

JANA TOMAŠOVIČOVÁ – BOGUMILA SUWARA (eds.): Literature in Bioethics and Bioethics in Literature

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The essays in the collective interdisciplinary volume, *Literature in Bioethics and Bioethics in Literature*, show how bioethics provides topics and dilemmas to explore in literature, and how literature offers a narrative space to reflect upon these topics and dilemmas. The contributors include philosophers and philologists from Comenius University in Bratislava, the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, and the Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences. This collection builds upon previous work carried out within a joint project, including the thematic issue of *World Literature Studies* (2/2024) devoted to this topic, which was also edited by Jana Tomašovičová and Bogumiła Suwara.

The first article, Ivan Lacko's "The Ethics of Care and Consequence: A Bioethical Reading of Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*", aims to use Picoult's 2004 novel as a bioethical case study. One of the central observations Lacko makes in the article is that the ethical systems themselves contradict each other, as they are rooted in their own argumentation and/or value systems. This poses a challenge to resolving complex bioethical dilemmas, as answers based on various ethical systems and subjective, personal morals present clashing values and arguments rather than a universally accepted resolution.

Tomáš Károly's article, "Machines Like People in Healthcare: From Science Fiction to Reality", explores the intersection of science fiction narratives and real-world technological development. Discussing the

relationships between robots and humans, the author poses a question whether robots can be trusted, for example, in healthcare or friendships, and presents both positive and negative examples of bonds between humans and robots or AI. Károly discusses the inevitable inclusion of robots in healthcare and the need of patients to come to terms with this reality, but also the issue of the anthropomorphic fallacy.

Adam Škrovan, in his study "Beyond Genetic Enhancement in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*", aims to broaden the novel's interpretive framework by examining the enhancing (or "lifting", as termed in the novel itself) process from a bioethical perspective, drawing attention to the enhancement as opposed to the usual focus on artificial beings. The author argues that by leaving out the specifics of the lifting process, Ishiguro allows for multiple interpretations of its ethical significance. Škrovan draws on other literary depictions of human bodily transformation, such as *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) by H. G. Wells and reflects upon the public acclaim of and skepticism towards genetics and bioethics and its technologies, such as CRISPR. He also argues that as our real-world technology catches up to sci-fi, its depiction in the works of fiction changes as well. Škrovan approaches some of the most important bioethical questions: the line between therapy and enhancement, the question whether to enhance or not to enhance and also if such procedures risk redefining what it means to be human. Apart from the

purely bioethical issues, Škrovan also examines the social dimension of such issues, such as the possible gap or tensions between the lifted and non-lifted, loss of individuality or the possible exploitation of the procedures by the wealthy.

Bogumiła Suwara's article, "The Diversity of Life and Its Finitude in Selected Works", examines the denial of death in the "systems of death", established in all cultures, and the resolution of unbearable pain through euthanasia or palliative care. The literary landscape through which the author discusses these phenomena consists of Edson Oda's film *Nine Days* (2020) and Mateusz Pakuła's work, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję* (How I didn't kill my father and how much I regret it, 2022). Suwara discusses the problem of euthanasia in the systems of dying and analyses the boundaries of the Western model of death. One of the key questions in the article is that of viewing euthanasia either as suicide or as natural death. The analysis of the film *Nine Days* also draws on Martin Heidegger's idea of harmony with one's essence and the authentic experience of being.

Peter Fraňo's chapter "Two Cases of Suicide in Roman Literature and the Issue of Assisted Death in Bioethics" discusses the phenomena of suicide and its depiction in ancient literature. He conducts two case studies: one on Cicero's friend, Titus Pomponius Atticus from *On Famous Men* (*De viris illustribus*, c. 35 BCE) by Cornelius Nepos, arguably an Epicurean suffering from long term unbearable pain; the other on Tullius Marcellinus from Seneca the Younger's *Ad Lucilium epistolae morales* (*Moral Letters to Lucilius*, c. 65 CE), suffering from an unspecified yet curable illness, and most likely a Stoic. Fraňo discusses the paradox of the Epicurean suicide itself, and also describes other cases or attempts at suicide, comparing the role of a philosopher present at the scene of a suicide to that of a grief counsellor or psychologist.

Matúš Porubjak's article "Was Hesiod's Pandora a Posthuman?" analyses the most

relevant myths concerning Pandora's creation, Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (both c. 700 BC), in order to interpret the first woman as the first posthuman as well. Porubjak focuses on the following aspects of the myths: first, the "posthuman" gifts that the gods bestowed upon Pandora, and secondly, how the human world changed after her arrival. One of Porubjak's observations is the change of social order after her arrival – the need of men to provide for their wives (as a part of Zeus's scheme to prevent men from further pacts with gods), as well as establishing the institution of marriage and sexual reproduction. Lastly, Porubjak uses Nick Bostrom's definition of the posthuman to reach the conclusion that Pandora meets at least one criterion and thus can be considered as one.

Denisa Mišinová's article, "Dystopia as a Moral Experiment: The Educational Potential of Literature", aims to analyze and critically evaluate the potential of dystopian and young adult literature as a tool for shaping the moral values of young readers. In her opinion, dystopias can play a role in ethical maturation and presents recommendations for effective use of young adult dystopias in the education process. The author states that while 20th-century dystopias were more concerned with the critique of totalitarian regimes, 21st-century dystopias reflect such topics as technology and the climate crisis. Mišinová discusses the dynamics of biology, free will, and the influence of media on human morality to answer her question of whether morality can be shaped by reading and education.

The last chapter, Jana Tomašovičová's "Narrative Abilities and Moral Competencies: Inspiration from the Works of Martha C. Nussbaum", discusses the connection between strengthening narrative abilities and increasing moral competence. Tomašovičová describes the mutual influence of literature on bioethics and vice versa. Another argument of this study is the interaction between ethical expertise and moral competence: for example, in medical scenarios the reliance

only on ethical expertise is too abstract, risking the loss of complexity and specificity provided by the judgement of experienced healthcare personnel. In Tomašovičová's view, Nussbaum argues that literature deepens complex moral situations and its narrative methods prompt us to judge based not only on abstract ethical rules, but to include emotions in the equation – adding the dimension of vulnerability.

Jana Tomašovičová and Bogumiła Suwara's volume *Literature in Bioethics and Bioethics in Literature* provides the reader

not only with a thematically diverse series of individual studies, but also with a publication that critically examines the core topic from various viewpoints.

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