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Shangri-La as a utopia, sacred place, and a prison in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* in the context of its utopian character and historical and mythical parallels that make up its setting, Shangri-La, as a refuge, but also a paradoxical prison. This paper delves into the historical and cultural context of the Western imagination's portrayal of Tibet as a sacred and mystical place and places it within the context of Orientalism and exoticism, emphasising the misconceptions and romanticised notions associated with the country. The paper also explores the sources and inspirations behind Hilton's setting and characters, highlighting the connection between Hilton's Shangri-La and the mythical Tibetan kingdom of Shambhala.

Key words: utopia, Shangri-La, James Hilton, *Lost Horizon*

Shangri-La jako utopia, święte miejsce oraz więzienie w powieści *Zaginiony horyzont* Jamesa Hiltona

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest zbadanie powieści Jamesa Hiltona *Zaginiony horyzont* w kontekście jej utopijnego charakteru oraz historycznych i mitologicznych analogii, które wskazują, że jej miejsce akcji Shangri-La postrzegane może być jako miejsce schronienia, ale jednocześnie paradoksalne więzienie. Artykuł zagłębia się w historyczny i kulturowy kontekst przedstawienia Tybetu jako świętego i mistycznego miejsca w wyobraźni Zachodu, umieszczając go w kontekście orientalizmu i egzotycyzmu i podkreślając błędne przekonania oraz idealizowane wyobrażenia związane z tym krajem. Artykuł bada również źródła i inspiracje autora powieści, podkreślając związek między Shangri-Lą Hiltona a mitycznym tybetańskim królestwem Szambala.

Słowa kluczowe: utopia, Shangri-La, James Hilton, *Zaginiony horyzont*

Introduction

First published in 1933, the novel *Lost Horizon* brought the British author James Hilton (1900-1954) both recognition and fame[1]. The novel

[1] The Hollywood adaptation of *Lost Horizon* in 1937, along with the recognition received through the Hawthornden Prize in 1934, propelled the author's successful career in Hollywood screenwriting.

depicts a utopian monastery called Shangri-La, which is hidden away from the world in the Tibetan mountains in the Valley of the Blue Moon. Peter Bishop[2] calls the novel "one of the final and most complete embodiments of Tibet as a sacred place". The primary setting of *Lost Horizon*, the secluded Tibetan monastery of Shangri-La, introduced a new word into the English language. The word made its way into everyday speech and *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* defines Shangri-La as "a place regarded as an earthly paradise, especially when involving a retreat from the pressures of modern civilization"[3].

The very definition of Shangri-La, then, brings to mind the concept of Utopia, which can be understood fourfold: as an imaginary perfect society or a non-existent "good place"; a literary genre that emerged as the result of utopian imagination; the function upon the reader to take action against inequalities pinpointed by utopian literature; or, finally the desire for a better life and discontentment towards the real society[4]. The last interpretation of the term evokes the words of Ruth Levitas, who emphasised that "Utopia expresses and explores what is desired"[5]. The term 'desire' encompasses not only the aspiration for a better life, but can also imply colonial desires. Both contribute to the envisioning of a "remote this-wordly paradise"[6] in Hilton's novel. Because of its remote geographical location, however, Hilton's vision of Shangri-La as a utopia needs to be explored in the context of both Orientalism and exoticism, both terms referring to the production of imaginary visions of geographically and culturally distant areas from a European perspective.

An orientalist and exoticised utopia

James Hilton never visited Tibet, but acquired knowledge about the country, its history, topography, and religion from the British Library in which he read accounts of missionaries and explorers[7]. In the introduction to the Universal Studios radio version of *Lost Horizon*, he admits: "I remem-

[2] P. Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1989, p. 19.

[3] *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (2 ed.), 2006. The definition of 'Shangri-La' Available at: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810-e-6408.

[4] see: F. Vieira "The Concept of Utopia" [in:] *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, G. Claeys [ed.] Cambridge 2010, p.6-7.

[5] R. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Oxford, 2010, p. 221

[6] Levitas proposes a division of utopian visions into of a myth of a Golden Age, other-wordly, and this-wordly paradise. See: R. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Oxford, 2010, p. 222.

[7] see: J. R. Hammond, *Lost Horizon Companion: A Guide to the James Hilton Novel and Its Characters, Critical Reception, Film Adaptations and Place in Popular Culture*, Jefferson 2008, p. 92.

ber hours in libraries reading tales and legends of the great missionary travellers who explored all central Asia centuries ago"[8]. The inhospitable mountainous location of the monastery was also inspired by the accounts of journeys from the National Geographic Magazine. While preparing to write the novel, Hilton also studied Younghusband's *The Heart of a Continent* (1892), *Visits to High Tatary, Yarkand and Kashgar* (1871) by Robert Barkley Shaw, and *My Journey to Lhasa* (1927) by Alexandra David-Neel[9]. Interestingly, all of his sources were probably exclusively Western accounts of Tibet, heavily tainted by Orientalism.

In his ground-breaking book *Orientalism,* Edward Said offers several overlapping definitions of the titular term, the most general one of them being "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in the European Western experience"[10]. According to Said, Orient is a cultural construct of a region without a particular geographical locus, geographical characteristics, history or culture, imagined by the West and for the West's own use. Orientalism is thus discussed as a cultural enterprise that encompasses diverse geographical areas and matters:

> a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a long tradition of colonial administrators, a formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental "experts" and "hands", an Oriental professorate, a complex array of "Oriental" ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use.[11]

The term itself can be applied to denote an academic field that examines the culture of regions that are perceived as parts of the imaginary land of the Orient. On a deeper level, Said proposes that the term also encompasses a manner of thinking rooted in a fundamental differentiation between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'[12]. Said suggests that this distinction goes beyond academic studies and represents a certain mindset reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's statement "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet"[13] from his poem "The Ballad of East and West", existent in the accounts of travellers, administrators, soldiers and missionaries, including those which inspired Hilton's novel.

Exoticism, in turn, emerging as a result or a by-product of Orientalism, is explained by Graham Huggan in his book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* as a political and aesthetic practice of the production

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[8] *ibid.*

[9] Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969) was a Belgian explorer famous for her 1924 incognito visit to Lhasa. She was particularly interested in supposed mystical practices of Tibet, which she explored in her books, including *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (1929).

[10] E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 2007, p. 3.

[11] E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 2007, p. 4.

[12] *ibid.*, p. 2.

[13] R. Kipling "The Ballad of East and West", Available at: https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_eastwest.htm.

of otherness. According to Huggan[14], "exoticism describes [...] a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery". Even though, at times, exoticism may serve positive, unifying goals, it is very often a tool for justifying both conquest and wrongful appropriation. More importantly, exoticist rhetoric distorts the view of the "exotic" as reachable and available for the taking and is based on the fetishisation of otherness. Moreover, the very process of exotisation is connected with the decontextualisation and cultural dislocation of the "exotic". Huggan views extreme forms of decontextualisation as sanctioning cultural ignorance and illustrates the point with a comment from Tzvetan Todorov: "Knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is, in turn, irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be. This is its constitutive paradox."[15]

Tibet, the main setting of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon,* had remained a long time mystery for most Europeans. In the nineteenth century, the British had unlimited access to India; however, Tibet remained undiscovered and unattainable. As a result, it became, as suggested by Bishop "a landscape to which the soulful imaginings of many Westerners were drawn; one which has sustained a deep fascination over the centuries"[16]. The creation of the myth of Tibet as one of the crucial points of the "mystic East", apart from imperial claims, was also fuelled by what Richard King[17] calls "nostalgia for lost origin". As observed by King[18], the characterisation of the East as mystical serves a function "to define the essential modernity and rationality of Western culture through a projection of contrary qualities onto the Oriental other". Furthermore, as noticed by the author of *Orientalism and Religion,* the East was long believed to provide some access to ancient wisdom, or "a much needed sense of continuity with archaic traditions and the natural world, and [...] a way of defining the West as quintessentially 'modern' in contrast to the 'primitive' or 'traditional' cultures of the East"[19].

The earliest European encounters with Tibetan traditions planted in the Western imagination an initial image of the country and its culture as magical and somehow mystical. However, the surveillance of Tibet in the nineteenth century provided the British with more information about the country's geo-

[14] G. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins,* London and New York, 2001, p. 13.

[15] *ibid.*, p. 17

[16] P. Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1989, p. 10.

[17] R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the 'Mystic East',* New York 1999, p. 147.

[18] *ibid.*

[19] *ibid.*

graphy, customs, and religion. It was conducted by "pundits", British agents, who, pretending to be Buddhist pilgrims entered Tibet in order to conduct surveys and make maps[20]. Still, Tibet was often portrayed as isolated and became the object of imperial desire, and the longing for the unattainable only strengthened the fantasy of the Himalayan country. As a result, what emerged were overly romanticised portrayals of Tibet[21], which through the Western imagination, came to be recognised as timeless, free, mystical, and unchanging, contributing to numerous misconceptions about the country, some of which are listed by Donald S. Lopez in *Prisoners of Shangri-La:*

> Tibet [...] has been portrayed in the West as an idyllic society devoted to the practice of Buddhism, a nation that required no police force because its people voluntarily observed the laws of karma, a society in which, through the workings of an "inner democracy," a peasant boy might become a great lama. But traditional Tibet, like any complex society, had great inequalities, with power monopolized by an elite composed of a small aristocracy, the hierarchs of various sects (including incarnate lamas), and the great Geluk monasteries. The subordinate members of the society included nonaristocratic laymen, non-Buddhists, and women. The turn-of-the-century colonialist saw incarnate lamas as "an incarnation of all vices and corruptions, instead of the souls of departed Lamas."[22]

What Lopez highlights is that the true image of Tibet was far from a terrestrial paradise and the stereotypic, flat, and untrue construction of Tibet is, according to the author,[23] a product of colonial desire, since Tibet never came under European control.

Hilton's Tibet as a "sacred space"

The first military attempt to colonise Tibet was the British Invasion of Tibet, also known as Younghusband's Expedition[24] from December 1903 to September 1904. Under the auspices of the Tibetan Frontier Commission and Lord Curzon, the expedition was meant to establish diplomatic relations with Tibet but also to counter Russian ambitions to conquer the country. The expedition reached the Tibetan capital in 1904 and ended with the Treaty of Lhasa. It allowed the British to gather extensive material related to Tibetan religion and art, unfortunately, however, by means of looting.[25] The biggest impact that the Western intrusion in Tibet had on knowledge

[20] see: D. S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago and London 1998, p. 5.

[21] see: *ibid.*, p. 6.

[22] see: *ibid.*, p. 9.

[23] see: *ibid.*, p. 5.

[24] Named after its leader, Colonel Francis Younghusband.

[25] see: C. Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs: The Men who Discovered India's Lost Religion*. London 2002, p. 288. and M. Carrington, "Officers, Gentlemen and Thieves: The Looting of Monasteries during the 1903/4 Younghusband Mission to Tibet" Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2003, 81-109.

of the country's culture and religion was the fact that Tibet preserved many translations of Sanskrit literature that were otherwise lost. However, the religion of Tibet was treated by western orientalists as a degenerate version of the teachings of the Buddha.[26]

A sacred space can be defined in terms of "its separation from the profane world, by the limited access accorded to it, by a sense of dread or fascination, by intimations of order and power combined with ambiguity and paradox"[27]. According to Mircea Eliade, a sacred space consists of a centre and a boundary surrounded by a threshold. As described by the author in *The Sacred and the Profane*[28]: "the threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds—and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible".

Tibet, as perceived through the lens of popular imagination, encompasses the essential characteristics of a sacred space, known to possess a paradoxical influence, capable of evoking both a tranquil sense of serenity and a disquieting horror. Tibet is associated with not only ancient wisdom and its preservation but also with peaceful inhabitants who adhere to the principles of mindfulness and compassion. This paradoxical nature of Tibet as a sacred place stems from the coexistence of serene spirituality and mysterious, awe-inspiring and uncharted mountains, which serve as a challenging threshold to cross.

The myth of the immaculate and secluded utopia was, however, shattered in 1951 when Tibet was invaded by the Chinese People's Liberation Army. As a result of the invasion and the cultural revolution (1966-67), what followed was a series of repressions of Buddhists and the destruction of most of the Buddhist temples, art, and artefacts and the beginning of the Tibetan diaspora. According to Lopez the Chinese takeover of Tibet caused a shift of attitudes towards Tibetan culture salvaged from destruction, since it "has been portrayed as if it were itself another artifact of Shangri-La from an eternal classical age, set high in a Himalayan keep outside time and history"[29].

Mythical places: Shambala and Shangri-La

The name "Shangri-La," likely influenced by the mythical kingdom of Shambhala, incorporates the Tibetan term "la," denoting a mountain pass and frequently employed in place names. As aptly pointed out by Yi-Fu

[26] see: D. S. Lopez Jr., *op.cit.*, p. 4.

[27] *ibid.*, p. 10.

[28] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: *The Nature of Religion,* Trans. Willard R. Trusk, New York 1987, p. 25.

[29] D. S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago and London 1998, p. 7.

Tuan in his book *Space and Place,* "Myths flourish in the absence of precise knowledge"[30]. Hilton's limited and second-hand insight into Tibetan culture and geography seems to align with this idea, explaining the use of myth as one of his main inspirations.

Shambhala,[31] in Tibetan tradition is a mythical kingdom located somewhere north of India. One of the Tibetan sources that describe the kingdom is Kalachakra[32] Tantra, a varied body of texts on astrology, rituals, and meditation, which is a basis for a Buddhist tradition within Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. The Kalachakra Tantra presents Shambhala as "a harmonious society ruled by a lineage of enlightened kings. The myth tells of how a peaceful army will one day rise forth from Shambhala to save the world from destruction and inaugurate a golden age of enlightened culture"[33]. The texts of Kalachakra Tantra clearly locate the kingdom somewhere north of the Himalayan range. The people of the country practise Kalachakra Tantra, a set of beliefs based on wisdom and compassion, which the king of Shambhala, Sucandara, received from the Buddha. The texts also give a clear description of the kingdom, its capital, and its inhabitants. As retold by Lopez[34]:

> Shambhala is shaped like a giant lotus and is filled with sandalwood forests and lotus lakes, all encircled by a great range of snowy peaks. In the centre of the kingdom is the capital of Kalapa, where the luster of the palaces, made from gold, silver, and jewels, outshines the moon; the walls of the palaces are plated with mirrors that reflect a light so bright that night is like day. [..] The laypeople are all beautiful and wealthy, free of sickness and poverty; the monks maintain their vows without the slightest infraction. They are naturally intelligent and virtuous, devoted to the practice of the Vajrayana, although all authentic forms of Indian Buddhism are preserved.

However, the myth includes a sombre conflict in the future of Shambhala. As barbarians and demons invade the country, the twenty-fifth Shambhalan King, Raudracakrin, will fight the forces of evil in a victorious battle. This is believed to be the beginning of a new era: "The victory will usher in a golden age in which the human lifespan will increase, crops will grow without being cultivated, and the population of the earth will devote itself to the practice of Buddhism"[35]. The kingdom is also believed to have survived a large crisis at the time of its eighth king, Yasas. The Brahmans who inhabited Shambhala were devoted to the Vedic religion, which involved animal sacrifice, perceived as barbaric by Yasas[36]. The king chose to impose

[30] Y. Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis and London 2001, p. 85.

[31] Alternative spellings: Shambala or Shamballa or Shambhallah

[32] Alternative spelling: Kalacakra

[33] S. Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. Berkeley 1994, p. 366.

[34] D. S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago and London 1998, p. 182.

[35] *ibid.*

[36] see: *ibid.*

an ultimatum and persuade the Brahmans to either become Buddhists or emigrate to India. As a result of the king's ultimatum, the Brahmans decided to leave Shambhala, which resulted in political instability and led the king to imprison the rebellious sages[37]. It was religious and cultural diversity that was seen as a threat to the integrity of the kingdom, weakening Shambhala and making it susceptible to the invasion of barbarians, whereas unification under one religion was believed to make it stronger. The prophecy of Shambhala, eventually leading the war against the barbarians and the victory of Buddhism, is probably a tale inspired by Buddhism being persecuted and driven out of India by Islam and rejected by the Hindu religion.

It is not certain whether Shambhala should be perceived as a lost historical civilisation, as there are no texts to specify its further history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, several expeditions were launched in order to locate the mythical country; however, all of them failed to discover any traces of such a civilisation.[38] As pointed out by Tuan, similar continued unsuccessful attempts to discover ancient paradises did not deter explorers from persisting in their efforts. As explained by the author of *Space and Place*, they demonstrate that dismissing the concept of a terrestrial paradise would have been a challenge for complex sets of beliefs which relied on the existence of such places[39]. Both Shambhala and Hilton's Shangri-La represent not only the idea of a perfect, morally unpolluted place that contrasts with the corrupt outside world but also the need for such places to exist. On the other hand, Hilton's utopian lamasery also clearly demonstrates an act of appropriation and decontextualisation of the myth of Shambhala for Western needs and desires.

Hilton's Shangri-La as a utopia

The plot of the novel follows a group of people who arrive at a mysterious monastery as a result of a plane crash. The prologue and epilogue are narrated by a neurologist, who tells his friends the story of Hugh Conway, a British diplomat in Afghanistan who disappeared in mysterious circumstances. A novelist, Rutherford, reveals that he had met Conway, who was suffering from amnesia, in a hospital. Conway, once he had regained his memory, told Rutherford his story which the latter recorded in a manuscript. The main

[37] see: *ibid.*, p. 183.

[38] Several unsuccessful expeditions aimed at discovering Shambhala were undertaken in the twentieth century. In the early 1920s led by Russian Theosophists, Nicholas and Helena Roerich (1924-1928), later Russian Theosophists and communists Gleb Bokki and Alexander Barchenko. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany sent three expeditions to Tibet in search of the lost kingdom.

[39] See: Y. Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis and London 2001, p. 85.

action of the novel begins with the evacuation of Westerners from Baskul during a rebellion. In one of the small planes, there are four passengers: the British Consul, Hugh Conway, a Vice-Consul Captain, Charles Mallinson, an American, Henry Barnard, and a Christian missionary, Roberta Brinklow. The plane is hijacked and deliberately crashed in the Himalayas, and the survivors are taken to a lamasery called Shangri-La.

Soon after arriving at Shangri-La, the protagonist Hugh Conway meets the High Lama of the monastery. It is revealed that the Lama was one of the Belgian Catholic missionaries who arrived there in 1734 and established a Christian monastery in place of a decaying Buddhist one. However, as time unfolded, the Lama's transformation and adaptation to the local culture challenged the initial European-centric paradigm. He gradually discovered that a berry that grew in the valley, called tangatse berry, was a narcotic that also significantly prolonged people's lives, which marked a transition in his perspective. He not only embraced Buddhist principles but also immersed himself in practices such as yoga and meditation, eventually leading to his conversion to Buddhism. This transformation underscores the interplay between Western and Eastern traditions in Hilton's narrative. At the time of the action, Father Perrault is over three hundred years old and in charge of the monastery. Other monks and inhabitants of the valley value him as "a very earnest, busy, learned, simple, and enthusiastic person who, along with his priestly functions, did not disdain to put on a mason's overall and help in the actual building of these [Shangri-La's] very rooms"[40].

Peter Bishop[41] in *Dreams of Power. Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* theorises that, in accordance with Jung's quote, "Projections change the world into the replica of one's unknown face". Europeans, and especially the British, led by their frontier fantasies of the country, projected onto their view of Tibet what they had expected to find there. Those projections changed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Initially, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, Europeans sought in the East ideas that resonated with their own, including matters of belief, ethics, and morality. The twentieth-century expectations of Tibet, however, turned to the search for the uncanny, unusual, and supernatural, including claims of occult powers[42]. A sign of this attitude is undisputedly James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, which presents the fictional monastery of Shangri-La as a place of magic, obscure practises, and supernatural power.

Bishop[43] claims that the root-metaphors of these extensive fantasies about Tibetan Buddhism are based on the images of the Holy or Wise Old Men: the Elder, the Autocrat and the Sage, which stand for order, authority

[40] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[41] P. Bishop, *Dreams of Power. Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination*, London 1993, p. 50.

[42] See: *ibid.*

[43] *ibid.*, p. 51.

and continuity; they represent "the longings for superior knowledge, for assurance, for what is ordered, old and established, for a continuity with learned traditions and hierarchical disciplines are all pre-eminently senex values"[44]. The figures of the Wise Old Men together constitute the archetype of a Senex, characterised by Jung in *The Archetype and the Collective Unconscious:* "Wise old man, the superior master and teacher, the archetype of the spirit, who symbolizes the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life"[45]. Jung, while writing on Tibetan Buddhism, also focused on the psychological wisdom of Tibetan Lamas. For instance, in his commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* he refers to the learned practitioners of Buddhism in a way that surely brings to mind the image of a Senex: "every serious-minded reader must ask himself whether these wise old lamas might not, after all, have caught a glimpse of the fourth dimension and twitched the veil from the greatest of life's secrets"[46].

The High Lama from *Lost Horizon,* as a Christian monk who gradually converted to Buddhism, is a clear manifestation of this archetype. In his monastery, he safeguards knowledge, art, and science in the event of a disaster that deprives people of their cultural heritage. The High Lama is believed to possess some supernatural powers, although he only confirms some telepathic and healing skills:

> [It] was said that Perrault had become a god, that he worked miracles, and that on certain nights he flew to the summit of Karakal to hold a candle to the sky. […] It was supposed, for instance, that he practiced the art of self-levitation, of which so much appears in accounts of Buddhist mysticism; but the more sober truth is that he made many experiments to that end, but entirely without success. He did, however, discover that the impairment of ordinary senses could be somewhat offset by a development of others; he acquired skill in telepathy which was perhaps remarkable, and though he made no claim to any specific powers of healing, there was a quality in his mere presence that was helpful in certain cases.[47]

The Lama tells Conway the story of an Austrian man named Henschell, who arrived at the monastery in 1803 and started an immense collection of art, music, and literature. He also established the rule that in order to protect the lamasery newcomers were welcome to join; however, nobody was allowed to leave Shangri-La, as the monastery needed new arrivals to keep functioning, but it could not compromise its secret location. It is revealed that Conway's party is to be kept in the monastery forever because, as Father Perrault found through his experience, Europeans adapt best in Shangri-La and live the longest. The character of the Lama, thus, can be seen as somewhat sinister since, for the sake of the monastery's safety, he does not allow anybody to leave, which results in the main characters being kept hostage in Shangri-La.

[44] *ibid.*, p. 51.

[45] C. G. Jung, *The Archetype and the Collective Unconscious*, Transl. R.F.C. Hull, London 1991, p. 35.

[46] C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East.* Transl. Adler, G. and R.F.C. Hull, Princeton 2014, p. 524.

[47] J. Hilton, *Lost Horizon,* London 2015, p. 125.

During Conway's conversation with the Lama, it becomes apparent that the pilot of the plane was sent by the High Lama to introduce new people to the monastery. Father Perrault believes that a war is coming which will eliminate all beauty and wisdom from the world; Shangri-La, therefore, is intended to preserve art, philosophy, and literature for a future time of peace when the heritage needs to be re-established in the world. Conway is convinced by Perrault; however, other members of his group want to leave. The High Lama reveals to Conway that he wants him to take over the function of the Lama after his death, as the berries provide long life, but they do not make people immortal. Soon, Mallinson arranges to leave the monastery with Lo-Tsen, a young woman with whom he falls in love. He persuades Conway to assist him on the way.

Conway, who comes across as an intellectual introvert, seems to be disillusioned with the materialistic and shallow post-war world and traumatised by the Great War. It becomes apparent that, because of the war, he had lost all faith in God and humanity: "The will of God or the lunacy of man—it seemed to him that you could take your choice, if you wanted a good enough reason for most things"[48]. Being quite open-minded, he eagerly engages in the life of Shangri-La and decides to learn from his experience, as he probably considers the monastery to be a refreshing alternative to the outside world. The High Lama recognises Conway's traumatising experience of war, telling him "your wisdom has the ripeness of age"[49]. Conway, however, believes that his war experience was "No more unusual than has happened to many others of [his] generation"[50]. When the High Lama tries to further pinpoint the impression Conway has made on him, he comments:

> [You have] an odd quality [...] that I have never met in any of our visitors hitherto. It is not quite cynicism, still less bitterness; perhaps it is partly disillusionment, but it is also a clarity of the mind that I should not have expected in anyone younger than—say, a century or so. It is, if I had to put a single word to it, passionlessness.[51]

As a response, Conway explains that all his passion and energy was lost to the war: "I used up most of my passions and energies during the years I've mentioned [1914-1918], and though I don't talk much about it, the chief thing I've asked from the world since is to leave me alone"[52]. The word "passionlessness" in the passage may be referring to the Buddhist Third Noble Truth, which states that awakening and freedom can be achieved by the cessation of desire. It can be assumed that Conway's war trauma establishes him as a perfect candidate for the Lama's disciple and offers an opportunity for spiritual transformation. Inspired by the conversation, Conway comes to the following conclusion: "the exhaustion of the passions is

[48] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[49] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
[50] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
[51] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[52] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

the beginning of wisdom"[53], which the Lama explains to be one of the main guiding principles of the monastery, and, as a result of meditation, offers "calmness and profundity, ripeness and wisdom, and the clear enchantment of memory"[54]. However, it is important to note that this portrayal of Buddhism, emphasising only one aspect, like the Third Noble Truth, represents a decontextualised and exoticised depiction of this complex and multifaceted belief system. According to Lawrence Normand[55], however, Conway's involvement in this system of beliefs transcends the confines of traditional Orientalism, where the West predominantly imposes its fantasies onto the East, and instead, explores instances when influence flows from the East to the West, resulting in the transformation of a Westerner. By means of the disillusioned and traumatised character, it is clearly suggested that some form of Buddhist practice may offer consolation or even spiritual enlightenment to those who had lost their hope and faith because of the war.

The religious system of Shangri-La can be called "quasi-Buddhist", as, according to Normand[56], it is "an amalgam of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian wisdom, along with a dash of Christianity". Due to the complicated history of the lamasery, Buddhist and Christian traditions mixed and merged and, as a result, for some time, "Te Deum Laudamus and Om Mane Padme Hum were [...] heard equally in the temples of the valley"[57]. The High Lama, while persuading Conway to take over his position, claims that "the traditions of this building, both Buddhist and Christian, are very reassuring"[58]. Such passages demonstrate an attempt to reconcile Western and Eastern cultures by uniting different religious elements into a harmonious and distinctive whole. This syncretic approach reflects the interplay of these traditions in the fictional world of Shangri-La, emphasising the utopian potential for mutual understanding and coexistence between East and West.

The society of Shangri-La is based on moderation. Nobody seems to be in a hurry; however, everybody is busy; towards the newcomers the people of the valley are "good-humoured and mildly inquisitive, courteous and carefree"[59]. The system of government is described by Conway as a "loose and elastic autocracy, operated from the lamasery with a benevolence that was almost casual"[60]. The main character is rather puzzled by the fact that law and order are not kept by means of police of any military organisation:

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[53] J. Hilton, *op. cit.,* p. 160.

[54] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

[55] See: L. Normand, "Shangri-La and Buddhism in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* and W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6*. [in:] L. Normand and A. Winch (eds), *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American Literature*. London 2013, p. 41.

[56] *ibid.*, p. 42.

[57] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

[58] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[59] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[60] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

Conway was puzzled as to the ultimate basis of law and order; there appeared to be neither soldiers nor police [...]. Chang replied that crime was very rare, partly because only serious things were considered crimes, and partly because everyone enjoyed a sufficiency of everything he could reasonably desire.[61]

The guide's answer shows that there is no crime because the people of Shangri-La do not have a drive towards owning more than others. Moreover, they consider courtesy to be the ultimate tool in solving conflicts and a way to avoid them.

The attitudes of Conway's party, who recognise the place as purely Buddhist and alien, vary. Mallinson, even though unwilling to stay in Shangri-La, sees the place as safe and comments (alluding to the death of Thomas Becket): "As a matter of fact, murder is the very last thing one would expect in a Buddhist monastery. It would be rather less likely than being killed in an English cathedral"[62]. On the other hand, when the guide to the Christian missionary, Miss Brinklow, tells her that Lamas spend their time contemplating, she states: "you won't convince me that a place like this does any real good. I prefer something more practical"[63]. According to the widespread stereotype of "passive Orientals"[64], she perceives meditative practice as idle and devotes herself to the study of the Tibetan language in order to convert the natives of Shangri-La to Christianity. This attitude aligns with the racist notion that people in the "Orient" are passive and unproductive, contrasting with the perceived industriousness of the "Occident." Miss Brinklow's mission to convert the natives of Shangri--La to Christianity underscores her active, goal-oriented approach, which further reinforces the stereotype. Moreover, her scepticism regarding Shangri-La's "pagan degradation"[65] reveals a Western bias that associates non-Christian religious practices with moral inferiority. Her scrutiny of the Buddhist temple, particularly her focus on phallic symbols, highlights the Western tendency to exoticise and sexualise Eastern cultures. This reflects the Orientalist viewpoint that sees the "Orient" as mysterious and sensual, a stark contrast to Protestant ideals of modesty and morality. What disconcerts Miss Brinklow, however, is the fact that the inhabitants of Shangri-La value pleasure, ease, and a careless lifestyle, as she believes in the virtues of discomfort, self-denial, and hard work. In this way, Miss Brinklow's character embodies biases and misconceptions, illustrating the clash of worldviews between the East and the West, which renders her an unsuitable candidate for an inhabitant of Shangri-La.

[61] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
[62] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
[63] J. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
[64] see: E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 2007, pp. 97, 105, 138.
[65] J. Hilton, *op. cit.,* p. 95.

Conclusions

This paper confirms Bishop's assumption that 'Lost Horizon' embodies a Tibetan utopia in alignment with Western imaginations of Tibet[66], exploring the novel's setting, characters, and their connection to Orientalism. This eroticised depiction of Tibet finds its roots in Hilton's limited first-hand knowledge of Tibet and reliance on Western accounts, shaping it as an exotic place filled with mysticism and timelessness. Tibet, in the Western imagination, is often infused with such qualities, reflecting colonial desires, the quest for ancient wisdom, and the perception of the East as a timeless, unchanging culture. The secluded geographical location of the setting satisfied Western fantasies of elusive Tibet while offering a vision of a perfect society based on moderation and courtesy, addressing the anxieties and disillusionment resulting from the Great War. Thus, the novel can be understood both as a product of British imperial desire and as a projection of contemporary anxieties.

The setting represents a mysterious place that holds ancient wisdom, inviting comparison to the Tibetan myth of Shambala. Hilton's Shangri-La holds the world's knowledge in order to restore it to the world if it is lost to war, becoming a prison for those who wish to leave it, similar to the mythical Shambala. Both places also seem to be the last hope of saving the righteous from destruction. The utopia presented in the novel can be seen both as a sacred and mythical place, highlighting the interplay between serenity and disquiet central to the Shangri-La myth. It is also inspiration with the myth of Shambala that adds to the paradoxical nature of the lamasery as both a utopia and a prison.

The characters in the novel represent various Western attitudes and biases towards the East. While some, like Conway, find solace and wisdom in the monastery, others, like Miss Brinklow, cling to Western religious beliefs and a mission to convert the natives to Christianity, reflecting numerous stereotypes and misconceptions. Conway's journey from disillusionment with the post-war world to potential spiritual transformation in Shangri--La underscores the novel's exploration of the exoticist potential of the East and its philosophy to offer solace and enlightenment to those who have suffered the traumas of war. However, this portrayal simplifies the rich and multifaceted nature of Buddhism, reducing it to a means of coping with war-related trauma.

Importantly, Hilton's portrayal creates a vision of Tibet that reflects Western fantasies and desires rather than an accurate representation of the country. The utopia, while dependent on the Orientalist distinction between the Orient and the Occident, attempts to reconcile the differences by blen-

[66] P. Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1989, p. 216.

ding elements of both worlds in the utopian society. In Hilton's creation of Shangri-La, the author both perpetuates Orientalist and exoticised depictions of Tibet while also exploring the potential for Eastern philosophies to offer transformation and solace to disillusioned Westerners.

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