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“Black-eyed Bastard”

The Outsider Character in the *Dishonored* Series

Michaela Šimonová

Abstract

Dishonored is not only one of the most popular and original game series on the market, but from a religious point of view it has one of the most complex and original fictional belief systems. A character that particularly stands out is the Outsider, a mysterious divine-like entity that interacts with all main playable characters, giving them supernatural abilities and commenting on their choices. He inhabits a mysterious otherworld called Void, containing everything supernatural, chaotic, magical and irrational. The Outsider also indirectly affects the ‘human world’ by figuring in underground cults and their opponents, creating an interesting mosaic of religious teachings and struggles. In this article, we would like to examine the Outsider both in the context of the game lore and comparative religion studies, with emphasis on the analysis of his character and its parallels in world mythologies.

Keywords

Digital games, Religious studies, Dishonored, cult, devil, Tezcatlipoca, Odin, inquisition

1 Introduction

The fictional world of the *Dishonored* series, similar to the 19th century Victorian era and industrial revolution, comes with its own history, political system, geography and customs inspired by their real-life counterparts. The core of its gameplay is a combination of playable character’s abilities, both in combat and magic, and a freedom of choice whether the player will use a non-lethal or lethal approach, determining the end of the main story. The social, political and religious system is highly developed and included in the narrative, with additional context that is possible to explore

outside the main storyline. This information can be obtained via numerous notes, dialogues, artefacts, surrounding decoration or posters. Considering the fact that the Outsider is an integral part of a wider game narrative, we cannot ignore a religious world created within the game. As Henry Jenkins (2005) pointed out, the game designers should be seen more as narrative architects rather than storytellers, which fits with the complexity and ‘real-feel’ of world and characters in *Dishonored*. An overview and impact of religious institutions and their beliefs will be discussed in the second part of this article, with focus on their perception of the Outsider and parallels in ‘real-life’ examples. In the third chapter we will attempt to approach this figure as a complex fictional character, keeping in mind that the creation process was different than with ‘real-life’ divinities. In their highly informative and extended study, Heidbrink, Knoll and Wysocki provide us an overview of various approaches on studying games in an academic context, with an emphasis on religion:

(...) In the context of computer games, religion and religious elements (like narratives, iconography symbols, places and character names etc.) can be researched and analysed on different levels and from a multitude of perspectives and foci, depending on the research question(s) and the scientific interests. One possible approach could be a game-immanent analysis of religious topics, the reception, transformation and/or (re-)construction of religious elements as symbols, rituals, architectural styles, quotes and other materials. (Heidbrink, Knoll and Wysocki 2014)

Following this approach, we will try to partially isolate the Outsider from a wider game narrative in the last part of this article, in order to study him as a character with ‘mythological’ qualities, compared to the deities Tezcatlipoca and Odin.

If not stated otherwise, listed quotes without a reference are directly from the games *Dishonored*, *Dishonored 2* or *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*. This article works with texts and materials used in actual games, not including features such as interviews or developers’ commentaries, in order to present an objective description of a specific figure in its own game context. Our goal is not to find a ‘hidden’ critique of religious and social systems, but rather focus on the fact that they were an inspiration and serve as an excellent example of how some themes are deeply integrated in human’s perception of faith, whether ‘real’ or ‘fictional’.

2 Shadows of the Void

Each of us carries the Void inside our bodies. It churns just beneath the surface of our consciousness. It yearns for our contact. Our fears. Our desires.

In the game's lore, there are two known worlds: the first one is inhabited by humans and similar to the one we live in, while the other one is a mysterious supernatural dimension known as the 'Void'. The existence of the Void seems to be widely accepted both by common people, Abbey of Everyman (a religious institution discussed later in this article) and occultists. On the other hand, the belief in the Outsider's existence is not so clear, and as stated in one of the notes, "*for most, the Outsider is nothing but a child's tale meant to instil fear of that beyond the family, the community*". According to the Abbey's teachings, the Void was a primordial world of creation and it will swallow the human world in the end. It is also the world to which some souls pass¹ after their physical body dies, however their consciousness appears to be short-lived and in time they will dissolve into the Void. Animals strongly linked to this world are huge whales, sometimes referred to as leviathans, with a strong connection to the magic and simultaneous appearance in the Void. Another animal, rather connected to the Outsider and magic, is the rat. Apart from a connection with the 'Lonely Rat Boy', discussed later in this article, there is a brief mention of a sickness one woman got from feeding a rat with her own blood, during which she met the Outsider and walked with him in the Void. Furthermore, in the last instalment *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*, players can find a note about a large hound of the Void certain magic practitioners used for a ritual, nicknaming it 'Sugarboy'. Investigators called it a 'malevolent spirit of the Void', but unfortunately we don't know more about these supposedly supernatural creatures inhabiting the place together with the Outsider. A visual representation of the Void is in dark colours, with bright white light, strong wind and many floating stone islands. Sometimes, a reflection of a scene from the human world can be mirrored into it, but in most cases they appear to be static and no interaction is possible. This realm can also partially pass through to the human world, creating strange and unexplained disturbances, such as disembodied voices, hallucinations and strange lights. The Void seems to be an opposite of the human world, including everything chaotic, mysterious, magical and incomprehensible by physical laws and rationalism. This is confirmed by the ability to access this realm through dreams or specific magical means, such as altars or paintings and spells. The link between two worlds is a figure of the Outsider, who inhabits the Void and can channel its powers to the human world. He is the only known long-term inhabitant of the Void at the time all three *Dishonored* games take place and interacts with both protagonists and antagonists. Special objects connected with supernatural powers can be found throughout the game in the form of incised bones and constructed charms, known as runes and bone charms. Although their primal mean is to enhance character's supernatural abilities, they are known to be used by people with no magical skills or connection to the Outsider, making them similar to 'real-life' amulets and talismans. An interesting touch is an existence of so-

1 They appear to be people who died by a violent death, people with strong connection to the Void, restless souls etc. Additionally, it is extended in *The Death of the Outsider* that everyone who experienced a near-death state, visited the place.

called corrupted charms that can negatively affect other abilities or vital function. This type of charm is mentioned in the lore, as well, as being created on purpose or by mistake. Runes are much stronger and rarer items, carved with the Outsider's mark, and the player can usually find them in home-made shrines. As it is pointed out in the first instalment, if a person "*wasn't chosen and doesn't wear my (Outsider's) mark, he can't unlock their (runes) secrets.*" The mentioned secret is an obtainment of new skills or an enhancement of already possessed magical abilities. Although most of them are mentioned to be made of whale bones, which have a certain connection to the Outsider and the Void, the explanation is far less mysterious. According to one of the notes, whale bones became popular after the whale trade had begun. These charms were described to "*sing in the night and grant some small boon to a man's vigor or defense against pregnancy*". This 'singing' meant that they possessed the power of the Void, as it is pointed out that when one of the characters, an old witch nicknamed Granny Rags, created the charms, she "opened" them to the Void until they "*moan like the fever-sick on a cold night*". Rune design is very similar to a writing system of the same name, which was believed to possess certain magical attributes among Germanic people, who used them for centuries as a decoration of various objects (MacLeod and Mess 2006).

Despite a close connection of the Void and the Outsider, he appears to be in a position of a 'parasite', an artificially created being that is not supposed to be in that realm. This is implied in the fact that a young boy had to be sacrificed in order to be 'reborn' into the Void and an interesting mention about 'Ancient music', a set of tones that can disturb magic channelled from the Void. Furthermore, certain musical notes have "*the ability to calm the turbulence originating in the Void, which we attribute to the Outsider*". Therefore, he was not a keeper of a balance between two worlds, but its disturber. The Void itself seems to be a world in a constant motion following its own rules, with some parts being described as 'old', while others offering a twisted mirror of the current state of the 'human' world. Players learn about an interesting ritual, by which the main antagonist and bearer of the Outsider's mark in *Dishonored 2* had found a place of the Outsider's 'birth' and hid a piece of herself there, making her human self immortal by becoming "part" of the Outsider. Thus it seems that the Void has its own laws and the chaos is only a seeming illusion, attributed to it because its forces cannot be understood by the human mind and can be partially controlled by or through the Outsider. That was the main reason cultists sacrificed a young boy at its edges, so they could channel its infinite creative and destructive energy to the threshold of their world. Interestingly, it is revealed in the last instalment that some of these members mutated into monstrous beings called 'envisioned', an effect of a long-term occupation of the place where a border between the worlds is broken.

3 Abbey vs. Cult

Can two enemies occupy the same body? No, for the first will direct it one way, and the second another, until they stumble into a ditch and its neck is broken.

Although we do not find much information about religious life of common people, at the time the game takes place the only ‘acceptable’ faith seems to be the path of the Abbey of Everyman. Information found throughout the game tells us that before the Abbey took over, there was a wider variety of faiths and cults, all eliminated in a conflict known as the Rectification War. Surviving remains of other religions and beliefs can still be found throughout the game, ranging from an individual worship, guided séances, witch convents to a highly organized cult centred in Shindaery Peak. Usually, the Abbey deals with the first mentioned case, trying to uncover the worshippers and illegal shrines dedicated to the Outsider. The Abbey itself is a hierarchized group with two main factions, the Oracular Order and the Overseers. Interestingly, the exclusively female Oracular Order reportedly used visions to interpret prophecies². The same contradiction can be found in Medieval Europe, with the most famous example of Hildegard of Bingen. She was a great 12th century mystic, but if we look objectively at her visions and means of work (Singer 2006), in a different context she could have been easily accused of witchcraft and heresy. Thus, we can observe the same paradox in which ‘supernatural’ powers used under a supervision of the dominant religious group are acceptable and even desired. This religious institution oversees also political and civil matters, thus covering all important aspects of daily life. Despite their seemingly atheistic and civil nature, they do not deny the existence of supernatural forces inhabiting the world, however they see most of them as something negative that has to be avoided and fought against. It should be also noted that their fight against witchcraft is perceived in a positive light, unless it is corrupted by power hunger or torture and false accusations. To quote the Outsider, “(Vice Overseer) believes in the Abbey’s mission, protection the good people of the empire against the likes of us”. Even one of his human ‘agents’ mentioned in one of the additional notes that “the Overseers are right to fear us, to warn the common folk to stay near their homes at night and keep their families close”. It is true that we can see many negative aspects of magic especially in *Dishonored 2*, and there are strong reasons for people to be afraid of it. These fears and sense of duty were concentrated in one of their main goals, which was an elimination of the Outsider as the main source of magic and discord. However, this anti-campaign seems to be directed towards his followers, rather than the entity itself, for the simple reason that the Outsider could not be confronted directly. In one of their invocations, we can clearly

² It should be noted that the developers referred to these powers as a cover up for an intellectual analyses they carry out in order to establish a prophecy. However, for the goal of this work the fact is important that the Abbey and people count their visions and prophecies as ‘unnatural’, whatever the truth is behind them.

recognize this goal: “*And to those who choose to wander, beyond the walls of our homes, in far places, we will strike at them swiftly before they whisper to their neighbours, filling their hearts with strangeness and doubt*”. Their actual practices and approach towards the fight against ‘magic’ strongly resemble the Spanish Inquisition. Firstly, they exercised both secular and a religious functions, with an approval from the ruler with supreme authority to root out heresy. Similar to the Abbey, the inquisition had its own leader, ministry, courts, prisons, commissioners and local agents (Rawlings 2006); indeed, a very similar structure to the Abbey of Everyman with its High Overseer, civil institutions, prisons and Overseers. The same can be observed in the relationship with the crown, or in the case of *Dishonored*, an emperor or empress. There is a certain influence and cooperation, but the ruler is not the one selecting the next High Overseer³, just like it was the case with a Spanish king and Grand Inquisitor. Manifestations of its public influence can be found within the game, for example in *Dishonored 2* a player can hear out a public speech about a girl, who confessed to an Overseer that she had found the Outsider’s shrine. After an interrogation, the girl was executed as a heretic. This example reminds us of a public reading of an edict by a local inquisitor, comprising of a long list of heresies against the Catholic faiths, which was followed by an invitation to acknowledge own sins and denouncement of others for engaging in such offence (Rawling 2006). If the Abbey can be compared to the Inquisition, then we can compare the cult of the Outsider to heresy and the devil⁴. The strategy of both Catholic Church and the Abbey of Everyman is similar in identifying and explaining an enemy of their teaching as a source of evil and discord. We also need to keep in mind a difference between official church view and folklore surrounding these beings. Both devil and the Outsider are sometimes presented as monstrous magical animals⁵, considered outcasts at the edge of society, sources of magic and discord, with a connection to an unknown and feared world of chaos and magic that lays beyond human understanding. Of course, this scheme doesn’t have to fit the game lore, but when we look at the presentations of the devil in history and human mind, we may be surprised to find interesting parallels, proving the point that the religious system of *Dishonored* is ‘built’ with a great craftsmanship and understanding of religion.

In the case of the Abbey’s perception of the Outsider, we shall rather talk about propaganda than a real ‘understanding’ of his figure, especially considering the fact that the player is able to directly interact with him in all three games and thus make his or her own opinion. On the other

3 The next High Overseer is chosen by a council made of elder Overseers, during the Feast of Painted Kettles. Although not much is known about the process and the feast, it seems to be a process similar to Catholic Pope election.

4 It is worth pointing out that in one description, he is described as a ‘horned thing warped by heresy’.

5 In one note from the Death of the Outsider, a confrontation between the Outsider and High Overseer is mentioned, in which the Outsider took the form of a large serpent and attacked him. However, author of this note pointed out that this story is made up and that the Outsider’s physical form “exists bodily in the Void, and does not, as we know, shapeshift like a trickster from some fanciful tale”.

hand, we know that the worship includes carving of bones⁶, human sacrifices, blood infusions, and other undefined “disgusting rituals”. Interestingly, it has little to do with the requirements the Outsider has for people he talks to. It was clearly and well formulated by the Outsider already in the first *Dishonored* game: “*Sokolov believes there are specific words and acts that can compel me to appear before him.(...) He performs disgusting rituals beneath the old Abbey. But if he really wants to meet me, he could start by being a bit more interesting.*” Additionally, in one of the journals excerpts, we can find a more detailed description of these rituals: “*I’ve known four people in my time who carried the Mark of the Outsider, but I’ve known dozens more who wanted it, who stood at night in stagnant ponds or begged in the dust blowing through graveyards. People who gutted farm animals or burned the flesh of men, thinking it would call forth the Void.*” In the novel *Corroded Man* (Christopher 2016), an official addition to the game series, the main antagonist carved the Outsider’s mark on his hand with a blade that created the Outsider, but we know only about vague mentions of dreams in which this entity visited him. The mark gave him certain supernatural abilities because of the dagger’s magical properties, but they were imperfect and ‘corrupted’, negatively affecting his body and mind. Also, in the second game instalment, the main antagonist is able to ‘block’ the powers of the Outsider’s mark. It is worth noting that this antagonist partially merged with the Outsider and that she was among those few chosen to bear the mark. Their relationship is interesting: on one side it seems that the Outsider is impressed by her cunningness and resourcefulness, on the other he helped to destroy her after realizing she was draining powers from him against his will. But again, there is no moral judgement of her deeds nor traceable hatred or disgust in the dialogues. It would be interesting to hear their direct conversations, but unfortunately they are not included in the game. Otherwise, a player can find brief mentions about other people to whom the Outsider appeared in dreams or gave his mark, but they are very brief with no new information.

When it comes to the worship of the Outsider, there appears to be two main types: unorganized worship at custom-made shrines and organized cult. Witches and wizards are a specific category, not necessarily connected to the Outsider, but drawing some of their powers from the Void, which is an ultimate source of magic. Performance of magic includes creation and use of various items, such as potions and amulets, but also more complicated mechanical devices, as seen in *Dishonored 2*. Two antagonists from the series are able to borrow some of their supernatural powers to their followers, but it should be noted that neither of these groups, witches and assassins, were considered to be the worshippers of the Outsider. An organized cult was revealed in the last instalment, *The Death of the Outsider*, but already hinted at in the second instalment. This cult is

6 Bones are an important part of magic in general, and some are considered ‘stronger’ and more suitable for occult rituals, as confirmed both in the game and novel *Corroded Man*. Apart from whale bones, bones of witches and Oracular Sisters seemed to possess special magical properties. Several accounts also mention use of children bones.

alive at least on Serkonos, an island on which their main base is located at the physical entrance to the Void. It comprises of carefully selected followers guarding the entrance to the Void, accessing it with the help of an artefact called ‘Eye of the Dead god’. They have strict rules about taking in new members to live in their main base, carefully observing potential candidates. Once in Shindaery peak’s base, they have access to a huge library concerning the Void and the Outsider, as well as a chance to use the power of the Eye of the Dead god to reach the occult secrets⁷. Their other duty is to guard the Outsider, so that no one will destroy his human body, trapped in a border area between worlds. Although they are forced to work with the outside world, once they are invited to join the close circle of core members, they stay at the base. This type of organized cult follows strict rules and its members wear uniforms, both features identical to devoted Overseers from the Abbey of Everyman. It seems that the individual goal of some cult members is to become an ‘envisioned’ and physically merge with the Void, while still staying in the human world. Reach for this form of immortality, study of the Void’s secrets and guard of the Outsider’s body appear to be core elements of the cult. Search for a ‘secret’ and ‘hidden’ knowledge, as well as immortality, is a characteristic trait for many occult and spiritual groups appearing through centuries in nearly all cultures, and we can safely consider it to be an integral part of human desire to raise above its own limitations.

An individual worship seems to be still active at the time the game takes place, despite the Abbey’s prosecutions. As expected, it takes place in secret and shrines are built in abandoned apartments or areas that are hard to reach. A shrine is usually in the form of a wooden altar-like structure with a purple cloth and burning candles, on which a player can find a rune, presumably an offering to the Outsider in hope that he will enhance it with magical energy of the Void. The most notable individual worshipper in the first instalment is ‘Granny Rags’, a blind old woman with an interesting and well-documented backstory. She used to be a beautiful and desired young noble, but after she had married and travelled to the mysterious continent Pandysia, the Outsider marked her. Later in life, she killed her husband and made charms from his bones. Additionally, she ‘adopted’ a mute boy that became an executioner in order to bring her more bones for runes and charms. Even as an old woman suffering from dementia, she was a dangerous and ruthless witch, qualities noted by the Outsider himself. She is indirectly mentioned in *Dishonored 2*, when one of the secondary characters kept her hand as a charm, still ‘charged’ with magic. The Outsider’s comment on the situation is very interesting, revealing another part of his ‘worshippers’: “*In case you’re wondering, Paolo’s not one of those unhinged cultists who believe I’ll grant them favors if they leave a big enough offering or play just the right musical notes.*” Thus, it is revealed that magical abilities are directly connected to a physical representation of the mark, burned on the head of a chosen one.

7 The power of this artefact is summarized in a memoir note found in the game: “It seemed to hum with power, beckoning me. And when I touched the Eye understanding exploded within me. The invisible layers of the universe were laid bare to me.”

Paolo, an idealistic and ruthless gang leader, used its power to gain a partial immortality, and although he didn't worship the Outsider, a shrine was built in his office to keep the magical properties of Granny Rag's hand.

A middle ground between the Cultists and individual worshippers are small occult groups. In the second instalment, a group of nobles centred around the main antagonist, a powerful witch bearing the Outsider's mark, are after immortality. Their 'worship' seems to consist of guided séances and gathering of powerful artefacts, allowing them to come closer to their ultimate goal. Although no other similar groups are found within the game, a group of people centred around a charismatic and powerful leader is always at the beginning of an organized cult.

4 Born in the Month of Darkness

In these sleepless nights of despair, you appear to me not as the mighty leviathan, but as a young man, with eyes as black as the Void.

The origin and personality of the Outsider slightly changes in process, depending on the needs of the main storyline. While in the first game he seemed to be a fully-divine, impersonal and almost eternal entity with no particular backstory, in the second and third instalment his human aspect is revealed and notably extended. The behaviour pattern and communication seems to be more personal and emotional already in *The Knife of Dunwall* and *Brighmore Witches* DLCs, however it might have been fuelled by a hostile approach of the main protagonist, assassin Daud, towards the Outsider. The nature of dialogue in all games and DLCs slightly varies, depending on individual choices. If a player decides to spare an assassination target, the Outsider is intrigued by an unexpected behaviour, and the exact opposite can be said about the choice to kill the enemy. It shall be noted that the Outsider is not judging the choices in a traditional pattern good vs. bad or right vs. wrong, and his interest is not based on morality. Rather, he sees murder as a predictable and 'boring' solution to a problem, with expected consequences reflected in one of the possible futures he can see. The Outsider is a being observing the world without judging it or taking sides, granting his mark to people with a potential for great things that might be good or evil, depending purely on their choice.

As noted above, one of his abilities is to foresee the future. However, according to his own words, this ability is limited and he seems to see several possibilities of how the future can look like. Sometimes, even the Outsider admits that the outcome is obscured to him, (*"what will that mean in the days to come, I wonder."*) but he seems to be rather interested in them, or to quote him.

“*these are the moments I wait for*”. A good example is the death of the ‘Lonely Rat Boy’, a figure introduced in *The Tales from Dunwall*⁸, who received the mark from the Outsider just to die shortly after because of carelessness and lust for personal vendetta. It is most likely that this outcome was not the one the Outsider expected, but it was made clear that the boy was grateful for that short moment he could live without fear. A similar situation was in the first game, when he stated that he “*can see all her tomorrows and I know that either she dies tonight at your hand or she’ll live out her days, month after month, year after year, far away, even as her fine clothes wear into tatters and her silken hair gets dull and gray*”. A similar ability is implied in *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*, when the Outsider gave abilities and weapons to kill him to the main protagonist Billy Lurk, whose initial intention is to destroy him. He seems to know possible outcomes of his own future, which would be either death or liberation by Billy’s hand, and instead of threatening, he reveals to her more information about himself so she (the player) can make a decision on her own. We don’t know much about how the Outsider perceives the past, but in the last instalment of the game, it is suggested that he cannot see behind his own “birth”⁹. As for the present, his sight reaches far and wide, most likely able to perceive everything in a particular moment. It is not specified whether it is the Outsider reflecting parts of the human world into the Void, but the fact that they are observed by the ones he ‘chose’ and are directly linked to their situation, speaks in favour of the fact that the Outsider could partially manipulate the space he inhabited.

A physical representation of this divine entity is one of a young man with dark-brown hair and all-black eyes. As it is revealed in *The Death of the Outsider*, that body is a reflection of the real one ‘frozen’ in a place called Ritual Hold, sacrificed five thousand years before the main events happened. Interestingly, in the first *Dishonored* game, the Outsider told the main character that he is “*older than the rocks this place is built on*” when referring to Dunwall, a city in which the game takes place. As stated earlier, we shall consider similar narratives to be a part of a different, more ‘divine’, version of the Outsider in its ‘original’ concept of an impersonal supernatural entity. However, he could be also talking about the ‘age’ of the being he became, since we know there was at least one inhabitant of the Void before him. Coming back to his appearance, the all-black eyes are his main characteristic feature, visually distinguishing him from other characters. Although it was never directly explained in the game what was the reason for this colouring, it was hinted at the end of *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*. When the Outsider’s body is liberated from the Void by revealing his true name, his eyes change back to those of a human, most likely corresponding with how they looked before the ritual took place. Some scientists suggest that the eyes can provide

8 The Tales of Dunwall is a set of three short animated stories. Their protagonists are connected with the world of *Dishonored*, briefly mentioned in the original game.

9 It was mentioned in a context of an artefact called “Eye of the Dead God”, when the Outsider said that the object is relict of “*whatever god that was before me*”.

information about another person's emotional state and personality¹⁰ and if that would be an idea here, too, it would mean that the boy's emotions and personality were trapped outside the Void, unable to perish or return into its physical body. The blackness of the eyes could represent the supernatural energy of the Void channelled through the current Outsider, especially if we compare it to a huge black Eye of the Dead God, an entity that inhabited the mysterious world before him. Little is known about the Outsider's life as a human, and most information comes from a song included in the game¹¹, revealing that he was an orphan and mongrel begging on streets before an occult group took him in and sacrificed him in the Void. This choice was not random, as it is indirectly suggested that they were looking for a "chosen one" that would be accepted by the Void.

It can appear as a paradox that an object with strong connection to the Outsider is a human heart, both abstract and in flesh. He analyses human thoughts and emotions, however it is implied that he couldn't 'read' them with certainty. Assassin Daud, one of the main characters in the game in direct contact with the Outsider, noted that "*no doubt that the black-eyed bastard takes delight in watching me twist into knots. He knows I can't abide a mystery*". Similar can be said about his knowledge of the future, discussed earlier in this article. In the first *Dishonored* game, the main character is given a device constructed from a human heart. Although the Outsider claimed it was done by his hands, the 'real-life' artefact was constructed by Piero Joplin, a brilliant inventor bearing his mark, to whom he had given the instructions. Thus, this mechanical heart is of his construction and given his magical ability to expose an individual's secrets. In the second *Dishonored*, it is revealed that the heart contains remains of a spirit or soul of the empress, murdered in a previous instalment, whose lover and daughter are the main characters in the game. Thus, this trapped spirit of the empress seemed to possess some supernatural abilities drawn from the Void, but the moment this essence left the vessel, it perished into oblivion. The ability to read secrets of a human mind and soul was undoubtedly connected to the Void, since the spirit of the empress was, similarly to the Outsider, on the border of both worlds.

In the last part of this article, we would like to have a closer look at some gods from world religions that share common features with the Outsider. However, we have to be careful and keep in mind the different nature of the figures we are going to compare. On one side we have divinities developed for centuries by cultures that believed them to be real beings participating in their lives. On the other side is a fictional world serving as a base for an action game, with the goal to create a believable and working system within an entertainment environment. Once we are aware of this basic difference, we can see that even the unintentional parallels have their place and logic,

10 For further information see: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-apes/201512/your-eyes-really-are-the-window-your-soul> (23.05.2018); Larsson, Pedersen and Stattin (2007).

11 This song is called The Month of Darkness and appears in *Dishonored 2*, naming the boy as a son of a monster. However, the cultists didn't treat him with respect but with an abuse. Interestingly, a concept of a "chosen child" is present also in the Abbey of Everyman, in a ritual initiation of their members, the Overseers.

considering they follow the same goal: to make a supernatural figure fit into its own world. We have already mentioned some parallels to the Christian devil, especially in connection of their perception in the eyes of a dominant religious group. Therefore, in this part we would like to turn our focus to two other deities from different cultures. The first god, with whom the Outsider shares several notable similarities, is an Aztec deity called Tezcatlipoca. He was one of the most important gods of the pre-Columbian pantheon with an important place in cult and mythology, thus we have rich historic sources from which we can draw important information. Firstly, we are talking about a god with many names and functions, sometimes in seeming opposition. For example, he was the patron of rulers and young elite, but at the same time slaves were under his protection. His body and mind were imperfect, with one leg absent and mind filled with strife, but a youth representing him at the great feast Toxcatl had to be perfect in every possible way. In a 16th century account, written by Friar Bernardo de Sahagun, we can find interesting passages describing Tezcatlipoca:

When he walked upon the earth he quickened war; he quickened vice, filth; he brought anguish, affliction to men; he brought discord among men, wherefore he was called ‘the enemy on both sides’. He mocked men, he ridiculed men. He was called wind, shadow. This wicked Tezcatlipoca, we know, is Lucifer, the great devil who there in the midst of Heaven, even in the beginning, began war, vice, filth. From there he was cast out, from there he fell. But he walketh here upon the earth deceiving men, tricking men. (...) He (Tezcatlipoca) only maketh sport of one. Of no one can he be a friend, to no one true. They said Tezcatlipoca enriched one, and thereby visited him with pain and affliction. (Sahagun 2012)

Of course, this summary is heavily affected by a Christian worldview, but we can still gather interesting information that could have corresponded with how the Aztecs perceived this god. Interestingly, this description strongly resembles how the Abbey of Everyman perceived the Outsider, especially as a source of strife and discord among people. A more general aspect is a connection with wind and shadow, attributes of the Void as a world the Outsider inhabits. Both elements are connected with something hidden, invisible and unpredictable. Although we cannot say that the Outsider directly mocks people, at some points his attitude can be considered provocative and teasing. It is also interesting to observe the note about both enrichment and pain that the favour of Tezcatlipoca can bring, just like we can see in the case of the Outsider, whose mark can be both blessing and curse. They also share an attitude towards their ‘favourites’ by not taking sides and leaving them to take responsibility for their own choices. An interesting example is an episode in which Tezcatlipoca, in a disguise of a drunk man, met men of Moctezuma, the last ruler of the Aztec empire, and prophesised the fall of his empire (Todorov 1995). Thus, even if Moctezuma was a ruler that gave rich tributes to him, it didn’t guarantee the favour of the god who seemed to rather enjoy interesting moments to come, revealing only part of a bigger picture. A

similar episode can be found in the *Knife of Dunwall* DLC, in which the Outsider appears to assassinate Daud just after he murdered an empress. There is no moral judgement present, however he states that the “*empress was different*” and “*you can’t just disappear in the shadows*”, notifying him about the consequences of his action, but not telling him whether his action was right or wrong. Additionally, he provides him with a mysterious name and indirectly led him to a point when he would save the young empress. Despite this, Daud has a hostile approach towards the Outsider, blaming him for not stopping the murder of the empress he committed, and later in *The Death of the Outsider*, seeing him as a source of the world’s discord and his personal misery. This refusal to take responsibility for own actions is an interesting motif, especially if we consider the fact that the Outsider always left a freedom of choice for the ones he marked. Another similarity between these deities is a specific connection to a human heart. In general, Aztecs considered a human heart to be the supreme offering fit for gods (Miller and Taube 1993), and Tezcatlipoca had a special connection with this organ. One of the postcolonial tales tells us about this god appearing with an opened chest, and if a person who met him was brave enough to tear out his heart, he would get a rich reward. However, if he would run away, a punishment or death would meet him soon (Olivier 2008). It reminds us of the way the Outsider appeared in a dream or vision to a potential bearer of his mark, especially if we consider the fact that in the second instalment there is a possibility to refuse his powers. We need to keep in mind the fact that this was done primarily for a gameplay purpose and not as an extension of the lore. Still, in *Death of the Outsider*, we can find an interesting note that he appeared in a dream of an Oracular sister and offered her the mark, but she rejected it. Despite that, she was cast out of the convent. However, the main character of the same instalment clearly refused the mark, but the Outsider ignored it and on top of supernatural abilities, she ‘received’ an artificial hand and eye with clear connection to the Void. The last important aspect of Tezcatlipoca that can be compared with our main topic, is the feast in the month of Toxcatl. A perfect young man, chosen from captives one year before the celebration took place, represented the god for the whole period. The selection process was crucial and there were dozens of very specific attributes the slave had to possess. This selection of a suitable victim is similar to the one we can find in the game when cultists searched for a child to become the Outsider, suggested in various clues and additions to the main storyline. Unfortunately, we don’t have more information about these requirements, but what is important is the fact that an ‘apotheosis’ of a sacrificed victim is a desirable outcome in both cases.

The other god that shared some notable similarity is the Old Norse deity Odin, worshipped by Germanic people for centuries before the Viking Age. However, most of the information we have about him comes from sagas and poems written down in medieval Iceland. Despite this ‘handicap’, there are strong arguments speaking in favour of the antiquity and importance of his figure. During the Viking Age, he was the chief of gods with several areas of patronage and influence. His

personality, like with other gods from the same pantheon, is highly anthropomorphised, with both positive and negative traits. There were many spheres over which this god ruled, including poetry, death, war, magic and wisdom. He is the father of gods, co-creator and ruler of the world and humans. With the help of his throne he can look over all worlds, making him an omniscient deity that possesses knowledge about what's going on around him. Although he is unable to see the future himself, in poems and myths he is a frequent visitor of dead seers in the Underworld, forcing them to reveal to him the future or interpret concerning dreams of his son. He can be easily recognized because he is the only god with one eye, the other sacrificed in a sacred well as an exchange for wisdom. This eye 'deformation' can be paralleled to the Outsider, whose divine status and knowledge are visually demonstrated through the black eyes. Odin's relationship with heroes is a double-edged sword: on one side, he is the god of victory granting achievements to his favourites; on the other side he can bring their doom once they lose his interest. Creating discord and warfare is in his nature, as it is stated in numerous heroic poems (Simek 1993). An image of Odin awaiting fallen warriors in his hall Valhalla is similar to the Outsider living with restless spirits of the dead in the Void, as it was demonstrated in the last instalment in which Daud's soul sat next to the Outsider's physical body. A strong connection to magic is undeniable and crucial for both characters, as they seem to grant certain qualities to their 'chosen ones'. Odin, although in poetic tradition an important deity, was not intensively worshiped by a wide public (Simek 1993). Similarly as Tezcatlipoca, Odin was connected to a human sacrifice. And just like at the Toxcatl feast a young man embodied Tezcatlipoca, according to the poem *Havamal (138-141)* Odin sacrificed 'himself to himself' by hanging from the world tree, to gain a mystic knowledge of runes. According to an episode from the medieval chronicle *Gesta Danorum*, king Vikarr's death, which was requested by Odin himself, was a direct reference of this sacrifice but with no 'mystical' outcome (Saxo Grammaticus VI). This practise resembles a sacrifice of the Outsider, who was reborn with an access to a greater knowledge and power, while at the same time preserving an integrity of his old memory and human body. On the top of this, we have already mentioned earlier in an article that runes and bone charms inscribed with a mysterious script resembling the Scandinavian runic alphabet are items through which the Outsider channels the magic into human world, which can be seen as another interesting parallel to Scandinavian religion.

5 Conclusions

This article attempted to present an overview of one of the most interesting non-playable characters in modern games. The Outsider is a passive observer that comments on player's choices and fills or extends blank spaces in the storyline. The complexity of his personality and function is remarkable,

especially when compared to ‘real-life’ counterparts and the way he interacts in a world built for the *Dishonored* franchise. First, we had a closer look at the world he inhabited in the game and summarized information available about this place. The Void appeared to be a world of infinite creative and destructive forces, impossible for humans to control without the intervention of an intermediary, born into both worlds but not fully belonging to any of them. The Outsider was in a position of an intruder, able to break the barrier and keep his independence from humans, but not from the Void. His human body is held ‘hostage’ in the place where it was sacrificed, and the same can be said about his spirit or soul relieved of all emotions, visually represented in black eyes. If a player decided to liberate him from this captivity by revealing his true name, both essences merged and the first thing the Outsider noticed is that he can ‘feel’. In the second part, we analysed major religious groups of the game and compared some of their aspects with real-life counterparts. These institutions perceived the Outsider in a different light depending on their goals. The Abbey of Everyman is dedicated to destroy him and his followers, strongly demonizing his image and labelling him as the source of all evil and discord in the world, a propaganda strongly resembling a Christian view of the devil. On the other hand, cultists and individual worshippers seem to overestimate their influence over him, thinking that performance of certain rituals and sacrifices would turn him into an obedient servant to their cause. In rarer cases we can find romanticization and idealization of his figure and Paolo’s example shows us a rather ‘practical’ relationship. A specific case is Daud, a character with hostile approach towards him, and Billy Lurk, the main character in the last instalment with similar attitude. Lastly, we attempted to look at the Outsider as a complex character with fully-developed personality within game measures. Additionally to this ‘humanization’, we looked at two other deities from ‘real-life’ and compared certain individual aspects specific for them. Tezcatlipoca, Odin and Outsider are entities both admired and feared, living at the edges of the known world and granting both blessing and curse to their followers. Their connection with magic, discord and knowledge point them towards a dangerous, yet fascinating part of the human mind and supernatural world that is out of our reach to understand. All three figures ‘distribute’ supernatural powers to the human world, create strife and test the limits of human dedication and moral codex. It can be said that they are ‘bridges’ between consciousness and unconsciousness, available only to people ready to take a ‘trip’ into an unknown part of their minds, usually through dreams. But first, they had to be chosen by the divine entity, usually due to their potential strength or inner conflict. Following partial analysis of these characters, we came to the conclusion that they are a specific ‘type’ of supernatural being, not directly corresponding to one of the established archetypes, although sharing several features with them. With final remarks, we would like to conclude this study in hope that an ever-growing field of religion studies will acknowledge an importance of fictional characters (not only) in games as cultural reflections of

existing faiths and ‘mechanics’ of human mind, which is an ultimate source of both religion and game lore.

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