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Bakalářská práce

Reflections of Cultural Diversity in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot*

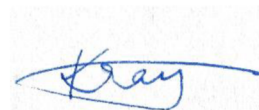
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Olomouc 2024

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci na téma *Reflections of Cultural Diversity in Elif Batuman's The Idiot* vypracovala samostatně za užití zdrojů a literatury uvedených v seznamu použité literatury.

V Olomouci 13. 6. 2024



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Krajčová Karolína

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## Anotace

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Karolína Krajčová
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<b>Název práce:</b>	Odraz kulturní rozmanitosti v románu Elif Batumanové <i>Idiot</i>
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	Reflections of Cultural Diversity in Elif Batuman's <i>The Idiot</i>
<b>Zvolený typ práce:</b>	Výzkumná práce – přehled odborných poznatků
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rozmanitostí kultur v akademickém románu <i>Idiot</i> od turecko-americké autorky Elif Batumanové. Cílem práce je reflektovat a uvést do souvislostí aspekty různých kultur, které se v románu objevují. Teoretická část práce předkládá základní pojmy týkající se této práce a románu a stručný popis života autorky a jejího díla. Praktická část se zaměřuje na analýzu hlavních postav románu a turecké, maďarské, americké a srbské kultury objevující se v románu.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	Kultura, Univerzitní román, Bildungsroman, Elif Batumanová, Kulturní normy v Turecku, Maďarsku, USA a Srbsku
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The focus of this bachelor's thesis is on the reflection of the diversity of cultures in the campus novel <i>The Idiot</i> by the Turkish-American author Elif Batuman. This thesis aims to reflect and provide context for the aspects of various cultures occurring in the novel. The theoretical part of this thesis introduces fundamental terms regarding this project and the novel and a brief description of the author's life and her work. The practical part of this thesis analyses the main characters



	as well as Turkish, Hungarian, American, and Serbian cultures in <i>The Idiot</i> .
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	Culture, Campus novel, Bildungsroman, Elif Batuman, Cultural customs in Türkiye, Hungary, USA, and Serbia
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# 1 Introduction

Becoming a national best-seller, Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* achieved a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize in 2018. The publisher of this book – Penguin Press – introduced *The Idiot* in the synopsis as “*A portrait of the artist as a young woman. A novel about not just discovering but inventing oneself*”. The protagonist's path to self-discovery and reinvention is enriched by her experiences with diverse cultures, which is the main aim of this thesis – to reflect on different cultures in *The Idiot*. This project is structured into eight chapters and related sub-chapters.

The first three chapters (excluding the Introduction) focus on fundamental terms associated with *The Idiot*. The second chapter shares an overview of what the term culture encompasses and includes two sub-chapters about general perspectives of Turkish and Hungarian cultures that occur in the book the most (further analyses of these and other cultures appear in Chapters 7, 8, and 9). *The Idiot* is a coming-of-age story set in an academic setting, and these two aspects are the topics of the third and fourth chapters. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the author of *The Idiot* – Elif Batuman, and a short introduction to the book itself. Lastly, the sixth chapter introduces the protagonist, her love interest, and her friend, whom she met at Harvard College and who come from different cultural backgrounds.

The second half of this thesis reflects all the cultural backgrounds, customs, traditions, and languages that appear in the book. The seventh chapter concentrates on Turkish culture in *The Idiot*. This chapter is divided into five sub-chapters – Kemalism, Turkish language, social and cultural customs, cultural differences between the protagonist as a Turkish-American and Turks, and figures from Turkish history – each addressing an aspect of Turkish culture occurring in the book and how they relate to the protagonist or the plot. The following chapter discusses three aspects of Hungarian culture that appear in the book – the language, social and cultural customs, and history and historical figures. The last chapter includes two other cultures that are mentioned on a couple of occasions, which are American and Serbian. Both cultures are discussed in individual sub-chapters – arranging these two cultures into sub-chapters rather than chapters has been chosen because of the significantly fewer instances they are mentioned in.

As the first paragraph states, reflecting on the variety of cultures in *The Idiot* is the main objective of this thesis. While culture is not at the centre of the book, the many occasions it appears throughout the book provide a unique element that readers might appreciate.

## 2 Culture

### 2.1 Definition of culture

There is no uniform definition of culture, as it is a complex concept to grasp. Its evolution throughout history and usage in various academic disciplines and systems of thought forged it into one of the most intricate words to define (Williams, 1985). According to White, however, there was a homogeneous consensus in the 19th century on what the word culture meant when anthropologist E. B. Tylor wrote: "*Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society*" (2016, p. 15). The term culture in its pilot stages meant tending to things a person considered valuable to impart to future generations.

Although Tylor's definition was appropriate for decades, the concept of culture and its clear definition have been fluctuating since the 20th century. Numerous anthropologists began to wonder whether there is a difference between culture and human behaviour, and many believed culture was indeed behaviour. However, some argued that culture is an abstraction from behaviour (White, 1959). Anthropologists C. Kluckhohn and A. L. Kroeber throughout their *Critical review of concepts and definitions* debate that culture does not exist anywhere, only in the minds of people. They also compare culture to a map: "*Just as a map isn't the territory but an abstract representation of the territory so also a culture is an abstract description of trends toward uniformity in the words, acts, and artifacts of human groups*" (1963, p. 172).

### 2.2 Turkish culture

Turkish immigrants to the United States have difficulty assimilating into American society while maintaining their Turkish culture and identity. Compared to Greeks or Armenians, there is not much awareness about the existence of Turks who wish to be perceived as valid components of American society while also discerning themselves from Muslim communities (Kaya, 2009). The former is true, especially for first-generation Turkish Americans – many hold conservative values and beliefs which they want to raise their children with; however, American social customs clash with these ideals.

Religion and class are important boundaries between the Turkish-American community. Non-religious Turks detach themselves from Muslim circles. Lower-class and upper-class Turks differ in terms of the neighbourhoods they choose to live in (Kaya, 2005). One of the

lower-class neighbourhoods is Paterson in New Jersey. It is not an area with many opportunities, but the vast concentration of Turkish Americans evokes cultural freedom. As the first paragraph mentions, first-generation Turkish Americans are conservative as well as nationalistic therefore they enjoy this autonomy of culture the most as they can spend time in purely Turkish establishments (Kaya, 2005).

Türkiye's geographical position is between Europe and Asia, which allows a variety of cultures to merge. As urbanization increases, conservative values and traditions become central in rural regions. The reign of the Ottoman Empire and Islam that lasted for centuries had a tremendous impact on today's Turkish culture. Turkish values and principles stem from this Islamic sovereignty. Honour, hospitality, and honesty are some of the core Turkish virtues (Evason, 2019a). The online collaborative project *The Cultural Atlas* shares that honour rules how Turks behave – if a person's behaviour is shameful, dishonour befalls the family as the individual's actions' root cause is their upbringing (Evason, 2019a).

Close-knit communities are a crucial factor for Turks. This extent of sociability, however, does not allow much privacy. Despite that, Turkish American immigrants feel the loss of this aspect of their culture. The writer of the Turkish culture portion of *The Cultural Atlas*, Nina Evason, also states: "*It should be noted that the influence of cosmopolitan ideals and technology has led to a general decline of collectivistic/community values in urban areas of Türkiye. The younger generation may also show more preference towards individualism*" (Evason, 2019b).

### **2.3 Hungarian culture**

Various hundred-years-long political situations, such as the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, or the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, have influenced Hungarian culture. Rudolf Chmel also mentions the effects of the Trianon syndrome in his article *Syndrome of Trianon in Hungarian Foreign Policy and Act on Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries*. Firstly, the Treaty of Trianon was an agreement between the Allies and Hungary following the loss of World War I, which declared Hungary to dismantle the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and relinquish  $\frac{2}{3}$  of its territory to neighbouring countries (Britannica, 2024). Furthermore, the Soviet dominion shaped Hungary's culture. The following paragraphs discuss Hungarian cultural customs associated with the mentioned political situations.

While Hungarians felt discontent towards the socialist government, life under the socialist regime provided Hungarians financial stability and security – this disappeared in the years after

the country transitioned to democracy. Numerous industries were privatized by the state, which has been an ongoing issue because finding an affordable housing property has become difficult. As a result, many Hungarians move abroad to search for more convenient opportunities. According to *The Cultural Atlas*, generations of Hungarians who witnessed their country's shift from socialism to democracy assign the poor economic situation to the government's insufficient management. This tendency stems from their experience with a socialist government that handled most of societal needs (Scroope, 2017a).

As was alluded to in the first paragraph, the Trianon syndrome persists among some Hungarians, which has created a sense of apprehension experienced across the country. Many reminisce about Hungary's prime under the Monarchy – this inclination to clutch onto past victories to compare them to current times and to feel resentment towards the alleged injustice of the Treaty of Trianon is described as the Trianon syndrome. While this is true for some, there are Hungarians who transcend this bitterness and only celebrate the success of the past (Scroope, 2017a).

## 3 Campus novel

### 3.1 Definition of campus novel

Campus novel is a genre of literature focused on a university setting and its scholars. Other interchangeable titles are college novels or academic novels. However, Jeffrey J. Williams, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, argues in his journal article, *The Rise of the Academic Novel* (2012, pp. 561-562), that a campus novel focuses on the setting of campus and student life, while the academic novel's centre point is academic workers.

### 3.2 Characteristics of campus novel

For academics and scholars alike, campus novels are relatable as they are about topics and include themes that both groups come across in their daily academic lives. Robert F. Scott listed in his journal article the areas of focus of a campus novel: "...*the absurdity and despair of university life; the colourful, often neurotic personalities who inhabit academia; and the ideological rivalries which thrive in campus communities*" (2004, p. 82). These areas are presented together with key elements, such as satire, deadpan humour, and comedic tone. It is universally known that authors use satire in literature when they expose unorthodox topics, ideas, or views. Such concepts can be portrayed in campus novels as well.

Character-wise, the usual characters of a campus novel are professors depicted as "*buffoons or intellectual charlatans*" according to Scott (2004, p. 83). Professors usually play the role of protagonist and teach more often than not social studies or humanities fields. The obvious explanation for this is that the writers of the novels have operated in these departments (Anténe, 2015, p. 7). Campus novels provide a wide range of character types – people of colour, queer people, people of different religious or cultural backgrounds, and students of various majors.



## 4 Bildungsroman

### 4.1 Definition of Bildungsroman

Bildungsroman is a novel genre about the mental and moral transformation of a usually young protagonist. Coming-of-age is a traditional theme of this genre. Other common themes of the development of the protagonist are enlightenment, attaining maturity, self-reflection, and the loss of innocence. Marc Redfield wrote about the genre as follows:

*“Since by definition the Bildungsroman seeks to repeat this synthesis of particularity and generality on the level of content itself as the narrative of a ‘Bildung’—of the gradual acculturation or socialization of a self—the genre seems structured from the outset as an aesthetic formulation, offering itself as the formal repetition of the synthesis of form and content that is the content of the form. In this respect we can understand the Bildungsroman as a trope for, and example of, the aspirations of aesthetic humanism.”* (1994, pp. 17-18).

In other words, Redfield debates whether Bildungsroman could be classified as a trope if one concludes that the contents (the finding of one's true self) of a Bildungsroman novel are "an aesthetic formulation". Speaking of aesthetics, Hershinow agrees that the Bildungsroman narratives show vital aesthetic and ethical ideals (2019, p. 11). Bildungsroman novels uncommonly end with a happy ending, however, there is a “negative Bildungsroman” where the protagonist experiences melancholy, nostalgia, or even death at the end, which Melissa Hardie in her journal article, *The Bildungsroman: form and transformations*, views as “*a formal, moral, historical or aesthetic category*” (2020).

Marianne Gottfried in her letter to David H. Miles offers expansion on the definition of Bildungsroman, which is that Bildungsroman paints the development of related incidents that climax into a denouement. She also states that Bildungsroman aims to portray the protagonist from all aspects and their transformation in those aspects. Lastly, Gottfried articulates that Bildungsroman manages to sustain a balance between the social and personal aspects and investigates relationships between them (1976, p. 122).

Bildungsroman is connected to the campus novel genre (using Williams' definition of a campus novel as was mentioned in the previous chapter). Williams also states that Bildungsroman illuminates the genre of coming-of-age (2012, p. 562). This statement is logical considering that coming-of-age focuses on the growth of a young person and on the moment when they officially become an adult.

## 5 Elif Batuman

### 5.1 About the author

Batuman is a novelist and journalist of Turkish descent. She was born in New York in 1977 to Turkish parents (making her a second-generation Turkish American). She has been writing articles for *The New Yorker* since 2010, focusing on various topics such as dung beetles, the mass shooting epidemic happening in the United States, or stoicism. Batuman graduated with a doctorate in comparative literature from Stanford University (Furlanetto, 2017, p. 253). On her website, Batuman writes that when she moved to Istanbul in 2010, she began teaching at Koç University for three years. Her studies as a Russian literature student allowed her to spend a summer in Uzbekistan.

Her bibliography consists of her first book, a memoir *The Possessed*, her debut novel *The Idiot*, and its sequel *Either/Or*. The debut novel *The Idiot* was one of the finalists for the Pulitzer Award in fiction in 2018.

### 5.2 The Idiot

The novel is semi-autobiographical; it is set in 1995 America, and released in 2017. Inspired by the Russian writer Dostoyevsky, Batuman borrows the name of his novel for her own (Domestico, 2017, p. 26). Genre-wise *The Idiot* is categorized as a Bildungsroman and campus novel.

The storyline follows an 18-year-old Selin Karadağ, daughter of Turkish parents, beginning her first year at Harvard as a linguistics major. Batuman started writing the novel in 2000 but abandoned it a year later to focus on her studies. In 2014, she returned to it as she realized how similar her problems at 18 were to problems in her thirties.

## 6 Characters in *The Idiot*

*The Idiot* offers a variety of characters of diverse cultural backgrounds. This thesis will discuss the protagonist on her own in a following section. Alongside Selin, two other characters appear in the book the most – her friend Svetlana and Selin’s love interest Ivan.

Svetlana is introduced in the book with Ivan in a Russian language class for beginners which Selin also attends. Svetlana is from Yugoslavia, particularly from Serbia. She is intelligent and often references her upbringing based on Western philosophy. Svetlana is very talkative, sometimes as much as garrulous, and often overshares – for example at the very first proper meeting between Selin and her, Svetlana bombards Selin with her family history and “emotional baggage” as she later apologetically admits. Svetlana comes from a wealthy family – her father was a famous Serbian analyst, and her mother was an artist, architect, and designer. Svetlana’s character is a complex personality opposite of Selin’s who is still trying to find a place in the world.

As was mentioned, Ivan fills the character of Selin’s love interest. Ivan comes from a Hungarian village near Budapest and is in his senior year at Harvard studying mathematics. He appears pretentious and sometimes even clueless regarding Selin’s feelings towards him. When Selin begins corresponding with him through e-mail, his responses oftentimes make no sense, and it gets to a point when Selin questions whether she is not just the centre of his ridicule. Ivan’s arrogance raises the question of why Selin fell in love with him, especially because in one of his e-mails to her, he wrote that he is in a relationship and that he loves his girlfriend only sometimes, all the while he also carries some affection towards her (Batuman, 2017, p. 133).

### 6.1 Selin Karadağ

Her character was briefly introduced in the previous chapter as the protagonist of *The Idiot*. Selin is a Turkish-American teenager, an aspiring writer starting at Harvard College. She was born in New Jersey to immigrant parents who divorced when she was a child. Her mother is a medical researcher at a second-tier school. Selin’s father moved to New Orleans, remarried, and had a son – Selin’s half-brother. *The Idiot* introduces an atypical protagonist personality-wise, who experiences her first identity crisis and offers an interesting outlook on aesthetics and ethics.

Selin's personality is unconventional, cynical, naïve, and quirky. Her actions and attitude can be oftentimes perceived as absurd or idiotic. Batuman describes Selin in an interview with Anthony Domestico as a "*clueless person who thinks a lot about the right way to live, falls terribly in love, and does a lot of running around in an inefficient way*" (2017, Domestico). Selin's cynicism is deadpan and borderline morbid. An example of this is on the very first page of the book when Selin receives an Ethernet cable and asks what it is for and whether she is supposed to hang herself with it. Many of her remarks are about death or dying. Another example is on page 40 when Selin and her friend Svetlana talk about their sex life. Svetlana wonders how and when her first time will happen to which Selin thinks "*I had often flipped through a calendar wondering on which of the 366 days (counting February 29) I would die, but it had never once occurred to me to wonder whether I had already met the first person I would have sex with*". An additional aspect of Selin's naivety could be that she is a rules follower, which she admits on page 131 when she regrets not having accomplished anything because she always listened to her parents. Another instance occurs on page 136 when she reads an e-mail from Ivan where he describes his time at Caltech and at one point, he mentions getting illegally inside Universal Studios, to which Selin thinks how she would never do such a thing – try to outsmart someone. She asks herself where such a life could lead her and how that could make her attractive (Batuman, 2017).

During her second semester, Selin begins to struggle with her identity. For instance, on page 124, Selin asks one of her teachers whether her nickname Sonya is bad luck. She then proceeds to explain that female characters in *Uncle Vanya*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *War and Peace* called Sonya are pathetic and unable to find a partner. Selin has a problem understanding Ivan – her Hungarian schoolmate whom she falls in love with. Her shortcomings in creating a connection with Ivan and gradually losing interest in linguistics were the reasons for her insomnia and later, burnout. Selin likes to find meaning in things and has a curious mind, however, by the end of her first semester she feels discouraged and struggles to understand anything (2017, pp. 128-131). To find a sense of reality, herself, and to be close to Ivan, Selin agrees to spend a portion of her summer as an English teacher in a Hungarian village.

A prominent characteristic feature of Selin's is her sense for aesthetics, how it connects to ethics and dictates one's ethical principles. The online encyclopaedia Britannica defines aestheticism as an art movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that believed in creating art for art's sake – in other words, art can be beautiful while abstaining from political or any other purpose. Selin's personality traits discussed in a previous paragraph are consistent with aestheticism (Townsend, 2020, p. 587). The evidence of this can be found on multiple occasions in the book.

The obvious example occurs when Svetlana describes Selin as someone who lives by aesthetic principles, while Svetlana is influenced by Western philosophy and its ethical principles. Selin is astonished by this statement as she never thought of aesthetics and ethics as two different things rather than that ethics were aesthetic. To Svetlana's remark, Selin explained that people rarely defy the law, because it is unattractive (Batuman, 2017, p. 36).

Despite the audience having full access to Selin's mind, it is not easy to navigate through many of her thought and decision processes. Selin Karadağ is a complicated character whose character arc follows an interesting plotline.

## 7 Reflection of Turkish culture in *The Idiot*

### 7.1 Reflection of Kemalism

Selin Karadağ is an almost exact literary reflection of Elif Batuman's younger self. Batuman disclosed in *The White Review* (2017) that she is a child of Turkish immigrant parents. In her own *Cover Story* (2016) article for *The New Yorker*, Batuman writes about the beginning of Kemalism and its influence on her family as well as the Turkish community in Türkiye and the US.

Kemalism stemmed from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rising to power. Atatürk was the leader of the resistance movement in Türkiye in 1924 who was determined to keep Türkiye's sovereignty from Western forces as well as to abolish the Ottoman Empire (Kili, 2020, p. 381). With that came a surge of changes that Batuman lists in her article *Cover Story*. For women, the most significant changes were the right to vote, to own property, to run for positions in the Turkish Supreme Court, and to run for office. In a book talk meeting for the release of *The Idiot* at the Politics and Prose bookstore (a record of this conference can be found on YouTube), Batuman says that her grandmother was the first generation of women who were allowed to work and get education in the Republic of Turkey, which influenced her parents to put a great emphasis on her education. This is reflected in one of the scenes in *The Idiot*, which occurs on page 62 when Selin tells her mother she wants to work at a library. Selin's mother became furious because she was the one that was supposed to work and take care of all financial issues while Selin devotes herself to studies and does not have to worry about money (Batuman, 2017).

There is a clear divide between Turks who are favourable of Atatürk's reforms and Turks who are rather conservative and would like to bring forth what was left of the Ottoman Empire. To put this into context, Kemalists wanted a secular republic where women had reproductive rights, the right to education, and the right to engage in politics. Sciences replaced religion as the new haven, and Islam was discouraged from being practised (Kili, 2020). On the opposite side of the secularists was the opposition A.K. Party (who have been in power since 2003), which wanted to reverse all of Atatürk's reforms. Batuman describes her experience in Türkiye in the *Cover Story* article, where she lived for three years in 2010. She writes about her experience with citizens of the two opposing parties into which Türkiye was divided – “white Turks” and “black Turks”. White Turks were Kemalists and populated Ankara and Istanbul, while black Turks were middle and lower-class Muslim citizens populating the rest of the Turkish peninsula. Although this exact issue (and religion as a whole) does not occur in *The*

*Idiot*, there are few instances when religion is mentioned. Selin's parents grew up in a secular Türkiye and raised Selin without religion in the US, which she explicitly says on page 15. Then on page 174, she mentions her parents drinking alcohol, which proves the fact that her parents are not Muslim and were raised under Kemalism. On page 306, Selin jokingly condemns all religions, Islam specifically. Lastly, on page 315 Selin eats pork for the first time. Pork was not traditionally eaten in Türkiye regardless of someone's faith. Overcoming this cultural custom was so difficult for Selin that she teared up (Batuman, 2017).

Batuman being an atheist could be the reason religion and politics are not a prevalent topic in *The Idiot* as it is not something that defines her and is not a centrepiece of her life.

## 7.2 Reflection of the Turkish language

Language is an important feature in *The Idiot* since it ties Selin to her goal of becoming a writer. In her first semester, she signs up for two language seminars "Linguistics 101" and "Beginning Russian". The explanation of the Turkish suffix "-miş" spans across three pages in the book, which dawns on Selin's awkward relationship with participating in gossip and rumours. *The Idiot* also touches on the topic of people being unable to pronounce ethnic names.

On page 45, Selin talks about the Turkish suffix "-miş", which she mentions regarding the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis<sup>1</sup>. Selin agrees with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – she acknowledges the difference when she thinks in English and Turkish. The suffix "-miş" is used when a person talks about something they did not witness themselves. English does not have a literal equivalent, however, the appropriate translations could be "I heard" or "apparently" (Batuman, 2017). This suffix is used in fairytales, rumours, compliments, or jokes. Selin mentions complaining about the suffix to her mother, because every time it is used about her, she feels "caught out". Selin also dislikes talking about people without them being present and feels embarrassed when she does. She likens the suffix to a curse because it feels like she is intruding on others' experience, and it is a form of betrayal (whether she is gossiping or simply talking about them). Furthermore, Batuman confirms this in *The White Review* interview when she calls it "an act of violence to describe another person's story from your point of view".

The campaign "My Name, My Identity" classifies mispronunciation of someone's name as a microaggression, which *The Idiot* momentarily mentions. The campaign argues that a name connects to a person's identity and by mispronouncing someone's name the speaker misinterprets one's identity. The microaggression of misspelling or mispronouncing an ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> According to the educational site *ThoughtCo.*: "the linguistic theory that the semantic structure of a language shapes or limits the ways in which a speaker forms conceptions of the world"

name is often disguised by phrases such as “*Your names are too hard to say*” (Jola, 2020, p. 31). On page 3, Selin receives her university e-mail address made up of her surname, but it is spelled without the Turkish ğ, which is not pronounced. She thinks back to all the times she had to correct people and tell them that the ğ is silent and every time people laughed at that. Over time she became weary of having to repeatedly explain her identity only for it to be mocked (Batuman, 2017). While the original book uses the word ‘weary’, the Czech translation uses “*řikávata jsem mechanicky*” (an English translation of this would be along the lines of “I’d say mechanically”), which carries a different meaning and in a way downsizes the exhaustion one feels when their identity is disregarded (Batuman and Novák, 2019). Kaya Gadhia in her article in *The Oxford Student* weighs on this issue of having to repeat your name. She writes that others being unable to say her name correctly is “*a painful reminder of my ‘otherness’ compared to my peers, and the fact that I do not belong*” (Gadhia, 2021). Most of the scenes in *The Idiot* originate from the author’s life, including this one. In 2017, Batuman did an interview with Paul Laity for *The Guardian*, where Laity introduces Batuman and her first name, which she always had to spell out growing up. Later on, on page 138 a nurse calls out “*something that was almost definitely supposed to be my name*” meaning that once again Selin’s name was mispronounced (Batuman, 2017).

### **7.3 Reflection of Turkish social and cultural customs**

While the Turkish culture is rich and could be explored in depth, this subchapter will discuss only those cultural aspects occurring in *The Idiot*. The book does not necessarily revolve around culture, however with culturally diverse characters and the author being a woman of colour, cultural facets naturally seep throughout some scenes. Punctuality, handling money, and Turkish names are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Before the semester starts, Selin has to sign up for classes, for some she has to pass an interview. According to Evason, it is expected to arrive at social gatherings or meetings on time (Evason, 2019d). This cultural trait is not foreign to Selin as she arrives 20 minutes early to her literature interview. On other occasions such as going out with Ivan or accompanying one classmate to a play, Selin is punctual although the two counterparts were already waiting for her. Nonetheless, Turkish punctuality is not truly engraved into Selin’s core as she was multiple times late for her Russian language classes or even missed them altogether (Batuman, 2017, pp. 67, 78-79).

In the case of paying, Turkish people do not usually split the bill as *The Cultural Atlas* states. In Türkiye, the one who is inviting others is expected to pay for the meal or drinks and



supposedly if a Turkish person insists on paying, the other person should let them pay (Evason, 2019c). On one occasion, when Selin is shopping with Svetlana, Selin wants to pay for the whole purchase which Svetlana offers to pay for. Although Selin does not protest, she still counts half of their purchase to pay for. Another time when Selin and Ivan go to a café and it comes to paying, Selin is ready to pay (it is not disclosed whether for both of their drinks or just hers), however, Ivan does not let her, and Selin does not argue (Batuman, 2017, pp. 32, 157).

Turkish names follow the arrangement that most Western countries do – the last name follows a given name (e.g. Selin Karadağ, William Shakespeare, or Victor Hugo), and when they address someone they add “Bey” for a man and “Hanım” for a woman after their given name (e.g. Selin Hanım, Mahmut Bey) (Evason, 2017). Until 1934 when the Surname Law was established, Turkish people did not have surnames. Families were known and addressed by nicknames or epithets (Alakus, 2007, p. 5). Meral Alakus also explains the situation of women’s surnames. Women took their father’s or husband’s family name after marriage, however, in 2001 another law was passed and women were able to accept their husband’s name and add it after their family name. Some of the most common Turkish names which are also mentioned in the book are Attila, Yusuf, and Güven. The author’s name Elif is also quite common in Türkiye. The name Attila supposedly comes from the Gothic language and means “little father” according to the website *Behind the Name* (2022). Yusuf is the Turkish version of Joseph. In *The Idiot*, Selin explains that the name Güven means trust, and additionally *Behind the Name* (2019) includes “confidence” and “courage” as possible translations. The first part of Selin’s name “sel” in Turkish means “a torrent” or “a flood” and her surname Karadağ is translated as “black mountain” (2024). Turkish people consider various factors when they choose names for their children – to name a few, the informational website *How in Turkey* mentions the time of year or day they are born, to honour their ancestors, or what personality parents think their child will have. Selin receives an e-mail from a stranger called Yıldırım Özgüven, which she translates as “Thunderbolt Self-Confidence”. She then proceeds to make a joke out of his name: “Probably he had looked in the Harvard directory for girls with Turkish names and, drawing on the hereditary self-confidence his family was known for, [he] had written me that stupid note” (Batuman, 2017, p. 119).

## 7.4 Reflection of differences between Selin as a Turkish-American and Turkish people

It is logical to assume that the typical Turkish “politeness” when it comes to punctuality and splitting the bill (as was mentioned in the previous subchapter) does not bind Selin, because of her upbringing in the US. Nonetheless, being of Turkish descent has an impact on her personality and worldview as much as the American environment. This subchapter analyses Selin as an individual influenced by two different cultural backgrounds as they occur in the book.

According to the results of the research on weight, height, and BMI among Turks, conducted by the *Medical Science and Discovery* journal, the approximate height for Turkish women is 161 cm and for men 173 cm. Additionally, the chief editor of the online publication *The Attic on Eighth*, Olivia Gündüz-Willemin who is Turkish, wrote in her review of *The Idiot* that Selin’s tall figure is an important factor to counter the stereotype that Turks are small (Gündüz-Willemin, 2017). Selin’s height is discussed on two occasions in *The Idiot*. On their second meeting, Svetlana tells Selin she noticed her tall figure first, among other things, and on page 23 it is disclosed that Selin is the tallest member of her family. The proof of this can also be found on page 414 when Selin spends the night at her aunt and cousin’s house in Turkey, and she is too big for her bed. Her cousins told her once that it is because of consuming American food and leading a haphazard life in the US (Batuman, 2017). Her struggle with size also transfers to the difficulty of buying shoes that could fit her, which happens on page 150.

Upon their second meeting, Selin and Svetlana exchange phone numbers, and the opposite manner in which each notes the phone number makes Selin think of how different they are. While Selin writes Svetlana’s phone number on her hand, Svetlana writes hers in a diary. Selin describes how she is impulsive in her actions and less traditional, and Svetlana has a strong sense of order. To put into context, the online country comparison tool *Hofstede Insights* shares an outlook on various aspects of what comprises every country. *Hofstede Insights* compares the “Uncertainty Avoidance” aspect between Türkiye, Serbia, and the United States. This category explains how each country handles the uncertainties of what the future might look like. These uncertainties generally cause anxiety, and each country has developed strategies (traditions, customs, beliefs, rules) with which they attempt to control stability among citizens. Türkiye and Serbia have the tendency to avoid any uncertainties by following rules and conserving traditional facets of their cultures. Their fear of the unknown reflects their unwillingness to accept unconventional and new ideas. The United States, on the contrary,

welcomes innovations and is tolerant of diverse opinions (2023). Therefore, it is possible to infer that Selin's impetuosity stems from growing up in an American setting. Furthermore, a notable factor that could have played a role in influencing her is the ideology of Kemalism, which her parents support.

On page 213, Selin and Ivan talk about their cultural backgrounds. Ivan asks Selin how much of an American or Turk she feels and whether her sense of identity changes when she is in Türkiye. Selin answers that she feels like a child when she is visiting her family in Türkiye because she does not know enough Turkish to converse comfortably. Ivan responds that he feels more isolated and invulnerable in the US than in Hungary because Hungarian people are blunt and speak their minds freely, while Americans are overly polite and often conceal the truth (Batuman, 2017, pp. 213-214). At the end of the book, when Selin visits her Turkish relatives, she finds herself isolated and unable to socialize with her peer group. Turkish society lives in a collectivistic nature as opposed to the typical American individualism. Unintentionally, Selin stands out in her family because of her height and the fact that she enjoys swimming a lot, which she admits originates from her American upbringing.

Lastly, returning to the principle of aesthetics and ethics (which was previously discussed in Chapter 6), Selin's stance on this matter demonstrates the Turkish need for rules. As was mentioned in the last paragraph, Türkiye manages to preserve their conservative ways despite Atatürk's Kemalism.

## **7.5 Reflection of Turkish historical figures**

Turkish history spans over thousands of years. *The Idiot* talks about a few historical events, and there are three instances where Selin talks about significant Turkish figures from history – Hittites, the Huns and Attila, and Tamerlane.

The aboriginal tribe of Hatti is speculated to have been the foundation of the Hittites who populated the Asia Minor peninsula (Mark, 2018). The Hittites are mentioned in *The Idiot* on page 41 when Selin and Svetlana go to a Russian grocery shop, where they find an isle of Turkish goods, one of which is Eti biscuits (Eti is short for Hittite). Selin then explains that Turkish children loved the Hittites because the then Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk claimed that Turks come from the lineage of old Hittites, which is also the reason why Asia Minor is the native land for Turks (Batuman, 2017).

The Huns were a tribe of specifically unknown origins (their country of origin is estimated to be today's Kazakhstan). They were the most successful and powerful under Attila's rule (Mark, 2018). The Huns and Attila are mentioned when Ivan writes Selin an e-mail where he

jokingly says that he will forgive her for the Ottoman invasion of Hungary if she tells him about the plot of one soap opera (Batuman, 2017, p. 91). Selin then thinks about what she had learned about the Huns when she was a child – that Turks and Hungarians were of close origin and languages. Throughout the book, it is evident that the latter is true as Selin discovers many words that are similar in both Hungarian and Turkish.

On page 217, Selin and her mother discuss Selin's relationship with Ivan. At last, her mother says that she should not let this situation bother her and to think of Tamerlane. Selin's grandfather used to say that their family could be related to Tamerlane to comfort the children when they were upset (Batuman, 2017). Tamerlane was a Turco-Mongol conqueror in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and early 14<sup>th</sup> century. He was a ruthless ruler who established the Timurid Empire in 1370 which stretched from Russia to India and from Mongolia across the Middle East to the Mediterranean Sea. Tamerlane's actual name was Timur, which translates as "iron" from Turkish. He was one of many descendants of the Great Chingis Khaan (Szczepanski, 2019).

## 8 Reflection of Hungarian culture in *The Idiot*

*The Idiot* offers an outlook on Hungarian culture through Selin's love interest – Ivan Varga, a foreign student in the US – and through a teaching program through which Selin travels to a Hungarian village to teach English.

### 8.1 Reflection of the Hungarian language

When Selin agrees to teach Hungarian children English over the summer, she buys a simple dictionary to manage in a completely unknown country. Upon arriving in Budapest, she receives another book – from Ivan that contains practical Hungarian phrases. Because Selin does not speak Hungarian fluently, readers of *The Idiot* encounter Hungarian only through the few words Selin manages to understand and translate.

The Ottoman Empire expanded across the Middle East, the coast of northern Africa, and the Balkan peninsula at one point in history. Such reach of the Imperium is the reason for the similarities between Turkish and Hungarian languages, which Selin points out numerously. For example, on page 254, when Selin reads in her “*Teach Yourself Hungarian*” book, it stuns her how alike Turkish and Hungarian grammar is. She then mentions the similarities – both are agglutinative languages, have vowel harmony, and lack gender. During one of their meetings, Selin and Ivan try to compare which words are similar in Turkish and Hungarian, and they discover that the word goat is similar, and apple and boot are almost identical (Batuman, 2017). Additionally on page 338, Selin and Nóra (daughter of the first Hungarian family where Selin stayed) go for a walk when Nóra points at various objects and tells her what their Hungarian equivalents are. At one point, Nóra begins to point at “*telefon oszlop, elektromos oszlop*”, which Selin initially thinks means telephone and electric lines until Nóra points at a concrete column and says “*beton oszlop*”. Concrete is called beton in Hungarian and Turkish. Another similarity Selin finds, on page 347, in the two languages is between the words for whip (Batuman, 2017). Table 1 below visualizes all these words (using translations from the multilingual online dictionary *bab.la*):

Table 1:

English	Hungarian	Turkish
goat	kecske	keçi
apple	alma	elma
boot	csizma	çizme

concrete	beton	beton
whip	korbács	kırbaç

There are two Hungarian expressions that appear in *The Idiot*. The first is uttered on page 171 by Ivan when he and Selin discuss their whereabouts. Ivan thought he would find Selin at her new dorm, but she has not moved yet, so he calls her. Selin then asks why he is not at his senior class’s brunch, where he was supposed to be instead. Then she remarks that it would be like in the short story *The Gift of the Magi* if she went to look for him at his brunch when he went to look for her at her new dormitory. Not knowing this story, Selin tells him about its plot. After that, Ivan says that the story reminds him of a Hungarian expression – “*As useless as a bald man’s comb*” (Batuman, 2017, pp. 169-171). The second expression is used towards the end of the book on page 403. Juli (the last girl Selin stayed with in Hungary) used the expression “*to jump like goat shit on a boat*” describing some girl she did not like (Batuman, 2017).

## 8.2 Reflection of Hungarian social and cultural customs

While sub-chapter 2.3 provides a short overview of Hungarian cultural customs, this sub-chapter focuses on particular aspects of Hungarian culture occurring in *The Idiot*, such as the general characteristics of Hungarians and their high sense of hospitality.

The few characteristic Hungarian traits in the book are their truthfulness, frequent alcohol consumption, and national pride. During one of their conversations, Ivan tells Selin that Hungarians are more honest than Americans and are outspoken about anything. Later, this is confirmed by Rózsa, a Hungarian girl Selin teaches, when she demands to know what Selin truly thinks about the Hungarian people and their country (Batuman, 2017, pp. 214, 360). A prominent Hungarian trait is delighting in alcohol consumption. Ivan asks Selin to drink with him on numerous occasions. According to *The Cultural Atlas*, if people visit a Hungarian family, it is appropriate to bring an alcoholic beverage of a high quality (Scroope, 2017b). Peter, the head organizer of the teaching program in Hungary, advises the volunteers to bring some gifts for the Hungarian families who will be hosting them, and one of the volunteers tells Selin she brought her family a high-quality whiskey (Batuman, 2017, p. 305). On page 311, Selin tells her mother that she received a book about Hungary from Ivan’s mother and adds that “*everyone here is obsessed with being Hungarian*” (Batuman, 2017). It would not be wrong to infer that Hungarians must be proud of the peculiarities that make their country stand out in Europe. The term Hungarikum refers to these peculiarities that are distinctive of Hungarian

culture. One of the unique attributes would be the Hungarian language or typical cuisine, such as gulyás soup or paprikás (Scroope, 2017b).

All the Hungarian host families do their best to provide as much comfort to Selin as possible. For instance, on page 317, it is disclosed that no family would want to host a teacher without a single English speaker in the family as it might later on cause discomfort for the teacher. Another example appears two pages later when the first host family encourages Selin to eat anything at any time, as their house has become hers now too. During Selin's stay with her second family, on page 334, Selin offers to pay with her card but is abruptly stopped because she is the guest, and it would not be appropriate (Batuman, 2017). Lastly, upon Selin's departure from Hungary, she is given snacks for her trip by a couple of mothers (Batuman, 2017, p. 406).

### **8.3 Reflection of Hungarian history and historical figures**

During her teaching program in Hungary, Selin visits various monuments and sights in Budapest and Eger. This sub-chapter is structured into sections – each introducing a historical landmark, monument, or historical figure that Selin visits or hears a story about.

#### **8.3.1. The Matthias Church, Saint István**

The Matthias Church was founded in 1015 by Saint István – the first Hungarian king. In the present, the church serves the Catholic Church; initially, however, it was used as a coronation hall and during the Ottoman rule as a mosque. The church had been renovated in Gothic style in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by King Matthias the Fair. After defeating the Ottomans, it was again renovated – this time in Baroque style. The latest restoration was finished in 1896 by Frigyes Schulek in Neo-Gothic style (Buda Castle Budapest, 2023). In *The Idiot*, on page 296, there is a mention of the colourful tiles when Peter tells Selin that the tiles are allegedly inspired by Islamic architecture and asks her whether she recognizes any similarity. The stained-glass windows of the church are mentioned in connection with Saint István, whose life is represented on the windows (Batuman, 2017).

Saint István, or Stephen I of Hungary, is the nation's patron and the celebration of his founding of the state is also a national holiday in Hungary. Stephen I was open to outside influences, especially German ones, and built his kingdom accordingly (Britannica, 2024).

#### **8.3.2. Carmelite monastery, Wolfgang von Kempelen**

*The Idiot* refers to the Carmelite monastery as a theatre, which it was during Joseph II's reign in 1781 – until then, it was a church used by a religious order. In the present, it is used as the Prime Minister's office. When Joseph II abolished the Carmelite monastery, he asked

Wolfgang von Kempelen, who created a chess machine, to convert the church into a theatre (Batuman, 2017, p. 296; Bodó, 2022).

### **8.3.3. Seven chieftains of the Magyar**

While *The Idiot* describes the monument in one sentence as “a colossal Incredible Hulk-colored monument representing seven Hungarian conquerors riding bionic-looking horses” (Batuman, 2017, p. 296), Daniel Ziemann, author of a chapter on the beginnings of the Magyar nation, in the extensive volume *Empires to be remembered*, presents an exhaustive survey of the topic. Firstly, Ziemann mentions a chronicler called Anonymous who wrote about the early Hungarians, however, according to Ziemann this information is based on little to no factual foundation. There is a myth that seven great conquerors of seven tribes led the Magyar nation from Eurasia to Eastern Europe and settled along the Danube River in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, archaeological findings do confirm a diverse ethnic composition of the first Magyars in Europe, validating the myth (2022, pp. 181-184).

### **8.3.4. The Chain Bridge**

Connecting the two towns, Buda and Pest, the Chain Bridge was the first to do so. This bridge is mentioned in *The Idiot* mainly because of the statues of the lions on the bridge and the legend that surrounds them. The online guide *JustBudapest* provides the context of this legend. It is said that the lions guarding the bridge do not have tongues because the sculptor, János Marschalkó, forgot to add them. This mistake earned him ridicule, which led him to commit suicide by jumping from the bridge into the Danube. Only a portion of this rumour is accurate – people did laugh at Marschalkó because the tongues are not visible when walking by the statues. However, they exist and are visible only from above (n.d.).

### **8.3.5. The Margit Island**

The Margit Island, or the Margaret Island, lies in the centre of Budapest on the Danube River. The island was named after the daughter of King Béla IV, who swore to raise Margit to be pious and devoted to God if the Mongols left Hungary. When the king defeated them, he adhered to his promise, built a convent on the island, and sent his daughter to become a nun (katielou106, 2023). Additionally to this story, *The Idiot* mentions that the Margit Island was originally the Rabbit Island. Allegedly, the island was used to breed rabbits for hunting, or the Ottomans built a harem there (Batuman, 2017, p. 296).



### **8.3.6. Fisherman's Bastion**

The official Fisherman's Bastion website states that the landmark got its name from the order of fishermen who guarded the Bastion in the Middle Ages. This is one of the explanations for the name that *The Idiot* offers. The other explanations say that it got its name because of a fishermen's village that was nearby or because it used to be a fish market (Batuman, 2017, p. 296).

### **8.3.7. Batthyány Square, Count Batthyány**

When Selin and the other teachers reach the Batthyány Square in Budapest, she asks one of her colleagues whether the Square's name is translated into a "blanket" in Hungarian. This thought occurs to Selin because battaniye means blanket in Turkish. However, Count Batthyány, who was the country's first prime minister, is the eponym for the square's name (Batuman, 2017, p. 297). The website *A View On Cities* mentions that the Count's statue is part of the Square, which used to be a market (n.d.).

### **8.3.8. Eger Minaret**

During the teachers' trip to Eger, Peter took the group to a famous minaret – Eger Minaret – which is the northernmost Turkic building in Europe. It is the tallest and the most preserved out of the other two that remained in Hungary as stated by *Minaret Eger*, which is the official website of the Minaret. According to the *Visit Eger* website, a legend surrounds the Minaret. After the Turks drew out of Hungary, the townspeople tried to use 400 bulls to take the building down, however, all effort was useless as the Minaret stood still (n. d.).

### **8.3.9. István Dobó**

The captain of the Eger fortress' successful defeat of the Turks in 1552 is mentioned in *The Idiot* on page 346. The online encyclopaedia *Britannica* states that Dobó's army of 2000 soldiers defended Eger against 150 000 Turks (Batuman, 2017; 2024).

### **8.3.10. Saint George**

On page 374, Ivan tells Selin about Saint George. Christians believe he died a martyr while defending Christian virtues. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia commemorate his noble death on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, while the rest of the world the day before (Busi, 2024). Ivan tells Selin two versions of his story – the Christian version and one where Saint George slays a dragon that terrorizes a nearby town (Batuman, 2017, pp. 374-375).

## 9 Reflection of other cultures in *The Idiot*

### 9.1 Reflection of American culture

As was stated on a couple of occasions throughout this thesis, Selin was raised in the US, therefore she adopted a certain amount of American identity and characteristics. This sub-chapter reflects the few instances in which a feature of American culture appears.

Ivan compares Hungarians and Americans and their degree of individualism during one of their walks with Selin. He says that Americans are individualistic and too isolated from each other (Batuman, 2017, p. 214). This high extent of individualism has its roots in the idea of the American dream and belief in one's self-sufficiency (Andre and Velasquez, n.d.). Selin describes her high school friend, Ralph, as someone with an "*all-American quality*". She then says that it encompasses "*clean-cut broad-shoulderedness*" and "*a powerful obsession with the Kennedys*" (Batuman, 2017, p. 20).

On page 197 in *The Idiot*, Selin compares her and Svetlana's ability to memorize things. Selin says that the education system in the US condemns the teaching method of rote memorization. The reasoning for this is that it is prioritized to be able to think critically and not mechanically like "*robots, like the Soviet and Japanese schoolchildren*" (Batuman, 2017). The Western and Eastern worlds are divided on this matter, which is further portrayed on page 357 when Selin teaches her class of Hungarian children through games and rewards. After this class, Rózsa – the Hungarian village girl, at whose house Selin stays for a time – is appalled by the teaching methods Selin uses. She calls her an amateur and unserious (Batuman, 2017).

One of the cultural shocks Selin experiences is the fact that in Hungary people do not have to wear seatbelts in the car<sup>2</sup>. When Margit's husband, Gyula, sees that Selin is putting her seatbelt on, he starts yelling. Margit then begins to laugh and translates that Selin does not need to worry because her husband is a decent driver. Selin replies that it is a habit and completely automatic because it is mandatory to wear a seatbelt (Batuman, 2017, p. 320).

### 9.2 Reflection of Serbian culture

Serbian culture is introduced to the readers through Selin's friend – Svetlana, a foreign student in the US. Although Svetlana and Selin are close, the audience does not get much detail about the complexities of the Serbian culture through their interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to mention that the book is set in 1996, and the law has changed on this matter since then.

Serbia is a landlocked country in the Balkan peninsula, and as was stated in the previous chapter, the Ottoman Empire stretched over this area, including Serbia. The Turkic reign had a significant influence on Serbian culture and language, as it did in Hungary. Visiting a Russian store near their campus, Selin and Svetlana encounter Turkish products. Svetlana tells Selin that she knows all of them and that there are words in Serbo-Croatian identical to their Turkish equivalents because of the Turkish occupation (Batuman, 2017, pp. 41-42).

Svetlana's roommate, Fernanda, studies botany, which got her a nickname – Fern. Svetlana then tells Selin about a Slavic myth surrounding fern seeds. It is said that finding fern seeds causes one to become invisible. However, this is highly improbable because ferns do not produce seeds (Batuman, 2017, p. 33).

After seeing a documentary about Vladimir Lenin together, Selin tells Svetlana that she did not think so many people loved Lenin. Svetlana responds with a story from her childhood, where children teased each other by asking whether they loved Josip Broz Tito or their mother more (Batuman, 2017, p. 95). Tito was a former Yugoslav president who implemented a cruel dictatorship over his country. Although he defied the Soviet Union, Tito ruled with communist intentions. Tito also played a part in the Non-Alignment Movement during the Cold War (Banac, 2024).

## 10 Conclusion

This thesis' aim was to reflect on and provide an elaborate analysis of the diversity of cultures in the semi-autobiographical campus novel – *The Idiot* by Elif Batuman. Although the various cultures are not the main plot point of the novel, Elif Batuman's expansive knowledge and experience on the matter contributed to the book's received literary acclaim. The unique cast of characters and their backgrounds are the reason behind the novel's success, as it provides a charismatic environment for a universal audience.

The inclusion of the chapters about the fundamental terms offers an idea and overall ambience of the novel's setting. The first half of the book takes place at Harvard College and therefore assigns the novel into the genre of a campus novel. The protagonist's journey to self-discovery and the reinvention of self additionally classifies *The Idiot* as a Bildungsroman. The entirety of this thesis revolves around the word cultures, mainly the Turkish and Hungarian ones, as they are the most frequently occurring in the novel. The second chapter focused on a general overview of the two cultures. Following a brief chapter about Elif Batuman, the sixth chapter introduces the protagonist, her two friends, and their personality characteristics.

Although *The Idiot* offers a great variety of cultural backgrounds, the ones that appear the most are Turkish, Hungarian, American, and Serbian. The last two cultures occur scarcely throughout the book. Because the protagonist is Turkish by ethnicity and spends one month in Hungary, the chapters on Turkish and Hungarian cultures are the longest. The findings on the Turkish culture show the influence of Kemalism on Turkish attitude towards numerous aspects of Turkish culture. One of the sub-chapters shines on the issue of mispronunciation of ethnic names, which appears in *The Idiot* on the very first page. The chapter on Hungarian culture shares the impact of the Ottoman Empire on the country's language. A big portion of the chapter is dedicated to Hungarian landmarks and monuments that the protagonist visits during her stay in Hungary. The last chapter offers a summary of noteworthy elements of American and Serbian culture that occur throughout the novel.

In conclusion, the extensive analyses of the novel and its Czech translation as well as countless articles and other publications, provided a detailed reflection of the cultures appearing in *The Idiot*. Providing a context or a further explanation of the diverse aspects of the cultures presents the audience with the opportunity to better understand the direction the plot of *The Idiot* takes.

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