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# Fostering Intercultural Competence in Norwegian ELT through reading Multimodal Young Adult Fiction

An analysis of internalized and institutional racism in Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* and Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*

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# Abstract

This thesis investigates Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* (1999) and Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017), in light of how these two multimodal young adult novels depict internalized and institutional racism through incorporating the concepts Double Consciousness and Counter-storytelling. Written from the narrative perspective of a young male and female African American protagonist belonging to different periods of recent US history, each novel in different ways immerses the reader into a storyworld which exposes the persistent racial disparity against African Americans in the American Justice System and Law Enforcement. Focusing on the two novels' suitability for the English subject classroom in Norwegian Upper Secondary School, this thesis tries to connect the American field of Critical Race Theory with the emphasis on developing intercultural competence expressed in the English subject Curriculum in Norway. Using Hoff's (2016) Model of the Intercultural Reader, the overall aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which reading and working with multimodal young adult fiction could foster intercultural competence.

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# 1 Introduction and theoretical background

This thesis investigates the multimodal young adult novels *Monster* (1999) by Walter Dean Myers and *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas. Both novels are narrated from the perspective of an adolescent African American protagonist, depicting the internalized and institutional racism experienced by the African American population of the USA at different times in recent US history. The protagonist in *Monster* is the 16-year-old boy Steve Harmon who is on trial for murder in 1990s Harlem. Published nearly twenty years later, *The Hate U Give* is narrated by is 16-year-old Starr Carter, who witnesses police brutality when her unarmed friend Khalil is shot and killed by a white officer. Read together, these novels give valuable insight into the racial disparity of the American Justice System and Law Enforcement from both a male and female perspective. Their multimodal narrative structures add an additional challenge for readers, who are invited to take an active part in the reading process and experience empathy for the protagonists' traumatic experiences. As they follow Steve and Starr's movements between their marginalized local communities marked by drugs and gang violence and the predominantly white private High Schools they attend, readers encounter two storyworlds filled with elements that give opportunities for class discussions about racial stereotypes and prejudice in the USA. Focusing on the two novels' suitability for the English subject classroom in Norwegian Upper Secondary School, this thesis tries to connect the American field of Critical Race Theory and the emphasis on developing intercultural competence expressed in the English subject curriculum in Norway. Using Hoff's (2016) Model of the Intercultural Reader, the overall aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which reading and working with multimodal young adult fiction can foster intercultural competence. Potentially, through interacting with these multimodal novels on several levels, the students can become active readers and critical interpreters of the storyworlds' connections to each other and to the real world. This could encourage students to develop an ability to decenter their own point of view, avoid confirming stereotypes and prejudice, and increase their understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between language and culture.

## 1.1 Critical Race Theory and African American Young Adult Fiction

Following the death of George Floyd in May 2020 and the protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement, a resurge of media attention and questions related to the persistent influence of racism in society has been growing internationally. With the inauguration of Barak Obama as the first African American president back in 2008, a lot of media attention was directed towards the US becoming a "post-racial society". Panlay (2016) points out that "As much as one likes to argue that racism is a thing of the past and that America is now enjoying or living in the era of post racialism and colorblindness, (…) racial injustice in the USA is still a major and pressing problem; it has simply become less visible than it used to be" (Panlay 28). However, according to Hunt (2015), the shooting and killing of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2014 are just two of the recent high-profile cases that have brought national and international attention to the influence of race and ethnicity in the American criminal justice and legal systems. In their aftermath, widespread protests and social media campaigns, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement, have aimed at drawing attention to the persistence of police brutality and racial disparities in legal outcomes. Following a study reviewing research on possible jury bias, Hunt explains that the rate of incarceration in the US is 6,4 times higher for Black men than for White men. She concludes that: "the race and ethnicity of defendants, victims, and other trial parties can influence jurors' judgments about evidence, verdicts, and even decisions about whether to impose the death penalty" (283). Additionally, through analyzing police shootings at county-level in the US between 2011 and 2014, Ross (2015) found that the probability of being shot by police officers were about 3,49 times more likely for unarmed black Americans than for unarmed white Americans. He argues that these results provide evidence for a persistent existence of racial bias among US police officers (6).

With the long history of racial disparity in the USA, the Black Lives Matter movement is not the first to flag a need for change. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017): "The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (32). The movement was established around 1970 in the USA. Following a period in which the advances made by the civil rights era of the 1960s were starting to lose their effect, several activists, lawyers, and scholars from different parts of the country came together and argued that in order to fight subtler forms of racism and unequal power-relations, a combination of theories and new

strategies was required. Thus, they combined and gathered inspiration from previous movements like critical legal studies and radical feminism, in addition to the ideas of philosophers and theorists such as Gramsci, Foucault, Derrida, Du Bois, and the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Over the years, CRT has moved beyond a primary focus on the Law and inspired a number of spin-off movements. While starting out as a critique of constitutional law, today Critical Race Theory encompasses both intellectual and activist dimensions that revolves around the connection between race, racism and power in a number of different disciplines, and consists of various tenets, each of which focuses on specific propositions. The first tenet focuses on the ordinariness of racism in American society. The second tenet is known as interest convergence, emphasizing the material determinism which makes racism profitable for the white elite. The third tenet, or social construction thesis, states that race has no inherent biological reality and is instead a social construct and product of thought. The fourth tenet concerns differential racialization and focuses on how different minority groups have been racialized by the dominant society at different times in history, and closely relates to the notion of intersectionality. The fifth and final tenet concerns the notion of a voice of color speaking up, known as counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic 41-45).

Critical Race Theory forms an important theoretical background for this thesis. The fifth tenet, counter-storytelling, will play a significant role in the analysis of the two young adult novels *Monster* and *The Hate U Give*, and their verbal fight against institutional racism. Richard Delgado (1989), who first introduced counter-storytelling in the field of critical legal studies, explains how: “Members of outgroups can use stories in two basic ways: first, as means of psychic self-preservation; and second, as means of lessening their own subordination” (2436-7). Panlay (2016) describes several important and influential contemporary novels within the genre of African American Children’s and Young Adult Literature. Using Critical Race Theory as his key theoretical underpinning, he focuses specifically on the issue of how internalized racism is depicted in contemporary novels where a young black female character is portrayed as a victimized object experiencing self-hatred (Panlay 11). He argues that self-preservation can be achieved by the characters through reauthoring their own story and allowing themselves to be multiple and conflicted, and that: “these texts become not just ‘composite stories’ with historical significance but also ‘counter-stories’, which, as far as storytelling goes, are integral in creating a space for resistance and agency for both the fictional and outside child” (9). Building on Delgado’s (1989) description of counter-stories, Hughes-Hassel (2013) similarly argues that multicultural young adult

novels in particular can function as counter-stories that: "make the oppression and victimization of people of color and indigenous peoples visible – visible to themselves and to the majority culture. It can show that racism and inequality still exist in contemporary American society" (225). These ideas are going to play a significant role in chapter 2 and 3, where I will analyze each novel's function as a counter-narrative to the majoritarian story told by the dominant society.

Bishop (2010) notes how W. E. B. Du Bois' 1920 magazine called the Brownies' Book marked the start of a new tradition in children's literature where texts written by African American authors challenged the stereotypical beliefs about African Americans presented in the dominant literary canon (227). The description of how individuals living in a society marked by institutional racism end up internalizing racism through beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to the point where it becomes a part of their identity, matches the notion of Double Consciousness introduced by Du Bois. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (2007), he emphasizes the existence of two different and conflicting souls in one black body:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois 3).

Du Bois' notion has played an influential role in the field of African American literature, because of the way it manages to convey how African Americans are able to observe racial events from two perspectives at the same time, and how this takes its toll on the individual. Double consciousness will be a key term in this thesis. In chapter 2 the concept will be used to analyze the ways in which Steve, the protagonist of *Monster*, internalizes the racism he is surrounded by. In chapter 3, the concept of Triple Consciousness will be used to analyze the ways in which Starr as a black female protagonist of *The Hate U Give* is caught in an intersectional space between race, class, and gender.

Walter Dean Myer's young adult novel *Monster* was published in 1999. The novel centers around the 16-year-old African American boy Steve Harmon, who is incarcerated and put on trial following his alleged participation in a robbery that ends with the murder of a drugstore clerk in his local community of Harlem, New York. Most of the novel's action takes place in

a court room and Steve's prison cell at a detention center. The novel can be considered a counter-story that gives the reader valuable insight into institutional racism through depicting the racial disparity in the American criminal justice and legal systems at the end of the 1990s. In chapter 2, my reading of *Monster* will focus on the ways in which Myers incorporates the notion of double consciousness by creating a protagonist that is able to observe himself from multiple angles and adjust his performance through changes in the narrative structure. Shifting between sections resembling prison notebook-entries and a movie screenplay, the novel relates how Steve struggles with preserving his sense of self as he is constantly defined as an inhumane monster by the prosecutor.

Angie Thomas' young adult novel *The Hate U Give* was published in 2017, almost 20 years after *Monster*. The story follows the 16-year-old African American girl Starr Carter's traumatic experience as the sole witness in the car when her friend Khalil is pulled over and killed by a white police officer. The novel's depiction of police brutality narrated through the eyes of a young black female protagonist gives an important perspective on how the racial disparity does not only affect the male victim and is still present in the contemporary American society. Following the incident Starr struggles with grief and traumatic flashbacks. At the same time, she is torn between the identity she has in her local community of Garden Heights with her family and friends and the one she has at the predominantly white High School Williamson. In chapter 3, my reading of The Hate U Give will focus on the ways in which Thomas incorporates the notion of a triple consciousness, through examples of code-switching and changes in behavior that shows the reader how strenuous it feels to experience internalize racism. Chapter 4 will focus on the potential benefits of reading these two novels together in the English subject classroom of Norwegian upper secondary schools, as they present the experience of internalized and institutional racism from the more personal perspective of a male and a female point of view in addition to their depiction of two important time-periods in recent US history specifically in relation to the African American population.

## 1.2 The Norwegian Core Curriculum and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The increased international media attention on racial disparity in the US has led many other countries to examine their own history and prevalence of institutional racism and how to discuss these controversial issues. In a Norwegian context, Røthing (2020) points out how classroom-observations, interviews with both teachers and students, in addition to analyses of

curriculums and teaching materials over several years reveal a persistent reproduction of stereotypes, marginalization and discrimination. Despite teachers being motivated by good intentions, the lacking emphasis on ways of approaching such controversial issues in teacher education and the core curriculum applied in schools leads to a majority avoiding these discussions in the classroom (10). While the recently implemented Norwegian Core Curriculum does not mention racism directly, it does state that: "School shall promote democratic values and attitudes that can counteract prejudice and discrimination" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2017, 8). One of the central values described in the National Curriculum for the English subject specifically states that:

> English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns (…) The subject shall develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture dependent. This can open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019, 2).

Hence, the prevention of prejudice is emphasized as an important goal that can counter misconceptions and narrowminded views of the world. This focus on the complexity of culture and the importance of learning how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds has become increasingly emphasized in the context of education. Kramsch (1993) argues that: "[if] language is seen as a social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency" (8). From this perspective, culture and language cannot be separated and both play pivotal roles in an educational context. The view of culture as an integrated aspect of language teaching and learning was further strengthened by the Council of Europe (COE) in the 1990s. Through their inclusion of intercultural awareness in the concept of communicative competence described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the goal was to contribute to increased dialogue and cooperation between countries (Hoff 2020, 71).

Over the years, multiple models and suggestions have been made in relation to ways of helping students develop into democratic citizens with the ability to communicate with people from various cultural backgrounds. An influential voice in relation to foreign language education is Michael Byram. In his model of intercultural communicative competence, Byram (1997) describes qualities which are required for the student to become a competent

intercultural speaker, and not just imitate native speakers as was previously emphasized in foreign language teaching. Byram's model consists of attitudes, skills, knowledge, and education, which all together creates a competent intercultural speaker. However, the model has been criticized for its lacking focus on how this can be developed in a classroom setting (Hoff 2020, 74). According to Hoff (2020), the turn of the 21st century marked an intercultural shift in English language teaching. With emphasis on English as a global language the focus was increasingly shifted towards including diverse representations of cultures within and outside of Great Britain and the USA. She explains how literature and literary reading in particular became a medium through which students could gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others, and which could be linked to the idea of intercultural learning:

> As literature could be said to represent the personal voice of a culture, it was seen as key to promoting learners' empathy and identification with individuals from foreign cultures as well as a suitable medium for the consideration of multiple meanings due to its open and undetermined form (Hoff 2020, 73).

One of the core elements in the National Curriculum for the English, *encounters with texts in English*, similarly states that:

> By reflecting on, interpreting, and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus, the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context. (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019, 3).

Hoff (2016) reconceptualizes Byram's concept of the intercultural speaker by creating a model that more specifically focuses on how literary reading can foster intercultural communicative competence. The model of the intercultural reader (MIR) is based on an understanding of reading as a communicative experience where the reader negotiates with different aspects of the text (61). Operating on three interlinked levels, the intercultural reader combines emotion and cognition while simultaneously considering: "the effects of the narrative style and structure of the text as well as the different cultural, social and historical subject positions of text(s) and reader(s). In this sense, the reading of FL literature can take place as a multifaceted process that may contribute to learners' understanding of intercultural

communication" (Hoff 2019, 446). On the first level, the reader focuses on engaging with the protagonist and other characters' voices in the text and notices the responses they trigger. On the second level, the reader is asked to consider how other readers can respond to the text differently depending on their cultural, social, and historical position. This level plays a crucial role in students' process of decentering their own point of view to understand different perspectives. On the third level, the reader needs to consider how the text communicates with other texts through what is commonly known as intertextuality. Hoff points out that: "the act of reading should be regarded as a dynamic process of moving back and forth between the different levels" (Hoff 2016, 62-3).

As Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader specifically focuses on reading literature to facilitate an intercultural understanding of the world, which is emphasized in the English subject curriculum, it will play a pivotal role throughout this thesis. To my knowledge, there are no studies investigating the usability of *Monster* or *The Hate U Give* in a Norwegian educational context. Therefore, in chapter 4, I will more specifically analyze how the novels together can be used in the context of the English subject classroom in Norwegian upper secondary school. Focusing on the different levels of Hoff's model, both *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* come to represent the personal voice of a culture due to the reader's close alignment with the protagonists' narrative perspectives. Additionally, the complexity of each novel's narrative structure and their undetermined form encourages the reader to consider multiple layers of meaning. This is largely due to the authors' use of multiple modes.

## 1.3 Multimodality and development of empathy

This thesis tries to establish a connection between multimodal texts and the enhancement of intercultural competence in the English subject classroom of Norwegian upper secondary school. As will be shown in chapter 2 and 3, *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* can be categorized as multimodal texts. Thus, the concept of multimodality and subsequent perspective of reading as a multiliterate act becomes central to my discussion. In addition to emphasizing the development of intercultural competence, the core element in the National Curriculum for the English subject called *Encounters with texts in English*, further states that:

> Language learning takes place in the encounter with texts in English. The concept of text is used in a broad sense: texts can be spoken and written, printed and digital, graphic, and artistic, formal and informal, fictional and factual, contemporary and

> historical. The texts can contain writing, pictures, audio, drawings, graphs, numbers and other forms of expression that are combined to enhance and present a message.

This broad definition of what a text is matches the increasingly popular view of reading as a multiliterate act, emphasized in relation to the concept of multimodality. According to Kramsch (1993), in a similar way to how culture dynamically changes across time and place, so does language and the way it is used. Kress (2010) argues that semiotic resources are constantly shaped and remade by social interaction. Some semiotic principles are common for all cultures and can be generalized. All cultures create meaning through framing the world, only varying in *what* they frame, *how* they frame it, and *what kind of* frames are used. Kress (2010) defines a mode as: "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication" (79).

In relation to Western culture and specifically literature, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) describe a traditional preference for monomodality throughout history. This includes an emphasis on the written genre with literary novels that: "came entirely without illustration, and had graphically uniform, dense pages of print" (1). Building on their social semiotic theory, Hallet (2014) argues that reading is increasingly becoming a multiliterate act due to the growing use of several semiotic modes simultaneously in narrative discourse. In relation to the traditional novel, he points out that:

> As opposed to the multiplicity of semiotic modes in various communicative contexts, the traditional novel exclusively relies on the written word in printed form, with black letters on the white page in a paper-bound book (…) Therefore, in terms of the multimodality concept in social semiotics, the traditional novel is basically monomodal (although, strictly speaking, layout, black letters, paper, and margins on the page are also different modes and meaningful semiotic resources). (Hallet 124).

Thus, while Hallet categorizes the traditional novel as largely monomodal he also emphasizes how modes related to textual communication like layout, typography and margins cannot be excluded when examining the process of meaning-making. From this perspective, both *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* can be considered multimodal texts, as much of their meaning can be found in the multiple modes used by the authors.

Carlsen (2020) argues that the popularity of young adult fiction has grown over the past few decades. As their intended audience is adolescent readers, the uncomplicated language and relevant topics of this category of fiction suits the English subject classroom well. A distinctive trait of contemporary young adult fiction is its multimodality, often combining textual and visual elements (217). Both *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* can be categorized as young adult fiction. In relation to multimodal novels, Rimmereide (2020) emphasizes how adolescents growing up today are surrounded by a myriad of different media that use a combination of modalities within the systems of visual, audial, and textual communication simultaneously. Because of this they are increasingly required to read in a way that makes them able to recognize each mode separately before processing the interconnections between them (192). Bland (2020) describes this multifaceted way of reading as a type of deep reading, where the focus is shifted from passively working with literature to embracing how literature works on and communicates with the reader. She argues that deep reading can promote different aspects of cognition and engagement with the text, including the ignition of their empathy, as: "For deep reading we need to create a mental model while reading – a creative process of seeing, hearing, feeling and acting out the storyworld in the mind" (73).

Nikolajeva (2014) also describes this visualization of the storyworld through focusing on the creation of mental models. She argues that cognitive criticism and the concept of Theory of Mind plays a significant role in the process of how young readers experience empathy and develop an understanding of fictional characters, stating that: "successful children's fiction challenges its audience cognitively and affectively, stimulating attention, imagination, memory, inference-making, empathy and all other elements of mental processes" (227). Theory of Mind builds on the idea that humans gradually develop the ability to decenter themselves and understand the experiences of others and how they might differ from one's own. In relation to reading, Nikolajeva explains how: "Unlike the self-centered, immersive identification, empathy is a desirable social skill that implies the ability to understand other people's minds without sharing their opinions or, more importantly, their emotional experiences" (85). Thus, the reader through first projecting their own experiences onto the fictional character, is gradually able to immerse themselves into the storyworld. Only after being able to understand how the character's experiences differ from their own, however, is the reader more fully able to understand the character's perspective on the world. Understanding the difference between sympathy and empathy is especially important for young readers when they are exposed to the perspective of an untrustworthy narrator,

unsympathetic characters or when discussing vicarious ethical experiences related to controversial issues (Bland 73). As will be shown through the analysis of *Monster* in chapter 2, Myers' combined use of textual and visual modes establishes empathy for Steve while also challenging the reader to pay close attention to the different narrative structures that are used.

To combine and develop the different concepts and theoretical fields discussed above, I have chosen to structure this thesis into three additional chapters. This chapter has focused on introducing and outlining the theoretical background for my analysis. In chapter 2, I will focus on Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*. The chapter is divided into three sections, where the first section is an analysis of how Myers' creative combination of multiple modes draws the readers into the storyworld, establishes empathy for Steve as the story's protagonist, and invites them to become part of the jury investigating his participation in the robbery. In the second section I will use the concept of Double Consciousness to analyze Steve' racial identity and how he struggles with internalized racism, arguing that the shifts between narrative structures show different versions of Steve. The chapter's third section concludes with an analysis of how the novel functions as a counter-narrative, exposing institutional racism in the American justice system of the 1990s. In chapter 3, I will focus on Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give.* In the first section I will analyze how Thomas uses multiple modes to draw the readers into the storyworld as a way of making them understand and empathize with Starr's traumatic experiences. In the second section, I will argue that Thomas' description of Starr's conflicting identities can be considered a form of internalized racism. This will be analyzed in connection to the concept of Triple Consciousness, a continuation of Double Consciousness, which includes an intersectional focus on gender and socioeconomic class. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the novel functions as a female counter-narrative which exposes the institutional racism in American law enforcement. Finally, in chapter 4 I will combine my focus on both novels simultaneously to investigate their suitability for the English subject in Norwegian uppers secondary school. Looking at the ways in which they can be used to foster intercultural competence, I will focus on the three levels described in Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader. In the first section I will investigate the obstacle presented by multimodal narrative structure and the need for teacher scaffolding. The second section focuses on communication between different readers through Socratic group-discussions, while the third and final section explores intertextuality by juxtaposing different aspects of the two novels. The goal is to give students the opportunity to read deeply, critically, and interculturally so that they can develop an understanding about the

complexity of language and culture and potentially be able to apply this competence in other contexts.

# 2 Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*

The young adult novel *Monster* was published in 1999 by African American author Walter Dean Myers. Myers is a renowned author of young adult literature focused on African American adolescents and is described by Goodson & Funk (2008) as: "a powerful literary connection for young adults, maintaining a vital place on the bookshelves across the nation" (30). *Monster* won several awards following its release, including the Michael L. Printz Award in 2000 (American Library Association). Additionally, it has been taught in United States Middle- and High School classrooms for quite some time (Groenke & Youngquist; Seglem & Bonner). The novel centers around 16-year-old African American Steve Harmon, who is incarcerated and put on trial following his alleged participation in a robbery that ends with the murder of a drugstore clerk in his local community of Harlem, New York. Most of the novel's action takes place in the court room and Steve's prison cell at a detention center. The reader gradually learns that Steve was supposed to act as a lookout for the robbers known as Bobo Evans and James King by signaling whether there were other customers and police officers in the store at the time of the robbery. During the trial, and in conversations with defense attorney, Kathy O'Brien, Steve denies having had anything to do with the robbery and subsequent murder. He is ultimately acquitted by the jury. However, Myers at several points in the novel appears to leave hints that makes Steve's innocence questionable to the reader. He does this by playing with the narrative structure. While the story is only told from Steve's perspective, his narration shifts between sections resembling a prison-notebook and a movie screenplay, with illustrations interspersed at different points in the narrative. Throughout this chapter I will analyze how Myers' creative combination of multiple modes draws the readers into the storyworld and invites them to become part of the jury investigating Steve's participation in the robbery. Using the concept of Double Consciousness to analyze Steve' racial identity and how he struggles with internalized racism, I will argue that the shifts between narrative structures show different versions of Steve. These shifts help readers empathize with him while also challenging them to pay close attention and be active readers. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the novel functions as a counter-narrative, exposing institutional racism in the American justice system.

## 2.1 *Monster* as a multimodal novel that immerses the reader

As previously mentioned, Hallet (2014) based on social semiotic theory, argues that reading is becoming an increasingly multiliterate act due to the growing use of several semiotic modes simultaneously in narrative discourse. Groenke and Youngquist (2011) point out how the 21st century and its focus on new ways of communicating using multiple modes has resulted in an increased production of postmodern literature filled with ambiguity, non-linearity, and genre eclecticism (506). Published in 1999, right before the transition into the new millennium, *Monster* has been categorized by critics as an early attempt at bringing postmodernism and multimodality into the genre of young adult fiction (Engles & Kory; Groenke & Youngquist; Yearwood). Walter Dean Myers expressed his fascination with the creative writing process and how he likes to play with form as well as the subject matter of a story in a 2008 interview. Talking about the way in which he approaches a new project, he explained asking himself: "Can I approach this subject in a way that will make it fresh to the reader? Can I find a way to tell it that is particularly challenging to me, or fun? Will I give myself the chance to play with language? With concepts?" (Goodson & Funk 26). In *Monster*, Myers plays with the traditional novel form. The novel does not contain any numbered chapters and is instead divided into different sections marked by changes in font and layout, with illustrations interspersed throughout. Additionally, the postmodern theme of a fragmented identity is foreshadowed from the opening prologue which introduces the reader to an unknown protagonist's handwritten notes and reflections.

Myers opens the novel with the words: "The best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out and someone is being beaten up and screaming for help" (Myers 1), followed by a section in which the unknown protagonist describes seeing his reflection in a mirror, stating: "When I look into the small rectangle, I see a face looking back at me but I don't recognize it. It doesn't look like me. I couldn't have changed that much in a few months. I wonder if I will look like myself when the trial is over" (Myers 2). Since no details have been provided to the reader yet about who is speaking and where this person is located, except for the mention of a trial, Myers seems to be starting out with a generic focus on the experience of being incarcerated. The unknown identity of the first-person narrator combined with the lacking information about how he ended up in jail makes the reader question who he used to be and how he ended up there. This general focus on the prison experience matches what Myers has stated in interviews, where he explains that the inspiration behind the novel was his own

conversations with inmates talking about their upbringing, background, and the crimes that landed them in jail (Goodson & Funk 28).

To make certain sections resemble real notebook-entries, Myers chooses to use a font that mimics that of handwriting. Both in the prologue, where the protagonist is still unknown, and later sections marked with a date and the headline "notes", Myers uses the same font. As these sections contain what the reader quickly learns to be Steve Harmon's private thoughts during his incarceration, the effect is that the reader perceives Steve as more than a static character. Because of the unconventional layout on the page and handwritten font, the reader needs to pay attention to the visual presentation on the page in addition to what the text itself communicates. The notebook is the only object Steve is allowed to keep in his cell, and he uses it as a creative outlet for his thoughts and feelings. In the same interview mentioned above, Myers states that he spent many years in speech therapy as a child. With the encouragement of a teacher, he started putting his thoughts on paper and realized that writing can be a powerful outlet: "With this encouragement I began writing dozens of poems. Since we were reading British poets, my poems were largely odes to anything I saw" (Goodson & Funk 26).

Through creating the notebook-sections, Myers creates the illusion of reading a real prison memoir. In a similar way to Myers' "odes to anything" he sees, Steve's notebook entries include details about all the things he observes and feels during his time in the detention center. However, Steve's narrative is greatly influenced by the seriousness of his situation and the violence that surrounds him. Shankar (2020) explains how prison memoires have a long history of giving valuable insight into the experience of living under varying conditions in the American prison system, and how they are often centered around an "act of violence accompanied by bursts of shame, rage, fear, and remorse" (105). Steve writes about his growing fear, saying: "It's growing. First I was scared of being hit or raped. That being scared was like a little ball in the pit of my stomach. Now that ball is growing when I think about what kind of time I can get. Felony murder is 25 years to life. My whole life will be gone" (Myers 139). This description establishes a sense of sympathy for the serious situation that Steve as a powerless prisoner finds himself in. Through the handwritten notebook-entries, the reader gains insight into Steve's deepest fears about the possible outcome of the trial.

Underlined passages emphasize Steve's emotional state, signals frustration, and makes the notes appear real on the physical page. Emphasizing the divide between the real world and the storyworld created by an author, Ryan and Thon (2014) explain that: "while the author creates the storyworld through the production of signs, it is the reader, spectator, listener, or player who uses the blueprint of a finished text to construct a mental image of this world" (14). Myers' choice of writing Steve's notebook-entries in the present tense using a first-person narrator blurs the line between the real world and the storyworld. This is visible in a section where Steve expresses his frustration about being incarcerated: "Tuesday, July 7th. Notes: I can hardly think about the movie, I hate this place so much. But if I didn't think of the movie I would go crazy (…) I can't write it enough times to make it look the way I feel. I hate, hate, hate this place!!" (Myers 46). As previously mentioned, Nikolajeva (2014) focuses on how cognitive criticism and especially Theory of Mind plays a significant role in the process of how young readers experience empathy and develop an understanding of the protagonist in a novel. The handwritten font combined with underlining the word hate, emphasizes Steve's frustration. Potentially, this sense of frustration and subsequent underlining of words in anger is a familiar emotional reaction that can make him seem more real and relatable in the eyes of the young readers who: "use their own real-life experiences to understand fictional characters: to employ life-to-text strategies (…) Thus, in making sense of fiction, novice readers relate fictional events to their personal experience and understand characters' emotions by connecting them to relevant, emotionally charged memories" (84). As will be shown in chapter 4, this understanding of the protagonist is significant for the first level of Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader, focusing on the reader's interaction with the text.

The narrative structure of *Monster* grows more complex as Steve uses the notebook, which he has been given during his incarceration, to construct a movie-screenplay containing his own version of the story. At the end of the prologue, Steve describes the alienated feeling of having walked into a strange movie and elaborates on his plans for creating the screenplay: "I could write it out and play it in my head. I could block out the scenes like we did in school. The film will be the story of my life. No, not my life, but of this experience. I'll write it down in the notebook they let me keep. I'll call it what the lady who is the prosecutor called me. MONSTER" (Myers 8). In direct response to a later courtroom-scene in which the prosecutor calls Steve a monster, he chooses to name his own story "Monster". By doing so he somewhat reclaims a bit of the power that he has lost during his incarceration, using it to create his own version of the story and of himself.

As the novel contains no chapters, Myers indicates shifts between Steve's notebook-entries and movie screenplay through the use of contrasting fonts and layouts. Building on social semiotic theory, Bean and Harper (2007) argue that: "[The] softer scenes in Steve's diary where he lets down his courtroom guard and more macho persona contrast sharply with the conservative Helvetica block print of the screen play and the Courier typewriter font of the courtroom dialogue between the witnesses and attorneys" (23). In the opening of his screenplay, A font resembling handwriting is used for the date followed by a different font and layout for the introductory description of the setting and camera movements:

Monday, July 6th.

Monster!

> FADE IN: INTERIOR: early morning in DELL BLOCK D, MANHATTAN DETENTION CENTER. Camera goes slowly down grim, gray corridor (Myers 7).

The novel continuously shifts between sections resembling notebook-entries and sections that resemble a screenplay, with the handwritten dates connecting the two narratives. Since the screenplay is something that Steve is working on in his notebook and not an actual movie playing on a screen, the reader needs to actively take part in the reading-process and pay close attention to the changes in narrative structure and the possible meanings behind them to understand Steve.

Steve's close attention to detail and vivid descriptions in the screenplay-narrative makes the reader able to visualize how the words would move across a screen in the finished movie. From the opening pages of his screenplay, Steve appears to have a clear vision about what his movie is going to look like aesthetically. Referencing the cultural phenomenon *Star Wars*, he describes how he wants the text to move across the screen in his movie: "Words appear on the screen, just like the opening credits of the movie Star Wars, rolling from the bottom of the screen and shrinking until they are a blur on the top of the screen before rolling off into space" (Myers 8). In a similar way, the text on the physical page in the novel also appears to move, being bigger at the bottom and growing smaller towards the top. Through reading these instructions in combination with the changes in font size that can be observed on the page, the reader is invited to imagine what the movie would look like visually, observing the text moving across the page and "rolling off into space":

MONSTER!

The story of my miserable life

Starring

Steve Harmon

Produced by

Steve Harmon

(Credits continue to roll.) (Myers 9).

The way in which Myers draws attention to the novel's form itself through its multimodal elements, emphasizes Steve's role as a skilled writer and director of his own story. Following his description of the movie's layout, Steve chooses to include information about the most frequent characters starring in his movie. He includes himself by writing: "starring 16-year-old Steve Harmon as the Boy on Trial for Murder!" (Myers 10). Mentioning his own name both as the director, producer, and as the young boy on trial, Steve seems to emphasize a separation and distance between these different roles. It also indicates an awareness about how other characters perceive different versions of him, echoing his opening observation in the notebook where he reflects on not recognizing himself in the mirror.

None of Steve's descriptions of himself in the screenplay give any insight into his thoughts and feelings, as they are all observed externally from a distance: "INTERIOR: CELL. Sixteen-year-old STEVE HARMON is sitting on the edge of a metal cot, head in hands. He is thin, brown skinned. On the cot next to him are the suit and tie he is to wear to court for the start of his trial" (Myers 7). Every scene in Steve's screenplay where he takes part in the action himself is written from a third person narrative perspective, as if looking at the character through a screen and from a distance. The only indications about his reactions to what goes on in the movie are details about his physical movements, such as the description of him having his head in his hands before being transported to the trial, and his physical appearance as he wears the suit and tie. The character which Steve creates in his script thus becomes a victim constructed in a way that is supposed to awaken a feeling of sympathy in the reader, who knows from reading his notebook-entries that he is frightened about the whole experience.

Connecting the two narratives, Steve includes a description of himself holding the notebook on his way into court: "CUT TO: PRISONERS, handcuffed, coming from back of van. STEVE is carrying a notebook. He is dressed in the suit and tie we saw on the cot" (Myers 12). By specifically mentioning the notebook's presence during the court proceedings, Myers again makes the story more real by drawing the reader's attention to the novel's unusual form itself and how the action described in the two narratives occur simultaneously. The specific mention of the notebook emphasizes Steve's awareness about being observed from different angles, both by his readers of the prison memoir and potential viewers of the movie he imagines. Thus, through combining the two narrative structures in one physical novel, Myers creates a multifaceted reading-experience about Steve's different versions of himself.

## 2.2 Steve's double consciousness and unreliable narration

As previously mentioned, Du Bois (2007) emphasizes the existence of two conflicting souls in one black body. His concept of double consciousness focuses on the sensation of: "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (3). Steve's awareness about the ways in which he is perceived and his subsequent adjustment of his performance in various roles throughout the novel indicates that he has the ability to view himself "through the eyes of others". His frustration in relation to not being able to distance himself from the other prisoners is visible when he describes how: "being in here with these guys makes it hard to think about yourself as being different. We look about the same, and even though I'm younger than they are, it's hard not to notice that we are all pretty young. I see what Miss O'Brien meant when she said part of her job was to make me look human in the eyes of the jury" (Myers 63). Steve is aware that his racialized self, marked physically by his skin color, makes people see him as a monster no matter what he says or how he acts.

Steve's interactions with his defense attorney, Miss O'Brien, in his screenplay emphasizes her possible bias against him as a young Black male. At an early point in the novel, Steve describes a scene in which O'Brien is explaining what he should and should not do during the trial, saying: "When you're in court, you sit there, and you pay attention. You let the jury know that you think the case is as serious as they do. You don't turn and wave to any of your friends. It's all right to acknowledge your mother" (Myers. 13). The way in which Miss O'Brien explains how Steve should act indicates that she thinks he does not know how to adjust his performance in court and that she already has a certain stereotypical perspective on

him. This perception is further emphasized later in the trial when Steve asks how his case is going and O'Brien exclaims:

> Well, frankly, nothing is happening that speaks to you being innocent. Half of those jurors, no matter what they said when we questioned them when we picked the jury, believed you were guilty the moment they laid eyes on you. You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?" (Myers 79).

By uttering this explanation, O'Brien appears have a certain awareness about how the system puts Steve within a category of people to which the jury will be prejudiced from the beginning no matter what she argues in court. At the same time, she indicates that the evidence points to him being guilty and seems reluctant to support him completely.

In the opening page of his screenplay, where he lists the most frequent characters in his story, Steve chooses to describe Kathy O'Brien as "the Defense Attorney with Doubts" (Myers 10). O'Brien's doubts about his innocence are emphasized in the way he writes about their interactions in his notebook. In one of his entries Steve describes how Miss O'Brien lays the pictures showing Mr. Nesbit, the murdered drugstore clerk, in front of him: "Miss O'Brien looked at me – I didn't see her looking at me but I knew she was. She wanted to know who I was. Who was Steve Harmon? I wanted to open my shirt and tell her to look into my heart to see who I really was, who the real Steve Harmon was (…) I'm just not a bad person. I know that in my heart I am not a bad person" (Myers 92). Engles and Kory (2014) argue that her gaze bothers Steve, because he considers himself as a decent human being who is not like the other defendants (56).

O'Brien's doubts about his moral character greatly upsets Steve, who uses his creative skills to establish a greater distance between himself and the other defendants in the screenplay. He appears to be aware of how internalized racism and racial stereotypes can affect the readers' perception of each character and takes care to construct King in a way that contrasts his own appearance in court: "We see STEVE sitting at one end of a bench. Against the opposite wall, dressed in a sloppy-looking suit, is 23-year-old JAMES KING, the other man on trial. KING looks older than 23. He looks over at STEVE with a hard look and we see STEVE look away" (Myers 13). In a similar way to how other characters are describes as looking away from Steve, his own frightened response to King indicates that he perceives him as a monster he does not want to be associated with. A similar description is also used during a scene in which

the grotesque pictures of the dead body are shown to the defendants and jury: “You mean he literally drowned in his own blood? REACTION SHOT: STEVE catches his breath sharply. REACTION SHOT: KING has head tilted to one side, seemingly without a care” (Myers 136). While the camera zooms in to catch Steve’s shocked reaction, King is emphasized as cold and indifferent.

Steve increasingly conveys his fear to the readers, immersing them into his experience of being unfairly treated by the police based on racial stereotypes. He inserts a scene in which he is interrogated by a white and a black officer about his possible involvement in the robbery. The white officer, Karyl, explains how the other defendants have claimed that Steve was the one who pulled the trigger on the gun that killed Mr. Nesbitt, and that the defense attorney is considering death penalty:

> WILLIAMS: This guy’s only 16. They won’t kill him.
>
> KARYL: What are you, a pessimist? Hope for the best.
>
> CUT TO: Weird shot of INTERIOR: DEATH ROW. STEVE is seen walking down the hallway between two guards. He is brought into the death chamber. The guards are pale, almost greenish. They lay STEVE on the table for the lethal injection and strap him down. CU [Close Up] of STEVE’s face. He is terrified (Myers 72).

The officers’ comment is directly followed by an imagined scenario where Steve is given a lethal injection. The dramatic death-scene seems to invite the reader to imagine the action taking place in a movie and to relate to Steve’s significant level of fear for his life in that cinematic moment. The white officer’s indifference to Steve’s death, despite not knowing whether he is guilty yet, establishes him as an unsympathetic character who solely judges Steve based on his stereotypical appearance as a young black male who deserves the death penalty.

The possibility of Steve being an unreliable narrator, hiding certain facts from the reader and himself becomes increasingly clear as the story progresses. Steve chooses to include a scene from a film workshop at his High School where Mr. Sawicki, his teacher, explains: “When you make a film, you leave an impression on the viewers, who *serve as a kind of jury* for your film. If you make your film predictable, they’ll make up their minds about it long before it’s over” (Myers 19 my emphasis). The viewers of Steve’s potential film are also the readers of the novel. Through this scene in the screenplay-narrative, Myers seems to be reaching out and

drawing the reader's attention in towards the script itself by comparing the readers to a jury and asking them to interact with the text. He foreshadows Steve's unreliable narration, as he points to the importance of making the film unpredictable so that the viewers will not be set in their impression from the start. Additionally, Engles and Kory (2014) point out how this scene from the film workshop establishes Steve's: "credentials as a good student, suggesting a set of storytelling skills, and introducing the twin themes of judgement and prejudgment" (57).

Steve carefully constructs the screenplay-narrative in a way that emphasizes his innocence, with no connection to the robbers or the crime-scene. The clearest hint from Myers that Steve is withholding information in his screenplay can be found in a notebook-entry where he writes: "Before she left, Miss O'Brien warned me not to write anything in my notebook that I did not want the prosecutor to see" (Myers 137). O'Brien reminds Steve that his notebook could be used by Petrocelli as proof against him in the trial. This passage is especially significant seen in relation to the fact that Steve at no point in his screenplay describes the scene of the robbery, the subsequent murder of Mr. Nesbitt, and his whereabouts at the time from his own perspective. While withholding this information could be a conscious choice, it appears to be more likely that Steve is also in some way hiding these scenes from himself by separating the two narrative structures and versions of himself as much as possible.

The illustrations interspersed throughout the novel contradicts Steve's other narrative structures and challenges the readers to combine visual and textual clues in their search for the truth about Steve's involvement in the robbery. As previously noted in relation to what makes the novel multimodal, in addition to the notebook-entries and the screenplay, Steve also inserts illustrations at different points throughout the novel. Each illustration shows a grainy photograph of an African American boy, who is supposed to resemble Steve, taken from different angles in different locations. Especially significant are the two illustrations showing Steve walking along the aisles in a store, similar to the black and white video-footage seen from the perspective of a security camera. In the first photograph, his facial expression is visible, whereas the second photograph zooms in and is too grainy to see anything other than the shape of his head. Above the first picture are the handwritten words "What was I doing?" (Myers 220), echoed by the words below the second picture reading "What was I thinking?" (Myers 221). Describing the advantages of combining words and images to establish an emotional reaction from the reader, Nikolajeva (2013) explains how in books using pictures: "Images and verbal statements may be mutually complementary or

enhancing; they can even be contradictory. For instance, words can state that the character is happy while the images show the character is upset" (252). Specifically in relation to what she terms contradictory picture books, Nikolajeva argues that "Clever picture books make use of ambiguity created in the interaction between media when conveying a character's emotional state" (253). In relation to Steve's different narratives, the pictures directly contradict his statements about not entering the drugstore and knowing anything about the robbery. The security-footage photographs show Steve walking along the aisles and have his handwritten notes next to them, indicating that his guilt is starting to shine through and become present in the notebook-narrative.

Through including other prisoner's stories about their crimes and downplaying his own part in the robbery, Steve appears to be morally disengaging himself from his own actions. Bandura (1999) describes moral disengagement as a process through which people justify their inhumane actions to themselves in order to avoid self-condemnation (194). An example of this is visible in a notebook-entry where Steve is describing a conversation with other inmates about the crimes they have committed: "They weighted the evidence against them and for them and commented on each other's cases" (Myers 141). Elaborating on his motivation for writing the novel, Myers explains that while looking through transcripts from interviews with real convicts, he discovered a contrast between situations where the person being interviewed would be speaking in the first person when talking about their upbringing, and then switching to the third person when speaking of the crime of which they had been convicted: "No one wanted to be portrayed as 'evil'. But as I pored over the trial transcripts and their arrest records, I came to the conclusion that it was their ability to separate themselves from their acts that permitted them to commit those acts in the first place. With this revelation came the idea to write *Monster*" (Goodson & Funk 28). Myers uses this technique in his own novel as a way of showing the reader how moral disengagement feels for the individual who is haunted by their own actions. As has already been noted, Steve switches between a first person present tense narrator in the notebook and a third person narrator in the screenplay like the prisoners Myers mentioned in his interview. Distancing himself from the other prisoners' brutal crimes in the same notebook-entry described above, Steve questions his own actions: "What did I do? I walked into a drugstore to look for some mints, and then I walked out. What was wrong with that? I didn't kill Mr. Nesbitt" (Myers 140). By reducing his actions to having walked into the drugstore and out again, Steve separates himself from the following chain of events described in court.

Towards the end of the novel, when Steve is asked to testify in front of the jury, he states that he was never involved in the robbery, did not know the other defendants personally, and answers every question from Petrocelli calmly with the words "No, I was not" (Myers 224). However, the information Steve relates in his notebook-narrative increasingly points towards him being present on the night of the robbery:

> I thought about writing about what happened in the drugstore, but I'd rather not have it in my mind. The pictures of Mr. Nesbitt scare me. I think about him lying there knowing he was going to die. I wonder if it hurt much. I can see me at that moment, just when Mr. Nesbitt knew he was going to die, walking down the street trying to make my mind a blank screen" (Myers 128).

Steve inserts details here revealing that he walked away from the scene of the crime trying to block out what he had been a part of.

Due to the lacking evidence against him, Steve is ultimately acquitted of all charges and gets to go home. However, he is greatly affected by his prison experience and unable to "make his mind a blank screen". In his last notebook-entry, dated five months after the trial, Steve describes how he continues to film himself from different angles and locations for his movie:

> I want to know who I am. I want to know the road to panic that I took. I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image. When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away? What did she see? (Myers 281).

Steve refers to the way in which O'Brien turns away from him as he reaches out for a hug after being acquitted by the jury and released from the detention center. Even though it has been five months since the trial, Steve is still haunted by the experience of being incarcerated and called a monster in the courtroom. The way in which he gazes at his reflection "a thousand times to look for one true image" illustrates how his identity has become even more fragmented than the unfamiliar reflection he describes in the novel's prologue. His inability to move on signals to the reader that his moral conscience has been greatly affected by his actions and indirect involvement in a man's death. Additionally, the emphasis on O'Brien's reluctance to celebrate Steve's acquittal reveals a more complex focus on institutional racism which continually haunts the novel.

## 2.3 *Monster* exposes institutional racism through counter-storytelling

During the trial in Steve's screenplay-narrative, Sandra Petrocelli who is described as "the dedicated prosecutor" (Myers 10), uses specific terms to separate the defendants from other people in the minds of the jury-members. She does this by using language to emphasize the difference between what she terms citizens and monsters:

> Most people in our community are decent, hardworking citizens who pursue their own interests legally and without infringing on the rights of others. But there are also monsters in our communities – people who are willing to steal and to kill, people who disregard the rights of others (Myers 21).

What Petrocelli seems to imply is that the defendants are not quite human in the same way as other decent citizens, but instead monsters who lack a moral conscience. This generalized view of all the defendants as less human and not deserving of sympathy could be even more problematic if they are not actually guilty of the crimes they have been accused of and if her description affects the jury's verdict.

The screenplay that Steve constructs can be considered a type of counter-story to the narrative created by Petrocelli during the trial. Counter-storytelling has a long history which can be traced all the way back to the songs and letters of black slaves describing the horrible ways they were treated by their white masters (Delgado 2436). On the opposite side, Petrocelli, as a white woman and the trial's prosecutor, seems to represent the perspective of the "majoritarian story" throughout the novel. Contrasting counter-stories, Panlay (2016) describes the majoritarian story as the shared cultural understanding and perceived wisdom of people in the dominant race when discussing racial issues (40). Through reconstructing the chain of events with details provided by various witnesses, Petrocelli constructs a narrative for the jury-members about what went down on the night of the murder. She states that: "This case is about a crime that was committed on the $22^{nd}$ of December in which an innocent man, Alguinaldo Nesbitt, was brutally murdered" (Myers 255). Establishing how the stories told by the defendants themselves do not match the details provided by witnesses, she points out that: "What does work is the State's theory of what happened, verified by all of the witnesses. Mr. Harmon gave the all-clear signal, and Bobo Evans and James King went into the store to rob Mr. Nesbitt" (Myers 259). Seen in relation to the earlier scene, in which she describes the defendants as monsters and not citizens, one can argue that she comes forth as a moral

absolutist who perceives the world in black and white. This is further emphasized by the narrative she creates in which there is no mention of ambiguous details or focus on each defendant's individual underlying reasons for participating in the robbery. From Petrocelli's perspective, the defendants on trial are all inherently evil and Steve is equally guilty to the murder even if he did not pull the trigger on the gun that killed Mr. Nesbitt.

It has already been noted that as Steve becomes increasingly aware that the people surrounding him perceive him as a monster, he uses his notebook to create his own version of the story in the format of a screenplay for a movie which he even names Monster. As previously mentioned, according to Delgado (1989): "Members of outgroups can use stories in two basic ways: first, as means of psychic self-preservation; and second, as means of lessening their own subordination" (2436). Steve is physically limited and silenced by his incarceration and cannot directly lessen his subordination. He does, however, use his notebook as an outlet for the things he sees and feels during the trial, thus preserving his sense of self by refusing to let others define him. In relation to counter-storytelling, this can be connected to what Delgado (1989) terms psychic self-preservation. He explains how: "a principal cause of the demoralization of marginalized groups is self-condemnation. They internalize the images that society thrusts on them" (2437). Steve does not wish to internalize his society's image of him as nothing but an immoral monster.

An example of how Steve refuses to condemn himself and preserves his sense of self is visible in the scene following the one in which Petrocelli describes Steve and the other defendants as a group of monsters. In the screenplay's descriptions, the camera is described as shifting to focus on Steve:

> CUT TO: STEVE HARMON. Then: CU [close-up] of the pad in front of him. He is writing the word *Monster* over and over again. A white hand (O'BRIEN's) takes the pencil from his hand and crosses out all the *Monsters*.
>
> O'BRIEN (whispering):
>
> You have to believe in yourself if we're going to convince the jury that you're innocent" (Myers 24, original emphasis).

Steve's immediate reaction to being described as a monster by Petrocelli is to write out the word multiple times in his notebook, as it clearly bothers him emotionally. At the same time,

instead of internalizing its meaning and condemning himself, the repetitive writing-technique could be interpreted as an act of resistance to preserve his sense of self.

On the same page as this courtroom-scene is described in the physical copy of the novel, the word "MONSTER" appears six times on the page. Written in all capital letters using a font that matches the one used for the notebook-entries, the words seem to be written by Steve himself. Their faded gray color which contrasts the black screenplay-narrative makes it appear as if the words pop out of the physical page's background. The additional detail of two lines in different directions across each word, creating a cross, makes it appear as if O'Brien has just removed Steve's pencil from his hand and crossed out all the "monsters". Echoing the underlined words in Steve's notebook-entries which has previously been analyzed in relation to multimodality, the way in which Myers has chosen to incorporate these illustrations on the physical page makes the story come to life and blurs the line between the real world of the reader and the storyworld that Steve and O'Brien exist in. The screenplay appears to be written in real time during the court-procedure. By making the reader interact with the novel on multiple levels at the same time, Myers is able to immerse the reader into the storyworld and establish empathy and a deeper understanding of Steve's counter-narrative. This creates a visible connection between critical race theory and multimodality.

Myers' focus on how institutional racism can appear in the form of linguistic choices is emphasized through the screenplay-narrative's description of Petrocelli's interactions with the defendants on the stand. The way in which Petrocelli actively tries to separate the defendants from other citizens in front of the jury-members becomes problematic when she asks leading questions where she appropriates African American vernacular terms. An example of this appears in a scene where she questions a witness connected to the defendant Bobo Evans, who planned the robbery:

OSVALDO

I heard he messed up a dude in the projects.

BRIGGS

Objection.

JUDGE

Sustained.

PETROCELLI

> Do you know as a matter of fact if Bobo has hurt anyone in the hood?

BRIGGS

> Objection! Unless the prosecutor is going to pass out glossaries to the jury, I want her to use standard English. (Myers 83).

The witness, Osvaldo, uses the term “projects” to describe an area with subsidized housing in Harlem. However, in her response, Petrocelli chooses to use with the more stigmatized term “hood”. According to Delgado (1989): “the dominant group justifies its privileged position by means of stories, stock explanations that construct reality in ways favorable to it” (2438). By using the term, Petrocelli reveals a stereotypical and condescending view of the defendants and witnesses who live in this area of Harlem. This adds to the narrative she is creating for the jury-members in which the black defendants are established as an outgroup who are identifiable by their stereotypical language and background. It also emphasizes her role as a powerful representative for the white majority who appropriates certain African American vernacular terms, using the defendants’ language against them in court.

Steve’s screenplay includes details about events leading up to the robbery and the trial, thus giving the reader a more nuanced perspective that challenges the black-and-white narrative established by Petrocelli during the trial. As stated in the introduction, Hughes-Hassel (2013) argues that the narrative perspective of a young, victimized individual can function as a counter-story to the majority culture by exposing the oppression and inequality that is still present in contemporary American society (225). In the novel’s screenplay-sections, Steve creates scenes that give the reader insight into his vulnerable local community marked by substandard living and a lack of financial support. One of these scenes focuses on the planning of the robbery. Steve starts by describing the setting, which he emphasizes as filled with overflown garbage cans, before zooming in on a conversation between himself and his group of friends. The conversation starts with James King, the robber who is accused of shooting Mr. Nesbitt, exclaiming: “I need to get paid, man. I ain’t got nothing between my butt and the ground but a rag” (Myers 50). Following King’s statement, another person in the group comments on the increasing cuts in financial support, saying: “You can’t even hardly make it these days. They talking about cutting welfare, cutting Social Security, and anything else that makes life a little easy. They might as well bring back slavery times if you ask me” (Myers 50). Contrasting Petrocelli’s one-sided emphasis on describing the defendants as

monsters, Steve's screenplay provides details revealing a desperation over lack of money and opportunities being the reason why the robbery was planned in the first place.

The description of why the group chose to rob Mr. Nesbitt's drugstore reveals the institutional racism and recurring violence that is present in Steve's vulnerable local community of Harlem. In the same conversation as the one mentioned above, the group discusses the media attention robbing a bank would cause. Ultimately one of them states: "You need to find a getover where nobody don't care – you know what I mean. You cop from somebody with a green card or an illegal and they don't even report it. Restaurant owners got money, too. That's the only things left in our neighborhood – restaurants, liquor stores, and drugstores" (Myers 51). This comment seems to suggest that Myers as an author is trying to reveal the underlying institutional racism of American society through Steve's screenplay-narrative, to educate his young readers. People with a green card, illegal immigrants, and local business-owners are most likely Hispanic or Black just like the group planning the robbery. Through this scene it is made clear to the reader that rather than targeting the government or other parts of society, the violence and desperation of the group gets turned around against the local businesses and people in the vulnerable community itself. It is also indicated that American law enforcement would not react as strongly or urgently to a robbery in this area as they would in a different part of the city. Since *Monster* was published in 1999, the story most likely takes place towards the end of the 1990's. According to Jackson and Nobles (2015), this was a period marked by the War on Drugs and a high number of homicides related to inner-city Black-on-Black crime. They argue how the lack of an outlet for their frustration, combined with observing how violence against minority groups was punished less severely by law enforcement, seemed to cause especially young black men in these areas to internalize their anger and displace their aggression onto people in their own community (Jackson & Nobles 40).

Through the courtroom-scenes in his screenplay, Steve seems to implicate the contrast in social class and the racial division between the defendants on trial and the people working in the justice system. In one of these scenes, Steve emphasizes the insensitive way in which the judge and lawyers discuss their newly finished holiday with little regard to the defendants sitting close by:

JUDGE.

Hope everyone had a good Fourth of July?

BRIGGS.

The usual barbecue and a softball game that reminded me that I can't run anymore.

O'BRIEN.

With all the fireworks, it's my least favorite holiday.

JUDGE.

Bring in the jury. (Myers 18).

The judge leads the conversation as if it was a regular day at an office, while casually ordering the jury-members to be brought in. For Steve and the other defendants, on the other hand, the trial is a matter of life and death. The casual attitude about the trial without regard for the defendants as individual human beings is further emphasized in a scene in which Steve overhears the stenographer saying: "I hope this case lasts two weeks. I can sure use the money (…) GUARD 1: Six days – maybe seven. It's a motion case. They go through the motions; then they lock them up" (Myers 14). The court stenographer and guard focus mainly on money as they describe the trial as a motion case. Their conversation indicates that Steve and the other defendants are just part of one trial out of many where the result is often the same. Again, O'Brien's comments to Steve about the difficulty of changing the prejudiced perspective of the jury and people who work in the US justice system who view the trial as an indistinctive motion case is echoed.

Myers seems to further comment on the institutional racism of the American justice system, through emphasizing Steve's middle class background and its possible significance in his acquittal. Throughout the trial, both Steve and O'Brien work hard to separate him from the other defendants in the minds of the jury-members. By dressing in a suit and tie, and practicing how he should answer in court, Steve is able to present a version of himself that does not fit the stereotype of the criminal monster. Additionally, O'Brien manages to bring in Steve's white private school teacher and leader of the film club, Mr. Sawicki, as a character witness (Engles & Kory 57). When Mr. Sawicki is asked to give his opinion about Steve and his artwork, he replies: "I think he is an outstanding young man. He is talented, bright, and compassionate. He's very much involved with depicting his neighborhood and environment

in a positive manner" (Myers 235). In contrast, James King's character witness is his cousin Dorothy Moore, who is unable to provide a good alibi because she cannot prove King was with her on the night of the crime:

> PETROCELLI: What kind of work was he looking for?
> MOORE: Just a job. I don't know (…)
>
> PETROCELLI (condescendingly): And what do you do for a living? (Myers 209).

Petrocelli's question about what kind of job King was looking for, in addition to Steve's added emphasis on the condescending way she asks Dorothy about her own occupation indicates that she perceives the two cousins as stereotypically poor. This matches her use of the derogatory slang word "hood" which has previously been described in relation to her majoritarian story. The significance of social class in relation to race and gender will be further explored in the following chapter and brought into an educational context in chapter 4.

Throughout this chapter I have analyzed how Myers' creative combination of multiple modes draws the readers into the storyworld, establishes sympathy for Steve as a real person, and invites them to become part of the jury investigating his participation in the robbery. Using the concept of Double Consciousness to analyze Steve' racial identity and how he struggles with internalized racism, I have argued that the shift between narrative structures shows different versions of Steve and his awareness about his racialized self. The narrative shifts help readers empathize with Steve while also challenging them to pay close attention and be active readers, as the photographs of Steve ambiguously reveal his possible unreliability and moral disengagement. Analyzing how the novel functions as a counter-narrative, I have tried to show how Steve preserves his sense of self through creating the different narrative structures. Especially his handwritten notes on the screenplay-narrative emphasizes a connection between the novel's multimodal elements and function as a counter-narrative. Petrocelli comes to represent the majoritarian story by constructing a stereotypical narrative about the defendants as inhumane monsters. Myers exposes the institutional racism in the American justice system through the way violence caused by a lack of money and opportunities gets turned around against the local community of Harlem itself. Ultimately, the lacking evidence against Steve's involvement in the crime leads to his acquittal. Even though he is significantly altered by his incarceration, it is not indicated that he finishes his film and uses it to actively speak up about his experience. Instead, his guilt seems to fragment

his sense of self even more. As will be argued in chapter 4, this can be seen as Myers' way of scaring the readers in a moralistic manner to not act the same way Steve does. Monster can be categorized as an early version of a multimodal young adult novel with a focus on an African American adolescent due to the novel's publication at the threshold of the new millennium. Myers does not actively inspire to lessen subordination based on institutional racism in the American justice system. As will be shows through the analysis in chapter 3, this contrasts Angie Thomas' more progressive call for change in her novel *The Hate U Give* which was published almost twenty years after *Monster*.

# 3 Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*

The young adult novel *The Hate U Give* was published in 2017 by African American author Angie Thomas as her debut novel. Its inclusion in a *New York Times* article called "New Crop of Young Adult Novels Explores Race and Police Brutality" reflects a new trend in African American Young Adult Literature in which young protagonists raise their voice and fight back against institutional racism (Alter 2020). The novel centers around the 16-year-old African American girl Starr Carter, who is torn between the identity she has in her local black community of Garden Heights with her family and childhood friends and the one she has at the predominantly white High School Williamson Prep which she attends with her white boyfriend Chris and her friends Hailey and Maya. Opening with a spring break party in Garden Heights, the story quickly takes a dramatic turn as gunshots and gang violence forces Starr to flee with her friend Khalil in his car. On their way home Khalil is pulled over and shot by a white police officer. Starr becomes the sole witness to his death and struggles to process the trauma she has experienced. When the incident gains massive media attention because the officer is only suspended, a series of protests lead by the movement "Just Us for Justice" start to occur in the streets, demanding justice for Khalil. As the white officer wrongfully claims that Khalil was armed and the media frames him as a dangerous drug dealer, it becomes increasingly harder for Starr to stay silent and keep her two worlds separate. Choosing to give an anonymous interview and create a blog in which she presents a different perspective on Khalil, Starr slowly begins to speak up and eventually testifies in court. Ultimately, Starr's testimony is not enough to convince the jury who decides not to indict the officer. This decision drives Starr to join the ensuing protests, where she uses a bullhorn to reveal herself at the witness and throws a tear gas cannister back at the police in frustration. Throughout this chapter I will first analyze how Thomas uses multiple modes to draw the readers into the storyworld as a way of making them understand and empathize with Starr's traumatic experiences. In the second section, I will argue that Thomas' description of Starr's conflicting identities can be considered a form of internalized racism. This will be analyzed in connection to the concept of Triple Consciousness, a continuation of Du Bois' influential notion of Double Consciousness, which includes an intersectional focus on gender and socioeconomic class. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the novel functions as a black female counter-narrative which exposes the institutional racism in American law enforcement and comments on the erasure of black female victims.

## 3.1 *The Hate U Give* as a multimodal novel

As has already been discussed in the former chapter, *Monster* (1999) as a postmodern and multimodal novel breaks away from genre conventions of the traditional novel form through Myers' combined use of text and illustrations. Haddad (2018) categorizes *The Hate U Give* within the genre of literary realism due to its real-life references, the close alignment with the protagonist and the linear plot which progresses towards an uplifting resolution (41). Although *The Hate U Give* does not contain any illustrations, one can argue that it can still to some degree also be considered a multimodal novel. It has previously been noted in the introduction that while the traditional novel form relies heavily on the written word in a paper-bound book, Hallet (2014) argues that it can still be considered multimodal. Based on socio-semiotic theory, he points out how various modes related to textual communication such as layout, typography and margins cannot be excluded when examining the process of meaning-making (124).

In a similar way to Myers, Thomas chooses to change the font and layout in order to set up a contrast between different sections and signal a shift in the novel's narrative discourse. Typography is defined by The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as: "the arrangement, style, and appearance of printed words" (1982). This includes the use of various fonts to convey a particular feeling or meaning in a text. *The Hate U Give* contains 26 chapters divided into five different parts. Each part opens with a single sentence on an otherwise empty page, written in a font resembling handwriting and capital letters which marks it out from the rest of the text in the chapter. The effect of this change is that the reader's eyes are drawn towards the handwritten sentences on the page, each of which contains the word "it" and centers around that specific part's temporal proximity to Khalil's time of death: "Part 1 – WHEN IT HAPPENS" (Thomas 6), "Part 2 – FIVE WEEKS AFTER IT" (Thomas 276), "Part 3 – EIGHT WEEKS AFTER IT" (Thomas 333), "Part 4 – TEN WEEKS AFTER IT" (Thomas 347), "Part 5 – THE DECISION – THIRTEEN WEEKS AFTER IT" (Thomas 369). As the novel is narrated from Starr's point of view, these sentences, and the font itself seems to be Thomas' way of making it appear to the reader as if Starr wrote the headings herself. In a similar way as Steve's handwritten notes in *Monster*, these headings could potentially help the reader view Starr as a real person and not just a static, fictional character.

Through constructing realistic text-messages, Thomas further immerses the reader into the story and makes it appear real on the physical page. According to Crystal (2008), the limitations of the small mobile phone screen has led to the development of an idiosyncratic language variety called «Textspeak» with specific linguistic effects. The language used for texting is characterized by abbreviations and symbols (80). This is visible in an example from the opening chapter of the novel, in which Starr receives a text-message from her concerned older brother Seven after he learns she has attended the spring-break party where someone was shot:

> WHERE R U?
> U AND KENYA BETTER NOT BE @ THAT PARTY.
> I HEARD SOMEBODY GOT SHOT (Thomas 22).

In the example, Seven uses the abbreviated forms R and U instead of are and you. Additionally, the symbol @ is used instead of at. The effect of this is that the small bulk of text looks like a real text-message. Kress (2010) points out how smartphones have become a central part of everyday life, greatly influencing how we create meaning and communicate. While there exists a variety of different types of smartphones, the size of the screen generally creates a frame. This frame's possibility to combine visual and textual input marks it out as a great influence on how we create meaning and communicate today (186). Similar to the way in which the screen of a mobile phone is smaller and more compressed than the page of a book, what is supposed to resemble a text-message is separated from the surrounding text on the page with indented lines and written in shorter sentences, one under the other, simulating the screen's smaller format. In addition to this, the change to a font-type which is significantly bigger in size compared to the rest of the text makes the message almost appear to pop up on the page in front of the reader. The familiarity of texting as a form of communication could potentially make the storyworld more realistic and relatable for the young reader.

Thomas uses onomatopoeia in order to emphasize specific sounds. The Longman dictionary of Contemporary English defines onomatopoeia as: "the use of words that sound like the thing that they are describing" (1275). In a study focused on early language development, Motamedi et.al. (2020) found that onomatopoeia offers a link between the written word and sensory experience because of the way it evokes the sound properties associated with its meaning. Although the scope of the study was limited to younger children, a similar process

could be said to occur in relation to older children and adults as well. While Thomas uses onomatopoeia at several points in *The Hate U Give* to emphasize specific sounds, the most impactful use is arguably in the scene in which Khalil is shot by the officer:

> My parents haven't raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it's not smart to move while a cop has his back to you.
> Khalil does. He comes to his door.
> It's not smart to make a sudden move.
> Khalil does. He opens the driver's door.
> "You okay, Starr-"
> *Pow!*
> One. Khalil's body jerks. Blood splatters from his back.
> He holds on to the door to keep himself upright.
> *Pow!*
> Two. Khalil gasps.
> *Pow!*
> Three. Khalil looks at me, stunned.
> He falls to the ground (Thomas 27).

In this specific scene, Starr's description of the setting makes the reader able to visualize the occurring action while simultaneously hearing the sound of the gun being fired at Khalil three times. Kress (2010) explains how: "bolding in writing and loudness in speech are both signifiers of intensity and are one mean of realizing meanings (signifieds) of emphasis" (80). The onomatopoetic sound of the gun firing is emphasized in italics, which separates it from the surrounding text. The use of an exclamation mark also indicates that it is a loud and sudden sound. The effect is that the reader is invited to imagine both the visual and auditory aspects of the traumatic scene that Starr witnesses, and which she is haunted by throughout the novel.

The tone changes drastically as the police car pulls up and Starr watches Khalil die in front of her eyes. In the former chapter leading up to their encounter with the officer, the tone is easygoing while the two friends listen to music in the car: "Khalil drops the brush in the door and cranks up his stereo, blasting an old rap song Daddy has played a million times" (Thomas 20). The onomatopoeic sound describing a police car approaching becomes a transitional moment into a more serious tone and indicates to the reader that something is about to

happen: “A *whoop-whoop* sound startles us, and blue lights flash in the rearview mirror” (Thomas 23). Contrasting the long sentences and calm atmosphere as they drive home from the party, the scene in which Starr narrates Khalil’s death on the other hand, is constructed through short and concise sentences. This empathizes the abruptness of the shooting-episode. Thomas makes sure to give a detailed description of Khalil’s physical movements in the passage. The effect is that Starr’s narration seems to grow emotionally detached from what she observes and indicates that she is in a shock.

Using short sentences and gaps on the printed page, Thomas manages to recreate the feeling of a panic attack for the reader. Through Thomas’ detailed description of Starr’s reaction to the incident, the reader gains insight into how it feels to witness such an abrupt and traumatic event. As opposed to the static knowledge often presented in ELT course books, Bland (2020) points out that research shows how the brain responds to emotions in fiction in the same way as if it were real life and that an opportunity to “step outside their own frame of reference” can give students new perspectives (78). An example of how Thomas imitates a panic attack on the page is visible in in the opening of the chapter following Khalil’s death, in which the traumatized Starr struggles to breathe:

> They finally put a sheet over Khalil. He can’t breathe under it. I can’t breathe.
> I can’t.
> *Breathe.*
> I gasp.
> And gasp.
> And gasp. (Thomas 30, original emphasis).

To an even greater degree than the scene in which Khalil is shot, Thomas uses short sentences here to make an impact. By placing these short sentences, one under the other on the page, the readers need to move their eyes between the gaps in order to read the next line. The effect of these gaps is that pauses are created, as if the readers are also struggling to breathe while reading. As the scene appeals to the reader’s emotions, it potentially creates a closer alignment with Starr and could make the reader better equipped to understand and empathize with what she experiences in that moment.

Starr's italicized inner monologue emphasizes her restrained voice and feeling of helplessness in the immediate aftermath when paramedics arrive at the scene. Khalil's death is the main action throughout chapter 2, which ends with a helpless Starr kneeling by his side as the officer points the gun at her: "I blink through my tears. Officer One-Fifteen yells at me, pointing the same gun he killed my friend with. I put my hands up" (Thomas 28). Impersonalizing the officer as a hostile force, Starr takes care to memorize and refer to him only by his badge-number. In the opening of chapter 3, right before she experiences the panic attack, Starr's disapproval of the way the police and paramedics handle the situation when they arrive at the scene is brought to light:

> They leave Khalil's body in the street like it's an exhibit (…) The paramedics can't do shit for Khalil, so they put me in the back of an ambulance like I need help (…) The cops rummage through Khalil's car. I try to tell them to stop. *Please, cover his body. Please, close his eyes. Please, close his mouth. Get away from his car. Don't pick up his hairbrush.* But the words never come out. One-Fifteen sits on the sidewalk with his face buried in his hands. Other officers pat his shoulder and tell him it'll be okay (Thomas 29, original emphasis).

The description of the officer receiving supporting pats from other officers while Khalil's body is still exposed foreshadows how the incident will be framed in later media coverage.

In the passage above, Thomas uses italics to separate Starr's inner monologue from the external action she narrates. In a similar way to the examples of onomatopoeia and text messages, the effect of the italicized sentences is that Starr's thoughts appear to pop out on the page. As she uses short, desperate sentences to plead internally for someone to cover Khalil's body and stop treating him as an exhibit, the reader can almost hear and feel her frustrated voice while reading. Starr is presented as a mature narrator for her age, managing to make several observations at once despite being in shock. By pointing out how the internally narrated words never come out of Starr's mouth, Thomas seems to emphasize her lack of a voice externally in the immediate aftermath of the incident. The authoritative figures surrounding her are not interested in her point of view, nor do they consider her as a threat or enemy. Like Steve, Starr ends up keeping her observations to herself while remaining silent externally. Her ability to make very complex observations in her short inner monologues that she does not share in conversations with other characters is emphasized in italics throughout the novel in a similar way to Steve's handwritten notebook-entries. As Starr adjusts her

performance depending on who she is communicating with, the reader can perceive how she is torn between different versions of herself. This will be elaborated on in the following section.

## 3.2 Starr's triple consciousness and internalized racism

Even though *The Hate U Give* was published nearly twenty years after *Monster*, their similar expression of racial identity-conflicts shows how Du Bois' (2007) notion of a Double Consciousness continues to influence African American young adult fiction. In a similar way to how Steve is aware about the different ways he is perceived, Starr also shows the ability to adjust her performance and look at herself "through the eyes of others" (Du Bois 3). This is especially visible in a passage describing Starr's return to her predominantly white high school called Williamson Prep a few days after her traumatic experience. For her own protection as the unknown witness, her family decides that she should not talk about what has happened and instead try to have a normal day at school:

> I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I'm Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn't use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her "hood." Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the "angry black girl." Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto. I can't stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyways (Thomas 73).

Aware that her white friends could perceive her as a stereotypical "angry black girl" if she uses African American Vernacular English or slang words from rap-songs, Starr lists the ways in which she restrains herself from acting in a manner that would confirm their prejudice to fit in. Starr's exaggerated emphasis on the word "normal" in this passage indicates to the reader that this is not actually normal at all, but rather a way for her to convince herself and begin "flipping the switch" in her brain as she enters the predominantly white space.

Despite the guidelines she creates for herself, Starr is frequently reminded about how her life and perspective is different from that of her white friends. Later in the same chapter as the one mentioned above, the friend-group discuss their family-vacations during spring-break. After

her friend Hailey complains about being dragged to the Bahamas, Starr notes to herself: “That normal feeling? Gone. I suddenly remember how different I am from most of the kids here. Nobody would have to drag me and my brothers to the Bahamas – we’d swim there if we could. For us, a family vacation is staying at a local hotel with a swimming pool for a weekend” (Thomas 79). Starr does not reveal her position to her friends and remains a silent observer. The reader, who is closely aligned with Starr’s perspective by this point, knows that her life in Garden heights and traumatic experiences during spring-break greatly contrasts that of her privileged white friends.

By establishing this contrast between Starr and her friends at school early on, Thomas manages to convey to the reader how it becomes increasingly harder for Starr to uphold her Williamson identity. This matches Du Bois’ (2007) description of double consciousness and how: “One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 3). Starr explains how she feels like she can be herself around her white boyfriend Chris, who accepts her different selves: “I don’t have to decide which Starr I have to be with him. He likes both” (Thomas 85). However, her traumatic experience reappears in the shape of flashbacks as Chris’ hands are the same color as the officer who killed Khalil: “He grabs my hands (…) *A cop as white as Chris points a gun at me. As white as Chris*. I flinch and snatch away (…) the second bell rings, jolting me back to normal Williamson, where I’m not normal Starr” (Thomas 86, original emphasis). Starr decides to keep her experiences to herself since she increasingly notices the contrasts between herself and her white friends and realizes how not even Chris will understand what she has gone through. However, as the traumatic flashbacks begin to appear spontaneously, she is no longer able to uphold the impression that everything is normal and begins to be “torn asunder”.

Starr’s italicized inner monologue with guidelines for how to act seems to stem from her parents’ conversations with her as a child. Thomas chooses to open the chapter in which Khalil is killed with an explanation about how Starr’s parents have had two important talks with her: “When I was twelve, my parents had two talks with me. One was the usual birds and bees (…) The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me. Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn’t too young to get arrested or shot” (Thomas 24). Contrasting the upbringing of her white friends, Starr is taught from an early age to adjust her behavior when interacting with the police and authority figures. In his article

"The One Story: The Evolving Relevance Of 'The Talk'", Wright (2019) explains how the talk often consists of a 10-point list of guidelines describing how to act during a police-encounter to appear non-threatening. He also points out how this conversation between African American parents and their children has a long tradition in the US as a rite of passage for the children moving into adolescence, where they increasingly gain an understanding about their racial identity. Bringing to light how "the talk" still holds a prevalent position, Thomas shows the ways in which the persistent racial disparity causes Starr to internalize the rules she has been taught to the point where they become an inner voice in her head.

Starr's ability to adjust her speech and behavior in the presence of authority figures plays a significant role in her interactions with the detectives who interrogate her a few days after Khalil's death. From the moment she sits down across from the detectives, Starr internally reminds herself of the rules she must follow:

> *Keep your hands visible.*
>
> *No sudden moves.*
>
> *Only speak when spoken to* (…)
>
> "Hello." My voice is changing already. It always happens around "other" people, whether I'm at Williamson or not. I don't talk like me or sound like me. I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I'm ghetto (Thomas 97).

Echoing the earlier inner monologue, before she enters the white space of Williamson Prep, Starr again shows a significant level of awareness about the way she is perceived by the detectives. She emphasizes how her voice changes, and how she consciously chooses every word and pronunciation carefully to avoid evoking racial stereotypes. The italicized short sentences become repeated reminders of the guidelines she must constantly follow in her head.

Even when Starr slips up and loses her composure for a minute, she quickly checks herself and shows how she is skilled at code-switching:

> "Khalil didn't have anything to do with the fight?"
>
> I raise an eyebrow. "Nah."
>
> *Dammit. Proper English.*
>
> I sit up straight. "I mean, no, ma'am. We were talking when the fight occurred." (Thomas 99).

Levin (2020) argues that Starr's interrogation can be seen as an intertextual reference to Rachel Jeantel, the key witness in the trial against George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Trayvon Martin in 2012. Noting how her narrative as a witness was disregarded in court, he describes how: "Rachel's testimony was evaluated in relation to her class status, appearance, and language. Apart from being poor and overweight, she spoke African American Vernacular English" (Levin 149). Jeantel's testimony was ultimately discredited in court, and her narrative marginalized by prejudice in media coverage. Like Steve in *Monster*, Starr puts a lot of effort into avoiding such racial stereotypes, as she has been taught by her black middle-class parents how to adapt to the white norms. Despite her efforts however, she notices how the detectives are continuously trying to discredit her as a witness and villainize Khalil. The way in which they continuously ask if Khalil was a drug dealer, whether they were involved in the fight that broke out at the spring break party, and whether Starr was drunk on the night of his death, all indicates that they already perceive Starr and Khalil as stereotypical "thugs" no matter what she tells them.

As previously mentioned, since its publication Du Bois' concept of Double Consciousness has played a pivotal role within the field of African American studies and influenced movements that later laid the groundwork for what today is known as Critical Race Theory. However, Du Bois' concept has been criticized for emphasizing the struggles of African American men, largely ignoring the problem of intersectionality. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017): "This deficiency is apt to be particularly glaring in the case of "double minorities," such as black women, gay Latinos, or Muslim women wearing head scarves, whose lives are twice removed from the experience of mainstream Americans" (65). It is crucial to point out that the purpose of intersectionality is not to remove the importance of

examining racism against black men, but rather to diversify and expand the field by adding more aspects affecting the individuals' identities.

The opening paragraphs of this section have shown how Du Bois' description of Double Consciousness matches what Starr experiences throughout *The Hate U Give*. At the same time, Starr can be considered a "double minority", as her experiences are shaped by the intersecting parts of her identity in relation to being a black woman from a marginalized neighborhood who attends school in a predominantly white area. Building on Du Bois' concept of Double Consciousness, Triple Consciousness has increasingly been applied to account for further aspects affecting the individual's more complex identity. Welang (2018) argues that black women are caught in an intersectional space between race and gender, stating that:

> Black women, due to the physical and psychological anguish they have historically endured on both fronts of race and gender, are fated to view themselves through three lenses and not two: America (represented by the hegemony of white patriarchy), blackness (a racial space that prioritizes the interests of black men) and womanhood (a hierarchical gendered identity with white women at the top and black women at the bottom). (Welang 298).

Starr's black middle-class background makes her able to move between the white space of Williamson and the marginalized neighborhood of Garden Height. While she is not a stereotypical black female victim like Rachel Jeantel from the real trial mentioned above, Starr still encounters obstacles due to her gender and complex combination of identities or the "lenses" she views herself through.

As previously noted, Starr receives two talks from her parents when she is twelve years old. Starr is treated differently from her brothers in relation to the talk about birds and bees because she is a girl at the brink of puberty. She reveals to the reader that her mother, who got pregnant with her during her senior year of high school, was kicked out by her family and taken in by Khalil's grandmother (Thomas 62). To protect Starr from the same struggles she went through at that age as a young girl in a neighborhood marked by poverty and drug-selling gangs, her mother who is a nurse, explains the risks of pregnancy to her in detail when she is twelve. This conversation appears to have an impact on Starr a few years later, as she sets clear boundaries with her white boyfriend Chris when he tries persuade her into having

sex with him: “He raised his eyebrows at me, silently asking for an invitation to go all the way. All I could think about was those girls I see walking around Garden Heights, babies propped on their hips” (Thomas 83). Starr’s perspective on these young mothers in Garden Heights, and how easy it is to fall into their position is also visible in the way she describes the spring break party she attends in the opening chapter. Starr remarks how: “Guys in their freshest kicks and sagging pants grind so close to girls they just about need condoms (…) Spring in Garden Heights doesn’t always bring love, but it promises babies in the winter. I wouldn’t be surprised if a lot of them are conceived the night of Big D’s party” (Thomas 8).

The combination of Starr’s social class, race, and gender has a complex effect on her experience in the various places she moves between. As already described, she does not feel like she can be herself in the white space of Williamson Prep. Interestingly, she does not feel like she can be herself in Garden Heights either. The way in which Starr narrates the novel’s opening chapter, establishes a distance between herself and the other teenagers at the spring break party: “I shouldn’t have come to this party. I’m not even sure I belong at this party. That’s not on some bougie shit, either. There are just some places where it’s not enough to be me. Either version of me. Big D’s spring break party is one of those places” (Thomas 7). She goes on to emphasize the contrast between the dressed-up girls and her own ponytail, sneakers, and oversized hoodie: “My Jordans are comfortable, and damn. They’re new. That’s more than some people can say. The hoodie’s way too big, but I like it that way. Plus, if I pull it over my nose, I can’t smell the weed” (Thomas 9). Bringing attention to her dislike of the smell of weed, Thomas establishes how Starr does not approve of the use of drugs. Her choice of wearing an oversized hoodie and comfortable new sneakers indicates that she wishes to hide her body, avoid being objectified, and stand out from the other girls at the party. This is commented on by her friend Kenya, who points out how: “people already say you think you all that (…) You act like you don’t know nobody ‘cause you go to that school” (Thomas 8). Starr replies that she does not care what people think. However, the details she focuses on in her narration reveals that she is self-conscious about the way she looks and acts differently from the other teenagers in Garden Heights, who all go to the local high school while she has spent several years adjusting her performance to fit in at Williamson Prep.

What seems to separate The Hate U Give the most from previous African American Young Adult novels with a female protagonist, is Thomas’ decreased emphasis on white physical beauty standards. In his analysis of contemporary African American Children’s and young adult literature, Panlay (2016) argues that a lot of the young female protagonists’ internalized

racism is caused by internalized white physical beauty standards. These black girls attach their self-worth to physical beauty and struggle because they are: “socially and psychologically programmed to perceive themselves as being ‘less’, and often wish that they looked more like the dominant group” (Panlay 3). At no point in the novel does Starr indicate a wish to look like any of her white friends at Williamson. Instead, Starr envies her friend Kenya’s appearance:

> Kenya could be a model. if I’m completely honest. She’s got flawless dark-brown skin – I don’t think she ever gets a pimple – slanted brown eyes, and long eyelashes that aren’t store-bought (…) She never wears the same outfit twice. Her daddy, King, makes sure of that” (Thomas 9).

Thomas emphasizes Kenya’s physical appearance in a way that celebrates a darker complexion and feminine physical beauty instead of marking it as inferior to the white beauty standards described as problematic by Panlay (2016).

Starr seems preoccupied with how clothes, shoes and accessories function as physical identity markers signaling class, money, and group-belonging. She takes care to point out how Kenya’s many outfits are sponsored by her father who is the leader of a local gang called the King Lords, giving her status as a princess in Garden Heights. Shelat (2019) argues that “the cultural capital of sneakers, and Jordans in particular, offers an appearance of wealth (…) This emphasis on the monetary and cultural weight of sneakers throughout the novel brings to light Starr’s recognition of economic status and class” (71). Her dissatisfaction with expensive outfits bought using money from drug sales becomes clear during her first conversation with Khalil at the party: “The brand-new Jordans, the crisp white tee, the diamonds in his ears. When you grow up in Garden Heights, you know what “busy” really means” (Thomas 15). Despite Khalil telling her in the car that he is not part of any gang, Starr does not believe him because of all the money he has earned and the way he dresses at the party. After the King Lords place a gray bandana over Khalil’s body during his funeral, signaling that he was their member, Starr struggles with separating him from his actions and membership to the gang: “I swear to God whenever I think about Khalil falling into that life, it’s like watching him die all over again. Yeah, Khalil matters and not the stuff he did, but I can’t lie and say it doesn’t bother me or it’s not disappointing. He knew better” (Thomas 234).

DeVante, a former gang-member and Khalil's close friend, is taken in by Starr's family and allowed to work in her father's store to have a chance at getting away from the King Lords. During a conversation with Starr about their common friend, DeVante reveals to her that Khalil was never actually a King Lord: "Look, his momma stole some shit from King. King wanted her dead. Khalil found out and started selling to pay the debt" (Thomas 234). This revelation makes Starr feel awful about the way she herself has judged Khalil for selling drugs: "No matter what his momma did, he was still her knight and he was still gonna protect her. This is worse that denying him. I thought the worst of him. Like everybody else" (Thomas 235). Learning about his true reasons for selling drugs Starr begins to question her own prejudice, colored by the media coverage presenting him as a dangerous drug dealer, and review the previous conversations she had with Khalil before he died. As the reader is closely aligned with Starr's narrative perspective throughout the novel, the new information can be interpreted as Thomas' invitation for the reader to also review possible bias and prejudiced interpretations of Khalil as a character up to this point.

## 3.3 *The Hate U Give* as a black female counter-narrative

As previously noted in the former chapter, Steve's notebook-narrative and screenplay-creation in *Monster* can be considered a way in which he preserves his sense of self. Similarly, Starr's italicized inner monologue and shifts between different versions of herself could be interpreted as a method of self-preservation. In contrast with Steve, however, Starr is not physically limited by a prison cell. Throughout the novel, Thomas increasingly gives Starr the courage and ability to lessen her subordination by actively countering the stories told by other characters. After Khalil's funeral Starr is approached by Ms. Ofrah from "Just Us for Justice", a movement that Haddad (2020) marks as an intertextual reference to Black Lives Matter during its formation (40). Ms. Ofrah explains how the local police department has chosen not to arrest One-Fifteen, and that she advocates for police accountability. Having learnt that Starr is the eyewitness, she offers to represent her saying to her parents: "Starr offers a unique perspective on this, one you don't get a lot of with these cases, and I want to make sure her rights are protected and that her voice is heard" (Thomas 134). Starr's parents want to protect her privacy and are worried that speaking up could result in Starr being exploited and harmed. However, Starr notices how the media is presenting the case in a way that villainizes Khalil: "The news does more than give Khalil's name now- they show his picture too. They only call me 'the witness' (…) I didn't say something right, and now the cop's not getting arrested. But while the riots are my fault, the news makes it sound like it's

Khalil's fault he died" (Thomas 140). While she wants to protect her family from the media attention speaking up would bring, Starr feels increasingly guilty about not telling the whole story about Khalil.

Kenya gives Starr a "verbal slap" when she confronts her about staying quiet and implies that she is embarrassed of her neighborhood:

> "I already talked to the cops, Kenya. Nothing happened. What else am I supposed to do?" "Go on TV or something, I don't know," she says. "Tell everybody what really happened that night. They're not even giving his side of the story. You're letting them trash-talk him" "Excuse – how the hell am I letting them do anything?" "You hear all the stuff they're saying 'bout him on the news, calling him a thug and stuff, and you know that ain't Khalil. I bet if he was one of your private school friends, you'd be all on TV, defending him and shit" (Thomas 195).

Whereas Starr's family perceives her as a fragile girl in need of sheltering and protection, Kenya becomes the character who most clearly confronts Starr about her hidden prejudice. Challenging her with the opportunity to speak up about Khalil's death, Kenya urges Starr to help create change in their community.

In a similar way to Steve's screenplay-narrative, following her conversation with Kenya, Starr constructs her own version of the story told by the media through creating an anonymous blog on Tumblr: "I started a new blog – *The Khalil I Know*. It doesn't have my name on it, just pictures of Khalil (…) In just two hours, hundreds of people have liked and reblogged the pictures. I know it's not the same as getting on the news like Kenya said, but I hope it helps. It's helping me at least" (Thomas 203). The blog contains pictures of Khalil from their shared childhood, presenting him as an individual human being and not the dangerous thug that the news depict. Arguing that multicultural YA fiction can function as a counter-storytelling tool, Hughes-Hassel (2013) points out how: "the dominant narrative regularly portrays young African American males as criminals, crime victims, and predators and African American girls as having one asset – their sexuality" (216). By showing a different perspective on Khalil, Starr preserves the version of him that she knew, and counters the negative depiction of him in the media. The act of creating and sharing the blog anonymously also helps Starr process her traumatic experiences and grieve the loss of her friend, preserving her sense of self without fear of exposing herself at the witness.

Before meeting with the defense attorney in the trial against the officer, Starr and her parents agree to let Ms. Ofrah represent her. At her office, Starr learns that the gun the officer claims Khalil had in his car was in fact just his hairbrush: "Ms. Ofrah opens a folder that's on her desk, takes a piece of paper out, and pushes it toward me. It's a photograph of Khalil's hairbrush, the one he used in the car" (Thomas 214). Shocked that Khalil's hairbrush has been mistaken for a gun and subsequently caused his death, in addition to learning that the officer's father will give a TV interview later that night, Starr realizes the importance of her testimony and voice: "One-Fifteen's father is his voice, but I'm Khalil's. The only way people will know his side of the story is if I speak out" (Thomas 215). Calling him by his given name Brian and emphasizing how he was scared for his life, the officer's father humanizes and establish sympathy for One-Fifteen in the interview: "Pictures flash on the screen. One-Fifteen smiles with his arms draped around a blurred-out woman. He's on a fishing trip with two small, blurred-out children." (Thomas 241). Contrasting the previous depictions of Khalil as a dangerous criminal, the officer is presented as the victim by the media. Starr notices how her neighborhood is also reflected badly: "I tense as footage of my neighborhood, my home, is shown. It's like they picked the worst parts – the drug addicts roaming the streets, the broken-down Cedar Grove projects, gangbangers flashing signs, bodies on the sidewalks with white sheets over them" (Thomas 242). In a similar way to how Petrocelli frames the defendants as inhumane in *Monster*, the media and the officer's father present Khalil and Garden Heights in a negative light. Thus, by depicting One-Fifteen as a victim and only emphasizing the "worst parts" about Garden Heights, the media comes to represent the powerful perspective of "the majoritarian story" in the novel (Panlay 40).

Starr begins lessening her subordination by giving her own interview where she presents a different perspective on Khalil and Garden Heights. According to Delgado (1989), the dominant group is often unaware about the harm they are inflicting on the marginalized group, upholding a sense of complacency by repeating their version of the story. Through refusing to be oppressed and presenting the dominant group with a different perspective "counterstories can attack that complacency" (2438). While her face is blurred and her voice changed on TV to preserve her anonymity, Starr uses her words to establish a counter-narrative. After telling the interviewer about how Khalil only sold drugs to help his mother and was not a gang member, Starr verbally decides to attack the media's depiction of Khalil:

> "I don't understand how everyone can make it seem like it's okay he got killed if he was a drug dealer and a gangbanger."

> A hook straight to the jaw.
> "The media?" she asks.
> "Yes, ma'am. It seems like they always talk about what he may have said, what he may have done, what he may not have done. I didn't know that a dead person could be charged in his own murder, you know?" The moment I say it, I know it's my jab to the jaw. (Thomas 284).

Comparing her arguments to physical punches, Starr presents discomforting arguments that forces the interviewer and everyone who watches the program to confront their stereotypical perspective on Khalil. Revealing that the officer pointed his gun at her as well, Starr emphasizes how she is tired of the police making assumptions about black people and that One-Fifteen's: "assumption killed Khalil. It could've killed me" (Thomas 285).

Once Starr' interview has aired, she gains massive support online and a text from Kenya saying it was about time she spoke out. However, her friends at Williamson remain in the dark. When Hailey learns that Starr has lied about not knowing Khalil, she confronts her with two printed photographs of him and demands an apology: "I stare at the two Khalils. The pictures only show so much. For some people, the thugshot makes him look just like that – a thug (…) I knew the whole Khalil. That's who I've been speaking up for. I shouldn't deny any part of him. Not even at Williamson" (Thomas 335). According to Owen (2019), while Starr has learned to accept all aspects of Khalil and herself, Hailey comes to represent the persistent everyday racism of white fragility (252). After Maya points out Hailey's previous negative statements and jokes about her Chinese heritage, Hailey refuses to accept their allegations about her being racist. Commenting on how she does not recognize Starr anymore, Hailey says:

> "The cop probably did everyone a favor. One less drug dealer on the-"
> I move Maya out the way and slam my fist against the side of Hailey's face. It hurts but damn it feels good. (…) I'm no longer Williamson Starr or even Garden Heights Starr. I'm pissed. (Thomas 337).

In response to Hailey's statements, after Starr' verbal attach during the TV interview, she goes one step further in her journey to lessen her subordination by physically punching Hailey. Noting how it feels good to release her long-suppressed anger, Starr manages to move away from thinking of herself in terms of different selves. Hailey refuses to change her

perspective throughout the rest of the novel. Thomas' choice of Starr eventually stepping away from their friendship becomes an act of lessening her subordination by not accepting the limited way she must act to fit into Hailey's perception of her as a person.

Following her fight with Hailey, Starr admits to Chris that she has been embarrassed about her upbringing in the projects and chosen to keep parts of herself from him and her friends at Williamson to avoid being seen as a "charity case" (Thomas 296). Inviting Chris and Maya to her house for a garden party with her family and friends, Starr nervously describes how: "Chris and Maya walk through the gate, and my stomach gets all jittery. I should be used to my two worlds colliding, but I never know which Starr I should be" (Thomas 353). Starr worries that she will have to code-switch and pay attention to which version of herself she expresses. However, Chris and Maya get along well with Kenya and DeVante, and a couple of pages later Starr points out how "My two worlds just collided. Surprisingly, everything's all right" (Thomas 355). Although Starr is better able to combine and accept her different selves by this point, she notes in the chapter's last sentence how: "Good days don't last forever thought" (Thomas 365). The comment foreshadows the news about One-Fifteen not being charged for killing Khalil.

Part 5 of the novel, named "THE DECISION – THIRTEEN WEEKS AFTER IT" (Thomas 367), opens with the long-anticipated decision of the grand jury about Khalil's death and the officer's fate. Despite speaking up through giving a testimony, Starr feels like she has not been heard and that the system has failed Khalil. Driving by a protest on the street Khalil was killed, Starr notices Ms. Ofrah shouting through a bullhorn that a hairbrush is not a gun. Approaching the scene, Starr is noticed by Ms. Ofrah who encourages her to use her voice as a weapon. After handing her the bullhorn, Starr is lifted on top of a police car to speak for the crowd: "The bullhorn is heavy as a gun. Ironic since Ms. Ofrah said to use my weapon. I have the hardest time lifting it (…) Forget trigger happy – speaker happy is more my thing" (Thomas 406). Mirroring the gun used by One-Fifteen to kill Khalil, Starr uses the bullhorn as a weapon to attack the officers in riot gear with her words.

In relation to the use of counter stories as a way of lessening subordination, Delgado (1989) describes how:

> Storytelling is an engine built to hurl rocks over walls of social complacency that obscure the view from the citadel. But the rocks all have messages tied to them that

the defenders cannot help but read. The messages say, let us knock down the walls, and use the blocks to pave a road we can all walk together" (Delgado 2441).

Admitting publicly that she was the eyewitness on the night of Khalil's death, Starr shouts that his life mattered and that One-Fifteen is a criminal. When the officers throw a tear gas cannister at the protesters, Starr picks it up and throws it back at them: "I scream at the top of my lungs, hoping Khalil hears me, and chuck it back at the cops. It explodes and consumes them in a cloud of tear gas" (Thomas 407). Haddad (2018) interprets the tear gas cannister as an intertextual reference to the Ferguson-riots following the killing of Michael Brown in 2014. In a Pulitzer Prize winning photograph, a black man wearing a shirt with the American flag throws a tear gas cannister towards the police (44). Building on this interpretation, Levin (2020) argues that Thomas' choice of having Starr throw the tear gas cannister becomes her way to: "reconsider and revise the masculinist narratives of Black activism by reinterpreting them through a 'herstorical' lens" (162). Thus, Thomas creates an empowering female counter-narrative.

Thomas also seems to create the character of Natasha to comment on how black-on-black crime and especially female victims are often given less attention by police, media and the affected community. Early in the novel, Khalil's death brings back traumatic memories of Starr's other childhood best friend Natasha who was shot and killed in a neighborhood drive-by when she was ten years old: "Khalil is lying in the county morgue. That's where Natasha ended up too. It happened six years ago, but I still remember everything from that day" (Thomas 32). The way in which Natasha's death frequently shows up in Starr's mind whenever she thinks about Khalil, shows how one experience can trigger previous unresolved trauma of a similar kind. The last thing Starr and Khalil talk about before they are pulled over by the officer is how close the three of them used to be before Natasha died and Starr was transferred to another school district: "We laugh, but something's missing from it. S*omeone's* missing from it. Natasha" (Thomas 23). Throughout the rest of the novel, Starr is the only character who remembers Natasha and what happened to her. She recounts to Miss Ofrah how she has tried to suppress what happened to her, saying: "I've tried to forget it, but I remember everything. The shots, the look on Natasha's face. They never caught the person who did it. I guess it didn't matter enough. But it did matter. She mattered" (Thomas 216). Whereas Khalil's death leads to protests, media attention and a trial, Natasha's death appears to be erased from the discourse. Levin (2020) argues that: "The reason for this erasure is two-fold. On the one hand, it demonstrates the problematic and neglectful perceptions of acts of

violence within Black communities. On the other, it signifies how 'herstories' within Black communal spaces are silenced" (Levin 157).

By making Starr the protagonist, Thomas creates a black female voice that speaks up and is no longer silenced as she comes to represent a redefined "herstory" with the ability to counter the majoritarian story told by the media and other characters. The novel ends with an intertextual reference to traditional fairytales: "Once upon a time there was a hazel-eyed boy with dimples. I called him Khalil. The world called him a thug" (Thomas 436). Emphasizing the contrasting perceptions of Khalil, Starr goes on to comment how:

> It would be easy to quit if it was just about me, Khalil, that night, and that cop. It's about way more than that though. It's about Seven. Sekani. Kenya. Devante.
>
> It's also about Oscar.
>
> Aiyana.
>
> Trayvon.
>
> Rekia.
>
> Michael.
>
> Eric.
>
> Tamir.
>
> John.
>
> Ezell.
>
> Sandra.
>
> Freddie.
>
> Alton.
>
> Philando.
>
> It's even about that little boy in 1955 who nobody recognized at first – Emmett. The messed up part? There are so many more (Thomas 437).

Thomas includes the names of her fictional characters on a list with real victims of police brutality in the USA, connecting the past to the present and fiction to reality. Thus, she brings her storyworld into the real world to establish the bigger picture of institutional racism.

Changing the layout on the page, so that each name is centered with a punctuation mark behind it, she emphasizes the equal value of each individual name. Only their first name is included, mirroring the media's depiction of the white officer One-Fifteen as Brian during his father's interview. The names of the real victims are placed in a chronological order, starting with Oscar Grant, who was killed in 2009, and ending with Philando Castile, who was killed in 2016. Additionally, the inclusion of female victims shows how Starr's triple consciousness makes her able to perceive the need for an intersectional focus that does not only represent the value of black male victims of police brutality. Speaking directly to Khalil on the novel's final page, Starr notes how: "People are realizing and shouting and marching and demanding. They're not forgetting. I think that is the most important part. Khalil I'll never forget. I'll never give up. I'll never be quiet. I promise" (Thomas 438). The reader is encouraged to speak up about injustice and demand change as Thomas ultimately emphasizes the importance of telling stories to preserve the memory of each victim and to speak up for the voices that have been lost.

Throughout this chapter I have analyzed how Thomas uses multiple modes to draw the readers into the storyworld. By changing the layout and font she signals shifts in the narrative discourse, constructs realistic text-messages, emphasizes sounds through onomatopoeia, and uses italics to construct Starr' inner monologue. The effect is that the readers become closely aligned with Starr's point of view and potentially able to understand and empathize with her traumatic experiences following Khalil's death. Using the concept of Double Consciousness and the expanded concept Triple Consciousness, I have analyzed how Thomas' description of Starr's conflicting identities can be considered a form of internalized racism. An intersectional focus on gender, race and class reveals how Starr is torn between different version of herself due to her ability to move between the white space of Williamson and the marginalized neighborhood of Garden Heights. While she is a skilled code-switcher, the traumatic flashbacks, and detectives' continuous attempt at villainizing Khalil and discrediting her as a witness makes it hard for Starr to keep her different worlds separate. Having spent several years adjusting her performance to fit in at Williamson, Starr does not feel like she fits in with the teenagers from Garden Heights anymore. Her prejudiced opinion about drug dealers and gang members is challenged when she learns about Khalil's reasons for selling drugs and refusal to join the King Lords. Analyzing how the novel functions as a black female counter-narrative, I have tried to show how Starr preserves her sense of self through an inner monologue, shifting between different versions of herself, and through the

anonymous blog she creates in honor of Khalil. She increasingly lessens her subordination by actively countering the majoritarian story told by One-Fifteen's father and the media, becoming Khalil's external voice. Starr's fight with Hailey marks a shift, as she refuses subordination, accepts the different versions of herself, and invites Chris and Maya into her Garden Heights world. Following the Grand Jury's decision to not charge One-Fifteen with Khalil's murder, Starr speaks up at a protest and attacks the police with her words using a bullhorn that comes to mirror the gun previously pointed at her. Through an intertextual reference to a male activist from the Ferguson-riots, Starr throws a tear gas cannister back at the officers. By doing this, Thomas empowers Starr as a black female voice speaking up against injustice. While her childhood friend Natasha comes to represent the erased female victims of gang-violence, Starr brings to light the often-forgotten female victims of police brutality and blurs the lines between fiction and reality by ending the novel with a list of character names combined with real victims of police brutality. Thomas ultimately seems to do encourage young readers to speak up against injustice and never forget the voices that have been lost. In the following chapter, I will analyze how *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* can be used in the English subject classroom in Norwegian upper secondary school to foster intercultural readers and the possible obstacles caused by the novels' complex narrative structures and provocative subject matters.

# 4 Fostering intercultural readers of *Monster* and *The Hate U Give*

In the words of Richard Delgado (1989): “Listening to stories makes the adjustment to further stories easier; one acquires the ability to see the world through others’ eyes. It can lead the way to new environments” (Delgado 2440). His words emphasize a possible bridge between counter-storytelling as a tenet of Critical Race Theory in the USA, and the concept of intercultural competence described in the Norwegian core curriculum. As both fields seem to focus on the development of an ability to “see the world through others’ eyes”, it becomes the first step to understand and accept others. It has previously been noted in the introduction that one of the core elements in the Norwegian national curriculum for the English subject directly mentions the encounter with different types of texts in English and emphasizes how students should: “build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2019, 3). Byram’s (1997) influential concept of the intercultural speaker has played a pivotal role in European research on intercultural communicative competence. However, Hoff’s (2016) model of the intercultural reader (MIR) more specifically focuses on the relationship between readers and their negotiations with different aspects of a text, which is of relevance here. The model is based on an understanding of reading as a communicative experience and operates on three interlinked levels that each combine emotional and cognitive aspects of a text. Each level also considers how narrative style and structure in addition to the cultural, social, and historical subject positions of different texts and readers affect the multifaceted reading process. Level 1 focuses on the reader’s interaction with various voices present in the text and the responses they trigger, while level 2 brings in the perspective of other readers’ interpretations, and level 3 considers the text’s communication with other texts (62).

In the two former chapters, I have tried to establish how the multimodal young adult novels *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* each present multifaceted reading experiences that bring valuable insight about the internalized and institutional racism that persists in the USA, seen through the eyes of the young African American protagonists. In this chapter, I have chosen to combine my focus on both novels simultaneously to investigate their suitability for the English subject in Norwegian upper secondary school. Looking at the ways in which they can be used to foster intercultural competence, I will focus on the three levels described in Hoff’s (2016) model of the intercultural reader. As there to my knowledge are no available studies from Norwegian ELT related to these specific novels yet, I will use empirical research from

an American classroom context in addition to Hoff's (2019) study on Norwegian Vg1 students' experiences with the MIR. The purpose of my analysis is to prove that reading *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* and working with them in the classroom could give students the opportunity to decenter themselves by stepping into the perspectives of others, challenge racial stereotypes and prejudice through group discussions, and generally develop an ability to communicate with texts that they can apply in other intercultural contexts.

## 4.1 The obstacle presented by multimodal narrative structures

As previously noted, level 1 of Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader (MIR) focuses on the reader's interaction with various voices present in the text and the responses they trigger. In the two former chapters, I have discussed how the narrative structure of *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* immerses the reader into the storyworld and closely align them with the protagonist. Especially through the authors' use of multimodal elements, readers are given the possibility to better understand why the protagonist has internalized racism through developing a double point of view in their interactions with other characters and their surroundings and how this is strenuous for them. By critically investigating the narrative structure on a cognitive level, the intercultural reader should potentially also be able to communicate with the implied author of each novel and understand how they comment on the institutional racism of the contemporary American society. Thus, the analyses in the former two chapters seem to reflect the first level in the MIR through its focus on the reader's interaction with various voices in the novel and the responses they trigger. However, due to each novel's complex narrative structure and provocative subject matter, scaffolding the students' reading-process becomes crucial.

The teacher plays an important role in the individual students' reading-process. Functioning as a facilitator that encourages the students to explore their own emotional and cognitive response to the text, it is important not to shy away from unfamiliar genres or challenging texts, or to limit their attention to one point of view and one correct interpretation. Instead, the reading process should encourage students to negotiate more freely the meaning of texts that expose them to confusion, discomfort, and tension. Hoff (2016) argues how:

> One way to bring about such processes in the FL classroom is by including texts that challenge the learners on a number of levels, for instance in the form of provocative subject matters, the inclusion of unsympathetic literary characters who may be difficult to relate to or narrators whose trustworthiness is disputable (64).

Due to Myers' creative play with narrative structure and use of multiple modes, *Monster* can be considered a novel that challenges readers on multiple levels related to the aspects mentioned above. The story takes place in a courtroom and revolves around Steve and the other defendants' involvement in a murder trial, which can be considered a provocative subject matter to discuss with students. As has previously been discussed in the chapter on *Monster*, the way in which Steve narrates the notebook and screenplay creates a distance between him and the character called James King. This distance makes it difficult for the reader to empathize with King who becomes an unsympathetic literary character. Most importantly here, however, is the way in which Steve's unreliable narration throughout the novel makes him a protagonist and narrator whose trustworthiness is disputable to the reader. Similarly, *The Hate U Give* also emphasizes a provocative subject matter in the form of police brutality, and its harmful effect on Starr and her local community of Garden Heights. The reader is closely aligned with Starr, who becomes a trustworthy protagonist through the multimodal elements emphasizing her traumatic experiences and establishing empathy. However, Thomas includes several unsympathetic characters who the reader finds it difficult to relate to and who challenges Starr's point of view. While there is still limited access to studies focusing on *The Hate U Giv*e in an education context, studies on *Monster* in the American classroom give an indication about possible advantages and disadvantage of teaching the novels in Norwegian English language teaching.

In a study by Groenke and Youngquist (2011), 25 ninth graders in a suburban American High School read 30-50 pages of *Monster* each day over a period of nine instructional days. The students were encouraged to keep a log describing their response and questions to what they read along the way. In class, the students discussed the novel in smaller online chat-room groups of five (508). Analyzing transcripts from the students' discussions, Groenke and Youngquist discovered that the students struggled to understand the novel due to its multimodal and postmodern format. The complex narrative structure, especially the screenplay's flashback-scenes, made the students unable to focus on the possible reasons behind Myers constructing the narrative in this way. Instead, they were preoccupied with the novel's structure and the way in which the flashback-scenes revealed ambiguities about Steve as a protagonist, complicating their ability to understand and relate to him: "Even by the end of the book, readers, like Steve, are not sure about Steve or the truth" (Groenke & Youngquist 507). In this study, the unfamiliarity of the narrative structure became an obstacle that made it difficult for the students to immerse themselves into the storyworld created by Myers.

Emphasizing the importance of scaffolding during the reading-process, Hoff (2016) notes how: “The degree of complexity in this process must be adjusted to the learners’ prior experience with texts, but it must also challenge their creativity and capacity for critical and abstract thinking” (Hoff 2016, 64). Noticing how the lacking exposure to the screenplay format and postmodern use of flashback-scenes caused the students to miss important aspects of *Monster*, Groenke and Youngquist (2011) realized that the ninth graders needed more scaffolding and support from the teacher before and during their reading process. Bean and Harper (2007) also note how young readers are not likely to realize the significance of typographical changes in *Monster*, and that for them to pay closer attention to these semiotic elements and their inferred meaning, the teacher should engage them with critical questions and interpretive activities while reading which more explicitly bring them to the students’ attention (23). In a Norwegian context, Bland (2018) explains how scripts and screenplays have mostly been used in English language teaching in connection with plays by Shakespeare. The unfamiliar format combined with complicated language has made it more commonly targeted towards older learners. However, she argues that the screenplay format has more broad potential that can be expanded to younger learners if the context is familiarized to them (44).

As previously mentioned in chapter 3, in relation to Starr’s traumatic experience and panic attacks coming to life on the page, Bland (2020) points out that the brain responds to emotions in fiction in a similar way to real life experiences (78). This indicates that reading can trigger an immediate emotional response for the readers, if they are introduced to and understand the narrative structure and cultural context which the action takes place in. Especially for students in Norway, who might be unfamiliar with the long history of slavery and persistent racial disparity experienced by African Americans today, it is important for the teacher to present the novel to them with its original context and not in a vacuum (Rindal, Beiler & Listuen 221). To understand the authors’ choice of narrative style and structure, the young readers need to critically investigate the context through external sources with the guidance of the teacher (Hoff 2016, 62). In the case of *Monster* and *The Hate U Give*, this would include researching external sources on the period which the novels were written in, identifying trails of postmodern fiction and realist fiction, in addition to reviewing details about the function and structure of the American justice system and law enforcement. Through this scaffolding-process where the narrative structure and cultural context has been

explained, the students are potentially more able to focus on their immediate emotional response to the novel during their individual reading process.

## 4.2 Communication between different readers through group-discussions

As already noted, the second level in the model of the intercultural reader focuses on how the reader communicates with other readers of the text. This includes increasingly understanding and accepting the ways in which different cultural, social, and historical positions lead to different ways of seeing the world. Level 2 plays a crucial role in the students' development of the ability to decenter their own point of view to understand other perspectives, echoing the words of Delgado (1989) in relation to the purpose of counter-storytelling mentioned in the opening of this chapter. According to Hoff (2016):

> In a classroom-context, for instance, the text-interpretation process has the potential to become a collaborative effort. Such democratic and sociocultural processes of text interpretation may allow the different subjectivities of the classroom to be recruited rather than ignored and may thus contribute to an understanding of cultural identity as a complex phenomenon (Hoff 2016, 62).

Therefore, in contrast with level 1 where the readers explore their own emotional reactions to the text, level 2 opens the possibility of collaborating with other students in a text-interpretation process that could give them access to a variety of perspectives.

In their study on ninth graders' experiences with reading *Monster*, Groenke and Youngquist (2011) observed how each discussion-group in the student chatrooms made different observations and helped each other gain new perspectives on the story which they had not noticed while reading the novel on their own. This indicates that they were able to listen to their peers and understand that there are various ways of perceiving and interacting with the text (511). This advantage of other readers' interpretations through collaboration is also visible in another study by Seglem and Bonner (2016). In their study *Monster* was read by eight graders in a rural US Middle School over a longer period. In a similar way to the ninth graders in the former study, these eighth graders were encouraged to write down questions while reading the novel. Contrasting the former study, however, these students additionally:

> blogged about the book, located non-fiction articles that connected to the text, and interviewed community members who shared roles similar to the characters in the

> novel. Then, through Socratic Seminar discussions and teacher questioning, [they] guided students towards the development of questions that emerged while reading the novel (Seglem & Bonner 21).

Throughout this project, Seglem and Bonner found that scaffolding the reading process meant the students were increasingly able to form their own "student-driven" questions and perceive the complex sections of the novel from different perspectives which they discussed in Socratic seminars.

Focusing on the development of critical thinking skills in a safe environment, the Socratic method emphasizes a dialogue between teacher and students where critical questions and interpretations are continuously debated collectively. Explaining the relevance of the Socratic method in anti-racist education, Orelus (2020) notes that the philosophers Socrates and Pluto: "showed how knowledge is dialectically constructed through dialogue between teachers and students and mentors and mentees (…) through open dialogue, a mentee learns from his/her mentor and vice versa" (16). During the Socratic seminar discussions in Seglem and Bonner's (2016) study: "the student groups focused on a specific section of the text that interested them, developing critical thinking questions as a means to construct dialogue throughout the seminar process" (24). Guided by the teacher and fellow students through discussions in a safe environment, the young readers were able to reflect on and recognize their prior stereotypical beliefs. By the end of the project, Seglem and Bonner (2016) noted a significant increase in the students' awareness about the influence language choices can have on how a text is perceived by various readers and its possibly harmful effects. The students were able to explore the word "Monster" and discuss its close connection to dangerous stereotypes about black men (26). In the Norwegian context, using the Socratic method as a critical approach to the novels *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* could potentially become a way to combine the focus on cultural content with language competence in the English subject classroom. Through comparing their own and others' emotional responses to each novel and question how their interpretations differ, students could gain a more critical and deeper awareness about the close connection between language and culture. This echoes Kramsch's (1993) perspective on language as a social practice and cultural awareness as both: "enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency" (8).

The Socratic method and similar forms of peer-group discussions guided by the teacher appear to be a suitable way to encourage valuable interactions between students and expose

them to other readers' interpretations of the same text. Hoff (2019) discusses how Norwegian Vg1 students through peer-group discussions of a literary text showed an ability to distance themselves from the literary characters' actions, while at the same time managing to stay personally involved with the text. Their discussion revealed how: "learners' identification with literary characters is not a requisite for their willingness to engage with FL literature at an emotional level" (452). Personal and emotional involvement is emphasized as essential in the development of intercultural competence. However, students do not need to sympathize with every character to prevent confirming stereotypes and prejudice. The development of empathy as a social skill in relation to Theory of Mind, which has previously been described, is connected to the understanding that one does not have to share other people's opinions and sympathize with them to step into their shoes from a distance and view the world from their perspective (Nikolajeva 2014, 85). Therefore, through class-discussions students can for example increase their understanding of the reasons Steve has for creating the different narrative structures and hide information in *Monster*, while at the same time disagree with his actions and statements throughout the novel. This could be achieved by collectively discussing the novel and put students in a situation where they can argue how they perceive Steve and why Myers chose to construct him in that way. Debating whether Steve has any other options, the students could gain a better understanding of him as the protagonist and avoid reaffirming static racial stereotypes about criminalized black men.

In a similar way to *Monster*, *The Hate U Give* challenges readers in several ways. Hoff (2016) points out how: "at level 2, the intercultural reader takes into account how other readers may communicate with the FL text, and she reflects on how different subject positions make some interpretations possible/likely and others impossible/unlikely" (62). Whereas exposing students to the perspective of unsympathetic characters and controversial issues risks enhancing their existing stereotypes and prejudices, Hoff (2020) emphasizes the importance of presenting the students with different perspectives to challenge them. Discussing the Black Lives Matter movement as an example of a controversial issue where the different perspectives must be brought to light, she states that:

> The controversy around the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the USA can be used to illustrate why seemingly open-minded statements and values must be problematized. The opponents of this movement emphasize that all lives matter and that the focus on one particular group at the expense of others is divisive and counterproductive to promoting solidarity and mutual respect. From a human rights

> and equality standpoint, this may be a valid argument. However, BLM advocates point out that such a view ignores the oppression and discrimination that African Americans have endured and continue to experience, thus contributing to upholding the status quo rather than challenging it (82).

In *The Hate U Give*, Thomas brings forth this debate through the perspective of Starr contrasted with the perspective of her white friend Hailey who comes to represent white fragility in the novel (Owen 252). In a passage where the two characters watch the TV interview with officer One-Fifteen's father, Starr observes how Khalil is depicted as a dangerous criminal. Hailey, on the other hand, makes the remark that the officer deserves their sympathy: "His son lost everything because he was trying to do his job and protect himself. His life matters too, you know?" (Thomas 244). Hailey thus comes to represent the #BlueLivesMatter argument and the perspective that all lives matter. Starr is instantly shocked about their different perceptions of the situation, and the reader who is closely aligned with Starr, sees the situation from her perspective. When Hailey asks what is wrong with saying the Officer's life matter too, Starr replies: "His life always matters more! (…) That's the problem!" (Thomas 245). A conversation between Starr's father Maverick and her uncle Carlos, who is a black police officer, early in the novel also brings forth different perspectives on the police and the drug dealer stereotype:

> "I heard he was a drug dealer," says Uncle Carlos.
>
> "And that makes it okay?" Daddy asks.
>
> "I didn't say it did, but it could explain Brian's decision if he felt threatened." (…)
>
> "Other races aren't killing us nearly as much as we're killing ourselves."
>
> "Ne-gro, please. If I kill Tyrone, I'm going to prison. If a cop kills me, he's getting put on leave. Maybe." (Thomas 55).

Uncle Carlos changes his perspective throughout the novel after discovering that One-Fifteen pointed his gun at Starr as well. However, his early remarks about Khalil as a dangerous drug dealer and the prevalence of black-on-black crime greatly contrasts Maverick's perspective as a former gang member and ex-convict who has experienced the racial disparity close hand. These passages give a golden opportunity for Socratic discussions about the different positions on the controversial issue as it has been extensively debated in real American and International media throughout 2020 in relation to the death of George Floyd. Both novels'

connection to real events and intertextual references from the time they were published, gives the advantage and possibility to critically explore them thoroughly in the classroom.

## 4.3 Exploring intertextuality in *Monster* and *The Hate U Give*

In Hoff's (2019) study on Norwegian Vg1 students' experience with the model of the intercultural reader, she notes how the tasks they were given by teachers: "primarily involved level 1 and 2 of the MIR, as there was a focus on the learners' communication with different literary voices inherent in the text as well as their consideration of other readers' interpretations of it" (450). On the third level of Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader, the reader considers how the text communicates with other texts from: "different cultures, time periods and genres", through what is known as intertextuality (63). By comparing different texts, the intercultural reader can: "juxtapose the FL [Foreign language] text with other texts in order to explore the extent to which alternative narrative choices and subject positions affect her understanding." (63). A possible way to increasingly bring level 3 into the English subject classroom could be to make the students explicitly aware of their role as an active interpreter of the text, not just a passive recipient of information (Fenner 244). This could be done by bringing to the students' attention to how they often make intertextual connections to other texts somewhat subconsciously while reading and how these references are signs of a deeper form of reading and interaction with the text. Hoff (2019) notes how: "The task of the teacher, in such respect, is to make the learners aware of how they often refer to other texts as part of their engagement with the level 1 text" (455).

According to Panlay (2016), intertextual references have a long history within the field of African American literature, because: "intertextuality, as a type of literary allusions, sees all texts and their meanings never as isolated entities but dialogic and intertextually dependent, a plurality of voices, embodying a diversity of positions" (166). As previously mentioned in the introduction, Bishop (2010) notes how Du Bois' 1920 magazine called the Brownies' Book marked the start of a new tradition in children's literature where texts written by African American authors challenged the stereotypical beliefs about African Americans presented in the dominant literary canon (227). In the two former chapters of this thesis, I have tried to show how both Myers and Thomas try to counter the majoritarian story through the protagonists' experiences in their novels. Reading the two novels together could give the opportunity to emphasize level 3 and combine the three levels of the MIR in the English subject classroom. By comparing the narrative structure, the protagonists, unsympathetic

characters, the subject matter, the authors, and the period in which each novel was written, students could gain a deeper understanding of the persistent internalized and institutional racism experienced by the African American population in the USA.

It has previously been stated in chapter 2 that *Monster* was published in 1999, at the threshold of the new millennium. Continuing the tradition of the prison memoir, Myers structures certain sections of the novel in the form of a prison notebook. Additionally, through the external descriptions of Steve as "the boy on trial for murder", Myers seems to insert an intertextual reference to the documentary-series "Scared Straight" as the inspiration behind Steve's movie. Harrington (2020) describes how the original 1978 documentary film and following TV-series focused on bringing to light the horrors of incarceration, narrated by an unseen host revealing shocking details. Bringing a group of adolescents into a prison followed by interactions with prisoners and guards, the goal of the documentary was to scare them by showing at close hand what the consequences of their actions could be if they chose a life of crime: "Scared Straight's use of real teens, real incarcerated men, in a real, operational prison space served to buttress its claim to display an authentic process—the "straightening out" of the teens" (422). A similar structure with camera angles and a narrator describing the events seems to be used for the screenplay-narrative in *Monster* to make it more real to the reader. Additionally, the didactic approach of scaring teenagers through exposure is used in a scene where Steve observes a group of teenagers watching the trial in the courtroom:

> When I went into the courtroom, I saw a group of kids sitting in front. It looked like a junior high school class. "Once the trial actually begins there will be no talking," the teacher with them said. "This is part of the American judicial system, and we have to respect every part of it". When I looked at the kids in the class, they turned away from me quickly (Myers 96).

Emphasizing how the kids turn away from him, Steve expresses an awareness about being observed by others and perceived as a monster in the courtroom. Owen (2019) argues that the focus on the horrors of Steve's prison experience can be interpreted as Myers' moralistic warning to readers of color as he: "adopts a didactic relation between text and reader" (239). From this perspective, the scary details from the inside of the prison cell and court proceedings are included to scare the implied readers into avoiding Steve's mistakes. However, the intertextual reference to Scared Straight, by using a similar filming technique and a voice-over narrator, could also be interpreted as social commentary on Myers' part.

Throughout the novel, the reader is exposed to Steve's continuous struggle with others' perception of him as a monster no matter what he does. Giving the students insight into the stereotypical way black prisoners were framed in Scared Straight and similar TV-programs from that time-period, the intertextual reference could be used in the classroom as a starting point for discussing the possibility of Myers, through Steve, using a similar format to show its harmful effects on the individual prisoners' sense of selves.

As previously mentioned in relation to level 2 of the MIR, Seglem and Bonner (2016) found that students' awareness about the connection between language and culture increased through Socratic discussions about *Monster*'s title and the words' close connection to racial stereotypes (26). Level 3 of the MIR focuses on how the intercultural reader can gain a broader understanding of the context through juxtaposing one text with another. The nearly twenty years separating the publication of *Monster* (1999) and *The Hate U Give* (2017) makes it possible to discuss their similarities and differences with the students in relation to the time-period each novel was published in, questioning whether a lot has changed over the years in relation to the African American population. Bringing attention specifically to the word monster could extend the discussion about the dangerous black criminal stereotype that is emphasized throughout Myers' novel into today's society, as the word is also present in *The Hate U Give*. In the TV-interview about officer One-Fifteen, his father says: "He only wanted to get home to his family, and people are making him out to be a monster." (Thomas 244). Starr responds by thinking to herself: "That's all Khalil and I wanted, and you're making *us* out to be monsters" (Thomas 244). The use of the word monster in both novels makes it possible to discuss its persistent connection to crimes and racial stereotypes with the students. Comparing the photographs of Steve to the descriptions of the "thugshots" of Khalils presented in the media, could further challenge students to combine visual and textual clues in discussions about racial profiling.

Additionally, while the action is focused on the institutional racism of the American justice system and law enforcement, both authors seem to bring to light the erasure of young black girls who end up in the crossfire and become the victims of gang violence. In *Monster*, one of Steve's screenplay-sections focuses on television news about the robbery and murder of Mr. Nesbit, as one of the neighbors is asked whether he is shocked by the tragedy: "I ain't shocked. People getting killed and everything and it ain't right but I ain't shocked none. They killed a little girl just about 2 months ago and she was just sitting on her stoop" (Myers 121). His description echoes how Starr's childhood friend Natasha was killed in a drive-by in *The*

*Hate U Give*. The similar mention of innocent lives lost to gang violence reveals how the intersectional position as a young black girl is a vulnerable one in both novels. While the murder of Mr. Nesbit in *Monster* and the shooting of Khalil in *The Hate U Give* gain massive media attention, Natasha and the unknown little girl are only remembered in the minds of people within the neighborhood. Furthermore, Starr's counter-narrative is focused on speaking up for Khalil as a male victim and only subtly points to the erasure of female victims. These sections thus give ground for critical discussions about intersectionality in the classroom, where passages from both novels could be combined with external sources providing statistical information from real life.

It has already been explained in chapter 3 how Thomas makes an intertextual reference to real victims of police brutality in the final pages of her novel, connecting the story to the real world. However, the novel's title in itself is an intertextual reference to an acronym which is repeated and interpreted from the perspective of different characters. The acronym first appears in a conversation between Starr and Khalil. In the car, before they are pulled over by the officer, they discuss the African American rapper Tupac. Starr points out how his songs are old, and something her father used to listen to twenty years ago. However, Khalil argues that Tupac's words are still relevant: "Listen! The Hate U—the letter U—Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. T-H-U-G L-I-F-E. Meaning what society give us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out. Get it?" (Thomas 21). By explicitly emphasizing how Tupac belongs to a different time, while still arguing for his current relevance, Thomas establishes a connection to the 1990s. This connects the novel to the time-period in which *Monster* takes place and reveals how the past continues to influence the present.

Khalil's interpretation of Tupac's famous words reflects an awareness about how they apply to his own life. Explaining how his grandmother was fired from her job at a hospital after developing cancer, Khalil points out how working in the store Starr's father runs was not enough to cover their bills, and that he started selling drugs because he was: "tired of choosing between lights and food" (Thomas 22). This social critique in relation to the lacking opportunities in marginalized neighborhoods is similar to how Steve's screenplay provides details revealing James King's desperation over lack of money and work-opportunities being the reason why the robbery was planned in *Monster* (Myers 50). At a later point in *The Hate U Give*, Starr discusses the acronym and Khalil's interpretation of it with her father Maverick. When he asks her why she thinks Khalil and so many other people in Garden Heights resort to

dealing drugs, she replies that they need the money and lack other opportunities to obtain it. Maverick agrees, replying:

> Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain't quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don't prepare us well enough. That's why when your momma talked about sending you and your brothers to Williamson, I agreed. Our schools don't get the resources to equip you like Williamson does. It's easier to find some crack than it is to find a good school around here (Thomas 168).

Starr's father explains the persistent institutional racism in their local community of Garden Heights, emphasizing how they have tried to give Starr and her siblings a better chance at breaking out of the cycle by sending them to Williamson Prep.

Starr and Steve as protagonists both come represent a black middle class. Starr's mother is a nurse, and her father has managed to establish a store in Garden Heights and break away from the gang he used to be a part of. The details about Steve's parents are scarce in *Monster*. However, during a visit to the detention center, his father explains to Steve how: "When you were first born, I would lie up in bed thinking about scenes of your life. You playing football. You going off to college. I used to think of you going to Morehouse and doing the same things I did when I was there" (Myers 111). His father's emphasis on visualizing Steve's life, which includes going to the same college he went to, indicates that Steve's parents have tried to keep him away from the drugs and gang violence of Harlem by sending him to Stuyvesant High School. That neither Steve nor Starr confirm racial stereotypes seems to be a deliberate choice by the authors that echo Bishop's (2010) explanation about how African American authors try to challenge the previous simplistic representation of African Americans in the dominant literary canon (227). Steve and Starr both live in a marginalized neighborhood marked by gang violence and drugs, making them able to present the realities of how institutional racism persistently causes a lack of opportunities for the inhabitants that continues in a vicious cycle. At the same time, they are both able to step into a different world through the private high schools they attend in predominantly white communities, showing the strenuous effect of internalized racism. Creating a bridge between the two worlds, their ability to shift between different versions of themselves reflects a dynamic perspective on identity and culture which makes them appear as more than fixed and static characters to contemporary readers. This dynamic perspective is essential in the Norwegian students'

process of decentering their own perspective (Bland 70). Thus, their exposure to these novels and increased understanding of the complex connection between language and culture through actively working with them could potentially be used in other unfamiliar contexts.

In this chapter, I have combined my focus on *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* simultaneously and investigated their suitability for the English subject classroom in Norwegian upper secondary school. Looking at the ways in which they can be used to foster intercultural competence, I have focused on the three levels described in Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader. In the first section I investigated the obstacle for reader immersion presented by the multimodal elements and complex narrative structure. Studies focused on American students' experiences with reading *Monster* revealed that Myers' complex play with the traditional novel form confused students and prevented them from focusing on their emotional response to the text. A possible solution could be to scaffold the reading process by explaining unfamiliar formats, concepts, and context in advance. In the second section I focused on how communication between different readers could be achieved through group-discussions using the Socratic method. By not shying away from controversial issues and unsympathetic characters, the students can actively discuss harmful stereotypes and positions in a safe environment. In the third and final section I have explored how reading the two novels together could give the opportunity to work with level 3 and combine the three levels of the MIR in the English subject classroom. By comparing the narrative structure, the protagonists, unsympathetic characters, the controversial subject matter, the authors, and the period in which each novel was written, students could gain a deeper understanding of the persistent internalized and institutional racism experienced by the African American population in the USA. The potential development of an ability to read deeply, critically, and interculturally, increasingly understanding the complex connection between language and culture could be used by students in other unfamiliar contexts that require them to decenter their own point of view.

# Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* (1999) and Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017), in light of how these two multimodal young adult novels depict the internalized and institutional racism experienced by the African American population of the USA. Focusing on the two novels' suitability for the English subject classroom in Norwegian Upper Secondary School, this thesis has tried to connect the American field of Critical Race Theory and the emphasis on developing intercultural competence expressed in the English subject Curriculum in Norway. Using Hoff's (2016) Model of the Intercultural Reader, the overall aim of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which reading and working with multimodal young adult fiction could foster intercultural competence.

My analysis has shown how both authors creatively combine multiple modes to draw the reader into their storyworld, blurring the line between fiction and reality. Myers does this by playing with the traditional novel form, creating a complex narrative structure that resembles a prison notebook and a movie screenplay. This establishes empathy for Steve as the story's protagonist and invites readers to become part of the jury investigating his participation in the robbery. Thomas signals shifts in the narrative discourse by changing the layout and font. By doing this, she constructs realistic text-messages, emphasizes sounds through onomatopoeia, and uses italics to construct Starr' inner monologue. The effect is that the readers become closely aligned with Starr's point of view and potentially able to understand and empathize with her traumatic experiences following Khalil's death. Using the concept of Double Consciousness to analyze Steve' racial identity and how he struggles with internalized racism, I have argued that the shift between narrative structures shows different versions of Steve and his awareness about his racialized self. The narrative shifts help readers empathize with Steve while also challenging them to pay close attention and be active readers, as photographs of Steve ambiguously reveal his possible unreliability and moral disengagement. Thomas' description of Starr's conflicting identities can also be considered a form of internalized racism. This has been analyzed in connection to the concept of Triple Consciousness, a continuation of Double Consciousness which provides an intersectional focus on gender, race, and class. The analysis reveals how Starr is torn between different version of herself due to her ability to move between the white space of Williamson and the marginalized neighborhood of Garden Heights. My analysis has also shown how both novels function as counter-narratives, exposing the persistent institutional racism of the American justice system and law enforcement. Steve preserves his sense of self through creating the different narrative

structures, and comments on the way violence caused by a lack of money and opportunities gets turned around against the local community of Harlem itself in his screenplay-narrative. Starr preserves her sense of self through an inner monologue, shifting between different versions of herself, and through the anonymous blog she creates in honor of Khalil. She increasingly lessens her subordination by actively countering the majoritarian story told by One-Fifteen's father and the media, becoming Khalil's external voice. Starr's fight with Hailey marks a shift, as she refuses subordination and accepts the different versions of herself. Through an intertextual reference to a male activist from the Ferguson-riots, Starr throws a tear gas cannister back at the officers during a protest. Thomas empowers Starr as a black female voice speaking up against injustice and ultimately seems to encourage young readers to speak up against injustice and never forget the voices that have been lost. Bringing both novels into the English subject classroom in Norway, I have analyzed the ways in which they can be used to foster intercultural competence by focusing on the three levels of communication described in Hoff's (2016) model of the intercultural reader. In the first section I investigated the obstacle for reader immersion presented by the multimodal elements and complex narrative structure, where a possible solution could be to scaffold the reading process by explaining unfamiliar formats, concepts, and context in advance. In the second section I focused on how communication between different readers could be achieved through group-discussions using the Socratic method. By not shying away from controversial issues and unsympathetic characters, the students could actively discuss harmful stereotypes and positions in a safe environment. In the third and final section I have explored how reading the two novels together could give the opportunity to work with level 3 and combine the three levels of the MIR in the English subject classroom. By comparing the narrative structure, the protagonists, unsympathetic characters, the controversial subject matter, the authors, and the period in which each novel was written, students could gain a deeper understanding of the persistent internalized and institutional racism experienced by the African American population in the USA. The potential development of an ability to read deeply, critically, and interculturally, increasingly understanding the complex connection between language and culture could be used by students in other unfamiliar contexts that require them to decenter their own point of view.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, empirical research would need to be conducted to examine Norwegian students' responses to *Monster* and *The Hate U Give* in the English subject classroom of Norwegian Upper Secondary School.

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