took the pencil in his hand, he sneezed loudly. He sneezed so hard that the paper on his desk, that was waiting to be filled, was destroyed by saliva. Luckily, Ornie had quite a number of papers. He took another paper, took the pen, pressed it against the paper and…AH-TCHOO! The sneeze again. He took another paper, took the pen again, pressed it against the paper, and

then the sneeze number three. The sneeze number four, five six etc. followed it. After some sneezes, his desk looked like a puddle of wooden mud.

It was of great pain to him to put the pencil down. Discouraged, he went outside, taking a stroll, listening to as much sounds as he can. Children's yells, friends' curses, couple's kisses…it all sounded sweet to him. Another idea came to him: he would write down what he had heard and seen on the street, while sitting in a café or a park bench – he hoped he will not sneeze out in the fresh air. He had a good sleep that night, and even a dream. In his dream, he took an object, which was a mix of a hammer and pencil, and started killing computopoets during the one of the poetry events. He managed to kill five of them. One of the murdered ones had malfunction while dying and recited "The Mickey Mouse" theme song. Ornie was accused of the murders and sentenced to have a chip implanted and become a king of computopoets. He would recite a poem every day to the people that attended the event, and they would always chant the same thing. "All hail the computopoet!" The chants were extremely loud and echoed in the chamber he was in.

The next morning, he went to work his plan out. He sat on a park bench, and took his pencil…and sneezed again. And again, and again. He changed his location a few times, and he always sneezed a lot. After some time, he felt embarrassed due to amount of sneezing. Upon arriving home, he felt sad, because it meant being unable to use a pencil and bowing down to technology.

"It's okay, old fella…you will write it down later. You are not defeated.", he said to himself while holding the salivated pencil. Deep sadness filled him, but few hours later, another idea came to his mind – maybe he could recite the rhymes that he thinks of and ask someone to transcribe them. He went out again, bought a cheapest Dictaphone he could find, sat on the park bench, and started reciting. Some people looked at him funnily, but he didn't mind it and it didn't put a stopped to his process. Later, he arrived home, happy that he produced some rhymes, and went to sleep. He had a dream again. This time, he was on a court hearing and many famous poets – he couldn't remember them upon waking up, but knew they all belonged to gone times – were in a jury discussing his fate. The judge looked exactly like him, but had the mask of his younger self. "You spent a day talking to a machine in the park! You're a disgrace to yourself. For betraying your own ideals, I sentence you to a lifetime of being a computopoet's butler. And when they get old, you will have to change their diapers!". The dream was even more unpleasant than the one he had the night before.

Ornie woke up with an awkward feeling, but he started reassuring himself. "Yes...I did talk to a machine, but I only used it as a means to an end. A Dictaphone will never replace a pencil, and my works will still be available on a paper…if they get accepted. Actually, why wouldn't they' I still have enough popularity to be regarded seriously…luckily." After that small internal monologue, he went to hold his lecture. with a red shirt on. Many students looked at him with a question mark above their heads, and he responded with a smile. Actually, he had a smile on his face during every lecture he held that day. Students asked themselves did he get a chip implant in the last few days, since they rarely seen him in a combination of bright clothes and curved lips. But they were wrong, since the implant he had was self-imposed dopamine. After the lecture he had a conversation with his colleague Artie. He argued that forms of poems and the way poetry is read are outdated, and insisted that there should be an even more experimental approach to writing and reading. "We should move on. We already have Shakespeare and Petrarca. Where is the point in trying to stylistically overpower them? It's impossible! Of course, I will read and love their work as long as I live, but I do thing we should put a nail to the coffin of some forms. I would not allow a single sonnet to be published anymore!" Although Artie's opinion of reading poetry was too radical for him and almost urged him to start an intense discussion, he did understand his wish to experiment a bit more. After all, it is impossible to lyrically surpass Shakespeare and Petrarca. But it is possible to move forward, or to put a twist to some themes specific forms were concerned with. He came up with an experiment: he will recite his poems into the Dictaphone, like he did before, and pause to hear the background sounds. Of course, it was clear to him that the poems will be transferred from sound files to paper later on.

He was walking home, thinking of his new work. A question floated in his mind: if he really does use the sounds found outside while he is reciting, isn't that similar to tear pills and happy pills in a way? The sounds are addition to a poem which change the experience. He quickly knew that it was the wrong way of thinking, since the final product will be on paper. Sounds will only be available to him, and the poem experiencing will be as pure as it was before the invasion of computopoets. That night he had another dream. A swarm of living Dictaphones surrendered him, and forced to hand them all his pencils and typewriters. After handing them, the Dictaphones used frequency that was loud enough to break the physical structure of pencils and typewriters. In addition to breaking them, he was ordered to destroy every pencil that he would find on earth, and he died knowing that he contributed to extinction of pencils.

He woke up with a simple thought in his head: "What stupid dreams do I have!"

For the next few days, Ornie was walking around the city in his free time. Not only did he produce new material, but he also investigated parts of the city he was not familiar with. It never crossed his mind that there could be so many parks in the city, in the time when greenery was not that often – or at least it seemed to him it is like that. While sitting in the numerous parks, he noticed the statues that populated them. It annoyed him that not many artists were sculpted. It was mostly political people, and politics was something terrible to him. He did read a lot (especially prior to elections) but his respect for politicians was of little amount. "Even the most tasteful strawberry turns into excrement", he often said to others when asked about who did he vote for. After a while, the sentence seemed idiotic to him.

Upon returning home, Ornie put down his Dictaphone ready to finally write down new material - and he had some indeed - after five years. He had a smile on his face while he was taking the pencil into his hand. But, when he took the pen, he sneezed. Then he started to cry. He had no idea why it happened. Was it the dust in the apartment? While he was tidy and clean and attentive to his own hygiene, he was so afraid of writing that his creative instruments were covered in thick dust after some time. He tried using his typewriter and it was so full of dust that the keys couldn't press the ink. He remembered a lyric: *Hold on, to that paper, hold on to that paper...hold on 'cause it's been taken care of...* Him taking care of paper was no yet possible. The only thing to do was going out with Dictaphone in his hand again. That Dictaphone would be, unwillingly, his closest friend in the next few weeks. He walked around so much that his feet started hurting, and the Dictaphone broke one day. His feet were so swollen and in such physical pain that he could not hold his lectures for some time.

He didn't know what to do. His passion finally came back, quite loud and quite intense, but his abilities were temporarily reduced. At least the rest of his body was obedient. He resorted to watching archive recordings and listening to music. Watching the recordings made him both happy and sad. All the information he saw motivated him to write down and interpret everything he could. But how could that creation come into fruition when his body stood in his way? This type of ironic frustration was unbearable. Despite his love for music, archive videos and documentaries, a person can watch so much without getting intensely bored. And all that information came in such quantity that it was not easy to remember. On the other hand, the inability to remember everything made him feel human and reminded him of all those sad people with chips implanted and whatnot implanted in their brains.

After some days of aimless contemplation, an idea did cross Ornie's mind: he could not walk outside but he could use his hands and stand on his feet a bit. So, he bid his time to clean that dust which surrendered the study. Dust was so thick that it took much time and many napkins to eliminate it. Upon eliminating it, Ornie took a look at the room and laughed. Finally, the pencils and typewriters were clean. Then he sat on the chair and grabbed the pencil. No sneezing. The holding on to the paper and taking care of it began.

Three hours later, Ornie ran out of paper. He was sweaty and delirious, feeling like he danced with words. He leaned his head down and started to sleep. He had nice dreams, Ornie's eyes opened and his head leaned up. The table on in front of his was stacked with papers. "Great, it was not a dream." Next thing to do was to call his editor and arrange a meeting, but felt too lazy to go out with such pain in his legs. It didn't bother him, since it meant he had more time to write.

And he did write. He remembered a sonnet claim by Artie, so he decided to write a sonnet. It was called *Impoetence*.

Holding pencils, loudly sneezing,

Table's empty, pretty vacant

Polyhymnia's little teasing

I'm getting quite impatient

Neither faith nor hope,

Ideas do not come

Words don't hit the slopes

If only could find some!

Lobotomy, staying blank

Hand stays firm in place

A bit of autonomy

Polyhymnia is this prank?

I wish there was any manner

To turn me into a word planner!

It made him smile; it's been a long time since he wrote something silly. It felt liberating. After few days of writing and categorizing his poems he called his editor to see him as soon as possible. The editor surprised that he received a call, but was more than happy to see him. Ornie called a taxi and walked a bit easier. When he arrived to the office building, there were three computopoets in front of him.

One of them was more aggressive than others, "Wait and get in line, oldie. What do you have that we don't?"

Ornie then recited one of his new poems and said "This."

Three of them were so confused their chip circuits broke down, falling on the pavement. He recited them another poem, one he thought on the spot.

After reciting it, Ornie calmly walked past them, without feeling pain in his legs.

As he met the editor, he was a bit nervous. After all, this was the first material in last five years. However, when the editor read those poems he was amazed, cried tears of joy and stared happily at the paper.

"This…this is a flame on paper! I think you are going full throttle!", he said and took the phone, insisting that Ornie hears his conversations. He contacted numerous libraries and cultural institutions, proclaiming the return of Ornie Phillips, the reactions were so loud that even Ornie could hear them, despite sitting a meter away from the editor. The numerous phone calls were finished. "Oh, Ornie…feel free to edit it however you like. This will be a literal event of the decade! And I hope that it will mean the decline of these fucking computopoets!"

Ornie sneezed upon hearing the word.

The editor continued talking, "You were right with your term…although the 'poet' part is quite wrong, to be fair,", he said and sighed, "…computopoets…", and Ornie sneezed again. After sneezing, he smiled and told he would send him the rest of the material soon.

"Don't rush, take your time, it will be popular anyway", he said confidently.

"I took much time already…it will not take too long", he said, left the room and entered the elevator.

The three computopoets were still lying down. Ornie went by them, saying: "You will be out of fashion very soon", and laughed.

3.2.   Robot Hand is the Future

Lights on! The audience were in their seats. They waited for him. For the guy who is called the best violinist since the invention of music. Yes, they were waiting for Oliver Willis. It is not easy to describe his playing style, but it is easy to admire it. This was Oliver's 365th concert. The best thing about his concerts was the fact that literally no song or composition sounded the same twice. You could attend five concerts where he plays the same Mozart piece, but he always makes some variation. A religious person may say that he sold his soul to the devil.

The sound of his violin was loud, but the applause that followed it was even louder. For a man of his talent and prestige, Oliver was moderately humble. He loved hearing the applause, of course, but he perceived it as "don't stop playing", not as "you're the best". Although he did hear both sentences quite a lot of times in his life, and hearing them made him satisfied.

Playing in theatre was a joy to him. He loved the fact that no one talked. He had no problem with audience murmur, in terms of obstructing his concentration, he simply liked how people focused on music, not drinks or something else – he did start as a bar player, and despite his liking of bars, a slightly classy part of him saw theatre as preferred option. And the recognition and money were a bit better than in a bar.

When the concert ended, the small talk began. All those rich people who came so they can tell their friends they saw Willis play approached him and spat out shallow praise. He hated those 20% who would talk to him while not caring about the music itself. This is why he insisted – when you're a superstar, you can allow yourself special demands – that ticket price is such that members of every social sphere can afford it. And wearing jewelry (except wedding rings) was prohibited.

Indeed, Oliver Willis was a respected artist.

Oliver wanted to get to the hotel that night as fast as he could. The rich people annoyed him more than they usually did. He just wanted to put his violin case on the couch and sleep. He always carried the violin with himself after the concert when he was able to do so – nobody could be reliable enough to take care of his most valuable possession, and he loved to feel the

fresh air after playing in closed space for few hours. It was also that he preferred to be alone after the performance, since he needed to recharge his social battery.

The walk to the hotel that night turned out to have a negative outcome and it was the first time a walk turned into a regret – a drunk driver passed by Oliver with intense speed. At first, Oliver was relieved it did not harm him. But three seconds later he turned his head to the left and saw his arm on the ground, form his elbow, in a pool of blood. Those things often make people scream or pass out - whatever it makes them, it is an instant effect – but Oliver just stood there, instantly silent and his hair instantly turned white. He stood frozen for around ten minutes, and would stay even more if it hadn't been for a random passerby who grabbed him and called the ambulance. The fatal car was crashed into a nearby pole and loud music could be heard on the radio, with the driver walking out on tipsy feet, shocked to see Oliver.

* * *

Oliver lay on the hospital bed, still not uttering a single word. One slightly good thing was that the violin was not damaged at all – that was the first thing he wanted to check with the doctors after opening his eyes. However, it was questionable if that violin will have any use except for some kind of historical relevance in a few hundred years' time, where it will be marked as "The violin played by Oliver Willis". No matter how talented and genius Oliver was, one arm wasn't enough to keep him playing. He spent the whole night awake, recalling his exercise sessions and concerts. That was the only thing he was psychologically able to do. What could he do for a living after losing his arm? He was condemned to being a music teacher, or even worse, to appear in various tv shows or write "tell all" memoirs. He could wave his career goodbye. The hospital staff was quite kind to Oliver, but he couldn't care less at that moment, even if they put quite an effort to make him smile for only a second, albeit unsuccessfully.

Oliver felt strong inability to smile. To be fair though, he did not try very hard. Actually, he tried nothing - he simply continued to lie on his bed and when they released him from the hospital he just sat on his chair and watched television. First, he wanted to read, but just one hand proved be a bit of an obstacle. Watching television aimlessly was the worst thing he could do. He also couldn't write since he was left handed, and using the computer was off-putting for a reason that typing whatever he would want to search would take a significant amount of time. Despite the problem, he practiced his right hand for mouse usage and in few weeks developed a skill which helped him to be at least bit more productive than he would've been otherwise.

While financial stability was not a problem. a steady amount of royalties kept swarming his bank account – psychological stability was. There was no passion in Oliver's everyday life. He would write pieces, since his sense for wonderful melodies was still intact. Despite those pieces he felt empty, since there was not a chance to play any of it. He did think of learning to play some instrument that required only one hand, but almost all of them were either too easy to play or required some involvement of technology, and Oliver was not big fan of technology, especially of the way it entered pretty much every aspect of everyday life, including music. Creating music on computer programs was a problem to him – and he realized it was not a problem of being old fashioned, it was rather a problem of another reminder that he couldn't play music on his own.

After a lot of contemplation and forty centimeters of grown beard, he decided to get a psychiatrist appointment. He never had prejudices about it but opening himself was an obstacle he often encountered, and talking about practically the biggest problem of his live was not easy at all.

He went to the psychiatrist and started talking. It made him calmer than he would expect. By the time the session ended, he found himself talking more and more, with a strong feeling of ease. He even thought about having the appointment again.

While flipping through television channels some days later, Oliver saw an ad for cybernetic body parts – ears, eyes, noses, legs…and of course, arms! His hand reached the phone in matter of seconds and his voice timbered with unheard enthusiasm. The voice from the other side noticed this and informed him that the parts may malfunction, but he did not care. And why would he? After having no hand, even an imperfect one will be a reason to have a smile on his face. After making the appointment deal, Oliver could not sleep and literally counted the seconds of operation date and its confirmation. A few days later, he got an envelope from the medical company.

The envelope said that Oliver had to visit the manufacturers laboratory so he could have the hands functions explained. That was not bad, actually. He did trust (modern) medicine and said to himself that doctor's instructions can do no harm. The only thing he feared was if the acquisition of the arm was eligible to postponement. Everything else was fine with him – even sitting through the hand function demonstration for hours.

The doctor was very pleasant, polite and talked in such manner that even a person like Oliver – an artistic soul with little knowledge and interest of medicine and technology – could

understand him. Also, the demonstration was more akin to dialogue, as doctor was interested in Oliver's state, opinions and medical history. After all, the new hand required a certain health condition, which Oliver was lucky to have, and a certain number of pills, and he luckily had no allergies. Some hours and a metro drive later, he arrived home with the arm assignment date confirmed.

The day he arrived at the facility was quite possibly the best day he had in a long time. He awaited to receive an anesthetic with great enthusiasm. After getting stung by needle, he fell asleep in twenty-six seconds. The operation lasted for a few hours, but it was nothing special. Attaching the cybernetic part was something usual in that field - a bunch of little chips, nerve endings and other parts whose names Oliver quickly forgot had to cut into his meat. He woke up with a new arm and a smile on his face. The doctors talked to him about the procedures he will have to go through, but it was so hard for him to concentrate while watching his new body part. They noticed his lack of concentration and told they will visit him when he is more serious.

When they visited him again, the lead doctor started talking, and during his monologue, another doctor strung Oliver arm with a needle. It hurt a lot. He screamed in pain and his scream was similar to a high-pitched violin note a beginner would maker. After realizing that, Oliver laughed.

He left the hospital few hours later, with a big grin on his face.

The first thing to do with the hand was, as instructed, to try doing everyday actions a normal hand can do. Scratching, grabbing, holding, pushing, stretching, finger snapping, clapping, squeezing and of course, pointing.

Oliver pointed his finger at the dusty violin case that lay by his shoes and walked towards it. He walked as slow as he could – there was a strong mixture of enthusiasm and fear in his mind. And then he opened the case. The violin was there, in a case that was not opened for god knows how long. He held the violin so many times, and it was a strange feeling then, like meeting a long-lost brother.

It was hard to keep calm after this. He had his arm and his happiness back. He cried for ten minutes straight. To be fair, this was a feeling he had not experienced before – he never had his hand reattached to his body.

The next few days were dedicated to getting used to the arm. All the everyday actions that the doctor mentioned were performed by Oliver, and he made great effort. He held little objects in

his hand to make little practices and did a lot of small manual movements, such as wash the dishes manually, using he computer keyboard a lot, randomly clapping, in addition to already prescribed exercises.

A few weeks later, he felt ready. It was still a new body part, but he got comfortable enough with it. He would also play his synthesizer in the meantime. But it was then time to move on to the most important thing.

He took the bow and the violin and he started playing.

Had he been calmer than he expected and decided to start with easy pieces and go harder as his hand got better.

But after all, he was Oliver Willis. The way his hand moved was like a wonder of nature. All the eagerness he kept inside himself and the not so hidden anger released themselves with a combination of unmatched passion. He played the violin so hard his neighbors could hear it. They were, of course, familiar with his situation so his noise was a welcome intrusion. When he finished playing, he could hear the neighbor's applause through the walls. He started crying and later invited them to his apartment on a dinner. It was the first time he did it, and the surprise on their faces was quite visible. He felt very sociable and talked to them with interest. He hadn't realized before that he didn't know any one of them that well, and it felt good to socialize. By the end of the dinner, Oliver told them to feel free to come again next time. A thought crossed his mind: maybe making new friends will be better than having a psychiatrist? The both scenarios include talking and do good for his well-being, expect socializing with neighbors didn't have to include his obligation to talk about more personal issues. When the neighbors left his apartment, he started to play the violin again. After playing for some time, it occurred to him that it was loud so he made a special room that will be sound-isolated.

Playing the violin in average ten hours a day for few weeks made him tired more mentally than physically. While sleeping, he held the violin like it was a teddy bear.

He had a specific habit – every day after he woke up, the first thing he would do was to look at his hand. And it would always be there. He would also play the violin prior to brushing teeth and he would smile so much his mouth would get a cramp. Those were the sweetest cramps he had his whole life, and he had many cramps before as someone used to many, many hours of practice.

Oliver's enthusiasm was unending but his hand could not follow his intensity and it malfunctioned the third week of violin practice. Oliver's bow fell down, as his hand was completely limp. He did feel it, but nothing could help him move it. Maybe it is just overworked, he thought. After all, the playing was quite tiring, even if he did slow down.

The limp last for an hour and he started to panic.

Quite intensely.

He called the doctor and described the problem to him. Doctor told him the main reason is overworking and that he should rest his hand for a bit. Oliver sighed. A little rest can do him no harm, despite his indescribable wish to play as much as possible. To kill some time, he wrote some pieces. He was not happy with what he wrote. He was happy while he was writing it, but the result made him dissatisfied. He thought that he will be more at peace when he is able to play it.

There was another way to kill time, one that Oliver almost forgot due to his intense sadness – listening to vinyl records. It would be a welcome activity now. He listened mostly to violin concertos, alphabetically ranked. The listening was in such quantities that Oliver even developed some new opinions regarding the compositions he didn't like as much before. During those listening session, he would continuously fidget and snap his fingers. He decided it was time to go back to work.

He stretched his hand and then started to play. He played like never before – with a restrained, slow movement, but pressing harder. There was a smile on his face, and he got that sweet cramp again.

He wanted to play somewhere as soon as possible. He needed feedback to see if his skills were not diminished by his new hand. Luckily for him, there was a big choice of art and jazz bars which held open nights for musicians. And he thought it would be the best way to have a first gig after accident. Playing in front of a big, more serious audience was too overwhelming at that point. And, having bars as his venues was a nice throwback to his origins. The most important thing, after all, was to play. The only downside was the cigarette smoke he still couldn't stand, but it was easier for him to sacrifice his smell than getting rusty.

Before every gig he had, Oliver put some makeup as he did not want to be recognized. He also had stage presence – a black glove where his cybernetic part was, and a synonym. It was fun for him, too, after all-too-serious audiences he saw before. Developing a stage persona was

something he allowed himself to do, and never expected he would enjoy it that much. Of course, it was good that the audiences seemed not only to like it, but to also encourage his little tricks. He was not aware if they understood how well he played.

He would also invite some of his neighbors to attend the performances, in his new stage of life, where he got more sociable than ever. It was still not too much, of course.

On his way to the bars where he performed – he always went alone - he would listen to people's conversations in the subway. The main objective for him was to detect if some of them talked about music, and if they were, he would "anonymously" suggest his concert. There was still a wish inside him to be heard, even if they didn't know if it was him.

He had become a regular in many places, still anonymous. Another thing about his neighbors was that they would make audio records of his performances and he would then listen to them.

Listening to them made elicited a slightly conflicting feeling – he could hear that every applause was genuine, and there was no chitchat during his set. However, his technique, although different, was not as good as before.

It was time to practice some more.

3.3. Breaking Glass

"It's not over till the fat lady sings."

Marie Aetos hated that phrase. She was an opera singer and she was not fat at all.

And she couldn't sing anymore.

She was very young – 33 years of age – but her vocal cords were damaged due to huge amount of time spent practicing and performing. The doctor mentioned a diagnosis which did not contain a happy ending – her voice could not go louder than thirty decibels. Upon hearing that, she wished to scream out of frustration, but that was, of course, impossible. So, she went to the toilet and smashed the mirror glass with her fists. A few moments later she felt quite stupid – the last time she got that overcome with rage was when one of the critics criticized her singing in a quite unpleasant manner. He was so disliked that few opera singers were planning to get a bounty on his head. She probably imagined it was him whom she was hitting. The two things opera singers disliked most were impolite critics and vocal problems. That day, Maria's level of disliking the latter got a step higher.

Life without singing also seemed impossible to her. How could it be?

She had her old audio recordings at home and she listened to them like crazy. There were no words to describe her feeling of sadness for the time gone by. Everyday things were also depressing to her. When she went to take a shower, she tried to sing, in an act of desperate hope. But the only sound in the cabin was that of water coming out of the shower head and her eyes. When she yawned she felt sad because it reminded her of her mouth's shape during the singing. A lot of her colleagues called her to ask if she was okay. She hated when people showed empathy. It was nice of them, but it only served as salt to her wound – every positive word acted as a reminder that her situation is a negative one.

Marie was willing to give everything to get her voice back, except her life. Luckily, her sister Anne was as good a scientist as she was a singer. Marie never understood what she was talking about while describing all the implants, reconstructive surgeries and bodily modifications she worked on, but always listened with great interest. One morning, her phone rang and Anne uttered a realistic sentence that sounded like a fantasy to her:

"We can get your true voice back."

"Whatever it takes…except becoming a critic", Maria replied in whisper.

"You'll be our guinea pig, however."

"Doesn't matter. I've attended NY music academy. This will be a piece of cake."

"Great! Visit the lab next Friday, we will explain the whole procedure to you."

"Can you please be silent about my operation? The last thing I need right now is more publicity…this intense empathy from the others is killing me. If they hear I am being operated on, the amount the messages that contain prayers will be too overwhelming for me", she asked sincerely.

"Only if you promise not to sing about it later", Anne responded. Maria did not laugh at that joke.

Marie thought how good it would be to get her voice back - actually, ideal - but it was still an unusual prospect.

Not only that – she was afraid. Which is a normal feeling to have when you serve as a guinea pig. She started having second thoughts about the medical procedure.

"I can lose my voice, but I could find something else to be a focal point of my life", she said to herself, "although I have no idea what something else can be." It was ironic, since she had a solid number of topics that interested her. But it was hard to be reasonable after losing the main source of happiness in life.

She phoned her sister next day. There was a whole speech she prepared – fear makes people think fast – but Anne did not pick up the phone. She phoned her two more times in the next fifteen minutes, but the response was the same one – there was none. Not knowing what to do next, Marie started a diary. At first, she wanted to watch some opera on the TV, but that would be too depressing. Then she sat on her desk and took a pencil with her hand. After writing down her thoughts on paper, she set it on fire. Usually, she was afraid of fire, but this time she couldn't even scream.

Anne saw Marie's missed calls and got worried instantly.

"What if she's suicidal again?", her worst fear came to her mind. She phoned her as fast as she could. Maria picked up the phone even faster.

"Oh, finally…I started to think my only sister's ignoring me. I hope you have a good reason for not answering the calls", said Maria. Anne let a sigh of relief upon hearing Maria's quiet laughter.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. What is it, how are you?", she asked calmly.

"Quite fine, but there's also a fear present that's not fine at all. I'm afraid of that operation…it is not pleasant when people are circling your throat with scalpels."

"Why should you be? You know me. I hate to sound arrogant, but I am a reliable doctor."

"Yes, you are, but you would still use me as a guinea pig."

"C'mon it will be fine. If that makes it easier, I will have the same procedure myself."

"It doesn't."

"Oh god, what can you lose?"

"Something else. What if I'm unable to talk at all?"

"Well that would be a welcome change", replied Anne, laughing.

Marie responded with a moderately loud grunt. She promised to herself that she will sing Anne's most hated song if the voice operation turns out to be successful.

"I shouldn't have said that, I'm sorry. Please, believe me. No, trust me. I promise you'll feel improvement after this. With all my heart."

That last part convinced Maria. Anne was never a person who relied on cheap sentiment in a serious situation. And she had a heart condition.

"All right, I trust you. But if the operation goes wrong, I swear I'll hire an amateur opera singer to perform an aria in front of your house every day for a month", said Maria, and Anne could see she's not joking.

"Okay, accept my virtual handshake. See you next Friday."

The next Friday came and Marie was trembling. Her legs were in a vibrato. While going up the stairs, she used the hand rail. It was of huge help. Anne welcomed her as she arrived to a birthday party. Marie said that out loud. As loud as she could, to put it better.

"Well, this is the day your new voice will be born", she said while patting Maria on the back and added a joke: "Don't worry, I've prepared myself for amateur opera singer to bother me if the operation goes bad. Hell, make it singers."

Anne's jokes made Marie calmer. She entered the operation room, lay on the bed and got anesthetized. While doctors performed their task, Maria had the most beautiful dream. She couldn't remember it upon waking up.

She opened her eyes and yawned. There was a feeling in her throat, like she had metal in it.

"How are you feeling?", Anne asked.

"Fine. I gotta say I am a little sleepy though", Marie said, rubbing her eyes.

"You should awaken, no time to rest here!", Anne pinched her cheek.

"Ouch!", Marie replied loudly. Upon realizing that, she started to laugh and cry in the same time.

After thirty minutes of disbelief and euphoria, Maria just took a stroll outside the hospital. Simply walking the street made her happy after seeing a street musician. She felt like a Disney character, so happy that she could join him in a song if it was socially acceptable, and if she were less shy. She was very down to earth after leaving the stage.

"I envy him a lot", she said to herself, "his smile says it all…and he has no critics near him. At least none whose opinions are taken seriously." She sat in the nearby cake shop and watched him sing for some time. After his performance, she approached him and gave him some money and some compliments. He was equally happy about both. The musicians' enthusiasm made Marie wish to sing again - professionally. She decided to get back to the stage, the empty empathy motivated her to make a return.

Before contacting the conductor, she had to wait a bit to check her vocal abilities. Anne told her that she can sing in a weeks' time, without any concerns, but she still felt a bit worried, reasonably. Even if she was not able to sing opera again, she could still sing less-demanding songs. She thought of becoming a singer-songwriter. If that was the case, it was not a bad

backup option, since her taste in music had a great variety of genres and styles. Except polka. And the switch from theaters to bars would certainly be interesting. The contemplation lasted for two and a half minutes, when she reminded herself that every bar has more nicotine than theatre concerts have obnoxious critics.

Marie phoned the owner of the studio where she decided to practice on her own – a close space made her calmer before moving on to bigger one – and reserved a term for herself. She wanted to sing alone, without anyone's feedback. It seemed like a best start of getting back to shape for her. And low key enough. The owner was so happy to for her that he insisted on her practicing for free. Instead, she told him to find the street musician she saw a day ago.

Marie entered the studio with a permanent smile on her face. First five minutes she spent just looking around, recalling all the little details she had forgotten about the recording booth and all the equipment. She remembered the first time she entered the studio as a teenager, before she even had an idea she would become an opera singer. And it was like a first time again, so she faced the big decision any person who takes music really seriously has upon entering the studio: which song should be the first one to practice? And when she got ready to sing, she spent another five minutes deciding what to sing first. She was a sentimental person, music-wise, and that first song had to be one she holds dear to her heart. And the song was indeed related to Heart. Her favorite rock song, *Barracuda.* After all, the first song should not be too demanding for her. She took a deep breath and then started singing:

"*This ain't the end, I saw you agaaaaaain*", and while reaching those high tones, the glass that separated her from the producer's space shattered.

"How the hell is this possible? Did my voice become a weapon?", she thought in shock.

 "Did you really have to do this?", the owner asked, in a state of shock.

"I'm sorry…it wasn't really my intention to do it, believe me… I can't believe it myself."

"Who's gonna pay for that now?"

"Are you kidding me? It's not like that glass was made of diamonds. I'll pay you, but do you genuinely think I did it on purpose?"

"One can never know with you opera singers.", He showed her the door and asked her to return later. Her disappointment was huge, but she hoped that he won't forget her favor about finding that street musician.

Maria arrived home and still could not come to her senses. First thought that came to her mind was calling Anne. But Anne was probably not available, since it was working hours. Maybe she could sing again in her apartment. What if there was something wrong with the studio? It's impossible for a voice to destroy glass, after all.

"I'm not a cartoon character.", she thought to herself.

She then went to her toilet – if she were loud, it was the best space in her apartment to isolate sound. She decided to sing the same song again. And if the glass broke, it was better to break a mirror instead of a television. She was neither superstitious, nor easy on the wallet.

"*This ain't the end, I saw you agaaaaaa-*"

CRACK!

Her mirror split into numerous little shards, and she had no slippers on.

"Great, I'm gonna damage my feet now", she said while rolling her eyes. "Hopefully my feet won't move the tectonic plates after recovery."

One glass sweeping and few swear words later, Marie sat on her couch, thinking what is wrong with her voice. Maybe it was *too* good? Whatever the case, it did not look, nor sound, very well.

"I hope Anne will be available soon...", her thoughts repeated.

She then left her a voice message.

Marie tried to google vocal cord disabilities and disfunctions, but could not find anything about her situation. It did not surprise her.

"Well, at least I could be a good novelty act. A little switch from high to low culture.", she said and tried to laugh. "Unfortunately, the 1920s are long gone…"

Despite her attempts of using humor to alleviate the situation, Marie felt quite desperate. Everything seemed like a cruel joke to her.

"I've become a walking Warner Bros character!"

Luckily, Anne called her back quickly.

"Hey, how is my new voice girl?"

"Marvelous…my new voice breaks glass."

"What?", Anne asked with a silent laughter that Maria picked up, "You're that confident now?"

"No, my voice is that destructive. Hear me out."

Maria told her what happened and Anne rushed to her apartment as soon as her working hours ended.

"Okay, I don't think you're mocking me, BUT, could it be that you're somehow hallucinating? It is possible that it could be an after-effect of the operation or something like that."

"Shouldn't you know that, you're the doctor in the family", she said angrily and grabbed the first glass she could find. Anne knew why her sister grabbed that glass, and waited her to start singing more eagerly than ever.

"*This ain't the end, I saw you agaaaaa-*"

CRACK!

Anne stood in shock. But, also in awe.

"You know no one else can do this, right?"

"Well, I don't want to do it either. I just want to sing normally. It's not good to be a medical phenomenon if you can't do what you like because of it."

"That's true…maybe we could get you another operation…"

"NO!", upon her accidentally raised tone another glass broke, "I mean…explore the options a bit first, please."

"Of course, we will. I know it's not easy, but try to be patient."

"I was a patient already, no thanks."

"Maybe you could try to gain control of your voice in the meantime? I mean, you don't break the glass by just talking. You can probably reach a pitch that is not lethal for glass objects."

"I'm so stupid…it didn't even occur to me."

Anne left after encouraging Marie, and Marie got to work.

She needed to find a place which was desolate enough to allow her singing at that destructive pitch for some time. After a few minutes of location googling, she found it, went there as soon as she could and started practicing, with two hundred glass guinea pigs.

"*This ain't the end, I saw you agaaaaa-*", she sang, again and again. She did that for few hours. If she wanted to sing opera, she had to be able to sing an ordinary song normally first.

Despite breaking all those glasses, Marie felt happy. The prospect of not being able to sing at all was so depressing that even glass-breaking performances felt satisfying while she perfects, or tries to de-lethalize her newfound condition.

She went to that practicing spot for the whole week. And another week. And another week. After some time, she called some of her colleagues and told them her situation. First, she sang *Barracuda* and demonstrated her newfound ability, and then started singing opera. They couldn't believe her and asked her why wouldn't she resume with her glass breaking singing. The comments got her mad and she screamed so loud that some of the nearby car windows broke. The colleagues apologized immediately.

Three months later. She was ready to get back to her main place of passion. It was not an easy feeling. She got a sudden urge to drink something. Alcohol was not very good for voice practicing, but she panicked so bad that big amount of reason temporarily left her mind. She asked a closest person to her to bring her a glass of whiskey, but she was denied her wish. She got a standing ovation the first time she arrived at her rehearsal with the full orchestra. Some of the people mentioned the glass breaking, but no one believed it and they were moved how their friend recovered her voice.

A month later came the time for her big comeback performance.

There was never a stage fright intense as the one she had that time. Her voice was, despite her many qualities, the greatest asset she had, in her opinion, and losing its importance was a great deal to her. She broke a lot of glass in recent months, and now she feared that the audience and critics could get her heart broken.

She got a standing ovation after the first performance in front of a live, quite demanding, audience. Best thing about it was that she knew it was not a pity ovation – the theatre she performed in was full of very, very nasty critics. And all but one described her comeback with highest praise. The negative review stated that "she sounds like a pig being brought to slaughter, if that pig wants to make one last revenge". She received so many flowers after the performance that she felt like a forest nymph.

The thing that she was happiest about was that she did not even need an ovation, which made Anne happier than Marie. Anne gifted her sister a bouquet of glass roses after the performance. Marie was silent, but if her stare could talk, the bouquet would be broken in a second.

Few days later, they saw the critic who insulted her on the street. There was still no bounty on his head. Marie asked him politely if she could whisper something in his ear, to which he responded positively. She leaned towards his ear:

 "*This ain't the end, I saw you agaaaaaa-*"

Buzz!

The critic got tinnitus.

3.4. Standing In

It's not easy to act.

Learning all those lines, talking loudly – no theater is small – and other stuff, it's really hard. Especially when you're sixty-seven.

Dustin Paniro was sixty-seven. He had trouble with remembering the lines since he was seventeen, so he switched theater to film. He got a few Oscars in the process, but acting itself was the most important thing for him, and he had no plans of retiring.

But his mind had no plans of obeying everything Dustin wanted, so remembering lines was harder to him than ever. He wanted to act, really. He couldn't remember those lines. He could, after twenty takes, but there was a small number of directors with a Kubrick–like patience.

He was shooting a film and did not manage to remember his monologue in two days. He was frustrated, and even worse to him, he frustrated others. Being a problem to others was a chore to Dustin and he always tried to avoid it as much as he could. His coworkers had patience for him because he is an icon of the trade, but he could not, nor wanted, to use that card for long. Despite his prior plans, he had decided that the film he shot was the last one he will make. It was time to put an end to a long and good career. But before that, he will do his best to be a best version of himself.

When he tried to say the lines, the block in his head was huge. It was not that anything distracted him – it was that there's a blank space where his lines should be. If only he had something that distracted him so much that it is impossible to remember all those lines, he would at least have an excuse for himself. This way, he had to excuse himself to the director. As someone who was in the business for a few decades, wasting other people's time was something that was not in anyone's aim.

After some long and painful hours of introspection, Dustin came to conclusion that he had to do something he never wanted to in order to make filming of his last film easier for others and for himself.

He decided to clone himself.

Cloning oneself was not cheap, but Dustin had no problems when it came to finances. He had a problem with managing all that into his everyday life and schedule. He worried about explaining his actions to his family. Was he going to explain the situation to his family? What about people in the studio? He decided to try to do his procedure without anyone finding out. It was, logically, not an easy thing to do, considering his fame. And not only because of fame, as would find later.

The first thing he started doing was finding out which company did the process with a maximum level of discretion and secrecy. He guessed that, after all, every such company had its reputation at stake all the time, so maybe he could trust any company. However, the hard part was going to the procedure when no one was able to notice him. After all, he was followed by paparazzi a lot – as anyone who had an ounce of fame in Hollywood. So, it was reasonable thing to choose the most expensive company available and to try to arrange some kind of secret transport, if such thing was possible. Luckily for him, it was.

Three days later, Dustin was cloned without any complications. Next thing he did was renting two apartments – each for one clone – and ordered them to be quiet while they are there. The only thing they had in their apartments were the ongoing film's screenplay, various books on acting, and DVD-s of Dustin's previous films. And food, of course. He ordered each of them to focus on a different part of the script.

It was quite serious, and elaborate, situation with the procedure. Every clone had the same clothes and routine he was supposed to follow. Needless to say, both clones thought they were the only one. Considering their limited knowledge of the world around them, they were really obedient.

"Cloning had gotten really simpler now…a few years ago, there were months of DNA modelling, calculations, clone production…and after all that, the clones needed at least three months to get acquainted with the world around them and the way their original functions…I'm so lucky it is this much easier now!", he said to himself.

Celebrity cloning was not an unusual thing. Actors did it, although moderately – it was mostly used to make scheduling conflicts as smaller as possible. musicians did it, to profit on the possible concerts, mostly farewell tours. The thing is that a clone could only look like the "original" in the age he is cloned in – a clone may be a year old, but if the "original" person was sixty, then the clone would be sixty too. Their age varied, since no clone functioned the same and it meant they could live for years or die after few months, and it wasn't carefully regulated by the law, since they were not regarded as real people, and they used only by the richest people who were in show business, since cloning of political figures was prohibited and punishable.

*   *   *

"Cut!", yelled the director. "Dustin, I can't believe it…you look so fresh these last few days. The way you said those lines, it's as if you've taken some substance that makes you remember all those lines easier than ever...it's a shame that such thing is not manufactured yet. Anyway, great job!"

And Dustin's clone number two, who was in his place, felt proud for the first time in his short life.

While the clone number two was revitalizing his career, real Dustin had an introspective retrospective of his films at home. He took a few days rest and watched almost every single one of his films, and felt a wish to be young again.

"It shouldn't carry me away this much…it's one thing to clone myself, but it's another to undergo a surgery which will make me look younger, I will become a laughing stock to every breathing person in Hollywood. And how would I get rid of all those clones? Calm down and get real, Dustin. ", he thought and continued watching the film. He didn't want people to know he cloned himself, since he gave an interview five years ago in which he expressed his firm stance about cloning.

Clone number one, at the same time, studied his part in the apartment.

"This is bullshit! How can any man who makes his living by writing screenplays produce this insult to rational thought? I…erm, the original I, starred in films that had quality and passion to them, made as works that were a product of honest artistic collaboration! The only thing honest in this script are the numbers on the bottom of the paper.", he shouted to his mirror, threw the script and stepped on it. "I'll have a word or two with the director tomorrow."

Clone number two, on the other hand, had a different opinion of the screenplay.

"I love this. The only bad thing in it is that my part is too small- I'll have a word or to with a director next time I visit the set…I have a big wish to act!", he said and he knew he will do it on the set. He will do his best to show what he is capable of.

And the original Dustin finished watching one of the films he starred in, with tears in his eyes.

"There is no way I could ever surpass this…it was a good thing to decide this one is the last production I'm in. How can I look at myself knowing that I use other people for something I don't even do? The Dustin who starred in *The Student,* and Dustin who starred in twenty other movies would slap me in the face right now, with a very good reason."

Next day the on the set, filming started, and clone number one threw a tantrum, of course, complaining about the screenplay. Everyone was shocked – through all his career, Dustin was known as a professional, and one of the kindest stars in the business. All the people thought it may be stress or something like that – there were strong rumors that his career is coming to a halt and that no one wants to employ him because of his line-remembering problems, and those rumors were spreading fast.

But, the Dustin in front of them remembered all his lines, that was not the problem at all. The problem was that he did not want to act. Director took him to the side.

"Look, I don't know the feeling you have, but please, be polite. We are one quarter through the shooting and this is the first time you complain about your lines. Whatever is the reason for this behavior, it's ok. I know you're not like this and that something – although I don't know what

– is happening. You can get a day off, clear your mind, whatever you need. Just be calm next time we see you."

Dustin was still mad about his lines, but he could not be mad at the director after this. He may be angry about his perceived quality of the screenplay, but he couldn't be angry at the other persons' politeness.

"It's fine…I'm sorry. I promise you won't see behavior like this anymore. And thank you for giving me a day off.", Clone number one apologized to the crew, changed his clothes and went off the set.

He walked around the streets looking at everything with childlike curiosity. The stroll calmed him. The steps he took were quite slow, and he destination he was going to was unknown to him.

He also forgot how famous the original him was – knowing the facts about the originals' life didn't necessarily mean knowing the everyday experiences of his - and while walking around the streets many people stared at him. It came to him that those stares could be a result of people's awareness of him being a clone, of him doing something that is akin to the original Dustin, so he got extremely paranoid. In a matter of seconds, a lot of sweat filled his forehead. His legs started to shake and he tried to go somewhere where no one could see him. One little obstacle with that was that he was in Los Angeles, and going somewhere people won't see him presented an impossible task. He walked by the video store where he saw a poster with a image of him in *The Student*.

After two minutes of shaky legs, he fainted.

Clone number one woke up in the hospital bed. He heard the nurses in the hallway talking.

"Is that Dustin Paniro?", one said to other, "I love his movies, with The *Student* particularly dear to my heart. Mr. Masterson, you're trying to employ me, aren't you?", she said, imitating Dustin's famous line. "I have seen it five times…actually, you have too, probably. There's not a person in possession of a TV that hasn't seen it.", she continued.

"Well, not exactly five times, but definitely more than two… and it could be him, but you know how it is here. Every person that had thirty seconds of fame had his or her impersonator. With

his name and popularity, that does not surprise me. After all, can you see his hair? It's not gray, and I read an interview of his where he said he will never color his hair."

The nurses' responded, "You're right. I also remember how he commented on the cloning process, he was to first famous actor to criticize it. There's no way he would do this."

Clone number one let go a sigh of relief. There is no way he could explain his situation to anyone if people found out he was a clone. And there is a possibility he would get terminated…or something. He had no idea what they did with clones, but he guessed it was not pleasant.

Luckily for him, he had money in his pocket and was able to pay he ambulance really quick and get out of the hospital even quicker. He then called a cab.

"They ever tell you that you look like Dustin Paniro?", the cab driver asked him casually

"I do NOT look like him! Jesus, why does everyone say that?!?!?!", clone number one shouted in a very unpleasant manner.

The rest of the ride was equally unpleasant and clone number one eagerly entered his apartment. Then he started to revise the script again, but was too stressed and turned on the television. *Seconds* was on the channel he switched on, and he angrily threw a remote at the screen halfway through the film.

Meanwhile, the real Dustin Paniro enjoyed some time with his family. Due to his clones, there was a new spark of energy to him and they all noticed that. His daughter was especially happy dad was home more often. Even though she is forty, child's enthusiasm to socialize with a good parent is always childlike.

While the real Dustin enjoyed the time with his family, clone number two had his troubles. He stared at the script in front of him, worrying how would he perform the lines his character had.

The next day of filming, he had a panic attack on the set. He tried not to make a big deal out of it – nor did his colleagues think he was annoying – but it was still an obstacle for him. They couldn't believe it was the same Dustin from yesterday, who threw a tantrum and was quite a pain to work with.

"Man, it's like we're working with three different Dustins", the assistant director said to the microphone holder.

And that is when clone number two had a full-on panic attack. It lasted for two minutes. It was the first time for him that someone commented on the possibility of him being a clone, and it was the worst feeling he ever had in his short life, right next to the dilemma about the importance of his character in the film.

The crew called ab ambulance. It was normal to be worried about a seventy-year old. Especially if he was a living legend.

It was the same ambulance that picked clone number one the day before.

"How the hell is this possible?", said the nurse who quoted the film's lines in front of, not to her knowledge, clone of her favorite actor. "Paniro was picked up at the film set. And he has dyed hair."

"Maybe he really did it for the role", her colleague answered. "Whatever's the case, I could've asked him for an autograph."

"You can do it now."

"Well, that's correct", she said and asked clone number two for an autograph. He was intensely relieved, since that meant they think he is the real Dustin. He could not wait to get back on set, but the crew assured him to go home. he felt devastated that a whole day of filming got ruined because of him.

The real Dustin found out about his clones' ambulance trips – he was in contact with them, of course – he made a not so easy decision to introduce them to one another.

The meeting didn't go well. They were shocked.

"It is one thing to be one clone, but to have two…", clone number one stated.

"Yeah! Did you really want that much rest? Or was it comfort?", number two continued.

"Well…no. I did not want to have that much trouble on set – you know that I struggle with remembering- so I thought having two of you will help me. As we see now, it didn't. Hell, it lasted less than my attention span", he told jokingly. "It is not alright but allow me to correct myself…tell me if I can do anything. I'm sorry. I can at least help you financially."

The two clones were angry at first, but after getting to know each other in a few weeks, they came to one conclusion – his initial intention was not nice, but this is the first time that clones are treated normally. They made a research on clones and saw that every other clone had not been treated like a human being at all, and that their "original" was actually a good one.

They contacted Dustin and told him that they accept his apology. The first thing they did was socialize with him. They gave him a condition that he has to introduce them to his family and he agreed quickly.

The family members were shocked and disappointed in Dustin because of the firm opinions that he proved to be not that firm, about cloning. Of course, the thing that bothered them more was that he didn't tell them anything about the clones. However, the clones themselves "saved" him – they explained how he treated them and how he allowed them to make their own choices. It was quite a redeeming value for Dustin.

<p style="text-align:center">* *</p>

They all agreed to acknowledge the cloning in order to avoid possible unpleasant situations. The story of Dustin and his clones turned into a tabloid saga which annoyed them a lot. Luckily for them, tabloid sagas last until the next one comes, so they didn't have to wait too much for it to get over. Despite some lawsuits including invasive photographers, thing worked out for all three of them pretty well.

Real Dustin was understood at last. No one judged him due to his memory problems and he got both happy retirement and a decent legacy.

Clone number one, who named himself Benjamin, wrote a bestselling autobiography, "My life in the copying room" (although he made a great use of hyperbole), and even became a short story writer who had got a solid recognition.

Clone number two, who named himself Brad followed the footsteps of the original and went on with acting. First, his looks helped him since he could act in all those films real Dustin was offered to make, and second, he became a sensation in the acting world. *The Hollywood Reporter* named him "The First Original Copy" – there were other actors who cloned

themselves, but none had any success. He was offered to make a few dozen sequels to films in which original Dustin starred, but had enough integrity and freedom to refuse them.

And all three of them remained good friends.

When the original Dustin died both clones were afraid they would be next. Luckily, despite their elderly appearance, their organs were those of a teenager, so they had many more years ahead of them.

"We can thank him", said the Benjamin, and Brad concluded "for it's an honor to be a modified copy of such original.", on his funeral speech.

They both smiled with tears in their eyes.

3.5. Cut!

Jack Summers entered the film museum in Berlin. He was an aspiring filmmaker, not unlike thousands, or millions of others. Every single object in that museum was like a cult idol to him.

"If I could only shoot something on that camera!", he said, looking at cameras dating from 1950s. He loved the look of those films, how you could really feel the depth of the picture. Whenever he discussed motion pictures and camera qualities, one thing was always noticeable – passion. He would never talk about it in empty manner. And visiting that museum, no matter how much he loved cinema, made him a bit sad. An era where analog cameras were the main thing was gone, but more importantly, he feared that none of his work would have even an ounce on quality that the works mentioned in those rooms had. Sometimes, he even went to sleep crying, with that fact inscribing his mind. But he was determined to make the cult idols himself.

As anyone who can confirm, making films was not an easy job. Even the most simple-looking films required a solid dose of planning, location scouting, auditioning, scripting and editing...and so much more. To produce just a minute, you need to invest hours. And Jack did it all with a smile on his face. Whenever he made something, the only thing that was on his mind during the production period was what to put or add to the script or the film itself, or how would he edit it later. Apart from sleeping, eating, drinking water and breathing, filming was the only thing in his mind.

As a member of local film society, he was allowed to use their equipment, which made his films look as professional as they could. No matter how much he liked the lo-fi aesthetics, it was more than clear to him that no festival would accept that kind of work, even if it's great art. However, he always had doubts about his work and never felt completely satisfied with it. He wanted it to be art, desperately, but fear was sometimes almost crippling.

A lot of time was spent thinking about his future and interests. He was someone who – at least he thought so – could do good work with a few jobs, but the thing that filled him with most satisfaction was cinema. So, he decided to apply for the film academy. It was quite a painful year, filled with even more fear than usual, hard work and stress, but he was accepted in the end.

The film school was not easy. It was the first place where he encountered *the* problem a filmmaker has – artistic freedom. Criticism was never a problem to him, quite on the contrary, he loved to be as better as he could, but the criticism he received there was empty and shallow to him. It was never elaborate, and it was more of an expression of envy rather than form of advice – and he was not the only one who had that feeling. Not every single experience he had was bad, but there were moments of serious contemplation where he questioned his decisions quite a bit. Whenever he had those moments, he reminded himself of the hard work he made and how it was still the thing he wanted to do the most out of anything, despite the stress and setbacks experienced on a weekly basis.

Some years passed, and Jack became a director. It was not easy at all – although his work rate and creativity could cause a lot of envy to other people, the production was what bothered him. No script he wrote was accepted by any major film studio because he was described as "too experimental-leaning". And he did not agree with that. There were so many genuinely avant-garde authors – whose work he loved – who had no problem finding a studio that funded their vision. He often thought he pitched his ideas to wrong studio executives.

And he was correct, since the biggest problem he had was the place where he was located - Hollywood. Another problem were many newly regulated laws regarding the diplomatic relations between the United States and the rest of the world, and financial problems which made him unable to move somewhere else.

The way he made his money was by filming music videos. These videos were deemed by many as masterpieces, and every respected and respectful musician wanted to work with him. That was good solace for Jack, knowing that his work is appreciated somewhere, even if it was not necessarily the field he was most happy at.

Not only were his videos well regarded and popular, they were also a work that was signature and people could see his trademark. Every he filmed had his signature, and he won a lot of awards – which did not matter much to him, but it had some importance in the industry. After three years of making music videos, he was greenlit by a film studio to make a movie. Finally, what he was waiting for! But there was a catch – his film had to star Robert de Niro. But not that De Niro – the studio required of his android copy to be in the film, as the real de Niro was dead for some time. It was a fairly new practice and studios were slowly incorporating the said practice, with Metro Goldwyn Mayer paying the right to use Silvester Stallone likeness. It turned out to be a business masterstroke as people never got tired of Stallone, Schwarzenegger

or De Niro - despite the fact they do not fall within the same category. Another two things that studios liked were that it meant having any actor or actress from whatever period they wanted. They could have both *Roman Holiday* Audrey Hepburn and *Charade* Audrey Hepburn. Another good thing about it was that androids could be programmed, so the actor behavior was not a problem – there were already few films scheduled to star Klaus Kinski.

Jack hated that.

He would also argue that it was destroying the art of cinema and could not stand it. However, it was the only way for him to make a film. He had to sit down and weigh all the pros and cons he could.

One of the worst things for an artist aside from not having a space for his output was having a space, means and backing - whether financial or psychological – without creative freedom. And that is something Jack lacked at that point. It reminded him of his film school years, which made it even more frustrating.

He weighed all of the options he had – for as much time as he could- and in the end decided he would make those films. However, how could he incorporate De Niro – no matter his age, or to put it better, his false age – in the film he wrote without De Niro or any actor that resembles his acting style?

He did his homework by watching some De Niro films. Although De Niro shot one hundred and twenty films, he could find only fifteen in the age of streaming platforms and decline of physical media. All the examples of his talent were the ones he had already seen, such as *Taxi Driver*, *Goodfellas*, *The Godfather: Part II*, and *The Deer Hunter*. And of course, *Meet the Fockers*. He was beyond lacking inspiration, and beyond having any will to do the thing he ws so eager to do few years before the chance he got.

In the next few days he tried to talk the producers into making a deal which would include some creative freedom. The proposed deal of his consisted of making three films that would star androids, whichever the studio heads wanted, and then one that would star real people who will have androids made after their likeness in a few decades time. It seemed like a reasonable, and more important passable proposal.

The studio heads, of course, declined the idea while laughing and puffing the cigar smoke in his face.

And Jack, of course, decided to fight against their vileness and for his artistic integrity. He tried to make a film that would be a box office bomb, utilizing the worst that De Niro's android could offer and making people hate the actor androids. The "hating the androids" part looked possible to him after reading all the negative articles and social media comments regarding the new practice. After conceiving the idea, he started shooting the film, and filming was of course marred with problems. On the first day of shooting, the android broke and repeated "You talkin' to me?" for approximately three hundred and seventy-three times. Few weeks after the repeated mistakes, Jack broke the android into tiny pieces with a baseball bat. Unluckily for him, few androids were already made in case of backup. He "accidentally" broke another android, using two baseball bats. The bashing had a small therapeutic effect on Jack, and few days after he calmly resumed filming.

Three months after filming wrapped and two days after the release of the film, it became a huge box office hit.

Jack hated it.

Even though it was not intended to be a success, it also got great reviews. He used *Meet the Fockers* De Niro in a crime drama, which he thought will result in a terrible movie and the reviews that will confirm that unknown intention of his. On the contrary, the critics described it as a "daring auteur work with a sense of irony, absurd and genre inversions". Had it been an android-less case, he would love that description.

Things got even weirder, as he got a new lucrative offer unseen in those days of intensely corporate filmmaking: three films with a relatively big budget and quite big amount of artistic freedom. The only catch was that he had to use androids in the main roles again. He was disappointed, but two things came to his mind. Maybe he could use heavy prosthetics to disfigure actors so much that they could not be recognized, or use some actors he liked but would never have had chance to work with them otherwise, such as Buster Keaton or Alain Delon. The answer was not encouraging and the studio heads' letter was clear:

"Why the hell would we disfigure actors people want to see? And why the hell would people today want to see Buster Keaton or Alain Delon? The first one doesn't even talk, and the second one talks in French. Are you deluded, or do you think you know the audience as we do? Get a fucking grip!"

Another studio head even made effort to arrange a personal appointment with Jack, and his message was also clear:

"Why the hell would we disfigure actors people want to see? And why the hell would people today want to see Buster Keaton or Alain Delon? The first one doesn't even talk, and the second one talks in French. Are you deluded, or do you think you know the audience as we Get a fucking grip!", he shouted to Jack, with a cigar in his hand, cocaine on his nose and few hundred-dollar bills in his trash can.

That was yet another time, Jack thought, where a producer has shown he had no idea what he is talking about. That is why he hated them after finding out what their role was, and then he hated them even more as a filmmaker.

However, he wanted his revenge. He needed it.

The next three films he made were as avant-garde as possible. He put in extra effort to make it as unwatchable as it could be – for an average Hollywood filmgoer, that is. But both the average and above average filmgoer loved his films.

After the fourth film he made – fourth in four years, because he was creative nonetheless, and hardworking - he read a review in which he was called "The first auteur of the 2050s".

It was then a bit more difficult to be as angry as he was before that. The anger didn't leave his mind, but it was a bit less intense. He never thought he would get such praise ever in his life or career. In all honesty, he did try very hard to be subversive and creative as possible. But that still did not change the fact that his films did not star human beings. He still did not get his revenge, and the studio heads had the last say again.

The next offer from the studio was to adapt a Philip K. Dick story into a romantic comedy. He hated it so much that he contemplated shooting the producer for a few minutes. He toyed with the idea of programming a Stallone or Schwarzenegger android to do that. The thought made him laugh out loud. While he was against almost any form of violence, he was also against every form of greed.

Jack's next deal included five films. He already had ten screenplays written, and then more ideas in making.

"I feel like Woody Allen, expect I'm not infatuated with my stepdaughter", he jokingly said to himself after completing another screenplay. He often talked to himself, not because he was

crazy, but because it was hard for him to make friends in such epicenter of artifice, and the second reason was that he would act a bit into the mirror. He would record some of those movements – he had a camera implanted in his mirror – and would program the androids after some of the movements. It was his way of adding human touch to a machine. He wanted to find real actors for that, but a law prohibited actors in Hollywood to star in films which have budget bigger than hundred million dollars – and no small studio would give Jack any deals.

It was important that Jack was the only filmmaker who could actually make films with androids on his own, without a screenwriter or an assistant director, while having both financial profit and critics' praise. In fact, he was the only American based director that "Cahiers du cinema" wrote about. He would sometimes read it – it was hard to resist that urge since he was among the best in the business. He read an article about him that said: "Hitchcock and Cary Grant, Martin Scorsese and De Niro, Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune…and Jack Summers and the androids". It made him cry, because of two reasons.

A few days after reading that article, some technician came to Jack with the news of androids not wanting to work. Another director instructed another Leonardo Di Caprio what to do, and the response was "I'm sorry Marty, I'm afraid I can't do that". It looked like the androids had started to develop free will.

When Jack heard it, he was delighted. He hoped that it could finally make the studios employ real actors. For a second, he felt bad about the android technicians – they were the only people in the industry he made friends with – but then he knew that a technician will always be able to find a job in that society. And that the technicians themselves preferred to work with things that are not human-like androids.

Of course, the inclusion of real actors did not happen. An android technician new to their studio easily found a way to program them so they do what they are told to. Jack reminded himself that this was, after all, real life and not some over the top sci fi movie. He felt like he was in a Bunuel drama, and in that moment his wish to watch works of Bunuel again – despite the fact that they were quite hard to find on streaming services - suddenly disappeared, which was a shame for him because he liked him before.

However, sticking around the android technicians helped him learn how to program them and mold them more into actors he wanted them to be. After every shooting day, he would stay and talk with android technicians more than usual – before that, they would talk about other subjects - and asking them additional info about what they could and couldn't do. Android technician

were usually restricted to talk about such matters, but they easily told the information to a guy who was not only a source of the studios' biggest income, but also a friend.

Adjusting androids was more fun Jack thought it would be. That way, he was able to make a twenty-year-old looking Leonardo Di Caprio act like older Dustin Hoffman. At one point he considered making a remake of some film he loved, but quickly discarded it. Selling out was something he did try to avoid really hard, even if he sold himself a bit by agreeing to work with a Hollywood studio.

The next film he made was met with confused reaction of both audiences and critics. They were used to seeing recognizable faces with recognizable manners doing unrecognizable things, but recognizable faces having manners that are not recognizable for them turned out to be too much for the audience. Only his biggest admirers approved of his latest work. "Cahiers du cinema," unsurprisingly, called it his most daring work to date. But the studio heads did not like daring, whatever type of dare it was.

They arranged for a meeting with Jack and told him that he is not allowed to modify android behavior in any way. This was the first time Jack talked with more than one producer in the last two years. He never felt more discouraged since he started his Hollywood career.

To top it all, they threatened him with cutting all of his budgets and terminating his contract.

"There is no way I'm going back to directing music videos", he had said to himself. But there was also no way he was going to let them suppress him.

And he did not make videos again. He carefully made three more films, trying to make as bigger financial profit as possible. His revenge plan got an outline one night. It came to him that only a cinephile could come up with a plan that he came up with, or a psychopath.

He started to give a big percentage of his salary anonymously to film societies throughout the country and to encourage young filmmakers to work. And to work only with real actors. He was ashamed that such idea did not occur to him earlier, as he could help more to people who were in many ways similar to him.

It was great joy for him to direct his last film for the studio and meet the end of his contract. Not because the film was any good to him – he considered it downright bad – but because it marked the end of his relationship with the studio. On the day of "That's a wrap" sentence, he started crying. And for the one last dance, he smashed another android actor. It was a bit hard for him because beating the lookalikes of actors that were so dear wasn't pleasant, but he

reminded him that they are still lookalikes and not the real ones. And he imagined he was bashing the studio heads, instead of androids.

Of course, the last film he made was a box office hit. It was as safe as it could be, to secure a big box office gross. The last three films he made together had a 10 billion-dollar profit. This last one was also a success, and it earned him twenty million dollars. He gave nineteen million to numerous film societies.

Some days after the end of the film's theatrical run, he contacted some filmmakers he knew – although he didn't know them well, he knew that they also disliked all the studio heads that existed in Hollywood - and proposed an idea which they were quite happy about. The idea was to make their own production company which would only employ real actors and prohibit any usage of artificial intelligence. Another thing about the company was that it would be connected to those films societies he supported financially, and it would help the cinema he loved in the first place to return. Every single filmmaker agreed to his proposal in a manner of seconds. The only thing that remained was to be as quiet as possible, since it required some work to do, especially in the Hollywood system, where everyone was eligible to be stalked if they made conflict with a studio head.

And some work it was!

Using the knowledge acquired during the conversations with android technicians, Jack decided to program the androids to destroy all the major studios and kill some studio heads. He did not feel bad about it – most of the them were sexual predator in addition to their money grabbing eccentricities. He looked forward to their demises.

The android technicians were in the plan too – they also hated working for all the greedy, evil personalities that populated Hollywood. They were not afraid for their jobs, since they were qualified enough to work in the industry, even when the androids become a thing of the past. It was also a big effort for them to coordinate all their actions, since fifty of them were involved in it. One night, they managed to disconnect the surveillance systems in the studios and program all the androids to "malfunction" in a week time.

Exactly one week later, a swarm of android Schwarzeneggers, Stallones, Van Dammes and Lundgrens wreaked havoc on the studio lots. Armed with real, non-android weapons. Had teenage Jack seen it, he would be raving.

Few hours after the destruction of studio lots, other androids were in the process of terminating those thirty powerful producers while the filmmakers' company was being set up in the other part of the country. And every android was programmed to say one thing before terminating the studio heads: "Hasta la vista, baby!"

4. Conclusion

The five short stories within this thesis provide an interesting example, as genre stories, short story collection, and an exploration of certain themes.

As a (short) collection, it is composed in such order that it provides a certain rhythm – all of the stories have the similar length – from seven to nine pages – and are placed in a way that it creates a certain thematic tone. They are in such an order that there is a zig-zag structure, in the sense that it begins with a humorous story followed by a more serious one, which is followed by another humorous story, etcetera. The reason for it was to create a rhythm that makes the collection have a certain variety to it. Another aspect of having the stories in such an order is to make them read as a natural progression – the first story is about "waking up", and it is concerned with the mind, while the last one quite literally ends with a bang. The last story is also concerned with mind, in a specific sense – like the character in the first story, Jack Summers, protagonist of *Cut!*, wants to resist negative effect that science has on art by using his wits (and some androids in the process).

Regarding the aspect concerned with art as a topic – which was a starting point for the thesis – it is important to note that no situation and person is the same, and that makes the stories similar in certain plot points, yet different enough. All of the stories have characters who are artists, talented and well-regarded ones, and all of those characters have a point in the story in which they overcome the problem they are faced with. That argument can be used to describe every story, and a formulaic element is present. However, there are variations that make the stories different from each other. The most important part is that no character reacts or feels exactly the same – they live through numerous fears and problems, such as existential doubts, anxiety, fight for their artistic integrity, reintegration into their field of expertise and overcoming the modifications they are met with.

About the rhythm of the stories themselves, they are also written in such way to be unpredictable as they can be for a short story, since not every novum is presented in starting point. The problems that characters have is resolved quickly but that is also an element that strays from the expectation a reader would have for a short story. However, each character's aim is clearly presented and the importance is not necessarily put on the time it takes for conflict to be resolved, rather than the presentation of the problem and conflicts that the characters face. Despite the fact that characters have human aspects to them – the conflicts and problems

mentioned above - they are written in a manner that makes them not typically human in term of their reactions to problems they encounter, but are human nonetheless. Despite the unusual story structure and quick resolutions, all of the characters have clearly presented fears, traits and aims set early in the stories. In addition to atypical story structure, the characters behavior is presented in a manner to provoke a (sometimes darkly) humorous effect. If they reacted like a typical human would, the stories would have been easier to predict, and possibly be less enjoyable that they are in their final versions. Another important aspect was that the stories are, as a short form, not easy to balance on all layers a longer form can, such as characterization, plot progression and exploration of genre tropes, and some sacrifices, which proved to be welcomed ones in the writing process, had to be made.

Regarding other subjects explored in the stories – cybernetics, disability and transhumanism - the genre itself, and its categorization, was important. Science fiction proved to be a point of juxtaposition to art, as art and science are often seen distant from each other. That juxtaposition was used as starting point for exploration and variation of the subjects mentioned above. It was also important to use those subjects in a manner that was not obvious as it could have been. Disability itself was presented as element which is present and affective to the characters, but not as intense as it could be, and focused on the individual. It was important to present a 'spectrum' of disabilities – disability is often seen as physical and stigmatizing, but the disabilities in stories were not necessarily physical, as they are sometimes used to convey the characters' position in the society they are in, while still using the definition of disability and disability as a trope. Regarding cybernetics, it was intended to be a presentation of a science fiction element which is inverted. All the stories contain elements that are by definition cybernetic, but used in a sense which would not bring it to the foreground. As for transhumanism, it presented itself as a logical combination of cybernetics and disability. To put it shortly, all of the science fiction elements present in the stories were meant to be inverted and explored in a manner which does not come to mind when one thinks of genre that is science fiction, but science fiction tropes nonetheless are elemental to the stories.

One of the most important aims of the five stories was to make a mixture of author influence and genre inversion as such, in addition to building upon the themes and motifs that the authors used. Upon reading the stories, traces of the authors mentioned in the introduction are quite visible. The type humor and the slightly unusual behavior of the characters owes a lot to both Stanislaw Lem and Kurt Vonnegut. However, despite the thematic similarities mentioned in the introductory part concerned with comparison, it was also important to make the stories

imaginable as possible futures. Both Lem and Vonnegut use either exaggeration or fantastic elements which, despite the similarities with the existing world, do not make the stories believable as possible futures. The stories in the thesis rely on the existing scientific accomplishments and the possible directions they could go in.

To conclude, these stories quite possibly have their imperfections and topics that could be explored differently, but every sentence they consist of is intentional. The character descriptions, meaning and symbolism of names, usage of stylistic figures, and genre tropes were all chosen with great consideration and detail. The aim of the stories was accomplished – to produce stories that combine elements which are not often combined and explored, use humor, and present an optimistic view since, despite all the difficult imperfections of the existing present, the possible future could contain imperfections that are easier to overcome.

5. Literature sources:

1. Mann, George, *The Mammoth Encyclopedia of science fiction*, St. Martin's Press, 1999

2. Lem, Stanislaw, *The Cyberiad,* Penguin Random House*,* 2020

3. Ghiglione, Loren, Does science fiction — yes, science fiction — suggest futures for news?, *Daedalus* , Spring 2010, Vol. 139, No. 2, *On the future of news*, (Spring 2010), pp. 138-150

4. James, Edward, Utopias and anti-utopias, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction,* Cambridge University Press, 2003

5. Svec, Michael, Winiski, Mike, "SF and speculative novels: Confronting the science and the fiction", *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction: Challenging genres*, edited by P. L. Thomas, 35-57. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013

6. Bertetti, Paolo, "Building Science-Fiction Worlds", *World Building*, Boni, Marta, Amsterdam University Press, 2017

7. Eco, Umberto, "Science Fiction and the Art of Conjecture", *Times Literary Supplement* 4257, : 1257-1258, 1984

8. Volli, Ugo, Gli universi paralleli della semiotica e della fantascienza", in *La fantascienza e la critica. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Palermo*, edited by Luigi Russo, 113-124. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980

9. S. Haney II, William, The Latent Powers of Consciousness vs. Bionic Human; *Cyberculture, Cyborgs and Science Fiction: Consciousness and the Posthuman,* Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2006

10. Perkowitz, Sidney, *Digital People: From Bionic Humans to Androids*. Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2004

11. Campbell, Fiona Kumari, "Ability", *Keywords for Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, NYU Press, 2015

12. Ott, Katherine, "Prosthetics", *Keywords for Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, NYU Press, 2015

13. Berresem, Hanjo, "The Sounds of Disability: A Cultural Studies Perspective", *Culture – Theory – Disability; Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies,* edited by Waldschmidt, Anne, Berresem, Hanjo, and Ingwersen, Moritz, transcript Verlag, 2017

14. Goodley, Dan, "The Dis/ability Complex", *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2018), pp. 5-22

15. Rekret, Paul, "Seeing Like a Cyborg? The Innocence of Posthuman Knowledge", *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects*: *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Capitalism, Labour and Politics in the Age of Big Data,* edited by Chandler, David and Fuchs, Christian*,* University of Westminster Press, 2019

16. Cowley, Robert,"Posthumanism as a Spectrum: Reflections on Paul Rekret's Chapter, *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Capitalism, Labour and Politics in the Age of Big Data,* edited by Chandler, David and Fuchs, Christian, University of Westminster Press, 2019

17. Link, Eric Karl, "Introduction: Naturalism and Science Fiction", *Studies in American Naturalism*, Volume 8, Number 1, Summer 2013, pp. 1-5 University of Nebraska Press

18. Cheyne, Ria,"Wondrous Texts: Science Fiction", *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*, Liverpool University Press, 2019

19. Dinis, Eva,"Vulnerability as duality in speculative fiction", *Mediating Vulnerability: Comparative approaches and questions of genre*, edited by Masschelein ,Anneleen, Mussgnug, Florian, Rushworth, Jennifer, UCL Press, 2021

20. King, Edward, Page, Joanna, "(Post)humanism and Technocapitalist Modernity", *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America Book* Author(s): Edward King and Joanna Page, UCL press, 2019

21. Mackellar, Calum, "Cyberneuroethics", *Cyborg Mind Book Subtitle: What Brain–Computer and Mind–Cyberspace Interfaces Mean for Cyberneuroethics* edited by Mackellar, Calum, Berghahn Books, 2019

22. Vonnegut Jr., Kurt, *Complete Stories,* Seven Stories Press, New York, 2017

Abstract

This thesis is about science fiction, its certain subgenres, and it contains five short stories which explore the subjects such as cybernetics, posthumanism and disability. The stories can be categorized as soft science fiction, and also explore intertwining of art and science, the life of an artist and the difference that happens after the interference of science.

Sažetak

Ovaj diplomski rad je o temi znanstvene fantastike, o određenim podžanrovima iste i sadrži pet kratkih priča koje istražuju teme poput kibernetike, posthumanizma i invaliditeta. Priče mogu biti kategorizirane kao meka znanstvena fantastika, i također istražuju isprepliranje umjetnosti i znanosti, te život umjetnika i razlike koja se događa nakon interferencije znanosti.

Izjava o pohrani i objavi ocjenskog rada
(završnog/diplomskog/specijalističkog/doktorskog rada - podcrtajte odgovarajuće)

Student/ica: _Jakov Andro Skomrlj_

Naslov rada: _Znanstvena fantastika i kreativno pisanje_
Science Fiction and Creative Writing

Znanstveno područje i polje: _Humanističke znanosti, Filologija_

Vrsta rada: _Diplomski rad_

Mentor/ica rada (ime i prezime, akad. stupanj i zvanje):
Simon John Ryle, dr.sc.

Komentor/ica rada (ime i prezime, akad. stupanj i zvanje):

_____

Članovi povjerenstva (ime i prezime, akad. stupanj i zvanje):

Simon John Ryle, dr.sc.
Gordan Matas, dr.sc. izv.prof. dr.sc.
Victoria Vestić

Ovom izjavom potvrđujem da sam autor/autorica predanog ocjenskog rada (završnog/diplomskog/specijalističkog/doktorskog rada - zaokružite odgovarajuće) i da sadržaj njegove elektroničke inačice u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenog i nakon obrane uređenog rada.

Kao autor izjavljujem da se slažem da se moj ocjenski rad, bez naknade, trajno javno objavi u otvorenom pristupu u Digitalnom repozitoriju Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Splitu i repozitoriju Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu (u skladu s odredbama *Zakona o visokom obrazovanju i znanstvenoj djelatnosti* (NN br. 119/22).

Split, _15.1.2024_

Potpis studenta/studentice: _JS_

Napomena:

U slučaju potrebe ograničavanja pristupa ocjenskom radu sukladno odredbama Zakona o autorskom pravu i srodnim pravima (111/21), podnosi se obrazloženi zahtjev dekanici Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu.

SVEUČILIŠTE U SPLITU

FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

IZJAVA O AKADEMSKOJ ČESTITOSTI

kojom ja _Jakov Andro Skončrlj_, kao pristupnik/pristupnica za stjecanje zvanja magistra/magistrice _Anglistike i Povijesti umjetnosti_, izjavljujem da je ovaj diplomski rad rezultat isključivo mojega vlastitoga rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima i oslanja na objavljenu literaturu kao što to pokazuju korištene bilješke i bibliografija. Izjavljujem da niti jedan dio diplomskoga rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno da nije prepisan iz necitiranoga rada, pa tako ne krši ničija autorska prava. Također izjavljujem da nijedan dio ovoga diplomskoga rada nije iskorišten za koji drugi rad pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj ili radnoj ustanovi.

Split, _15.1.2024_

Potpis

_F S_