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**Major 20<sup>th</sup> Century Writers**

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### **Human Characters**

Most books have characters that are humanized so the reader can sympathize, relate and care for that character. This is a tool that many writers have become familiar with so that once a reader picks up their book they want to finish it to find out what happens to the characters they feel for. Yet this tool can sometimes be used in a way that a reader, society, government or religion can see it as a danger to them and their ways. Say, for example, a writer chose a young Palestinian living in the West Bank during the Israeli occupation, a narcissistic sultan wanting a portrait painted of himself, a whole race living in Georgia while racism was high, or a man who went through temptations to save the world. These stories have been told and people have seen them as threats or untruths that they do not want the world to see. By delving further into these books, the humanistic characteristics of the people portrayed can be fully understood.

A young Palestinian, Usama, returns to the West Bank with a mission in his mind and in his heart. This is what the book *Wild Thorns*, by Sahar Khalifeh, shows us when we first open its pages. The thoughts that are shared the most with us are those of Usama. From beginning to end Usama fights with himself, between innocence and cold-heartedness, "A Romantic, right? No way! Not since the training, the shooting, the crawling on all fours; such things make a man unromantic in thought and deed." (pg. 9) A romantic can be poetic and be in love, while his opposite can only be cold, calculating and vengeful.

As Usama goes on, his ways, his thoughts and his wants become apparent. He wants change in the world that he seldom controls. As an underdog many readers are drawn to him, wanting him to rise up above the people who hold his world in occupation. No politics or policies. He wants freedom, even if it's just him against everyone. Later on in the book Usama begins to think deeply about what he has done and what he has become. How he believes the romantic inside of him is dead. "The same hand that had written poetry about love and peace." (pg. 162) He looks onto his hand that is stained with blood. He has changed in a way that many people change throughout their lives. He is human.

Deep down inside there is a desire to be remembered, and to be forgotten is the worst fear. Who would not have the glories of their life to be told over and again in stories, which turn to myth, which turns to legend. This is something that many have sought. In *My Name Is Red* by Orhan Pamuk, one of the characters that are portrayed is a sultan who wishes nothing more than to have his portrait made in the middle of a book. "Precisely what our Sultan stated he wanted: A book depicted the thousandth year of the Muslim calendar... A portrait of Our Sultan would be situated at the heart of the book. Furthermore, since the illustrations were made in the Frankish style using Frankish methods..." (Pg. 226) Being depicted in a portrait in the style of western painters is unheard of for a Sultan. The Muslim world frowns upon any depiction of any kind, except that sometimes wanting to be remembered is a feeling that all of us succumb to. The Muslim miniaturists are skilled, yet they lack the knowledge of painting a detailed portrait from something they see in front of them. To have a sultan displayed as a narcissist, as someone that can share the same wants as a man off the street, is something that many people in the Middle East frown upon. Yet they cannot see that it's not his fault that he is human.

In the south there was always a deep-seated animosity between races, even when slavery was abolished people still lashed out at certain times. What they failed to see was that those, whose skin appeared to be of a different tone, was a human just like them. In the book *Cane* by Jean Toomer, he writes of many characters, white and black, living in the state of Georgia. One of the stories tells of a white woman who, apparently, loved a black man. "Becky was the white woman who had two Negro sons. She's dead; they've gone away. The pines whisper to Jesus. The Bible flaps its leaves with an aimless rustle on her mound." (Pg. 5) Becky was shunned away from both the whites and the blacks because of whom and what she had done. Yet a few people in that town, because they saw through such shallow things, helped her find a small patch of land, build it and give her supplies from time to time. A town that is blamed for hate should also be blamed for being human. Humans hate, it is something that cannot be gotten rid of, no matter how hard one tries. So it is of no surprise when the two black sons of Becky left town saying these words, "Goddam the white folks; goddam the niggers." (Pg. 6) They show the same animosity that the townsfolk of all tones showed them and their mother. How can you blame them for being human?

Sometimes, during one's life, enticements arise that few have the power to overcome them. They come in many forms such as power, lust, and greed, but what of the want of being human, of simply living. In Nikos Kazantzakis *The Last Temptation of Christ*, we see Jesus as just a man with wants and needs just like any other, yet he already knows his path and where it leads. In his final temptation, while he was on the cross, the devil tempted him with a life. A life of a man, who finds love, gets married, has children and dies peacefully. These are the things that tempt a God, not power, for God is all powerful, not lust, for God is spiritual, and not greed, for god has everything. Jesus had overcome many things, and in the end he disregarded that last attempt by the devil. "He uttered a triumphant cry: IT IS ACCOMPLISHED!" (Pg. 496) Jesus has done what was predestined for him to do and he did it as a god and a human. Humans have temptations; they have the want while a god does not have the need for earthly things. To accept Jesus as God, one must accept him as a human. For most of the west, they see Jesus as only an ethereal god. While in the east they see Jesus as an earthly god, one with just as much flaws as any other person would have. Jesus was a God and was a human.

As the world today grows more and more technological where Sally from Wisconsin can catch up with what happened to her friend Takeda in Japan, our privacy levels go down to a level where everyone knows what everyone is doing. I am guilty of such things as well, as soon as I walk into a new place, or something happens, I instantly update my Facebook status, tweet on twitter, and check in on four square, but with all this technology we are still not able to read minds and thoughts, unless you believe that guy wearing a tin foil hat that's always on the corner of the street. That's why the book *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, has so much attention, we get a front row seat into the minds of everyday men as they go about their day. Our minds are the only place where we get to say what we want, even though no one can hear it. Joyce uses a technique called stream of consciousness, where he presents his characters thoughts unedited, uncensored, and free-flowing. Yet it can be said that Joyce probably edited the hell out of this book, therefore making the use of this technique hypocritical. I think, Therefore I am. Or is it I am, Therefore I think. Whichever way, thinking, whether factually or abstractly, is something truly human.

Have you ever picked up a book that completely changed the way you look at the world? Making you look at certain aspects more closely, or helped you take a step back to see the whole scheme of things unravel before you? It makes you want to pick up another book, so that your mind's eye can capture more of what the world has to offer. That pursuit of knowledge ensnared two youths in the book *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* by Daj Sijie. The books that they read were forbidden at that time. But their thirst for words and other worlds surpassed their sense of danger which also made their readings even more enjoyable. "I would never have understood the splendor of taking free and independent action as an individual" (Pg.110). The narrator has been introduced to a new idea in a place where such an idea would never have sprouted by itself. Like them, we all want to know more about anything if not everything. The quelling of curiosity has always been a human trait. Some are able to block it out, while others cannot help themselves. We have always wanted to know more, to learn as much as we can about what surrounds us, even if we can't even see it with the naked eye. To gain and want knowledge is to be human.

Being human is something every living person on this earth knows about. Everyone knows how to act and be human, it is imbedded into us. So it is only natural for writers to write about humanistic characters. As the rule goes, write about what you know. What else would we know better about than being human? Gifted writers have been able to even give animals and inanimate objects the voice and feelings of a human. How a spoon might feel agonizing pain whenever it is dipped slowly into boiling hot soup, or the dog expressing his excitement when he goes on his epic adventure to return to his master the bright orb that he had tossed far away.

Being human is a gift and a curse to us all. With each of our advantages comes a flaw to keep us in balance, to keep us human. In the end you cannot blame authors for making their characters human, because humans are interesting creatures to be looked upon and studied. Each character comes with their own unique perk or flaw, it makes us drawn to them, makes us feel what they feel. In the end, we're all humans.